

Experience of European Interchange: Keith Archer

Salford / Lünen

Contact between the Churches of Salford and this town in Germany's Ruhrgebiet began in 1980. A Lünen minister invited a group from Salford to come and explore the possibility of a link based on the civic twinning which had existed since 1966, and soon a partnership was formed by the Deanery of Salford and the Kirchenkreis Lünen. There have been attempts to broaden it out ecumenically on both sides, which has worked better here than in Germany. But it is fragile on both sides as it is based on the enthusiasm of particular individuals.

There have been youth exchanges and adult visits. The **youth exchanges** were good, but have now ceased, for a number of reasons. (a) It was possible to hold visits only during school holidays, but they are at different times in Salford and Lünen. (b) Funding was obtained from Brussels, but the conditions for it put heavy responsibilities on the leaders – and though the Germans had paid youth leaders who were able to bear them, it was not easy to find volunteers on the UK side who were able and willing to do so. (c) Recruiting was not easy, as England and Germany are less attractive destinations to young people that, say, Spain or Greece. (d) Churches in inner-city Salford tend to have few young people anyway.

The **adult visits**, which have been consistently successful, have been of 3 main kinds: *study visits*, *holidays* and *extravaganzas*.

The earliest *study visits* were simply opportunities for the two sides to get to know and learn about each other. Soon they began to focus on themes, so that activities were chosen in order to expose visitors to experiences germane to the chosen theme. Later on we became more ambitious and designed carefully structured study visits. Some topics were the History and Character of the German Church Scene; the History and Character of the English Church Scene; Europe as a Common Homeland; and Nationality and Identity. There is a proposal that Globalization should be addressed in the near future.

Some of these visits have been brilliant, but there is one snag. The heavier kind of study visit tends to exclude ordinary, working-class Church members, who can feel excluded by more 'intellectual' discussion than they are accustomed to. For the Germans there is the additional problem that in such visits discussion plays a big part, and since they tend to bear the language

burden, people who are less than confident in English tend to exclude themselves.

Holidays have been mainly visits in which activities were chosen more for their entertainment value than educational content. More recently a need for family holidays was identified – as practicalities had tended to exclude families with school-age children. There has therefore been a visit in each direction in which groups of families have lived together in self-catering residential accommodation, with programmes arranged and accompanied by people from the host town. The most recent was in a Church-run horse-riding centre not far from Lünen. This year's activity is a further variation on the holiday visit: an Anglo-German pilgrimage to Iona.

The first *extravaganza* was in 1991, when the Kirchentag took place in the Ruhrgebiet. A group of 55 Salford people took their contribution to the Kirchentag events in Lünen and Dortmund: a country dance group, a cricket team, fish & chips, and English beer. Later a Lünen parish brass band came to Salford. Another English group took various programme contributions to the *Landesgartenschau* in Lünen in 1996. In 2000 the Lünen churches contributed to Salford's Millennium Festival with the same brass band, a gospel choir, some jugglers and a group serving traditional *Reibekuchen*. Visits of this kind give the partnership a much higher profile – but they take a lot of organising.

The Churches' contribution to the civic twinning has been recognised by Salford City Council, which has given us help with visits, mainly in kind, and had us share, at its expense, in the recent celebrations of the twinning's 40th anniversary. It has also done much to enhance the Churches' credibility with the Council.

Anglo-German work on the EU

This developed out of the partnership with Lünen, in that when in 1994 I, as Manchester Diocese's European Officer, arranged a diocesan visit to the EU institutions in Brussels, it seemed natural to suggest to a Lünen friend, who had meanwhile moved to Dortmund, that a German group should share it with us. That's what happened – and after two more visits to Brussels it was decided to set up a project looking at the ground-level effects of EU membership in Manchester and Dortmund (reported in *Towards a People's Europe*, 1999). During this project it became apparent that the "people" in both cities included significant ethnic and religious minorities, and we decided to try and include some of them in our future work. The result was an Anglo-German, Christian-Muslim visit to Brussels, which was reported in *Unity in Diversity*, 2004.

This work has been complex but immensely stimulating, but there have been two main problems. In Manchester it has been difficult to slot it into the Anglican diocese's structures, as it crosses the boundaries drawn between domestic and international issues. It has been more easily recognised by Greater Manchester Churches Together, but denominational bodies are the ones with clout. In Dortmund it has fallen foul of the reorganisation of Church structures – with the result that, though there is energy here for this kind of work to continue, it is not clear who our partner in Germany should be.

Manchester / Tampere

This is a new partnership, founded under the Porvoo Agreement in 2004, between the Diocese of Manchester and the Lutheran Diocese of Tampere, Finland. It was kick-started and is now co-ordinated by a diocesan Workgroup, but its activities are increasingly decentralised. The two cathedrals have had a pretty regular interchange, though only so far of clergy. The Diocesan Board of Education has run group visits to Finnish confirmation camps for young confirmands. One pair of parishes are already exchanging visits, and another pairing is in the process of forming. Clergy from Tampere attended the recent Manchester clergy conference. A seminar on Contextual Theology involving academics and clergy from Manchester, Tampere and Strängnäs (Sweden) has been set up by a suffragan bishop. A formal Partnership Agreement has been signed by both bishops. The Bishop of Tampere helped consecrate two new Manchester suffragans. The Bishop of Manchester will help consecrate a new Bishop of Tampere. A priest from Tampere has spent part of his sabbatical in a parish team in Manchester.

The fact that this is a diocesan partnership, with the involvement of the top brass, has given it (compared to Salford / Lünen, above) a high profile. This, and the enthusiasm of the Finns, backed by financial resources far greater than ours, has enabled an amazing amount to happen in such a short time. But it could become so top-heavy with bishops and clergy that it means nothing for ordinary church members.

Compared with Manchester Diocese's other partnerships – with Namibia and Lahore – Tampere is different. Namibia and Lahore operate rather like Salford / Lünen, though on a much broader base – because their much heavier demand on resources needs a broader base to operate from. But Tampere costs relatively little: travel there is relatively cheap, and the Finnish Church needs no support. This being so, decentralisation is good, even essential, as insisting on control through the Workgroup could stifle all this initiative. But

there is a danger that excessive decentralisation could deprive the Workgroup of its reason to exist – and thus dissolve the partnership’s “diocesan” character.

There is another danger, but there seems little we can do about it. Because Finnish is such a difficult language, spoken by so few, the only people in England who speak it are Finns who have moved here. So the inequality of the language burden and the problems that causes are even greater with Finland than with Germany.