



[Welcome](#) > [Conferences & FAQ](#) > EurECA Conference 2001

EurECA Conference 2001

The Teacher as Educator, Leader, Model, Counsellor and Visionary

Schloss Beuggen, Rheinfalden, Germany

Standing proudly above the swift-flowing River Rhine and looking out towards the tree-covered hills of northern Switzerland is Schloss Beuggen, the venue for the 2001 EurECA Conference. The oldest parts of the castle date from the thirteenth century and it is not difficult to imagine the main conference room thronged with members of the Order of German Knights who founded the building. For most of the past 200 years, the schloss was a centre for training teachers of the poor and disadvantaged and this work was carried out with a Christian motivation. Now a conference centre under the auspices of the Lutheran Church, it became for a few days in late July the happy meeting-place of Christian educators from all over Europe.

Seventy Christian educators from nineteen countries gathered together: from Norway to Croatia; Finland to Portugal; Scotland to Romania. Three travelled from the United States of America and two from the even more distant land of Australia. The participants represented a wide range of Christian involvement in education. They came together from newer Christian schools; older church schools; state schools of various kinds; international schools and theological seminaries. There were teachers, headteachers, trainers of teachers, school inspectors, advisers to national governments and some were involved in home education. Some were leaders of national associations of Christian teachers, some worked with organisations supporting Christian work and witness in schools; and others worked to provide classroom equipment for needy schools in eastern Europe. A wide age range was represented: the young and active and those past retirement age, no less energetic.

The speakers for the plenary sessions were Dr Lee Hollaar from Canada and Dr Ian Findlay from Scotland. They led the conference participants in grappling with issues of educational leadership and school improvement. Dr Findlay spoke of the need to consider a broad view of leadership to include, not only the professionals within and outside our schools, but also parents, pupils and others from the wider community. He referred also to the effect of continuing professional development of staff, which gave Christian teachers the opportunity to influence by example, offering guidance and support to the school community.

Dr Hollaar drew our attention to leadership in the context of a changing landscape as the world of education moves from a period dominated by rationalism and individualism into all the unknowns of what has come to be termed postmodernity. A common thread in the talks of both key speakers was that Christian educators need to see leadership more in terms of community building and the development of a shared vision than of old-style hierarchies with their pyramids of authority.

Workshop sessions sought to apply this thinking to particular educational contexts and issues. The strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of different national and regional situations were analysed by the participants in small groups. Lively plenary sessions shared concerns and challenges which we face in an increasingly secular society. As country representatives reported and gave us items for prayer, we learned also of new openings to share the Christian message.

The EurECA General Assembly took place during the conference and no fewer than 15 new organisations and 28 new individuals were accepted into membership. This brings the total membership of this growing association to 48 organisations and 135 individuals.

As always on these occasions, a key feature was the informal fellowship among participants around meal tables, on outings to local places of interest and sometimes late into the evening after the day's sessions were long over. This is where lasting friendships are made, ideas are exchanged and the whole world of education is put right - at least until the next time! The conference closed with a Communion Service. For a time, we laid aside our individual educational cares and concerns as John Shortt opened the scriptures and led us in worship. He poignantly focused our attention on the centre of our faith, our Lord and Saviour. The participants stood in a large circle around the table and celebrated together the Lord's death and resurrection. It was a moving experience of international Christian fellowship, across denominational, linguistic and cultural divides: a foretaste of that to come in the new heavens and the new earth.

As the conference closed and the participants returned to the four corners of Europe and beyond, they could not but leave feeling refreshed and challenged. Refreshed by new and renewed friendships and fellowship in Christ; challenged that in the changing world Christian educators must seek a shared vision which goes beyond our own vista and spheres of influence.

John Muir (Scotland)

If it is the aim of EurECA to create an environment, in which "different people are one in Christ", much remains to be done. Only as Christians involved in EurECA recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ in the context of their respective countries, will the Christian perspective of education be viewed by others as a genuine alternative to the secular. To achieve this, as Lee Hollaar said in one of his conference talks, "Human obsession for control, which contradicts the desire to serve and to lead" must be overcome. This is a key challenge for Christian educators, whose profession it could be said has an inbuilt predisposition to control.

The effort to convey the Christian perspective, which is more than passing on contents about Christian belief, was palpable during the entire programme of the EurECA conference. This was expressed succinctly when Dr. John Shortt stressed the need for a genuinely European point of view from EurECA members. Hierarchies on the basis of language, gender, origin, culture or education should not be allowed to prosper in EurECA, he challenged.

To build a European "community of the unequal" in a Christian sense needs time. If we accept this viewpoint, EurECA is, therefore, only at the beginning of a long journey, which will certainly be enjoyable but which will, inevitably, at times, be painful.

Waltraud Gebhardt (Germany)