

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

March 2018

Part One

Dear Franconians,

With our AGM coming up on April 13th, this seems a perfect opportunity to shed some light on our society's charitable work, one of the striking, but less known features of our society. Of course, all of us want an attractive programme – a good mix of interesting talks and fun and social events, and all of us place importance on English being our “working language”, but, for many, the worthiest aspect of the Franconian Society since it was established over thirty years ago is the fact that it has never stopped donating money to good causes, be it money sent to an orphanage in India or earthquake victims in Nepal, to an inter-faith school in Northern Ireland or to a poor community in Armenia, to a project combating disease in Africa (Ebola), or to a local organization making inexpensive glasses for the visually impaired (One Dollar Glasses). Another recent and very close-to-home recipient of a donation has been “wabe”, an Erlangen organization that aims to help those with mental issues become re-integrated into society. We are, of course, a non-profit-making society, so it's in the DNA, I suppose. And approximately half of the fee you pay for being a member ends up in our “charity pot”. But you wouldn't expect otherwise.

To shed more light on our charity work I need to answer three questions. Firstly: How do we collect money that we then give to others?

The answer: Whenever And Wherever We Can. We do so, for example, by selling coffee, tea and cakes at the Erlanger Frühling. In April 2017 we made €536, all of which went to selected charities (incidentally, the next one is on March 18th). Similarly, when we auction books at the beginning of a Stammtisch evening all the revenue (€687 in 2017) goes to good causes. If we organize a bus trip somewhere and there is money left over after the bills have been paid, if a member of our society celebrates a birthday and asks not for flowers but for a small donation to our charity fund, if the Sparkasse give us some financial assistance for a worthwhile project, all the money, you've guessed it, goes to charity. Our Irish music evening brought in money, as did the Christmas bazaars, or the Twelfth Night performance on September 17th last year. The latter brought in very little, in fact, because it was poorly attended, but as the saying goes, “every little helps”. And here I'd like to point out that quite a number of you do sterling work organizing, transporting, making, baking, selling, and so forth. More volunteers are always welcome, however.

The next question is: How do we decide who should be receiving a donation? The quick answer is the members of the committee, who assess the worthiness of a cause and the amount to be donated. The committee, in turn, welcomes ideas from society members. Or we follow up on suggestions received from guest speakers who don't ask for a fee, but are quite happy to know that a charity of their choice has been taken into consideration. The talk on “*Médecins Sans Frontières*” is a perfect example. Usually we donate money to organizations such as those helping the handicapped, or people in dire need. Occasionally, however, we have had a request to donate to a “worthy” project of a quite different nature. A good example is the donation we made towards the publication of “*Kleine Dörfer in Franken*” by Helmut Haberkamm, the regional writer who spoke to us on Franconian dialects – a very worthy cause with a regional touch. Another project we'll discuss in committee shortly is a musical adaptation of a book written by Claudia Gliemann aimed at helping children come to terms with depression in their own families. Claudia will be coming in the early autumn to present her project at a Stammtisch evening.

A last question should be: What are the challenges facing our charity work? The last few years have seen a major source of donation money drying up, namely our income from our twice-yearly book sales, and we are trying hard to find replacements. Very recently a few of our members began a “Bastelgruppe” to provide items to be sold at various bazaars. That's a great idea, but I suppose a bigger group is required to come close to the proceeds from the book sales. A revamped book sale in a central location in Erlangen might also be a possibility. Or there is the idea of offering charity concerts featuring a number of our talented members – a

musical evening, something theatrical, something literary. What we need are the motivated volunteers to turn good ideas into concrete reality. So what are some of your ideas?

Part Two

Dear Members,

In Part One I told you a lot about our charity work. This will be discussed at our Annual General Meeting coming up on the 13th April. You will receive the invitation and the agenda in due course, but please put the date in your diary if you haven't done so already.

I can't let our recent events pass by without comment and a big thanks to all concerned. Our February Stammtisch was an opportunity to hear Prof. Dr. Heiner Bielefeldt reminding us again of the many areas where Human Rights are ignored. However, it is worth bearing in mind that even in the "civilized" parts of our globe "human rights" call for greater vigilance. The debate on equal pay for men and women is an example - take the behaviour of the BBC towards its female journalists; take the way in which women are sometimes subjected to sexual assault and harassment in the film industry, and not just the film industry.

The Dinner Club, I was told, had a very successful evening at the Schwarzer Bär in Erlangen in February – so well done to Teresa again for organizing everything!

January and February have been good months for new members – a very good start to the year! All we need now are some warmer temperatures so that our Easter Egg walk on March 31st will be truly enjoyable.

Frank Gillard