The Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna held Congress Vienna 2012: The Future of Logotherapy in Vienna, Austria from March 16-18, 2012. The conference was attended by 175 persons from 40 countries. Presentations were held at the Billrothhaus of the Vienna Medical Society in the same lecture hall where Viktor Frankl spoke against collective guilt following his release from the concentration camps. It is also where Eleonore Frankl, his future wife, heard him lecture for the first time. Professor Alexander Batthyány, Ph.D., President of the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna and Director of the Viktor Frankl Archives, set a tone of transparency and inclusiveness throughout the event. The purpose of the Congress was to provide an overview of what currently exists in the field of logotherapy and existential analysis and, from that solid foundation, determine themes that logotherapy must address as it moves into the future.

Dr. Eleonore Frankl delivered a greeting message at the conference opening. In it, she expressed her great love for Viktor Frankl and her deep gratitude for all that she has experienced and learned in life, with gratitude expressed especially to her family. She explained that family was also very important to Viktor Frankl and that without his family he would not have been the man that he was. “I’m very grateful for every day of my life,” she said in German. She also offered a piece of advice: “to live every moment and to take every moment and to use every moment to make the best of life.” She continued, “It is important to take every moment and use it to the best of our abilities.” Switching to English, she concluded with gratitude toward the Congress participants: “You have enriched both our lives, Viktor’s and my life…. I wish you
all the best and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. What you are planning to do is to keep logotherapy alive. I only can say thank you, and the best to all of you.”

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. William Evans, Professor of Psychology at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. The keynote was entitled The World Still Cries for Meaning – Are We Still Listening? In it, Dr. Evans explained that in our post-modern age the world is still struggling with meaninglessness, hopelessness, and existential emptiness. Logotherapy, as lived and taught by Viktor Frankl, still stands firm as an alternative to reductionism, depersonalization, and the world's pervasive existential vacuum. Drawing upon Viktor Frankl's concept of the tragic triad, Dr. Evans provided evidence of the crisis of meaning in today's world, including data on depression and suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, and aggression. He challenged all participants of the conference to respond to this cry for meaning. He said, “The truths of logotherapy as lived and taught by Dr. Frankl are as needed and as timely today as they were during the Holocaust. The world still cries for meaning! Are we still listening?” The full text of his keynote address is available at http://www.univie.ac.at/wissenschaftstheorie/batthyany/keynote.pdf.

The opening session concluded with a roundtable discussion by pioneers of logotherapy: Professor Gerónimo Acevedo, Ph.D., from Argentina; Professor David Guttmann, Ph.D., from Israel; Professor Katsutaro Nagata, M.D., Ph.D., from Japan; Professor Kazimierz Popielski, Ph.D., from Poland; Irmeli Sjölle, Ph.D., from Finland; and Giosch Albrecht, Ph.D., from Switzerland. Dr. Sjölle delivered a greeting from Professor Robert Barnes, Ph.D., President of the Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy (USA). Each of the pioneers shared stories about Viktor Frankl, or about the growth of logotherapy in their countries, or both. This roundtable was organized as an open forum so that it was possible for all participants to ask questions and to learn from these distinguished pioneers of our field.

The remainder of the Congress included presentations by over 35 speakers from 25 countries. Because of time limitations, each of the parallel sessions was limited from 15 to 30 minutes and was moderated. All sessions were delivered in German, English, and Spanish with the help of volunteer translators. A wide range of topics was covered, including the development of logotherapy in particular regions of the world, specifics of clinical practice, integration and dialogue with developments in psychology and other scholarly fields, as well as the application of logotherapy to a variety of social, cultural, and occupational issues. The presentations were marked by a high degree of scholarly rigor.

The final plenary presentation was delivered by Charles McLafferty, Jr., Ph.D., and was entitled The Future of Logotherapy: Idea, Ideal or Idol? Dr. McLafferty argued for the “de-guru-ification” of logotherapy as Viktor Frankl had done at the First World Congress of Logotherapy in 1980. He likened the conference participants to the founding fathers of the United States and
insisted that the future must remain open. Dr. McLafferty said, "For us to discover the future of logotherapy, we must live it."

Other components of the conference were a bookstore and a room for posters and printed information about various initiatives in logotherapy from all over the world. In this area, conference participants could share contact information concerning initiatives with which they may wish to become involved. Congress Vienna also provided a radio booth for the LogoTalk Radio podcast and encouraged presenters to allow recording of their presentations to comprise an audio archive. As a consequence, many of the conference presentations are available at http://www.logotalkradio.com. In addition, José Luis Alvarez Coitinho recorded a great deal of the Congress on video. These presentations are now available on YouTube.

Additional highlights of Congress Vienna included the reception dinner at the Albert Schweitzer Haus and the conference dinner buffet at Gasthaus Rebhuhn that featured traditional Austrian food. Of course, there were multiple opportunities for groups of conference participants to explore the many cultural experiences that Vienna has to offer, including the Sacher-Torte. Deep discussions of logotherapy and existential analysis could be heard morning and night in the coffee houses, restaurants, and hotel lobbies surrounding the Billrothhaus, especially at the Hotel Regina where many conference participants stayed.

A guided walking tour of Viktor Frankl’s Vienna concluded the conference. The tour included the street on which Viktor Frankl met Sigmund Freud, the grounds of the University of Vienna were Frankl taught, and the Vienna Poliklinik that Frankl directed. The Poliklinik is currently being restored. Some participants also visited the Viktor Frankl Center located in the apartment building where Viktor and Eleonore Frankl made their home. The Viktor Frankl Center contains multiple educational displays about Viktor Frankl and logotherapy, as well as some historical and personal items. Viktor Frankl’s dictaphone and flight manual are on display, for example.

Four themes emerged from the Congress that logotherapy must address in the future. The first is that psychoanalysis has been replaced by neuropsychiatry as the dominant reductionist model in the field. While Viktor Frankl’s books address psychoanalysis, future logotherapists must be prepared to address the reductionism inherent within neuropsychiatry with the same vigor. The second theme involves quality control and training in logotherapy. The Viktor Frankl Institute receives about one letter per month concerning someone holding him or herself out to the public as a logotherapist, but who appears to lack adequate training. Conversely, the Institute receives from 10 to 20 inquiries per month in search of logotherapists. Yet, no directory of officially trained logotherapists is available. The Viktor Frankl Institute is moving forward with the publication of a yearbook of logotherapists to address these interrelated issues. The third theme involves the relationship between the Viktor Frankl Institute as an umbrella organization and the various national and regional institutes. There
is a desire to maintain national and regional autonomy while also maintaining quality control of training. The fourth and final theme to emerge is the desire on the part of conference participants that Vienna take a more active role in addressing these issues. The Viktor Frankl Institute plans, therefore, to sponsor congresses every two years.

Professor Batthyány reminded us, as logotherapists, that we know the future is open and for us to create. The Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna has a very good understanding of current initiatives all over the world. Consequently, the conference served both to present what already exists and to build from this point. Both before and after the conference, participants received questionnaires to allow the sharing of ideas and to develop a good, bright future for logotherapy and existential analysis. More information about Congress Vienna 2012: The Future of Logotherapy can be found at the conference website http://www.viktorfrankl.info.