

REPORT ON A TRIP TO SCANDINAVIA

October 1 – 16, 2001

and FR. GORAN BEIJER'S TRIP TO THE PROVINCE OF CHRIST THE KING

October 16 – 26, 2001

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October 1 – At the Philadelphia Airport I met a Roman Catholic priest from the Scranton, Pennsylvania area, near the Headquarters of the Polish National Catholic Church. He was on pilgrimage to Rome. I was going to Oslo, by way of London, in clericals, and the woman who sat next to me on the plane said, "Are we ever glad to see you on board tonight!" The flight was half-full.

Norway

October 2 – 3. Fr. Roald Flemestad picked me up at the airport in Oslo, and was my host in Norway. He is the Vicar General of the Nordic Catholic Church, under the Rt. Rev. Thaddeus Peplowski, Bishop of Buffalo for the Polish National Catholic Church. Fr. Flemestad has been a leader of the Church of Norway for many years, and is well known to Forward in Faith – Great Britain. I first met him at the Forward in Faith Assembly in London in 1999. The tour he gave of old Oslo, with its harbor, old fort and museums, was a lesson in the history and culture of Norway, Denmark and Sweden. After the tour I had dinner with him and his wife, Kerstin. The next day he took me with his newly-ordained deacon, Johannes Hvaal, to the Telemark district of mountainous central Norway, where we met a local schoolteacher, Tor Arne Morkved, and the Sandlands, an elderly couple who hosted a Mass in their tiny cedar-shingled chapel behind their house, on land which has been in their family for many centuries. That evening we returned to Oslo, for lengthy conversations in the Flemestad's home, a snack, and the evening news, dominated by September 11.

October 4. I flew to Alesund, on the coast, a fishing town of about 10,000, enriched now by North Sea oil, to visit Fr. Ottar Myrseth. We also first met in the Forward in Faith Assembly in London in 1999. After his day of teaching school, he showed me the parish church from which he resigned the previous month, so as to join the Nordic Catholic Church. He was ordained by Bishop Peplowski in September 2001. He gave up a great deal for his orthodox conviction; his large former parish, the Spjelkavik Menighet, where he had been vicar for many years, is graced with a beautiful new building. That evening he and his wife Reidun, their daughter Johanna and a Turkish exchange student and I dined and talked for many hours. We had Compline in a lovely Chapel which he built alongside his house. His advantage in setting up new work for the Nordic Catholic Church in Alesund is that he is so well known there, and further afield.

The Nordic Catholic Church has raised the flag. Their goal is to grow, and someday have a local bishop, and be an independent sister church to the Polish National Catholic Church, and to Forward in Faith – Great Britain, and to ourselves. They know they may fail in the face of daunting odds, but they are growing, and their clergy and lay leaders are truly first-rate, faithful, learned, energetic, competent and brave. The Norwegians, people of the mountains and sea, have a vibrant and independent spirit, and they also graciously accept help from other quarters. By the grace of God, the Nordic Catholic Church has a fighting chance of making it.

Sweden

October 5 – 7. A flight to Goteborg reunited me with Fr. Rolf and Kiki Pettersson. Fr. Pettersson serves as a curate in the town of Lilla Edet in the Fuxerna Kyrka, some 30 miles north of Goteborg, and as Dean of the Free Synod for the Goteborg area. Lilla Edet, by the way, now has five pizzerias, all run by Moroccans! The Petterssons have three children, and I wanted to help the boys, Erik and Mikael, with English, and their five year-old daughter, Karolina, had me read Gospel parables to her from her Swedish children's Bible, which is my level of Swedish. They invited their vicar and his wife, Fr. Roland Kristensson and Margrethe, for dinner. The next day there was a tour of nearby Trollhatten and a baptism at the Fuxerna Kyrka. On Sunday I concelebrated the Parish Eucharist with Fathers Roland and Rolf, after which we gathered for lunch at the Vicarage.

During our many talks, Fr. Rolf explained that the Free Synod can still rally large numbers – more than 2,000 in Linkoping last year, with Bishop Gartner presiding. But there are issues to face: (a) future episcopal oversight, (b) relationships of the groups that comprise the Free Synod and (c) building up the newly-forming *koinonias*, or eucharistic communities, such as the one Fr. Goran Beijer serves in Stockholm. These emerging parishes are entirely separate from the Church of Sweden.

October 8. Fr. Rolf took me to Bishop Bertil Gartner's home, just south of Goteborg. We spent over an hour and a half together, highlighting the Free Synod's plan initially to "look East." As the Free Synod turns itself into a missionary diocese, there are various possibilities for episcopal oversight. the Archbishop of Riga, in Latvia, or bishops either in St. Petersburg, Bylerus, England, the Province of Christ the King, or the Nordic Catholic Church. Bishop Gartner suggested that I should next come to Sweden in late July, because July 23 is the Pilgrimage to St. Bridget's Shrine in Vadstena, and Archbishop Vanags from Riga, and the Roman bishop in Sweden, are always there.

October 8 – 11. After thanking Bishop Gartner for his hospitality I took a train to Uppsala for a visit with with Fr. Folke Olofsson and his family. He is the Vicar of the Rasbo prastgard, a few miles north of Uppsala, in the country. I had stayed with the Olofssons in 1999. Fr. Folke is a pastor, a scholar, a theologian and a poet. His wife is a doctor, and they have five children. As with every Free Synod priest I have ever visited, Fr. Folke runs a model parish, evidenced by a great confirmation class of 14 teenagers. In Rasbo it would be nearly impossible to set up a *koinonia*. Here, in the country, the only church that could ever be recognized is the local parish

church, which has been there for at least 700 years. In commenting on this situation I said that a priest in his position can, for the next while, help the emerging koinonias in a great many ways.

This was made clear when he drove me to Uppsala, after lunch with the Sisters of the Holy Spirit in Alsike. In Uppsala, alongside the University, is the St. Anskar Center, a chaplaincy church which is an independent foundation. I related to Fr. Folke the possibility that our Province could perhaps someday open an embassy in Uppsala. The priest at St. Anskars, Fr. Patrick Lind, listened with interest to this idea. He is a member of the Society of St. Bridget. He could understand that, just as we used to send missionaries to deepest, darkest Africa, we could now do more in deepest, darkest Sweden for the re-evangelization of Europe. To Fr. Folke I said, "What possibilities there are, living alongside Europe's black hole! Just as Berkeley, California and Cambridge, Massachusetts are the black holes in North America for gnosticism (I argued for Cambridge being pre-eminent), Uppsala is Europe's black hole!" The opportunities there are staggering, for missionaries, scholars and apologists. The Rasbo prastgard makes a fine launching pad right into the heart of it.

And so, some Free Synod parishes will be able to work overtly and also under cover with an emerging missionary diocese, and help in ways that are unique to their locale. Even offering hospitality to orthodox clergy from abroad is a vitally important work to build up the networks needed in the Church today. In France, during the Nazi occupation, those merchants and businessmen who could not work directly with the Free French Resistance could offer valuable help from the sidelines. A sympathetic merchant might, for example, discreetly offer his attic for a radio transmitter, or his basement for a printing press. One thing is clear to the Free Synod: as they step forward in faith, help will come from many quarters, from both Europe and America and beyond.

England

October 11 – 13. Fr. Folke put me on a bus for the airport in Stockholm, and I flew to Gatwick for an evening at the nearby Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Crawley Down, an easy train ride the next morning to Victoria Station and the Forward in Faith Assembly. I was the only American to attend, and made a brief report to the International portion of the Assembly, basically saying that we are opening up conversations with the Nordic Catholic Church and the Free Synod, and that Fr. Goran Beijer was about to begin his tour of our Province.

Perhaps the single most important feature of this year's Forward in Faith meeting is the fact that every retired flying bishop has been replaced. Bishop Edwin Barnes, for example, is being replaced by Fr. Keith Newton, who will be consecrated this Spring. Attendance was good, at about 700 laity and clergy, and morale is high. St. Stephen's House and Mirfield are full of young ordinands. Fr. Geoffrey Kirk and Stephen Parkinson gave a lengthy blow by blow account of the ordeal at Christ Church, Accokeek, Maryland, for a preview of what could be unleashed upon them in the not distant future.

October 14 – 16. After the Assembly I returned with Fr. Geoffrey Neal to St. Peter's, Bushey

Heath (25 miles northwest of London) where Fr. Robbie Low is the Vicar (and his wife Sarah is editor of New Directions), and one of the members, Mrs. Ros Dolphin, most graciously put me up. During the weekend at St. Peter's, there would be time to visit with the Lows and other parishioners. Fr. Neal is helping out there part-time. That Sunday at St. Peter's, there must have been close to 300 people at three services, one of which was with the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. After the Liturgy, Fr. Neal, his wife Jenny, Ros and some others from St. Peter's adjourned to a tiny local pub for some of England's finest refreshments. The next day we visited three retired Church Army sisters.

United States

October 16 – 17. Fr. Goran Beijer and I flew to Philadelphia, on separate flights. That evening we relaxed in our new rectory in Phoenixville. In the morning we visited Fr. David Ousley and Beth at St. James the Less, where the church property is being contested by the Bishop of Pennsylvania. After seeing old colonial Philadelphia we visited a parishioner in the hospital and returned to Phoenixville for Evensong and Benediction. Professor William Tighe of Muhlenberg College and a contributor to Touchstone Magazine attended, and he and Fr. Beijer each gave a presentation on the crisis of the Church in Scandinavia and the Baltic republics, to a very attentive congregation of 35. Transfiguration provided the scenario of a new congregation that started in a home, went on to a school hall, and then bought a small, affordable property to grow in.

October 18 – 19. Fr. Beijer and I drove to Ansonia, Connecticut to be with Fr. Rocco Florenza and Fr. Robert Bader at the Church of the Resurrection. We had Evening Prayer together, a tour of the Pro-Cathedral, supper, and a long talk. Here Fr. Beijer could see a how a congregation that lost its property in a law-suit was miraculously given a new and better property by a primary donor. The next day Fr. Bader gave us a tour of northern Greenwich, which was glorious in Autumn foliage. We saw his rectory and church, a different example of how a congregation, the Church of the Advent, situates itself. We visited with Fr. Nicholas Voyadgis nearby, and drove into Manhattan for a visit to St. Patrick's Cathedral. That evening, at St. Mary Magdalene (renting space at Zion St. Mark's Lutheran Church, E. 84th Street) Fr. Beijer said Mass in Swedish and gave an address to an attentive congregation. Fr. Bader, Fr. Beijer and I had a late supper, for which a lady at an adjoining table paid our bill!

October 20. Fr. Beijer wanted to see Battery Park and the Statue of Liberty, and off to one side we saw ground zero, shockingly grim and surreal. He got on a train for Washington, D.C. to stay with Deacon Charles Nalls and his wife Elizabeth. I headed back for Phoenixville, for Sunday Mass at Transfiguration.

October 21. The Nalls took Fr. Beijer to Sunday Mass and a reception at the Episcopal Heritage Church, our Provincial Headquarters in Georgetown. It was very good that Fr. Beijer had time with Deacon Nalls, who is doing so much to help the Catholic cause in Accokeek. I drove to Georgetown that afternoon for the 5:00 p.m. Evensong at which Fr. Paul Sterne officiated, with a congregation of at least 35, which included Fr. Sam Edwards. Fr. Beijer gave his presentation downstairs during a grand reception which Fr. Sterne had organized. We then drove to the Plains, Virginia, 40 miles to the West, to stay with Brownie and Betty Wells, who are members of St. John the Baptist, Marshall.

October 22. Fr. Larry Morrison and his wife, Priscilla, at St. John the Baptist, hosted a well-attended breakfast for Fr. Beijer, after which we toured St. John the Baptist church, in the center of Marshall, for another example of how we have set up our congregations, in this case, by using an empty Episcopal church! Then I drove Fr. Beijer to Accokeek, Maryland for lunch with Fr. Edwards, his wife Kate, and two of their children. Winchester, Virginia, 95 miles to the northwest, was our destination for supper, with Fr. David Wastie, Deacon Raleigh Watson and his wife Patricia. Fr. Wastie celebrated Mass at St. Michael's, Fr. Beijer gave a talk, and there was a reception – all well attended. St. Michael's gave Fr. Beijer an example of how a congregation can buy a small unused church, restore it, and make it altogether charming. Two of its priests have come from the Church of England, Fr. Wastie and Fr. Neal.

October 23. Fr. Beijer flew early to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to All Saints Church, to have the day with Fr. Frederick Morrison and his family. Here Fr. Beijer could meet a another priest who years ago came from another country, England, to serve the Province. At All Saints one sees a congregation that started from scratch and grew to be an important parish in Tulsa, a large city.

October 24 – 26. The national Clericus of the Province was held at St. Joseph of Arimathea Seminary in Berkeley, California, and at St. Peter's Pro-Cathedral, nearby, in Oakland. The San Francisco Bay Area is the birthplace of our Province. Archbishop Morse was there as a parish priest and university chaplain in the 1950's and 60's, facing even then the truth of what was coming to the Church, because of new age clerics like James A. Pike, and because of what he saw in Sweden in those post-war years.

The Clericus gave Fr. Beijer the opportunity to meet many of our priests, deacons and bishops from around the United States, to have time to visit with Archbishop Morse, to see the Seminary and its extraordinary chapel, and to sit with two ordinands and the examining chaplains for an oral examination for the Diaconate. The final Pontifical Mass at St. Peters in Oakland allowed him to see a large parish church that walked away uncontested from the Diocese of California in 1977. During off-hours, Deacon Harold Minor drove Fr. Beijer and others on some sightseeing tours of San Francisco.

I know that Fr. Beijer enjoyed his trip and was grateful for the opportunity to see us up close, to stay in the homes of our people, and to meet our bishops and clergy. He, and his counterparts in Forward in Faith Great Britain, are interested in what we have set up with the Permanent Diaconate, for men who can be trained in the local parish, with the assumption that every parish can have one or two deacons in it. We in the Province are very grateful to him and his wife, and their family, for the time he so generously gave us.

Fr. Beijer will have gotten some important clues about the various ways new work can be established. He can see our track record, how we have organized our life, maintained our integrity, built a seminary, and grown. His stronger ties with us can only give him more insight and confidence in the task he faces. And our stronger ties with the faithful in Scandinavia and England will have their transforming effect on us too. Over time, the threads that now link us with the Scandinavians and the British can be turned into ropes, then cables, and then bridges.

May all our life together in the Holy Spirit reveal the unity and splendour of Christ's Church, to the glory of God, the Father Almighty. Amen.