

**Communiqué of the Fifth Theological Conference of the
Porvoo Communion of Churches
Meeting in Riga, Latvia, 19 – 22 October, 2016**

More than forty delegates from the Porvoo Communion of Churches met in Riga, Latvia, to listen to each other, reflect and deliberate on the theme: ***The Spirit of God in the Life of the World (Rev. 3:20 – 22) – What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?***

The conference took place at a significant time. The Porvoo Declaration was first signed 20 years ago and we were able to reflect on what has been achieved. We engaged in reflecting in new ways on how to be a missionary church in the changing and challenging circumstances in Europe. These are due to secularism, the difficulty of communicating the Christian faith effectively and the adjustments needed across Europe arising from recent migration.

Setting the scene

The conference started with a Celebration of the Eucharist in the Cathedral of Riga, celebrated by Archbishop Janis Vanags, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia. The sermon was given by Archbishop Michael Jackson, Church of Ireland, Anglican Co-chair of the Porvoo Contact Group, who set the tone of the conference by addressing the context of Latvia and the changing political landscape of Europe, with its consequent challenges for the churches. He ended his sermon by citing the Collect prayer for the Feast of St Luke; *By the grace of the Spirit and through the wholesome medicine of the gospel, give your Church the same love and power to heal...*

Archbishop Janis Vanags received the conference in Latvia, thanking the Porvoo Communion for contributing with interesting and refreshing theological conversations. He gave an account of the current situation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, as well as the presence of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia in 2016 in its Synod passed a motion to say that only men can be ordained to the priesthood. It is expected that its relations with the Porvoo Communion will be dealt with in four years time at its next synod. Archbishop Michael Jackson thanked the Archbishop Vanags for his welcoming words and assured him and the church of the Porvoo Communion's continued prayers. He also highlighted the special component of being hosted in Latvia, being both "at home" and "abroad", alluding to the history of the Lutheran church in Latvia.

The Rt. Revd. Peter Skov-Jakobsen, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, Lutheran Co-chair of the Porvoo Contact Group, gave an introduction to the overall theme of the conference, by describing the situation of the churches as being at the crossroads. The churches are living with two stories, one is the story of fear, and the other is the story of hope. After 9/11 fear became decisive in such a way that fundamentalism and fear of religion was re-born. The New Testament also contains stories of fear and terror, but as Saul met Jesus through being blinded by the "the Light of the World", he became Paul. Perhaps the churches, then, should be open to look for the Spirit in the world, especially in the other, even in secular society and with people of other World Faiths. Jesus is not teaching us to be gods, but to be human beings, meeting each other face to face.

Latvia in Context

Prof Dr Jouko Talonen, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, gave historical perspectives to the development of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia until today, including the history of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad. Dr Voldemars Laucins, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, responded to his paper by looking at it in an international perspective, comparing the ecumenical involvement of the church with different periods in its history. Dr Dace Balode, Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad, addressed a particular part of the history by giving an overview of the history of ordination of women in the church.

Setting the scene of Europe and Porvoo

Revd. Dr Paul Weston, Church of England, spoke about the concept of the post-secular as a challenge and opportunity for the churches in Europe: How do we speak about God today? He started by giving an historical background for how we have seen secularization and Christianity, and then suggested that we should move beyond that. We were brought into the middle of the reality of contemporary spirituality. The crossing point between Christianity and Post-secular society starts with returning to the Gospel narrative of Jesus and in bringing it to the current context. We all share humanity as a precondition of encounter. He referred to Ephesians 2:17 – 18 as a basis for churches to engage in the break down of cultural barriers rather than “living with them”.

Together in Mission and Ministry

The Rt. Revd. Dr Ragnar Persenius, Church of Sweden, reflected on the Porvoo Communion of Churches and its continuing journey. We have a common basis in our Christian faith and we recognize each other’s sacraments and ordained ministry as indicated in the Porvoo Common Statement and in the Porvoo Declaration, but we also knew from the beginning about the differences between our churches, when entering into the Communion. What has been surprisingly important is the extent of the twinning exchanges that have taken place between parishes and dioceses. The churches of the Communion also seem to have the same kind of challenges in common. An issue the Communion could explore further, is baptism and the common priesthood of believers. Lutheran churches may have emphasised the ordained ministry too much. There must be a relation between the ordained ministry and the people of God, the priesthood of all believers. At the same time the understanding of baptism relates to a number of other common challenges, like Christian education, young people, theology and inter-religious dialogue.

Dr Sandra Gintere, member of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity, started her presentation by giving an account of her involvement in the Porvoo Communion through the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, and added her account to the history of the church. She then introduced the work of the Lutheran and Roman-Catholic Dialogue resulting in the document “From Conflict to Communion”. The document gives background and guidelines for a joint commemoration of the history. It also explores baptism as a primary sacrament, which in turn may prepare a dialogue for Eucharistic hospitality.

Dr Kristin Graff-Kallevåg, Church of Norway, spoke about contextuality and ecumenism and diversity in communion. Using her own background as an example, she related our faith to the real issues people are raising in the world. Taking the context into consideration serves the missionality of the Church. The presupposition is that there is something to be communicated beyond our easily narrowed contexts. When constructive ecumenical discussions take place, there needs to be the balance between acknowledging the validity of a plurality of contextually determined interpretations and practices of faith on one hand, and the striving towards finding ways of expressing faith in word and deed that is cross-cultural, on the other hand. She recommended for discussion the challenge set by Fr Stephen Bevans: "Mission is finding out where the Spirit is at work, and joining in".

Spirituality in a Changing Context

Revd. Prof Dr Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and teacher at the University of Helsinki, gave a lecture on the impact of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in the European and global context. He presented statistics on Christianity and confessions in the world, in which Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians number 25 % of all Christians, before he went on to introduce the ecumenical roots of Pentecostalism, and its sometimes surprising ecumenical influences. He also presented a comparison between the influence of Lutheranism on Pentecostalism, and the Pentecostal influence on Lutheranism, as an example of the "Pentecostalisation of Christianity". This year an international Lutheran-Pentecostal dialogue was launched. The focus is on the Spirit-Christology, which is fundamental for the Pentecostal theological orientation, and also seems to be a fruitful point of encounter for Lutherans. The connection between Christ and the Spirit is central also to Pentecostalism. Kärkkäinen saw that a recognition of one Christian baptism between mainstream Churches and Pentecostals can be possible, if the different points of orientation are taken into account. There is good theological and biblical material for that.

The Revd. Prof Dr David Brown, Scottish Episcopal Church, gave a lecture on why theology needs the arts. He used examples from music, architecture and painting to illustrate how artists have attempted to convey a concept of the divine. Society no longer has such trust in dualist understanding of the person, in rationality or in systems of universal knowledge. The arts can help point theology in the direction of symbols, the value of stories, and human experience, as ways of making us open to the dimension of transcendence.

The Revd. Dr Cecilia Nahnfeldt, Church of Sweden, spoke about how we listen to the stirrings of the Spirit in the context of migration and a troubled Europe. She started by describing the two-sided nature of what migrants experience in society, such as a feeling of lack of a meal when there is food, or the feeling of not being listened to, while still meeting people. Referring to Dr Judith Butler she explained the mechanism of de-humanisation. She also referred to Luther, and his trust in the recipients of a message. The concept of "being called" could help us deal with what is perceived as disturbances in society, helping us to give priority to the needs of our neighbours. All humans are entitled to call others, as well as to being called. The role of the church is to give room for this calling. The calling can come from unexpected places. An example is the recent

restrictions in regulations on asylum seekers in Sweden, showing conditional hospitality, a situation in which the church has become a contra-voice. Are we a naïve church, she asked? The church cannot eliminate the signs of disturbance, but it must be willing to show un-conditional hospitality.

The Most Revd. Dr Michael Jackson spoke on receptive ecumenism as a resource for our joint journey. As a communion of churches, we need to gain an understanding of communion as something deeper than just ecumenical exploration and thereby engaging as a family in communion with other churches. Receptive ecumenism is something we can take on further and use to ask real questions of ecumenical engagement of ourselves in our relations with others, a task of which the Porvoo Contact Group can be an engine. Receptive ecumenism involves engagement with, and a deep sense of community with, the other.

Summing up

Participants and members of the Porvoo Contact Group led morning and evening prayers. Bible studies were led by The Venerable Dr John Perumbalath, Church of England, who spoke on Acts 7:1 – 53, “Resident Aliens: Our Calling” and Esther 4:4 – 5:8, “Mission in the Public sphere”. He explored the passages, asking how do we minister in a world where God is not spoken about? In situations where the church may seem powerless, God can still use coincidences that are contributing to people being saved. The church must be present in the twists and turns of the world, because God acts through them. God calls us to action.

The Closing Eucharist took place in St. Saviour’s Anglican Church in Riga, celebrated by The Rt. Revd. Jana Jeruma-Grinberga from the Diocese in Europe. The sermon was given by The Revd. Helene T. Steed, Church of Ireland, who reflected on the prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake; “Disturb us, O Lord ...”.

In addition to worship and lectures, the Fifth Porvoo Theological Conference worked through plenary discussions and group work, as well as interviews with keynote listeners, all of which contributed to the recommendations of the conference.

Recommendations

- Building on the understanding of apostolicity, as it is expressed in the Porvoo Common Statement, we recommend that further work be done on the role of the baptized in their shared responsibility for the mission in the world.
- We have listened to and understood more fully the situation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, and we recommend a continuing dialogue. We long for signs of the church’s greater commitment to our common journey, and a positive vote for full membership of the Porvoo Communion of Churches.

- We recognize that changes in the world are affecting our communities, thereby also changing the understanding of our own mission, especially in relation to migrants. We recommend that the Porvoo Communion of Churches look for fruitful ways to deliberate on how we take our common mission further in this new context.

The Porvoo Communion of Churches consists of the following Anglican and Lutheran churches: The Church of England; The Church of Ireland; The Scottish Episcopal Church; The Church in Wales; The Lusitanian Church in Portugal; The Spanish Episcopal Reformed Church, The Church of Sweden; The Church of Norway; The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland; The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland; The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church; The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania. The Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad and The Lutheran Church in Great Britain signed the Porvoo Declaration in September 2014 and are now full members of the Porvoo Communion of Churches. Currently the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia is the only church with observer status on the Porvoo Contact Group. The VELKD is invited as guests to all Porvoo Theological Conferences.