

Munich Partnership 6-14 September 2008

A party of 22 went to Germany this autumn, the largest in recent years. There was one retired minister (Rev WD Brown), one active minister (Rev Dr. Caroline Lockerbie), one candidate for the ministry in his final placement (Dr Glenn Chestnutt), and five elders (of whom Dr. Niall Martin and Miss Joyce Armstrong are members of Presbytery). The party also included members of churches and others interested in the topic, an exploration of the Reformation as it affected Scotland and Germany. Planning was the work of an all woman group supported by the Dekanat under the dynamic leadership of Mrs. Brigitte Boettger (instead of Elisabeth Soerensen who carried it forward for several years). They too came to events in substantial numbers, some of a notably younger age group than in the past. The Scottish side was co-ordinated by Suzette Bell (Secretary) and Niall Martin (Treasurer). Thanks are due to Mr James Byers, the presbytery Treasurer for help with dealing with the moneys involved.

Following the long established pattern there were two parts to the programme: a residential meeting away from Munich, followed by time in Munich staying with host families. The venue was a Protestant diaconal centre in the winter sports resort of Ruhpolding near Traunstein in the Bavarian Alps. The meat of the programme flowed from the realization of the Lutheran Germans that they did not really understand the Church of Scotland and its history very well. For this part of the programme everything of importance was translated, largely by Suzette Bell, Brigitte Boettger, Alice Schaupp, Irene Ronald, and Brigitte Wedderburn (Swiss wife of Professor Alexander Wedderburn).

Glenn Chestnutt's talk on John Knox and the Scottish Reformation was supplemented by Robert Kernohan's able survey of the varieties of Reformed Church round the world. Rev Joachim Funk's interesting account of the German Reformation gave us much to think about and at least one surprise: how close Calvin's thinking was to that of the Lutherans. Perhaps later Reformed Christians have taken at least as much from Zwingli as from Calvin. The doctrine of the Sacraments has always been a sore point between Lutherans and Reformed Christians, if a difficult one for lay Christians to understand. Rev Ghita Lenz-Lemberg did her best to unravel its complexities, while Caroline Lockerbie gave us an admirably clear account of Calvin's view on the subject. It was noted that since the Leuenberg agreement of the 1970s, Reformed and Lutheran Protestants have recognized that their disagreements on these matters are not sufficient to divide the church, or prevent intercommunion and the exchange of ministers.

Our stay in Ruhpolding was enlivened by a mountain top service conducted by Ghita Lenz-Lemberg and by the Georgiritt, the annual blessing of the horses of the area. Wonderfully groomed horses were being walked, ridden or pulling carriages. On the return journey to Munich we visited the Herrenchiemsee palace of mad King Ludwig of Bavaria.

The Munich programme included a reception at the Rathaus presided over by the vivacious representative of the Oberbuergermeister and attended by the British General Consul and the Dekanin Barbara Kittelberger, at which letters of greeting from the Lord Provost and the Moderator of Presbytery were read. There was also a visit to the spectacular new Jewish centre and synagogue; a discussion session on where the church should be going; and a visit to the Bavarian Parliament, where, sadly, Caroline Lockerbie tripped and broke her ankle in the debating chamber. She is now recovering at home after the attentions of surgeons in Munich and Edinburgh. We are particularly grateful for the assistance of Mrs. Anne Fletcher (a nurse) of South Leith.

The farewell session was in the Zacchaeuskirche in Groebenzell, a beautiful modern structure with a superb small organ. Dekanin Barbara Kittelberger presided over the celebration of the Sacrament, and Bill Brown preached, showing his outstanding gifts as a storyteller.

As in previous years we were all impressed by the warmth with which we were greeted by our hosts, and the depth of friendship shown. The Dekanat is involved in several other partnerships, both in Europe and in Africa, but there should be no doubt that ours enjoys the support of the Dekanin and of the city, both

financial and personal. Those of us who took part are fully committed to receiving a party from Munich in 2010, though we will hardly be able to entertain them as well as they looked after us. The host families in the Munich area, also more than did their share, and my wife Jenny and I are particularly grateful for the friendship of Sandy Wedderburn and Brigitte. They also give us a link to the small Reformed church in Munich. Particular thanks are also due to Suzette Bell. With her hard work, imagination and dedication she contributed so much in many ways.

Niall Martin