

1990s he joined a new Circle in Ealing. He remained on its committee in various roles for about twenty years until ill-health forced him to retire as secretary last summer. Meanwhile in 2007 he accepted the role of Independent Examiner of the annual accounts of the Newman Association, a responsibility he fulfilled up to the financial statement for 2014-15.

Michael was small in stature but big in personality and remarkable for the breadth of his friendships. Besides the Newman he was active in the Catholic Union where he was Secretary of the PPAC (Parliamentary and Public Affairs Committee) from 2008 until September 2014, while he also joined the Board of Trustees of the Catholic Truth Society in 2008. Another affiliation was the Teams of Our Lady, the Catholic organisation for married couples.

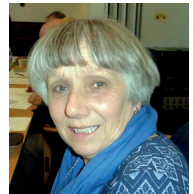
He was avid for activity and knowledge in all sorts of fields including the Catholic Church, wine-tasting, the cooking of Hungarian peasant stews, travel to almost anywhere – from the upper reaches of the Amazon to Las Vegas, not to mention the rather uncomfortable Newman Pilgrimage to Egypt in 2007. At one time he was Treasurer of the Questors, a leading amateur theatrical company in West London. He enjoyed reading with a new book group which he founded in 2009 and after retirement from his firm he also became a governor of a local Catholic school. Towards the end he was looking forward, still an engineer at heart, to using a new workshop to be installed in a house which he and Kay were preparing to move into later this year.

Barry Riley

What is *andante*?

by Marie Rose Low

This is a question I have been asked many times, followed by others such as “why does Council use Newman money to pay a yearly subscription to *andante*?” and “if the Association covers the cost of your attendance at the *andante* event, should it not be for more than your personal benefit?” Let me try and answer these questions and maybe some others I have not yet asked.



What is *andante*?

Andante is an alliance of 23 Catholic women’s organisations in Europe from 15 countries, representing a total membership of approximately 1.2 million women. *Andante* is open to European Catholic women’s organisations and to organisations for women and men in Europe which subscribe to the objectives of the alliance. The Alliance is run by the Coordinating Committee of *Andante* (CoCoA), now composed of 6 women, each from a different country.

Andante’s mission is to be a voice for Catholic women and to offer women’s abilities and their vision for building a living and just Europe that works for the common good. *Andante* works for the just participation of women both in society and in our Church. The role of *andante* is: to inform, to consult, to coordinate and to represent. It is a platform for Catholic women to express their ideas, to discuss them frankly and with trust and to establish common values across our different cultures so that we are able to respond to current and emerging issues in a way that reflects Gospel values and our

experience as women.

Andante represents the interests of Catholic women at the Council of Europe and the European Union. The Conference of INGOs¹ is recognised as an institution of the Council of Europe. *Andante* is a full right member of the Conference.*

Why should the Newman Association be a member?

In spite of being an island, we do not live in 'splendid isolation'. We are part of the world; our circles are not parochial but part of the wider community in which we live, our association has a voice with the bishops and politically under the umbrellas of the NCLA and the NBCW. It is also right that, as a national association, we should play a part in our even 'wider community' i.e. Europe. *Andante* provides a channel for us to do this, as does Pax Romana.

Andante speaks for and represents Catholic women but its concerns are not 'feminist' issues. They deal with the day-to-day realities women face across the whole of Europe, either in their own personal suffering or in helping alleviate the suffering of others and these are issues which have concerned, and continue to concern, Newman members e.g. we have recently had two conferences, one on poverty and one on bioethics. *Andante* has likewise had had two convocations on the same two topics in the last two years.

At these gatherings, each organisation brings its own experience, expertise and problems and the organisations are able to learn from and help each other. The outcomes of these study days are then taken by *andante* to the Conference of INGOs. By being a member of *andante* our association has the means to channel the outcomes of our own conferences and our own experiences to a European platform.

Why pay for me to go to any *andante* event?

I hope that by now the answer to this question is fairly obvious. Certainly, neither our individual Newman members nor our circles will gain any 'personal' benefit from paying to send a representative to a conference. But if we see ourselves as 'brothers and sisters' to the rest of humanity and if we would like to 'make some difference' to the hardships which those we cannot reach directly are suffering, then this is something we can do as an association through *andante*. However, we cannot do this from a distance: someone has to be present, to be your ears and listen, to try to understand and communicate and to form a bond. The sad thing is that we have had no representation at either of the *andante* conferences on poverty or bioethics as I was not able to attend.

Study Days and General Assembly, April 14th-17th 2016, High Leigh, Hoddesdon,

My second *andante* General Assembly, as one of two Newman Association representatives, proved to be as exhausting and uplifting (though not quite as exotic) as my first one in Bratislava 3 years ago. Every minute was timetabled and 'free time' did not appear anywhere in the schedule. The pace of the three days was relentless and we worked hard – but don't let me give the impression that it was solid work from morning till night. Built into the programme was time to show something of our culture to the other 50 European women and also time to celebrate *andante's* 10th birthday.

The aim of *andante* is to bring the needs and concerns of the Catholic women of Europe to the Council of Europe and to the Catholic Church. The Study Days are used to discern those issues which are of greatest common concern. Then those of highest priorities will be taken to Strasburg by the CoCoA. Similarly any issues concerning the

Church will be taken to the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE).

We began on **Thursday** evening with dinner at 6.30pm followed by the first session, during which the women of *andante* remembered and marked the significant events that had taken place since the beginning of *andante* ten years ago – the first meeting in Budapest, the subsequent workshops and study days, the writing of the *andante* prayer (translated into 9 languages), when *andante* was accepted as an INGO at the Council of Europe, when *andante* made its representation on Poverty to the Council of Europe and many special memories. The strong bonds of friendship that have been formed across Europe were very evident as everyone contributed their own memories.

Andante uses 3 official languages, German, French and English and all *andante* literature is produced in three versions. Every delegate has to speak at least one of these languages. The small working groups were organised according to languages spoken. At all other times we wore headphones and listened to translations from our most efficient interpreters.

Friday morning and a talk by Julie Clague, a Lecturer at the University of Glasgow. Julie spoke mostly on *Amoris Laetitia* showing how Pope Francis' way of being Church is compatible with Christ's compassion and mercy and is fairly 'female' in its nature. Julie left us with five questions to discuss in groups and so begin to identify the priorities of our organisations. My group was composed of a young Albanian woman, a Romanian and a Hungarian as well as three of us from the UK. Speaking with women from Eastern Europe, women who are constantly dealing with abused women and children, with those who are vulnerable to being trafficked, women who have lived under communist rule, you realise that their reality is outside our experience. To work with them in solidarity, and to be able to assist them, we have got to meet face to face and listen and learn.

After lunch we met again but in different groups in order to widen our discussion. This time we looked at the problems we anticipate in the future. As in our association, many of the Western European organisations are suffering from an ageing and diminishing membership. How do we, both the Church and us, deal with these problems? The members of the organisations from Eastern Europe have a younger profile. Another topic arose out of the refugee problems. Should we not be having serious and wide interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims? How else are we going to be able to understand, help and live with those refugees who settle in Europe?

We finished our discussion with just enough time to change before we came together again to celebrate Mass for *andante's* 10th birthday. It was a beautiful Mass with bidding prayers read in nine languages. We prayed the Our Father together, each in our own language – thoughts of Pentecost flashing through my mind. After dinner we had our cultural evening which turned out to be a great success. An English folk band played and 'called' us through the evening in a barn dance. Whether by spoken words or signs, most of us were able to participate and enjoy ourselves. We were all ready for our sleep.

"*Our position? – Dare to go!*" was the title of Simone Curau's talk first thing on

Saturday. Simone is about to take up the presidency of the Swiss women's organisation and is a board member of the Catholic People's Party of Switzerland. She spoke of strategies and the differences between male and female strategies. *Male strategies tend to set a course from which no one is willing to deviate; aggression is met*

with aggression. Female strategies leave room for modification, for compromise, and aggression is countered with attempts at co-operation. We do not have to behave like men, even though it is a man's world; we need to be courageous and adopt our own female strategies, introducing these strategies into society and the Church.

Back in our language groups, after the break, it became obvious that the differences in the needs of women in the Eastern European countries to those in the West were stark. *How can women go into politics or be worried about their role in the church when their basic needs of food and shelter are not being met, when girls are not being educated?* We need to be a voice for those who are voiceless. By the end of this session, we had identified fifteen topics which were causes of concern across all the delegates.

The General Assembly, the formal business, began after lunch. We registered and collected our voting card – each organisation had a vote. There were many formalities to get through and we went through these carefully, sometimes very slowly as some problems arose with slight differences of meanings in words and phrases between the three languages. Three new organisations presented themselves asking for membership: they were unanimously accepted. The women standing for the new CoCoA also introduced themselves and were formally elected. The financial report was presented and accepted, and the old CoCoA discharged. The first half of the GA closed.



Getting ready for the GA

We barely had time to change before the start of *andante's* 10th **birthday party!** We had a bit of fizz to toast *andante* and after dinner we provided our own entertainment. Several organisations had come prepared to share something of their culture, to read a poem or to perform a sketch. Maureen Thomas started the evening by introducing a Welsh singer, and then one of his songs was played from a CD. Then other acts followed, tulips from Amsterdam coming second only to the 'tragedy' *The Fatal Quest* performed by the German organisations in three languages!

Sunday, early morning Mass and then the second half of the GA. We had to discuss and approve the strategic plan for the next three years; this also proved cumbersome in three languages. We were then asked to vote for the five topics which were of greatest concern to our own organisations out of the fifteen identified the day before. Taking into consideration the conferences our association has held and the interests we see in our members, we voted for the following on your behalf: Poverty, Education, Modern Slavery, Bioethics and Communications. The 5 priorities selected by all the organisations were: Migration, Modern Slavery, Women in the Church, Poverty, Education and Diversity & Difference (these last two got equal votes).

Andante will look at these topics, possibly have Study Days on some of them and then make representations on our behalf at the Council of Europe. Our association now has the opportunity to engage with and respond to the work of *andante* by having talks and conferences on some of the chosen topics. The GA concluded with many thanks being given, gifts presented and much applause.

In conclusion

So, did I gain 'personal benefit'? Of course I did, you cannot go to an event as thought-provoking and as uplifting as this without gaining and growing in some way or other. But I actually didn't set out 'for my benefit', I went to represent you, so that we can all be a part of the bigger picture and in the hope that somehow, in some way, the Newman Association can help to make a better world.

** This description of Andante is put together from extracts taken from Andante literature and from its website.*

1 International non-governmental organisations

Working Groups

Following last October's Newman Assembly in Leeds it was agreed to set up four working groups to examine various aspects of the future of the Association. Three of them have issued interim reports.

The **Finance Working Group** has been examining the deficit which the Association is running – about £4,000 a year excluding exceptional items. Although the Association has substantial assets, enough to last for a number of years, economies may need to be considered. The Group is concerned that the central expenditure by the Association on the journal, the website and Council meetings is excessive in relation to the sums distributed to Circles. Perhaps there should be a target to reduce the deficit to zero, while allocating some of the reserves to fund projects to further the mission of the Association.

The **Mission Group** has concluded that the main objective of the Association remains valid after 70 years: promoting open discussion and greater understanding in today's Church. But there is probably a need for different approaches to how the organisation promotes itself; the Group is looking at comparisons with similar bodies. The most important specific objective is the encouragement of innovation within the Circles. Collaboration with other organisations might be desirable. The Group is proposing to draw up a series of action plans and to set priorities.

The **Communications Working Group** is studying connections at many levels. The group suggests that channels between Council and Circles and between the Circles themselves should be improved. Council should also promote the links that exist nationally with the NCLA and the NCBW, and internationally with Pax Romana and Andante. Other aspects include the strengthening of relations with the Bishops and with universities. The website, some Group members think, is an underused resource, but it is pointed out that the Association has a new QR code which enables rapid access to the website from smart mobile phones.

Unfortunately the **Membership Working Group** has proved by far the most controversial of the four. It has been suspended after the resignation of two of its members from Council. Meanwhile Council has separately been exploring the question of retaining the Catholic status of the Association; it appears there would be limits on the proportion of non-Catholics in the overall membership, and in their rights to occupy senior positions, but the details are not entirely clear. A new working group may be set up.



QR code