

Giessen community/UPF Festival

Giessen, Germany, 27. July 2014



Happy trouble - the UPF premises in Giessen were overflowing with over 100 participants! A babe-in-arms, toddlers, young people and 'best-agers-all had responded to the invitation to the Giessen UPF Summer Festival. Luckily the weather was on our side; it was a hot and sunny day, and we could spill over into the yard and garden.

In addition to about 60 local 'Giesseners', we were delighted to welcome visitors from Austria, the USA, Hungary..... and even Frankfurt!

And we were especially happy that a group of Russian women who have made their home in the Giessen area and who entertained us at a previous event, were able to join us.

First on the programme was a worship service, opened by the local Giessen choir 'Melody of Peace', led by Violetta. Their 3 international songs set the atmosphere for the theme of the whole day:-'World Family'.



Giessen community leader Christian Claus then introduced Joni Makkonen. But Joni really did not need any introduction. He is a '2nd generation' Giessener who has returned to settle here with his family after a few years in Vienna. Joni gave a brief sermon relevant to the topic of 'World Family' and made many simple but clear points. He stated that it is not God's desire that each one saves his own 'religious skin', and asked us to consider how Jesus,

Mohammed and other religious founders would interact if they were here today. They would certainly not fight, and would be profoundly saddened and disturbed by current divisions and animosities. We look forwards to seeing Joni develop in his new position as youth pastor here in the Giessen community.



To help us absorb and internalize the sermon, Helma Born, a 'peace ambassador' led us through a meditation which was introduced by the soothing tones of a Buddhist singing bowl.



The worship service was brought to a close by further musical contributions; a song self-accompanied on the piano by Nicole from Munich, and 3 songs from our very own mixed-generation band. Many joined them enthusiastically in their rendering of 'Winds of Change', 'Hills and Valleys' and 'Annie's Song'.



Meanwhile, our grill chefs had been busily at work, so that shortly afterwards we could enjoy a feast from the barbeque and other prepared dishes. The lunch break gave opportunity to mingle and socialize, or to reflect and enjoy quiet time on a bench in the grounds.

And lunch was barely over, when the appearance of a variety of delicious home-baked goodies signaled that it was time for coffee and cake.



'World Café' is a model to facilitate group dialogue, already successfully employed by Youth UPF, and Giessen Youth UPF representative, Benedikta was inspired to introduce it to us as part of the afternoon programme. We were fortunate to have the assistance of several members of Youth UPF Vienna as support.

Three young people each gave a short discourse on chosen topics-'youth', 'society', and 'religion'. Then, following the World Café model, we divided into 6 groups and rotated three times after 20 minutes of discussion. Each time a different aspect of 'world family' was discussed, such as the meaning of world family, values to be passed on to the next generation, and possibilities and potential for development in this day and age.

And in conclusion, all suggestions and ideas were summarized and posted on the wall.

This was a stimulating and creative exercise which allowed and encouraged direct participation and contributions from all, regardless of age or experience.



And the afternoon session was punctuated by contributions from local Giessen talent: a piano piece by Alex F. and several songs by Desi and Gerina

whose creative costumes impressed and amused the audience!

The festival was officially closed in late afternoon, but it is surely a testimony to the level of well-being generated, that many lingered and were still engaged in lively discussion hours later

Behind such an event is always much planning and hard work and heartfelt thanks go to the many who invested time and effort in preparations. It was undoubtedly a team effort, but a special acknowledgement must be made of our community leaders Christian and Glenys who have always supported and encouraged the development and implementation of new ideas in Giessen.

Catriona Valenta