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*Mine Eyes Have Seen
Thy Salvation*

From the Chairman



Rev. George Samiec
Chairman of the ELCE

I didn't mean to ruin Christmas but she said I did! We were talking about the cast of nativity plays and what Matthew and Luke actually say and she was shocked. The others in the office were listening in as well and I could see that they, too, were hearing 'new things' about Christmas. Actually these were old things, written in the Bible, and when I mentioned that the world was only celebrating Christmas because Jesus died for us, there was a nod and an acknowledgement. 'I suppose so. I hadn't thought about it like that.'

After over a millennium, Christmas has accumulated lots of meanings, customs, and traditions, many of which seem to overshadow the fact that it is Christ's Mass celebrating the Nativity. I'm not fussed that Christmas is somewhat hidden behind today's commercialism and emphasis on family in society (at least it's not being banned) because the Nativity is a hidden truth that needs to be revealed to us.

The circumstances of the birth of Jesus look scandalous. Mary's situation and Joseph staying by her only come about because what God is doing is revealed to them. A baby lying in a manger looks like a poor kid with a tough start in life and a tough life ahead, but the shepherds' message and our perspective now is because the angels revealed what was really going on. Much later in the house in Bethlehem, when the Magi arrive fol-

lowing a star and expecting the reigning king to have had a son, it is the prophet Micah who reveals what is going on. So the Magi find and rejoice while Herod plots and kills. The mystery of the Incarnation is that Jesus is God with us – but not as we expect! Jesus didn't beam down as a superman ready for action but was born, weak and helpless, to live and rescue us from the world and the lives we have made.

That rescue happened on the cross, which also has to be revealed to us. We walk by faith and not by sight! Hidden under Jesus' death is our life, now and forever, with God!

This mystery is not only in the past or when Jesus reappears for the world to see, but it is part of our lives right now as Jesus' disciples meet him 'in, with and under' bread and wine. Jesus tells us that this is his body and blood – and a person is where their body and blood are – and thus all Divine Services are Christ masses. This truth is revealed to us, received in faith, that Jesus who was born for us, died, rose again and ascended for us, keeps coming under our roof to live with us and help us live the life he has given to us.

That is the mystery of Christmas – and the story never gets old! Of course, it can be hard to see, back then and today. That is why the followers of Jesus share and reveal the *real* story, so that the world can know that God is with people and they do not have to be afraid!



GIOVANNI BELLINI (c. 1430–1516), PRESENTATION AT THE TEMPLE (DETAIL)

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'Simeon in the Temple'
(detail)

Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74)

Source: www.theleidencollection.com

Peace in Our Time

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word.

Many years ago, I heard a proud grandfather relate to a lecture hall full of students a conversation he had recently had with his 3-year-old granddaughter. It went something like this:

“Susie, What day is it tomorrow?”

“Sunday.”

“What do we do on Sunday?”

“Church.”

“Why do we go to church on Sunday?”

“Peace!”

We are once again living in a worse-than-restless time. A large-scale international war of aggression has broken out in Europe for the first time since the end of the second world war. Our TVs, radios, newspapers, computers, tablets and phones are all keeping us right up to date with the images and stories of misery and destruction, while politicians, journalists and experts speculate about the possibility of the war spreading beyond Ukraine.

It is when things are taken from us that we begin truly to appreciate them. Having enjoyed almost unbroken peace for over two generations, we had learned to take it for granted. War and conflict are things that inflict others – less civilised, less developed or just lesser people in far-away places – while we were supposed to have moved beyond them, to perpetual peace.

Not so, as it turns out. The same propensity to evil is alive and well in Europe just as much as anywhere else in this fallen world. And now we both crave the return of peace and are seemingly impotent in our efforts to establish it, while trying to avoid bringing about World War III or a nuclear Armageddon.

The reality is that two contrary forces inhabit every human society, through history and now. On the one hand, most people crave peace, security and prosperity for themselves. On the other hand, strife, violence and oppression are never far away. These two contradictory forces act on the lives of nations, societies, communities and indeed individuals, creating tension, insecurity and outbreaks of conflict.

Another war has broken out. But we know from experience as well as from the testimony of Scripture that there is always a war on, of which actual wars are only the most visible and terrible manifestation. St. Peter writes that the passions of our flesh, our sinful nature, wage war against our souls (1 Peter 2:11).

The war that tears at mankind, and wages inside each person, is ultimately a spiritual battle: sin waging war against the good and holy will of God. So long as the fallen world stands, there will be wars and rumours of wars on every level of human life.

To fight against war, God responded with the Gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). When Jesus was born, the angels sang of “peace among those with whom he is pleased” (Luke 2:14). On the eve of his death, Jesus promised, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27). After the resurrection, he greeted his disciples, “Peace be with you.” In fact, the word ‘peace’ appears in the New Testament exactly 100 times!

Jesus came to bring peace,
and that peace is given to us
when we draw near to Jesus

All of this brings us back to my lecturer’s little granddaughter. There was one more question and answer:

“Where do we find peace?”
“Jesus’ body and blood.”

She knew what is at the heart of the Christian faith: peace. Peace with God, which brings about peace with one another. In the Divine Service in particular, we are in the presence of Jesus, hearing his word, being filled by his Spirit, eating and drinking his body and blood. Jesus came to bring peace, and that peace is given to us when we draw near to Jesus. This is why we join our voices to that of blessed Simeon as we return from the Lord’s table: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ... for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” And as we prepare to depart the holy assembly, the minister of Christ de-

clares, “The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.”

As wars and conflicts rage around us, we are called by Jesus to be peacemakers: to pray for peace, and to contribute to the building of peace as we are able. But we also know that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and there will only be lasting peace once all creation has been brought under subjection to him who is the Prince of Peace.

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”



Rev. Tapani Simojoki,
Editor

Call for Material

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You can submit material for
consideration to the editor:

editor@tbl.lutheranchurch.org.uk

The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of our Lord

In Peace and Joy I Now Depart (LSB 938)

In peace and joy I now depart
Since God so wills it.
Serene and confident my heart;
Stillness fills it.
For the Lord has promised me
That death is but a slumber.

Christ Jesus brought this gift to me,
My faithful Saviour,
Whom You have made my eyes to
see
By Your favour.
Now I know He is my life,
My friend when I am dying.

You sent the people of the earth
Their great salvation;
Your invitation summons forth
Ev'ry nation
By Your holy, precious Word,
In ev'ry place resounding.

Christ is the hope and saving light
Of those in blindness;
He guides and comforts those in
night
By His kindness.
For Your people Israel
In Him find joy and glory.

*Text: Martin Luther (1483–1546). Tr. F. Samuel
Janzow (1913–2001), st. 1, alt; Christian Wor-
ship (1993), sts. 2–4, alt.*

The feast of the Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord falls on 2 February, the 40th day of Christmas. According to the Law of Moses, a woman would remain unclean for 40 days after giving birth to a male child, but “when the days of her purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering.” (Lev. 12:6)

St. Luke records in his gospel that, following the birth of Jesus, “when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses,” Joseph and Mary “brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22). While they were in the temple, Simeon took the infant Jesus in his arms and sang a song of praise to God for fulfilling the promise that “he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26).

This festival, also known as Candlemas (from the mediæval custom of blessing candles at the start of the service), has its origins probably in Jerusalem, no later than the fourth century, from where it spread to the rest of the church. Originally, its focus was exclusively on the Presentation of Christ, and the additional theme of the Purification of Mary was added only towards the end of the first millennium.

Even today, many Lutheran churches have the custom of blessing the candles intended for use in the coming year at the start of the Candlemas service. These candles proclaim the presence of Christ—the light of the world, the light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel—in the midst of the

The central theme is the hope of salvation brought by Jesus Christ to the whole world.

worshipping congregation, and especially in His body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar.

The same theme of light is also prominent in ‘Simeon in the Temple’, part of which forms the cover of this issue of *The British Lutheran*. The Flemish artist Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–74) bathes the aged Simeon praising God in a shaft of light falling on the infant Jesus, while Joseph and Mary, together with other bystanders, watch from the shadows.

This Song of Simeon has entered the Christian liturgy as the Nunc Dimittis (the opening words of the song in Latin), which is sung universally as part of the night office of Compline and in the funeral liturgy, and in many parts of the Lutheran church as the post-Communion canticle as well.

In the early years of the Reformation, Martin Luther led efforts to enable Christian congregations to sing the songs of the Church in their own tongue. Only a minority of boys had the opportunity to learn Latin at school, yet until the Reformation, the liturgy, including all the canticles and

the majority of hymns, was sung in Latin.

It was Luther himself who penned a German paraphrase of the Nunc Dimittis, ‘In Peace and Joy I Now Depart’. His version is ‘funereal’ in the sense that it interprets Simeon’s “departing in peace” as death. However, the central theme is not the presence of death, but the hope of salvation brought by Jesus Christ to the whole world, present in His word.

Luther’s hymn became one of the core hymns of the Lutheran church, present in virtually every Lutheran hymnal, and set to music by almost every major German composer of church music.



‘In Peace and Joy I Now Depart’ in a 1545 Lutheran hymnal

O Blessed, Counter-Intuitive Mary

Rev. Dr. Didzis Stilve,

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Borehamwood & St. Andrew's Lutheran Church, Ruislip



It is quite striking how often God's Word and His acts go against our deepest intuition, against "how things really should work". And yet, this is exactly the way God acts – ignoring our intuition or the "inner voice" or "the sixth sense". Thus, in the account of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth, Mary is called blessed not because she relied upon her intuition and common sense, but because "she believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Luke 1:45). To be sure, she had some questions, like "How will this be, since I am a virgin?". But at the end she was able to rely on the Word that came from God more than on what her intuition told her. For this, Mary is a great example to all of us, indeed, to the whole Church.

G. E. Veith, in his wonderful book, *The Spirituality of the Cross*, lists three major intuitive ways people have of approaching God or the divine: moralism, speculation and mysticism. Although all three seemingly make sense, he nevertheless argues that all three can be detrimental to one's spiritual life. Veith writes:

Moralism ... involves a host of impossibilities and contradictions. People just do not – and, it seems, cannot – live up to their own high standards ... Sometimes, our very at-

tempts at moral perfection lead us to immoral actions, as when our strict rules cause us to hate, coerce, and feel superior to others. Another problem inherent to moralism is that righteousness has a way of twisting itself into self-righteousness, a feeling of pride and superiority that undoes the virtue that is achieved... It seems that the very effort to be moralistic tends to breed harshness, pride, and even cruelty, hardly signs of being "a good person".

Mary was blessed because
she believed in what
God had spoken

Speculation – yet another intuitive way. It is the assumption that knowledge is the key to spiritual fulfilment. If we only knew the truth, if we could only find the key to understanding the complexities of life, if only we attained the right knowledge, then we would be content...However, the human mind is just not big enough to take in the whole of existence. Many answers have been offered, but they keep changing, as the history of human thought shows ... Ideologies that claim to account for everything

have often become the pretext for power plays, deception, and oppression.

Mysticism is one of the most popular ways of spiritual exercise and is described as attaining the ecstatic experience of becoming one with God... Even Christian mystical experience can veer close to claiming supernatural power, from divine inspiration, with the Holy Spirit speaking to the person directly, to the power to work miracles... Mysticism can come dangerously close to the serpent's primal temptation: "You will be like God" (Genesis 3:5).

Now, how about us? Are we tempted to lean towards any of those three "intuitive ways"? Or do we, like Mary, counter-intuitively "believe that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to us from the Lord?"

There is nothing in our intuition that can inform, or confirm for, us that there ever will be a resurrection, for example. Or, that our sins are forgiven, for that matter, or that it is the very

body and very blood of Jesus that we are receiving in the Sacrament of the Altar. All that rests on God's Word and promises alone.

There is one more thing that we can learn from Mary. When Elizabeth said that Mary was blessed because she believed in what God had spoken, Mary also spoke in response. "My soul magnifies the Lord ... my spirit rejoices". Here it also should be noted that speaking about God and His promises is a quite counter-intuitive thing. It does not seem to come naturally to any of us. Now, what if (maybe for the first time in our lives) we could act counter-intuitively in this regard and try to find ways to start speaking about God and his wonderful promises to the culture that surrounds us, for instance? Perhaps we could reflect something similar in our mission efforts to what Gimli the dwarf from the "Lord of the Rings" puts so counter-intuitively but also encouragingly: "Certainty of death, small chance of success... What are we waiting for?"



ELCE News

67th Annual Synod of the ELCE

*The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped;
my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. (Psalm 28:7)*

Delegates of the congregations of the ELCE met virtually online on 19–20 November 2021 to receive reports from the boards and committees of the church and from each congregation; to hold the Annual General Meeting of the ELCE Trust Ltd., to elect office holders, and to make decisions concerning the future of the ELCE.

Synod Elections

The following persons were elected to office:

Executive Council: Lay Councillor – Mrs Mairi Cowie;

Pastoral Councillor – Rev. Jaime Kriger

Committee on Worship: Rev. Wade Bellesbach

Congregational Life Committee: Mr Jonathan Flor

Nominations Committee: Mr. Paul Hill

Board for Overseas Mission: Mrs Helena Simons, Rev. Dr Arno Bessel

Board for Youth: Ms Dipuo Mataboge, Mr Daniel Wan

Salary Review Committee: Rev. Claudio Flor

Delegates elected the following people nominated by the Barnes Conference:

Commission on Theological and Social Concerns: Mr Aleksander

Bieriezjanczuk, Rev. Dr Arno Bessel

ELCE Restructure

Resolution 2 was presented to Synod as the final, missing piece of the Church Order (the bylaws of the ELCE under the new constitution):

Whereas

The Church Order with caveats was adopted by Synod (Resolution 3 of Synod on 22nd May 2021) and one of those caveats related to Article VII Synod not being adopted at that time; and having voted on the synodical franchise

Be it resolved that:

Article VII Synod of the Church Order be adopted.

The Executive Council presented a series of different options as to how the right to vote at Synod may be distributed. Following extensive discussions, a series of votes took place, at the end of which a new system of franchise was adopted by a narrow majority.

Since the process is a change in the church's constitution, it involves "cooling-off period", where members congregations have a right to dissent from the resolution of Synod. If more than 25% of congregations write to the Secretary within the 28 days, the resolution lapses.

In this case, the threshold was met, as a result of which Article VII remains unadopted. There was an additional discussion day on 15 January– in the place of the planned Etraordinary Synod – held online to seek greater mutual understanding and consensus. The matter will next voted on at the Extraordinary Synod on 30 April.



The virtual 'floor' of the Synod, with a snapshot of some of the delegates.

COVID Regulations Lifted – Response from the Executive Council

The current government guidance is that legal restrictions in relation to COVID-19 have been lifted.

We must now balance our legal responsibility to protect all who attend worship and other activities within our buildings (including members, visitors and pastors) from health and safety risks (such as communicable illnesses like COVID-19) with the instruction that no COVID-19 restrictions apply.

Like any community, we have a range of anxiety levels and pre-existing vulnerabilities to communicable diseases. While we follow government advice, we continue to recommend caution and considerate behaviour.

The Lord's Supper

Congregations are encouraged to discuss their return to pre-COVID-19 communion practices in a spirit of mutual Christian care. There are no longer any requirements that would hinder us from kneeling together at the altar to receive the Lord's Supper with the chalice.

Extraordinary Synod on 30 April

There will be an extraordinary meeting of Synod on 30 April at Resurrection Lutheran Church, Cambridge. The key items of business include the following:

- Article VII ('Synod') of the Church Order (see previous page)
- A budget for the ELCE (2022–23)
- ELCE Financial Reports (2020–21)
- Model Congregational CIO [charity] Constitution
- Westfield House Constitution



Pastors and (some of) their families met for two and a half days in October for a Family Barnes Conference at High Lea Conference Centre, Herts., to worship, study, play and rest together.



Also in October, a group of teenagers from ELCE congregations spent a weekend in Cambridge at the first post-COVID youth rally. Generously hosted by Resurrection Lutheran Church and Westfield House, the weekend included punting on the River Cam, a treasure hunt around the city centre, Bible studies, helping



Punting on the River Cam

catalogue the Westfield House library, providing music for Sunday's Divine Service, and countless games of Irish Snap.



The youth rally participants outside King's College

Congregational News

The members of **Christ Lutheran Church**, Petts Wood, rejoiced in the Lord because on the 29th August, three members were confirmed into the Lutheran



Faith. Sean Daye, Iteka De Bessou, and Henrique von Mühlen confessed their faith in Jesus Christ and declared their desire to join Christ Lutheran Church. We pray for these faithful servants of Christ and for their families.

On Saturday 27th November, we opened our doors as the Christmas Fair returned! Having no idea whether anyone would attend, we went full speed ahead. Thankfully, some folks did come along, and we hope they had a good

time. It was wonderful to see our neighbours again, and to meet some new visitors to the Church.

Our regular Wednesday evening Vespers Services seamlessly transformed into Wednesday evening Advent Services. This Advent we studied Luke chapter 1 in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

On 3 October, **St. Peter's**, Plymouth, celebrated Overseas Missions Sunday, remembering God's work through the Gospel and the Sacraments in the lives of



people. The means of grace have been brought to this country many years ago from overseas. So today we harvest the fruits God Holy Spirit produces. On that Sunday, with immense joy and thanksgiving, the twins Anthony and Chloe were added to the family

of faith through Holy Baptism. Mum Brenda and grandma Vanda are Brazilians living in Plymouth.

Furthermore, on the same Sunday, St. Peter's welcomed with joy and thanksgiving new adult members: Roy Barlow and the couple Wally & Lynne Walton. Roy has been attending the church for three years already, and Wally & Lynne started to come to services a few months ago this year. All three of them feel at home at St. Peter's and are regular attendees in services and Bible studies as well as active participants in the work of the congregation.

Members of **St. Columba Lutheran Church**, East Kilbride, give thanks to the



New members Anna, Agnese and Helen at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Fareham (11 November 2021)

Lord for His steadfast care and blessings throughout this past year of grace, and we look forward to His plans in the year to come.

As with many of our brother and sisters in the ELCE, we gathered online for fellowship and worship at the start of the year. Although disappointed and frustrated with lockdowns and restrictions, we found it even more difficult that we could not gather in-person for the preaching of the Gospel and the reception of the Sacrament. Nevertheless, the Lord supported and enriched us throughout this time as we came together for prayer, hymn-singing, and the preaching of the Gospel.

Although thankful for these opportunities, we were even more grateful to celebrate our Lord's Resurrection together and in-person. From Easter Sunday forward, we resumed in-person public services at St Columba. This has been a great blessing! Pastor Bellesbach continues to take services twice a month in addition to services in St Andrews and Pastor Ehlers joins us each month for a Thursday evening service.

In addition to returning to public worship, we have continued our online Tuesday and Thursday devotions with our brothers and sisters at Christ Church in Petts Wood. Pastor Ehlers and Pastor Bellesbach lead brief devotions that reflect on the selected readings for the evening. This has been a joy and we look forward to continuing to come together for prayer in this way.

Throughout the past year, we have welcomed new friends for worship, catechesis, and confirmation in East Kilbride and St Andrews. Students and families from Glasgow, Stirling, Edinburgh, Dundee, and St Andrews join as they are able. We also look forward to confirmations in the spring when new candidates have completed instruction.

Redeemer Lutheran Church, Harlow, continues to move between in-person-in-building and online activities – worship services, Bible Studies, congregational meetings, and Advent and Christmas events – and it is lovely to see more and more people attending. A number of the hall users have returned to the church which is lovely to see. The congregation is particularly pleased to be able to support the work of Cocaine Anonymous who use the hall and whose services have been in high demand this past year.

Good Shepherd, Coventry, is still in the midst of earthworks and a building site as the redevelopment of part of their land is well underway. The congregation is currently busy with three projects – refurbishing of the current church, the purchase of a second house, and discussing the shape of the pastoral presence in the Midlands.

Ascension, Brandon, is still reaching out to the US Air Force and recently representatives from Ascension, together with other local congregations which support military personnel, were invited on RAF Lakenheath for a ‘Thank You and Appreciation Day’. It was a good opportunity to network. Ascension was also pleased that Pastor George received his Queen’s Commission as a Sea Cadet Chaplain (and Royal Naval Reservist) recently. It was an unexpected moment as part of a visit to the Mildenhall and Newmarket Sea Cadets by the Area Officer, Cdr De La Mare (RN).

**Would you like to learn more about the foundations of
Lutheran theology and the confessional documents to
which the Lutheran Church subscribes?**

**Does your congregation wish to equip members
for service in the Church?**

If you answered ‘Yes’ to either of these questions, then the Westfield House Certificate in Lutheran Ministry, designed for Lutheran ministerial and diaconal candidates, church workers and laity, may be for you!

Westfield House is offering ELCE members the opportunity to undertake an online course of study focused on a close reading of the Lutheran Confessions as the foundational text for introducing the history of Christian doctrine, Reformation history and a Lutheran approach to systematic theology, spirituality and practice. The Certificate can be completed in one academic year or spread out over two or more years. We pray that this programme will be a blessing to the ELCE, our partner church bodies and especially all who wish to learn more about the basis of our Lutheran teaching.

*For further information please contact Cyndy Lumley, Principal of
Westfield House, at principal@westfield.cam.ac.uk*

I Have Seen The Devil & His Works

Paul Hill

Christ Lutheran Church, Petts Wood



I am retired now and have been for three years. For those readers who don't know me, I worked at *The Daily Telegraph* as Foreign Desk Manager for 37 years. Boris Johnson used to report as Brussels Correspondent to me (no, he is not the Devil in this story!). I was made redundant aged 54, and I needed to work, so I ended up as a Station Reception Officer (SRO) at Bromley Police Station in Kent.

And that is where I met the Devil. In fact, I met him many times and in many guises during the 10 years I spent at the nick's front counter. Hopefully, most of you will have never had the need to go to a Police Station, but if you do – as a victim – the first person you meet will be at the front counter. You will probably be unhappy because something bad has happened to you: your wallet has been stolen, you've been burgled, you have been thumped in a fight, your car has been in a prang or vandalised, your partner has slobbered you with a frying pan, you have been sexually assaulted, your neighbour has kicked your fence down in a 6-inch border dispute ...

the list, in truth, is endless.

During my time there I personally took just under 2,500 crime reports and helped many, many people as best I could. A few victims were suicidal from complete and utter despair, most were angry, some in physical pain (had quite a few dripping blood, telling me their story) and some would be fatalistic and resigned to whatever had happened to them.

The true God is always in control of even the smallest twists and turns in our lives

As a newsman I found their stories riveting, and my keyboard would take a hammering as I wrote the crime report while asking the victim relevant questions. My report would then be assigned to a Police Officer and I could focus on the next poor soul tottering into the nick.

But then there is the other side – the darker side – of people that I dealt with. The suspects themselves: The murderers (the youngest I met was 16), the paedophiles – lots of them –, the violent thugs,

the burglars, the thieves, the druggies, the mentally disturbed, domestic abusers, dangerous drivers ... that list too sometimes seemed endless. They swore at you with lots of colourful expletives because the SRO was the first person they had to deal with, even though we are civilians.

They all ended up at the front counter at some time or other, even if it was on the way to the cells. Quite a few people who did not want to be seen during the day would come into the nick in the small hours of the morning: wanted suspects who came to give themselves up, paedophiles who had to sign the register every week or month.

Now this is where the Devil is in the detail. I looked at these people, I spoke with them, I got to know the “regulars” quite well. Some even liked me. One or two tried to attack me (yay for armoured glass), one I tried to punch (boo for armoured glass), and I got to know their background and personalities quite well. I was nervous and even frightened by some of them and others didn’t worry me in the slightest. I had even had some of them arrested on occasion and met them afterwards for a natter.

But, my word, they were Dark Souls indeed. I have learned a lot in my newsman life, dealing with many disasters: assassinations; earthquakes; wars; plane, train and coach crashes all around the

world – from the safety of my London desk. But it was all second-hand. People who had been there would report to me of what they had seen. News agencies would be telling a tale of woe. But now, I was dealing with it at first-hand. Both suspects & their victims.

I was dealing with a lot of evil people. Some are like that out there. Simply evil. They thrive on it. They literally neither know nor care about any other way of life. Burglars burgle like you or I go shopping. It is what they do. Addicts care about nothing beyond their next “fix”. Who they rob and steal from or hurt to get money for that fix does not come into any equation at all.

The Devil is indeed out there, working his evil through these people, causing harm, mischief and pain.

So how did I cope with all this gloom and doom? One thing did rattle my cage long term – the burglars. About a year into the job I installed an alarm at home. I was getting to the point where any creak in the house would have me up and about turning lights on. I slept better immediately after that.

But I saw and lived with the good people in this world. The people who work together to beat the devil in all our lives. Those with Christ in their hearts and lives. I saw so much darkness every day, but I would love the light that worshipping brings. The hope for mankind

through our Risen Saviour. I so looked forward to my own “fix” on a Sunday at Christ Church (I still do) where the Word is proclaimed, Communion is shared & Christ crushes the evil works of the Devil. I wonder sometimes if I had not had that balance in my personal life whether I would have been able to do those ten years without some sort of damage to my own soul.

Looking back, I am glad I did it. I saved at least one person from suicide (they told me I had) and I spent many hours

talking quietly to victims helping them rebuild some confidence so perhaps they would not be victims again. Legally, I was not allowed to proclaim Christ’s message, but let’s just say I pointed them in a certain direction when no-one was around.

On a lighter note, in one of the briefest visits ever to the nick, a man came in and I said, “How can I help you?” He replied, “I don’t know.” Then simply spun on his heel and walked out again.

I like being retired.

NEWS FROM THE LUTHERAN WORLD

Sources: www.lhpk.fi; www.seurakuntalainen.fi; www.ilc-online.org

Lutheran Bishop and Christian MP Acquitted in Landmark Trial

Helsinki District Court dismissed all charges against Dr. Päivi Räsänen MP and bishop Juhana Pohjola. The judges’ unanimous ruling was released on 30 March 2022. Räsänen and Pohjola had been charged with incitement against a protected group, “hate speech” (see the October 2021 issue of *The British Lutheran*).

Following the verdict, Pohjola commented, “The District Court’s decision was to be expected. This is a

victory not only for us, but for freedom of speech and religion in Finland and beyond. In seeking to criminalize Christian teachings on sexuality, the prosecution cast a shadow of fear over



Bishop Pohjola and Dr. Räsänen outside the courtroom. Photo credit: lhpk.fi

society. It was important to receive a strong signal from the District Court defending our fundamental rights as citizens and as Christians. We have always denounced defamatory speech. On the contrary, we have taught the concept of humanity and marriage in accord with natural law and the Bible. This is what we have taught and will always preach as a Church, both in private and in public.”

Räsänen expressed gratitude for the opportunity the lengthy legal process afforded her to go give witness to fundamental Christian teachings both in police interviews and in the courtroom. “It has been an honour to defend the freedoms of speech and religion. It is significant that this is the first time that a court has dealt with the question of whether one is permitted to agree with the Bible!”

The trial has received a lot of attention both at home and abroad. There have been many expressions of support, both privately and publicly, throughout the process.

“I would like to thank all of those who have provided support and encouragement during this long process,” bishop Pohjola said. “There has been a tremendous outpouring of intercession from all around the world. Ultimately, this a spiritual battle and a matter concerning the Gospel of Christ.”

The prosecutor has the right to appeal the decision the Court of Appeal, so the decision of the District Court is not yet final.

Final Report of Lutheran—Roman Catholic Dialogue Released

The final report on conversations between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the International Lutheran Council (ILC, of which the ELCE is a member) was published in November 2021.

The five-year informal dialogue began in 2014 when a working group was organized by the PCPCU and the ILC.

The ILC will discuss the results of the informal dialogue at its 2022 World Conference, after which next steps will be considered in co-ordination with the PCPCU.

The final report appears in Volume 33 (2021) of *Lutheran Theological Review*, a journal produced by the seminaries of Lutheran Church—Canada. German, Spanish, and Portuguese translations will be released at a later date. A digital copy can be obtained from the ILC website: www.ilc-online.org.

The Lutheran Church of Nigeria Re-elects Archbishop

The Lutheran Church of Nigeria (LCN) has re-elected the Rev. Dr. Christian Ekong to another five-year term as the Archbishop and President of the Church. Dr. Ekong has served as leader of LCN since 2009.

The election was held at LCN’s 42nd Synodical Council on 26–28 November 2021. The 2021 Council also elected the Rt. Rev. Raphael Aju as Vice President of the LCN, as well as members for the church’s Board of Directors.

In January, 2022, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria held its Synodical Convention, where the LCN consecrated four new bishops, ordained more than 40 new pastors, and certified 19 deaconesses for service in the church. The convention also saw the installation of officers elected during the Synodical Council in November 2021.

LCN Archbishop Christian Ekong and Bishop Raphael Aju after the 2021 election.



Guatemalan Lutherans Mourn Death of Former President

Guatemalan Lutherans are mourning the death from COVID-19 of Rev. Dr. Abdiel Orozco Aguirre, former president of the Lutheran Church in Guatemala (Iglesia Luterana en Guatemala – ILG). Dr. Orozco succumbed to COVID-19 on 22 January 2021.

Dr. Orozco came to the ministry later in life, having spent many years as a medical doctor and immunohaematologist. He served as the head of Guatemala’s national network of blood banks for more than a decade.

The son of a Presbyterian minister, Dr. Orozco was introduced to the Lu-

theran faith while studying for a doctorate in the USA.

Dr. Orozco began studies for the pastoral ministry a number of years later in 2007, and was

ordained into the pastoral ministry in 2012. In 2015, he was elected president of the ILG, a position to which he was reelected in 2017. He completed his tenure as ILG president in 2019.

In addition to serving two terms as president of the ILG, Dr. Orozco also served as National Director for the Lutheran Centre for Theological Studies.

Latvian Lutheran Church Joins International Lutheran Council

The International Lutheran Council has welcomed the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia (LELB) into observer membership. As reported in the previous issue of *The British Lutheran*, LELB had applied for membership by an overwhelming majority of votes at its 28th Synod in August 2021. The membership was accepted by ILC’s Board of Directors. LELB’s application for full membership will be discussed at the ILC’s next World Conference, which will be held on 13–16 September 2022 in Kenya.



Map of ELCE Congregations



Congregation	Address	Service Time
Ascension Lutheran Church	Brandon Methodist Church, London Road, Brandon, Suffolk, IP27 OEL	5 pm on the 1 st Sunday of the month, and 9 am on every other Sunday
Brighton Lutheran Mission	Holland Road Baptist Church, 65-71 Holland Road, Hove, BN3 1JN	3.30 pm on 1st Sunday of the month
Bristol Lutheran Mission	Contact St. Peter's Lutheran Church for details	
Cheltenham Lutheran Mission	Contact Luther-Tyndale Memorial Church for details	
Christ Lutheran Church	227 Poverest Road, Orpington, BR5 1RD	10.30 am
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church	49 Eastern Green Road, Coventry, CV5 7LG	4 pm on the 2 nd & 4 th Sunday of the month
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church	53 Antill Road, Tottenham, London, N15 4AR	11 am
Ipswich Lutheran Mission	St. Luke's Church, 78 Cliff Lane, Ipswich, IP3 0PJ	6 pm on the 3 rd Sunday of the month
Luther-Tyndale Memorial Church	9 Leighton Crescent, Kentish Town, London, NW5 2Q	10 am
Our Saviour Lutheran Church	10th Fareham Scout Hall, 20B Highlands Road, Fareham, PO16 7XN	10:30 am
Oxford Lutheran Mission	Marston United Reformed Church, 352 Marston Road, Marston, Oxford, OX3 0JB	4:30 pm on 2 nd & 4 th Sunday of the month
Rainham Lutheran Mission	Wigmore Evangelical Free Church, Durham Road, Rainham, Kent, ME8 0JN	10:30 am
Redeemer Lutheran Church	22 Tawneys Road, Harlow CM18 6QS	11 am
Resurrection Lutheran Church.	25 Westfield Lane, Cambridge, CB4 3QS	11 am
St Andrew's Lutheran Church	Whitby Road, Ruislip, Middlesex, HA4 9DY	11:30 am
St Columba Lutheran Church	151 Westwood Hill, East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 8QA	11 am
St David Lutheran Church	St. Fagans Road, Fairwater, Cardiff, CF5 3EU	11 am Last Sunday of the month: 6 pm (Holy Communion)
St Paul's Lutheran Church	St. Paul's Close, Cranes Way, Borehamwood, Hertfordshire, WD6 2DB	9.30 am
St Peter's Lutheran Church	21 Larkham Lane, Plympton, Plymouth PL7 4PG	11 am
St Timothy's Lutheran Mission	Queen Alexandra Road, Sunderland, SR2 9AA	11 am on the 1 st & 3 rd Saturday of the month

Half a Century of God's Faithfulness

Sylvia Guthrig

St. Peter's Lutheran Church Plymouth

I was fortunate to be brought up as a Christian from early childhood, not in a forceful way but gently being led by my parents who both attended the Anglican Church all through the war and for the rest of their lives. I joined my father in the choir when I was 11. I married a young man whom I met through the church in 1953. Two years later we moved to Devon, ending up in Plympton in 1955 where we went to the parish church of St Mary. It was not the friendly place we had left behind and, although I became a Sunday school teacher for many years, I never really felt at home.

It took our son Neil, who wanted to try out the youth club at the unknown Lutheran Church, to send us to a service there to ascertain that it was not some cranky American cult church. It was certainly different but very welcoming, although it did not sit easily with me as a young woman that women had no vote and could not hold office. Despite this, I found its teachings very much in tune with my own, and the people welcomed us as a family. We soon found ourselves drawn into life at St Peter's, despite the pastor telling me that he thought I should go back to St Mary's. I did not. A new pastor came, and soon Ian and I were accepted into the congregation. St Peter's had a great influence on our lives;



we once more had a proper church home where we could worship our Saviour and listen to the True Word in like company.

Of course things changed over the years: women got the vote and as soon as women could take on positions in the church I became Stewardship chairman (and still am). I went back to singing in church in a small choir which has gone through "fat years and lean years" but still exists. I lent my help with the youth for more than 20 years and have spent many happy hours in St Peter's which has been the bedrock of my life for 50 years now. God gave me several small talents which I have tried to use in His service, for I was brought up in the belief that it is better to give than to receive.

Now I am almost ancient I am still enthusiastic for St Peter's Lutheran Church and the whole of the ELCE, and have been watching with interest the changes that will be put into place in the coming months. I shall continue to pray for God's Grace. His will be done.



From L to R:

Rosemary (Gowers), Ian, Sylvia & Neil (2008)