

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

CENTRE DE RENCONTRES
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX
TÉL: 021 / 962 91 11
FAX: 021 / 962 93 55

pour le Réarmement moral

CAUX

Web page <http://www.caux.ch>

BUREAU: 1, RUE DE
VAREMBÉ
CASE POSTALE 3
CH-1211 GENÈVE 20
TÉL. 022 / 733 09 20
FAX: 022 / 733 02 67

Caux, 19.07.99

Dear friends,

Only one week into the conference - is it possible? The first turnover, with numbers rising sharply as we come to the opening of the Caux Conference for Business and Industry this afternoon. With 81 arrivals today, we should be 394 by supper time. Last night we enjoyed an impromptu rock concert on the lawn by the band of the Latin American group *Gente Que Avanza*, 'people on the move', with help from other young friends. A slightly surprising welcome to the mainly older arrivals - but we were mostly pleasantly surprised to discover that they knew and wanted to sing some old Beatles numbers from our youth, before they were born! The storm lights flashed around the lake, the thunder rumbled, but the promised storm held off and passed us by. But summer seems to have arrived at last. Thank you to whoever put him/her on the plane for Switzerland! The rich scents of cut grass, of hay, wild flowers and pine, as the sun hots up.

Part of the team who carried this first week and session leave for Sweden this morning, with our thanks. We can have the feeling of satisfaction that we have set the summer season here off to a good start. The clean slate metaphor has already proven a rich vein, provoking deep sharing and change in the communities - but of course, I have to respect the golden rule of not sharing anything that was said in my group outside the group! All the community leaders reported great depth and honesty in the sharing. What struck and moved me most in my group was the spirit of equality, with all of us questing after new life together, sharing where we were at, with no preaching by those older or more experienced. And several of the young Latin Americans said what it meant to them to hear older people sharing so honestly about themselves.

At our first meeting after the opening session, I remember looking round the strange and familiar faces and wondering how it was going to work. But with the work together in the kitchen and our times of sharing we have become real friends. I can share with you, since they shared it with everyone in the closing session of the 'clean slate' week the stories of two of our group. A young Latin American expressed his hurt and confusion at being abandoned by his mother, and his readiness to try to clean this slate. Then a retired Englishman shared from his similar experience. The younger man had just posted a letter to his mother asking for forgiveness for 'the love denied and the resentment'. 'I thought that I was the victim, but I understand now that my mother is also a person who has suffered. Now I can hear freely what God wants for my life,' he said. And the older man had just realised that he'd forgiven his parents long ago, but he'd never seen the need to forgive his foster-parents until this day, but he'd just done so. 'Now I'm free,' he said. And he looked it.

The final meeting had opened with a large mirror on the side of the platform, completely covered over with 'post-its', those little sticky yellow paper message sheets. We 'cleaned' it, revealing ourselves and the world, by coming up, taking a paper, writing on it what we wanted to leave behind, to be free of, and putting the little emotion-charged papers into a shredder placed under a large map of the world on a torn and partly mended embroidered cloth, a work of art now part of the Caux Expo. 'It is amazing what God can do in me in one week,' commented another, 'I'm not the same any more. My picture of myself and of the world has changed.' A head cook, in Caux for the first time said, 'the kitchen is my favourite place to be here, with my friends. It reminds me of my Italian grandmother's kitchen on a Sunday.' And one of her team remarked on the 'fellowship and fun of working with her in