

Anglican-Lutheran Society

Annual Meeting

9th March 2024 in St Mary's German Church, Sandwich Street, London

“THE STUDENT CHAPLAIN”

A presentation by the Rev Rebecca Daniel



Before I start I want to acknowledge the work with students done by the Council of Lutheran Churches in the past.

(Rebecca showed the slide you can see in this photo)

This is what the international student community looks like today. We have students from different parts of the world and these are some from the Indian

YMCA and from SOAS, London University's School of Oriental and African Studies. I have an Intern from Finland, and there are students from the Norwegian Church. It's a beautiful mix of people.

Our vision is to foster a sense of belonging. And how do we do that? We adopt three different ways: *Embrace – Encounter – Engage*. By 'Embrace' we mean offering these students hospitality and, as you know, in the Lutheran tradition hospitality plays a major role. To 'Encounter' we offer all kinds of social and spiritual activities, making space for conversation and dialogue. So where you are sitting today, here in St Mary's German Church, we call 'Luther Hub'. The German Church has asked us to use this place as a meeting place for students, so every month, on the first and third Tuesdays, students come together here. By 'Engage' we introduce aspects like justice, inclusivity, care for creation and compassion because the students are from different parts of the world and come with different social and ethical values. So here we create a space for them to interact and to learn from each other, and also to learn certain values which have not been part of their upbringing.

Before I move on to what I do here as part of the international student community I want to stress one particular thing: the work that we do with the International Lutheran Student Community (ILSC) and the Council of Lutheran Churches (CLC) is entirely based on partnership.

Before I talk about my work I want to call on Pastor Joseph Nelson from Leeds where he is a University Chaplain to share what they do in Leeds. This is because, for CLC member Churches, it's very important that we extend our ministry to different places, and I derive my strength from partnership, working along with others. So here is Joseph to tell you about the work he does in Leeds.

(Pastor Joseph stepped forward)

In Leeds I'm a Lutheran Chaplain in the University Chaplaincy. We don't just cover one University, there are four of them! There is something in the region of 100,000 students so it's a lot of work! There's an ecumenical trust there where Christians from across the city have come to work together to minister to the students in partnership. We provide a social space, opportunities for worship, so on Wednesdays we have a rotating service led by Christians from different backgrounds, and we also provide opportunities for intellectual reflection, discussion groups and religious and pastoral support.



At the moment we have a vacancy for the Anglican chaplain so I've been involved, with my Porvoo hat on, working with Anglican students as well. This can be a wonderful example of Anglican-Lutheran cooperation, and we can support one another in ways like this when there are vacancies or when members of the team need support. It's a very broad ministry, but it's very rewarding as well.

(Rebecca took the floor again)

I started this work in 2021. Until 2019 this place was a student hostel but in that year the CLC sold the hostel so there was no longer a core of Lutheran students here. So my first task was to create a community of people from Lutheran backgrounds and different faith traditions and to make a base for them. So, working with Pastor Joseph, the CLC and the Indian YMCA, were decided on three aspects for our work. The first was 'Prayer Life'. The first evening that I did here in this church was a Taizé service along with the German congregation. We continued this for a while and gathered students from different Churches and hostels. But I realised that coming for Taizé wasn't their priority. What a number of them wanted was a space to join in conversation. So we asked ourselves how we could do this and we started in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, holding a Vigil for Creation and invited people from the other member churches – Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, the Lutheran Church in Great Britain – and it worked! We invited them and they joined us.

At CLC we have a good outreach programme and, as part of it, Pastor Meelis Suld started an inclusive group and students showed interest, five joining us last year and sharing the journey. Last year we also took some students to join the Anglican-Lutheran Society at the Reception they hosted at Westminster Abbey. That was a wonderful experience for those students, two of whom were from the Roman Catholic tradition, to enter such a space and meet people from so many difference Christian traditions. That was very important.

That is the kind of thing we do in our work with students, and last year I also held a retreat in York on the theme “Like a Tree Planted by the Waters”. Some of the students had finished their studies and were going back to India and this was to celebrate their success and to help them consider where they were going from now on. We continue to communicate through a WhatsApp group which is very effective.

I’m also part of the Churches in Higher Education Liaison Group (CHELG) which consists of chaplains from leading higher education universities and colleges where we discuss issues like the challenges facing us in higher education and how can we best support our students. We also have a Facebook page through which we can be contacted so we are offering web support, we provide training for new chaplains and we also have a chaplains’ conference in January every year.



Here at the Luther Hub we started a thing called ‘Eat and Encounter’. All that we do is cook and eat and talk. It happens every month on the first and third Tuesday from 6.30pm to 8.30pm. This space is full of aroma and a handful of students play music while others chat together while students in the kitchen are making the meal and others are setting up the tables. At the end they clean up, and it’s all supposed to finish at 8.30pm but it doesn’t always, and sometimes I leave this place at 10pm! People ask why we start so late, and one reason is that for students living in London is so expensive so most students need to work. Some of them work two shifts and by the time they have finished it is almost 6pm, so they can come directly from work to the Luther Hub where they can relax and enjoy hot food and meet their friends. While they are here we pray; sometimes we play games; we have had an ice-cream party, a barbecue and a Christmas Party. During Christmas we attend the Christmas Markets of the different member churches. So Christmas can be a very busy period for the chaplains!

Right now I’m doing Lent Bible Study based on the book “Life Balance” which looks at ways of making time to celebrate life and getting a right Life/Work balance, and the importance of rest and recreation. We have done three sessions and have two more to go. The sessions are online and we who are based here are joined by a student from Belfast and two who I met in Poland at the LWF Assembly – it’s quite late evening for them! A South African who attends the Lutheran Church here also attends so there are people from a number of different parts of the world with different experiences and different skills. I really enjoy these sessions and interacting with the others enriches the whole experience.

There are Norwegian and Finnish Chaplains here, and Pastor Sarah Farrow who works in Kings College as Chaplain and Vice-Dean, and Pastor Joseph arranged for us to visit Leeds to meet their chaplains and find out how they work. We are all still recovering from the Covid Pandemic and some of the chaplains here are so tired and don’t know how to reach out to their students. Meeting our counterparts in Leeds helped us to understand that we are not alone, we are all in it together. We can help each other to move forward so we have decided to hold this trip every year and to meet together quarterly to see how we are going.

Every Thursday evening at the Indian YMCA in Warren Street they have worship so I visit and lead worship for them. We also visit other member churches to see what they do, and we have Interns in the Norwegian and Finnish Churches so we all support one another. Pastor Sarah at Kings College also creates a space for me to go with the Interns and the Intern last year was involved in the Chaplaincy at Kings.

Recently I have joined the SOAS Chaplaincy Team. I go there four hours each week. I soon discovered that most students didn't know who the chaplains were. So we decided to have an open coffee afternoon in a room in the Student Union. It's been beautiful. Students come up to you and ask, "Who are you? Can you tell us what you do?" The first week we started we were having some biscuits, fruit and coffee, and a student came up. I said, "Please take what you want." She asked, "What is the catch?" I said, "There's no catch! You're most welcome. We just want to be here to say hallo to you!"

This year we observed the World Day of Prayer and the Swedish Church. We were praying with and for the people in Palestine.

I invited a Norwegian social worker to be with us today, but she is not well but she sent some information about what she does. She runs "Young in London" which is principally for Norwegian students and young professionals. Every month, on the first Saturday, they have Norwegian Porridge Day. Their aim is also to create a safe space, a place for networking and a home-from-home for everyone. Most of their events take place in the church. So we invite them to our events and they invite us to theirs.

The important thing is that, if you look at our chaplaincy work, we don't try to overlap what we do but we try to support each other and to learn from each other.

Rebecca was asked if, when they hold joint Communion Services, the students were reluctant to receive from another tradition. She replied that, at the Eucharist in the Indian YMCA, there seems to be no problem. She had seen Roman Catholics receiving the bread and wine – but not the Orthodox. Generally, among the students, denominational differences are not so important.