

## The Conference Begins – Friday 12th September 2014

‘We’re sorry we’re late,’ said two people, puffing their way up the steps to the reception area at the Conference Centre. ‘Have we missed very much?’



‘You’re not late!’ they were told. ‘Indeed, you’re among the first to arrive!’

Our first day at Révfülöp was not without incident. More than 30 of our conference members had set out from Budapest by coach. They’d completed less than half the journey when one of the tyres burst quite dramatically. It was a really scary moment and caused quite a long delay. They didn’t reach us until 7pm, three hours late.

As they approached the Lajos Ordass Centre they’d texted: ‘Ten minutes away. Have the drinks ready, and a cheery reception, and some flowers!’ And that’s exactly what they

got. Schnapps, a smiling reception committee and flowers on the table!

Everyone dumped their bags in their rooms and went straight into supper. It was an excellent – and very welcome – meal. Then they made their way to the meeting room and the conference made a belated start at 8.15pm.



After warm words of welcome from Michael Ipgrave, our Anglican Moderator, and Dr Hafenscher, Director of the Centre, Prof Tibor Fabiny (left) presented an overview of Hungarian history, from the Christianization of the region in 1000AD to the present day.

In just 45 minutes he described ‘The Hungarian Dream and its Collapses in History and Religion’. It was fascinating, insightful and entertaining, and accompanied by a

hand-out that is available on the ALS website. [You can find it by clicking the ‘Tibor Fabiny’ link on the home page of the website, where you can also find a link to a recording of his lecture.](#)

The day ended in the Church with Compline, led by our Lutheran Chaplain, György Aradi (see picture right). During the service we remembered those of our Society’s members who were unable to be with us because of illness.

So our Conference got off to a good start. The Centre proved very comfortable, the rooms spacious and well appointed, and there were plenty of small meeting rooms. We also had a small chapel that we set aside for private prayer.



## Saturday : The Conference Gets Underway



After Morning Prayer in the Church and a hearty breakfast, we started on morning of concentrated work. The first session, entitled 'Divided Communities', considered the role of minority churches in situations where there are competing spheres of cultural, linguistic and national loyalty.

Praxedis Bouwman, from the Netherlands, reminded us that tensions and conflicts are part of human beings and part of human life. Many are blamed on groups, minorities and majorities. Whilst individuals can play a role, it's better when groups take up the challenge. She examined what minority means and then looked at the strengths and weaknesses involved in belonging to a minority group.

She introduced us to Calimero, a little chicken, who personifies the paradox of having the right to be protected and of being a bridge-builder. **You can read all about him, and the whole of her presentation, by clicking 'Praxedis**

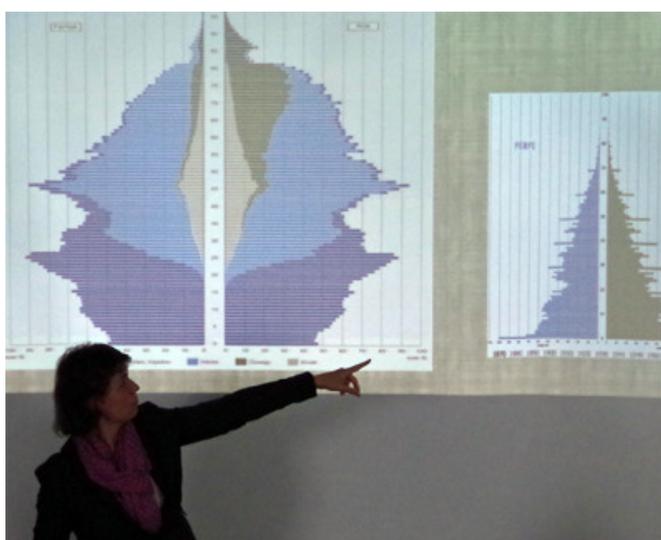
**Bouwman' the Home page of the website.**

She gave us an illustration from Hofstede and Hofstede who described cultures as onions with different rings. The core consists of the values. The outer rings are rituals, heroes and symbols. For any community, minority or majority, it is the core that is almost unchangeable. In practice, rituals, heroes and symbols can change and adapt to new contexts and challenges, but the core remains fixed. She left the conference with the question: what are the core values in your local churches, and how are they interacting with the community around you?

Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin, reported that the Rev Ian Paisley, a leading Protestant campaigner in Northern Ireland over many decades, had died the day before. He was deviating from his prepared presentation to look at ways in which this particular person had been one of the causes of the divisions in Northern Ireland but also part of the solution. This led him to reflect that people as individuals need to move beyond 'buying into' a particular situation or allegiance towards 'selling on'. By this he meant that they needed to become proactive participants in the future of their society. The experience in Ireland shows how the vision and work of a few significant individuals shaped the pathway out of 'the Troubles'. All societies, small and large, need to ask: what is the source of our energy? How can we develop a sufficient pride in ourselves to make us a happy people and a happy place? The honest recognition of divisions and their causes is the essential slip-road to this process.



**His presentation as originally conceived, and the additional material, is available by clicking 'Michael Jackson' on the Home Page of the website.**



After coffee there were two more presentations, this time on 'Diakonia'. Anna-Mária Buda, head of the Department of Diakonia in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, gave a short history of the development of church social work in Hungary, focusing on the communities of deaconesses. She then described the organisation of her Department and gave a description of the kind of work that is being done by the Lutheran Church in Hungary today. **Click 'Anna-Mária Buda' on the Home page to read more.**

She was followed by Madeleine Holmes, Environmental Officer for the Church of England's Diocese in Europe. Having described the Diocese, she told a series of stories

illustrating how the minority Anglican churches have been able to cooperate with their larger neighbours in Greece, France, Spain, Moscow, Turkey and Rome. Together they had been able to address all manner of social and economic needs and, most recently, to assist refugees from Syria and Iran. She ended with a quote from Elias Chacour 'Get up, go ahead, do something, move', Jesus said to his disciples.

I believe I can imagine our Lord saying to me, 'Get up, go ahead, do something Madeleine, move ...' she concluded. [Click 'Madeleine Holmes' to read her entire presentation.](#)



Both sets of presentations provoked considerable question and comment which was taken up in small group discussions later in the day.



Having worked so hard all morning, we were invited to spend the afternoon exploring the town, the beautiful lakeside at Revfűlöp (which means Philip's Ferry), and the surrounding area. It was very warm in the sunshine. Some went on a boat ride. Some even went swimming!

After Evening Prayer we all went to a local vineyard for a sumptuous dinner and an incredibly long wine tasting. We returned to the Centre tired and very merry!

## Sunday : The Conference Continues



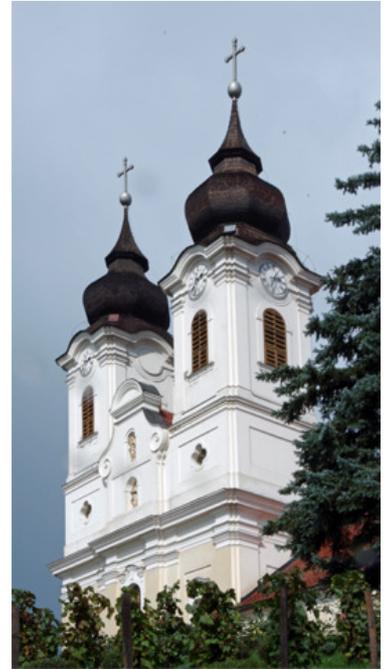
Sunday morning dawned wet – very wet! There were thunderstorms all day and we were told that more rain fell in that one day than usually falls in two months in Hungary. Farm tracks turned into rivers and roads were flooded!

We were not deterred. Wet, but not deterred! After breakfast we set out for Balatonfüred and the Lutheran Church there. The congregation was very welcoming indeed. The service was lovely, and Bishop Tamás Fabiny preached in Hungarian and English. Afterwards there was a reception and enormous quantities of refreshments.





We moved on to lovely Tihany Abbey. We all had to cower in the coach until there was a lull in the rain. Then everyone hurried the 350 metres to the reception area



where we were shown a film depicting the history and life of the Abbey. Then we made another short dash to the Abbey Church, an ornate baroque building of majestic proportions. The guide explained the most important features before we were entertained to lunch by the Benedictine Community.



After lunch we returned to the church where the Prior invited us to sing a mixture of Anglican and Lutheran hymns. Then, a great treat! One of our number, a church musician, was invited to play the magnificent organ. After that we visited their exhibition which again outlined the history and life of the community, before cowering in the coffee bar while the rain continued to hammer down. We were rewarded by a beautiful rainbow out across the Lake.

On our return to the Conference



Centre we enjoyed two more presentations on the topic 'Involving the Laity'. Dr Roy Long painted a theological and scriptural picture of Christian Community, contrasting the (possibly romanticised) description of life in the early church in Jerusalem found in the Acts of the Apostles with the 21st century Lutheran congregation he serves in Nottingham, UK. He raised two questions: How do we enable people in our congregations to use their gifts for the good of everyone in the community? Has the Church's ministry become over-professionalised so that gifts given to non-ordained ministers are overlooked or undervalued? [Roy's presentation can be read by clicking 'Roy Long' on website's Home page.](#)



Dr Robin Greenwood, an Anglican from the North of England, addressed these two questions and raised many more in his presentation. He suggested that churches should be 'wisdom communities', a very difficult term which he explained. A scriptural theme is 'blessing'. God loves creation for its own sake, and humanity is invited to love God for his own sake, and to love other people for their own sake. He quoted an American journal where he had read, 'Pay attention to the marginal. They have a lot to say but are not often listened to!' "We heard yesterday how minority churches can make their contribution to the world," he reminded us. "Why don't we stop going to church and become the church?" [Click 'Robin Greenwood' on the Home page to find his presentation in full.](#)

These presentations provoked some lively questions which, after supper, were addressed in the small group meetings. The day ended with reflective Night Prayers. The rain had stopped!

## Monday : The Conference Draws to a Close

After Sunday's meteorological excitement Monday dawned bright and clear. Most of us made it to Morning Prayer and everyone was at breakfast! Ahead of us was a very full day.



It began with two presentations on Ecumenism by Christiane Groeben, the Lay President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Italy and Jorge Pina Cabral, Bishop of the Lusitanian Church, a member Church of the Anglican Communion serving the people of Portugal.



Both began by sketching the history of their own Churches. Christiane explained how, despite Lutherans being in Italy for almost 500 years it was only in 1961 that the ELCI was recognised as an official religion. From that time the “*otto per mille*” (eight thousandths of a person's which can be given to a church designated by the tax-payer) has provided much needed financial assistance for mission, diakonia, projects, evangelism and paying pastors.

She went on to describe the ways in which her tiny Church works with other Protestant Churches to achieve remarkable things. ‘Ours is a joyful little flock,’ she told us. ‘We have learned to invest in small things, people or projects, hoping they will grow.’ The building of Christian unity starts when two people share parts of their daily lives, be it at work, family, grief, music, worries, joys, questions, Sunday services. ‘Very often we believe that we know what the other person is thinking, but do they really think what we are thinking they think?’ she remarked. ‘Differences have to be recognised before they can be accepted – not destroyed.’

Her presentation was very enthusiastically received. It was followed by that of Bishop Jorge, who told us that since its founding in 1880 the Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church had always expressed and ecumenical openness. In the 1960s it had forged friendships with a number of other Anglican Churches and it joined the World Council of Churches in 1961. However, it has only been recognised by the Portuguese State since 2001. Like the Church in Italy, his Church finds itself in a predominantly Roman Catholic country. In recent years relationships between both the Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church have improved. ‘I am of the opinion that, in Portugal, ecumenism with the Roman Catholic Church takes on greater significance at the local level than at a national level,’ he said. He then mentioned some of the obstacles to ecumenism. Some of the Evangelicals find some aspects too liberal, while others are suspicious of Roman Catholic involvement. They feel that the Church in the majority merely wishes to absorb the minority ones. However, Bishop Jorge feels that Churches need one another in order to discover their own identity. ‘Only by walking together will they realise that ecumenism is not an end in itself but serves the most authentic Christian witness of the Gospel,’ he said.

Both Christiane and Jorge seemed to agree that, though minority Churches often feel vulnerable, God has manifested himself and revealed to them the power of the cross. In their weakness they have experienced God's strength and have come to understand that something that might be considered small and negligible in the eyes of the world may be great and noteworthy before God (1 Corinthians 1.19-20).

[Click ‘Christiane Groeben’ and ‘Jorge Cabral’ on the website’s Home page to read both their papers for yourself.](#)

Following a coffee break Anne Burghardt (right), Secretary for Ecumenical Relations in the Department for Theology and Public Witness at the World Lutheran Federation, spoke about Lutheran Spirituality in Central Eastern Europe. She began with a brief historical sketch outlining some of the influences that have been at work. In areas ruled by the Hapsburg dynasty, for example, the Counter-Reformation led to an anti-Roman Catholic sentiment which in some places persists to this day. In these areas liturgical reform may be resisted for being too ‘high church’ or ‘catholic’. Later the influence of Pietism and the



Brethren Movement of Count Zinzendorff created a kind of individualistic piety ('my personal relation to Jesus') that seemed to prevail during the communist era and resulted in the Church being pushed into a 'niche'. In some areas there is a search for 'our way of being Lutheran' (often with the desire to resist doing it the German way). This often accentuated the role played by the Church in education and culture in the history of the nation. Then the communist era led to scepticism about any ideologies that might prevail over the truly Christian message, so newer theological ideas like Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, etc were often ignored. In some areas church life was reduced to liturgical life, and for some people today corporate worship is the centre of their life, and the place which provides their spiritual energy. Another influence has been the resistance to the historical critical approach to scripture in the more conservative groupings.

All this was carefully worked through in a paper you can find by clicking the 'Anne Burghardt' link on the Home page.



The conference then split into small groups to discuss these presentations until lunch, after which there was a brief Panel Discussion with Bishop Tamas Fabiny, Christine Allsopp (an Anglican Archdeacon) and Anne Burghardt responding to questions and comments raised in the small group sessions.

Everyone enjoyed some free time after tea. Some explored the shores of Lake Balaton, others relaxed in the Centre's grounds while the more intrepid climbed the Millennium Tower on top of a nearby hill.

Then, after Evening Prayer, we held our Conference Dinner. Our guests were the Most Rev Gyula Márfi, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Veszprém, the Rev Zoltan Tar, Chief Councillor of the Synodal Office of the Reformed Church, the Rev Vilmos Fischl, Secretary of the Ecumenical Council, and the Mayor, Mr Géza Kondor.



The meal was magnificent, and typical of the hospitality afforded us by the Lajos Ordass Conference Centre. Thanks was expressed to the Director, Dr Hafenscher, and his staff, and presentations were made to those who, on the Hungarian side and in Britain, had worked so hard to organise the conference, and to those who had helped it to run smoothly, including this smiling quartet! After all that it was time for packing and getting to bed ready for an early start.



Our Conference Eucharist was at 7.30 on Tuesday morning. The preacher was the Rev Mária Süks (Lutheran) and the celebrant was the Society's Secretary, Canon Dick Lewis (Anglican), assisted by our chaplains, György Aradi (Lutheran) and Helen Harding (Anglican). After breakfast we all went our separate ways to return to the 20 different countries from which we came.

Everyone enjoyed meeting old friends and making many new ones. We have all worked together, worshipped and prayed together, shared our experiences, enjoyed our leisure time and learned from each other. And that's what the Anglican Lutheran Society is all about.