

Theobalt 2002

- report on activities

1. Standing committee and Contact persons

The standing committee met in St. Petersburg on the 2nd of February. His Eminence the Metropolitan Vladimir cordially greeted the committee and addressed the meeting with a short speech. The committee then discussed possible future priorities and noted the following in particular: 1) Seminars on national level as a follow-up of Theobalt V; 2) Exchange of experiences of social care as Christian mission; 3) Development of links to other networks. 4) A general study programme in order to deepen the knowledge of the network Churches and their traditions.

A proposed seminar on the relation between Christianity and Islam was rejected as it was regarded to be of less priority for the Baltic area at present. It was, however, suggested to be a topic for a religious dialogue in a broader ecclesiastical context.

The Theobalt homepage was presented.

Meeting with the contact persons took place in Visby on the 6th – 8th of September. The first day there was an excursion to some Gotlandic churches to illustrate the theme of the Theobalt seminar on church buildings later in the autumn. The meeting dealt with topics like a study programme, particularly “Baltic School of Early music”, the co-operation with the bien network, plans for the follow-up in Poland of Theobalt V and themes for the Theobalt VI conference. Information was also given about a new ecclesiastical network for Emergency preparedness in the Baltic region.

The representative of ELKRAS invited the contact persons to have the 2003 meeting in St. Petersburg. From the Lutheran Church in Finland it was suggested that Theobalt should be represented at the Baltic Forum for NGO:s in Turku Finland on the 8th – 11th of May 2003 and also act as host for an evening prayer. Information was also given about the invitation to Theobalt to the CEC general assembly in Trondheim in the summer 2003.

It was suggested that the Roman Catholic Church in the Nordic countries should be invited to join the network through its Nordic bishops' conference.

2. Theobalt V – a follow-up in Poland

Following the recommendation from the standing committee the planning of a national follow-up of Theobalt V started in Poland. A meeting with the three contact persons plus the co-ordinator of Theobalt was held in Warsaw in April. The original intention was to arrange a seminar in November. Due to unforeseen reasons the arrangement has been postponed to April 2003.

3. bien

There have been frequent contacts between Theobalt and bien during the year. During 'the bien festival' in Visby in the end of July, there was a workshop related to a Baltic study programme in co-operation between Theobalt and 'bien'. Theobalt also assisted considerably with administrative work in connection with the festival. The Theobalt administrative secretary Kristina S Furberg, Visby is member of the bien steering group.

4. Study programme

The concept of a Baltic study programme is still worked on. The idea was strongly supported at the 'bien' festival, where there were many young people being potential students in such a project. The basic idea to perform the programme within the frame of the Nordic Folk High School system is still in the pipeline. There are continuous contacts with a study centre in Gotland and a couple of meetings have been held with representatives of the Swedish Folk High School in Estonia.

In co-operation with a cooperative council for students at Nordic Faculties, the first outlines have been made up for a summer course in English/Russian for theological students from Scandinavia and Russia. The possibility of developing a study programme within Theobalt and in co-operation with bien was discussed at a meeting in Vilnius in the end of October. Representatives from Theobalt and bien participated. The purpose at this stage was mainly to introduce ideas in order to start up a dialogue to keep the process going. A concrete idea was to create an administrative frame for the Theobalt study programme co-ordinated by the diocese of Visby (as the juridical person) under the name 'Baltic Institute for Intercultural and Ecumenical Communication'.

5. Seminars and meetings

A consultation on care and preservation of church buildings - 'Committed to care for the House of the Lord' - was arranged in Fårösund, Gotland in the middle of October. The overall purpose was to establish links between people responsible or involved in this kind of work within the network Churches. It was arranged together with the 'Co-operative association of care and preservation of Gotland's churches'. Fourteen participants from eleven Churches took part in the consultation. In a way the consultation gave birth to a network within the overall Theobalt network. Among the ideas for a continuation, there was suggested to arrange another meeting inviting also professionals and experts in this field, information of mutual interest published on the Theobalt home page, co-operation in certain projects etc.

The planning committee of the symposium of Religion, Science and Environment, which is working on the mandate of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople has had a meeting in Visby in December. The purpose of the meeting was to go on in their palling work for the environmental symposium, which is going to take place in the Baltic in June 2003. It is an arrangement in the line of similar symposia, which has been held in different sea area in southern Europe. The diocese of Visby and Theobalt were invited to attend the meeting as observer.

6. Personal contacts

All of the steering group had the opportunity to meet with Vladimir, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga at the meeting in January. During the year the Theobalt co-ordinator Ragnar Svenserud has had some significant personal meetings to inform about Theobalt and establish links supporting the purpose of the network. In Poland, there were meetings with Archbishop Dr Jeremiasz, the Orthodox Church in Poland and the new Lutheran Bishop Janusz Jagutski together with Bishop Mieczyslaw Cieslar of Warsaw.

In Brussels meetings were held with Dr Michael Weninger, member of the advisory group of the President of the European Commission, with Mgr Noël Treanor, general secretary of COMECE, Rev Rüdiger Noll Associate general secretary of CEC and Bishop Hilarion, representative of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Union. As a rule visits in the Baltic countries are always connected with meetings with the Theobalt contact persons.

7. Finances

The administration work is primarily financed by the diocese of Visby. For the first time a network church, namely Church of Finland, has contributed to the Theobalt work. Besides this grant, there have been no cash contributions from the network churches. However, in connection with different arrangements contributions in kind are given, like premises for meetings, accommodation and meals.

The administrative assistance given at the bien festival generated an income. On the basis of an application for the activities during the year, the Swedish Government has approved a contribution of 150 000 SEK.

Visby, the 29th of January 2003

Ragnar Svenserud
Theobalt co-ordinator