Report from the Archdeaconry Synod for North-West Europe
Drongen, 9-11 October 2025

It was my honour to represent M&Ms at the Archdeaconry Synod on 9-11 October. It is an annual meeting of clergy and lay representatives of chaplaincies across Benelux. The word 'synod', comes from a Greek word σύνοδος, has the meaning of 'gathering', 'meeting', being "on the way" together. The Archdeaconry Synod discussed mainly church practical and pastoral issues like refugee care, care for creation, and racial justice.

As a Church, we walk together by our shared faith in Christ as his body. So we prayed together, sang hymns, and shared meals together. I was privileged to lead a morning prayer and had a lovely time praising the Lord with Sarah-Jane in a Eucharist with our voices.

The presence of M&Ms was highly visible through the participation of Sarah-Jane (our chaplain), Athan (one of four young adult observers), and me (your elected lay representative). We listened to reports on various church and societal issues and exchanged views with fellow representatives—it was truly a rewarding experience. I was particularly moved by two topics that we discussed, and I would like to share my thoughts with you: Refugee Support and Evangelization (to follow next week).

<u>Refugee Support</u>

We heard from Bradon Muilenberg, the Anglican Refugee Support Lead working in Calais, France. Hearing his description of the death of a child due to cold temperature, and the occurrence of sexual exploitation as a result of the lack of tents, has left me unsettled. The stock of tents is so low that NGOs have had to restrict tents to mothers with an infant under two years old. What about those children who are three years old? Four years old? Five?

These are not distant stories—they are happening now in our neighbouring country. Every one of these people has a name, has a beloved family, has friends, has unique personalities, and has different hopes. They are just as human as we are.

Bradon shared that one tent costs only €8, yet even one tent could potentially save more than one life, especially with winter approaching. He made an emergency appeal for donations so that more tents can be provided to those living in vulnerable and exposed conditions. Who is a neighbour to them? It is the one who showed them mercy. Perhaps Jesus would say to us today: "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:37)

As I listened to his presentation, this Bible verse came to my mind:

“The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:34)

I am myself an “alien” to Belgium, and many of us are not native-born here. Yet we have the privilege of calling this place home, and are not suffering from a lack of shelter and food.

Our friends at our sister Anglican church in The Hague have set up a QR code to make it easy to donate to this appeal. They will send the funds directly to the Refugee Women's Centre in Calais.

If you prefer, you can also donate through USPG, who are a partner in the project https://refugees-appeal-2025.raiselysite.com/

Evangelization

Our Suffragan Bishop, Andrew Norman, discussed with us some key points regarding evangelization within our Diocese. He invited us to reflect on whether the Five Marks of Mission are owned by the members of our church—consciously or not:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

3. To respond to human need by loving service

4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation

5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

All five points concern evangelization, and the first three are directly related to what we usually understand evangelization to be. This has a particular resonance for us at M&Ms, because recently we’ve welcomed a growing number of visitors and new members into our church community. As we celebrate the gift of this expanding spiritual family, I’ve also been thinking about what we shared during the M&Ms Council Quiet Day. That day was a significant step for us to think about how our church could grow a culture of discipleship—moving beyond (without letting go of) our commitment to warm welcome and loving inclusion, and learning how to support one another more deeply in our walk with Jesus. Here I would like to share with you my thoughts on mission and evangelization after speaking with the other representatives at the synod:

We have had a strong outward mission. All Christians have the duty to make disciples of all nations (Jesus’ Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20). This command to make

disciples is the task of the whole Church, and of every individual Christian. But we mustn't pursue mission to the point of neglecting our own discipleship. After all, we mustn't forget that we ourselves need evangelization too! When we proclaim the good news to the world, let us also remember to preach to our hearts.

Christ calls every one of us to become his disciple. But it is the disciple who makes disciples. If we are not disciples ourselves, how could we preach the good news faithfully?

Let each of us examine the spiritual condition of our interior castle (our soul): Is there a dark corner? A staircase filled with spider webs? A mirror unwiped for years? Let everyone say to themselves: Let me share the exciting good news of Christ to my soul! Let me spend time with Jesus so that he may clean and decorate my interior castle according to his intention and example! As our interior castles are restored by our encounter with Christ, surely our inner motivation of evangelization will be driven by more love and excitement for the good news. Let us share to the world our joyful discovery of the treasure hidden in a field, that is worth selling all that we have and buy them—namely, the kingdom of God (Matt 13:44-46).

When any of us needs time to rest and be refreshed, let us encourage each other to speak up, so that as brothers and sisters we can care for those who need recovery. We as a church work as a team, because we who are many are one body. Let us not hesitate to rest, or to support each other, when the circumstances require it. As Jesus said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). It is in loving one another that we become witnesses to Christ in the world. Non-believers will recognize that we are disciples of Christ and be drawn to the beauty of Christ in us.

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours." (attributed to St Teresa of Avila)

Ohin Cheng, Archdeaconry Synod Representative, St Martha and Mary's Leuven