Anglican-Lutheran Society Conference Hamburg

11th-15th September 2026

‘Changing Church in a Changing World’

‘Ignatian Spirituality’

Here is Ms Vania Kent’s own summary of the session she led on the Sunday evening.
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I opened the session with the *Suscipe* of Ignatius of Loyola — a prayer of surrender ("Take, Lord, and receive all our liberty, our memory, our understanding...") — before turning to a reflection on Ignatian discernment as a resource for congregations navigating migration, demographic change, and new arrivals. Drawing on the life and teaching of Ignatius of Loyola, particularly the *Spiritual Exercises*, I situated that tradition within the wider Christian practice of *discretion* (John Cassian) and *diakrisis* (the desert fathers and mothers), framing discernment as a practice shared across Anglican, Lutheran, and other traditions, not the property of any one denomination.

I first distinguished discernment from three common substitutes. It is not voting: canvassing opinion and counting hands may be a legitimate tool of governance, but it tells a room only where it already stood, not where God is leading. It is not consensus-building: consensus seeks the lowest common denominator that offends no one, while discernment seeks the highest common calling — what God actually wants, which is not always what a group can comfortably agree to. And it is not prayer offered as decoration on a decision already made; genuine discernment requires real openness to being surprised, in contrast to "lobbying, with a prayer attached for cover." Positively, I defined discernment as a process that occurs within the boundaries of a relationship established and nurtured through prayer — the prayerful ordering of common life so that a person or a community has the freedom and desire to find and embrace God's will.

Three postures were presented as the conditions that make discernment possible:

- Attentiveness — paying honest attention to what is actually happening (in finances, buildings, neighbourhoods, languages, and who is arriving or quietly leaving), rather than reacting to a story about what is happening. I suggested that much church anxiety about migration is a failure of attention rather than a failure of theology.
- Reverence — receiving what is seen as holy ground and a place of God's activity, rather than as a problem to be managed or a threat to be contained, without minimizing the real financial strain, grief, or cross-cultural difficulty involved.
- Devotion — responding not with anxiety or control but with love: a chosen, sustained direction toward the actual people in front of a congregation, whether arriving or departing, rooted or new.

Together, I described attentiveness, reverence, and devotion as forming the sensitivity a church needs to begin distinguishing movements that draw it toward God from those that draw it away. The session's core teaching then turned to the Ignatian categories of consolation (movements toward peace, hope, clarity, and expansion) and desolation (movements toward anxiety, contraction,

and isolation), which I illustrated through individual examples and a composite case of a German parish weighing whether to share its building with a neighbouring English-speaking Anglican chaplaincy amid neighbourhood demographic change. Neither movement alone yields an answer; together they provide data to be read patiently and communally — with the practical rule that major decisions should not be made in a time of desolation.

I offered five working principles for communal discernment: grounding conversation in prayer as its atmosphere rather than its bookends; speaking from one's own sense of the Spirit's movement rather than policy opinion; listening for patterns of consolation and desolation across the group; holding outcomes loosely rather than forcing a timeline; and naming losses as honestly as hopes. I also noted that migrants themselves are engaged in their own discernment about belonging, often under greater pressure than the receiving congregation.

Partway through, I gave participants an opportunity to practice discernment directly: sitting quietly with a single question in God's presence, noticing what arose, and then sharing what surfaced honestly with a partner, without needing to explain or justify it.

The session concluded with a guided Examen, inviting participants into a final period of reflective prayer.