

HOW THE ANGLICAN-LUTHERAN SOCIETY BEGAN

40 Years of growing together

An account of a presentation made by the Very Rev Tom Bruch
at the Society's Annual Meeting, 9th March 2024

The Past

Tom began with some personal background. He was brought up in USA. His father was the Pastor of St Paul's Lutheran Church in Iowa (right) where there were many Lutherans, but few if any Anglicans.



Moving to a suburb of Chicago he found things very different. There were many different churches, Redeemer Lutheran which he attended came from a German background. He was confirmed there, and there were also Lutheran congregations for Danish, Swedish, Norwegian & Finnish communities in the town. But there was also Christ Episcopal – an Anglican congregation! Tom admitted that the Lutherans didn't think much of Anglicans, regarding them as Calvinists who liked dressing up a bit!



During the 1970s Tom and his wife moved to the UK. He attended theological College, Westfield House, Cambridge, an Evangelical Lutheran Church of England (ELCE) institution. Of course, there were Anglicans all over the place in Cambridge, but at his college they tended to be kept at arm's length. Westfield House was part of a union of theological colleges which included Wescott House, Ridley Hall, Westminster College and Wesley House.

In 1977 he became Pastor of his first congregation, All Hallows Lutheran Church, Sunbury-on-Thames. It was a congregation of the ELCE but enjoyed 'cordial but distant' ecumenical links with other local churches. However, the pulpit in the church contained stones from All-Hallows-the-Great in London which was demolished in the nineteenth century. So the Lutheran church was named after an Anglican church and these stones a symbol of a distant Anglican-Lutheran relationship. Back in the seventeenth century Lutherans in London had a pew reserved for them in All-Hallows-the-Great.



Then in 1980 Tom moved from ELCE, which in those days had a strong Missouri Synod affiliation, to the Lutheran Church in Great Britain (LCiGB). This was connected to the Lutheran Council of Great Britain. He was appointed Pastor of St Paul's, Corby, in Northamptonshire, a congregation which considered good ecumenical relations important

and so actively pursued them. Tom admitted to having been really ignorant of other Churches and to committing some embarrassing faux pas when first coming across the United Reformed Church and the Church of England!



In 1982-85 he served at Hothorpe Hall, Theddingworth in Leicestershire, a Conference & Retreat Centre owned by Lutheran Council of Great Britain, and enjoyed a close relationship with All Saints Parish Church, Theddingworth. Easter Vigils with a great fire were held jointly in the extensive grounds at Hothorpe, and Harvest Festivals took place at All Saints. Tom even served as a stop-gap priest during vacancy, though whether that was strictly legal is a matter not to

be investigated too closely! There was a family feeling between Hothorpe and All Saints and, though Porvoo was perhaps just a twinkling in someone's eye, it was the kind of grass-roots ecumenism that the people wanted. So Tom learned a lot about Anglicans.

In April 1982 an article in Church Times by Canon George Austin, Vicar in Bushey, Hertfordshire, a Church Commissioner and well-known Anglican Catholic commended Lutheran Eucharistic theology and asked if: *'The assumption that even carriers of bubonic plague should be less assiduously avoided than anyone loosely described as "Protestant" has not simply blinded Anglo-Catholics to the riches of Lutheran understandings of apostolicity and episcopate, thereby diminishing the fullness of our own theology of ministry.'*

Tom wrote a letter to the Church Times thanking him, hoping that the 500th anniversary of Luther and 150th of the Oxford movement could mark beginning of better understanding and closer relationship between Lutherans and Anglicans worldwide, and noting that far more unites two traditions than separates them in doctrine, worship and Church life.

Several people wrote to Tom, among them the Rev Dr Ian Phelps, Church of England Vicar of Peacehaven, Sussex, who Tom invited to visit to Hothorpe Hall. They talked about theology, Ian experienced Lutheran worship, enjoyed walks in the countryside and a few beers. Then Ian suggested trying to form a society. They agreed to send a letter to the Church Times to test the waters – it was signed by the two of them, a local Vicar, a BBC local radio presenter and an ELCE pastor.

In the Church Times, 11th November 1983, were several articles about Luther and Lutherans, including by Archbishop of Canterbury – and in it our letter appeared.

Anglican-Lutheran Society?

SIR.—The visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Germany this week to take part in the five hundredth anniversary celebrations of the birth of Martin Luther is indicative of the growing interest in unity between the Anglican and Lutheran Communions.

In 1972 the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission published the Pullach Report, as a result of which the two Communions have been working together more closely—especially in the USA, where Episcopal and Lutheran parishes are often neighbours. In Europe conversations have been continuing, and a further report is about to be published with more recommendations for future co-operation.

We believe that these official moves are to be welcomed, not least because the Lutheran Communion holds a similar position in many European countries to that of the Anglican Communion in English-speaking lands. But official proposals can only be made effective in practice if there is an interest and enthusiasm for unity among the ordinary clergy and laity.

It is our hope that this would be encouraged by an unofficial Anglican-

Lutheran Society. Such a society would work to encourage friendly contacts, to study matters of theological and historical interest, to experience each other's forms of worship, and above all to pray for reconciliation.

We invite all who are interested to write to us if they would be prepared to support such a society.

(Rev. Dr.) I. R. PHELPS,
Vicar of Peacehaven, Sussex.

(Rev.) T. BRUCH,
Director, Hothorpe Hall, Leics.

(Canon) N. C. CROWE,
Vicar of Market Harborough,
Leics.

(Rev) R. WHITTALL,
Concordia Publishing House,
Leics.

(Rev.) D. SAINT,
BBC Radio Northampton.

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A meeting was held on 10th March, 1984, at the International Lutheran Student Centre, London (St Mary's German Lutheran congregation where our Annual Meeting was taking place). About 30 turned up! So the Anglican-Lutheran Society was established with Ian elected chair and Tom as secretary.

After this the first issue of *The Window* was published in September 1984, with the Rev Ron Englund as editor. Membership increased to 87, and as reported in *The Window*: *'Included are people from many European traditions within Lutheranism (Finnish, German, Hungarian, Latvian, Norwegian, Polish and Swedish), as well as from North American Lutheranism. Anglican members come from churches in England, Wales, Scotland, France, Germany, Norway and the USA.'*

The first Annual General Meeting was held on 9th March, 1985, and the first conference from 17th-18th September, 1987, with the theme: "Comparing Anglican and Lutheran Spirituality". In 1988 the AGM focused on Namibia and Annual Meetings have taken place in March every year since.

The 20th anniversary was celebrated in 2004 at St Paul's Cathedral where the theme was "Updates on Anglican-Lutheran relationships". In the photo you can see L to R: Tom Bruch, David Carter (Methodist), Sven Oppegaard (LWF), Gregory Cameron (Anglican Communion Office). David spoke about both Anglican and Lutheran relationships from a Methodist standpoint.



The Present

The Society is a Registered Charity with 350 members including students, with joint and group members counted as one! They are in 37 countries – Australia, Austria, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Jordan, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, UK, USA, and Zimbabwe.

Conferences have been held in Estonia, Germany, Finland, Ireland, Hungary, Norway, Rome (virtual), Sweden, USA & UK and bursaries are available to assist students preparing for accredited ministry in their tradition in attending.

Our Patrons are the Archbishop of Canterbury assisted by the Archbishop of Dublin and the President of the LWF.

The Window has reached 135 issues, all archived on the Society's website and a wonderful resource for discovering the story of the Society but also the progress of ecumenical conversations, dialogues and agreements between our two traditions.

We have National Coordinators in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, USA and our Roman Catholic and Methodist observers demonstrate our widening ecumenical interest.

The Future

Tom drew attention to the 2024 Conference in Edinburgh on the theme “Church in a State” and the fact that there is to be another Reception at Westminster Abbey for Anglican and Lutheran Chaplains.

He ended by encouraging members to share their ideas about how the Society should move forward, the topics and issues they would like to explore together, and to tell stories of their ecumenical partnerships and activities through The Window.



Our Society’s Co-Founders

The Very Rev Tom Bruch,
the author of this presentation

and

The Rev Dr Ian Phelps,
a dedicated ecumenist until
the day of his death

