

Aftenposten Article on St Edmund's Church – April 16 2014

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translated by Ingeborg Worheide.

Over 130 years have people of the 3rd largest Christian church gathered in Oslo to listen to sermons and hymns in English.

A GREAT CHURCH IN A LITTLE BUILDING

About 70-80 souls find their way every Sunday to the hidden away St Edmunds Church at Hammersborg.

It is typical expat church, a church for people living outside their English-speaking home-country, like England, Kenya, Australia or Bermuda. Common for them all is their tradition linked to the Anglican Church, which with its 80 millions of members are spread all over the British Commonwealth as the 3rd largest Church communion after the Catholic and the Orthodox Church.

Right now the parish prepares itself for Easter celebrations on Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday. Good Friday they have a joint service with the American Lutheran Church at Frogner.

"We are an international Church, only in our Choir sing people from 15 different countries", says the Ven Dr Brian Russell, priest, who after 21 years work as a priest in Birmingham is now serving 1750 members in the Anglican Chaplaincy in Norway.

His title Venerable, stands for that he himself is a priest working directly under the Archbishop as head of the Church of England. This means that the Parish in Norway and the office for Germany and Northern Europe is one of the 44 Dioceses in the world wide church.

"Oslo is our largest congregation, but we have also very active congregations in Stavanger, Bergen and Trondheim, also St Olaf's Church in Balestrand, our summer-church".

This Church was ready built in 1894 to commemorate Margareth Kvikne, an English woman missing her English liturgy and hymns, while she found herself as a hotel-owner's wife at Kviknes hotel, hosting the first mountain hikers in Norway at the end of the 19th century.

"A home away from home"

It is not the same to pray and sing in a different language, says Grace Steen from Kenya. She has lived in Norway for 6 years and found immediately "a home away from home" in St Edmund.

The same feels Sigrid Kvaal, being in the Church of England, when she was a student in London in the 70ties. "I felt there was more room in the Church of England than in the Norwegian Church, therefore I choose to come here, after I moved back to Norway. This is an open Church where it is easy to feel home, she explains.

Here we have Ambassadors and beggars taking communion, here you can meet wealthy business people, scientists and poor students while they attend choir practice or bible studies and the children gather at Sunday School. This is a church where the British come together for Family celebrations like baptism, weddings or funerals. And we try to give some musical offerings while having organ-concerts".

The Anglican Church has the ability to tolerate various traditions, from extreme conservative churches in Africa to the English state Church, Church of England, accepting theologically uncertain views, when it comes to marriage and blessings of people with the same sex.

Women have been accepted as priests in the church for many years. 40% of all priests are women, but first in the autumn one expects to have the first female bishop.

Henry VIII

Celibacy and remarriage has of course never played a role in the church after the break with the Catholic Church in 1530. The son-less Henry the 8th wished to divorce from his wife Catherine of Aragon and to remarry one of his court ladies Anne of Boleyn. The Royal fight against the Pope lead to the English reformation in a different way than on the European continent. The monarchs had since the title Defender of the truth because of their defence of the protestant church against Catholicism. Queen Elizabeth is the head of the Church, and on English coins the "truth defender" is imprinted – F.D. – fidei defensor.

At the same time when the Catholic Church elected their new spiritual leader, Pope Francis, the Church of England got a new Archbishop of Canterbury, where since the reformation the main seat lays: the most important place for belief and theology.

While Pope Francis became so to speak popular over night, Justin Welby is an unknown figure to people outside the Anglican Church.

But also his was a radical election, for the first time the Church elected a spiritual leader, who also had an earlier career as businessman and here many years in the oil industry.

He left his worldly career for a spiritual one after his daughter's death.

"He is our first Archbishop who has a worldly career education", says the Venerable Dr Brian Russell.

He has known Justin Welby since he was ordained into priesthood in 1993.

Into his office he brings a different type of understanding and knowledge, he masters also the business requests and he is very engaged in ethic standards concerning all parts of life".

His work in the oil industry brought him and his family of course to Stavanger.

He said that he is still including the city in his prayers.

Picture on the left:

There is often a full Church and those coming in the last second, have to sit at the children's table. – We are so happy and grateful to come to this church", say Nigerian Samson and Beauty Okeke, who brought their children Goodness, Favour and Angel with them.

Main picture:

Children are always creating a lively atmosphere in St Edmund's, exactly what my wish is for the congregation, says priest Brian Russell.

Picture on the right, above:

St Edmund's church lies a little bit back from the road amongst the big buildings at Hammersborg. The Church has served Brits and English-speaking people in the Capital for more than 130 years.

Picture on the right, below:

In the crypt below the church children during the service are gathered for Sunday-School. This Sunday they celebrated Mothering Sunday and they cut little hands to give their mothers as "helping hands".

Little picture on the right:

Queen Elizabeth visited the church during her first state visit in Oslo 61 years ago. Women in the congregation embroidered this kneeler, which she used attending the service.

Facts:

St Edmund's Church

The church in Møllertg.30 was built by the English congregation in Kristiania in 1884 in a simple neo-gothic style and has since then been the main church of the Anglican Chaplaincy in Norway.

It was Queen Maud's favourite church because she knew the liturgy and hymns from England before she became Norway's first modern Queen in 1905.

In the church you can see a memorial-plate of her and her father, King Edward VII. The English monarch's coat of arms, to be found above the baptismal font on the wall, is together with several other gifts from the English Royal Family.

Easter at St Edmund's

Maundy Thursday, 7pm: Holy Communion

Easter Sunday: 11am, Sung Communion

The Anglican Church

The Anglican Church is a common expression for several churches who had their start in the mother church, Church of England (CofE), state-church in England and Wales. The church is protestant, but has also elements from the Catholic Church in it.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is the overall leader of the Church of England and the spiritual head in the Anglican Church. He has no direct power in the churches, but he leads the work between the churches in the 43 dioceses, where Europe is one of them

Queen Elizabeth is the head of both.

Porvoo-Agreement

Through the Porvoo-Agreement the Anglican Church in Great Britain and Wales has a baptism- and Holy Communion link with the Lutheran Churches in Scandinavia and the Baltic countries. The Agreement was signed 1994 in the Norwegian Synod.