

The Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Churchwardens' AGM Report for 2017-2018

It has been a busy year for the Churchwardens as we set about recruiting a new Chaplain following Chris Lyon's retirement in March 2017, while at the same time keeping all the usual activities going and dealing with the unfamiliar situation of running a Chaplaincy without a Chaplain.

Chaplain recruitment

We received a great deal of help with the recruitment process from the Diocesan office and Archdeacon Paul Vrolijk, but it was up to us as a Chaplaincy to decide what kind of person we wanted as our new Chaplain. Last spring we asked the views of as many people as possible, even those who were only vaguely associated with our church. Predictably in our diverse congregation, opinions differed about the strong and weak points of our church, and about what was required in a new Chaplain. The Prayer Afternoon organised by Evelyn Sweerts and the Vision Day led by Paul Vrolijk helped everyone who participated to clarify their ideas, and then the Churchwardens had a meeting with Paul to refine our ideas still further and write them down in a Job Specification and Person Profile to be sent to prospective candidates. The Churchwardens, with help from Council members, then had to complete a form setting out in detail what we were offering – not only gross salary, but also a simulation to show pay after tax and social security contributions, and other benefits such as housing, travel allowance, etc., and giving details of Luxembourg immigration requirements (bearing in mind that applicants might come from outside the EU). The whole package of nine documents was approved by the Council at its meeting of 14 June and handed to Paul Vrolijk on 25 June. The Diocesan office completed further documents that they were responsible for and decided that, as the holiday season was approaching, the post should not be advertised until the end of August. It was advertised in the *Church Times* of 1 September.

On 20 September the Churchwardens travelled to Brussels to read the applications and choose a shortlist, together with Bishop Robert and Archdeacon Paul. There were three applicants and we decided to interview two of them in Luxembourg on 2 October. The candidates arrived in the afternoon of 1 October, which gave us an opportunity to meet them informally and show them the flat and chapel and other features of Luxembourg. The formal interviews with a four-person panel of Bishop, Archdeacon and two Churchwardens took place the next morning, and in the afternoon the panel conferred and reached a decision. There followed a very long wait before we were finally allowed to make the decision public, on 18 December. But we are delighted that Geoff Read has been in post since 1 March, and are looking forward to his Licensing Service on 5 May.

Locums

Meanwhile, we found a series of locums to take services. We are quite proud of the fact that, during the whole period from Chris' last service on 12 February 2017, to Geoff's first service on 18 March 2018, there was only one Sunday when we had no locum. On 2 April last year our ordinands at the time, Phil and Evelyn, led two non-Communion services. On every other Sunday we kept to our usual pattern of Communion services and monthly Evensong. There were 11 locums overall, two of whom came back for a second stint, some with wives or husbands, and we were privileged to benefit from their wealth of experience. The length of time they stayed varied from one Sunday to eight weeks. Several had to take funerals, some provided

pastoral assistance, some offered 'extra' meetings – an evening discussion on bereavement, another on 'why I am still a Christian', a Transition workshop, a ladies' breakfast, a Lent course. Many thanks to all those who helped the locums to feel welcome, gave them lifts, invited them round or took them to see places of interest.

Every time there was a change of locum we picked them up at the airport, took them to the flat, gave them the keys, showed them around, talked them through the dossier provided by the office, explained the bus system, tried to explain the mobile phone, went through the plan of the city, introduced those who were interested to the Chaplaincy car, answered any other questions – and either took them to the Konvikt Chapel on the first Sunday morning or made sure they knew how to get there. In addition the flat had to be cleaned, laundry done, basic groceries restocked. Many thanks to Elaine, Lynn, Moira and Victoria who coordinated these issues between them. Thanks also to Nick Jones and Justin and Wendy Loasby who kept the garden tidy.

Services

As well as regular services we held the usual Christingle service and a Te Deum for the second time. Archdeacon Paul officiated and the Grand Duke's representative attended, as well as a number of representatives of other faiths. The Remembrance service went very well and was attended by five ambassadors or heads of mission, Mme Colette Mart for Luxembourg city, several military representatives and representatives of the Guides, Scouts and Brownies. We also held a couple of new services as one-off experiments, led by Lay Assistant Evelyn Sweerts – a well-attended and appreciated Healing service and a Blue Christmas service which was less well-attended but nonetheless appreciated.

In general our remit was to keep everything going as before. This has meant that many people, including but not limited to the churchwardens, have had to play a more active part than previously. Those on the chalice rota for both Sunday morning services have been setting up the tray for Communion. Sidespersons' duties have been extended to include handling keys and locking up. People on the Coffee rota have been asked to take extra care to clean up afterwards. Procedures have been worked out and clear instructions written. This has generally worked well, and we would like to thank the rota organisers who have helped to ensure this. Our Music Director Ovidiu Dragan and First Sunday Group coordinator Lisa Dishman have continued to provide an excellent standard of music week by week and we wish to thank them and the organists, singers and other musicians who have given their time and talents and made this possible.

We kept things going, and also managed to slip in a couple of improvements. Thanks to the generosity of Esmée Chengapen and her employer, Fidelity International, we took delivery in January of six tables to use for coffee and Junior Church. They are on wheels and much lighter than the old ones and have transformed the work of providing refreshments after the service, as weightlifting skills are no longer required. For some time we had been thinking that a sound system in the chapel would make our services more inclusive, and thanks to the efforts of Nick Jones in researching what was needed and then obtaining and installing it, we now have a sound system that includes a loop for hearing aid wearers and means that lesson readers and intercessors don't have to shout to be audible. We need to train more people to be able to switch it on and monitor sound levels during the service.

We would like to say a special thank you to Lucyna Muscat, who for several years has been looking after the altar linen and hanging decorations as well as organising the flower rota. She

will still do the flower rota, but has handed over responsibility for the candles and most of the linen to a new, six-person team.

There has been a certain amount of friction with Altrimenti, the other user of the Salle Maria Rheinsheim. Our new tables have helped, as we are now no longer entirely dependent on them for furniture. At a meeting with Altrimenti and a Goeres group representative (Goeres group run the hotel) we were able to negotiate some mutually beneficial changes to the hours when the Salle is available to us. We now have the use of it every Sunday until 2.30 (instead of 3) and for a longer period a few times a year for lunches (eg Harvest, Mothering Sunday) and can book it at other times for special events. On a few Sundays when others needed the room in the afternoon we have cleared up earlier as a goodwill gesture. There have still been complaints, however, mainly about the state of the room after we leave, and about organ practice and noise in general. We have had several meetings to try to resolve the situation, but have not yet found a way to share the premises in a manner that satisfies everyone. Relations with the Goeres group are generally good – we provide them with a lot of custom – but since they have started offering a Champagne brunch on a Sunday they are no longer willing to serve coffee after the 9.30 service, so that congregation has had to make other arrangements – although there have been encouraging signs in recent weeks that this may be changing.

Property and accommodation

As our Honorary Auditor has been known jokingly to remark, from an accounting point of view our Chaplaincy can now be considered a property management company.

This has certainly never been a specific policy intention, but the following series of decisions taken over several years have together brought us to a position in which we own two valuable modern flats, both rented out to private tenants:

- (i) the sale of the former Vicarage in September 2016 (but planned long before then);
- (ii) the purchase of the former Chaplain's flat at 33 rue de Mühlenbach, L-2168 Luxembourg, in December 2015;
- (iii) the purchase of the new flat at 3 rue Jules Mersch, L-2184 Luxembourg, in September 2016 and the completion of its construction in December 2017;
- (iv) the preference of our new Chaplain, Geoff Read, and his family for a house in a village rather than a flat in the city.

We sent an explanatory e-mail to members of the congregation in February 2018 briefly documenting these historical developments. At that time we had just signed an initial one-year unfurnished rental contract for the flat in rue Jules Mersch. Since then, we have also signed an initial one-year furnished rental contract for the rue de Mühlenbach flat. Excluding charges, our total monthly rental income from these two flats is €3,800; by comparison, the total rent that we are now paying for the Chaplain's house in Steinsel and the Chaplaincy office is just under €3,450, so we are now in the fortunate position of being able broadly to cover our main rental costs without recourse to the funds donated by the congregation. The new tenants in both of our flats have made it clear that they would wish to stay well beyond their respective initial one-year rental periods.

For further financial details of the above, please see the 2017 Accounts, Notes 4.0, 4.1 and 4.2.

In parallel to the above, we found ourselves dealing with the fallout from the departure of our

former Assistant Chaplain, Andy Markey, and his family in August 2016. At the time, as mentioned in our report last year, we agreed to pay an extra 4 months' rent, as notice of the Markeys' departure had not been given within the contractual deadline. In addition, the owners of the Markeys' rented house felt that their tenants had left the house in an unacceptably bad state. They requested payments totalling some € 8,200 (after deduction of the rental guarantee and advances against charges, both already paid). We felt sympathy for some of their complaints but certainly not all; their expectations of how their house would look after 4 years' occupation by a family with 2 small boys seemed rather unrealistic. We had several on-site meetings and intermittent exchanges by e-mail and letter, consulting the Union Luxembourgeoise des Consommateurs along the way.

The whole process lasted from August 2016 until February 2018. In reaching a final resolution we agreed to pay the owners a total of € 3,450.

The casual observer could be forgiven for imagining that the Churchwardens' most demanding task during an interregnum would be the recruitment of the new Chaplain. However for at least one of us the issues around property – with the remarkable numbers of meetings, site visits, e-mails and exchanges of documents with promoters, suppliers, service providers, banks, agents, prospective tenants and angry proprietors – have actually proven very considerably more time-consuming. Perhaps our Honorary Auditor is more right than he realises ... We would like to thank both Isabel Page and Gerd Gebhard for their very extensive help, in both supporting us at these meetings and providing much useful advice about the property situation generally.

Relations with the Luxembourg authorities and government subsidy

During the interregnum, responsibility for dealings with the government and other Luxembourg official bodies devolved to the Churchwardens. The main subject was the implementation of the new Convention. Since September 2016, relations between the Luxembourg State and six religious groups, including the Anglican Church, are governed by a law of 23 July 2016, “ ... regulating the amount and the arrangements for granting annual financial support to the Anglican Church of Luxembourg, determining exemptions with respect to the acquisition of buildings set aside for the practice of Anglican worship, conferring legal personality on the said Church and repealing the law of 11 June 2004 authorising the State to defray the salaries and pensions of the ministers of religion of the Anglican Church of Luxembourg and granting legal personality under public law to the said Church.” (our translation of the French text).

For the Anglican Church, the annual subsidy is fixed at € 125,000 (index as at 2016). Andy Markey, our Assistant Chaplain, left in August 2016 and was not replaced. This should normally have led to a fairly small subsidy payment in 2016, but administrative delays meant that this was not the case. Under the terms of the Convention the 2017 subsidy should have been paid in January. There was though a small problem; even though we knew in January 2017 that Chris Lyon would be leaving, nobody knew when – and his departure date would affect the 2017 subsidy amount. We had extensive exchanges with the government about this throughout the year, finally resulting in the payment in November of an amount of well over € 100,000, covering both 2016 and 2017. For further financial details, please see the 2017 Accounts, notably Note 10.

The government paid us the full amount of the 2018 subsidy, being € 125,000 + two years' indexation, in January 2018.

Social events

We maintained the usual pattern of social events – Mothering Sunday lunch, Ascension Day walk, Harvest Festival and Christmas lunch. Our fundraisers were also successful social events – see Fun & Fundraising report for details. A big thank you to all the many people who helped to organise these events.

Konvikt chapel

A constant issue in past years has been the possible demolition of the Konvikt chapel and/or adjacent building. This year everything on that front has gone strangely quiet. We suppose that the Catholic Church, which owns the chapel, is busy working out the implications of the new Convention, which has taken management of church buildings out of the Church's hands and given it to local authorities. We have heard absolutely nothing about plans for the Konvikt building, or about the possibility of us moving to Cents or anywhere else.

Departures and arrivals

In June we said farewell to Phil and Penny Harvey. Phil was well supported by a group from Luxembourg at his ordination in Norwich Cathedral and we wish him well in his ministry in Norfolk. Graham and Isobel Weller went back to Britain in September and we wish them well also. One consequence of their departure is that we no longer have Saturday Breakfast Bible Study. We do, however, have the Christian Classics book group, which started in September and has been steadily gathering new members, and a new monthly event, Prayers for the Chaplaincy. Gerd Gebhard is stepping down from the Council this year under our rotation system, but we hope he will still be prepared to give expert advice on property, tax and many other issues. Tania Buhr will also no longer be attending Council meetings after faithfully taking the minutes for eight years. We shall miss her. Some people have taken on new roles: Gabriel Chelladurai has just completed his first year as Treasurer; Carol Birch has taken over the Intercessions rota and provided training to intercessors. Rupert Birch has stepped in as Assistant Webmaster so that John Dimond can spend more time with his family.

Another new face was that of a car, a 14-year-old VW Polo automatic, procured on our behalf by Edward Ojo. It was primarily intended for the locums' use (Edward's brief was to find a vehicle that could reasonably be expected to serve for 12-18 months), although as it turned out only a couple drove it with any regularity. It is now being put to good and regular use by the Chaplain.

Our particular thanks go to our Lay Assistant Evelyn Sweerts, who has worked far more than the hours she is paid for, Parish Coordinator Lynn Barclay and Admin Assistant Elaine Birch for their invaluable and unfailing support, and all the Church Council and other members of the congregation who have made their time and expertise available to help us shoulder the burden of keeping the Chaplaincy going. Many times we have been faced with situations for which we felt unprepared, but support and/or useful advice has always been forthcoming. Many of us have developed new skills and a deeper understanding of how the Church works, and we feel confident that the Anglican Church of Luxembourg is well prepared for the next phase of its development under our new Chaplain.

Philippa Seymour & Simon Norcross
April 2018