

The ARC Charter (Utrecht - September 1998)

"Where two or three come together in my name, I am with them" (Mt 18:25)

ARC (Accueil, Rencontre, Communauté, or Welcome, Meeting, Community) is a Christian and ecumenical organisation offering young people in Europe the opportunity to live a unique human and spiritual adventure, in the form of a summer project. In order for the project to succeed, members need to understand the spirit that animates the Association. It is the aim of this Charter to provide such an understanding to the communities of young people who participate in the projects, and who are interested in learning about religious buildings and sharing this knowledge with others.

1. WELCOME

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35)

Large numbers of visitors pass through cathedrals without encountering any form of friendly attention; the building seems to be a relic of some dim and distant past. Members of ARC, when present in a cathedral, endeavour to provide the often missing warmth by making themselves readily available and being attentive to visitors. They may help simply by offering practical information or more importantly by organising guided tours - whatever the number of visitors. The cathedral with its architecture and symbolism then becomes more like an open book. Guides employ their knowledge and sensitivity both to explain the Christian faith and to make the visitors feel welcome.

The local cathedral authorities welcome the guides and provide them with board and lodging. The authorities also give the guides all they need to know about the history, architecture and other features of the cathedral. The guides offer their services free of charge.

2. MEETING

"Human relations are the only true wealth" (A. de Saint-Exupéry)

Meetings, due to ARC's presence in cathedrals, result in valuable cultural exchanges between the guides and the visitors, and also between the guides themselves. These informal meetings make the conversations between guides and visitors much easier. The guides may accept gifts on behalf of the cathedral or the organisation, but take no reward for their own work.

Progress towards being ecumenical is further enhanced by interaction between young people of different Christian faiths, allowing better mutual understanding of the sensitivities and spiritualities of all. Guides joining the local Christian community are likely to encounter religious attitudes, persuasions and faiths different from their own.

3. COMMUNITY

"The Community makes the stones talk, the stones make the Community talk" (ARC)

Guides from different countries and churches form temporary religious communities. Members benefit from the wealth of each other's experience and knowledge and thus make progress in their own lives. Every community has its own unique qualities which draw from the temperament, character and culture of each member. The community lives together under one roof, and every member is required to contribute to improving the daily life and the spiritual life of all. In addition to their work in the cathedral, members share the daily domestic tasks as well as their leisure time.

Members of the community organise their time by taking into account each other's experiences and points of view. The daily life of the community includes time set aside for prayer which is organised by mutual agreement. Prayer can help to develop this communal life. Members are invited to take part in the life of the local church.

4. ORGANISATION of the federation

ARC is a federation of linguistic associations based in Germany, Great Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands, France, Italy and Spain. All ARC associations are affiliated to Ars et Fides.

In general, each national group organises the year's first contacts during a week-end devoted to introductions and training (held in March and April). This is a time for forging friendships between old and new members. Participation is essential for an understanding of ARC's spirit.

Each member serving in a cathedral during the summer writes a personal report of his experience. These reports are summarised for the annual international meeting in order to highlight features which are successful, and also pinpoint and solve those which are not, thus helping in the preparation of future communities.

National weekends are usually organised during the autumn to discuss the experiences gained and to develop the relationships formed during the year.