

What is my EUROPE?



Roy Crowder



Janice and Peter Clark



What a wonderful opening session to this year's conference! Roy Crowder hosted the evening and Janice and Peter Clark led a very enjoyable yet thought-provoking session. 'Nets' and 'belonging together' were strong themes running through an evening packed with singing, prayer, activities and exuberant music from the Portuguese folk group Trevo Alegre. The European theme was very strong as we sang – words and music all carefully chosen for their European connections. We sang the different verses of each hymn/song in different European languages – what a diverse continent we belong to.

We opened with "In Christ there is no East or West" and were then sent in search of three other people such that our four journeys to Swanwick were from the four different compass points (a very imaginative way of getting folks into groups of four which I shall store for future use). After hearing the story from Mark's gospel of fishermen called from mending their nets to follow and to belong, we were challenged to discuss with

our group the questions "Who are the net-makers and who are the net-repairers in my church?" A week later and I'm still reflecting on those questions.

The extent of our internationalism was determined not just from where we came but also by the languages we spoke. In the quick poll which followed I managed to count at least twelve languages but I'm sure I missed some!

For our key activity Peter and Janice had printed A4 maps of the European countries and then sliced each map into four. I had a slice of Luxembourg!! Our task was to find those folk holding the other three slices. The resulting scramble and noise was worthy of a teenage rave! Reflecting on this activity later some talked of the fun and sense of success in finding their partners whilst others talked of frustration and feeling lost. Interesting! In our new group of four we were asked to fasten our slices together to complete our map and then to tie it to a large net draped at the side of the room.



While this was being done Trevo Alegre sang and played more of their wonderful music.

Many questions challenged my thinking during all of this. How connected am I? How can I help others feel connected? How far am I throwing my net? How large or fine is the mesh? Only one hymn could follow – “O for a thousand tongues to sing” – with alternate verses sung of course in English and Portuguese.

Afterwards, introductions and welcomes were given to some of our World Church

visitors including students at Queen’s College and returning mission partners, and to our workshop and key note speakers.

The evening was drawn to a close by Nicola Vidamour as she reflected on a Russian icon of the ascension of Elijah. We were encouraged to think of journeys, of what we’ve left behind, of when we’ve been served by angels and of opportunities to ‘grasp the mantle’ (see page 10).

Chris Thompson