



The Lyons and the Lambs

Chris and Joan Lyon, Chaplains of the Anglican Church

«I always wanted to work in Europe, this job came up...and I took it.»

FIONA URQUHART

Like many other expatriate arrivals in this little country, Chris and Joan Lyon, Chaplains of the Anglican Church in Luxembourg, came here to work with little knowledge of the country.

But they immediately felt welcomed, both by their congregation and by the other churches in Luxembourg, particularly by Archbishop Franck and Father Breslin of the Catholic church. Joan, as one of only three women priests in Luxembourg, has been surprised and touched by the positive reactions she continues to receive throughout the community.

They enjoy the different nationalities – at least 27 within their congregation alone –, the intellectual stimulus and how Luxembourg rises to the challenges of a changing world – but would sometimes like to be able to communicate in just one language, although they are both fluent French speakers. Some mountains and sea would be nice too, but that would require more divine intervention than even they can summon up.

They are used to blossoming where they are planted; Chris was born in Wales, his father an Australian Catholic, his mother a Welsh Baptist. Welsh was his first language. The family moved often and although his father suddenly stopped taking him to mass at the age of six, he found his faith at an early age, eventually trained in Edinburgh to be an Anglican priest, and spent twenty-one years in parishes in Scotland. Joan was born in Glasgow of Scottish Presbyterian parents and travelled a lot, including a number of years in the 1970s in Christian mission stations in a

remote and beautiful part of Papua New Guinea where the application of faith to daily life left a lasting impression.

They both had a number of jobs before being ordained. Chris studied law and worked in politics, Joan studied languages and business, worked in university and hospital administration and in training. She also has a diploma in person-centred counselling. Their grown up children are still based in Scotland.

Their commitment to Anglicanism is reinforced by the fact that they both deliberately chose it; for Chris it was because of the mixture of Protestantism and Catholicism, and because the Anglican church publicly wrestles with big questions and doesn't take a hard line, which, he says, is its strength and its weakness. For Joan it was the rhythm and the beauty of the services, and the open welcome, and perhaps both have been inspired by figures within the church, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whom they have met.

CONGREGATION

Since their arrival in 2002, much has changed – in their own lives, in their congregation and in the country itself. Decisions by the Luxembourg government and the Anglican Bishop meant that Joan was appointed as Assistant Chaplain in 2005, so they now work as a team, along with Jack the dog who, they say, keeps them sane.

Very different in character, there is a complementarity which certainly works for them as a couple and they hope it works for the congregation too. Joan sees herself as a sprinter, brimming with enthusiasm, does the births and baptisms and work with young families, while Chris thinks he is a kind of solid carthorse, doing the «milk round», dealing more with crises and death, teaching and

the Church's engagement with contemporary issues.

For Chris that «milk round» is the most important thing. Their congregation has expanded in size and diversity in recent years, through a deliberate policy of being actively open and welcoming. But they would also say that it is about their message. Chris, who does most of the preaching, says, «*the Church isn't here to tell people how they ought to live, it's here to help people work out how they can live. That means dealing honestly with how people actually do live, coming alongside and talking with people instead of preaching at them. Too often the Church runs on guilt rather than grace.*» Joan agrees; «*The church is not a place where people are gathered into a closed and cosy circle but a place where people can find confidence to open themselves to the world and feel nurtured and strengthened by their faith.*»

They try to be active in the

wider Luxembourg community. Joan recently was the MC (in French!) of the inter-faith celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, shared between Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Baha'is. In the context of the «Glaubenssache» exhibition Chris will speak about «Tentes, temples, murs et ponts – religion en exil» on 23 April at the Luxembourg City History Museum.

Life in Luxembourg is changing very rapidly, identity is important, and so is social contact, in church or outside. In their pastoral work Joan and Chris are surprised and sometimes shocked at the hidden extremes in their parish – real poverty among wealth, emotional and physical neglect, isolation and dysfunctionality. Providing tents and temples, pushing down walls and building bridges will continue to be central to the Lyons' lives for some years to come.



Photo: Pierre Matgé

Still-life with therapeutic Jack: the couple in their Lyons' den

Love and Death

Quirky Festivals Explained: «Veltesdag» (St Valentine's Day)

This Saturday is «Veltesdag», another highpoint in the florists' calendar.

ARIEL PARKER

This is the day when lovers everywhere declare themselves to their beloved(s), though often anonymously, which seems silly – but it's the thought that counts. People spend a fortune on kitschy cards, fading flowers, chocolates and moronic messages in newspaper columns, stuff like: «Wee Billy Bee loves Milly

Molly Mandy». Or if the beloved's already on board, there might be an overpriced Valentine dinner or indeed, a romantic weekend for two. There's no end to the stuff to spend our money on. But what's it all about, Alfie? It's about Christianity squatting a pagan custom yet again.

St Valentine's Day is a relic of the Roman Lupercalia, which started off as your average mid-February pagan fertility rite but degenerated (or more likely improved) into an orgy of mating and «fêting».

A few hundred years later, the Church Fathers were casting around for a new lovefest to

win hearts and minds and for some reason hit on St Valentine. I won't bore you with the unlikely doings of the two (yes!) saintly candidates, but one of their name days fell on 14th February, date of the ex-Lupercalia. The spin doctors are called in and reinvent Valentino as a romantic hero, whose deeds of derring-do include loving and leaving some hapless maiden and penning a farewell note signed «Your Valentine». Bingo.

LOVES ME... NOT

Unfortunately, the St Valentine ethos of romantic love

hasn't been an unqualified success.

We all know about the St Valentine's Day Massacre of 1929, when two gangs, led respectively by Edward G. Robinson, sorry, Al Capone, and Bugs Moran, took sub-machine guns to each other in a house in Chicago, leaving seven dead and many more arrested.

Less well-known but much bloodier is the massacre that took place on St Valentine's Eve in 1692. During this charming episode of brotherly love, grudge-bearing members of the Campbell clan invited themselves to the Mac-

Donalds in the Valley of Glen Coe – and then, on the pretext that the MacDos had been a bit slow pledging allegiance to the new English king, William of Orange, slaughtered 38 clansmen and burnt down their homes, leaving some 40 women and children to die of cold.

But legend has it that on their way back to Fort William, the murdered MacDonalds got ghostly revenge by piping the cutthroat Campbells to their doom – a tradition nobly continued today on the culinary front by the US branch of the clan in McDos all over the world. Hey-ho.