

**PORVOO COMMUNION OF CHURCHES  
CONSULTATION ON INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT  
GÖTEBORG, SWEDEN, 28th – 31st MARCH 2011**

**COMMUNIQUÉ**

This was the third in a series of such meetings, and was directly linked with the consultation in Oslo in 2003. Both were concerned with guidelines for inter faith engagement across the Communion. In between, there was a meeting in Scotland in 2007 which was different, with Muslims fully participating from beginning to end. We remain convinced that the Porvoo churches, most of which have a history of being national churches, and with a care for the parish and wider community, have something distinctive to offer, in the rapidly changed field of inter faith relations.

The Gothenburg consultation was held at the invitation of Bishop Carl Axel, who has played a key role in the city in recent years, developing an Inter Religious Council, and enabling the ministry of Marika Palmdahl, as his Adviser, now much trusted in the city as well as amongst the churches and people of other faiths. He also invited Andrew Wingate, from the Church of England, founding Director of the St Philip's Centre, Leicester, to work with Marika over the last year, a very significant Porvoo, Anglican-Lutheran working partnership. One of their tasks has been to prepare and implement the consultation in Gothenburg, in cooperation with Christopher Meakin, Elspeth Davey and the Porvoo Contact Group Co-Secretaries, Leslie Nathaniel and Beate Fagerli. Special thanks are owed also to the writing group, Guy Wilkinson (Church of England), Helene Egnall (Church of Sweden) and Jørgen Sørensen (Church of Denmark), who produced, in full consultation with all the delegates, a substantial document, now being edited, to be sent to the Porvoo Contact Group and later to the Primates meeting in October. There is also expected to be a shorter version.

It was decided that altering the existing guidelines was not the place to start but to work on a framework document aimed at understanding the current issues and suitable for the much changed context of 2011 following.

Key developments were discussed that have influenced the agenda over the last 8 years. International events have included the continuing war in Afghanistan, the ongoing situation in Iraq, the continuing conflict in Israel/Palestine, crucial developments now happening in Egypt, North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf. Questions of religious freedom have grown more acute, affecting Christians and other minorities, in many parts of the world, including Orissa, Iraq, Pakistan and the Holy Land. There has been a rising stridency in religious rhetoric in many places. The Cartoon controversy, beginning in Denmark in 2006, rapidly affected the climate of respect across much of the Muslim-Christian world. Immigration has increased to most Porvoo countries, Muslims, Christians and Hindus, and there is a growing voice in public discourse from such communities, and debate on the appropriate place of religion in the public sphere. These years have seen a growth in militant atheism and secularism, and of popular anxiety, fuelled by the Far Right and some of the media. There has been an increase in mixed faith marriages and families, multiple religious belonging, and alternative spiritualities, along with a decline in institutional religion.

Positively, there has been a great increase in inter faith structures, and networks for dialogue and action. Significant documents have included Generous Love (Anglican Communion), Guidelines for Mission and Conversion (Norway), and A Common Word (a letter to church leaders everywhere, from 38 Muslim scholars and leaders).

With this background, the consultation considered the guidelines grouped under four headings:

**International, National and European issues**

Highlighted here, beyond what was in the previous guidelines, were questions of Human Rights, Christian confidence and identity in complex societies, and relationship of Church and

State, as governments engage more with faiths for their own purposes, and how to retain a proper sense of the Lordship of Christ, servant and advocate ministry.

### **Responding to diverse and changing patterns of living**

Under this heading, new spiritualities, new atheism, gender issues, and questions of sexuality including same sex partnerships and cohabitation were in focus.

### **Building long term trust**

This depends on dialogue and engagement at the local level, a dialogue of deeds as well as words that can stand firm in difficult times. Steady engagement at the congregational level, and in hospitals, the work place, social action and elsewhere- and with children and young people. Important with people of other faiths is tackling issues of difficulty as well as commonality, in a spirit of honesty and openness- 'telling and receiving the truth in love.'

### **Sharing our faith**

The unique Christian story and remaining true to the distinctiveness of our traditions were highlighted here. We should be ready to use language drawn from our heritage and scriptures, and not only the 'external' language used in the public sphere. Mission, evangelism and conversion are not to be apologised for, while it is essential to be sensitive to where others are coming from.

The consultation engaged in theological reflection, centred on the Trinity, and contextual reflection. Faith leaders from Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and Hindu faiths were also invited to comment on our emerging document. Visits were made to the site of the largest mosque in Scandinavia, to be opened in June, and to neighbouring parishes which are preparing to engage with it. Preparation is also being made for a march of the Swedish Defence League next month. The City welcomed the delegates to a dinner in the City Hall, addressed by the Governor and the Deputy Mayor with much empathy for the task we were involved in.