

The Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Chaplain's AGM report for 2016-2017

Dear Friends,

2016 was a challenging and eventful year in very many respects for the Anglican Church in Luxembourg, and for me as its Chaplain. In this short report I want to point out some of the main features as I experienced them.

Assistant Chaplain

At the beginning of 2016 the Assistant Chaplain was off work for a few months, which added somewhat to the challenges of that time. He returned to work shortly after Easter, and was with us for just a few months before his contract ended in August.

THE NOMADIC LIFE

Moving out of the Vicarage

I moved out of the Vicarage just before the New Year 2016, and immediately enjoyed the new apartment. It's well located, quiet, has a small garden, faces away from the road, is not overlooked, and the neighbours are courteous and friendly. It will certainly suit a single chaplain, but could be a little tight for a married couple. It's in ideal first-time buyer territory, so if necessary it will be very easy to sell: altogether an inspired purchase, I think.

The pressure of the first few months was considerable as Elaine, Lynn and I prepared to move the office out of the Vicarage and into the Centre Jean XXIII (CJ23) at the beginning of February. In the end the move went relatively smoothly - much better than we anticipated, and we received a warm welcome from the CJ23 community who were very helpful in ensuring that everything worked in our new offices.

The move was originally thought of as temporary, but we soon felt that it would be good if any decision about permanent location should be postponed for a while. I'm sure that this was the correct move, and I can easily imagine that the Anglican Church of Luxembourg might stay for much longer than originally envisaged. The working atmosphere is very good, our Catholic colleagues are very friendly, the building is owned and maintained by the Government, the location is very convenient for Kirchberg, the facilities are excellent and the setting is clean, spacious and tranquil. A real blessing after the traffic noise and permanent dust levels of 89, rue de Muhlenbach, right on the edge of the road, and surrounded for many years by building works.

The first Anglican Te Deum, in a heat wave

Sometime towards the end of May temperatures in the Konvikt Chapel became almost intolerable on Sunday mornings. Unfortunately we had planned to hold our

first Te Deum at the end of June, on a Sunday evening, when the temperatures made it impossible to sing, or even stand for longer than a few minutes.

After consulting with the Catholic authorities we were encouraged to hold the Te Deum in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Cents, where we were warmly welcomed.

The occasion was magnificent: the singing was excellent, the orchestra was wonderful and the refreshments were delicious. It was wonderful that HRH the Grand Duke was represented by the Grand Chambelan, and that HM Ambassador John Marshall was also present, together with the Irish and Belgian Ambassadors. I would like to pay special tribute to Ovidiu Dragan for the time and effort he put into organising the music, and to the Choir for rising to the occasion so magnificently. My hope is that this will become a tradition for our congregation. It is something which is part of the process of integrating with the wider Luxembourgish society, and our musical tradition is something which is greatly appreciated by our neighbours.

The Konvikt Chapel

Once again it seemed as if the Konvikt Chapel would not be repaired or maintained by the Catholic Church for much longer. I consulted with the Vicar General, Leo Wagener. Although the Chapel itself would no longer be demolished, in a few years it was hoped that the supporting structure would be cleared (making the Chapel inaccessible for a long period), and it was not expected that it would be any longer a lieu de culte, but instead become part of a different sort of complex. The Vicar General discouraged us from thinking about investing in the building in any way and encouraged me to take soundings with the Church in Cents.

Changes to the religious legislative landscape.

2016 was a year of profound challenge for all the religions in Luxembourg, but especially for the Catholic Church. The legislative structure of the Catholic Church has changed completely, which has been very controversial within the church itself. This will have an impact of our situation too.

Church Council Conference

At the beginning of October the Church Council met for a day conference, at which point I indicated that I would retire within the very foreseeable future (although I myself did not know exactly when). I discussed whether we should take up the challenge of moving from the Konvikt while I was still Chaplain, or whether we should try instead to consolidate the present situation. They were overwhelmingly in favour of making a move as soon as possible.

Meeting the Church of Cents

In the early Autumn I arranged a meeting with L'Abbé Henri Hamus, who was at that time in charge of the Cathedral and the Church of Cents. I invited Philippa, Evelyn and Moira to join me, and we also met with Mr Gallion, the sacristan of Cents Church. It was a very useful meeting, and we felt very encouraged, so much so, that it seemed that we might be able to move into Cents church before Christmas, thus

avoiding one of the deadlines imposed by the introduction of the new legislation. It was a very agreeable surprise to discover that Philippa, Evelyn and Moira were able to discuss practical questions about the church in fluent Luxembourgish, which seemed to be a pleasant surprise for our interlocutors as well.

In the end the move did not take place, and there were a few failures of communication, but fortunately no failures of goodwill. It was good to maintain conversations with the President and Secretary of the Fabrique d'Eglise, who accepted our invitation to the Communion Service in the Konvikt Chapel and to lunch afterwards. It was clear in our discussions that it would take a while for the new legislation to be worked out (unless it was repealed, which might also be possible), and that everyone would need some clarity about this before we can think of moving to Cents or anywhere else. But it was also clear that the Cents representatives were very positive about accommodating us.

I'm confident that, in the fullness of time, this is where the Anglican Church of Luxembourg might find a new home.

MISSION AND MINISTRY

Pastoral Ministry

The Anglican theological tradition has always laid great emphasis on the church being part of the community in which it is set. For us in Luxembourg this means always having at the front of our minds the fact of our presence amongst non-churchgoing neighbours. We do our best to be grounded in the life of this place, and many of our members are very involved not only with the English speaking community, but with the wider Luxembourg community as a whole.

One consequence is that we are known by more people than we might realise, and this results in a steady stream of pastoral demand from people whom we have never met in church. I have rejoiced in this, even as I have personally struggled sometimes with the pastoral load that has fallen on me. "You should delegate!" some people said, but honestly, most of what has come my way could not possibly be "delegated" - it was highly confidential, and often very complex.

Although there is obviously a need for people to share deeply some of the issues which trouble them at times, there's also another need, which is simply to be able to relate. Being known, finding friends, sharing food and laughter, these are essential elements in the life of any healthy community. But this doesn't just happen, especially within a church and society such as ours in Luxembourg.

So it was good that at the Church Council conference in October we made the decision to employ Evelyn Sweerts as a Lay Pastoral Assistant. Her job description is a long one, but it is essentially to help the church build up its sense of community, especially through the junior church and in wider education. I know Evelyn will find a lot of support within the congregation.

Justice

But our mission is not only pastoral. Over most of our history our church has raised money for good causes world-wide: our charitable giving is generally more than 10% of our income each year. In the last two years I have pushed for us to move away from the notion of "charity" which has too many difficult overtones, especially for its recipients, and in favour of "justice", which is what the Bible speaks about, and involves us working in partnership with those with whom we share some of the benefits of our economic good fortune. Although in financial terms anything we have ever offered has been tiny in comparison to the need, our contribution is illuminating, it shows what we think should be happening in a fairer, more just world - it is a sign which points towards the Kingdom of God.

I'm really glad that this idea has received the support of the Charities Committee, as it used to be known. Their work will continue, because it is essential that due diligence is done on the projects we support, so that we can have confidence in the work that we are doing.

I'm also glad that the Environmental Footprint Group has expanded its remit and changed its name to the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) group.

Church Fair

I take appropriate responsibility for the decision not to go ahead with a Church Fair in 2016. The reasons were discussed at length within the Church Council, and there was certainly quite a long discussion about this within the congregation. It was a decision which might represent the end of an era, but I thought then, and still think that this was the correct decision.

A number of other ideas have already been put into effect to keep a sense of fun and fellowship bubbling in our community, and I'm confident that nothing will be lost in the long term.

Communication

Nothing is ever finished in this field, and as soon as we think we have made another step forward, suddenly the field, and the goal-posts change, and we have to re-think. Fortunately we have a very dedicated Communications Committee, and a particularly keen Webmaster in John Dimond. I'm very grateful for the hours that John has put into this job this year, working not only on the website but also on the office computers.

Ordinands

One of the real blessings which I have experienced in the last six years is to have had three ordinands train within the church of which I was Chaplain. Phil and Evelyn have been quietly inspirational for me, working extremely hard at their studies, and asking profound questions of the church, of me, and most of all, I think, of themselves. It has been deeply moving to have watched their vocations develop. I wish every blessing to Phil Harvey as he moves to begin ordained ministry in a couple of months time, near Norwich in England.

Confirmation

It was particularly good to be able to run a short but intense confirmation course in the second half of the year, and to invite Bishop Robert Innes to confirm teenage and adult candidates. It was especially good that Helen Innes could join us for the weekend, and that I was able to give them both a short tour of the city, and the Church at Cents. Philippa and Simon joined the Bishop and I for dinner when we had time to discuss in depth some of the challenges posed by my imminent retirement, as it was then.

STRUCTURAL ISSUES

Contracts, Compliance and Finances

That the church needs money is not news. What is almost as challenging is the increasing need to make compliance with legislation a focus of the work of the Church Council. The good news in this is that we have a Church Council which is able and (fairly) willing to embrace these challenges. I have been impressed with the level of skill and dedication which different individuals brought to bear on these issues, especially as we developed a contract for Evelyn, which will become a model for the contract for a new Chaplain. Everything has changed since I was appointed, and it has changed again just in the last few months.

THANKS

I have learned over time that if you can't finish, you can at least stop.

I am hugely aware of what remains unfinished in my ministry here in Luxembourg, and of my shortcomings as a priest. Fortunately I am even more aware of the support I have had from so many people, especially in this last year. It would be invidious to try to name them all, but I have to name some names, who have done special things for me over many years, but in this last year in particular ...

Elaine and Lynn have been wonderful. Occasionally I realise that I am not the easiest person to work with, but the office staff not only do an excellent job behind the scenes but they do it with sweetness and light, and often with a lot more grace than me. Because of them it always felt good to come into the office.

Ovidiu and all the musicians. I am very aware of just how much work Ovidiu puts into the preparation of our music Sunday by Sunday. The congregation must be aware of the very high standard of music at all the sung services. But they might not be aware of the depth of my appreciation. The music is the thing I miss most about having retired from the post here. Not just the sound, but the harmony, and the eye contact between the musicians themselves. Thank you for the joy I have had as your most regular listener over the last 15 years.

Philippa and **Simon** have been excellent Churchwardens. More has been imposed on them than they ever expected, but they have risen to the challenge with real dedication, and provided me with real and visible support. They also provide real support to the whole congregation but in ways which are largely invisible, so on your behalf I would like to thank them for their unseen labour.

Tania Buhr

Tania is someone whose work is perhaps the least visible of all, but is as essential as anything which happens in our church, and more stressful than most. It was not easy to persuade Tania to be Church Secretary, but she has been utterly gracious in her service. Thank you Tania, for all your support.

Chris Vaudrey. Chris deserves a special vote of thanks for having picked up, transformed and then gracefully laid down the post of Treasurer for the umpteenth time (actually his third time, I think). His meticulous attention to detail is sometimes scary, but he combines a firm grip with a twinkling eye, which is a gift not all accountants possess. Thanks for all your service, Chris.

John Overstall I want to pay a special tribute to John. John was on the interview panel in London when I was appointed. He has served the Church continuously over the last 15 years as Archdeaconry Rep, but more than that he has been a gentle, warm and friendly presence in our congregation nearly every Sunday for a lot longer than that (since the early 1970s I think). John's engagement with the Church, and his activities in the wider community are in so many ways a real example of what the mission of presence is all about. Thank you John, for being there at the beginning, and also at my final service in Luxembourg.

There are far more people I would like to thank, but there is no room, and no time. It has been a huge blessing to have been your pastor, and in so far as we are allowed to feel any sort of pride, I have been proud to have been your Chaplain.

God bless you all as you move into the future.

Chris Lyon

Chaplain August 2002 - March 2017.