

*A reflection on our Guildford
Diocesan clergy exchange Pilgrimage
visit to Viborg*

11th – 14th September 2023

A snapshot of the week



This was the accommodation on our first night -which was good!

A team of eight clergy from the Diocese of Guildford travelled across the North Sea to our partner Diocese in Denmark, Viborg, on a four-day pilgrimage.

Joining eight pastors from the Danish Lutheran Church, the team started on 11 September and completed the 60km pilgrimage route along the Hærvejen. The path ultimately joins with other pilgrimage routes through Europe which ends up at Santiago de Compostela in Northern Spain, but the group thought that might be a bit too much this time around!

“We visited Denmark this week. It was great. The countryside was flat. It rained a lot. We felt comfortable with that ...”

“We are also made to feel exceptionally welcome. The hostel accommodation we find ourselves in ranges from the ‘good’ to the ‘truly amazing.’”

We are fortunate: all our hosts speak excellent English!

We soon discover that 79% of the Danish population of almost 6 million belong to the Church: that belonging is further made good by an established system of rites of passage, especially Confirmations, extensively prepared for.

This news makes us visitors feel rather inadequate. This sense is further compounded by learning of the financial freedoms which evidently accrue to the Church from the Danish government collecting a Church tax. When three of us ask how, for example, we might contribute 10 Kroner for a spare pillow cover accessed in the hostel, we hear a phrase so strange to our ears, so foreign, it has to be savoured and digested: ‘The Diocese will pay.’ We feel as if we are dwelling on another planet. On the other hand: - money, it seems, can’t buy you disciples. Learning as the pilgrimage progresses that a majority of the clergy we are walking with preach to congregations of between 10 and 30 on a weekly basis certainly evokes a sigh of solidarity if not relief!

It is really good to be able to locate Viborg within the wider picture of the Lutheran Church in Denmark.



VIBORG



AALBORG



HELINGØR



ÅRHUS



RIBE



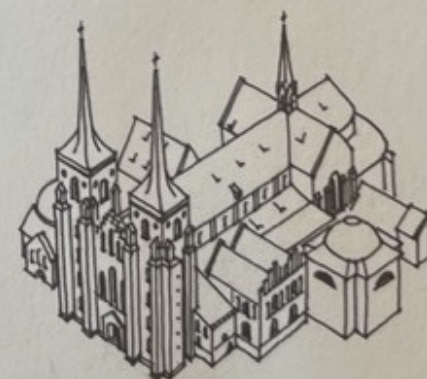
KØBENHAVN



ODENSE



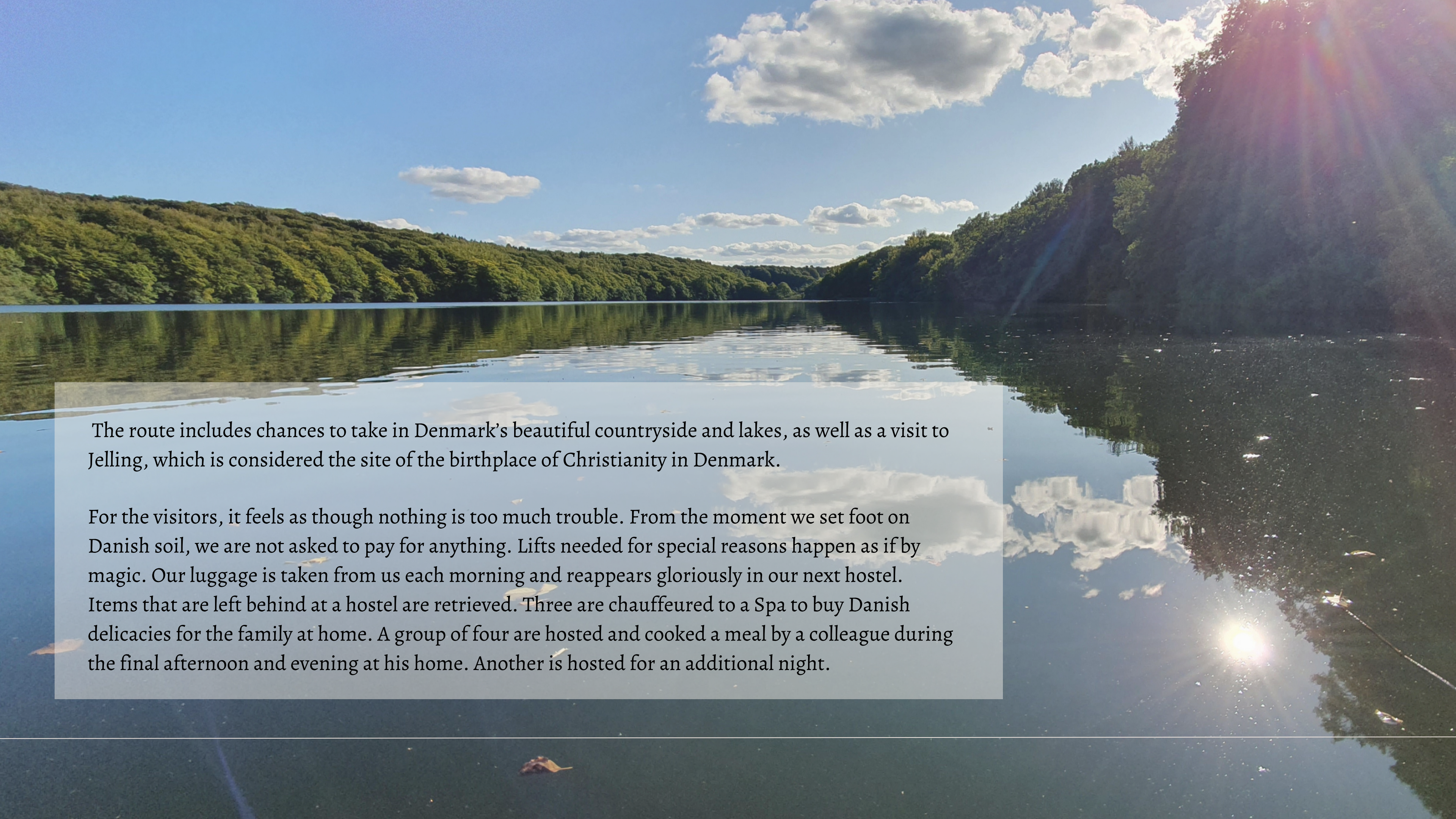
HADERSLEV



ROSKILDE



MARIBO



The route includes chances to take in Denmark's beautiful countryside and lakes, as well as a visit to Jelling, which is considered the site of the birthplace of Christianity in Denmark.

For the visitors, it feels as though nothing is too much trouble. From the moment we set foot on Danish soil, we are not asked to pay for anything. Lifts needed for special reasons happen as if by magic. Our luggage is taken from us each morning and reappears gloriously in our next hostel. Items that are left behind at a hostel are retrieved. Three are chauffeured to a Spa to buy Danish delicacies for the family at home. A group of four are hosted and cooked a meal by a colleague during the final afternoon and evening at his home. Another is hosted for an additional night.

5. Herre, at se dig er min længsel og bøn,

*himmelske konge, vidunderlig skøn!
Vær du mit hjertes kæreste skat,
lyset, som stråler ved dag og ved nat.*

2 Vær du min visdom, min sandhed og trøst,
vær du Det Levende Ord i mit bryst!
Far, lad mig være barn her hos dig.
Kom til mig, Herre, ja, bo du i mig!

3 Vær du i striden mit skjold og mit sværd,
vær du min lykke, min ære, mit værd,
liv for min sjæl, den tryggeste vagt,
løft mig mod himlen
i din kærligheds magt!

4 Menneskers ære og rigdom og magt
bliver til støv i din herligheds pragt!
Du er min arv, min rigdom, o Gud,
du er min styrke, når mit liv rinder ud.

*Himmelske konge, o giv at jeg må
sejrende ind i dit himmerig gå.
Vær du mit liv i alt, hvad der sker,
indtil jeg ser dig i din herlighed der!*
(Torsten Borbye Nielsen)

5. Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
*be all else but naught to me, save that Thou art;
be Thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

*Be Thou my Wisdom, be Thou my true Word;
be Thou ever with me and I with Thee, Lord;
be Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son,
be Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

*Be Thou my Breastplate, my Sword for the fight;
be Thou my whole Armor, be Thou my true Might;
be Thou my soul's Shelter, be Thou my strong Tow'r,
O raise Thou me heav'nward,
great Pow'r of my pow'r.*

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
be Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
be Thou and Thou only the first in my heart,
O High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.*

*High King of heaven, Thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys, after vict'ry is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be Thou my Vision, O Ruler of all.*
(Elanor Hull)

The Danish love to sing, and not just on Christmas Eve when they walk around the Christmas tree as families, singing 'A child was born in Bethlehem.' The current version of the Danish Hymn Book, with Luther's influence of course still paramount, a book authorized by her Majesty Queen Margrethe II in 2002, contains 791 hymns.

We discover that the Danish resistance hymn 'Always dauntless when you tread', sung by imprisoned members of the Danish resistance movement when one of their comrades was taken away for execution by the Germans, has become for the Danish the national equivalent (for the British) of 'Jerusalem.'

Our group are able to experience singing in good measure: the pilgrimage booklet which we are given for our route contain 6 hymns, suitably translated into English as well!

Joyfully we learn that Danish women clergy have been present since 1948 and have represented 50% of all clergy since 2010. Five out of eleven Bishops are women.

There are more learnings. At funerals, clergy tip three scoops of soil on to or into the coffin of the deceased at the 'Dust to Dust' moment. All clergy wear a black cassock and ruff collar, which dates from the 17th Century, for ministry.

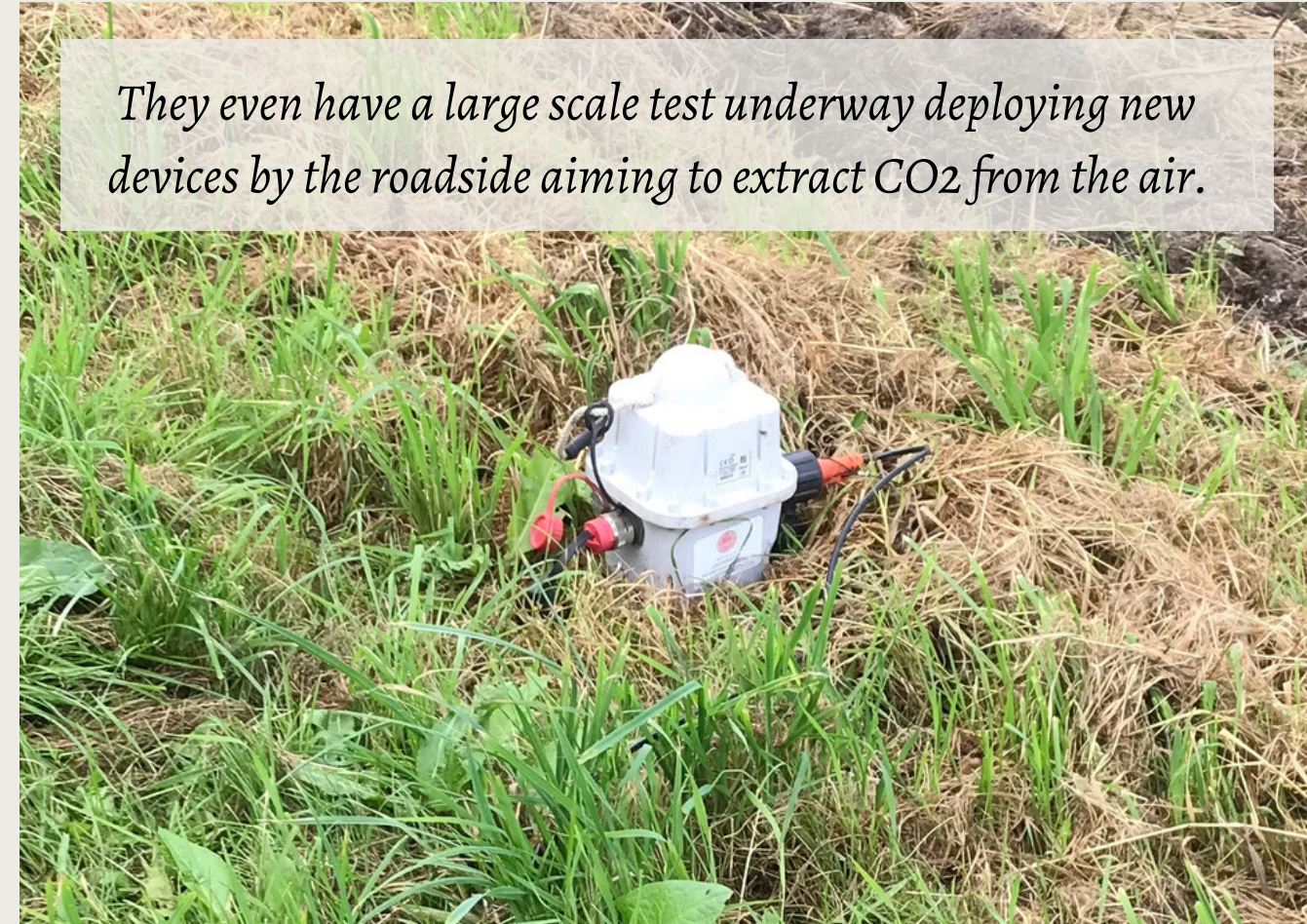
This is designed to demonstrate that the pastor, far from being out of the ordinary, is like everyone else. No-one blinks.



*Denmark seems to have a lot of houses with solar panels.
How encouraging.*



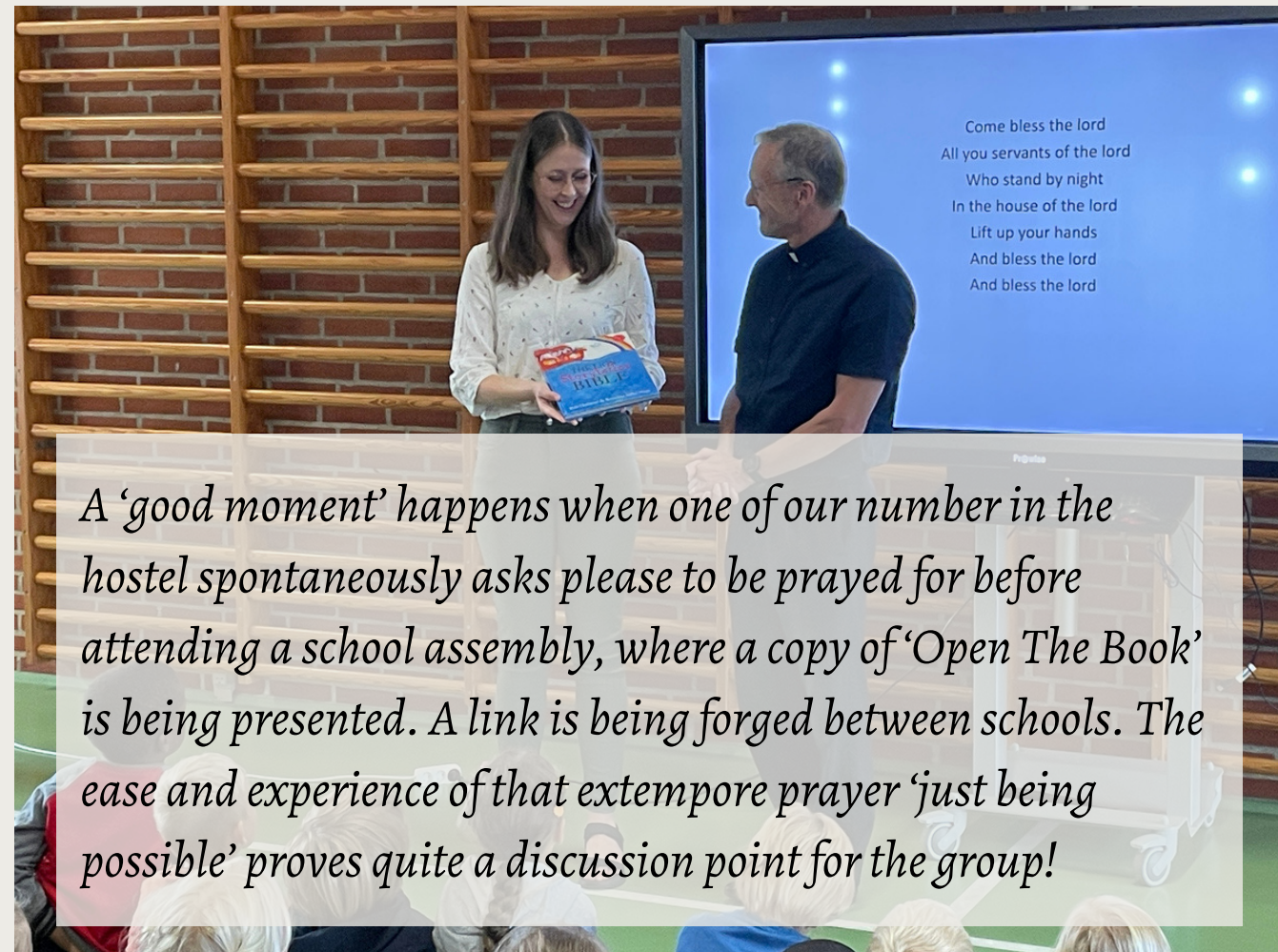
*They even have a large scale test underway deploying new
devices by the roadside aiming to extract CO2 from the air.*



*We cannot fail to be impressed with the extensive system of
'honesty boxes' which we come across along our route and on
paths and roads, for coffee and biscuits, fresh fruit, potatoes,
and flowers. Impressive because: it works!*



*A 'good moment' happens when one of our number in the
hostel spontaneously asks please to be prayed for before
attending a school assembly, where a copy of 'Open The Book'
is being presented. A link is being forged between schools. The
ease and experience of that extempore prayer 'just being
possible' proves quite a discussion point for the group!*





As we walk the group are able to connect with one another, as Revd Jonathan Thomas, Vicar of St Peter's Old Woking, shares:

“We sang hymns together – in both English and Danish – reflected together, prayed together, walked in silence together, laughed together, ate Danish food together and learnt much about each other’s churches.”



Cornflower Bolete mushrooms at Tange Krisna Friskole



A Danish Crocodile log we passed en route!



An image outside the Cathedral door captures the sense of the purpose of pilgrimage: to take the love and kindness of God onwards and outwards to others.

A final reflection



Peter and Peter at a wonderful viewpoint on Day 3

One of the sheer luxuries of the experience for those who walked was that of temporarily being relieved of responsibility for the welfare of others. In addition to this freedom, a significant part of the walks were spent in both free and directed silence. Space was made for reflection. Those with an eye for such things were able to capture memorable views and curiosities.

Our pilgrimage group was ably led by Christian Kjær Bjerre, a 'Pilgrim Pastor', whose job is to facilitate and run pilgrimages, keeping everyone safe and informed along the way at all times. There was no pressure: only those who had volunteered to lead a reflection were asked to do so.

All in all, a wonderful week! It was a happy moment to all arrive safely at Viborg Cathedral! Travelling from south to north, the journey culminated with a communion in the crypt there on 14 September.

The partnership between the two Dioceses continues to be a valued relationship on both sides and the team is already beginning to explore the possibility of a return pilgrimage along the Pilgrim's Way in the Guildford Diocese. We can never repay the debt of gratitude we owe: and especial Thanks go out to Bitten! - but we are filled with thankfulness in our hearts.



Thank you