

Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference

Turku, Finland, September 2009

The Rev Dr. Kimmo Kääriäinen is Director of the Church Research Institute in the Evangelical Church in Finland. What follows is a summary of his opening address as heard by Bishop Rupert Hoare. Dr. Kääriäinen provided each participant with a booklet, 'The Church Today', published in 2009 by the Church Communications Centre, Helsinki, Finland, ISSN 1457-5027.

His address, delivered on 11th September 2009 was entitled

Introduction to Finland and Church Life in Finland

Finland itself: 75% forested; 10% lakes (190,000!); border with Russia 1000 kilometres long. Population: 5 million, of these 140,000 foreign citizens (due to double in next 10 years). Finnish belongs to Finno-Ugric linguistic family; Estonian and Finnish in one part, Hungarian in the other. Unemployment: 7% (8% in European Union as a whole).

The Church in Finland: Confession of Augsburg was accepted by Sweden (then in control of Finland) in 1593; from then on, the church of the nation was Lutheran (enriched by pietistic movements). In 1809 Finland became a Grand Duchy of Russia, but was largely able to maintain its autonomy. In 2003 freedom of religion was guaranteed in Finland, so the Lutheran Church ceased to be the State Church, but became "church for the people". It now has 4.3 million members; the Finnish Orthodox Church comprises 1.1% of population; officially there are now 9,017 Muslims, but the real number is nearer 40,000.

Ecumenically: Finnish Council of Churches, with full participation of Orthodox, founded 1917 (Roman Catholics joined in 1966). Formal conversations between Lutherans and Orthodox started in 1986 in Finland.

Church Life in 2008: 87.6% of all Finnish 15 year olds attended Confirmation classes; 57% of all marriages solemnised in church (as contrasted with 95.9% in 1970); 96% of all Finns had a Lutheran burial. The church tax is collected together with the Communal (the local) Tax; at the present time many parishes are being merged with consequent challenges to members' sense of identity.

Editorial Postscript: On Saturday the Revd Aino Vesti welcomed us to the Retreat Centre of her parish in Masku, and described her work with children and young people, focussing on baptism (75% of baptisms taking place in the family home), and confirmation preparation including a 7-10 day residential course in the Retreat Centre – regarded by teenagers as part of their national culture, those confirmed one year returning the next to share in the teaching.