

SIESC ANNUAL MEETING IN STRÖMMA 24 TO 29 JULY 2024

From 24 to 28/29 July we met for the **SIESC annual meeting in Strömma, near Sätilla** and Göteborg in Sweden. 63 participants from 12 countries: Albania, Germany, Austria, France, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and Ukraine. The theme of the meeting was "**Children's right to spiritual development**". As in previous years, it gave us the opportunity to reunite with our big SIESC family and to welcome new people, in the hope that they will come back for other sessions.

At the opening evening, chaired by the president of the Swedish association RKF (Riksförbundet Kristen Fostran, a Christian organization for parents and teachers) Carl-Henrik Karlsson and our president Alin Tat, we welcomed Cardinal Bishop Anders Arborelius, who spoke on children's right to spiritual education and also celebrated mass for us. We also watched a speech by Monsignor Mariano Crociata, President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, who wished us a good meeting.

On the first day, we had a two-part talk by **Per and Therése Ewert** on the "Perspective of the Child", interspersed with time in groups. Per Ewert has a doctorate in political history and is the director of a Christian think tank, while his wife is a theologian and therapist. During the talk, various references were made to international and European texts.

The following day, **Anders Dunemyr**, director of a Christian school in Stockholm, gave us an interactive presentation on "children's right to spiritual development". In the afternoon, we had two seminars and were able to exchange ideas in language groups on either "the secularisation of school and family policy in Sweden" or "the teacher's provisions concerning children's right to spiritual development".

During the first two days we were able to see that the situation differs depending on the country to which we belong. The secularisation of schools and society is a subject of great concern to our Swedish and Slovenian colleagues, for example, whereas in France this secularisation, which took place many years ago, has been integrated and seems to be accepted.

On the 3rd day, **Ulrika Erlandsson**, representative of the Catholic Educational Committee, an organisation of the Stockholm diocese, showed us the "methods" of catechesis with concrete examples that we tried out. Some of us would like to find this same dynamic and enthusiasm in our churches. In Sweden, Catholics represent 1% of the population.

We spent an afternoon exploring the city of **Gothenburg**. We visited the Catholic cathedral and some of us were blessed by a newly ordained priest. On another afternoon, we visited a fabric factory and an old village typical of the region. This gave us an insight into life in the Swedish countryside.

The optional excursion took us to the **Västergötland** region. We visited a site with a church featuring beautiful frescoes from the Middle Ages and the ruins of an ancient castle, the place where Olof Skötkonung, the first sovereign to bear the title of King of Sweden, is said to have been converted to Christianity and baptised in 1008 by the English missionary Sigfrid. By bus, we climbed the Kinnekulleleden hill with a magnificent view of Europe's 3rd largest lake, Lake Vänern.

Nature, which is very present in Sweden, accompanied us during our stay in Strömma as we were staying in an agricultural school in the middle of the countryside. We were in a peaceful place, surrounded by greenery.

During this meeting, we were delighted to welcome 3 Hungarian women from a Protestant association with whom we hope to forge links. We also met up with our Ukrainian friend Oleksii

and welcomed Natalia, another Ukrainian. During an evening meeting, the two of them gave us an insight into the life of Ukrainians, with daily alerts throughout the country and displaced persons. It was a highlight of our meeting. Our prayers go out to these people who are going through so much.

More than usual, this meeting had an ecumenical dimension, as we took part in Protestant services and prayers in this country with a Protestant majority.

A big thank you to our colleagues Karin, UllaCarin, Annette and Agnetha who organised it, and to all the people from the Swedish association who helped in particular with the preparation of the home-cooked meals, which we particularly enjoyed, the service and making life easier for us. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts, we really were spoiled!

We look forward to seeing you next year in Slovenia for the 68th meeting. We hope to see even more of you there!

Catherine LeCoz