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Sermon at the opening of the Nordic bishops' meeting in Akureyri Church on June 27, 2022

Grace and peace be with you from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

A warm welcome to Iceland and welcome to the North.

It is important for us bishops and our spouses to come together and to build a community of friends.

The friendship between pastors and the friendship between bishops is so important, more important than we realize when we are caught up in our daily tasks and we can't seem to see an end to all our projects.

It is important that we stop and think about the friendship, support, and general helpfulness among us.

Today we are invited to a celebration. We are invited to a royal celebration and we have decided to accept the invitation.

There are many dishes on the table, dishes that come from all over. Some taste good, others taste bad. Some are sour, some are sweet, and still others are bitter.

At this celebratory table we have the environment issues, issues of peace, democracy, and the position of the Church in an ever-changing world (The Church in a changed world is the title of the Episcopal Conference).

We have accepted the king's invitation to this banquet table - or have we?

That is a question we must ask ourselves.

Are we dressed in wedding attire, like the guest mentioned in another gospel who was invited but asked to leave because he was not dressed in wedding attire?

The wedding attire represents that, right? That we are true and true to ourselves in what we are doing.

We must constantly ask ourselves: Are we doing the right thing?

Are we doing God's will?

This is a question we must constantly ask ourselves as Church leaders.

The Church has a difficult position in the Western world. Many people have other things to do than to be involved in church activities. Many have bought a field, or five yoke of oxen, lands, businesses, large houses and cars, and have no time to cultivate their faith or to nurture the Christian upbringing of their children.

There are many who cannot take the time to come to church at all - to come into fellowship with God. We all know this very well, having served both as pastors and bishops in the Nordic countries.

Here in Iceland, the situation is very difficult when it comes to Christian education in schools. Since the turn of the century, the teaching of Bible

stories has been in short supply in schools. Those who were born at the turn of the century have already become adults and many are well into their University years. Professors of literature at the University of Iceland have complained that it's difficult to teach Western literature to people who don't know any stories or sayings from the Bible. That is why the Church's work with children and the youth has never been more important.

The Church has a great responsibility here to pass on the message of Christ's love on to future generations because no one else is really doing it. This message of love is the foundation of our entire Western welfare system.

Hospitals, health care, emergency relief workers, the education system, equality, democracy, the acceptance of refugees, all of this is based on the message of Christ and we must never take it out of context because as soon as people do not know the word of Christ, it may seem appropriate to stop providing the kinds of services that we take for granted today.

The foundation of the welfare system and charity organizations wherever they are found is rooted in the words and deeds of Christ. As the golden rule says: treat people the same way you want them to treat you.

The Icelandic Church was responsible for making strategic planning last year. Over a hundred people from all over the country worked on this planning. The conclusion was apparent. The Church's work with children and the youth is the most important thing the Church should be working on in the coming years, and now there is an action plan for how this work will be done.

The Church's desire is that all of those who are invited will accept the invitation. Our dream is for them to come and listen, and to embrace the Christian message so that it burns in their hearts.

My dream has always been that people flock to church every sacred day and make it their lifestyle. Of course, there are many who have devoted

themselves to this lifestyle, but they are not many enough.

Actually I got to experience this dream of mine in January 2020, just before covid hit.

That's when I went to the Pokot district in northwestern Kenya, where Icelanders and Norwegians started evangelism last century. I went there with some pastors, members of some congregational boards and parishioners under the guidance of Kjartan Jónsson, who was a missionary in Pokot in the eighties.

He and his wife Valdís Magnúsdóttir, as well as two other Icelandic couples, started their work there under a tree.

In those days, the churches were built from mud, some of which are still in use, but in many places large concrete churches have been built that can fit hundreds of people.

Two of these churches had been donated by two Icelandic couples.

A girls' school for hundreds of girls had been built using Icelandic money, in collaboration with Norway.

Hundreds of people flock to these churches every holy day, singing, rejoicing and praising God. When people met Kjartan, the missionary, they said: He changed our lives. He changed our lives, but Kjartan always answered that statement by saying: The word of God changed your life!

God's word will also change the lives of people in the West. The word of God will also change the lives of people in the Nordic countries because Christ is risen. Christ is risen! Yes, Christ is truly risen and he will see to it that the Church lives. So, we have to answer the call when we are invited to the king's wedding.

Here we are gathered in The Church of Akureyri, the church leaders of the Nordic countries. We have a great responsibility. We have a responsibility to the Church, but we also have a great social responsibility.

One of the great tasks of the Icelandic Church in recent years is to serve refugees and asylum seekers. Here, two pastors are in that service full-time and six pastors work with them part-time.

The project multiplied when the war in Ukraine broke out and a large number of refugees arrived from Ukraine.

I would therefore like to quote a resolution from the LWF Council, the Council recalls the statement on Peace and Justice from the LWF 1984 Assembly in Budapest, Hungary which declared

„...the firm conviction that peace is the will of God for the whole creation. War is not according to the will of God. There can be no lasting peace as long as people starve, injustices prevail, or people are oppressed, persecuted, or discriminated against because of their faith, view of life, race, sex, or ethnic origin. Social and economic injustice as well as ideological conflicts are at the root of many of the wars of liberation. There is no peace without justice, and no justice without peace...”

Freedom to love and freedom to live in your true identity are essential parts of a free and just society for us all.

That is why I am deeply saddened by the events that occurred in Oslo and would like to express my deepest condolences to us all and especially to our Norwegian colleagues.

We are invited to a feast - a royal feast.

That celebration is much bigger than a bishops' meeting, even bigger than a Nordic bishops' meeting.

This feast is a communion with Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

We are invited to fellowship with Jesus Christ, who gives our lives courage and strength to face any obstacles that may arise.

But to do that, we need to cultivate that community ourselves, cultivate our faith in Jesus Christ, and give ourselves time during the day to reflect on his message and love.

Glory be to God, the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is, and will be forever and ever. Amen.

Receive the apostolic blessing:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.