

## The History of the Collegueship in the North American Region

In the early 60s, a selected group of senior Camphill co-workers were invited to a conference of three lectures given by Karl König at Newton Dee Village, Aberdeen, Scotland (from 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> January 1962). The aim was to prepare them for the work with adults in the Village Communities, as this was beginning to become as important as the work with children that had been the first phase of Camphill's history. Karl König was keen that there would be a different attitude to this work than what his co-workers were used to. A second conference was held at Murtle Estate, Aberdeen, Scotland on 29<sup>th</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> February 1963. A third conference was held again at Murtle Estate on 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> January 1964. (1963 and 1964 König was very engaged with preparations for a first Camphill Village on the European mainland, resulting in the founding of the Lehenhof in 1965). The lectures of the three conferences were memorialized in an edition of the proceedings, edited from 1979 by Hubert Zipperlen and published in 1986 under the title, *In Need of Special Understanding*.

In the mid-1990's, Michael Schmundt and Peter Beier decided that it was time to "resurrect" the proceedings of these Village Conferences as it had not gained the traction in the Camphill movement that some felt it deserved. So, Michael and Peter organized a series of three retreats, each focusing on the content from each year respectively. The retreats were well received, so a series of three, annual, international conferences were organized in the late 1990s, again, each focusing on the content from one of the years.

These, too, were successful, and there was a wish amongst some, for further work together on the content. Michael Babitch suggested an "International Collegueship for the Renewal of the Village Impulse" that would meet annually, where, as with a professional symposium, participants would bring their ongoing research and reports of their efforts to work with the content within their respective villages. This Collegueship met annually in various Camphill places in the UK and Europe for some years, and, in the North American Region in 2004, a similar initiative was founded by Wanda Root, Louisa Van der Meulen, and Michael Babitch. It began with three retreats for co-workers of adult villages in the NA Region. The prerequisites were that the participants were to have studied the contents of König's lectures and were committed to attend all three retreats.

In 2009 an expanded edition of the contents of the Village Conferences was edited by Michael Schmundt and Wanda Root under the title, ***Seeds for Social Renewal*** and published by the Karl König Institute within the series of the New Edition of Karl König's works. We owe a great debt of gratitude for this fine edition.

Michael Schmundt's wise advice was that the content was meant to be done more than lectured on, and this brought important liveliness to the retreats. Consequently, there again was enthusiasm for further work. The North American Collegueship for the Renewal of the Village Impulse has been a lively working group ever since. Here, too, the prerequisites for participation were familiarity with the content and a minimum three-year commitment to annual 5-day retreats and ad hoc collegial communication between retreats. In recent years, three quarterly video conferences have been added. This way of working has proven to be very rewarding, enjoyable and community-building for the participants.

The retreats, over the years, have taken place in all the adult Camphill villages in North America. This has been a good way to get acquainted in person with the life of each adult community and for the host community to get to know the work of the Collegueship.

Generally, the participants of each annual retreat take responsibility for one, two or sometimes three sessions, generally, but not always, on an agreed-upon theme or focus. The sessions have, over the years, included sharing on the well-being and challenges within each village; work in all the performing and visual arts; insights born of work with the content during the year and sharing about efforts within the villages to make the contents come alive. Much of these efforts have found their way into teaching by the colleagues of courses on the three Village Conferences within the Camphill Academy.

Over the by now 21 years, the group consisted of 12 participating colleagues, with some leaving and others joining. This has proven to be a good number. Going forward, it would be wonderful if similar groups would be initiated. The Colleagueship would be happy to assist such initiatives. Contact for the North American Colleagueship: Elvira Neal, [elvira@camphillvillage.org](mailto:elvira@camphillvillage.org).

- Michael Babitch with input from Wanda Root