

Bishop Budde among the Swedes

In September, Episcopal bishop Mariann Edgar Budde will travel to her mother's homeland at the invitation of the Stockholm Cathedral.

by [Gary G. Yerkey](#)

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Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington (AP Photo / Carolyn Kaster)

When her mother died late last year, Episcopal bishop Mariann Edgar Budde described her as “a woman of deep faith and courage, of tenderness and vulnerability.” Her mother, Ann Björkman Edgar, who emigrated from Sweden as a young adult, lived most of her life in the United States. But her heart remained in

Sweden.

A few weeks after her mother's death, in a sermon at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., Budde displayed a similar deep faith and courage in remarks addressed in part to the newly inaugurated president of the United States, Donald Trump. "In the name of our God," she said, standing just a few feet from the president, "I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now." She said that there are LGBTQ children—in Democratic, Republican, and independent families—who fear for their lives. Some immigrants, she said, may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority are not criminals.

"I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away, and that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here," she said. "Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land."

This fall, Budde, the first woman to serve as spiritual leader of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, will travel to Sweden, where today many Swedes see her as someone who shares their fundamental values.

On September 9, she will deliver remarks at the cathedral in Uppsala, about 50 miles north of Stockholm. Initially, she was invited to speak at the cathedral in Stockholm at a service marking the opening of the 2025–26 session of Parliament. But according to Mona Wahlund, press secretary for the Uppsala Diocese of the Church of Sweden, the change in the venue for Budde's remarks was made "in response to the overwhelming interest and numerous requests from people who wish to attend and listen to Bishop Budde."

In Uppsala, Budde will also participate in a previously scheduled meeting of priests and deacons. Her book *Receiving Jesus: The Way of Love* is being translated into Swedish for the occasion.

Archbishop Martin Modéus, the current head of the Church of Sweden, recently told Swedish journalist Anna Hedenmo that, in his opinion, Budde struck exactly the right tone in her January 21 sermon at the National Cathedral, adding that he hopes that her words "touched" President Trump and that "he took what was said into account."

Karin Johannesson, bishop of the Uppsala Diocese, has met Budde and admires her ecumenical outreach. “Mariann Edgar Budde has a talent for unifying,” she said, “and she combines a deep spirituality with a visible commitment to social justice. For us Swedes this combination feels particularly important, not least when it comes to inclusiveness, climate, and human rights.” Johannesson said that when the Church of Sweden invited Budde to come to Sweden, she immediately accepted.

As for Sweden, it has consistently been ranked among the happiest countries in the world (fourth, according to this year’s *World Happiness Report*). But it is also known to be the most secular. While a majority of Swedes are at least nominally members of the Church of Sweden—the official state church until 2000—very few practice religion in their daily lives. One survey found that fewer than one-fourth of Swedes believe in God, and according to the Swedish government’s official website, only one in ten believe that religion is important.

Church membership itself is in decline, too. At the end of 2023, 52 percent of Swedes were members of the Church of Sweden—a number that reflects a continuing decline since the 1970s and 1980s, when more than 90 percent of Swedes were members.

Recent trends show a slight increase in new members and a corresponding decline in withdrawals. But earlier this year the church itself forecast that by 2051 it will have only about 3.9 million members: 34 percent of the expected population at that time.

[In a 2022 interview with the Century](#), Modéus said that he would work to help reverse the decline in church membership, as well as to speak out on issues where human dignity and all of creation are threatened. Such issues are “not beyond the religious,” he said. “They are religious.”

Jonas Eek—dean of the Stockholm Cathedral Parish, who initially invited Budde to speak at the church service in September—said that, from his perspective, Budde’s remarks at the National Cathedral in January were neither polemical or provocative. “Instead,” Eek told the *Sweden Herald*, “her message was classically Christian—that those with power and might are asked to show mercy to those who are exposed and powerless.”

President Trump, however, has demanded that the Episcopal Church issue an apology for Budde’s remarks, posting online that she “brought her church into the

World of politics in a very ungracious way.”

But according to Modéus, she was doing the right thing in exactly the right way. Her message was “simple, friendly, and warm” and properly emphasized the need for “mercy, compassion, and inclusion,” he said. “She stood next to Jesus, saying what he said and doing what he does.”

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