

The International Prison Chaplain's Association has its roots in Scandinavia where Prison Chaplains from Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have held biennial conferences since 1973. One of the participants was the Reverend Pekka Viirre who was the Secretary for the Pastoral Care of Offenders in the Lutheran Church of Finland. In 1975 he also attended the 5th United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders and noticed that many groups were represented but that there were no Prison Chaplains. In 1982 at the Scandinavian Prison Chaplains Conference, some Prison Chaplains from Sweden asked if it would be possible to arrange an international consultation for Prison Chaplains. It was suggested that as the 7th United Nations Congress was to be held in Milan in 1985 a Prison Chaplains Consultation could be held at the same time with a focus on the Standard Minimum Rules of The Treatment of Prisoners as it applied to Religion.

Later in 1983 Pekka Viirre was a participant at the Conference of the International Association of Penal Law in Vienna 1983 and during his time in Vienna he visited St. Stephen's Cathedral and saw a Painting of the Virgin Mary. As he meditated he saw Mary as the "Mother of the Sentenced Jesus" and this encouraged him to develop the vision of a international forum for Prison Chaplains as they seek to serve those serving their sentences. He therefore contacted other interested people including the Reverend Allan Robertson in Sweden and the Reverend Alan Duce in the United Kingdom and developed other international contacts through the Churches, the United Nations, Universities in Finland and the Netherlands, the World Council of Churches and together with Prison Chaplains he began to plan for a Conference in

1985. In 1984 further meetings took place in Norway and contacts made in the Netherlands and Vienna including contact with Minoru Shikita, then the Director of the UN Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch. He asked why this was only for Christian Chaplains to which the reply was that we should start by trying to understand each other, but it also gave a foretaste of future work with Chaplains of other faiths.

The planning came to fruition in August 1985 when instead of meeting in Milan as initially suggested, the first Prison Chaplains Consultation held in the World Council of Churches Centre in Bossey in Switzerland. It was attended by fifty Prison Chaplains from twenty countries from all over the world including Iceland, South Africa, USA, Brazil, Papua New Guinea, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, West and East Germany, the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Australia and France. From that meeting the International Prison Chaplains Association was founded on 25 August 1985. In the opening service in Bossey 1985, Bishop Kortekangas of Finland wore for the first time a Stole that was originally provided for a Central American village church, but the church was destroyed and the priest was arrested. The Stole was then sold on and later came into the possession of Pekka Viirre who gave it to be used by the President of IPCA.

A second conference was held at Bossey in 1990 attended by 100 Prison Chaplains again from all over the world and was supported by the World Council of Churches. At that conference it was suggested that in addition to occasional worldwide conference that Regional Conferences

were the way forward. Some French Protestant Chaplains then offered to host a European Conference, an offer that was accepted. At this early stage the leadership and financial support came mainly from Germany and Pastor Peter Rassow, the Commissioner for Prison Chaplains for the German Lutheran and Reformed Churches, who became the Chair of the IPCA-Europe Steering Committee. A series of Conferences were then held in Strasbourg, France (1992), Rugby, England (1994), Ystad, Sweden(1997), Driebergen, Netherlands (2001), Tallinn, Estonia (2004). At each Conference a Steering Committee has been elected by the participants with the rule that no-one should serve for more than three conferences. In addition in Europe other local conferences and working parties were organised including a Nordic and Baltic Countries Conference in Helsinki and Tallinn in May 1998; a Central and Eastern European Working Party in Poland in October 1998 Poland; a Conference of Southern European Prison Chaplains in May 1999 in Siena, Italy, a Mini-Conference in November 1999 at Sazava, rear Prague, Czech Republic; a working party on “Women in Custody” in Aichach, Germany in 2000 and in 2002 a consultation in Popowo, Poland for Eastern European Countries and also a conference in Geneva for Prison Chaplains of the Mediterranean countries. The latest IPCA-Europe Conference was held in Springe, Germany in 2008 and the new Steering Committee was elected with representatives from the UK, Netherlands, France Belgium, Germany and Sweden.

In the meantime the Steering Committee of IPCA Worldwide elected by the participants at Bossey arranged the next Worldwide Conference in Ottawa, Canada in 1995 when a new Steering Committee was elected including Pierre Allard as the President. The leadership and financial

support then came primarily from the Canadian Correctional Service and Canadian Churches for the German Church had to respond to the financial pressures that came from reunification. The next IPCA-Worldwide Conference was held in 2000 in Kroonstad, South Africa, and under Pierre Allard's continuing leadership the next conference was held in 2005 in Cornwall, Ontario, Canada. A new Steering Committee was elected, with Birgitta Winberg from Sweden elected as the President and the next conference was held in 2010 in Stockholm, Sweden attended by 320 participants from 69 countries representing all regions in the world, with the theme "Forgotten People". Now rev. Dwight Cuff from Vancouver, Canada, was elected to be the president, and a new steering committee was also elected.

IPCA now has six regions, Africa, Asia, Oceania, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America and more information can be found on their website at [www.ipcaworldwide.org](http://www.ipcaworldwide.org). IPCA-Europe has been the strongest regional organization and has developed a life of its own with many initiatives such as a link with the Council of Europe and the C.P.T. It has always elected its own Steering Committee as well as linking in with IPCA-Worldwide and the International Commission for Prison Pastoral Care.