



European Forum of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Christian Groups

Dear friends!

At the end of this year we like to inform you of the things that have been done since St. Albans. But first: we wish you a good Christmas-time and a happy 2009!

1. The board's work

The board had its first meeting in October 2008 in Finland. We were staying in the conference-centre at Järvenpää. And further we discussed a lot of things (you read later on this letter).

By **Vanja Hamzić**, President of LOGOS, we received a review on our meeting in St. Albans. Some sentences from his report:

"Guests and Forum members from across Europe and beyond attended the Annual Meeting, including a delegate from Armenia and several guests from USA. I was invited as a guest who may have convened the Muslim and inter-faith prospective in our joint struggle for recognition and an

inclusive understanding of religion in our multicultural societies.

Fed by many different developments, incidents and events, there has been a growing debate about the ways in which different religious denominations should get together and work towards greater acceptance of diversity and social justice. Sensitive to injustice and oppression from the experience of their own constituencies, the LGBTIQ religious/spiritual groups are among the first to realise how important it is to join hands and facilitate mutual empowerment, regardless of canonical differences and problematic historical heritage.

LOGOS as a non-patriarchal inter-faith organisation is willing to extend its cooperation with the Forum and remain present at its main meetings. We have participated in the Eastern Europe Training Project and are looking forward to its follow-up activities. The key areas of our contribution may include building up a multi-dimensional and effective inter-

religious dialogue among and beyond the LGBTIQ faith-based communities, sensitising the communities on the multiple discrimination and multiple identities, and theological and community-based work towards greater mutual understanding, joint services and meetings of people of faith, in particular those belonging to various Abrahamic traditions.

May God bless all my sisters and brothers in the Forum!"

His whole report can be read on our website, www.euroforumlgbtchristians.eu

Mark Bowman wrote us:

"I look forward to the many ways we can work together to preserve the history of LGBT religious movements in Europe. If you haven't had a chance to check out the LGBT Religious Archives Network website yet, please do so at: www.lgbtran.org ..

2. International contacts - world wide networking

- Hilde Raastad represented the Forum at the conference of the ILGA-Europe and ILGA World in Vienna.
- Michael Brinkschröder has been representing the Forum, HUK and AG Schwule Theologie during a conference in Florenz and at the World synod in Rome (October)

During the last conference of the European Forum we wondered what might be going on in the lesbian and gay Christian groups of Italy. Now I found a large bundle of answers at the weekend from 7th to 9th of november 2008 in Florence, where I represented the European Forum at two parallel meetings.

The first one was the national conference of REFO (Rete Evangelica Fede e

Omosessualità = Protestant Network Faith and Homosexuality) with ca. 60 participants. REFO consists of three local groups (in Rome, Milano and Florence) and various single members. The homepage of REFO is www.refoitalia.wordpress.com. New president of the network became Giorgio Rainelli from Rome, with Rosa Salomone (Milano) as vicepresident and Andrea Panerini as national secretary. The REFO conference celebrated the ten years of existence of REFO with contributions reviewing the developments of this time, especially the success of last year, when the common synod of the Valdesians, the Methodists and the Baptists -Protestant churches of Italy which are working closely together - have passed a motion, in which gays, lesbians, bi- and transsexuals are explicitly welcomed. These churches confess their historical guilt and speak out against any act of violence and homophobic discrimination. The document of the synod was prepared by a group of pastors of these churches beginning in 2000 in cooperation with REFO. Only the passage about the blessing of same-sex partnerships or marriages was not accepted by the synod and shall be discussed in the future. But further progress is not to be expected easily, because now a lot of immigrants from Africa join the Protestant parishes of Italy and usually don't have any understanding for homosexuality. The paradox for the idea of inclusive communities, that results from this situation, was intensively debated at the conference. An important contribution to this question was given by Jean Vilban (Lille) from the French network „Carrefour des Chrétiens inclusifs", who has done an intense empirical research about inclusive Christian communities in Europe preparing a doctoral thesis.

After this REFO-conference, there was another meeting together with several local Roman Catholic groups (Milano, Florence, Padova, Rome, Rimini, Napoli, Bologna etc.) and one Old Catholic group from Milano. They decided to continue in 2009 the two-years-old tradition of a vigil for the victims of homophobia, that will be on may 17th, the international day against homophobia. Its motto comes from 1 John 4,18: „Who has fear, is not perfect in love“.

On Saturday evening the first meeting of the Roman Catholic groups of Italy after the collapse of their coordination (COCI) five years ago, when the president could not get a political mandate from the member groups to speak for them in public, took place in a pizzeria. The majority of these groups meet regularly on Sunday for a *lectio continua* of an interesting book, for prayer and to share the gospel in an intense personal exchange. A confident relationship with their bishop is more important to them than a public political statement. My impression was, that a „new generation“ met for the first time in this pizzeria. They were very interested in the work of the European Forum, which I was invited to introduce to them, focussing on the Roman Catholic book project.

Although many of them haven't met personally before, they were already connected by the website www.gionata.org, where a lot of important informations, texts and the discussion among the Roman Catholic groups can be found.

Michael Brinkschröder

(AG Schwule Theologie, Munich, Germany)

- Hilde Raastad represented the Forum at the conference of the ILGA-World and ILGA Europe in October.
Regarding ILGA, from Hilde:
I had the opportunity to represent the European Forum at the ILGA

Europe and ILGA World conferences in Vienna in October. It was a good place to meet and network with LGBT activists from all over the world, and there seems to be an increased interest in religious issues among the LGBT communities. As we see how religious organizations are influencing national opinions, using their power to violate basic human rights for LGBTs, as well as preventing LGBTs from participating as full members in their local religious communities, there is a growing awareness of the importance of learning how to discuss and dialogue with, and sometimes combat, religious authorities and their influence and argumentation. There were several workshops focusing on religious issues and I was able to take an active part in all of them, which also led to interesting one-on-one discussions of religion and faith afterwards. Yves from David&Jonathan was also present during the ILGA Europe conference and it was good to have another Forum member to connect with. Unfortunately my computer (with all my documents!!!) was stolen on my way back from the Forum so for a detailed rapport of the decisions made and the discussions during the ILGA conferences I suggest you read about this on the ILGA websites.

- Hilde Raastad also represented the European Forum on the MCC region 4 conference in Birmingham in the beginning of November. MCC region 4 consist of churches mostly from Great Britain and Germany as well as churches in South Africa and Nigeria, but there

is also an MCC church in Copenhagen, Markens Liljer. I was able to talk about the Forum with many of the people present there as well as connecting with people from the different MCC churches.

- LC/NA
Enric Vilà has been in July to the conference in San Francisco. There has been agreed and handed out a communiqué from LC/NA and the European Forum:

This joint communiqué between the European Forum of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and transgender Christian Groups and Lutherans Concerned/North America (LC/NA) was prepared at the "Hearts on Fire" Biennial Assembly of LC/NA in San Francisco and was issued on July 28, 2008 by the respective organizations with the intent of giving further definition to their mutual accompaniment. Such potential activities as indicated below are not seen as either limiting or obligatory but exemplify activities for future focus. Any actions which would require financial support would require the approval of the respective Boards of the two organizations. Such examples of activities would include working to:

1. Exchange representatives at their respective annual and biennial meetings;
2. Consider the development of Joint Statements and Press Releases on specific issues as seen appropriate;
3. Consider the development of joint policy, concept, and/ or strategic documents as seen appropriate;
4. Consider the development and implementation of a strategic plan for advancing the recognition of the importance of religious witness, specifically

with the context of LGBT issues, by targeted international, regional and/or national organizations; and

5. Consider the development of international programs regarded relative to respective concerns of the two organizations, including aspects of design, sponsorship, and implementation.

4. Finances

We reviewed the finances and Arie could report that our finances are looking good. It is good to mention the following points:

- The invoices for 2008 are almost all been paid.

5. Website

Our site: www.euroforumlgbtchristians.eu

It is still not working the way we, the board, would like to see it. We are working hard on this issue and we do hope that we can make some progress before next AGM. The ideas are clear, the work just needs to be done (which will take a lot of time for the people involved).

6. Next conferences

2009 - Helsinki, Finland

Watch their website: www.yhteys.org

2010 - Catalonia, Spain

2011 - Germany

2012 - Malta

7. Forum AGM 2009

a. Invitations

Within a few weeks you will receive by mail the invitation. Of course: we will send the formal invitation to the Forum contact person of the group. We will also send all the information by mail to all Forum-contacts whose e-mail address I have.

Please if you have a new e-mail address mail it to: heleendeboer@hetnet.nl

b. Elections!!!

- President - male

Enric is considering his renewal for another term.

- Secretary

Heleen cannot stand up for another term, because of our byelaws. So please think of some good candidates in your group. Our nomination committee is searching already (B. Schnoor from Germany and Brian Smith from the UK).

c. donations

If you/your group would like to make a donation towards travel costs of representatives from the "East European" countries, you can send this with your membership fee. You can also send donations directly to the organising committee if you prefer.

d. member groups

Next year we hope to welcome a new group from Armenia . We already met dr Karen Badalyan in St. Albans.

f. activities in Europe

1. Switzerland:

As you all may know, the Europride 09 will be in Zurich. Cool considers being present with a stall in the village.

2. Denmark:

The Outgames 2009 will be arranged in Copenhagen at the end of July. During this time (July 27-29) there will be held a LGBT human right's conference and it is important that the Forum is present and visible here. We have already applied to have a workshop. At this point 400 workshops have been submitted, and only 100 will be accepted so we hope the Forum workshop will be among these. In addition we have made contact with Markens Liljer (MCC Copenhagen) regarding church services etc during the Outgames. We

know that several Forum groups and members are planning to be at the human right's conference so as the time gets closer, we will get in touch regarding how we can co-operate and support each other.

g. Developing a Strategic Plan for the European Forum

We have been discussing again the strategic plan for our Forum. We will prepare a workshop on this topic chaired by Yves and Christine from David & Jonathan during the next conference in Järvenpää.

**NEXT CONFERENCE will be in
HELSINKI.**

20-24th May

We wish you all a great time and a
HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

All the best from the Board
Heleen de Boer
European Forum Secretary
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