

Dear brothers and sisters!

It's a joy to especially welcome you who participates in the Theobalt theological conference. Welcome to Visby and to Gotland and to S:t Mary's Cathedral here in Visby.

This year S:t Mary Cathedral celebrates 800 years after she was consecrated by bishop Bengt in July 1225. Something we are now celebrating the whole year of 2025.

As part of that celebration Visby will also host and welcome participants from the European cities of the Hanseatic league later this week.

The Theobalt conference is not that old, but was created on the initiative of my predecessor, the late bishop Tore Furberg in 1983.

As a network of churches around the Baltic see from the three major traditions of the region: Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran churches. During the years representatives also from other church traditions have participated.

Bishop Tore took the initiative during the Cold war in order to facilitate relations between the churches of the region and as an important forum for consultations and discussions about theological, environmental and social topics concerning the churches and the countries around the Baltic Sea.

Then initiative of bishop Tore has not declined in importance, which is even more obvious in the current geo-political situation in the world and in Europe.

With an ongoing war with unacceptable methods of terror and enormous human suffering and losses of life. There is there even more urgent need to come together, deepen contacts and relations, pray and reflect together over the conditions of church and society.

Two years ago, the *Theobalt Conference in Copenhagen* was focused on reconciliation, peace, justice, responsibility and eco-theology in the Baltic Region

The theme of this year's Theobalt conference is **“Church and state relations – how to be Church in today's Europe”**

The Gospel of today is a promise from the Lord that he will guide his church to a greater understanding through the gift of the Holy paraclete – that will guide us, comfort us, heal us and give us the true communion with the risen Lord and with each other.

In his promise the Lord describes how he will give us the truth gradually and in a growing process there we are developing and growing closer to Him and in the mystery of the Church. The holy Spirit continues to guide his church also after the ascension.

This perspective – that Jesus himself describes when he instructed the disciples just before Jesus was betrayed and arrested Gethsemane – was only fully understood by the disciples when they received the holy Spirit on the Pentecost.

This promise and the reality Jesus describe is also the foundation and the inner meaning of ecumenical method, as it is understood in the WCC and the method used in ecumenical dialogue.

A method that could be understood as a Christological and Pneumatological method. That is, when we, the churches, respectively and together in the holy Spirit found our true way to Jesus, we will also find the unity that we are searching for.

Ecumenical dialogue shall never be diminished to diplomatic negotiations – But rather, they shall and have to be understood as a mutual search for a deeper and more true understanding of the revelation given by the Triune God in his Son Jesus of Nazareth.

In order to do so there must be a fundamental and mutual trust in the promise of Jesus, that he will guide us, through his holy Spirit, in our work, efforts and spiritual life, to the greater truth that fundamentally is Himself. I believe that we can see many signs of that gradual growing of unity in the history of the ecumenical movement.

But also, that there is also a need to renew that trust and work even more eagerly and goal oriented for the unity we confess but still are longing and waiting for.

In the name of Jesus!
Amen!