

## Malines Conversations Group's meeting in Finland

The annual meeting of Malines Conversations Group was held in April 2024 in Finland. The Malines Talks were originally conversations between Anglicans and Catholics held in Mechelen, Belgium, from 1921 to 1927. These discussions focused on the ecclesiastical unity between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church.

The current Malines Conversations Group, inspired by these historical debates, is an international group of Anglican and Roman Catholic theologians dedicated to dialogue and promoting Christian unity. The group meets annually in spring in alternately Catholic and Anglican venues, under the patronages of Cardinal Jozef De Kesel (Archbishop Emeritus of Mechelen-Brussels) and Rowan Williams (former Archbishop of Canterbury), as well as with the blessing of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and Lambeth Palace. One of the fruits of the group's work is the *Sorores in spe* document from 2021.

In Finland, the group discussed especially Christian anthropology, ordination and other issues related to the unity between Catholics and Anglicans. Group's working sessions were joined by a couple of academic guests, among others Dr. Alexandre Étaix, who presented aspects of S. John Chrysostome's vision on human's free will, and Prof. David Roef Nieuwejaers, who led the group in a philosophical exploration of the idea of an "ecclesiology of symbols".

Finland, where both Anglicans and Catholics are minority churches, provided a unique context and additional flavour to discussions with Lutheran and Orthodox overtones. Most of the work took place at the Sofia Cultural Centre in Vuosaari, Helsinki. In Sofia, encounters with Metropolitan Ambrosius (orth), bishop emerita Irja Askola (luth) and Bishop of Helsinki Raimo Goyarrola (cath) were related to the group's discussions. At the same time, the bishops opened up the ecclesiastical landscape of Finland to the group. In addition to Helsinki, the group visited two of Finland's oldest cities. The group's work was preceded by a visit in Porvoo, where the group attended the main Sunday mass of the Finnish parish, led by the vicar Pontus Salmi (luth) and parish staff. At the Mass, Anglican-Lutheran cooperation featured prominently. The group also met Bishop Bo-Göran Åstrand (luth) in Porvoo. The mass, concelebrated by Bishop David Hamid (ang), was a concrete demonstration of the ecclesiastical unity and ecumenical model made possible by the Porvoo Agreement.

The second place to visit was Turku towards the end of the work. In Turku, the group worked at the Turku Cathedral parish as guests of the Dean Aulikki Mäkinen (luth). In addition to visiting the cathedral, they also learned about the Finnish devotional tradition under the guidance of the cathedral parish staff and volunteers, and heard about the Lutheran-Anglican cooperation in the city.

The group had an official meeting with Archbishop of Turku and Finland Tapio Luoma. The Archbishop told the group about the ecumenical work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and current issues. The Malines Group, in turn, presented to the Archbishop the group's work, objectives, method and the fruits of the visit to Finland.

During these days, while together discussing, praying and sharing a common calling on the path of Christian unity, the Malines Conversations Group was left ruminating on the new perspectives that had emerged. I think that the group's work will also have something to give to the churches of Finland. The *Sorores in spe* document concludes by pointing out that when we walk together, we talk. When we talk, we also understand Christ's presence in the new (cf. Lk 24:13-27). When we talk openly about the experiences of our churches and our own experiences as Christians, we see that much has changed since the classical question setting of the Reformation.

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