

PLAYING THE BLUE MUSIC

- EXPLORING NEW OPPORTUNITIES TOGETHER

EUROPEAN SECRETARIES' REPORT 1999/2000 to the EAY GENERAL ASSEMBLY, MAY 2000

PART I:

Dear EAY Family,

1. A Bus-Ride in Hungary

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. The bus was scheduled for Kaloz, not far from the Balaton-sea. I entered the bus in Budapest, and knew that the bus-ride was supposed to last for exactly two hours. The local YMCA-leader, who was a minister in the local church, should meet me at the final stop. The bus did not go any further than to Kaloz. One hour and forty minutes later most people left the bus, I could not see my friend there and there were still twenty minutes more to go and since three ladies were still in the bus, I relaxed and continued to listen to my walk-man.

The road became more and more narrow, and the bus went up and down in rather surprising movements. Around five o'clock there was no more road to be seen. A small farm at the end of the road in the middle of nowhere. We had landed on the bus-driver's farm, and it turned out that the three ladies were the bus-driver's mother, mother-in-law and wife. I was stranded with no Hungarian language.

How do you describe YMCA with only body-language? It took me exactly 30 seconds to give it up.

I concentrated on my friend's church-position. After all he was the local priest.

I created a one man liturgical procession all by myself. It did not work. I tried the bells. Ding-dong! The bus-driver laughed. I preached with arms and legs. Now also the mother-in-law laughed. I built a church-tower. The mother joined in laughing.

We did not communicate very well.

I played my last card. I knelt and bowed my head in prayer. In fact I was about to resign. I could not communicate. My head was down. That worked. They stopped laughing and said: Pop. Priest! Church.

It was an amazing experience. I, who almost totally depend upon verbal communication, found myself communicating with my knees. Kneeling communication, I call it.

It may feel humiliating, this way of communicating, but it works.

Half an hour later the bus-driver delivered me outside the local church. He waved good-bye and shouted: Ding-Dong!

Dear friends! This first part of my report is an attempt to introduce elements of change, thoughts I hope can be useful for the group discussions. Things are going well in the EAY just

now. Therefore this is exactly the right time to start preparing for change. What will be the relevance of EAY for the next ten years?

We invite you to play the Blue Music and explore new opportunities together.

You may remember from last year when I introduced those terms, with Grey Music we build the house - with Blue Music we fill the house with life!

Change may be exciting - but almost never comfortable.

This travel experience from Hungary was for me a piece of Blue Music. It changed my ideas of development work. I had played all my cards, used my skills and knowledge and strength, and it did not work. Then I communicated through my weakness. It was definitely not planned, because I do not like to be weak, But it happened.

That is a strong message to a person who definitely does not like to be weak. Maybe the same message has some value for an organisation that does not like to be weak?

A couple of weeks ago at the Executive Committee of the World Alliance in Canada, I listened to Konrad Reisser, The Secretary General of the World Council of Churches. He said that the Ecumenical Movement had changed from being a Movement to becoming an Institution. The Grey Music had gone so far that the strength of the Institution, the buildings and structures and power had become the weakness. It was no longer possible to move it into new positions. The challenge now is to de-institutionalise it and recreate a movement.

The Blue Music gives us a crucial question for the future relevance of EAY and YMCA - Institution or Movement?

Stable and strong, but stuck with yesterday's challenges - or weaker, but moving into new positions to serve new generations?

2. Change as an Opportunity to Loose Face

Excuse me - but I love these provocative titles. Of course loosing face is extremely embarrassing. I do not like to loose face, and change offers a risk to loose face. Therefore I tend to avoid change and stick to the Grey Music.

But how many of you have experienced loosing face - and discovered that it is an enormously empowering experience - it can set you free. You loose the facade, and your real strength comes forward, can be used, will grow.

Life is not about saving face. It is a wonderful freedom in the knowledge that I am here to save the face of others, maybe even save the future of others. To be able to see my sisters and brothers I have to stop looking in the mirror evaluating myself.

In Geneva a wise old man is writing the history of the YMCA, his name is Clyde Binfield. At the same meeting in Canada a few days ago Roger Newhall shared with us a poem written by Clyde, and there he says:

Risks

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool,
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental,
To reach out is to risk involvement,
To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.

To plan your ideas and dreams before the crowd is to risk their love,
To love is to risk not being loved in return,
To live is to risk dying,
To hope is to risk despair.
To try is to risk failure.

And the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing,
The one who risks nothing, does nothing and has nothing and finally is nothing.
He may avoid sufferings and sorrow,
But he simply cannot learn, feel, change, grow, or love.

Chained by his certitude, he is a slave; he has forfeited freedom.
Only one who risks is free!

In the process of exploring new opportunities together, are you willing to risk losing face a little?

To talk about the weaknesses you see in your own Movements? Try communicating through weakness?

3. Gender and Youth

Because I so much love the YMCA and the fellowship with all of you, I want to share my most personal encounter with the BLUE Music, the music of change.

There are so many important matters. Some times we become important. In our own eyes. The BLUE Music comes to us also then, with a sad smile.

Mid-eighties, my daughter was seven and she was for the first time accompanying me alone on one of my travels. I was doing important things. And she became sick. I pushed her gently away. She became more sick. I asked her to lay down. I needed to do my work. I was important, you see. Then she started silently to cry. And I was forced to leave my responsibility with somebody else and take my daughter to our room.

She had serious pain in her stomach, temperature was going up, she started to have fantasies, then she cried, then she fell asleep for some minutes.

I was so afraid. I was so alone. And in the silence when the child was asleep, the BLUE Music played sadly, silently for me and sung songs about my life. And I did not like all those songs. They were about some values not being practiced. One song was about a father having not much time for his daughter. The worst song was about a lady being alone at home with all the responsibilities in crisis and emergencies. For the first time in my life I felt these emotions, for the first time I understood them. And I was full of shame. The only thing I could say to myself, was: You stupid, stupid MAN.

It was a long, long night, it was a blue night. I had to find a doctor and got medicine.

When dawn's early light came creeping into the room, my daughter was sleeping normally, the crisis was over.

That night changed me.

Wholeness is to bring your values home and practice them. And life is just one, for your lady and for yourself.

And this is still so much of a MAN's world.

What the Blue Music had taught me, was the difference between a helping hand and taking responsibility at home.

I use this experience to ask us this question: Do we listen enough to the voices of women? Do we share influence, positions and space with them in the YMCA? Or do we pay lip -service and offer token influence?

Do we listen to the questions and needs of youth in our Movement? When their questions become provocative, do we shut them down or do we still listen, listen for the Blue Music?

The new YMCAs of Europe, do we lend a helping hand, or do we share responsibility?

What will be our strategy for the next ten years, regarding women, youth and struggling Movements, inside and outside of Europe?

4. Theology of Incarnation

Will you allow me three minutes of theological reflection? It is a suggestion to see the YMCA as an ongoing Incarnation. Incarnation is the word for Jesus being born as a child. It is about the eternal Word of God, Logos, becoming flesh. It is John, chapter 1.

At University I was taught how to speak and preach to young people. How to bring them to church. When I started to work and live with young people in the YMCA, I understood that before I could say anything, I had to listen to them and learn from them. Instead of bringing them to my culture, I had to bring myself to their culture. I was starting to learn what the theological term Incarnation meant. Jesus came to ordinary people, dressed like them, talked their language, became like one of them.

When I started to organise Leadership Training Courses in the YMCA, I was full of my own ideas, I had methods and techniques how to fill empty heads with my wisdom. Reality taught me a completely new way. My task was to be there to open up for all the resources, experiences, knowledge and skills within the participants and let a wonderful process of mutual learning start. Again I got a lesson about the word Incarnation. I am not here to demonstrate my own excellence, but to open up for other peoples' excellence and let them grow.

Jesus came to serve. He brought the Kingdom of God to mankind, by demonstrating it himself. The Kingdom of God became visible, we could hear it and we could touch it. And we could see a man who lived and practised his values till he died from it.

I see the challenge for us as YMCA to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ - as an ongoing, never-ending process of Incarnation.

The deep going question behind the General Assembly -theme this year is a question of relevance. How can we stay relevant for the new generations. How can we be relevant for young people of our time with all their different needs, symbolised in the triangle of body, mind and spirit.

I cannot answer that question with all my Christian values only downstairs in the cellar, as a foundation. I need those values to fill the house with life and joy.

The YMCA is certainly not a church, we will never be. But we are a Christian movement. Born of the Spirit. I think Jesus is talking about the Blue Music in John 3.8:

"The wind blows wherever it wishes; you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everybody who is born of the Spirit."

5. All I Really Need to Know

When you are exploring new opportunities together, I would like to give you my favourite piece on every day theology:

"All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School. These are the things I learned:

Share everything.

Play fair.

Don't hit people.

Put things back where you found them.

Clean up your own mess.

Don't take things that aren't yours.

Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody.

Wash your hands before you eat.

Flush.

Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup: The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that. Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup - they all die. So do we. And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned - the biggest of all - Look.

Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and equality and sane living. Take any one of those items and extrapolate it into sophisticated adult terms and apply it to your family life or youth work or your government or your world and it holds true and clear and firm. Think what a better world it would be if we all - the whole world - had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had as a basic policy to always put things back where they found them and to clean up their own mess.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are - when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together."

(Robert Fulghum "All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten")

PART II:

6. Acknowledgements

First of all let me use this occasion to say thank you to the Executive Committee for an inspiring and close co-operation during this year. The staff team has again invested time and efforts more than we could ask for, I am proud of this staff team!

Zdenka Sera is not here today, but I want to share with you all how grateful we are for her whole-hearted assistance in moving the office from St.Gallen to Prague and get us going in a new environment. Zdenka has left the EAY to join some friends in establishing a new company in her home-town.

I am proud to introduce to you our new Office Manager, Katerina Malinova, Czech Republic, Our Finance Manager Martina Plackova, Slovakia and Office Assistant and responsible for IT-Management, Artak Saroyan, Armenia.

Michal Sourek has assisted us well in the office, from July first this year he will return to the field of EAY Leadership Development.

For Armenia, Georgia and Fund Raising we have Vardan Hambardzumyan, Armenia, For Russia and Ukraine we have Mikhail Guskov, Russia, for Ukraine and Rumania we have Adam Rychlik, Poland. A very special thank you goes to my dear companion and Executive Secretary, Michal Szymanczak.

7. Highlights From Last Year

I will basically use my travel schedule from the last 12 months to invite you to join in on some of the highlights from the last year.

- Shortly after the Assembly in France 37 people from 16 countries met in The Czech village Herlikovice for the event "Catch the Vision". Stefano Tomarelli.
- In June 85 people from all over the world met in Geneva to conclude the Organisation Review Process of the World Alliance of YMCAs. Carlos Sanve.
- In July I was invited to The European Y's Men-Convention in Denmark. Y's Men Rep.
- The Russian Programme Festival took place in Suzdal , Russia in August for 150 people from 5 countries from the former Soviet-Union. Nikolai Kurochkin.
- In October I went to Charlotte in the USA to discuss further co-operation with local US-YMCAs in former Soviet-Union. Jerry Prado-Shaw.
- In October I visited YMCA in Wales and met a new programme called "Cynon Valley Young Carers Support project". Dave Allen.
- In January the first round of Training for Programme Developers took place. Martina Plackova.
- In January I visited Y-Care in London and heard about the "Target Campaign". Katherine Cash.
- In March I visited Scotland and saw an exciting programme for training life skills. Pamela Orchard.

- In April I participated in the German Secretaries Meeting on the new YMCA-Riverboat in Dresden.
- From there I went to Rumania to visit a YMCA in a difficult situation. I was impressed by new, young leadership there. Bogdan Ciociu.

Last year I spent 155 days on 22 international travels to 14 different countries. Do you know what was the most exciting? The most exciting thing last year was the Mayor of Litomyšl, a small town in the Czech Republic, who fell in love. With whom did this mayor fall in love? With Ten Sing and the YMCA, of course. And that is why the EAY will have a new Training Centre from this autumn. Jana Vohralikova.

The partnership around this Centre will be with Czech YMCA, the City of Litomyšl, Danish Y's Men and the Norwegian YWCA/YMCA who will pay one year salary for the Centre Manager - Michal Sourek.

8. Balkan

Before I go on to more optimistic future perspectives, let me talk to you about the situation in the Balkan countries. Last year we were in serious negotiations with Action of Churches Together, ACT together with the World Alliance. We intended to go into refugee camps with programmes for children and youth. Before any co-operation could start, the situation changed rapidly. We decided not to go into Kosovo itself. We are not that kind of organisation, we are not set up to offer emergency aid almost in the battlefield. If anybody want us to become such an organisation, we need to be given the resources to change. After some months we were told that there were more than 400 NGOs trying to find their place in Kosovo. We still think our decision was the right one.

With assistance among others from France, Bulgaria, Italy and Switzerland we have started doing what we are good at, developing a YMCA together with local contacts in Macedonia. We have had two visits in Macedonia lead by our Executive Secretary. Recently there have come some initiatives about a possible YMCA in Albania, we are looking into that for the time being. We are actively supporting the YMCAs in Rumania and in Bulgaria. When time comes for reconciliation initiatives in the region, we hope to be strong enough in the neighbour countries to be able to offer some services also in the reconciliation process.

I am not optimistic. Tension is growing in different areas of the former Yugoslavia. People are still suffering in Chechnya. Let us pray for the people in these areas. And if you want us to do other things in emergency situations, we welcome a discussion with you on how we can share ideas and resources to do so.

9. Future Perspectives

Last year I identified three areas of priority for the near future:

- Focus on Programme Development
- Trainers' Network
- Training Centre

In all these fields we see good results already. The Russian Programme Festival was a success. We have seen the first session of Training for Programme Developers, a new Training Centre in Litomyšl is welcomed by our Executive Committee, on the condition that the coming

negotiations go well, and we have the next Training the Trainers' Reunion planned and financed for September this year.

I have not gone concretely into the areas of need in Europe just now, because we want you to dream and feel free to identify new areas of activity for the European YMCA.

Still I want to indicate where my thinking is going regarding our internal development and setting of priorities, and I would feel very good about any feedback from your side before we go into a more detailed process of deciding the new strategic plan next year.

When I analyse the situation, 10 years after we started the intense Movement Development-work in Central and Eastern Europe, I see that we still have years of challenges ahead of us in this field.

But I would soon change the key headline. In stead of Movement Development I will suggest the term Integration as heading.

As we are continuing to strengthen and develop the emerging and re-emerging YMCAs, I am convinced that a lot of this Movement Strengthening will take place through participation in common European Programmes and events.

At the same time I observe some obvious signs of weakness in the European Programmes. The different Programme Groups need more support, they need a minimum staff support from the EAY. We will try to offer this with the existing resources we have. We are already in good communication with several Programme Groups, and of course we will share the resources as equally as we can. Important will the process of co-ordination be. I am happy to refer to the joint Programme Leadership Training course which will be offered in Litomysl 2-4 October this year. We do hope this is only the beginning of a constructive process of bringing Programme Resources together.

If I should try to divide my thinking in the body-mind-spirit format, it would look like this:

Mission-related issues will still be Youth Spirituality and Social Exclusion. I would like to see both of them being much more integrated into the common field of Programme Development, so that these important impulses can inspire all what we are doing.

Content-related elements would be increase in staff support for the European programmes, improved co-ordination in the programme Field, more combined events and training courses, more centralised Fund Raising and development of Resource Material, improved Public Relation, Branding is a new buzz-word, and improved Representation in the European structures. Our group of Representatives has done a very good job, but they need some more resources, basically young people trained to do this job on our behalf.

As a result, we hope for more volume - that is more mutual inspiration across all borders, new leadership, recruitment of members, establishment of new YMCAs and a clearer profile.

A clearer profile must give us a better fund raising result. This year YMCA of Malta invites to an EAY Language Training School and YMCA of Italy invites to an EAY Summer Camp in Italy. Both initiatives come from member movements wanting to support the EAY. The famous Eberstadt-fund raising is giving the EAY DEM 60 000.- every year. Fabulous!

In 2003 EAY can celebrate 30 years anniversary. We have started to plan for a mega-event to create a manifestation of what YMCA is in Europe - and create a fund for future European YMCA-work.

The crucial question is how we see our relationship to the international dimension. Do we want to participate in this process of integration in Europe and beyond Europe?

The result of the Organisation Review process in the World Movement was very encouraging, we will hear more from Martin Vogler, the WAY President about this later. The conclusion is a much closer co-operation between Area Organisations like EAY and the WAY. As Secretary General I will take part in what is called the Global Staff Coordinating Team. A four year Operating Plan will be presented for the EAY General Assembly and you will meet the same Plan when you come to the World Council.

A very good friend of mine always says that the EAY exists only five days a year for him, during the Assembly.

The question you will deal with tomorrow and on Saturday is what kind of relationship you have to the EAY and how it may change. The second question is what we shall undertake to do together the next few years.

10. We are not alone!

The YMCA serves individual human beings all over the world. At the same time I do believe that we have an important impact on societies. If Non Governmental Organisations all over the world could work closer together, I believe the impact would be much more effective.

From Michal's last journey to Macedonia I heard a story which gave a little glimpse of a bigger perspective on what we are doing. Michal and Stefano went to Macedonia to help starting YMCA there. In a square in the city Skopje, which was terribly damaged during an earthquake in the 1960's, they found a memorial plate telling that here was once the house where Mother Theresa was born. She went to Calcutta to serve the suffering people of a far away country. Now we are walking past her birthplace in Skopje to serve the youth of Mother Theresa's country.