

## The Scandinavian Bishops' Conference 5.-11.9. 2008

### Press release

On 11 September, the Roman Catholic bishops of Copenhagen, Oslo, Reykjavik, Stockholm, and Trondheim together with the apostolic administrators of Helsinki and Tromsø concluded the Conference's autumn session in Lourdes, France. The most important questions discussed were liturgy, especially the Swedish translation of the mass and the rites, the observance of the Sunday, preparation for the Bishops' Synod in Rome in October, the education of the candidates for the priesthood, and a possible sphere of conflict between civil legislation in Scandinavia and freedom of religion.

In Scandinavia like most countries in Western Europe, the Sunday is getting increasingly commercialised and more and more like any other day of the week. The bishops encourage Catholics and Christians of all denominations to maintain this day as a day of worship, rest and prayer. The full text of a Pastoral Letter on the Sanctification of the Sunday and a shorter version to be read in the churches will be decided when the bishops meet for the next Conference in Turku, Finland, in March.

Bishop Georg Müller of Trondheim will represent the Conference at the Synode of Bishops in Rome this October. *The Word of God in the Mission of the Church* is the topic that representatives from the entire Bishops' Conferences in the world will share when they meet. Their thoughts, suggestions and visions will be presented to Pope Benedict XVI at the end of the Synode. In his contribution to the Synod, bishop Müller points out that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, very much alive in our Catholic communities, "not only to be seen as informative, but also performative."

Freedom of religion has not presented a problem for Catholics in the North of Europe for many decades, but as legislation on e.g. employees' rights expands the Church may have to defend her freedom. There are signs that some of these laws may come into conflict with Church's self-understanding and the claim is being made that Canon Law is irrelevant for the question of rights and duties in the Church if the State Law happens to differ. None of the Nordic countries have a Concordat with the Holy See. The bishops are uneasy as the Diocese of Oslo is taken to court in a case concerning the implications of a certain priest's vow of obedience.

This autumn, the Diocese of Stockholm starts training its clergy in Uppsala in cooperation with the Newman Institute and the University of Uppsala. The Swedish seminary in Rome will continue to offer formation for candidates to the priesthood, but its future may be more Scandinavian than Swedish. In Oslo, five new seminarians have started their formation at the newly opened St. Eystein's. Their academic training will mostly be provided by the independent *Menighetsfakultetet* in Oslo and the Dominican Pontifical University (*Angelicum*) in Rome.