

Episcopal and European churches seek to fortify ecumenical bonds

by [Matthew Davies](#)

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Utrecht, Netherlands, May 16 (ENInews)--Two Christian denominations in Europe -- one in full communion with the Episcopal Church and the other exploring the potential for such a relationship -- welcomed Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori for key talks and a keynote address.

Following a three-day visit to the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden, with which the Episcopal Church is hoping to formalize a full-communion partnership, Jefferts Schori traveled to Utrecht in the Netherlands to deliver the annual Quasimodo Lecture, hosted by the Old Catholic Church, Episcopal News Service reports.

The Episcopal Church entered into full communion with the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht on the basis of the Bonn Agreement in 1934. The Old Catholic Church consists of several national churches in Europe -- located in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Poland -- that could not accept the definition of papal infallibility presented by the first Vatican Council in 1870.

Archbishop Joris Vercammen of the Old Catholic Church told ENS that cooperation between his church, the Episcopal Church and the Church of England -- all of which have a presence in Europe -- is "essential for contributing to the gospel" on the continent.

"It's important to really enter into one another's theology and that is where you will really find more unity," he said. "Churches must collaborate more with one another, and that means tearing down boundaries, which is very possible between Anglicans and Old Catholics."

The Convocation of Episcopal

Churches in Europe serves a culturally diverse demographic of Christians in 20 parishes and missions throughout Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland.

"It's all about celebrating our full communion," Vercammen said, "and it's important that we have the opportunity to witness the life of the Episcopal Church. We are not that far away from each other and we are struggling with the same issues. Such a visit also provides an opportunity for solidarity."

But Vercammen acknowledged that more creativity is needed in dealing with overlapping jurisdictions. The Church of England's Diocese in Europe also includes parishes throughout the continent. "We need more concrete initiatives," such as common searches for church leadership to serve across jurisdictions, he said.

On 14 May in St. Gertrude's (Old Catholic) Cathedral complex in Utrecht, the presiding bishop delivered the Quasimodo Lecture, which explores issues of faith in contemporary society. The lecture historically has been held near the second Sunday of Easter, known in some traditions as Quasimodo Sunday, taking its name from the opening Latin text of a traditional Introit for the day, "Quasi modo geniti infants," meaning "As newborn babies."

In the lecture, Jefferts Schori said that a church catholic should be an open place where wrestling with difficult questions is encouraged and a place where old forms give way to new opportunities.

"The leadership of Christian bodies like ours, as well as all of the partners we can discover and nurture, are needed in order to transform the future," she said. "We must build networks for that transformed future, for that image of the reign of God ... That future is only possible with the catholicity of relationships beyond our current understanding. We must reach beyond the bounds that divide us for the love of God and for the love of our neighbors." She said that the rich diversity of relationships throughout ecumenical partnerships "make us so effective."

"[H]ealing

of the community is why we're here, not just the healing of the Christian community through our ecumenical work, but the healing of all creation," she said. "The constant peril of ecumenism is thinking too small. Ecumenism is basically housekeeping work, cleaning up the household, setting it in order so that it can be a home ... So we need to keep our focus on God's mission, that great dream of restored creation... The work of full communion is meant for fuller communion than you and I can envision."

Jefferts Schori visited

Uppsala to continue to explore ways that the U.S.-based Episcopal Church and the Church of Sweden can deepen its partnerships. "It's really about formalizing a relationship that already exists," the Rev. Thomas Ferguson, the Episcopal Church's ecumenical and interreligious relations officer, told Episcopal News Service. Ferguson was accompanying the presiding bishop.

Church of Sweden Archbishop Anders Wejryd has been invited to attend the next meeting of the Episcopal Church's General Convention in 2012, when it is hoped that a resolution on formalizing a full-communication relationship between the two churches will be acted on, Ferguson said.

Churches in full communion formally recognize that they share essential doctrines, including baptism and Eucharist; agree to accept the service of each other's clergy; and pledge to work together in evangelism and mission. The churches become interdependent while remaining autonomous.