

Final Communiqué of the EuFRES Conference 2021

EuFRES organised the online conference on 9.04.2021 in virtual form according to the prevailing pandemic situation. The participation of more than 30 people responsible for RE from 7 European countries exceeded the expectations of the organisers and showed the importance of the topic "Religious Education in the time of the pandemic".

1. The situation of RE under Corona conditions

Although the pandemic is a painful experience, it makes us discover that there is the possibility of a media-supported and thus broader and enriching exchange of experiences across linguistic, national, religious and denominational boundaries. This difficult time also makes us aware of the need to courageously build a Christian identity in order to work together to solve the problems that have arisen and are arising in education and religious education. Religious education teachers who are not always able to bear their own personal and growing problems in the classroom need special support. The time of the pandemic has made us aware once again how important it is to establish personal relationships, to accompany and support pupils. Likewise, pastoral support and accompaniment is necessary for RE teachers, parents and students. Therefore, there is also a call to strengthen the Christian family in passing on the faith in the home church. The involvement of the family (parents, grandparents, siblings, etc.) in the teaching and education process and the need for personal conversations with the students is essential.

2. New situation of the RE in different European countries

In view of the various political and social problems that challenge religious education in schools, we consider it important to strengthen the presence of religious education in the space of the school systems in the countries. In the general social sphere, it is necessary to work towards a greater emphasis in the public consciousness on the issues relevant to religious education as irreplaceable, especially in times of crisis such as the present one.

3. Assistance from school authorities, teacher training colleges, universities.

We want to reassure all RE teachers, educators, parents and pupils that they are not alone with their problems. We all face the same challenges and can get so much support, learn from each other, be with each other to create a good religion lesson. Finally, we can share our own problems and happiness, our own spirituality in families, at community level or in the church (online and offline). We should strive to build a network of relationships between religious education teachers in Europe, which ultimately needs to be real, not just virtual. Furthermore, in religious education we should strive for cooperation with all subjects in school events and projects. In this way, religious education will become irreplaceable in schools. An important task will be to reassure the teaching staff after the pandemic. For conflicts have arisen everywhere in society, between Covid 19 deniers and others, between

responsible teachers and those who react hysterically. In initial and in-service training, the communicative media competence of teachers of religion must be valued. Therefore, it is important to organise additional training for them.

4. Technology in the service of RE

While online education is an opportunity we must continue to use it in a pandemic situation, face-to-face contact is essential and we must restore it as soon as possible. Modern technology in educational communication should follow and serve education, not the other way round. There should be a long period for students to renew and deepen their contacts with their peer groups as a pedagogically and educationally important task. This is one of the priority tasks as it is a key element in the development of the pupils. Emerging problems make us aware of the need to reflect and fundamentally rethink the teaching and learning process also in its electronic version. It is not only about "digital tools" but about the general way education works today. It is necessary to change the model of teaching; therefore, it is necessary to depart from the rigid core curriculum and train teachers using new technologies and change the didactic model used so far. There is a need for methodological diversity that encourages more group/team work, but also for support from the school authorities in legal, didactic and methodological terms.

We are convinced that it is worthwhile to use the many possibilities offered by the internet and its various tools. It is also necessary to train current and future teachers of religion so that they are not strangers to the online environment and know how to use it fluently. Even when the pandemic comes to an end, the knowledge and experience gained in this area will not have been in vain. Perhaps the fruit of this period will be a hybrid activity later on, where traditional service is complemented by online reality. Therefore, learning digital tools and computer forums should be possible as part of continuing education. Similarly, it is important to learn a specific language for digital teaching, including symbolic language, which can be understood in new ways today.

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