

The Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Churchwardens' Report for 2016-2017

At the beginning of 2016 there were several things for the churchwardens to be worried about – and this was long before Chris announced his retirement. In December 2015 we had bought a new flat for the chaplain, and Chris had moved in almost immediately, and we had signed a compromis de vente to buy a new-build flat intended to be used as the church office, but the compromis de vente for the sale of the old vicarage was about to expire and we had heard nothing from the would-be purchasers for some time. We could not even say what the exact sale price would be because that depended on the size of the area that the Ville de Luxembourg would allow the developers to build on, and everyone was still waiting for the Ville's decision. Meanwhile, the proposal to bring service times forward to ensure an earlier finish for the 11 am service had stirred up controversy among the congregation, and it also looked likely that there would be no Church Fair because we could not find an organiser. And in the background was the prospect of the referendum on Britain's continued membership of the EU, which nobody was really worried about.

In the event, the outcomes of three of these four situations were not as bad as they might have been. There were long negotiations with the buyers of the old vicarage but eventually, on 7 September, the sale contract was signed, for a price that was better than we had originally expected. A week later we signed the contract to buy the new flat in Residence Isatis, rue Jules Mersch, on which building work had already started. In parallel to all these property transactions, the church office moved in February 2016 – out of necessity, since it was previously in the Vicarage, which was now due for demolition, but also at the invitation of the head of the Luxembourg School of Religion and Society – into the Centre Jean XXIII, in Weimershof, near to the EU institutions.

Discussions were held with various groups in the congregation about changing the service times, and it became clear that one part of our activities that works really well is the 9.30 service, and that bringing the start time forward would be most unwelcome to those who attend this service. So the service times did not change, leaving unresolved the issue of how to organise services in a way that welcomes families with small children.

The Church Fair did not take place, and it was sorely missed by many people, but to date not one person has offered to run another Church Fair in the future. However, we held a Congregational Meeting to discuss fundraising events as well as welcoming people to church, provision for young people and families, and giving to charity. Many good ideas were raised in all these areas; some have still to be implemented.

The first tangible result was the new Fun and Fundraising group, which held its first meeting in June. It decided from the start to do something new rather than try to organise another Church Fair, because comments at the Congregational Meeting showed

that people wanted something that was not such hard work to set up and take down, and preferably not so far from the centre of town. The group agreed that as well as raising money and being fun for everyone including the organisers, fundraising events should be aimed at the whole of Luxembourg, not just English speakers. Four events were planned for 2016 – 17, three of which have already taken place: the Treasure Hunt at the Bambësch last September and the Wine Tasting and Arts Festival, both in February this year. The major outdoor event, a Sports and Fun Day, will be held on 18 June in the Kirchberg park by the Coque.

Despite the general view at the Congregational Meeting that provision for young families is essential for the life of the church, volunteers for youth work have been slow to come forward and the Crèche has been struggling, with not enough volunteers to be able to staff it every Sunday. However, the Junior Church continues to flourish, although it too would welcome new volunteers, and the Youth Group has recently started up again.

At a Chaplaincy Council meeting last April, Chris Lyon outlined ambitious plans to set up a new Justice and Peace Group, to increase our understanding of these issues in the same way as the Environmental Footprint Group has done with environmental issues, under a new coordinating committee. The new group was to be linked with the Charities Committee, which was not intended to change, except possibly in name, but more coordination was envisaged between the good causes we support and the justice, peace and environmental issues we would be learning about; Chris pointed out that it was important through our giving to stand alongside people in need, not just to dispense cash from our riches to alleviate their poverty. These ideas were discussed, in the Council and at a meeting between Chris, the Churchwardens and the Charities Committee, but no action was taken until later in the year, when Evelyn Sweerts, representing the Justice and Peace Group, and Philippa Seymour, representing the EFG group, met and decided to merge the two to form the JPIC (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation) group, which would report directly to the Council (so no need for an additional coordinating body) and seek to coordinate its activities with the Charities Committee. The Council approved this arrangement at its meeting of 12 December 2016. See EFG/JPIC report for news of what the JPIC group is doing.

We received the good news in March 2016 that Evelyn Sweerts had been accepted as an ordinand and would begin training in September. In September also, following Andy Markey's departure, she took over (voluntary) responsibility for Junior Church, Youth Group and Crèche. It was proposed in October to offer her a paid position as a Lay Pastoral Assistant, and she finally began this job on 1 February 2017. She will work 60% of a 40-hour week and her main responsibilities will continue to be Junior Church, Youth Group, Crèche and All-Age/Family services.

Andy Markey's contract came to an end in August. He was not just an Assistant Chaplain, but also a husband and father, so we said goodbye to Caroline, Joshua and Malachi, as well as to Andy, after four years here. We had held a farewell Sunday lunch in July, attended by some 40 people, at which the family was showered with generous gifts.

Unfortunately notice had not been given in due time on the Markeys' rented house in Howald. Under the terms of the rental contract, this error could have proven extremely costly; after negotiation the owners accepted that we would simply pay four months' extra rent, net of other charges. Furthermore a subsequent inspection of the house revealed some damage and the garden was showing signs of neglect. The owners have recently sent us a bill, which we consider excessive, for various repairs; negotiations will again be required to attempt to reduce this to a more reasonable level.

Other events during the year: we confirmed Ovidiu Dragan's position as Music Director and signed a contract with him; we formally adopted an environmental stewardship policy; we tried, through letters to the caretaker and meetings between Chris Lyon and more senior officials, to draw attention to the poor, even dangerous, state of the stair carpet in the Konvikt chapel. Nothing happened for months, until one day earlier this year we walked in and found the problem solved by new edging on the stairs.

For the first time in 2016 we held a Te Deum service to celebrate the official birthday of Grand Duke Henri and to demonstrate that the Anglican Church sees itself as not just for expats but as part of Luxembourg society. It was an emotional occasion; a wonderful ceremony attended by the Grand Duke's representative and representatives of the Government, embassies and other faiths. Ovidiu had assembled an orchestra as well as a larger-than-usual choir and the music was glorious, but at the same time we were dealing with the shock and grief of the UK referendum result two days before.

We held this service in Cents church because we wanted more space than the Konvikt allows, and to escape the heat of the Konvikt on a summer evening, and this began a train of thought leading to a decision, taken at the Council all-day meeting on 1 October, to think about Cents as a new permanent home for our church, and to move there for a three-month trial period starting on the first Sunday of November. Normally decisions in our church are taken after months, if not years, of rumination and discussion. This one was taken very quickly for us, for two reasons: we wanted to do it before the end of the year because once the new *Convention* came into force and the *Fabriques d'Eglises* were wound up, the church at Cents would be administered by the Ville de Luxembourg and the bureaucracy involved in getting permission to use the building would be much more complicated; also, we wanted to be in the new church for at least one Sunday before our big Remembrance Day service.

During October the Council and Communications Committee worked hard to put everything in place for the move. Chris Lyon wrote a formal letter to the priest in charge of Cents, Henri Hamus, and he met Chris and a few Council members at Cents, showed us round the building and said he would be delighted if we used it on Sundays. What he did not say was that we would need to get the agreement of the Fabrique d'Eglise committee and, most importantly, the caretaker/sacristan. We had booked the removal firm and were within 24 hours of moving when it became clear that these people had not agreed to the idea and the move had to be called off. We tried to arrange a meeting between members of their Fabrique d'Eglise committee and members of our Council, but because of various commitments on both sides we could not find a date for

this until January. We had a cordial lunch with Mrs Jeanne Meyers and Mr Albert Ludig of Cents parish council and a lot of good will was expressed, but they were unable to tell us whether we would be able to use their church on a regular basis as they had heard nothing from the Ville de Luxembourg since the new convention had come into force and did not know what was the current situation of the Fabrique d'Eglise.

Throughout last year Chris Lyon continued to lead worship and provide pastoral care as usual, as well as starting or consolidating the various initiatives mentioned above. He had warned us that he would like to retire sooner rather than later, but it still came as a shock when he gave formal notice of retirement.

October saw the visit of Bishop Robert Innes for a confirmation service at which two adults and four young people were confirmed. We took advantage of his presence to discuss how the recruitment of a future Chaplain and the attendant interregnum period would work. Bishop Robert confirmed that we could not start the recruitment procedure whilst the present incumbent was still here and explained that it is a lengthy process, typically taking a year. He assured us of his full support and made it clear that the future of our church here, and thus the choice of the right Chaplain, was important to him personally and to the other people in the Diocese and Archdeaconry who would have an influence on the process.

Chris originally announced that his retirement would be effective from end-February 2017; however later, by agreement with the Bishop, this was delayed until end-March to allow him time to deal with various important outstanding issues. His final service, though, was on Sunday 12 February in Cents Church. It was attended by a number of dignitaries, including the British, Irish and German ambassadors and, representing the Archbishop of Luxembourg, M. l'Abbé Jean Ehret, Director of the Luxembourg School of Religion and Society in the Centre Jean XXIII, who made a touching speech in his honour. We presented Chris with two beautiful books of art: a catalogue of the works of Quentin Metsys and a collection of works related to the Apocalypse. Chris will put the rest of the money collected towards a new digital camera. The service was followed by an agreeable *vin d'honneur*.

Much of the four months of Chris's notice period has been used to set up structures and procedures to make it easier for the church to function without him. He has trained people on the Chalice rota to set up for services and clear away afterwards. We have bought a phone, laptop and car for use by locums and the next chaplain. The Council asked Edward Ojo to identify an appropriate car for a price around € 2000. After extensive searching of the market he decided that a 14-year-old VW Polo owned by a relative of Simon Norcross and priced at € 2100 was by some distance the best offer that he could find. The process then continued without any involvement of Simon Norcross and in close cooperation with our Auditor. The car was examined thoroughly by the Automobile Club, minor repairs were carried out at the seller's expense by Garage Losch, it passed its Contrôle Technique, and the formalities with the Ministry of Transport were completed on 31 March. Meanwhile, Chris moved out of the chaplain's flat on 11 February, to an address in Strassen, and we bought some more furniture for

the flat and installed wifi so that the locums can use it.

In December 2016 following a review of realistic candidate fiduciary companies, we had engaged Fiduciaire Faber, the company that was already paying the salaries, to make payments and prepare the accounts. The idea, advocated by our Auditor, was that by outsourcing the detailed accounting process we would no longer need a qualified accountant as treasurer; the qualifications for any future treasurer would then be a good understanding of the church's activities and a degree of numeracy. On this basis we were able to ask Gabriel Chelladurai to take this on; he agreed and will hold the position of Treasurer as from this AGM.

Since the new *Convention* between the Luxembourg Government and the Anglican Church came into force on 1 September 2016, we expected at some point reasonably early in 2017 to receive a subsidy amounting to € 125,000 minus an adjustment to take account of the Government salary paid to Chris Lyon prior to his retirement, i.e. for the first three months of 2017. We were thus very concerned when the church received a letter a few weeks ago from the Prime Minister (who, as Minister of State, handles the portfolio for relationships with religious communities), indicating that no subsidy would be paid this year and the new subsidy would start in 2018. We took advantage of the visit of Archdeacon Paul Vrolijk on 14 March to arrange a meeting with a senior civil servant close to the Prime Minister. This went well. He invited us to write a letter of reply explaining why we believe that the subsidy should now be paid. At the time of writing Chris Lyon is preparing this letter; meanwhile informal contacts with this civil servant suggest that he considers that the Government has made a mistake, that he agrees that we should receive the subsidy this year and that he intends to ensure that this happens.

Our job as Churchwardens this year is to keep all the church's activities going as usual, using locums to take services and provide pastoral care. After Chris's 14-year ministry it is in a healthy state and we are confident that it can continue to thrive during the interregnum. However, we are often dealing with situations that we have not faced before, so please bear with us if we don't get it right all the time. At the same time we are handling the process of recruiting a new chaplain, under the responsibility of our Archdeacon and in cooperation with the Diocesan authorities and our congregation, all of whom have been asked for their views.

There are a number of people whom we should like to thank for their important contributions to various aspects of the life of the church and whose support is particularly valuable to us:

- Evelyn Sweerts, who undertook a very significant workload on a voluntary basis well before she actually started being paid as our Lay Pastoral Assistant and who has been very helpful to us as Churchwardens by helping us to tackle the challenges of an interregnum;
- Phil Harvey, for being willing to lead or assist with services on a regular basis – and again, for supporting us as we get to grips with the interregnum;

- all the Council members – Victoria Hodgson, Catriona Gillham, Gerd Gebhard, Gabriel Chelladurai – and particularly John Dimond and Isabel Page, who are due to step down from their positions as elected members, although John will continue as Webmaster;
- Chris Vaudrey; having worked closely with him, we particularly appreciate, and wish to highlight here, his remarkable willingness to continue as Treasurer for considerably longer than he originally intended! His wisdom and knowledge of the church's finances and associated processes and procedures have also been tremendously helpful;
- Tania Buhr, who as Council Secretary, continues to produce minutes of a remarkably high order in addition to oiling the wheels in other ways;
- Lynn Barclay and Elaine Birch, whose diligence in running the office and a whole range of administrative and coordination tasks is often not visible to most members of the congregation, but is essential to the well-being of the whole Chaplaincy;
- Ovidiu Dragan, our regular organists and the other leaders of our music, whose high skills contribute so much to our worship;
- John Overstall and Moira Hogg, our long-standing Archidiaconal Synod representatives;
- Edward Seymour, who serves the church in so many ways; the consistent quality of his work as editor of our magazine, *Lumen* is remarkable and constitutes a real contribution to our quality of life as a church;
- our Charities coordinators, Martin Curwen and Jacqui Spence, who bring much wisdom to a role that is far more complex than it might appear at first sight;
- those who run midweek groups – Cheryl Fisher, Rani Roloff, Cherry Kent and Graham and Isobel Weller;
- all the people who manage rotas – Barbara Thomson, Carole Vlachavas, Lucyna Muscat, Phil Harvey, Siân Crisp, Richard Deeley, Elizabeth Galvin, John Overstall;
- and the many other people who, without fanfare, quietly get on with helping our services and other events to run smoothly.

Simon Norcross and Philippa Seymour
Churchwardens