

St Martha & St Mary's Anglican Church Leuven Annual Chaplaincy Meeting 2024

Curate's report

"Keep your eyes peeled!" my parents used to say to me as a child. A reminder to be alert – to opportunities, or to threats. It struck me as a funny phrase. I used to think of pickled onions in a jar, and imagine my eyeballs like those little things, peeled and staring through my glasses.

ICS [*Intercontinental Church Society, an Anglican mission agency to which I am connected as an Associate Ministry Partner*] asked me earlier this year to write a short devotional based on Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 **'Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing'**. To be honest, this wasn't a difficult task! There has been so much good going on at M&Ms this year, so much encouragement, that the only difficult part was using all my briefing-writing skills to boil it down to the word limit they had given me.

When I pray for the M&Ms community, my heart sings from encouragement. From who you are in Christ, and how we do things together.

Whether that's the faithful love and commitment of our churchwardens; the care and dedication of the other clergy here at M&Ms; the skill and kindness of our humanitarian corridors refugee support team; the warm hospitality of our welcomers, servers, and all who help set up and prepare our Sunday services; the joy of our musicians leading us in worship; the quiet, gentle service of those who work behind the scenes to support good administration and communication; the curiosity and hope we see in seekers and those growing in their faith and sense of calling; or the desire for greater obedience to and love for Jesus, that's shared in our home groups – I'm filled with gratitude for the genuine encouragement you all are.

Paul is telling his friends in Thessaloniki to be alert to this kind of encouragement. Because Jesus died for us so that we can live together with him, in love. We're not to try going it alone, because that's hard. Rather, we need one another to build each other up. "*Just as in fact you are doing,*" he says. We're already doing this! The key is to notice – to "keep our eyes peeled"!

We have certainly had some challenges this year – the vacancy; the fire in the Pauscollege chapel, and the ongoing logistical and communication challenges of split-site worship, due to the constraints of other communities in Leuven with whom we share space; and the various difficulties faced by the second refugee family we have been supporting here in Leuven.

Nevertheless, week by week, we have continued to meet together, to offer worship to the God who in Christ Jesus has redeemed us. We have continued to trust in God who we love, who loves us and whose love we seek to share in and through our community. Looking back, I treasure all the fun we have had together! Our Harvest service in support of the Community Kitchen. The Christingle. Seeing the JLC packed for our joyous evensong with the students from King's Voices. And our wonderful Easter brunch and egg hunt at the American College.

We do this because we believe we have a gospel to proclaim. A gospel of hope. And Paul is right: we need, through prayer, actively to be alert to the encouragement already around us. It's fuel for hope. And hope, through love in action, is the difference we can make in this world.

Thank you all, for your support, prayers and encouragement over the past year at M&Ms. I thank God for the blessing that is this lovely community. For God's faithfulness. And for the constant love and care of the other men in my life as well as Jesus: Rutger, Bram and Max.

*Sarah-Jane King
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