

Overview of the Planning and Preparation of the 3rd ICBE Consultation

By Lolit Hafner-Monico

The following write-up is a result of the compiled documentation/agenda during the course of working with the BIBAK-Switzerland group in the planning and preparation for hosting the 3rd ICBE Consultation. It commenced on the first meeting after the consultation in Vienna on May 29 – June 1, 2003. Brainstorming already started on the trip back home from the meeting.

The first preparatory meeting was held in Baseland at the Passerini residence in the summer of 2003. With the evaluation results from Vienna as our guideline, tasks were listed and divided among the members. Other meetings followed in Bern mostly at Bruder Klaus Church through the effort of Sabina Kuenzi and in between, we also met in private homes or outdoors.

Challenges

The first challenge was to create the general framework of the preparatory committees and assign tasks to the 11 active members of the group. It turned out that there were more committees than members so we had to devise ways to do our multiple functions. From that time on, there were already enthusiastic expressions and encouragement from our background supporters and that helped sustain and propel all of us to get to work.

Another challenge was the disperse locations of the different members from all over Switzerland. Because of the travelling costs, we limited the number of meetings to the minimum therefore more mail and phone communications.

The whole planning and preparation was a real challenge to all of us not only in terms of the bulk of work but also in dealing with each other. From the beginning, as is normal in every group, each member believed in different ways of doing things which could already spell chaos. It was just impossible to consider and accommodate all suggestions so we had to settle for the most practical one to get started. In order to get going, we had to agree and set rules for ourselves. We agreed to disagree, and yet unite, cooperate, and concentrate our energy in our assignments. This common agreement kept us on track over the last two years. The result speaks for itself. With respect to each member and every involvement I had in this preparation, it was inspiring to experience the group dynamics within the majority of members, powered by each other's encouragement during group meeting with doses of humour and wit. Throughout the year long planning and working together, we made mistakes but learned a great deal.

Hotel Friedegg

As soon as the task lists and activities were finalized for each working committee, work commenced for some. Assigned to scout for the venue, I started to list prospective locations considering suggestions from the Vienna evaluation report. Criteria were ranked according to the following: reasonable cost, accessibility to public transport, countryside location and possibility of outdoor activities. (e.g. hiking, camping and shopping). For practical reasons, it was the group's consensus that if possible, the venue should be in Bern since five of the members live in the area. This was to centralize the task coordination in the preparation.

In a span of six months, we visited more than 20 location/venues in the region of Bern and the upper country area. First, we started with low-budget venues like YMCAs/YWCAs, scout centres, youth hostels to converted bunkers. Most often, there were those satisfying our criteria but were either booked or too isolated. With most of those, there were no function rooms. Before the onset of winter 2003, we narrowed the choices to three.

We then called for a meeting to inspect the prospective venues. For the group, it was a welcome opportunity to meet outdoor and have a picnic in the nice autumn setting. The outcome was an overwhelming approval for Credo hotel at Wilderswil near Interlaken. The cost, location and accessibility got the best points so we made an initial arrangement with the hotel manager. We were informed that a group who yearly use the place for religious retreat had not confirmed their reservation yet and will be given priority being regular clients. For this reason, we had to hold one of the other venue for three weeks until we heard from Credo Hotel. For us, it was a long wait. Unfortunately at the end, we lost the bid for the venue.

As time for the reservation was getting shorter and the target dates were a holiday, the group decided to get the second choice (Meielisalp) also located in the area along the lake of Thun between Interlaken and Spiez. We were then frantic to reserve the venue, but while waiting for the decision from Credo, Meielisalp was already booked. That left only one choice to grab which, in the meantime, was closed for vacation when we went to see it.

Frustrated and disheartened, on the way back home, Juerg and I decided to detour and give a try to a venue in Aeschi we saw listed under VCH hotels (Association of Christian Hotels). These are hotels like the previous venues we inspected belonging to the Union of Free Mission Communities. Your guess? ...yes, it is - Friedegg. On hindsight, we can say or think, what happened has to happen to lead us to our venue.

Without wasting time, the next meeting was held at Friedegg hotel in the spring of 2004. From then on, we moved on to the next task.

Financial Plan and Budget

Much as we would like to bargain more on the cost of the board and lodging, we were aware that the prices at Friedegg were reasonable compared to others in the vicinity. The contract was made and as it came out, it was an interactive process involving negotiation between hotel and the host organization. Close coordination with the contact member or unit negotiating was necessary until days after the consultation. In some instances, visa applications needed validation from both hotel and host. We had to assume and anticipate numbers of attendees because it was the basis to request for the group discount. For 50 guests and over, the group discount applied and all the function rooms and facilities reserved.

Throughout the entire preparation of the conference, close attention to the budget was necessary so as not to go beyond the threshold set. A check book of records of all financial activities (income and expenses) was maintained. This set-up proved helpful to us until the end of the financial report.

Programme Development

Simultaneously, while arrangements with the venue were on going, the committee on programme started rolling. Yvonne Belen from the Netherlands and Fred Labfayong, started drafting the programme. Numerous exchanges by mails followed to come up with the consultation format that included the title, theme, objectives, motto, methods, topics and issues and the presenters. Likewise, there was the first official promotion of the consultation in the IIC-5 Souvenir Programme. Yvonne wrote the advertisement and Fred sponsored it. Invitations and hand-out information were also sent to prospective participants complemented by phone calls and word advertisements from other ICBE members like Cristabel (Dono) Bounggick. To further facilitate the information dissemination, Juerg suggested adding a special page on the BIBAK-Switzerland website where relevant information and updates from the working committees could be posted. Through the ICBE mailing group, members from the BENELUX, UK, Austria, Germany, Philippines, US and Canada contributed their inputs in finalizing the format and programme activities of the consultation. When the first draft was posted, several revisions were introduced to accommodate suggestions from other members. Through e-mailing, improvements and changes were done faster than the previous meetings.

In choosing the topics for the workshops, we based the suggested topics on the evaluation report from Vienna.

For the presenters/facilitators of some topics, we already had some people in mind. On the topic on aging migrants, we placed Conchita Pooten being professionally involved with aging migrants; Mia Abeya for her comprehensive knowledge and background on Igorot culture and Rev. Cesar Taguba on Cordillera and migrant issues. The other topics were chosen from suggestions of other ICBE members. For the workshop of the second generation, we deliberately left it open to give them free hand to choose their own topic of interest.

In the process of developing the programme, we had to deal with problems and conflicts that arose, but we dealt with them as they came. Several revisions were made because of the unconfirmed attendance of speakers/moderators, changes in the programme activities or time conflicts with invited guests.

The last winter, before the event, we made minor adjustments in the program activities to accommodate a local group from the community of Aeschi, the Jodlergruppe. Alpengruss Aeschried, whom we requested to participate. Through the help of Mr. Thomas Knupp, the hotel proprietor and manager of Friedegg, we were introduced to the group leader, Mr Fritz Portenier. More meetings followed and eventually, we got their commitment to this experiment on integration. What transpired during the cultural exchange that gala evening was for all of us, undoubtedly, an experience we will all remember.

Up to the last days prior to the consultation, we tried, as much as possible, to incorporate in the programme contributions before the final printing. There were also ideas introduced later by other members to spruce and animate the program and so came the Alphorn number and the intermission from the Austrian delegates.

Due to short time changes on attendance, there were parts in the program where we had to replace speakers and moderators. We were fortunate to have guests who willingly took over so the programme flow went smoothly.

Final Hotel and Transport Details

In the autumn of 2004, the final arrangement for board and lodging at the venue was posted in the website and sent to the ICBE mail group. The bank account and instructions for payment were included. Since then, payments started to come in for the room reservation as it was first-come-first-serve based on the room categories available.

Apart from follow up mails and calls to participants, some final arrangements had to be undertaken with the hotel concerning meals, number of full board guests, day guests and room assignments.

Likewise, transport service had to be confirmed and coordinated. It had two purposes: it was to meet and guide arrivals who flew into Zurich and Bern airport and to shuttle participants from Spiez train station to the venue; and the other way around on the departure day. While some found their own way to the venue, most were fetched somewhere along the way.

Stage and Hall Decoration

Subsequently, while work on the programme and financial planning was in progress, those in charge of the physical arrangements were designing/preparing the stage and hall decorations. After ocular inspections of the venue, Violeta Passerini, Rebecca Riesterer and Julio Monico started pooling their ideas to come up with the hall decorations. The ICBE banner (BIMAAK) was the original idea of Peter and Rebecca Riesterer. They did extra effort to produce that very nice motif. The group is indeed grateful for their ingenuity.

The stage decoration with the unique cut-out letters is a product of Violeta's creativity. How she toiled and worked for perfection is worthy of emulation. She really deserves the compliments accorded to her for a job well done.

A day before the consultation, a group of ten members spent the afternoon until evening pasting, mounting and fixing up the decorations and artifacts in the session hall. Peter delivered a van full of materials all the way from Baselland, including his tool box. We are so fortunate to have their support in providing the snacks and the sweets before and during the meeting.

Sightseeing tour

After scouting and calculating the costs of possible places of interest for the tour, arrangement was made to reserve the transport. This entailed logistic planning which fortunately went well in spite of the intermittent weather condition. To meet one of the suggestions from previous consultation, the group decided to organize an Alpine panorama bus trip to Muerren or Rosenloui-Grindelwald, inclusive optional short treks, shopping possibilities, and a ship cruise on the lake of Thun. As it turned out, the bad weather option had to be the program of the day due to the short time notice of an avalanche alarm.

Personnel and Fees

All these administrative and logistical support in the preparation had been the main task of Juerg Hafner with my assistance.

During the first month of preparation, we budgeted a registration fee of SF 80.- to offset the expenses for the tour, miscellaneous, documentation and proceedings. As the date neared, we were confronted with unforeseen on site expenses which every member helped defray. We solicited funds, which unfortunately did not bear result except from Victorinox who gave the knives as keepsake. Considering the budgetary constraint we were in, we still think that we were within the work plan expectations. When the fees started coming in, it solved the financial strain of the preparation.

Group Effort

Lastly, I want to thank all the people in the group who have helped make this consultation a successful one. We have worked on the principle that quite a few people, each putting in a small contribution, can make big things happen and create benefits to all concerned. Our united effort paid off even if none of us had any experience in organizing such an event. This is a proof that this can work for all without being too great a burden for any of us.