

EurECA Conference 2008

Hope for the Planet: Christian Education for a Sustainable Future

Graz, Austria

(To listen to audio recordings of conference lectures, click on their titles in the report below.)

The 2008 EurECA conference took place in the Exerzitenhaus der Barmherzigen Schwestern in Graz, Austria during Ascension Weekend (1-4 May). The 62 participants gathered from 16 countries: Austria (10), Bulgaria (3), England (10), Finland (3), France (4), Germany (7), Italy (1), Netherlands (2), Norway (2), Poland (4), Portugal (2), Romania (8), Slovak (1), Switzerland (2), Ukraine (2) and one participant even came all the way from Australia!

The conference was a working conference for teachers of all curriculum subjects with the aim of helping them both to learn themselves and to teach their students how to care for God's world. It focused on the very topical theme of our times – on Hope for the Planet: Christian Education for a Sustainable Future. The aim was to stir our thinking to consider what this means for us as Christians in our schools in a time of such widespread concern over what is happening to our planet? The main conference speaker was Dave Bookless, a former teacher from England, working at present with the international Christian nature conservation organisation A Rocha.

The motto of the conference was Psalm 24 verse 1: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it". On arrival in their rooms, each participant found this verse written on a small piece of paper together with a lovely small bird or fish as a home-made souvenir, prepared with great love by Thesi Kerneza.

The other topic-related surprise for everybody was their nametags, prepared with great thoughtfulness as they not only gave the name and role of the participant, but each country was also represented by a special picture from nature as a distinguishing sign.

Besides moving lectures, the Lord granted us wonderful worship times led by bass player Robert Kerneza and other gifted singers and musicians (pianists, violinists, and a percussionist). The effects of this were enhanced by videos showing the wonder and beauty of God's creation.

There was another special surprise at this conference: a prayer room in the basement of the cloister which provided for quiet times for anybody who wanted to spend time on their own with the Lord.

During the whole conference the participants had a chance to view and buy interesting and thought-provoking teaching materials, books and CDs from various countries.

Thursday, 1 May

After registration and a delicious dinner, we gathered for the first conference session. The Chairman of EurECA Board, Matt Kägi, gave a warm welcome to everybody. He introduced the Board as well as the worship group. After a time of worship, Thesi Kerneza introduced the national groups of participants with the help of pictures from each country.

Friday, 2 May

The first session after breakfast started again with powerful worship. Then Dave Bookless gave his first presentation: [The State of the Planet](#).

After a coffee break, it was time for the presentations of ecological education in different national situations. It was very interesting to see enthusiastic Christian teachers presenting projects from eight European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, England, Finland, Germany, Poland, Romania and Switzerland).

Several excursions were planned for the afternoon. A large group of people opted for a visit to an exhibition on climate change in the Science-Tunnel at Graz University. Other people had a chance to view films with topics relevant to the conference theme or to explore Graz.

In the late afternoon, the second topic-oriented presentation by Dave Bookless - [Biblical Overview](#) – on God's purposes for the earth and our role in them.

After dinner the participants divided into three groups according to their interest in three different films: An Inconvenient Truth, Unser täglich Brot and Life Running out of Control. In spite of the provision of popcorns and a lovely atmosphere, the truth in the films and its visual expression was really thought-provoking and led into discussions in small groups.

Saturday, 3 May

The day started again with worship and prayers not just in English, German and French, but also in various national languages of the participants.

Dave Bookless gave his third presentation - [What can we do?](#) - with practical hints on how to approach the topic of the conference in our daily lives and especially in our teaching practice. Discussion continued in curriculum subject work groups. The groups brainstormed the practical application of the pillars of sustainability with a view to the inclusion of values and hands-on interaction with nature in our classrooms and the possibilities of allotting time so that we can focus on this topic in our teaching.

In the afternoon, we were offered two great opportunities to get into direct contact with God's wonderful creation. One group visited a farm about one hour from Graz. There we met a real ecological family in the wonderful Austrian countryside, saw their work with their crops and animals, and tasted wonderful home-made bread, cakes and various meat products. The second group went to Graz Botanic Gardens to experience the lovely spring-blooming flowers, bushes and trees.

The evening sessions consisted of two different activities. The first part focused on prayer for the nations. The importance of prayer, introduced by Liviu Caprar, was evidenced by an overwhelming testimony about the Lord's answer in the case of Christian schools in Finland. As all participants had had an opportunity to write their prayer requests in earlier meetings, current needs from different countries were summarised and prayed for. After this, a social evening with music brought a lot of fun and enjoyment.

Sunday, 4 May

Another lovely spring day, a gift from the Lord! The morning service was certainly very special for most of the participants. After we opened our hearts in worship, the Lord spoke to us through the inspiring testimonies of Thesi on the conference subject. Then Rupert Kaye, led by the Holy Spirit, introduced to us familiar Christian truth in a new way during Communion.

At the end we thanked not only our dear Heavenly Father but also the people who took wonderful care for our hearts, minds and bodies. The conference was closed at 11.30 and the only things left were the farewells, tears, wishes for the future, and email addresses exchanged with new friends.

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