The Window

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We hope you enjoy this extra issue of your Newsletter.

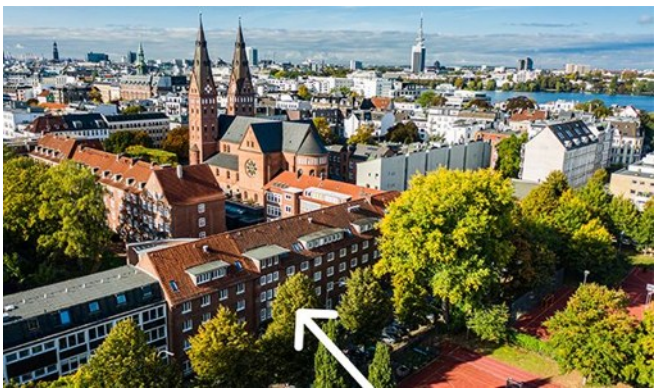
CONFERENCE



SPECIAL

An Enjoyable, Informative, Varied, Challenging and Spiritual Conference

Those are some of the words used to describe the Society's Conference in Hamburg from 11th to 15th September, 2026.
Our Secretary, Canon Dick Lewis, has prepared this special issue of our newsletter which he hopes will serve as a taster for members who were unable to attend, and encourage them to sample some of the excellent presentations we enjoyed by visiting the report on the Society's website.



St Ansgar-Haus in Hamburg is a lovely, modern Roman Catholic conference centre. The staff members are all very friendly, the rooms are spacious and comfortable and the food is very good, so everyone seemed very pleased with the venue. The seminar rooms are spacious, very well equipped and perfectly suited to a conference like ours.

Our conference planning group, Bishop Paul Ferguson, the Rev Kai Funkschmidt, Bishop David Hamid, the Rev Lagle Heinla and Mrs Kirsten Scott, had prepared the programme and our five days together ran very smoothly indeed.

The Centre is wonderfully situated. Within five minutes' walk we had access to the S-Bahn, the railway system, to buses, to a wonderful variety of restaurants (which we didn't really need because we were provided with three full meals a day plus tea, coffee and biscuits or cakes throughout the day), and to a wonderful little café called 'HugsandCoffee' which some of us made good use of during our free time. Just another five minutes' walk and we were beside the inland lake watching the boats and ferries criss-crossing the water.





Immediately behind St Ansgar-Haus stands the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Mary where we held all but one of our services. It is a magnificent building, a copy of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, built between 1890 and 1893 in the Romanesque style, with a wonderful acoustic and an organ that makes full use of it. There is a reliquary, pictured below, containing a relic of St Ansgar, the first Bishop of Hamburg from 831 to 865 who became known as 'The Apostle to the North' and is also Patron Saint of Scandinavia.



When everyone had registered and settled into their rooms, having first enjoyed coffee and cake, we made our way into the chapel in St Ansgar-Haus for a welcome and opening devotions.

Our Opening Worship

was led by the Rev Meelis Suld and the preacher was Bishop Jana Jeruma-Grinberga, our Lutheran President.

What follows is a brief summary of the sermon, which can be read in full on the Society's website.



Migration is both a Biblical and Human Theme

Bishop Jana pointed out that the readings (Jeremiah 29.1, 4–8; Psalm 1071–9; and Hebrews 11:8–12) all highlight Biblical stories of migration, exile, and faith-driven journeys. It's a theme that recurs throughout scripture, and involves figures like Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and even Jesus' family.



She shared a personal encounter with a Sri Lankan migrant in Latvia illustrating the mutual benefits of migration for individuals and host societies. In contrast, the current political tensions around the issue in countries like Germany, the UK, and USA are becoming very divisive and tend to foster a very negative attitude towards migrants.

Migration is Part of Spiritual and Human Existence

Bishop Jana drew a parallel between physical migration and the spiritual journey of humanity, referencing the expulsion from Eden and the lifelong journey back to God. Life is often described as a journey or pilgrimage, essential to our growth and learning as children of God.

The Church's Role and Reflection

Our conference, she said, aims to explore different experiences of migration — physical, spiritual, and ecclesiological — and will look at ways in which the Churches might need to adapt in a changing world. She expressed gratitude for this opportunity to learn and journey together during the conference, trusting in God's presence throughout.

*You can read her sermon in full on our website at **Events** and scroll down to Friday.*

The Nordkirche – Bridging the Gap between East and West

After the Chapel service we went for a session that should have been led by the Rev Dr Sebastian Dittmers, Pastor of Bad Segeberg. However, illness prevented Dr Dittmers from attending the conference, so he sent it to Dr Kai Funkschmidt, one of the Conference organisers, who presented it for him. You can read the presentation in full on the Society's website. This is a very brief summary to give you a taste of it.

Introduction

In his presentation Dr Dittmers demonstrated how political regimes and restructurings repeatedly shaped conditions that drove long-run declines in post-war Church membership, with particularly steep losses in the East (Mecklenburg, Pomerania), and persistent secularization in Hamburg/Schleswig-Holstein. He also explained how the *Nordkirche* came about.



This map shows how the *Nordkirche* spans much of northern Germany. It was formed in 2012 by the union of the Church of the North Elbe in Hamburg and Schleswig Holstein with the two former East German (GDR) Churches, Mecklenburg and Pomerania.

Different underlying causes of decline

In Eastern Germany the *Landeskirchen* of Mecklenburg and Pomerania showed extremely low membership after decades of GDR repression and post-1990 secularization. Dr Dittmers identified Mecklenburg as having the fastest decline between 1930, when suppression and secularisation began in Nazi Germany (see below) and 2015.

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⇨ In the West (Schleswig-Holstein/Hamburg), long-term secularization has been the main factor, with Hamburg "for a long time the most secularized city in Germany", at under 50% Christian for the past 20–30 years.

Political interventions played a part

In the 19th century regional rulers like the King of Prussia ordered Church unions across former Prussian territories, imposing state-shaped Church structures and identities. These state-driven unions set a precedent for centralized, politically influenced Church organization. Over time, such restructuring weakened people's sense of local identity and attachment, conditions that later compounded decline when further political shocks came.

A significant shock came between 1933 and 1945 when the Nazis adopted a policy of centralization and boundary changes by which former *Landeskirchen* were merged. In 1934 this policy affected the *Nordkirche* area, for example. These changes were ideologically driven and involved direct interference in Church affairs. For example, attempts were made to purge the Churches of Jewish influence by minimizing the use made of the Old Testament. Then, in 1937, the boundaries of the city of Hamburg were significantly expanded.

All this was done with minimal consultation with local churches and congregations which undermined trust and gradually eroded congregational engagement.

The Second World War brought devastation of cities and displacement of people. Then post-war the rebuilding further altered geographical boundaries. For instance, the city of Hamburg was greatly enlarged and spanned two *Landeskirchen* which added to administrative complexity.

Meanwhile, in the GDR, 1945-1989, the federal states were dissolved and new districts created with the aim of suppressing regional identity. Alongside this went a systematic repression of churches so that, for example, Christians were hindered in accessing a university education and the materials needed for the upkeep of church buildings was deliberately kept scarce. All this had a significant impact on church membership which went into steep decline. The loss of regional identity hit many people very hard. It was, for instance, no longer permitted for a person to say that they were a Pomeranian. These measures weakened communal cohesion and, coupled with the decaying church infrastructure, led to a reduction in the church's visible presence and capacity to serve.

Reunification and EKD-driven mergers (1990s–2012)

There had been East-West partnerships between parishes during the period of the GDR and these continued after the reunification of Germany in 1990. However, as these partnerships intensified it became more and more clear that the flow of financial aid was one-way, from West to East, something that created feelings of inferiority and superiority. Moreover, as prosperity increased people began to be more concerned about wellbeing and security rather than religious practice.

Faced with dwindling finances and shrinking church rolls, especially in Pomerania, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) initiated merger negotiations (2002–2012) which eventually led to the creation of the *Nordkirche*. However, the emergence of the new Church has not reversed secularization; instead, rising prosperity has reduced the "demand" for religion, and it is this declining religiosity, rather than Church "supply" failures, that are seen to be the underlying cause of dwindling Church membership.

The proposed merging of *Landeskirchen* was a reaction to these declining circumstances, driven by a united vision rather than a determined effort to promote church growth, and issues of identity still feature significantly. In particular, the Pomeranians are still afraid that they will disappear as a distinct region once the legal protections built into the formation documents lapse. Issues like this serve to weaken commitment and participation in the new, enlarged *Nordkirche*.



Dr Dittmers had prepared questions for the conference participants to discuss and they broke into small groups. The first discussed 'Secularization'; the second was asked to consider the issue of 'Patrons or Partners - the role of financial resources in church unions'; the third looked at 'Democracy and minority rights: the role of membership size in church unions.'

Each group reported their 'findings' when they gathered back into plenary. But for now, what matters is how you, dear reader, might approach those issues.

Conclusion

It is clear that the structurally consolidated *Nordkirche* is facing persistently low demand, with identity-sensitive regions (especially Pomerania) at risk of further disengagement if their anxieties are not constructively addressed. So, time will tell if the *Nordkirche* really will be able to 'bridge the gap between East and West.'

There is a great deal more in Dt Dittmers' presentation as given by Dr Funkschmidt as you will discover if you read it in full on the website. Go to ***Events*** *and scroll down to Friday.*

Then it was time for our evening meal in the Centre's dining room. There was a very good choice of food and drinks all laid out buffet-style so we could help ourselves to exactly what we wanted. Vegetarians and vegans were well catered for, so everyone was happy.

When we had fed well we returned to the seminar room for our next presentation.

Hamburg – a border Town in Danish-German (Church) History

This is a summary of the presentation by Dr Frank Hatje of the Department of History in Hamburg University. In it he explored the historical and geographical context of Hamburg's role in religious, political, and migration-related developments from the early Middle Ages to the modern era.

You can read his presentation in full on the Society's website.



Historical Border and Religious Relations between Hamburg and Denmark

Hamburg originated when the Emperor Charlemagne founded it in 811CE as a strategic outpost on the Holy Roman Empire's border with Denmark. The political and religious ties were complex. Hamburg was historically influenced by Danish rule, and by Christian confessional shifts and territorial changes over centuries.

Development of Hamburg's Political and Religious Identity

Hamburg gained independence and prosperity after victory at Bornhöved (1227), when it was granted privileges fostering trade and self-governance. Later, the city adopted Lutheranism in 1529, blending political power with religious reform, with a unique form of governance involving lay Church Councils.

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⇨ Growth of Hamburg's Religious and Cultural Infrastructure

The city's medieval churches and monasteries reflected the city's increasing wealth and religious devotion, with notable altars and art, many lost after the Reformation and Enlightenment. Hamburg's churches played a central role in spiritual life, exemplified by the Franciscan St Mary Magdalene's monastery with significant Medieval art. Dr Hatje described this in some detail, including the high altar of St Petri church, completed by Meister Bertram in 1383, and now exhibited in the *Kunsthalle*.



Hamburg's Economic and Political Rise in the Hanseatic League

By the 15TH century, as a member of the Hanseatic League, Hamburg dominated Baltic trade alongside Lübeck, protecting merchant shipping through alliances and privileges. Trade took place with England, but a trade dispute arose whereby English and Dutch ships were attacked and, in reply, they attacked Hanseatic ships in the North Sea. At this time Hamburg came under the Danish Crown when King Christian I became King of Denmark in 1459.

Reformation and Religious Tolerance

By 1529 Hamburg had embraced Lutheranism, under the influence of leaders like Johannes Bugenhagen and reformers like Stephan Kempe. The city maintained a strong Lutheran monoconfessional stance while at the same time fostering some degree of religious tolerance, especially toward Dutch immigrants of various Church allegiances and faiths.

Migration and Religious Diversity

In the mid-16th century, Dutch migrants, including Lutherans, Calvinists, Mennonites, and some Catholics, fled religious persecution and economic hardship, settling in Hamburg and nearby Altona. Their arrival challenged Hamburg's monoconfessional Lutheranism, as many were non-Lutheran and accustomed to private worship. The city responded by allowing economic integration but maintained strict Lutheran public worship, while neighbouring Altona under Count Ernst of Schauenburg offered religious freedom to attract these migrants.

So, for example, the Mennonites and Calvinists were granted freedom of religion in Altona, leading to the establishment of parallel religious communities and institutions. This fostered a competitive yet symbiotic relationship between Hamburg and Altona, with migrants contributing to both economic and religious life. Towns like Friedrichstadt were founded for diverse Protestant communities. Political complexities persisted until the 18th century, with Hamburg's status fluctuating between Dutch and Danish imperial influences.

In Hamburg, lay administrators and burghers became central to parish church councils, integrating civic and ecclesiastical authority. This was partly a response to the influx of migrants and the need to manage diverse religious practices and poor relief. So, for example, the Hamburg Church Ordinance of 1529, influenced by Lutheran reformers and local lay leaders, created a unique constitution where Church and Civic administration were closely linked, but only Lutherans could hold full political rights until the 19th century.

So, while full political rights for non-Lutherans were not granted until 19th century, it was the same for Jews who only gained civil rights in 1849, after a long period of social integration. Hamburg offered almost equal rights to Dutch immigrants without religious restrictions, encouraging trade while non-Lutherans were able to chose between Hamburg and Altona, which had gained status and boasted a toll-free harbour in 1664.

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⇨ Migration and Prosperity

Migrants, especially Dutch merchants and craftsmen, brought capital, trade networks, and advanced financial practices. Their economic success enabled the founding of institutions modelled on Dutch examples, such as banks, stock exchanges, orphanages, and poor relief organizations, many with religious affiliations or oversight.

The population of Hamburg tripled between 1550 and 1650, and the city became a major European trade hub. This prosperity was reflected in the construction and endowment of churches and religious art, as well as in the establishment of new charitable institutions.

Influence of English and Dutch Networks

Hamburg's prosperity grew due to this Dutch integration and overseas trade. It began to resemble a Dutch city. English merchants received privileges; Anglican church services persisted in Hamburg despite religious tensions in the city. When, in the early 1700s, the Jesuits celebrated mass near the Lutheran St Michaelis Church rioting broke out, and Altona's Protestant communities opposed efforts to reintroduce Catholic practices, including the dedication of chapels.

Protestantism and Enlightenment Reforms

Pietism and rationalism influenced Hamburg, transforming liturgy and promoting moral philosophy. Danish reforms in Schleswig-Holstein abolished serfdom and censorship, and a rationalist church liturgy was introduced in 1797. Meanwhile, around 1770 Altona had become a hub for opposition to rationalism, being linked to the German Christian Fellowship. Mennonite and evangelical networks fostered social reform and transnational religious contacts, especially via Altona.

Long-term Effects of Migration

Migration and international trade made Hamburg a centre for cultural and theological exchange. The city became a hub for Pietism, Enlightenment rationalism, and later revivalist movements, often influenced by transnational networks and migrant communities. For example, in 1814 the founding of the Hamburg and Altona Bible Society brought together Lutherans, Mennonites, and Calvinists from both sides of the border, reflecting a new spirit of cooperation and ecumenism fostered by migration.

Conclusion

Migration has profoundly shaped the Church in Hamburg and its border regions by introducing religious diversity, prompting institutional innovation, fostering economic prosperity, and driving forward both confessional tension and eventual pluralism. The interplay between migration and Church life have created a dynamic environment where religious, social, and economic factors have been deeply intertwined.

Dr Hatje ended his presentation by saying, 'It would be nice if I could end my lecture on a millennium of Danish-German political and religious history with a tone of reconciliation. But unfortunately, the Napoleonic era gave rise to nationalism, which clouded the German-Danish relations throughout the 19th century. And while the neo-pietist revivalism widely gained ground in Denmark, rationalism prevailed in Hamburg, although the revivalist minority had a great impact in the fields of social reform and inner mission among German protestants. Johann Hinrich Wichern and Amalie Sieveking should be named in this context. But their activities and enterprises had little to do with Denmark, but were predominantly inspired by like-minded movements in England.'



For a much fuller account of Hamburg's history as a border town, you should read Dr Hatje's presentation in full. You can do so by going to the Society's website at ***Events*** *and scroll down to Friday.*

Some people went off to bed after a long day travelling whilst others explored and discovered the bar down in the basement. This became a popular meeting place at the end of each day.



Our Saturday Morning Devotion

The day began with a service in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. The preacher was Bishop David Hamid, our Anglican President, and his sermon is summarised here.

Bishop David began: '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.'

He went on to remind us that migration reflects Biblical themes. God's people are all on journeys: Abraham, Ruth, Mary, Mary and Joseph and, of course, Jesus' disciples.

The Church, he said, is called to be inclusive, welcoming foreigners as part of God's universal family. The scripture readings for the day emphasize unity, God's hospitality, and the Gospel crossing borders.

Migrant communities enrich worship and tradition, need support and inclusion in the congregations and also in Church leadership.

Migrants bring trauma and loneliness, and are often at risk from racism and from exploitation. Churches must listen and stand against unjust discourses that stigmatize migrants.

True belonging is rooted in Christ, and not on nationality or culture. The Church is called to adapt, support migrants and uphold dignity regardless of legal status or origins.

*You can read his sermon in full on our website at **Events** and scroll down to Saturday.*



Interior of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Mary



The Mar Thoma Syrian Church in Germany

After breakfast the Rev Thomas Joseph, Vicar of the Mar Thoma Church in Germany, who is based in Berlin, explored with us the impact of both migration and emigration on his Church, emphasizing its global expansion, challenges, and strategies for sustaining unity and mission across diverse contexts.

This is a brief summary of his presentation which can be found in full on the Society's website.

Introduction

The Rev Thomas Joseph set out to explain how migration has transformed the Mar Thoma Church from a Kerala-based community in India into a worldwide communion. But this expansion across the world, and the Church's mission efforts and ecumenical relationships have been one of the main causes of an aging and declining church membership back in the Kerala parishes.

The Church's goal, he said, is to become one Church with multiple homes, fostering cross-border unity.

Christianity in India
He painted a picture of the Church presence in India. The Christian population is just 2.3%, and Christians are found mainly in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and North-East areas of India.

Kerala's Christians trace their origins right back to the apostolic mission of St Thomas, and they have strong historical ties to Persia and Syria where he travelled and the ancient trade routes between them. Their liturgy and ecclesiology owe much to the Syriac tradition, though socially they are thoroughly Indian, he said.

European colonization of India, and the Synod of Diamper in 1599, sought to bring the Indian Christians under a more Latin discipline and liturgical control. However, this was resisted in 1653 with the Coonan Cross Oath (the 'Bent' Cross Oath) as the local Christians struggled for autonomy, insisting that they did not belong to the Pope in Rome. However, the European missionary efforts have led to a wide variety of Christan denominations in India, among them Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and Orthodox.

Challenges facing the Church today include social polarisation, caste issues, low fertility rates, ageing congregations, and cultural distance from younger generations.



Reformation and Mission
The Mar Thoma Church emerged from a 19th-century reform movement advocating renewal within Syriac roots. It was Abraham Malpan (pictured here) who led efforts to reintroduce scripture, vernacular liturgy, and personal renewal. At that time the Church adopted an outward mission focus, founding evangelistic associations, schools, and hospitals. Today it enjoys many ecumenical links and partnerships, and participates in the World Council of Churches and other alliances.

Education and Migration
Thomas Joseph made the point that education, which in Kerala has been supported historically both by secular and church efforts, is a key to mobility. Kerala has achieved near 100% literacy with the result that many highly educated young professionals migrate to other parts of India and of the world.

Migration from Kerala began early in the 20th century, first within India to the cities and areas of industry and commerce, and then it expanded globally, including to North America, Africa, Gulf states, and Europe. These diaspora communities often support their home parishes financially and through ecumenical partnerships.

But whilst some intend to return to Kerala, many marry and have children whose roots are no longer in India, but in the communities where they grow up. While first-generation migrants may prefer worship in Malayalam, this can exclude second and third generations and local spouses, affecting both their participation in their churches and also a loss of a sense of 'belonging' to the Church in Kerala. Indeed, young people who are Christians may gravitate towards local congregations of a different denomination. It is a real challenge for diaspora parishes to help newcomers with language, bereavement, and cultural adaptation, while also providing a setting for children to encounter their heritage.

Migration Paradox and Challenges
This leads to what Thomas Joseph described as the 'Migration Paradox'. Migration thins out the Kerala parishes. There are fewer children, fewer young adults and therefore fewer leaders and potential theological students. Their absence often causes financial strains on their home parishes.

On the other hand, many of the migrants who settle permanently elsewhere are often geographically removed from the Mar Thoma Church, reducing their sense of belonging to a home parish. Increased

distance reduces opportunities of real pastoral care. Diaspora parishes often rely on a single priest to serve multiple cities or countries, making regular sacraments and pastoral care difficult. For example, in Germany one priest may have to travel extensively, making it hard to maintain even a monthly Holy Communion or provide timely care for the sick and dying.

Meanwhile, back in Kerala, parish buildings can become memorials rather than mission centres, peopled only by the elderly and the less able, with shrinking Sunday schools and a reduced volunteer base. Declining membership and fewer remittances from abroad strain parish finances, making it harder to maintain clergy, buildings, and social services. Large church buildings in Kerala become costly to maintain with a shrinking, ageing congregation.



Ecumenical and Structural Issues

Ecumenical Partnerships become vital for diaspora congregations because they often depend on hospitality from local churches (Anglican, Lutheran, Catholic), which is both a gift and a challenge for maintaining identity and autonomy. In Germany, for example, Mar Thoma congregations all use buildings of other denominations and sometimes participate in their services.

Thomas Joseph feels that the global Mar Thoma Church needs new structures: perhaps regional pastoral teams, properly trained lay leaders, better understanding and use of digital formation, and proper safeguarding systems. To remain relevant, diaspora ministries must offer worship and study materials in both heritage and local languages, addressing the kinds of ethical questions relevant to children in their new societies.

Conclusion

The Mar Thoma Church is continually in movement, shaped by migration, expanding globally while facing internal demographic and financial challenges. Migration has redefined its geography, relationships, and sense of belonging, posing opportunities and challenges. Future growth will depend on balancing tradition with accessible, mission-oriented outreach. A major issue is maintaining traditions without becoming socially exclusive, and treating every place of settlement as a field of mission, not just preservation.

Somehow the diaspora congregations must see themselves as being part of one Church which has its roots in Kerala, and develop strategies for valuing and supporting the work of the parishes there.

There is, of course, much more detail to be found in Thomas Joseph's presentation and you can read it on the website here Events and scrolling to Saturday.

Some Unexpected Free Time!



After we had enjoyed our coffee, tea or fruit juice break, we made our way back into the seminar room to be told that our speaker had been unable to come. However, the Rev Prince Ossai Okeke was able to come another day to meet us and share something of his work with African migrants.

So we were able to get outside in the fine sunshine, explore the cathedral next door, or go to the shopping street at the bottom of the road.



The African Centre Hamburg

This is a summary of the introduction given by the Rev Prince Ossai Okeke, Chairman of the African Christian Council, Hamburg, serving around 50 international and African churches in the region. He outlined the activities, partnerships, and challenges for intercultural Christian communities in Hamburg, and the cooperation to be found across diverse traditions.

His text can be found in full on the Society's website

The African Centre, Borgfelde

This serves as a multicultural hub for Africans, Germans, and others, promoting peace, dialogue, and social cohesion. There are worship services, including English and German, that celebrate diversity and a variety of cultural traditions.

You find a Gospel Choir there (pictured here) and all kinds of intercultural activities like Café Mandela and confirmation classes for young people. Pastoral care is provided by pastors, supporting migrants in various life situations. Partners include the African Christian Council, Hamburg, and Christ Ambassadors Ministries International, founded by Pastor Okeke and his wife. Together they foster worship, advocacy, and community support. There are a number of challenges to be faced, such as coordinating different denominational traditions, language barriers, resource sharing, and ensuring equal representation.



International Churches Convent (ICCN)

This is a network of 50 international congregations, rooted in ecumenical and intercultural principles. The primary focus is on networking, building sound relationships, and providing education to shape the future church.

Themes include intergenerational worship, intercultural learning, and pastoral responsibilities. Activities involve seminars, intercultural coaching, joint services, and ecumenical visits.

The resulting benefits include building a stronger community, sharing of resources, increased visibility, mutual learning, and peacebuilding. The emphasis is on cooperation on equal terms to enhance social cohesion and diverse worship styles.

Overall

Both these initiatives aim to foster intercultural, ecumenical Christian communities, to address social integration and the challenges that diversity bring, all through dialogue, shared worship, and partnerships.

*You can read his text by going to the website **Events** and scrolling down to Saturday.*

Meissen and Augsburg Agreements: Towards Full Anglican-Lutheran Communion

After lunch on Saturday we had some free time and then, after tea, we enjoyed a presentation by the Rev Stefanie Reuther, Head of the Department for Northern and Central Europe of the Evangelische Kirche Deutschland (EKD).
She compared and contrasted these two ecumenical agreements.
This is a brief summary of her presentation which can be found in full on the Society's website.

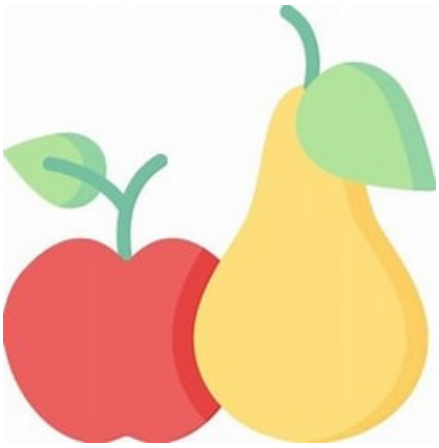


Context and Structure
Stefanie Reuther told us that comparing the Meissen and Augsburg Agreements is a bit like comparing apples and pears. Both agreements are the fruits of ecumenical dialogue but the context and aims of each are rather different.

The Meissen Agreement was established between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), which is a federation of 20 diverse Churches (Lutheran, Reformed, and United). This diversity on the German side means that Meissen is an overarching, multi-confessional relationship.

The Augsburg Agreement, on the other hand, is a bilateral agreement between The Episcopal Church (USA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria. It is, therefore, more focused, involving two specific Churches who have previously enjoyed a long-standing partnership.

Goals and Approach
Each dialogue had rather different aims. The goal expressed in the Meissen Agreement was "to move together towards wholeness in unity." The process is framed as a journey, emphasizing ongoing dialogue, mutual recognition, and partnership, but not yet with full visible unity or full interchangeability of ministries.



Augsburg, on the other hand, set out "to enter into a relationship of full communion." It builds on decades of shared practice and makes possible full communion, including the mutual recognition of ministries and Eucharistic hospitality.

Theological Differences and Models of Ecumenism
Again, the different context of each dialogue shaped the outcomes. The Meissen approach recognizes each other's ministries but does not achieve full interchangeability, mainly due to the differing views within the EKD Churches about the historic episcopate (the role and function of bishops). It emphasizes that unity does not require uniformity; differences can persist without breaking communion.

As such, Meissen functions as an ecumenical model where consensus and disagreement coexist, and what is truly valued is being together on the journey towards unity.

The "Meissen Paradox" involves recognizing ministries without full agreement on the historic episcopate's significance, reflecting the different ecclesiologies within the EKD.

Augsburg, on the other hand, achieves full communion by recognizing that different historical forms of church oversight (episcope) can be legitimate expressions of apostolic continuity.

It moves beyond seeing differences as church-dividing, provided there is theological integrity in each tradition's form of oversight.

This presents a concrete step whereby a lived partnership and theological agreement enable ⇨

- full interchangeability of ministries.

Practical Implications

The Meissen process is supported by some permanent structures, the Meissen Commission and the Theological Conference. These guarantee and support ongoing dialogue. Full interchangeability of clergy and Eucharistic unity remain unresolved, partly due to the diversity within the EKD.



Bishop Christian Kopp, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, left, and Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe signed the Augsburg Agreement, June 2025 in Munich, Germany. Photo: ELKB/MCK

In the case of Augsburg, the long-term partnership between the two Churches has achieved practical outcomes like full interchangeability of ministries and Eucharistic sharing.

Lessons and Ecumenical Significance

The Meissen process demonstrates that it is possible for Churches to live in a deep relationship without resolving all their theological differences. It is a model of journeying together, with openness to future developments.

Augsburg shows that, under certain conditions, differences can be reframed so they no longer prevent full communion. It demonstrates how different forms of church oversight can express apostolic continuity, shifting the focus from forms to function and theological recognition. It offers a precedent for what is possible, Stefanie Reuther said, but not a blueprint for all contexts.

So, whilst under Meissen a Lutheran pastor may work in an Anglican context (as indeed Stefanie did when she worked in a Team Ministry in England) there is not full interchangeability of ministry. Under Augsburg, clergy from both Churches can serve interchangeably, and preside at each other's Eucharists and other sacraments.

Conclusion:

The Meissen model is about journeying together with unresolved differences, while the Augsburg model demonstrates how, in specific contexts, full communion can be achieved by reformatting differences. Both models contribute to the broader ecumenical landscape, showing that unity can take multiple forms depending on context and history.

These agreements suggest ecumenism is non-linear, more like a garden with diverse plants that can grow under suitable conditions. Future steps for Meissen include ongoing theological discussions on episcopacy, practical issues for ministry interchangeability, and exploring new models of church unity.

Both agreements illustrate that full communion is a complex process. The key may be recognising differences as potential points of unity. Augsburg's experience offers valuable lessons, but partners in every ecumenical dialogue must acknowledge each Church's unique historical and theological background.

The central questions remain: what constitutes the Church and authentic ministry amid diversity, and how can unity transcend differences?

There is a great deal more in Stefanie Reuther's presentation which you can read in full on the Society's website. Go to Events and scroll down to Saturday.

Now it's 4pm and time for another refreshment break



These little breaks are not only good for our concentration and general well-being, they are wonderful opportunities for networking, for chatting to the presenters and getting to know new people. There are several younger participants which is a very healthy sign, and we are getting to know them as well as renewing old friendships. And that's certainly part of what these conferences are about. Now, back to work!



The Lutheran World Federation's Work on Migration

This is a summary of some of the points made by Bishop Kristina Kühnbaum-Schmidt, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany (Nordkirche), in her presentation to our conference. She gave us some theological, historical, and practical foundations of LWF's migration work, the strategic priorities guiding their actions, and concrete examples of their implementation. Her presentation is available in full on the Society's website.

Theological and Historical Foundations

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was founded in 1947, in the aftermath of World War II, when millions of people were displaced. This historical context makes migration central to LWF's identity, and not just an added concern. Its identity is rooted in responding to human displacement through faith and practical action across diverse nations.

LWF's migration work is firmly grounded in Biblical teachings, especially the command to welcome and treat the stranger as an equal (Leviticus 19:33 –34; Matthew 25:35). This underpins a commitment to dignity, equality, and rights for all migrants, and a conviction that migrants must never be regarded as 'problems' or 'commodities'.

Strategic Priorities (2025–2031)

When considering LWF's mission concerning migrants we must recognise that it is expressed through four strategic priorities: Theology, Churches, Justice & Peace, and Service & Dignity, all of which intersect with migration:

- Responsible Theology looks at how migration raises questions about neighbourliness, human dignity, and welcoming the stranger.
- Churches recognise that many of their congregations are being shaped by migration, providing as they do a migrant's first port of call when they are seeking assistance. Such churches can become transformed by their presence. Migration also raises questions about identity and belonging, both for the migrants and their hosts.
- Justice and Peace involve gaining a genuine understanding of how migration is linked to issues like war, persecution, poverty, inequality, climate change, and human rights violations. And, Service and Dignity means engaging in the practical outworking of faith through humanitarian aid, advocacy, and the empowerment of migrants.

Key Dimensions of LWF Migration Work

The LWF brings local church and migrant experiences into global policy debates, for instance at the United Nations. Their approach is described as "Local to Global to Local", ensuring that advocacy is informed by grassroots realities and that global decisions benefit local communities.

High on the agenda is the promotion of human rights, justice, and accountability, and a high priority is empowering migrants to participate in decision-making. The Bishop quoted the example of the Global Forum on Migration and Development and the "Resist, Reclaim, Realize: Migrants' rights are human rights" campaign.

Next, LWF's humanitarian and Diaconal Work across the world provides immediate and long-term support to refugees, internally displaced persons, and host communities. Again, the focus is on restoring dignity and self-reliance, and not just survival. For instance, in Jordan the LWF runs community centres for refugees and local people that offer education, psychosocial support, and training people to maintain their own livelihood. In Chad, the LWF provides water, sanitation, and practical support both for the refugees and for their host communities. In Ukraine the focus has been on supporting internally displaced persons through reconstruction, protection, and livelihood support.

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⇨ A pressing and worrying issue is concern about the risks involved in illegal migration, human trafficking, and exploitation. Where migrants are returned to their country of origin, LWF tries to provide psychosocial support, economic empowerment, and reintegration back into their communities. So, in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, returnees receive training and support to build sustainable livelihoods at home, making the choice to stay a viable alternative to migration.

Core Principles and Commitments

Every person on the move must be seen as bearing God-given dignity, and their human rights must be upheld. LWF works ecumenically and with different faiths communities in developing shared commitments like the "Welcoming the Stranger" document. The approach adopted is holistic connecting prevention, protection, psychosocial care, self-sufficiency, integration, and policy engagement across all stages of migration (origin, transit, destination, return).

Of course, the ultimate goal is not just to provide aid, but to restore hope, dignity, and the capacity for migrants to shape their own futures.

Churches and local congregations are in a strong position to assist migrants and refugees. They are trusted, locally rooted, and able to reach people beyond the scope of governments or international agencies.

But Churches also have moral authority and can challenge exclusion and dehumanization, and advocate for justice and hospitality even in polarized contexts where migrants are regarded as 'a problem' and are disrespected. Churches and congregations can do this locally, nationally and internationally.

The Impact of LWF's Work

There is no doubt that the work being done with migrants helps to restore their dignity, promotes family stability, and offers viable futures for migrants and host communities alike. Locally, congregations organize listening sessions with migrants, bringing their stories to the attention of their wider communities, and sometimes to national and international forums, as they push for policy changes that will protect migrant rights.

They also provide community centres that serve both migrants and locals, offering education, psychosocial support, and training in life skills, local cultural and societal traditions.

LWF also organises awareness campaigns about the dangers of illegal migration, providing economic alternatives, and supporting reintegration for returnees.

Conclusion

None of this work is done independently by LWF. Anglican and Lutheran Churches jointly reaffirmed refugee protections in 2025, for example, and cooperation between denominations and across faith boundaries demonstrates everyone's active faith and shared commitment to human rights. Refugees must be allowed to retain their dignity, their human rights must be protected, and they must be encouraged and enabled to shape their own destiny despite the loss they are experiencing. Protecting these rights affirms spiritual and moral values, demonstrates 'faith in love' and our belief that all people carry in them the image of God.

There is so much more in Bishop Kristina's presentation, and you can read it in full on the Society's website at Events and scrolling down to Saturday.



All our speakers received a gift, and here is the Rev Lagle Heinla giving Bishop Kristina hers

The Long Night of the Churches

After dinner on the Saturday evening we were free to explore '*Lange Nacht der Kirchen*'. Most of the churches in Hamburg were open, some all night long, and they hosted all kinds of activities. Gospel Choirs, Bible Study, Orchestral Concerts, Folk Groups, Debates and much else besides. At the Roman Catholic Cathedral, for example, there was a fabulous singing group from Brazil. The braver of our conference members stayed out for much of the night while others visited one or two churches and then went to bed! It wasn't hard to identify who had done what at breakfast on Sunday morning!

After breakfast we set off across the city to the St Michael's Lutheran Church to join the congregation for a sung Lutheran Mass.

The Sunday Morning Worship

Saint Michael's Lutheran Church has a very impressive tower from which, on a better day, we might have seen some wonderful views over the city. However, as you can see, it was dull and misty!



We received a very warm welcome from the Dean, the Rev Alexander Roeder (left in the picture, with the ruff). He had invited members of our conference to take part in the service, which included an adult Baptism.

Afterwards he treated us to a reception where he told us about the church, its history and the very lively parish, and how it takes a significant role in the life of the city.



The church is a most impressive building inside, and when we arrived we were very early and there seemed to be not many people about. However, by the time the service started the church was full.

The music was magnificent. There are four organs in the church – we only heard one of them! – and the recently formed boys' choir was excellent. The preacher was Pastorin Julia Atze, pictured here with the Rev Lagle Heinla, and what follows is a summary of her sermon which can be read in full on the Society's website.



She reflected on the Biblical creation stories, emphasizing that humans are created by God from the dust of the earth, the stuff we brush off our clothes, she said, and God breathes life into them, emphasizing his closeness and ⇨

⇨ intentionality in creation. Man is given the task of tending and caring for creation. That highlights that even in Paradise, humans are meant to work and have meaningful tasks, she told us, underscoring the relational nature of humanity – with God, nature, and each other.

In her sermon she acknowledged the loss of Paradise due to human choices, resulting in a world marked by struggle, conflict, and longing for peace. Despite this, the story of Eden remains a source of hope and inspiration. Pastorin Julia told us how she can find peace even among the few plants on her balcony, and she encouraged the congregation to seek moments of peace and connection in their own lives – through gardens, nature, and relationships – as glimpses of the lost Paradise and as sources of hope.



Ultimately, we should look to Jesus Christ as the one who fully embodied the dream of Paradise and true peace. By following his example, believers are encouraged to take small, courageous steps to bring hope, peace, and positive change to the world, starting from their own lives and communities.

Her message ended with the idea that dreaming of a better world is not futile; rather, it inspires real change and courage, echoing the hope found in the resurrection of Christ.

Pastorin Julia's sermon is available in full on the Society's website at ***Events*** *and scroll down to Sunday.*

Free time to explore the city or do whatever we liked

There is so much to do and to see in Hamburg. You can take a 90 minute cruise around the harbour, you can jump on and off one of the open top bus tours, which is probably the easiest way to take in the sights; there are so many museums and galleries it would take weeks to do them all justice, or perhaps you might try *Chocoversum* where chocaholics can taste all kinds of chocolate or you might simply find one of the many superb restaurants and settle in for the afternoon over a hot meal and a glass or two of wine. And don't miss the Lego Discovery Centre!



Our conference participants could do just what they wanted, and some of them simply cruised around on the many ferries that take you from one area to another across the water. But whatever we did we had to be back for 17.30 supper.

Apologies for a missing presentation



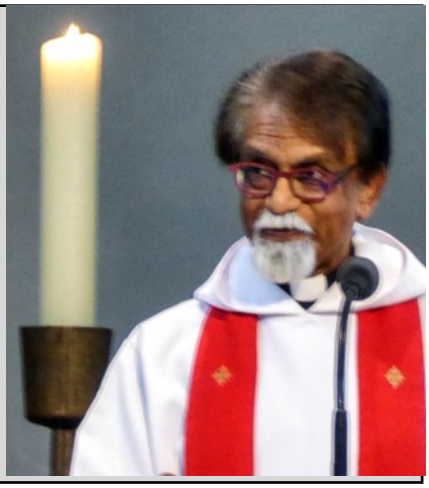
On the Sunday evening Vania Kent, who is working on a doctorate at Mainz University, gave a presentation on Ignatian Spirituality. She told us how Ignatian discernment is a valuable resource for congregations when navigating migration, demographic change and new arrivals. She carefully defined 'discernment', suggesting that attentiveness, reverence and devotion are three conditions that can make it possible. She then offered five working principles for communal discernment, noting that migrants engage in discerning their own belonging, often under greater pressure than the receiving congregation. Unfortunately, our Secretary was unable to take notes during her session, but Vania has kindly provided an outline for you and it is on the Society's website at **Events** and scroll down to Sunday.

Monday's Service of the Word

The service took place in the Roman Catholic Cathedral again. The preacher was the Ven Leslie Nathaniel, Archdeacon of Germany and Northern Europe and the Eastern Archdeaconry in the Church of England Diocese in Europe.

His sermon calls the Church to embrace unity, love, and courageous action in the face of division and injustice, following the example of Christ who draws all people to himself through the cross.

It is summarised here and you can find his full text on the Society's website



The main focus of Leslie Nathaniel's sermon was a call for Christian unity, radical love, and active engagement with social injustices, especially in the context of migration and societal division.

Drawing from John 12:27-36a, he reminded us that unity is both a gift and a responsibility. Christian unity is not just a goal, but a gift from God, compelling believers to live in a way where "no one is without the other." This unity should move Christians to continually ask, "Who is not yet here?" challenging the Church to be inclusive and welcoming to all, especially outsiders and foreigners. The Cross is at the heart of inclusion. Jesus's statement that when he is "lifted up" he will "draw all people to himself" is interpreted as a sign that Christ's self-giving love on the cross is for all humanity, not just a select group. The image of the seed dying and bearing fruit is symbolic, suggesting that what appears as defeat (the crucifixion) is actually the triumph of God's love, breaking down barriers and drawing diverse peoples together.

Dr Nathaniel directly addressed contemporary issues such as racism, xenophobia, political and economic exclusion, and the rise of anti-migrant sentiment. He urged the Church to speak truth to power, stand with the oppressed, and embody the love and presence of Christ among all victims of injustice. External divisions, such as racism, xenophobia, and political hostility, threaten human dignity and we must respond by promoting truth, justice, and cooperation with God's love. God draws people to himself in diverse ways. The Church is sent into the world to be present with those who suffer and to identify with their longing for fullness of life.

We were encouraged us to practical action, like welcoming migrants, standing against racism, and building inclusive communities as expressions of Christian faith and unity.

*The sermon is on the website at **Events**, scroll down to Monday.*

Ecumenism in Germany

A brief account of the presentation by the Rev Christopher Easthill, Rector of St Augustine's Anglican Church in Wiesbaden, Convenor (Chair) of the Council of Anglican Episcopal Churches in Germany (CAECG), and President of the German Council of Churches (ACK).

His full presentation is available on the Society's website.



Chris Easthill gave us an account of the history, current status, and ecumenical activities of the Anglican and Lutheran Churches in Germany. He focused on migration, the different church communities, and inter-church ecumenical relations.

History and Presence of Anglicans in Germany

The first Anglican congregation was in Frankfurt (1554-1559), he told us. Of course, people didn't call themselves 'Anglicans' then. They were refugees from England, fleeing persecution by Queen Mary. However, Hamburg's is the oldest continuous Anglican congregation having been founded in 1612.

It was migration in the 19th century that led to the growth of Anglican congregations. Business people came to settle, whilst many holiday makers came to take the waters in the spa towns like Wiesbaden, where Chris Easthill's church was built 161 years ago. By 1900 there were 63 Anglican churches spread across Germany, of which 35 were permanent and the rest operated just in holiday times. However, two World Wars saw a significant reduction and today there are just 17 congregations with about 2,800 members.

Structure and Identity of Anglican Churches in Germany

Ten of these churches are in the Church of England (Diocese in Europe) and the other seven belong to the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe under The Episcopal Church in USA, so there are overlapping jurisdictions. The CAECG is a joint German structure, its remit: *to assist its members in the performance of their missionary task in co-operation with the other Churches in Germany: proclaiming the Word of God, administering the Sacraments, pastoral work, religious education, charitable activity and participation in ecumenical endeavours, according to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Church of England and The Episcopal Church.*

There is tremendous diversity in nationalities, ethnicities and denominational affiliations among the church memberships. English speakers tend to gravitate to the English or American churches, and they welcome people from any Christian tradition. The majority are from the UK, USA, Germany, India, Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

Ecumenism and Christian Relations in Germany

In Germany there are two major denominations, Roman Catholic and EKD (Protestant), we were told. Both have a declining membership but still comprise over 50% of the population. But there is also a wide variety of smaller denominations and migrant Churches, which include Orthodox, Pentecostal and other independent congregations. This fosters a good deal of inter-denominational as well as inter-faith dialogue.

Ecumenical Initiatives and Agreements

The German Council of Churches (ACK) was founded in 1948 after the Second World War by five Churches to promote Christian unity and peace. Its first president was Martin Niemöller. In 1970 it was divided into a West and East German Council; in 1974 the Roman-Catholic Church and Greek-Orthodox Churches joined. Then in 1992 it was reunited into one new Council. In 2003 ACK signed off the Charta Oecumenica and in 2007 the Magdeburg Declaration recorded the mutual recognition of Baptism. In 2010, at the second Ecumenical Church Convention, an annual Day for the Care of Creation was proclaimed to foster cooperation and to promote ecumenism among the now 20 member Churches and five 'guest' Churches. There are a number of other key agreements including the

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Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the Evangelical Churches in Germany (EKD) and the more recent Augsburg Agreement between the Episcopal Church USA and the Lutheran Church in Bavaria. (These agreements are described in some detail in the presentation by the Rev Stephanie Reuther reported on page 12)

ACK has a Faith and Order Commission (DÖSTA) composed of theologians from the different member Churches who engage in independent study projects such as the language(s) of prayer, which has just concluded, and the Churches and Judaism, which has just begun. The Commission promotes ecumenism in theological education and also organizes study days.

Ecumenical Cooperation and Local Engagement

Local ecumenism extends to small villages with multiple churches collaborating and sharing resources. There are also local ACK groups which mediate the joint statements on societal and political issues made by ACK, on such topics as democratic elections and end-of-life care. Such statements demonstrate the active cooperation of the Churches.

Challenges

Some churches, especially minority and migrant congregations, face risks of closure and efforts are made to encourage sharing of church buildings. The Church of England and other bodies continue to work toward closer unity while at the same time addressing differences on issues like human sexuality.

Other initiatives include engaging with migrant churches, advocating for interfaith dialogue, and responding to societal issues like Islamophobia and migration hostility. There is the ongoing task of raising a general awareness of the diversity of Christianity in Germany, and that it is not just "*Evangelisch/Katholisch*".

There is also the issue of engaging with young people who tend to be suspicious of all institutions and especially the Church. Where will the next generation of ecumenists come from?

Finance is an ongoing challenge. Rising costs such as salaries and the expense involved in arranging meetings and events are a drain on resources.

But the over-riding aim is to implement the Charta Oecumenica's commitment "to live and act together at all levels of church life wherever conditions permit and there are no reasons of faith or overriding expediency mitigating against this."

There is much, much more in Christopher Easthill's presentation and it is well worth reading it in full at Events and scrolling down to Monday's programme

Excursion to 'Luthergarten' and 'Regerhof' Refugee Project

On Monday afternoon we took a bus ride to Regerhof which is an impressive example of community work offering different services and activities for migrants, refugees and local people.

We were warmly welcomed by members of the team working there, most of whom are volunteers.

Ms Aylin Schütte is the Coordinator of the Project and her explanation of the work is summarised here.

Regerhof is a community centre aiding refugees and locals by the provision of a range of different services, all designed to foster inclusion and participation. ⇨



⇨ What's on offer?

There's a café for social events, meetings, and private celebrations, when it can be rented out to raise some money. There's a bicycle repair programme whereby donated and sometimes dilapidated cycles are repaired and then provided free or at very low-cost for the refugees and migrants.



Help is provided with form-filling and other issues surrounding applications for permission to remain in Germany.



There is a clothing bank managed by volunteers from the local church and by the clients from many different countries.

German classes are offered free of charge. These are essential both for obtaining residence permits and for integration into German society.

There's a kitchen where daily communal meals are prepared, a bakery, and an art barn for creative activities. There's also a kiosk selling snacks and local products and a mobile truck for social counselling.

All the 'buildings' are temporary structures due to legal restrictions on building long-term structures on the site.



How did it start and how is it funded?

The Regerhof opened when refugees from Syria arrived in 2015 with just a small clothing bank run by the local church, which had to expand as refugee numbers grew. It has been funded mainly by Hamburg city money since 2017, supplemented by donations from charitable foundations and supporters. Extra funding came from the city in 2022 as Ukrainians fled the war there. Funding is declining recently, the city's contributions are expected to end in 2027, prompting great efforts to locate alternative sources.

What are the Strengths and Challenges?

The greatest strengths are accessibility, safety, and community involvement with the refugees and migrants. Volunteer support is crucial, not only to maintain the daily activities and structure but also to provide opportunities for networking. The project's Christian foundation emphasizes respect, welcome, and support, including church asylum where necessary. ⇨

⇨ The challenges include housing insecurity for the migrants, bureaucratic restrictions, mental health issues, and funding instability. Recent political shifts threaten ongoing church asylum and refugee support efforts.

What are the hopes for the future?
An informal, adaptable setup like the Regerhof sometimes faces logistical problems like power or heating issues. The hope is that sufficient funding will be secured so that the project can continue to gradually grow, and continue to provide a creative space where everyone, locals and refugees and migrants can participate and build relationships.



The nearby *Luthergarten* is a 6-acre site which at first glance appears to be overgrown. But look closer and there are 'allotments' where vegetables and fruits are growing. Fruitfulness amid apparent confusion symbolizes the hope and care for the refugees, and illustrates the ongoing importance of community support.



We all came away from the Regerhof full of admiration for the staff and volunteers and the project itself. Before we left the Church Scouts had prepared a short service for us, and we all gathered round their camp fire.

What Aylin Schütte actually told us can be found on the website. Just go to Events and scroll down to Monday.

The Conference Dinner



After our visit to the Regerhof we returned to St Ansgar-Haus to change and get ready for our final evening meal. It was held at the *Oekumenisches Hafenforum,* a project known as 'The Bridge'.

There is a small residential community there, but it also attracts people from many different churches and denominations in the district.

It is a place that encourages and practises ecumenical collaboration and outreach in what is a very secular, changing urban environment.

We were served a very nice meal indeed and there was a very convivial atmosphere. It was good that some of our guest speakers were able to join us.

After dinner Pfarrer Michael Stahl, Head of the Department for Pastoral Care and Public Dialogue in the Nordkirche, was invited to tell us something about 'The Bridge'.

What follows is a brief summary of what he said. You can read much more on the Society's website. ⇨

⇨ Pfarrer Stahl began by describing how, over the past decades, HafenCity has been transformed from a very run down district full of disused warehouses and crime to a vibrant district with apartments, cultural venues, and the university.

The Churches established 'The Bridge' project to foster ecumenical worship, dialogue, and social engagement. It was inspired by the first edition of the *Charta Oecumenica*, and involves 17 denominations, including Lutherans, Catholics, Anglicans, Mennonites, and Baptists.

Features and Goals of The Bridge

The building houses a chapel with a multi-denominational presence, open for prayer, discussion, and community events. In some ways you can think of the project as a kind of modern monastery with active residents and daily services, promoting community and solidarity.





Their focus is on "Fresh Expressions of Church", something they have borrowed from the UK, in an effort to reach those outside traditional faith communities, such as young people and tourists.

Achievements and Challenges

The project has been running for 25 years, attracting visitors and fostering cultural and interfaith dialogue. It has faced financial and engagement challenges post-COVID, with a declining number of visitors and difficulty sustaining the programmes. But it continues to adapt to social needs and to demonstrate ecumenical cooperation and innovation in a secular context.

Pfarrer Michael went into much greater detail and you can find his speech in full on the Society's website/ Just go to Events and scroll down to Monday.

'Men, Women and Faith on Shifting Ground: Rethinking Church Engagement in the Digital Age'

Tuesday morning after breakfast, and we were back in the seminar room for the last time. Here is a brief summary of the presentation by Dr Claudia Jetter, a research associate at Hümboldt University in Berlin. You can read her full text on the Society's website.



Who Are Christian Content Creators (CCCs)?

There are two kinds: the institutional creators, many of whom are ministers, theologians in training, or religious education teachers. They are often affiliated to established Churches (e.g., the German Protestant Church (EKD) or the Roman Catholic Church). They tend to reflect the stance of their particular Churches, sharing generally liberal positions on social issues.

The second group are the independent creators. These are mostly lay people, often from conservative or evangelical backgrounds, who act independently of any denomination. They are highly visible online, sometimes making a living from content creation and selling merchandise.

What is their Content Like?

Institutional creators often share insights into ministerial life, issues of work-life balance, explanations of rituals and liturgy, and theological reflections. Their principal aim is to make Christianity and church

⇨ work visible and relevant to their followers. They often do this through personal stories and practical philosophy. Whilst many of them seem keen to enter into dialogue with their followers it seems that most of the followers are passive rather than active, consumers rather than people willing to engage.

Independent creators mainly focus on a Bible-centred approach, giving personal testimonies, and advice on a lifestyle suitable, as they see it, for Christians to embrace. When addressing issues like gender, sexuality, marriage, and mental health, they often do so from a somewhat conservative perspective. They often create personal branding, and engage in somewhat emotional storytelling, sometimes adopting Biblical personas to communicate their message.

Trends and Challenges



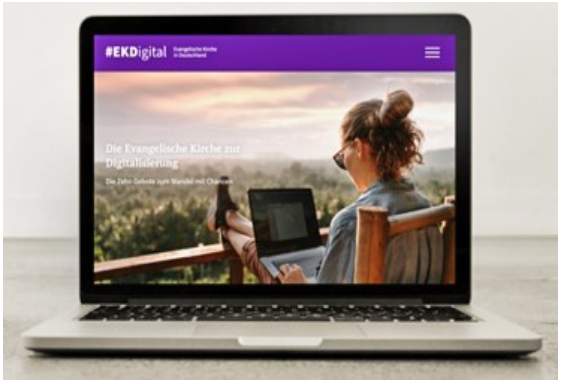
Institutional CCCs face challenges when it comes to balancing personal authenticity whilst at the same time trying to represent their Church's official positions. Sometimes the line between the personal and the institutional can become blurred.

Independent CCCs, especially those making a living from their content and merchandising, are motivated to reach an ever-broader audience. Social media algorithms and economic interests often give them a much greater presence online which can give the impression that Churches and Society are much more polarized than they are in reality. The more conservative CCCs often tailor their content and presentations to specific genders, with men and women addressing different issues and using distinct emotional tones. The women may sometimes shed tears whilst the men are more emotionally neutral.

Community and Engagement

Most conservative CCCs focus on an individual faith and on personal relationships with God rather than fostering online religious communities or referring to their own congregational commitment. These independent CCCs are more visible online than their actual numbers in the Christian population would suggest, partly due to their freedom from institutional constraints and their alignment with social media trends.

This prominence can skew public perceptions of Christianity online, sometimes leading to polarized debates or misconceptions about the faith's diversity.



However, despite challenges, digital platforms offer Churches and ministers new ways to connect with younger audiences and those outside traditional church settings.

Conclusion:

Christian creators online are a diverse group, ranging from institutional representatives to independent influencers. Their content reflects both personal faith journeys and broader social trends, with digital media amplifying certain voices and styles. While this raises challenges around representation and engagement, it also opens new avenues for outreach and dialogue in contemporary Christianity.

Dr Jetter gave numerous examples which cannot be quoted here, but are outlined in her presentation which is available on our website. Go to Events and then scroll down to Tuesday.

Our Closing Eucharist



The Conference ended with a Eucharist held in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. This was a remarkable occasion. The conference organisers had asked the Dean if he was comfortable with us using the Church of England liturgy and with the idea of a woman presiding. He said he was delighted, and found a full set of vestments to fit the Ven Christine Allsopp.

We wonder if this might be the first time that a woman has ever presided in the Cathedral. It was fascinating to see the double-takes of the local people when they looked up and saw Christine at work. We were both humbled and grateful for the generosity of the Cathedral community, and saw it as an example of the more relaxed approach to ecumenism by the Roman Catholic Church in Germany. It was a real privilege for us to be invited to conduct our daily worship there.

Christine was assisted by the Rev Fredrik Ulseth who was the preacher. His sermon is summarised here, but you can find it in full on the Society's website.

Stewardship and Hospitality



In his sermon Fredrik Ulseth said that migration is a test of Christian stewardship. How well do the Church and its members act as stewards (caretakers) of God's House, welcoming and providing for migrants and refugees. "Are we stewards opening the doors of the house, welcoming people in and providing them with what they need in due time?" he asked.

It is important to make migrants feel valued and included, not just as guests but as legitimate members of church and, beyond that, of society. He referred to the late King Harald V's legacy of making Norway a place where "citizens of every origin, colour, faith, age, profession … feel valued and included." Part of that hospitality involves the Church being called to engage in dialogue with authorities and politicians on behalf of migrants, acting as a voice for the voiceless.

Hospitality in Hostile Environments

Fredrik Ulseth acknowledged that it is a real challenge to show hospitality to migrants in social or political environments that may be hostile towards them. But his vision is for the Church to become more diverse, colourful, and bold by opening its doors to new people. He took Jesus's image of the Vine and Branches. Jesus describes himself as the True Vine, with his followers as branches bearing fruits through abiding in love. "Abiding", he said, "involves daily engagement with the scriptures, prayer, and Holy Communion as foundations for stewardship and Christian life."



Love and obedience are vital for bearing fruit and serving others as Christ's disciples. Using this central Biblical image of Jesus as the True Vine and believers as branches enables us to see migrants as new branches grafted onto the vine, symbolizing integration and shared growth. "A branch finds its place to grow ... red, green and blue grapes can grow on the same vine," he said.

⇨ The Open Door

A good steward is to be found "standing in an open doorway, having the grace to tell the newcomer: 'Come! You are among friends; you are a friend of Christ.'" He went on to describe the Church as a household (*oikos*), with stewards (*oikonomoi*) responsible for building it up and providing for all who enter, including migrants. He returned to the image of integrating migrants as grafting new branches onto a vine, emphasizing unity in diversity.

Conclusion

Fredrik Ulseth ended by saying, "After these important conference days in Hamburg I will, among lots of strong impressions and warm friendship, take back home with me the Vision of The Vine, Christ visible in the world through his Church, his oikos being more diverse, colourful, stronger and bold when opening the doors of this house for new people; inviting them to abide in Christ and his love. And look! By the power of the Holy Spirit the Vine will bear fruits on its old and new branches, locally, nationally, ecumenically – fruits we never could imagine! Dear friends! Share this vision with me!"

*You can read the sermon in full on the website at **Events** and scrolling down to Tuesday.*



Throughout the conference our worship was greatly enhanced by the wonderful organ voluntaries and accompaniment by Bishop Paul Ferguson, our Anglican Moderator. We are truly blessed to have the services of such a fine musician.

The services had been beautifully planned and the worship and hymn booklets were very well produced. Our thanks to the planning group, and to all who took part by leading, reading, interceding and preaching.

There was a wonderful variety of Anglican and Lutheran liturgies and hymnody, though one little lesson we have learned is that Swedish hymns translated into English and set to their traditional tunes need a little prior rehearsal! Not everyone at the conference was able to read music!

But that did not detract in any way from our worship together, which was offered to God in thanksgiving and praise in this magnificent, welcoming cathedral.

Looking Forward

That's the end of this review of our September 2026 Conference. It was thoroughly enjoyable and informative. We are sorry that more of our members were not able to come. It took place in a lovely venue and a magnificent city.

Now we look forward to the next conference in London, from 8th to 12th September 2028. Get the dates in your diary! We don't know the topic, but we do know the venue: The London School of Theology, easily accessible from central London.



Now here's news of another conference that may be of interest

'LUTHERANISM AND THE BRITISH ISLES'
15th-16th June 2027
at the University of St Andrews, Fife, Scotland, UK

CALL FOR PAPERS

Dr Brendan N. Wolfe and Andrew F. Simpson are pleased to announce an interdisciplinary conference on the theme of Lutheranism and the British Isles, exploring its influence across England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales from the Reformation to the present day.
We are delighted that our keynote speakers will be Professor Alec Ryrie (Durham University) and Dr Korey Maas (Hillsdale College, USA).

Proposals for twenty-minute papers are welcomed from postgraduate students, early career researchers, and established scholars across history, theology, literature, musicology, and material studies. Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words, with a curriculum vitae and a short biography, to lutheranism@st-andrews.ac.uk by 31st December 2026.
Successful applicants will be notified by 31st January 2027.
Panel proposals of three or four papers are also welcome, and limited support may be available for those who would otherwise be unable to attend.

Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

The reception of Luther's writings across England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales
Patrick Hamilton and the early Lutheran martyrs of Scotland
Lutheran influence on the Scottish Reformation
Lutheran ideas in the Irish Reformation and the early Church of Ireland
Lutheranism, Bible translation, and evangelical reform in Wales
Robert Barnes, William Tyndale, and the early English evangelicals
Lutheran theology in the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer
The Augsburg Confession and confessional writing across the British Isles
Lutheran print culture and the circulation of evangelical ideas
Anglo-German dynastic and confessional links
The Hanoverian succession and the German Lutheran court
The German Lutheran Chapel Royal and royal chaplaincies
Pietism, Halle, the SPCK, the Moravians, and early Methodism
Lutheran church music and its reception across the British Isles
Lutheranism in the United Kingdom Today
Scandinavian, Baltic, and German Lutheran diaspora communities
Lutheran refugees and émigrés after the World Wars
Anglican–Lutheran ecumenism (Meissen and Porvoo)
Dietrich Bonhoeffer and British Lutheranism

Location: The University of St Andrews, Fife, United Kingdom
Convenors: Dr Brendan N. Wolfe and Andrew F. Simpson
Keynote Speakers: Professor Alec Ryrie (Durham University) and Dr Korey Maas (Hillsdale College)
Date: 15th-16th June 2027
Abstract Deadline: 31st December 2026
Notification of Acceptance: 31st January 2027
Contact: lutheranism@st-andrews.ac.uk



We look forward to welcoming you to St Andrews, home to Scotland's first Lutheran martyr, Patrick Hamilton

The Window
supports members of the Anglican-Lutheran Society in better understanding our different traditions and social contexts so that we can more faithfully proclaim together God's love and justice in the world

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The Anglican-Lutheran Society

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Porvoo Primates and Presiding Bishops make Statement on Transitivity

Primates and Presiding Bishops of the Porvoo Communion, meeting in Lambeth Palace, London, 6th and 8th October 2026, agreed unanimously that the Porvoo Communion should pursue a relationship of ecumenical transitivity with Anglican/Episcopalian and Lutheran churches of North America known collectively as Churches Beyond Borders (they are the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Episcopal Church; the Anglican Church of Canada; and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada).

The Primates and Presiding Bishops appreciated the theological work that had been achieved, both within the Porvoo Communion and Churches Beyond Borders, which had led them to be able to agree this common position. They pledged to advance this move in their respective Churches by whatever means were deemed necessary and expedient in order to enable transitivity to happen.

The resultant recognition of ordained ministries would open the possibility of ministers serving across Anglican and Lutheran jurisdictions, subject in each case to the canonical, legal and other requirements of the receiving Church. Moreover, any Church wishing to advance would not be impeded by any sister Porvoo Church still discerning the way forward. The Primates and Presiding Bishops are convinced that this development does not contravene the Porvoo Common Statement. Rather, the Porvoo Communion is being invited to affirm that the agreements which underlie the theological and ecclesiological foundations of Churches Beyond Borders in North America are parallel, equivalent and wholly consistent with those of the Porvoo Communion. Moreover, a development of this kind follows the lead of the global Anglican-Lutheran International Commission in its 2014 report "To Love and Serve the Lord" which calls for the growth of relationships of transitivity in order to allow the practice of ordained ministry across Anglican and Lutheran traditions (see page 52). Certain member Churches of the Porvoo Communion – such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the Church of Sweden and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark – have already taken concrete steps in this direction. Hence, this invitation to all the Churches of the Porvoo Communion marks a further development in a movement already underway. The Primates and Presiding Bishops of the Porvoo Communion agree that these developments have an urgency in this 30th year of Porvoo with respect to ministry, mission and community globally.