

Anglican-Lutheran Society

Annual General Meeting, 8th March 2014, at Gustaf Adolf Church, Liverpool

Mr Stan Royden : Lutherans in Liverpool and the Gustaf Adolf Nordic Congregation

I shall begin with a confession: when I saw what I was asked to talk about, my heart sank. Roger has a relatively easy task; as chairman of our charity LiNC, he has plenty of material to talk about, lots of work that has been done to the building, of which he can be justifiably proud. And Robert, our historian: he's written two books about this building, for heaven's sake!

As for Lutherans in Liverpool, well, let's look first of all at the makeup of the most important people in the congregation, namely the committee: five live "over the water" on the Wirral peninsula, two live out in Wigan (rugby league country), one lives in Formby, near the famous footballers, and one lives in Runcorn, for reasons best known to himself. That doesn't leave many from Liverpool!

While we're on the subject of the congregation, it's worth noting that, apart from the house custodian who lives on site, no-one lives within walking distance of this building, so that's one reason why the purchase of the car-park was crucial. It should not, therefore, come as a surprise when I tell you that only a very small number attend our services on a regular weekly basis. This was illustrated very clearly a few years ago when we had decided to hold services through the summer (partly as a signal to the Swedish Church in Sweden). I took morning worship on two consecutive Sundays; the first was attended by 12 parishioners; the following week the attendance was also 12 - but none of them had been there the previous week!

Here's another point: the nearest school is just two streets away - St Vincent de Paul primary. Now what does that name tell you? Quite clearly, it's a faith school, in this case Roman Catholic. In fact, if you look in the old-fashioned telephone directory, there are literally dozens of faith schools in the city, mainly RC and Anglican. How many Lutheran schools do you think there are? Lutherans arrive here already "made" [I know there aren't any Methodist schools either, but Methodism is well-established in this country, unlike Lutheranism]. So our Lutherans tend to be straight from the Nordic countries or Germany. We are often asked how many Scandinavians or Finns live in the area, and the simple answer is that we don't know. We received a phone call a few weeks ago asking if we had a Danish flag that could be draped over a coffin, but when we enquired the name of the deceased, it was no-one we recognised. We can only assume that the person was one of many Scandinavians unknown to us. There must be hundreds, if not thousands in the whole of the north-west and north Wales.

The biggest influx was undoubtedly the Norwegian sailors during the last war. Hundreds of them married local girls and stayed on after the end of the war. Indeed, quite a few of them took their English brides to Norway and were not well-received there (because they had not suffered the same privations as those Norwegians who had remained in Norway during the occupation), so much so that they returned to these shores. We have one survivor who still comes to our coffee-mornings, Otto who is 95!

Obviously, the Norwegians were Lutherans (98% of the population was at that time – it's down to about 78% now) and they were not fazed if their English bride was RC. You will know the official RC attitude to mixed marriages, and the vast majority of the Norwegians were not particularly bothered. Interestingly, at least three of our regulars are Catholic and attend their own church as well as ours.

So the members of our church are nearly all from the Nordic countries or are related to someone who is (me for example). In actual fact, there are not many couples who are both Nordic – nearly all are “mixed.”

Most of our members are from the “colony” – the long-term residents. Sometimes young families come for a year or two, but they often take the opportunity to experience church fellowship in a local church here.

There are lots of students : 20% of the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) students are Norwegian and there are quite a number at the three universities. We don't see much of them, but last December two groups from LIPA put on Christmas concerts here which were very successful and we hope to have some of them back here to provide entertainment on 17th May, when we will be pushing the boat out to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Norwegian Constitution.

As they do when living in their own countries, the Nordic ex-pats turn up to church on special occasions: Norwegians on 17th May and Christmas Eve, and the Swedes at Valborg (spring festival), mid- summer and Lucia (the “festival of light”) in December.

Last autumn we had four baptisms, conducted by three different vicars: two little boys were baptized by their maternal grandfather, who is a Methodist minister in High Wycombe [glad we didn't have to pay his travel expenses], a little girl was baptized by the Swedish priest who came up to take the Sunday service, and another little boy (father Swedish, mother German) was baptized by Lars Ruden, who is Norwegian, but an ordained Anglican minister. All very complicated!

We haven't had a resident priest since the end of 2008, when the Swedish Church withdrew all staff. They used to send a priest up from the London church once a month, but this has been cut back and now we can only expect a visit four times a year. Once a month we have a communion service in English lead by a retired Anglican canon, who is very much on our side; third Sunday in the month usually no service and fourth (and fifth if there is one) we have morning worship lead by a lay member of the congregation. We do have visits from Scandinavia (chiefly Sweden), which help, and now that we have joined the LCiGB Bishop Martin Lind is coming at least twice this year. There is only one Finnish priest for the whole of the UK, so it's not surprising that we only get one service in Finnish per annum. That said, the Finnish consul is assiduously studying the language; he is also an Anglican Reader with sympathies for the Lutheran cause and has been trying to get us to learn the Lord's Prayer in Finnish!

Last year services were lead by 12 different people (all men, as it happens), and it was sometimes a challenge, but dull it wasn't!