

SAINT GEORGE'S, PARIS

Report for Synod 2017

Holy Week 2017

As always at St George's, it is was a very special week with services every day. It is something we try to do as a community - at the heart of our self-understanding as to our aim and purpose as a church. Bishop Nicholas Reade, formerly Bishop of Blackburn and now in retirement an honorary assistant bishop in our diocese, was our preacher. It was very good to have him with us – and his wife Christine – and a stagiaire from Brussels, Jean-Bosco, to add into the mix. Good too to have such solid attendance figures all through.

St George's Choir

The choir has had an excellent year, with a good number of students in its ranks. They are just back from a post-Easter tour to Rome: they sang for the chaplaincy of All Saint's Rome on a Sunday morning and gave concerts at San Clemente Basilica and at the Napoleon Foundation there. We are very thankful for the part the choir plays in our life here at St George's. They sing every day of Holy Week to deepen our experience and expression of worship. Something they do throughout the year, of course. And they are wonderful ambassadors for us wherever they go – for example singing the Evensong at St Joseph des Carmes last November for the Paris visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury. But in addition to that, the choir provides a place of welcome and support to many talented young members of our congregation. In the near future they are doing another concert at Pontigny Abbey in Burgundy and singing Evensong in Caen for the Diocese of Bayeux.

The Malagasy Congregation

As I write this about 100 members of our Malagasy congregation are off on pilgrimage to Canterbury and London, accompanied by Fr Andrew and Fr Nicolas (May 6/7th). It is a way of joyfully celebrating the fact that the Malagasy community has had its own worshipping life here at St George's for thirty years this year. And a worshipping life that is constantly growing and deepening. Of course, since the last Synod, Fr Nicolas Razafindratsima has been ordained deacon: a wonderful service last Pentecost at St George's, with our Diocesan Bishop and a very large congregation and many visitors. Having Fr Nicolas as now part of the clergy team has enriched both the liturgical offering and our pastoral work. But of course the work of ministering to the Malagasy congregation is a team effort and their council, led by James and Antoine, do it thoroughly, thoughtfully and imaginatively. We are now looking forward to the service this summer at which Fr Nicolas will be ordained to the priesthood. God-willing it will take place on Saturday 1st July at St George's again, with Bishop David Hamid coming to ordain – so please keep that date free if at all possible. But it has been a good year amongst our Malagasy members and the future is full of promise.

The Stewardship Campaign

We are also always thinking of appropriate ways in which we can all work together in the life of our community here. Over the past year, one way that has been expressed in concrete terms has been in our Stewardship Campaign, which from outset was carefully planned as a bilingual and joint effort. This time last year it has just come to a conclusion but it was far too early to know if the end result would meet our goals and our aspirations. In fact both the aims we set ourselves were achieved by the end of the year: we increased our giving by 15% and we encouraged more people to give by standing order. And the Malagasy congregation have been a full part of that. Another interesting and heartening statistic is that last year I signed 79 tax certificates, whereas this year the figure had gone up to 107 – a considerable increase in people giving by identifiable means. It is ongoing, continuing work of course because it is about stewardship not one-off gifts, and we aren't out of the woods completely – but it has been a wonderful and good-humoured exercise.

Disabled-friendly Access

Another major piece of work where we are finally seeing physical results is in our response to the disabled access legislation. The current phase of the work has just been completed and looks great – including a new disabled-friendly toilet at the top of the stairs down into church. I am not sure whether we are going to throw holy water at it but it is a satisfying result – likewise the new bannister rails. It has taken up much time and has been long in the planning. We now move to phases II and III, involving work on our doors, in particular

Electoral Roll

Sounder 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 Eucharistic community celebrating the sacraments of the new covenant together. The offering of our worship and our common life together into which we welcome others are the twin pillars of our mission. So it is good to notice that the electoral roll is gently up at 227 – 7 came off and 14 went on.

The Ordained Ministry

In fact overall the attendance figures over the year are showing a gentle rise – happily reversing the trend of the last little while. And we have had another full year of two stipendiary priests here at St George’s. Fr Andrew is assiduous in his care of the sick and housebound and does by far the greater part of that ministry as well as the student ministry. His quiz nights I think are now legendary and their fame has spread. But alongside that there is the more normal sharing of pastoral, preaching and liturgical duties. It just makes more things possible and many things sustainable. We both continue with our ministry to the chaplaincy at Caen. And I continue as ecumenical delegate – news of which is elsewhere.

Lay-led Ministry & Volunteers

In fact of course, as with any church the running of St George’s, its liturgical life and community, requires the commitment of a great many people: our church officers; our music department and choir members; but also our servers, readers, greeters and flower-arrangers; our Sunday School teachers; those who look after the kitchen and bar and garden; our parish office and administration; those who look after our website; our building and maintenance; our gang for the Bazaar and Book Sale and fundraising; as well as our team of finance people.

Well it’s been an eventful year. The Brexit vote in the UK that has put some of us British nationals in something of a puzzle, and now another national election in the UK. The Trump presidency in the United States, which puzzles others. And recently the French national election.

If you know your history, though, you will know how people here in Paris have lived through much stranger times than us: turmoil and occupations and world wars as well as the personal contours of the thousands of lives of the people who have passed through St George’s since its founding in 1824 – and somehow they have done it faithfully.

Bishop Nicholas Reade wrote after Easter: ‘You have a delightful congregation. As with every congregation there will be tensions and great strengths, joys and sorrows. But there is a very good feel to it, a special community spirit, and clearly a commitment to being open to the Lord and growing in holiness.’

That we set ourselves to nurture this coming year:

The Community Spirit; Being open to the Lord; And growing in holiness.

Fr Matthew Harrison,
Chaplain.

Facts and Figures: Electoral Roll 227, Budget 2016 – 236,010, Christmas attendance 353/communions 281, Easter attendance 319/communions 270.

*For a much more lively and illustrated insight into what goes on at
St George’s, Paris,
please visit our excellent web-site
stgeorgesparis.com*

