

Ecumenical Activity in Sweden

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William Kenney is the auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham; from 1987 to 2006 he was Catholic bishop of Stockholm.

There has been no established church in Sweden since 2000, but psychologically this fact hasn't completely worked itself through: many Lutherans still think of their church as established.

There are three aspects to current ecumenical activity in Sweden: theological, spiritual and diaconal.

The theological dialogue involves the Lutheran and Catholic Churches in Sweden and Finland. It is generally fruitful and successful, but I feel that the tackling of specifically ethical issues has been ducked. And indeed the solution of some dogmatic issues has left these ethical issues more prominent and intractable. In some areas, such as the sanctity of life, sexual ethics and medical ethics, the gap between the churches has been growing wider since 2005. This has had another effect, however, which might be quite positive: it has led to a real explosion of conversations between the Catholics and the Free Churches (for example the Pentecostals) who see eye to eye on certain ethical issues.

The area of spiritual dialogue is much more encouraging. There have been a lot of contacts amongst Lutherans, Catholics, Orthodox and Pentecostals. Ten years ago it would have been unthinkable to have joint services involving Orthodox and Pentecostals; now it happens frequently. The dialogue has also helped to overcome traditional hostility between Orthodox and Catholics. The Dominican sisters run classes in Zen meditation, and people of all churches and denominations take part.

In the area of diaconal work there is almost total cooperation amongst all the churches. All are united in opposition to the government's policy on immigration. The issues of climate change and poverty also galvanise all the churches. There are cooperative interdenominational efforts at local level on projects such as soup kitchens for the homeless.