Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference in Hamburg

11th-15th September 2026

‘A Changing Church in an Age of Migration’

Sermon preached by Bishop David Hamid,
our Anglican President
at Morning Devotion, Saturday 12th September

One Body in an Age of Migration

Isaiah 56.6–7; Psalm 96;
Ephesians 4.1–6

Hamburg is a fitting place for us to reflect on the Church in an age of migration. This is a city shaped by journeys, by ships arriving and departing, by trade across borders, and by people bringing different languages, cultures, hopes and memories. Our 400-year- old Anglican parish in this city is one testimony to this heritage.

Today people are moving across borders in great numbers, a few by choice, but many more fleeing war, persecution, poverty or environmental disaster.

Our theme is “a changing Church in an age of migration.” Churches do not like change! There are many jokes about resistance to change in the Church. *How many Anglicans does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is 8. One to change it, and 7 to form a committee to investigate whether the old*

one should be retained for pastoral reasons! Change makes us anxious. But we are changing in many ways: congregations are smaller, inherited patterns such as the parish system, in some places are under pressure, and familiar patterns of liturgy in some places no longer seem evident.

In our Scriptures migration is a theological theme. The Bible is full of people on the move, as Bishop Jana reminded us yesterday: Abraham and Sarah leaving their homeland; Ruth crossing borders; the exiles longing for home; Mary and Joseph fleeing with the child Jesus. And of course the disciples being *sent to all nations*. The people of God have never been a people without movement.

In our reading, Isaiah proclaims God's promise that the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord will be brought to the holy mountain and made joyful in the house of prayer: "My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all peoples*."

The people of God are not a closed circle, defined by ancestry, nationality or culture. The people of God are formed by God's welcome which is inclusive and universal. The Church is faithful to its own identity as God's People *when it makes room for the stranger.* A Church shaped by migration *becomes more fully itself*. Migrant Christians bring prayers, songs, theological insights and experiences of God that remind us that *Christianity is not the possession of one culture.* The Gospel has always crossed borders. The Gospel has always been translated, sung, and lived in many languages. Psalm 96 reinforces that inclusive vision: "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, *all the earth.*" The song of God's people is a harmony, of different voices, the whole earth gathered into one beautiful song.

But friends, we also remember that those who have crossed borders often carry trauma, loneliness and grief. They may face racism, exploitation, as well as worries over an insecure legal status and of course separation from family. So the Church offers more than a warm greeting and a safe place; the Church may be one of the few places that truly *listens* to the stories of these our sisters and brothers, and in listening we are in solidarity with them, seeking to challenge any injustice suffered.

In our countries at this time there are some alarming political voices. It seems to me that the Church cannot be silent when discourse turns migrants into a threatening mass, when refugees are spoken of as burdens, and when suspicion is directed to people because of their nationality, ethnicity or religion. Perhaps we do need to political debate about border issues. But that is quite separate from what we know to be a theological truth: the *God-given dignity of every person*.
Christian faith makes a radical claim: our deepest belonging comes from Christ, not from nation, ancestry or culture. This is the Gospel. St Paul teaches this to us today: "There is one body and one Spirit … one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all."

Newcomers, Christians who have recently migrated here, are already members of the one body. And the final words of the lesson today "one God and Father of all" remind us of the truth that before a person possesses the right documents, speaks our language or understands our customs, *that person already bears the image of God. Nothing* can remove that dignity.

I think that the historic churches in our lands are making some changes as our populations evolve. I have the privilege of

serving as an honorary assistant bishop in the Diocese of Southwark, particularly assisting with the pastoral care of migrant communities from Latin
America. They worship in Spanish and bring a wealth of musical and devotional traditions — and much joy. But we need more work on discernment to ensure that our members from newly arrived populations are on our councils, and who are supported in any journey towards being our teachers and priests.

Friends let us be confident: the Church in an age of migration is not a Church that is in danger of *losing* its identity. It is a Church being *recalled* to its true identity: one body, faithful to the one God and Father of all. Let us pray that we will manifest in our common life the new song of which the psalmist speaks, a song in which many peoples, many languages and many histories are gathered into the praise of the one Lord, in the one Church.

Interior of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Mary