ANGLICAN-LUTHERAN SOCIETY

Conference in Trondheim, Norway, 25th-29th July 2022

BISHOPS' ROUND TABLE

A discussion chaired by Prof Richard Stephenson, one of the Conference planning group

Richard welcomed the 'panel of prelates' as he described the seven bishops sitting round the table. He expressed our gratitude to them for making time in their busy schedules to join us at our conference. He began the session with some comments on our theme, 'A Pilgrimage towards Hope'.

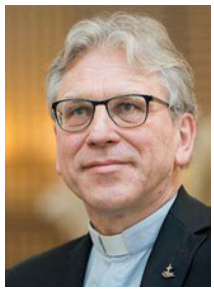
He showed this picture of Lindisfarne, explaining that it was one of the oldest pilgrim routes in Britain. But, he said, on 8th June 793 we had a large group of visitors from Trondheim! Their visit was not exactly about pilgrimage; they were Viking invaders! But all these centuries later we are receiving a very warm welcome from our Norwegian brothers and sisters, and we are very grateful.

After an opening prayer he invited the panel members to introduce themselves. First was **Bishop Erik Varden**, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Trondheim. He was born in Norway but had spent most of his life in the UK. He joined the Cistercian Order at Mount St Bernard in Leicestershire, remains a monk but has been Bishop since 2019. The Catholic community in Trondheim is spread over 55,000 square kilometres, but there are only 16-17000 Catholics so it is a small community. However, it is a rich mix because they come from some 130 nations.

Next was **Tor Jørgensen**, a Norwegian who until 2015 was Bishop of the Diocese of Sør-Hålogaland in the north of Norway, and now the Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain. He had been General Secretary of the Norwegian Mission Society and had served before that as a missionary in Japan.

David Hamid is suffragan Bishop in the Church of England Diocese in Europe plus Morocco, and Anglican President of our Society. The 300 congregations in the diocese are scattered across the continent so he felt he could trump Bishop Varden in terms of the area he covered! He was born in Scotland, ordained in the Anglican Church in Canada and served there until he was appointed Director of the Ecumenical Department in the Anglican Communion Office in London. He has been Bishop since 2002.

Jana Jeruma-Grinberga is Bishop Emerita of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain and Lutheran President of our Society. Latvian by birth, she served in the Latvian Church in Exile before joining the Lutheran Church in Great Britain and since she retired in 2019 she has been working as Anglican Chaplain in Riga under the Porvoo arrangements whilst retaining her involvement in the Latvian Church worldwide, though not the Latvian Church which does not ordain women.



Olav Fykse Tveit is the Preces (Presiding Bishop) of the Church of Norway. He was General Secretary of the Church of Norway's Council on Ecumenical and International Relations until his election as the seventh General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in August 2009, where he served two 5-year terms. He became Preces in 2020 and was consecrated in the cathedral in Trondheim.

Michael Ipgrave has been Bishop of Lichfield in the Church of England for six years and is Anglican Moderator of the Society. He grew up in Leicester and has often visited Mount St Bernard and also spent time as a curate in Japan, so he felt he was among friends!

Herborg Finnset is Bishop of Nidaros. She explained that there are 11 dioceses in Norway and in her diocese there are two bishops because the Preces is also based there. The diocese consists of the city of Trondheim and a number of smaller towns. It is 22000 square kilometres so it involves her in a lot of travelling. She served as parish priest in a number of places in the north of Norway and as Dean of Tromsø from 2005 until 2017 when she moved to Nidaros.

Richard then set the scene, as he put it. There is growing interest in pilgrimage. In 1972 just 67 pilgrims completed 'The Way of St James' to Santiago de Compostela whereas in 2019 (before Covid) 348,000 made the journey. Lourdes in France welcomes up to 5 million visitors every year. For many countries like Jordan and Israel/Palestine Muslim, Jewish and Christian pilgrims are vital for their economies.

Martin Luther, he said, doesn't seem to have been a great fan of pilgrimage. Although 'not bad in themselves', he was concerned that pilgrimages diverted Christians from true good works – caring for 'wife and children … serving and helping his neighbour', as he told the Nobility in 1520. Luther would probably be surprised that the 'Luther Trail' seems very similar to 'pilgrimage', attracting Christians from around the globe to Wittenberg, Worms, Erfurt and the other Luther sites.

Henry VIII banned pilgrimage in England, but there has been a tremendous revival of interest in Anglican Churches, as we shall hear later in the conference. On the other hand, the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church (2691) has always encouraged pilgrimages. They evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and are traditionally very special occasions for renewal in prayer.

So Richard's question for the bishops was this:

What is the state of pilgrimage in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches today?

Bishop Erik was invited to speak first. He began by reiterating that pilgrimage is a symbol of our journey towards our heavenly homeland. One of the Eucharistic prayers refers to the people of God 'pilgrimaging on earth.' But, he said, you can go on pilgrimage without necessarily going very far. Catholic churches contain the 'Stations of the Cross' which is one way of following Christ to the cross and beyond. 'You do this within the church but in spirit you are in Jerusalem,' he said.

The Rule of St Benedict states that monks should live within the confines of the monastery and that everything necessary should be there within the enclosure, but it uses the image of a 'journey' or a 'way' to illustrate the monastic purpose, and their third vow involves not standing still but being in constant movement towards Christ. In the earliest Christian communities we see this acted out in

turning towards the East in anticipation of Christ's return. The Benedictine Rule also sets out the distribution of the Psalms and Bishop Erik noticed that the Psalm before Vigils, Psalm 3 which is normally considered a 'waking Psalm' because it contains the verse 'I was asleep but now I am awake', has the title 'David, during the rebellion of Absalom, when he had to leave Jerusalem'. David had to leave in a hurry and Abiatha thought that the Ark of the Covenant should go with him. But David said it should stay in Jerusalem. If he is saved he will return to it. David leaves Jerusalem bare foot, head covered and singing. This reminds a monk that he is an exile. He is not where he is supposed to be. In the middle of the day the Gradual Psalms are sung, which Jewish pilgrims sang as they made their way to Jerusalem. Finally at Compline Psalm 133 was a priestly Psalm sung in the sanctuary before the Ark. So each day is a pilgrimage in miniature, from exile to homecoming. That's how we should all see our lives, and that's the framework in which pilgrimage makes sense.

Pilgrims in Kalwaria, Poland, following the Way of the Cross

Bishop Erik also told us that he had recently been to Kalwaria in Poland where they have constructed the Holy Land in miniature so pilgrims can follow the life of Jesus without travelling to the Middle East.

Bishop Tor then took the microphone. He, personally, had been on a kind of pilgrimage over the past three years since becoming Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain. It is a tiny Church that recently celebrated its 60th anniversary. He constantly asks, 'Why are we here?' Exploring our roots is also a kind of pilgrimage. His father was not a very religious man but whenever the family was travelling he always stopped at a church. He was always able to explain something about that church and its construction. The young Tor and his sister didn't like that at all! But looking back it was a valuable experience. It was a pilgrimage in itself. Then when Tor went to Japan he found that stopping at a church didn't happen very often! But instead he took his children into Temples, and that showed him and them something of what happens in other religions – the seeking for God, the seeking for meaning, the seeking for hope.

Bishop David began by thanking the Roman Catholic Church for the fact that Vatican II underlined the notion of the people of God being the 'pilgrim people of God'. This has become an understanding across all the Churches. We are supposed to be on the move – not static. The Diocese of Europe is a diocese of migrants, people who are living outside their country of origin for work, study, education and all kinds of reasons. We have to keep our vision of Church as a people on the move, not necessarily moving from place to place but moving in our ideas and practices - how we receive other migrants, for example. We have to be open to how the Spirit is calling us, moving us and tugging us along. Sunday by Sunday, as we go up the aisle to the altar, we are engaging in a little pilgrimage towards union with God which is our destiny. 'All across Europe there are shrines,' Bishop David said, 'places of pilgrimage; and so our congregations are used to welcoming pilgrims.'

'We have all of us been migrants during the course of our ministries,' noted **Bishop Jana**, 'whether it's to Geneva or Japan or even Leicester.' She wanted to focus on Latvia which used to be a predominantly Lutheran country but which now has a more equal representation of Catholics and Orthodox. Lutherans used to be suspicious of pilgrimage regarding it as a bit 'Roman', but that has completely changed in the past ten years. The Camino has a beginning in Riga and going to Santiago de Compostela is popular (though few walk the whole way!). There is St Mary's Basilica at Aglona which is the focus of an enormous pilgrimage with people walking from all over the Baltic States and

Poland for 15th August. Jana had been there with 150,000 people in the fields outside the Basilica praying the Lord's Prayer together, and she'd found it a most moving experience. When she asked colleagues why they thought people from all over Latvia took part, they thought it might be something that captured the imagination but would go out of fashion, or it might be that the Lutherans had been introduced to pilgrimage by their Catholic and Orthodox neighbours, or it could simply be that their pilgrimage is not a movement towards Christ but rather a process of self-discovery. But God works in unexpected ways and some who think of the walk as a way of challenging themselves do meet God on the way! Bishop Jana feels that the pilgrim movement has led to a kind of spiritual awakening in the country not necessarily associated with any of the established Churches.

Bishop Herborg told us that Nidaros Diocese has two foci of attention. One is the indigenous Sami people and the other is the pilgrimage tradition. After the Reformation pilgrimage was forbidden in Norway because it was thought necessary to neutralise the cult of St Olav, and Nidaros as its focus. Descriptions of pre-Reformation pilgrims entering Nidaros Cathedral which was then dark with columns like a forest (quite unlike today when the building is full of light) capture the imagination of Norwegians. It was in the 1960s that a group of Swedes arrived in Trondheim and said, 'We are pilgrims!' 'The local people were astonished,' the Bishop said, 'because no-one had said that for 400 years!' This year (2022) is the 25th anniversary of the pilgrim routes established by a joint initiative of the Church and local government. The thinking was that the routes should be revived for physical exercise, for cultural and perhaps even for spiritual reasons. Local farmers and landowners had to be asked if they knew where the ancient pilgrimage routes were, and many did. Norway's pilgrimage movement is small compared with the Camino but, as Jana said, people start as tourists and finish up with unexpected experiences. There are now pilgrim routes throughout Norway in every diocese. There are not many places to stay along the way so good planning is essential! However, 'the most important pilgrimage,' Bishop Herborg said, 'is to your local church!' Two things stand out for her; physical contact with the natural world and the road, and extending welcome to the stranger.

'It is very interesting that everyone who has spoken has put pilgrimage in a theological, spiritual and ecclesiological frame, with that idea from the catechism that pilgrimage evokes the journey to heaven,' contributed **Bishop Michael.** There are so many Biblical images of pilgrimage, and the First Epistle of Peter is a very pilgrim-oriented work. The word '*peregrinus*' means one who comes through the fields, who unsettles, who is a stranger from outside. He noted that pilgrimage is a world-wide thing, something he has experienced in Zimbabwe, for example, and in meeting many thousands of Nigerians in the Holy Land. He referred to the tradition in England when, on the Fourth

Sunday in Lent, 'Mothering Sunday', people would visit their mother church. People would also visit the graves of their loved ones. Those are two kinds of pilgrimages that persisted despite the fact that pilgrimage had been banned. So perhaps the revival of pilgrimage in England is simply making explicit something that has been implicit for centuries. When Bishop Michael is on pilgrimage he reflects that while he has chosen to take this route many people are forced to make long journeys – migrants and asylum seekers, people fleeing danger. He carries a simple prayer stick he was given when he visited 'The Jungle', the enormous refugee camp outside Calais in France. 'A pilgrimage can be a witness to justice,' he said.

Richard Stephenson then moved on to the second part of the session which was about Hope. The Bible is full of pilgrimage images – the Exodus where the Israelites were moving towards hope. There is pilgrimage to Jerusalem every year for Passover. As Bishop Erik had mentioned, some of the Psalms were written for the 'ascent' to Jerusalem. Old Testament prophets were always being sent to high mountains. In the New Testament we think of the Road to Emmaus (here is Chris Antenucci's depiction of it). Two disciples whose hope was gone when Jesus was crucified meet the stranger who opens the scriptures to them and they then recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

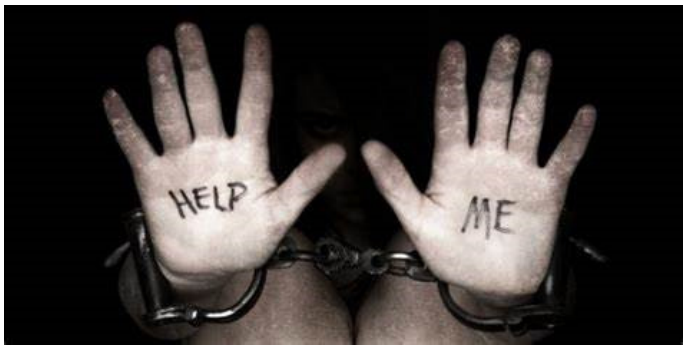
Martin Luther said that people make pilgrimages for many reasons, very seldom for legitimate ones. 'The first reason for making pilgrimages is the most common of all, namely, the curiosity to see and hear strange and unknown things. This levity proceeds from a loathing for and boredom with the worship services, which have been neglected in the pilgrims' own church. Otherwise, one would find incomparably better indulgences at home than in all the other places put together. Furthermore, he would be closer to Christ and the saints if he were not so foolish as to prefer sticks and stones to the poor and his neighbours whom he should serve out of love. And he would be closer to Christ also if he were to provide for his own family.' (Luther's Works Volume 31.198)

The Tent of Nations – the family lives in caves like their forefathers and the Israeli authority will not permit any building above ground

However, we see new expressions in Lutheranism of pilgrimage like the Tent of Nations where a Lutheran Palestinian family live under constant harassment by Israeli settlers. The Wall separates the family from their church and it takes most of the day to get there. But they have a motto at their gate: 'We refuse to be enemies'. They welcome visitors and are sustained by pilgrims, because if there wasn't a constant stream of pilgrims the Israeli authorities might easily demolish their place.

Richard then told us that 'Google' states that pilgrims hope for various things, from healing, miracles, peace or just weight loss. But for Lutherans hope is found in 'Christ Alone' by 'Grace Alone', through 'Faith Alone', as revealed in 'Scripture Alone'. So his next question for the Bishops was: **Where do you see 'hope' in your respective Churches?**

Bishop Erik said that it is easy to lose hope when there are dwindling congregations and over-large institutions but what strikes him is the goodness that he meets every day; people desire to help and to come together as community. Last Lent, after celebrating Mass in his cathedral, he heard unfamiliar singing. It was two Vietnamese ladies doing the Stations of the Cross. He had a notion of what those ladies had lived through during the course of their lives, yet here they were sticking to the faithful practices that had inspired and kept them going through it all. The opposite of hope is hopeless, and he meets a lot of hopeless people who say things like 'I'm lost!' or 'My life isn't going anywhere!' or 'I'm stuck!' Hopelessness is often a sense of being trapped in circumstances that restrict movement. So hopeless people start to fidget, and Bishop Erik thinks that the first step towards hope is to sit still and ask, 'Where am I now? And if this isn't where I should be or could be, how can I go somewhere?' Perhaps one reason why people are going on pilgrimages is that they feel lost, and they think, 'This is something I can do which will take me somewhere and then we'll see.' In antiquity everything seemed to be falling apart and people felt trapped. Along came the Gospel which said, you're free. You can be free in your heart and soul and no-one can take that freedom from you. Today young people are fed up with purposelessness. They want goals. And that, for Bishop Erik, is a sign of hope.



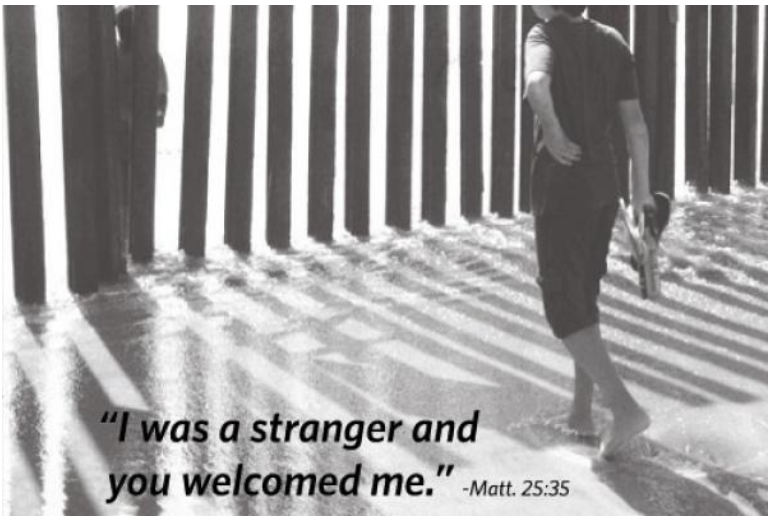
Bishop Tor said that 'grace' and 'joy' are the basis of his hopes for the congregations of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain. They live by God's grace, they exhibit joy. The time may come when they have to make tough choices about their future, whether they remain or disperse. But since most of the congregations grew as a result of World War II, when many refugees came to Great Britain from Germany and other countries, the congregations should be open to assisting refugees today. A sign of hope, he asserted, was the two Archbishops in England using their sermons on Easter Day to criticise the British Government's plan to send refugees arriving illegally in Britain to Rwanda. 'That was courageous and a sign of hope,' he said.

The Ministry Experience Scheme in the Diocese in Europe takes young people between 18 and 30 years of age and places them in chaplaincies to give them experience of what parish ministry is like. 'This is to help them discern their way forward,' **Bishop David** explained. 'Part of the programme is a study pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The reason is that pilgrimage leads to conversion. When they meet the People of the Land, those who have been displaced and those who have displaced them, and they hear the stories from both sides, and when they meet members of the ancient Churches they don't readily come across in Europe or the UK, something happens. They don't bring back souvenirs; they bring back a change of heart.' On his last visit they went to Emmaus. One of the great things about Emmaus is that archaeologists can't decide where it is! There are at least four candidates. Bishop David feels that Luke didn't intend a specific place. His intention is to convey that on the road when we meet a stranger and offer hospitality we are encountering Christ.

Bishop Jana said that she sees hope in the fact that the structures of the Church are gradually collapsing and she is convinced that out of that will be born something new. 'Buildings may die and structures may die but faith will not die, and Christ will be there at the centre of whatever it is that's coming,' she said.

Bishop Olav sees hope in the fact that pilgrimage opens the way to both purpose and openness. God is more than something I have created in my own interest. This opening up comes through

exercise, through fellowship and through praying together. This is borne out by Confirmation Classes in Norway which include elements of pilgrimage. Another sign of hope is that the Church is changing and becoming more of a part of the life of ordinary people. There's a kind of pilgrimage out of our churches into the life of the community where God is.



Bishop Michael, adding to Richard's Biblical references, reminded us that when Jesus was asked, 'Who is my neighbour?' he told a story about pilgrimage, about a man on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho, and of fresh encounters. And what gives Bishop Michael hope is the way that churches welcome the stranger who may be a refugee, an asylum seeker or simply someone from the next village with whom they've had a feud for the last 300 years! Or it may be someone recently released from prison. These things really open up churches, and he finds real hope in that.

Right at the end **Bishop Herborg** told us that all week she has been singing a song we all know, '*Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*.' To that she would add there is also hope.

Richard thanked the Bishops, and Bishop Michael closed the session with prayer. The Bishops were then given small tokens of our appreciation in the form of icons of St Alban, the first British Christian martyr, and a reminder that St Albans was a centre for pilgrimage in the past and remains so today.