**Report of the 68th SIESC meeting**

**Vipava (Slovenia) 24-30 July 2024**

The 68th SIESC meeting in Vipava, Slovenia, was organised by DKPS, the Slovenian association of Catholic teachers, with the topic: ‘NEW CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS: Gender - Sexuality - Education’.

The meeting brought together about forty people from 12 different countries: Albania, Austria, Belgium (Bolivia), France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine, and Slovenia.

The meeting opened with a Mass celebrated by **Anton Jamnik**, Bishop responsible for Education in Slovenia, who stressed the importance of taking into account the whole personality of young people in education. The opening ceremony included a welcome by the President of the DKPS, the Mayor of Vipava and the presentation of participants from the various countries, punctuated by traditional Slovenian songs.

The first lecture ***Gender change, implications and ethical dilemmas. Ethical and medical aspects of the treatment of children with gender dysphoria*** by **Urh Grošelj**, Professor of Medicine at the Department of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism at the University Children's Hospital in Ljubljana and member of the National Medical Ethics Committee of the Republic of Slovenia, spoke about gender dysphoria, treatments and the risks of these treatments. The speaker showed, both in the past and at present, the excesses in the practice of these treatments and the psychological consequences they can have.

The second lecture, entitled ***Sex education for young people*,** by **Benjamin Tomažič,** a computer science teacher at Zelimlje secondary school and one of the founders of the Integrum Institute in Slovenia, showed how the family and the example it sets can play an important role in sex education. This education then continues with peers (people of the same age and those around them) and at school, even if teachers sometimes avoid the subject. In today's society, television and social networks have a major influence on the maturing of young people, particularly when it comes to physical appearance, with the pitfalls of harassment and pornography at everyone's fingertips. Faced with this virtual world, teachers can create a safe space to address issues of sexuality and listen to young people's questions and concerns.

The third lecture, **The teacher's sources of strength in the face of new challenges,** by **Father Silvo Šinkovec**, priest, psychologist, educator and spiritual assistant of DKPS, emphasised the importance of the development of young people's personalities at school and the support provided by teachers and the institution. This development is multifaceted: physical, emotional, cognitive, moral, social and spiritual. Teachers must show love and compassion, be role models and cooperate with parents.

The **language groups** enabled participants to share their experiences and practices, showing the different approaches to these themes depending on the country and the type of school, state or denominational.

The participants could discover **Vipava**, close to Nova Gorica, with its history, crafts and vineyards. The mayor gave us a warm welcome, proud of his town. We also enjoyed a concert in the church and a visit to the church of **Vrhpolje**, which features mosaics by the controversial artist Rupnik. A daily Mass was offered to participants in the chapel of the host venue, the dormitory of the Catholic grammar school, where the conferences and language groups took place.

In **Nova Gorica,** we celebrated Mass in the co-cathedral and then visited the Franciscan monastery of **Kostanjevica**, where Charles X and members of his family are buried, before going up to **Sveta Gora**, a church celebrating an apparition of the Virgin Mary to the shepherdess Urska Ferligojeva.

The **last day's excursion** took us to the Soča valley (Isonzo in Italian), where fighting took place between Italians and Austro-Hungarian troops during the First World War. At Kobarid (Caporetto in Italian), we visited the ossuary where the remains of 7,000 Italian soldiers can be found, with their names and many unknown, an ossuary that reminds us that war causes many innocent deaths. This place in no way detracts from the beauty of this valley and its river, which at one point forms a lake, on which we took a much-appreciated boat trip.

The Slovenians gave us a very warm welcome; our colleagues had organised everything and helped everyone get around. The accommodation was very pleasant, with a beautiful view of the surroundings and the city.

Many thanks to our Slovenian colleagues and to the DKPS association.

See you next year in NAPLES!

**Catherine Le Coz**