

## Annual Reports 2021

### Church Warden's report 2021

What a year this has been. We still find ourselves in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, although small signs of improvement and hope in Belgium are emerging.

We had the excitement of welcoming Catriona as our chaplain following our length lockdown and online church and we have our new temporary venue of Pater Damiaancrypt in St Antonius kerk.

The arrival of Catriona has allowed our congregation to meet regularly for individual walks to chat and to pray and I know a number of our congregation have very much appreciated having this opportunity to get to know Catriona as zoom church and reduced opportunities for socialising has affected everyone's year.

The size of our congregation has been increasing some people have been unable to attend due to the restrictions on numbers, but this has led to people needing to book earlier in the week using the Eventbrite platform.

We celebrated an in-person Christmas day Eucharist which was kindly filmed by Femke for those unable to attend in person. There were 5 children in attendance who were a charming and joyful presence to add to and uplift what for some people was going to be a very strange and lonely day.

Our online and in-person worship has been very popular and we have explored different styles, we are grateful to Bram, Louise and Ilse for their playing for the services and the pool of people contributing to intercessions and readings has increased, demonstrating once again the rich vein of talent and calling in our little community. We were delighted to be back in church from Palm Sunday following from our further up and further in Lenten sermon series.

We are pleased to finally have a confirmed date for the bishop to join us to carry out the licensing service of Catriona and we are also looking forward to welcoming Sarah Jane as our curate.

We have a vision day planned for June following the postponement due to terrible weather of May. We will gather together to explore God's plan for us here in Leuven as we look to develop our connections with social justice projects and raise our profile a little higher both in the city and at the university. We will explore many topics around who we are, how, where and when we will worship. It will be a truly inspiring day led by Stephen Murray and Catriona.

The Church needs to talk about race talks were a huge hit across Europe we had many people attending from a broad spectrum of all aspects of the C of E and elsewhere. People were engaging and willing to listen and discuss tricky topics. The speakers were excellent and we are truly blessed that Catriona was able source them to enrich our conversations and understanding of global issues.

Catriona and Sarah will be attending Living in Love and Faith training as we look to have some conversations about who we are and what we stand up for and how we can include all around God's table. The way we approach this as a parish will be further discussed and explored by the PCC before we launch it.

After a number of years as churchwarden, I step down happy to have contributed to the best of my ability and grateful to all I have served with on the PCC for their humour and kindness as we faced challenging times. I look forward to seeing where M and Ms goes next, M and Ms has been a wonderful and welcoming home away from home and although we have a high turnover of congregation everyone however long or short their stay with us, enriches us and our worship. I am excited for the next chapter that we face together.

## Chaplain's Report 2021

I'm writing this report listening to Jenn Johnson sing the Goodness of God, a song Louise introduced us to when she preached at Advent. 'I will sing of the goodness of God. All my life you have been faithful'. I'm struck this annual meeting by the way God has protected and guided our community in this second year of the covid pandemic. It's only seven months since our last annual meeting, but there is so much to reflect on and to be thankful for in the life of our church in Leuven.

My appreciation begins with this crypt and Fr. Jozef whose gracious hospitality has enabled us to worship in person despite not being able to access our usual chapel, due to university restrictions in lockdown. What a gift it was to be able to step into this prayer infused place and celebrate the Eucharist together back in September when the lockdown lifted. We then had to return to zoom from All Saints until Palm Sunday, but joyfully regathered in person in time for Holy Week and Easter. During those months of online worship I was deeply grateful for all of you who joined our zoom services. And I am thankful for what we experienced and learnt through that different form of worship. We were able to try out a wider range of music, we were able to welcome former members of M&Ms, who have left Leuven; we greatly enjoyed having younger members participate in our services; we had good fellowship during the breakout group times and we were blessed with preachers and liturgists joining us from elsewhere.

I want also to show my gratitude to all of the PCC, it's a small group and the funny thing is, even a small congregation generates quite a bit of work! You still need someone to manage the finances, worry about the website, design all the communications and social media material, do hospitality, plan music, take minutes, forge links with our social justice projects, maintain our membership of university committees...to name just a few things. So a big thank you to the PCC. I'd like to add a shout out to Bram, Louise, Ilse and Sarah for helping with our music in church and online and for being so wonderfully adaptable to new music and different instruments. Last but not least, I want to say a special thank you to Sarah, who is stepping down as Churchwarden and whose tireless commitment and faithfulness to this community is something we rely upon so much that I fear we may take it for granted. She's such a hard act to follow that we're still waiting to find the right successor!

I'm thankful for the new things we've done as a community in the past year. I'm deeply thankful to those of you who started attending M&Ms in the last six months, who stuck out the lockdown and who are bringing new energy and gifts to M&Ms. Our the Church needs to talk about race online series of four talks was very well received. We had an average of 40 participants, which for a current average Sunday attendance of 15 aint' bad! We've also had some wonderful online prayer praying the daily office and praying in silence on a regular basis. P Cafe was masterfully hosted by Bram, who adapted to the online format and took up the reins last autumn. I'm grateful to Bram for holding it for us and I know it has been much appreciated by members of M&Ms as well as friends from the wider Christian community in Leuven.

And I'm thankful to God for continuing to work in the hearts and minds of his people even when they can't be together physically. M&Ms can continue to be proud of the charism we seem to have to accompany people in their discernment towards taking up forms of lay or ordained ministry. In the past year Ilse Swart has been accepted for training for ordained ministry, Jacob Quick, now at Holy Trinity, Brussels was licensed as a reader, Sarah Jones has completed another year of her training for reader ministry and Sarah-Jane King who will be ordained deacon at the beginning of July will be joining us for three years as a non-stipendiary curate. It is truly amazing and exciting to be part of a church where God's Holy Spirit is stirring the hearts and minds of his faithful as they explore different opportunities to contribute to the building of God's kingdom on earth.

In closing let me offer a few thoughts about the year ahead. I've spent a bit of time recently looking at reports from the previous fifteen years or so. I've been impressed and humbled by the affection so many have had for this community and for the determination my predecessors and yours had to

see M&Ms grow and flourish. I was also struck by a refrain I noticed in these successive reports. There has been a repeated concern to discover the calling of M&Ms in Leuven, to think about how to grow in number and in breadth, to explore how to develop closer ties with both the university, ETF and the city of Leuven. In short, many of the same questions that were articulated in the parish profile put together last year when you were looking for a new chaplain have been being raised for over a decade.

The dedication of our parish to Saints Martha and Mary has really touched me in the past few months. I feel called to explore with you all how we as a church can really discover a mission and ministry that is shaped by both Mary and Martha - or as Richard Rohr would put it, contemplation and action. May the Martha aspects of our ministry be completely grounded in a listening prayer that reflects our desire to sit at the feet of Jesus and be guided by his example. My prayer is that by developing the prayerful contemplative side of our lives we will have a clear sense of our identity and of the particular kinds ministry to which God is calling us.

As well as being a time of real challenge, loneliness and difficulty for many of us, I believe that the pandemic has been a gift to this chaplaincy. Going online, not being able to worship in the JLC, losing a number of deeply loved and long term members of the community last year has forced us to press pause on the way things have always been done and is inviting us to look to the future. Esther's words 'for such a time as this' keep coming to my mind. We don't usually choose these moments of challenge and opportunity, but they can so often be incredibly generative. Maybe this pause is the moment this chaplaincy has needed to stop and look at how far we've come and to ask questions about where we want to go and who we want to be. I look forward to pondering that with you further when we gather for our church picnic in June.

My mind is fizzing with ideas and possibilities for what we could do together here in Leuven. But what I am most looking forward to is hearing from you about what nurtures you, where your heart is and what you are passionate about. And then, together, discovering with each other and with God how we can continue to build God's church together in this place.