

The 61st ELCE SYNOD

“Living with God – the School of Meditation: I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways” (Psalm 119:15)

2nd, 3rd October 2015 – Good Shepherd, Coventry

The ELCE came to the Midlands – specifically to Good Shepherd, Coventry – for its 61st synodical convention and budget conference. For those visiting for the first time or returning after a long time, what they found was no church (now demolished) but a refurbished hall (worship space and kitchen) and a lovely marquee where the church used to be. Yes, the tabernacle imagine wasn't lost on folk; neither was the fantastic food and wonderful hospitality of the Good Shepherd congregation. And as God blessed us with his presence through Word and Sacraments and fine weather and Christian fellowship, everyone who attended was uplifted by the worship, the teaching, the hospitality, and even the business sessions. This was a good synodical convention and budget conference!

The convention welcomed international guests – Bishop Roland Gustafsson (Swedish Mission Province) and Rev. Pekka Hypponen (Finnish Mission Diocese) who spoke about the current situations in their countries and with their respective state churches. Dr Tomas Bokedal (currently at the University of Aberdeen) and with links with the Swedish Mission Province also attended the synod. Greetings and news were received from Lutheran churches in Australia, Canada, Brazil, South Africa and ELCE Chairman Rev. Jon Ehlers also gave news from his international links particularly from the International Lutheran Council World Conference in Buenos Aires from which he returned a few days earlier. Also at the opening service, the Bishop of Warwick, the Right Rev. John Stroyan, and the MP for Coventry North West, Mr Geoffrey Robinson spoke to the ELCE. A 'son of the ELCE' Pastor Daniel Brammeier was also a welcomed guest and participant at the convention.

This year's synodical theme focused on Meditation as the second of three reflections on living with God. Following Luther's approach of Oratio – Meditatio – Tentatio (Prayer – Meditation – Temptation or Trial) the Rev. Dr Didzis Stilve looked at Luther's understanding of meditation and its difference to contemplation. God deals with his people through external means rather than us looking or searching inside ourselves for him. Meditation thus involves working with – reading, hearing, studying, reflecting – God's Word (and not neglecting to actually read and pray aloud so your own ears can hear the words) for it is God who interprets us when we read his Word!

Synodical reports and business matters remain a large portion of synod and this year was no exception. Reports from the Executive Council, Westfield House, the Congregational Life Committee, the Worship Committee, the Board for Youth, Lutheran Radio UK, the Nominations Committee, the Salary Review Committee, the Board for Overseas Mission, the Commission on Theology and Social Concerns and *The British Lutheran* revealed that a lot is happening in the ELCE! The synod sang both 'Now thank we all our God' in thanks for our international church relations and 'For all the saints' at the In Memoriam where, this year, the list of names who had died in the Faith was certainly the largest since the In Memoriam began at synod. In all things God is good to us.

Delegates considered Holy Trinity's resolution regarding the Commission on Theology and Social Concerns' progress on the report on Freemasonry and after considerable discussion their resolution that the CTSC consider involving others in this project was adopted. The congregational reports in the last business session are always a highlight of synod and this year as no exception! (You just never know what news is shared!) Across the tapestry that is the ELCE we have congregations in many situations – solid, precarious, vacant, with part-time pastors, with many musicians, with no musicians, with leaking roofs, nice and clean (caused sadly by a fire), in need of repairs, not in need of repairs – but all congregations resonated with hope and optimism that God is with his people and is helping us to be faithful and creative in following Jesus while still walking together as synod – perhaps humming quietly “We are the ELCE and the ELCE is us”.

Delegates adopted the ELCE Safeguarding Policy, the terms and conditions for clergy as contained in the latest document (dated 17 Sept 2015), and the Code of Ethics and Pastoral Practice in the ELCE. Jacob, Cavenagh and Skeet were reappointed as auditors. ELCE Treasurer Mrs Rosemary Gowers presented her second report to synod. Her message continued a call for the Church to look at her finances and to realise that once the 'family silver' is sold, it is gone. There were many questions about budget and financial communication and the pension deficit buy-out and the Executive Council noted these matters. In a number of areas the ELCE is looking financially more stable and it is certainly hoped for and prayed about that this trend continues. Synod was very appreciative for all the extra work undertaken in the preparation of the accounts which saw a very smooth and less expensive audit this year! Thank you, Rosemary!

A significant moment quietly happened. Among the elections, ELCE Chairman Rev. Jon Ehlers was re-elected unopposed for a further three year term (2016-2019). Chairman Jon gave his perspective on matters throughout the synod and particularly in his report. It was evident throughout the two days of convention that he is held in high regard and the ELCE is grateful for his sterling and faithful service to us.

The next synodical convention and budget conference will be held on 7th and 8th October 2016 and St Peter, Plymouth, is considering inviting us.

Synod Elections

Delegates elected the following people for the coming synodical term for 3 years:

Executive Council – Chairman – Rev. Jon Ehlers (2016-2019)

Executive Council – Pastoral Councillor – Rev. Arno Bessel

Executive Council – Lay Councillor – Mt Mike Jennings

Worship Committee – Rev. Steve Edge

Congregation Life Committee – Mrs Barbara Higgins and Mrs Lizani Bessel (2 years)

Board for Overseas Mission – Mrs Helena Simons and Rev. Didzis Stilve

Nominations Committee – Mr Mike Jennings

Board for Youth – Ms Dipuo Mataboge and Mr Calvin Thomas

Salary Review Committee – Mrs Charlotte Samiec and Rev. Claudio Flor

Delegates ratified the following people nominated by the Barnes Conference to serve for 2 years:

Commission on Theological and Social Concerns – Dr Andrew Nicholson and Rev. Tapani Simojoki

For meditation and reflection ...

How can we be strong and courageous on our way as we are confronted with all kinds of obstacles? Strength and courage cannot be produced by ourselves. There is no magical socket we could plug in to be charged. However, there is a fountain wherefrom strength and courage come: God's Word. The Lord directed Joshua to the law of Moses, to the Book of the Law by which is meant the first five books of the Bible. For us God's Word is the Bible as a whole. You shall meditate on [the Book of the Law] day and night, the Lord said to Joshua. Study the Word, ruminant the Word, speak the Word to yourself, commit the Word to your memory, devour rich portions of the Word. Why? Because by the Word the Lord gives His servants strength and courage. Because by the Word the Lord keeps His servants marching straight ahead on the right way. Because by the Word the Lord accomplishes His promise neither to leave nor to forsake His servants. Because by the Word the Lord is with His servants wherever they go. Because by the Word the Lord gives His servants victory over all enemies. Because by the Word the Lord makes the way of His servants prosperous and they will have good success. – Rev. Arno Bessel

The best compliment we can give to the Word of God is change ...

One of the descriptions of meditation is a dialogue with the self. Many of us are doing that even though we are not always conscious about it. We are talking to ourselves. With this Samaritan woman there is something different. She was openly confronted with the Word of God and the Word of God revealed itself to the Samaritan woman. Then the Word of God revealed himself as Messiah and invited her to worship in the Spirit and the Truth. She realized that ultimately location of worship or ethnicity is not important if we worship Messiah in the Spirit and the

truth. Consequently, she decided to share this God's gift with her fellow citizens. – Rev. Boris Gunjević

Through God's word, the promises are both made and delivered. Through the Word, Christ comes to me with his promises. Through the Word of Christ, faith is created, and through faith all the promises of God become 'yes'. The more you hear God's word proclaimed to you, the more you will hear God's 'yes' in Christ. And like a bride, the more you receive the bridegroom's love, the more your trust in him and love for him grows. The more you study God's word, the more you learn about His character, His ways, His will and His pledges. And you will learn the meaning of those great words of faith: "for you". Not only did God create the world – He created the world for you. Not only did God send His Son into the world – He sent Him for you. Not only did Christ live, suffer, die and rise – He did it all for you. And if God did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all, how will He not also with him graciously give us all things? – Rev. Tapani Simojoki

If we are not to meditate on what to say when we are before kings, governors, etc., then what does this mean? Jesus is not telling us to be haphazard in our preparation or witness. Instead we are to be regularly involved in the meditation on God's Word. This Word moulds us and becomes part and parcel of us. It leads to prayer and a desire to worship God. Both prayer and worship also mould us and permeate our thoughts, speech, and actions in daily life. We do this when life is good, so that when life gets bad and the pressure and persecution come our way, we do not have to plan or worry about what we will say or do, because a lifetime of meditating on God's Word and living a life of prayer and worship will take over. – Rev. Jon Ehlers