

Trilateral consultation between the German evangelical Church, Church of Sweden and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 2018

From 25th to 28th June 2018 the delegations of the German evangelical Church (EKD), Church of Sweden (CoS) and Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) were convened into a consultation in the Evangelical Institute in Schwanenwerder, Berlin. The Lutheran churches of Finland and Sweden have had bilateral consultations with EKD based on their bilateral agreements also before, but this time the meeting was for the first time trilateral. The delegations were led by the Chairman of the Council of EKD, Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Archbishop Dr Antje Jackelén and Archbishop Dr Tapio Luoma.

The consultation served the regular sharing between the partner churches both in fundamental theological and ethical questions in practical issues. In the consultation common challenges of these European churches in the pastoral ministry in general were discussed. Also an update was received regarding the pastoral ministry in the mother tongue in the three countries. The delegations visited the Swedish congregation and the Finnish congregation in Berlin. Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg – Schlesische Oberlausitz Dr Markus Dröge gave a presentation on the general situation of the evangelical church in the region.

The consultation began with an overall view to the major topics and general situation in the respective churches. A presentation on the Finnish situation was given by Executive director Kimmo Kääriäinen, Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen and Archbishop Tapio Luoma. Archbishop Antje Jackelén presented the Swedish and Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber and OKRin Sabine Dreßler the German situation. The four task areas of the church evolution in the EKD are important also to other churches: to encourage many forms of participation in church life, to communicate with contemporary language, to deepen ecumenical unity, to think “church” in new ways.

In the evening, Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm gave an introduction to public theology. Public theology aims to build a bridge between university and church. It analyses critically the role of religion in the society and tries to bring the impulse of the liberation theology to the context of a modern pluralistic society. Referring to Dietrich Bonhoeffer Bedford-Strohm described as a basic idea of public theology that you can find the reality of God only through being present in the reality of the world. God has reconciled the world with Himself (2. Cor. 5). Referring to Jürgen Habermas he underlined that religion has a message also to the secular people. Bedford-Strohm also gave 6 guidelines for public theology: 1) Rootedness in the tradition, 2) bilinguality (theological and secular), 3) Interdisciplinarity, 4) prophetic, critical attitude towards existing realities, 5) enabling, supporting politics, 6) universal and ecumenical orientation.

On 26th June the main theme was “What does it mean to be in pastoral ministry today?” Prof. Dr Isolde Karle described in her impulse lecture how the traditional image of the pastor has changed since the 1960s. There is hardly any status-based authority of the pastor left at least in the city context. This raises the question of authenticity. Not only society is secularised, but also the church workers. Pastors should accept that their personal life has implications for their public position, because trust is so important. The church as a “folk” (people’s) church is still relevant as a church for the people. Problematic is that both practical theology and practical workers are nowadays often more response-oriented than commission-oriented. Another problem is the far reaching impact of the economical paradigm also in areas to which it hardly belongs, like the church. Customer-orientation means trouble for pastoral ministry. Evaluation brings standardisation which threatens creativity. The pastors are not as confidential in their

pastoral ministry as they were in the 1960s. Their main competence is theological: proclaiming the gospel in a way that touches people in their life's circumstances. A traditional pastor should pay attention to the diversity of life, and an entrepreneur pastor should remember that as an individual he or she is a witness.

From the Swedish perspective Bishop Johan Tyrberg paid attention to the change that church buildings have become more important than parish houses in the parish life. Church workers are received better than some decades ago, but at the same time there is an identity crisis, especially among pastors. Deacons, musicians or pedagogues have clear functions, but the pastors don't always have. Bishop Tyrberg underlined the importance of learning the people's language in developing the outreach of the church. A new question is how to deal with the modern technique. At the Lund diocese will be organised a theological conference in January 2019 for the pastors regarding the theological and ethical challenge of artificial intelligence. The next conference will deal with transhumanism. From the Finnish perspective Bishop Matti Repo saw that the latest development has set the Finnish church into a new missionary situation and forced to consider the identity as a folk church in a new light. He described the development in pastoral ministry through the development regarding occasional services. He concluded it is not always what the pastor says or prays in the actual liturgy that is remembered, but the way that people are encountered and how the pastor communicates with them, not only verbally but with the presence of his or her whole personality.

In the afternoon the development of a programme for Christian education/Catechism for all ages in the Church of Sweden was presented by Dr Maria Södling. She described how the folk church theology has been updated to mean that every member of the church is a point of contact for the gospel. The crisis of Christian education and the lack of Christian knowledge is clear. Yet a crisis is at the same time an opportunity. Perspectives and challenges from the Swedish, German and Finnish congregations abroad were presented by Revd Lena Brolin, Revd Hanna Savukoski & Revd Dr Päivi Vähäkangas, and Revd Rüdiger Glufke & Revd Christoph Ernst. In the evening Bishop Ralf Meister described from the perspective of one German regional church what it means that EKD is now also according to its constitution a church. He told how the development into the current situation has occurred. In practice most of the members of the regional churches in Germany have a postdenominational evangelical Christian identity. Five years ago, the basic question was how to be a church without a common confession. Now there is a reference in the constitution to the Augsburg confession, Barmen theological declaration and to the Leuenberg agreement. The role of the EKD is to guarantee the legitimate diversity of the confessions and at the same time to form a whole.

On 27th June delegations took part in the celebration of the „Johannisempfang“, a reception on the day of St. John organized by EKD. In this occasion bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm gave a lecture on *Images of human being in the digital age* (Menschenbilder im digitalen Zeitalter). Bedford-Strohm underlined the importance to draw a clear line between a human being and a machine. Algorithms standardize a unique person. However, also as churches, we exist between prophecies of salvation and destruction in dealing with digitalisation. Especially three dimensions seem essential in this context: 1. Digitalisation brings with it a fundamental change, 2. the digitalisation continues the paradigm of progress (Fortschrittparadigma) which, however, comes with a price, 3. the key word digitalisation is connected with almost religious expectations. The enthusiasm bring connotations to the promise of the snake before the fall. The biblical tradition defines a human in his connectedness with God and in his difference from God. Psalm 8 simultaneously emphasises both the greatness of God and the meaning of a human being. Yet we can't solve the progress of the 21. century with the mentality of the

19. century. Therefore we need to underline the interconnectedness of community and diversity. In Europe the big political issues like digital transformation can successfully be dealt with only at the European level. We should make the world better together, but it is sure that digitalisation won't open the door to the paradise. We don't pray and praise Google but God.

On 28th June the theme “CEC, EU and the advocacy work of the churches – current themes” was discussed on the basis of the presentations by Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen, Revd Jenny Sjögreen and Executive director Katrin Hatzinger. It was concluded it is advisable to take steps in order develop cooperation in the European advocacy work of the churches. This may contain for example joint visits, conferences, position papers etc.

It was preliminary agreed that the next trilateral consultation will be organised in Sweden in June 2021.

Participants

Church of Sweden

1. **Archbishop Dr Antje Jackelén** (June 25-26)
2. **Bishop Johan Tyrberg**, Lund
3. **Mr Nils Gårder**, Representative of the Church board
4. **Revd Jenny Sjögreen**, Head of the Ecumenical Dept.
5. **Revd Lena Brolin**, Church of Sweden Abroad
6. **Revd Maria Scharffenberg**, Senior Pastor Swedish Congregation in Berlin
7. **Dr Maria Södling**, Senior Advisor, Programme for Christian education and formation
8. **Mr Holger Sandelin**, Assistant to the Bishop of Gothenburg and Ecumenical Advisor

Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

1. **Archbishop Dr Tapio Luoma**
2. **Bishop Dr Matti Repo**
3. **Executive Director Kimmo Kääriäinen**
4. **Revd Dr Tomi Karttunen**, Chief Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Theology
5. **Revd Dr Juha Meriläinen**, Theological Consultant to the Archbishop
6. **Revd Dr Päivi Vähäkangas**, Associate Secretary for the Ministry to Finns abroad
7. **Revd Hanna Savukoski**, Coordinator of the Finnish Pastors in Germany

Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland

1. EKD Council Chairman **Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm**, Munich (June 25-26)

2. EKD **Bishop** for Ecumenism **Petra Bose-Huber**, Hanover (June 25-26)
3. **Bishop Ralf Meister**, Hanover (June 26-28)
4. **Bishop Dr Michael Bünker**, CPCE, Vienna
5. **Revd Dr Maria Stettner**, Ecumenical Officer, Lutheran Church of Bavaria, Munich
6. **Revd Jörg Weißbach**, Vicar at St. Gertrud's Church, Stockholm
7. **Revd Sabine Dreßler**, Ecumenical Officer, EKD Hanover
8. **Revd Christoph Ernst**, Ecumenical Officer, EKD Hanover
9. **Executive Director Katrin Hatzinger**, EKD Brussels (June 28)
10. **Bishop Dr. Markus Dröge**, Berlin (June 27)
11. **Revd Rüdiger Glufke**, assistant to the EKD council chairman (June 26-27)

Keynote: **Prof Dr Isolde Karle**, Ruhr-Universität Bochum (26.6.)

Ms Jasmin Straßburger, administration staff, EKD Hanover