

Church Leaders Consultation, Porvoo Communion of Churches Sigtuna, Sweden 8-10 October 2024

Communiqué



The Church Leaders' Consultation of the Porvoo Communion of Churches was held at the Sigtuna Foundation, Sweden, from 8 to 10 October 2024, on the theme of 'God's world – Proclaiming hope for future generations in the midst of the environmental crisis'. It was preceded by a meeting of the Porvoo Contact Group, which coordinates joint engagement with areas of common concern amongst the Porvoo churches, from 7 to 8 October 2024.

The Consultation began with a greeting from the Most Revd Martin Modéus, Archbishop of Uppsala, who held out the prospect of the Church as the messenger of faith, hope and love. In the first session, singer Elin Teilus, a yoik artist of the indigenous Sámi, and pianist and composer Rickard Åström presented a collection of Sámi songs celebrating the sacred life of creation. Ms Gunilla Mäarak, a member of the Sámi Council of the Church of Sweden, spoke of the Sámi life and culture, and its closeness to the natural world, as well as the current challenges it faces.

In the second session on 'The added value of church involvement in the discussion on climate, and how to offer hope', the Very Revd Christina Rygaard Kristiansen, Dean of Tønder, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, called for the churches to be contemplative, subversive (unafraid to argue from the edge and to resist easy solutions), and apocalyptic (open to the heavenly vision of a new earth). There were formal responses from the Revd Robert Bunder, of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church, and from the Rt Revd Jorge de Pina Cabal, of the Lusitanian Church, and further general discussion followed.

The third session was on ‘How do we avoid moralising and increasing the burden on people, hindering a constructive approach?’ Ms Joanna Slama and the Revd Aino Vihonen, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, gave a joint presentation exploring our continuity with nature and our dependence on it, considering how we can begin to turn our climate anxiety into hope which issues in practical action. There were responses from Revd Bjarni Thor Bjarnason, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland, from Ms Fernanda Tabita González Zubieta, of the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church, and from the Revd Jo Jan Vandenheede, of the Lutheran Church of Great Britain. Again, there was a fruitful general discussion afterwards.

The Rt Revd Martin Gainsborough, of the Church of England, began the fourth session, on ‘What are the practical challenges for the churches and possible ways of working with these challenges’. He pointed out that the climate crisis is actually more like a civilisational crisis, a ‘metacrisis’ (the term of Jonathan Rosen) which pinions on a deficit in our theological anthropology; the Church needs to listen to voices beyond its own walls, and to reconceive how we can live sustainably a genuinely human life. There were responses from Ms Elise Skjaerven Aas and the Rt Revd Svein Valle, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, and from Mr Paul Williams, the Scottish Episcopal Church’s Net Zero Director. Further discussion recognised the complicated nature of the practical issues, but also the critical importance of small but significant steps.

In a fifth session on “Reflecting with young people and the concerns they have”, Ven Andrew Orr, of the Church of Ireland, described the involvement of school pupils in climate issues with related projects. He identified six aspects young people are looking for in the present situation: thanksgiving, lament, a prophetic voice, joy in enough, justice with love, hope which gives resilience. Mr Fredrik Hinton, from the Church of Sweden, responded from the perspective of the church’s youth organisation.

The sixth session was on ‘Hope for future generations’. It was led by Canon Ian Loynd of the Church in Wales, who spoke about the healing of the deaf man by Jesus in Mark 7, with Jesus’s deep sigh as a sign of hope which could inspire us towards action; Christian hope is fortified with faith and love in a time of environmental crisis. There were responses from the Revd Zilgme Eglite of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Worldwide, and from the Revd Sofia Orelund of the Church of Sweden.

On the afternoon of 9 October, we visited Gamla Uppsala (Old Uppsala) and, during a short climate pilgrimage, learned about the huge environmental challenges faced by the human race, as well as possible solutions. Ms Ann Edlund and the Revd Claes Hedström, both from the Church of Sweden described their deep commitment to enabling others to undertake the theological and practical work needed in this time of crisis. The pilgrimage included a visit to the Old Uppsala Church, the first cathedral, including a prayer at that holy site. This was

followed by a guided tour of the current Uppsala Cathedral in the city centre, led by cathedral chaplain the Revd Lars Åstrand who spoke of its significance in the life of the Archdiocese of Uppsala and more widely as the mother church of the Church of Sweden. The visit to Uppsala concluded with a reading and short prayer in the Cathedral, gathered around the votive candle stand which had been produced to mark the occasion of the city hosting the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches, in 1968.

Worship took place in the Foundation's Chapel, beginning with a eucharist on the first evening at which Archbishop Michael Jackson celebrated and Archbishop Martin Modéus preached. On the second day our morning prayer was led by the Revd Karsten Felzmann of the Church of Sweden, a puppet master who enacted the Lukan narrative of Jesus's appearance on the road to Emmaus and interpreted it as a sign of the way in which Christian hope can arise even in the darkest times. The closing eucharist was celebrated by the Rt Revd Matti Repo, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and Archbishop Michael Jackson preached.

The Consultation brought together many different experiences and perspectives from our member churches. In a context of worship, reflection and hospitality there was a tangible sense of different Christian traditions coming together to confront the challenges presented to us by the climate crisis. We are very grateful to the Church of Sweden for hosting and facilitating this exchange.

List of participants

An asterisk * indicates that the participant is also a member of the Porvoo Contact Group.

ANGLICAN PARTICIPANTS

The Church of England

Martin Gainsborough

Jeremy Morris*

Leslie Nathaniel* (PCG member for the Diocese in Europe)

The Church of Ireland

Stephen Fielding*

Michael Jackson (Anglican Co-Chair)

Andrew Orr

The Lusitanian Church (Portugal)

Jorge Pina Cabral*

The Scottish Episcopal Church

Paul Williams

The Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church

Carlos López Lozano*

Fernanda Tabita González Zubieta

The Church in Wales

Ainsley Griffiths (Anglican Co-Secretary)*

Ian Loynd

LUTHERAN PARTICIPANTS

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

Thorsten Rørbæk (Lutheran Co-Secretary)*

Christina Rygaard Kristiansen

The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church

Tauno Teder*

Robert Bunder

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Tomi Karttunen*

Matti Repo* (Lutheran Co-Chair)

Joanna Slama

Aino Vihonen

The Lutheran Church in Great Britain

Meelis Süld*

Jo Jan Vandenheede

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Iceland

Bjarni Þor Bjarnason*

The Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church Worldwide

Zilgme Eglite*

The Church of Norway

Beate Fagerli*

Elise Skjærven Aas

Svein Valle

The Church of Sweden

Fredrik Hinton

Gunilla Mäarak

Christopher Meakin*

Sofia Oreland