

ST GEORGE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, PARIS – 2017/18

Looking back to a year ago, whether in church or in the wider world, we can be tempted to either stress the continuity – not much has happened, it's all much the same – or to focus on the events and changes and think that the world is a different place. To take one example from the wider context in France: the last twelve months saw the election of Emmanuel Macron as president (a pretty big change), yet of course the daily life for us, residents of this country, has not changed so much – at least



not as yet: though some of British origin have been quietly acquiring French nationality as well. At St George's too we can think of some significant events that have taken place over this last twelve months that have marked and built up our life together. But as important is the continuity of the daily and the Sunday-by-Sunday offering of our worship and its sustaining by the effort of all the community – keeping the focus of all that we do in clear sight – the prayer of the people, the Opus Dei, the Sacraments of the New Covenant. Of course it's not an either or: many of the special things that have taken place this last year were about renewing that offering of our worship and about deepening our discipleship and strengthening our life together.

We had a fantastic **Confirmation Service** last Pentecost with 14 candidates from our community making their adult commitment to Christ in his Church, supported by a congregation of around 300 people. Getting those fourteen candidates ready for that act of commitment and the sacrament of grace was also, however, quite a bit of work: preparing and teaching the different age and language groups over many sessions and supporting, challenging and encouraging them in their walk with Christ. **Nurturing young people in discipleship** is, of course, not something that begins at lesson 1 of a confirmation course – it is a question of already having provided a welcoming, safe and attentive space for them, week by week. As part of this whole aspect of our life it has been good to see the Sunday School gently strengthen in numbers too over the past year.

Then **at Petertide, Fr Nicolas Razafindratsima was ordained priest** at St George's. It was a wonderful and busy weekend, with the ordination service on the Saturday and then Fr Nicolas' first mass on the Sunday morning. Whilst the Malagasy Community is a particular focus of his ministry, he is of course a priest to the whole of St George's, and indeed to the wider church – for example he goes quite often to support the community at Strasbourg. His priestly ordination marked the end of a particular part of his discernment, formation and training and the beginning of a new ministry. For us as a church it was an important moment: ordination services in any parish church aren't that common, Fr Nicolas is a home-grown candidate, whose vocation emerged at St George's and whose ministry will be spent here - at least for the foreseeable future – so a marvellous enriching and strengthening of our common life and for years to come, which we welcome whole-heartedly.

Whilst we are talking of the ordained ministry, this past year has seen some other important changes. **At Christmas we said farewell to Fr Andrew Bigg** as he took up new work as Chaplain and Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, after three and half years with us as Assistant Chaplain. We gave our thanks to him at the time for his time and his ministry here. Apart from the quiz nights, two aspects deserve putting on the record as the parish thinks about the future. The first

was his assiduousness in **visiting the elderly and housebound**: at St George's this a time consuming business because people can be spread all over the city and beyond. So it is a major investment in time but also an essential part of the expression of our Christian community of care in action. Of course, this is not just something to be left to the clergy and it is marvellous to see how much is done quietly in this area by members of the congregation. Somehow we need to do all we can to strengthen it and to communicate about people in need where appropriate. The other aspect was Fr Andrew's **ministry to students and young adults**. It's not always been a well-represented group at St George's, so it is refreshing to see quite a gang at the moment and over the last little while: I think it probably is as simple as putting time, attention and resources into it. They bring so much life to the community and help us all to think better – part of the exchange of gifts that is also a definition of what it means to be Church.

Still on ordained ministry, **we have now been joined by Fr Stephen McCarthy, a priest of the Episcopal Church of the United States**. In a piece of what I hope is mutual serendipity, a priest looking for somewhere to live whilst he learnt French and a parish with somewhere to live looking for a couple of days a week of priestly help met each other. Fr Stephen is with us through the diocese on a 'house-for-duty' basis. He has cheered us all up a good deal. Not least through his Lent course, which garnered quite a following and taught us all something new – and his sermons too. He has returned temporarily to the United States but the plan is that he will be back in May and be around for much of the summer, including after my leaving – visa formalities permitting.

The Choir has continued in extraordinary form (and numbers one might add). It was a particularly gruelling Holy Week for them with the Chrism Mass and a funeral on top of all. In addition to enhancing our worship the choir provides a place of welcome and support to many young talented members of our congregation. Our choral tradition is a distinctive and valued part of our life and worship here and also acts often in an ambassadorial way for St George's reputation and mission.

Numbers in the choir are good: numbers at Sunday Sung Eucharist are gently but persistently on the rise too, after having dipped over a period of a couple of years. The electoral roll is unchanged at 227 – with 7 names off and 7 additions. Christmas communions 264 and attendance 354: Easter communions 287 and attendance 362.

Finance: The budgeted figures for 2017 proved to be remarkably accurate – operating income came in at 96% of budget and operating expenditure at 97%. So there were no great surprises. That still left a deficit for the year – a year in which we had a full twelve months of two stipends. So we have a little way to go with our financial stewardship. The budget for 2018 is for total income to be 193,000 and expenditure at 212,200, with the 19,200 deficit covered from reserves and investment gains.

Buildings. Careful work has continued on the stewardship of our buildings too. We had a big inspection earlier this year from the Fire and Police, which has led to a list of remedial works to be done. Over the long term this work of looking after our buildings is of course essential – Christopher Chantrey has been leading on it for many years and must have saved us many thousands in euros as well as averting any problems with the authorities.

Sound finances and a building in good repair and adapted to our needs are not of course just tiresome chores: they reveal something of what we are about and they provide the context for our core mission of being a worshipping community. In fact, as with any church, the running of St George's, its liturgical life and community, requires the commitment of a great many people.

In all that we do together and in all these many tasks, we keep the focus of our purpose in clear sight: renewing the offering of our worship, deepening our discipleship and strengthening our life together. Those essential three aspects of our mission remain constant even in the midst of this turning world, with its new challenges and contexts. And those three constants we also express in the essential and defining form of our worship: the Eucharist of the risen Lord that we celebrate every Sunday as best as we can and with all that we are, because all comes from him.

Please pray for the community of St George's as it moves forward with the search for its next chaplain. **Father Matthew Harrison**