



REMEMBERING LESLEY PRIOR

A Tribute from her friends in EFTRE

Lesley Prior, who was closely involved with EFTRE for over 20 years, died on April 20th 2024, following a long and recurring illness. From 2013, Lesley was the Chair of the EFTRE Executive Committee and led the organisation through a significant period of change and challenge over her ten years in that role. There have already been many tributes to Lesley¹, and here we want to add our own special EFTRE memories of our late colleague and dear friend.

Based in the London area, Lesley was well known within the professional Religious Education community in England and throughout the United Kingdom, as a member of a range of RE support organisations and as an academic involved in teacher education. Coming from an active Christian background, Lesley also had strong links with friends and colleagues from many other faith and belief communities, and regularly took her student teachers to visit diverse places of worship. Over the years she became increasingly well known around Europe due to her involvement and leadership in EFTRE and several other related bodies, notably CoGREE, the Co-ordinating Group for Religion in Education in Europe (of which EFTRE is a constituent member).

Lesley's EFTRE involvement started with the Edinburgh conference in 2001 and within a few years she had become a member of the EFTRE Board (which includes representatives from each active country), then a member of the Executive Committee and, at the conference in Malmö, Sweden, its Chair. The period of her leadership covered the conferences in Vienna (2016), Dublin (2019) and the preparations for Rome in 2023 (which was delayed by one year from the intended 2022 due to the Covid pandemic). Although she was closely involved in planning the Rome conference, Lesley's illness meant that she was unable to attend, and her role as Chair formally came to an end in Rome in August 2023, though she remained a member of the Executive.

It is unsurprising that those closely associated with EFTRE over the years often spoke of belonging to "the EFTRE family", because this is the most abiding memory, and a perfect description, of Lesley's leadership style! Her natural warmth, sense of humour and consideration of others' concerns and needs helped people to feel included and valued; there was no sense of a hierarchy, but a very strong sense of 'team'! This was strengthened by the care and pleasure that Lesley clearly took in preparing small gifts for Executive members at meetings and in sending greetings cards for special occasions, all of which served to bind the 'family' closer and to build strong working relationships.

Yet at the same time Lesley was a highly efficient organiser. Her strong sense of European identity made her an ideal leader for EFTRE as an organisation committed to cross-cultural

¹ See, for example, the tribute on behalf of the Comenius Institute by Peter Schreiner and Bianca Kappelhoff: <https://comenius.de/2024/04/25/nachruf-das-comenius-institut-trauert-um-lesley-prior/>. Also see the contributions to the Kudoboard website, set up by Lesley's friends in the UK: <https://www.kudoboard.com/boards/2338Z0nk>.

understanding and European exchange. She had a clear sense of EFTRE's vision and purpose in helping religious educators across Europe to share and learn from each other. It would have been so easy for EFTRE to focus only on the areas where there were already good relationships, usually in western and northern parts of Europe, but Lesley's far-sightedness encouraged ever-improving links with educators in southern and eastern parts of the continent. Her personal skills in committee team building were no less effective as she chaired meetings and worked collaboratively at planning the annual EFTRE Board meetings and triennial Conferences.

Working with Lesley on EFTRE's various projects was a genuine pleasure and professionally enriching. Beyond EFTRE, many others of Lesley's colleagues in the UK and beyond have acknowledged a similar experience – as may be seen from the many entries on the Kudoboard website (indicated in the footnote). At Lesley's funeral service, Dave Francis (one of her close friends, and who has strong links with EFTRE) gave a tribute on behalf of many professional contacts and highlighted how "it was as Chair of EFTRE that Lesley really came into her own", noting that he and some other members had affectionately nicknamed her 'The Empress of EFTRE'!

The funeral service took place on 15th May at the beautiful old Church of St Mary the Virgin, Aldingbourne, West Sussex, near Chichester in the south of England. It was the Church where Lesley's parents were married and where she was baptized, and now where she is laid to rest in the graveyard.

We remember Lesley with great sadness for her loss but with grateful thanks for all that she gifted to EFTRE and to her many other associations, and personally to us as her friends.

**The EFTRE Executive Committee
May 2024**