



**Porvoo Communion Theological Conference:
'A Vision for Communion', with
Meeting of the Porvoo Contact Group
8–9th October 2020**

Representatives of the Churches of the Porvoo Communion participated in an on-line theological conference on Thursday 8th October. The Porvoo Contact Group then met on-line meeting the next day.

The theological conference, with the title 'A Vision for Communion', was originally planned to take place at Sigtuna, Sweden, but it was agreed in the summer to make it an on-line event because of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. Participants joined from four different time zones across Europe, while one early riser from the USA also joined. It was divided into four sessions, combining two presentations in each session with group discussions and plenary feedback.

'A Vision for Communion' looked back to the theological vision behind the signing of the Porvoo Declaration in 1996, reviewed how that vision had been lived out subsequently in the Porvoo Communion of Churches, and considered current challenges and resources for addressing them.

The Revd Dr Tiit Pädam (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church) and Dame Mary Tanner (Church of England) offered reflections on the original vision for the Porvoo Communion, from the perspective of those who had been involved in laying its foundations. The lack of specification in the Porvoo Declaration on structures to embody the new relation of communion was noted: was this a weakness or a creative opportunity? While there were differences in thinking about 'models' of unity among those who drafted the Common Statement and Declaration, they had been able to come together in outlining a 'portrait' of the church's unity that was recognizable to all. Breakthroughs in understanding had been possible because of the level of friendship and trust. A key dimension of the 'portrait' had been the integral relation between unity and mission. Conference participants were challenged on how the Porvoo Communion so far had contributed to fruitfulness in mission on the part of its member churches.

The next session focused on Porvoo as a living communion of churches since 1996. The Revd Anne Burghardt (Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church) explored the terminology of 'full communion' and 'visible communion'. She emphasized the exchange of gifts between churches as indispensable for a living communion, giving examples of how belonging to the Porvoo Communion had contributed to change and growth in her church in Estonia and encouraging other participants to consider what they might be able to say about their churches in this regard. Pater Fredrik Emanuelson OMI (Roman Catholic Diocese of Stockholm) drew on Roman Catholic sources to indicate ways in which the theology of church as communion could be deepened and renewed. He affirmed the relationship between mission and unity as expressed for



The Porvoo Communion

instance in the Catechism, and also the need for continual conversion, individual, ecclesial, and ecumenical, in seeking for the unity of the church to be made visible, noting this included the 'purification of memory' (in the phrase of Pope John Paul II) in reflecting on our histories.

Emerging challenges for the Communion were highlighted in the third session. The Revd Dr Paddy McGlinchy (Church of Ireland) identified the importance of holding together 'vertical' with 'horizontal' dimensions when responding to our situation, urging shared confidence in what C. S. Lewis called 'mere Christianity' as the best basis for this. He also highlighted the challenges of diversity, including the growing presence in Western Europe of Christians formed in other cultural contexts, and suggested that a focus on beauty might be fruitful in seeking to share the gospel with younger generations. Dr Henrietta Grönlund (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland) argued that both church and society are increasingly affected by 'planetary urbanization' that enables unprecedented levels of global connectedness, while also being associated with the power of global markets, social inequality, polarization, and the climate crisis. While she proposed that this situation highlighted the importance of the church's message of justice, hope, meaning, and communion, she also acknowledged that various factors, including a pronounced individualism, had created a loss of religious memory that meant the church struggled to be heard and understood. An essential element of the response, she said, would need to be the weaving together of theological reflection with practical action and advocacy for justice.

In the final session, the Co-Chairs of the Porvoo Contact Group, Archbishop Michael Jackson and Bishop Matti Repo, led the participants in some reflection on what kind of proposals for the future of the Porvoo Communion might emerge from the theological thinking in which they had participated together. Themes that emerged from the discussion included:

- The continuing value of the rich ecclesiological vision underpinning the Porvoo Common Statement, and the need to keep filling in the 'portrait' of visible unity that it sketched out in such a way that the likeness of Christ is evident
- The possibility of developing further the structures or 'instruments of communion' that embody and enable the living out of the Commitments in the Porvoo Declaration
- The value of the image and of concrete practices of shared pilgrimage
- The place of diversity, difference, and disagreement within the communion of churches
- The need to find ways to engage a younger generation with the lived reality of the Porvoo Communion of Churches, including lay people, theologians and those preparing for ordained ministries
- The possibilities offered by on-line communication for addressing many of these points and extending and deepening relations between our churches.

The conference ended with an evening prayer where Revd Jenny Sjögren shared an experience of a new way of meeting each other in the era of Covid-19. She showed a picture of a gathering for children and adults in the Cathedral in Strängnäs where the exchange of gazes deepens encounter despite physical distance.



The Porvoo Communion

Participants

Church of England

Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen
Revd Canon Dr Julie Gittoes
Revd Dr Anderson Jeremiah
Dame Mary Tanner
Revd Dr Callan Slipper

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Rt Revd Dr Matti Repo
Professor Henrietta Grönlund
Revd Saara-Maria Jurva
Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen

Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Worldwide

Most Revd Lauma Zusevica
Revd Karlis Zols
Revd Zilgme Eglite

Church of Norway

Revd Einar Tjelle
Dr Sven Thore Kloster
Revd April M. Almaas
Very Revd Dr Gudmund Waaler

Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

Revd Dr Tauno Teder
Revd Dr Tiit Pädam
Revd Anne Burghardt

Church of Sweden

Rt Revd Dr Johan Dalman
Revd Dr Erik Berggren
Revd Jenny Sjögren
Revd Emma Jansson

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

Revd Rikke Juul
Very Revd Thomas Reinholdt Rasmussen
Rev Dr Thorsten Rørbæk
Signe Randorff Larsen

Church of Ireland

Revd Suzanne Cousins
Canon Gillian Wharton
Revd Canon Helene Steed
Rt Revd Dr Michael Jackson



The Porvoo Communion

Church in Wales

Revd Canon Dr Mark Clavier
Revd Maggie Thorne
Revd Dr Ainsley Griffiths
Angela Clarke

Lutheran Church in Great Britain

Rt Revd Tor B Jørgensen

Scottish Episcopal Church

Ms Miriam Weibye
Rev Canon John McLuckie

Lusitanian Church

Rt Revd Jorge Pina Cabral
Revd Sérgio Alves
Revd Abilene Fischer
Dr António Manuel Silva

Spanish Episcopal Church

Revd Dr Juan María Tellería
Revd Dr Duane Alexander Miller
Rt Revd Dr Carlos López Lozano

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland

Revd Dr Sigurdur Arni Thordarson
Rev. Bjarni Thor Bjarnason

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lithuania

No participants in the conference

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia

Revd Ainars Rendors

Ev. Church of the Augsburg Conf. in Poland

Rt Revd Prof Marcin Hintz

Speakers (not part of other delegations)

OMI, Roman Catholic Diocese of Stockholm

Pater Fredrik Emanuelson

Church of Ireland Theological Institute

Revd Dr Patrick McGlinchy



The Porvoo Communion

Picture of some participants in the Porvoo Communion Theological Conference 'A Vision for Communion'

