

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the lands!” Psalm 100

This year’s meeting of the Deanery Synod of the Nordic and Baltic States coincided with the 25th anniversary of the signing of The Porvoo Agreement. About twenty clergy and lay members participated in a busy weekend full of thought-provoking presentations and lively discussions organized by Revd Tuomas and Sarah Tahvanainen, as well as a celebratory Eucharist at Porvoo Cathedral on Saturday evening. Revds Parvez and Amos attended on behalf of the Anglican Church in Finland, and I joined as one of two newly elected lay representatives. It was a memorable, meaningful experience and a joy to meet in person after months of restrictions.

Many of the presentations focused on the Psalms and how God watches over the sojourners (Psalm 146). The Revd Dr. Tomi Karttunen of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland reminded us that as “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,” (Ephesians 2:19), it is our duty to follow God’s Will by fighting for justice, feeding the hungry, and praying for the suffering. We must “act as if everything depends on us but remember that God is responsible for everything.”

Continuing the Psalm theme, The Revd Canon Smitha Prasadam encouraged us to recognize that we are all strangers on God’s earth—pilgrims and exiles who are heading toward the eternal. We may speak different languages, but our common mother tongue is the Word of God. The Psalms offer us 150 opportunities to praise the Lord and lessen our perceived distance from Him. So, sing as if it’s your calling!

In a panel discussion with Bishop David Hamid, Bishop Matti Repo of Tampere outlined some of the challenges facing the Church today. For example, how do we reach out to young members and ensure that they will defend Christianity and carry it to future generations? Do we appear too homogenous in a multicultural world? If so, do we change with society and in what sense? His solution was not to conform, but to reform or transform.

Bishop David urged us to keep alive the memory of the Porvoo Agreement. We must loudly affirm our mission, restating what is at the heart of Christianity and differentiating between “spiritual” and “religious.” The trend has been to focus on our international partnerships, but more can be done at the local level, such as tending to the needs of migrants and refugees, tackling racial injustice, sparking interfaith dialogue, and finding consensus on pressing issues, such as climate change. By bringing Anglican and Lutheran congregations closer together, we can show unity in the world.

While most of these presentations were delivered live at Hotel Katajanokka, members listened to a riveting zoom presentation by The Revd Aaro Rytönen of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland about his work for peace and reconciliation at the Almana Center in Oman.

For me, the highpoint of the weekend was celebrating the Eucharist at Porvoo Cathedral with Bishop Bo-Göran Åstrand of that city. The Venerable Dr. Leslie Nathaniel, Archdeacon,

delivered the sermon in the fifteenth-century church with Bishop David as the principal celebrant. Erik Johannes Riekko led The St. Nicholas Chamber Choir in Bruckner's "*Locus Iste*," which aptly means: "This place was made by God." Afterward, we walked across the street to the Bishop Residence, where we were treated to a sumptuous buffet dinner and a performance of three songs in Swedish and Finnish.

The following morning, the celebrations continued with a moving Sunday Confirmation service in which four candidates were confirmed by Bishop David. Thanks to our volunteers, an abundant potluck lunch awaited downstairs in the crypt. Our guests spent their last hours getting to know members of our congregation before their flights home. I heard some gushing over our good fortune to have such a spacious church and crypt in which to worship and meet for coffee. Several visitors purchased Christmas cards and thought it a "brilliant" fundraiser.

It was with a heavy heart (and full stomach) that we all bid our visitors "Hei hei" at the end of the weekend. I look forward to meeting them again at next year's Deanery Synod in Copenhagen.

Linda Jämsén