

## **ANDREW ALLEN. REPORT ON PLACEMENT IN BONN, GERMANY.**

During Michaelmas and Hilary Terms 2009 – 2010 I was on placement in Bonn, as part of my final year of ministerial training prior to Ordination. I chose to return to Bonn, as I had studied law at the university in 2004 – 2005, and as I was to be away from Cuddesdon for a relatively short time, I felt it was best to capitalise on links already made, as well as being practical and easy to get to from England. Furthermore religion is widely discussed in Bonn; the churches' presence is felt not only by their architectural impact on the city, but through various initiatives, discussion groups, and programmes.

My main intention for my time abroad was to be able to theologically reflect and theologically digest what I had hitherto learnt, whilst also ensuring that I would be suitably trained and prepared for ordination. I have sought to find a balance between ensuring that the core classes and material which I was missing out on in Cuddesdon has been covered, whilst also making full use of the fact that I was living in a different country, a different culture, and with different expressions of how the body of Christ materialises itself in different forms of church.

This report looks at various aspects of my time in Bonn, in alphabetical order. I have not focussed on the Meissen aspect of my time in Bonn, as that is covered in a separate report.

### **Academic Work**

Having just completed a very intense two year second BA in Theology, it was always my intention, in agreement with my college, to spend my time in Bonn processing what I had learnt over the past two years, and to see how theology can be applied directly to ministry and indeed to one's life. Nonetheless, I also enrolled as a *Gasthörer* [visiting student] at the University of Bonn. This allowed me to attend lectures and seminars, and library access, but meant that I was unable to sit any exams or gain qualifications from the university. In addition to attending a couple of undergraduate lecture series [one on non Pauline books of the New Testament and one on Homiletics] I participated fully in the Masters in Ecumenical Studies [<http://www3.uni-bonn.de/studying/international-students/international-degree-programs/humanities-cultural-studies/ecumenical-studies-mest>]. This allowed me to explore in an academic setting what I had already learnt at Oxford, that is, how theology plays out in the non academic world. In addition to the actual seminars and classes, I feel that I have gained much insight into how other traditions interpret the Christian kerygma, ranging from skeptical Indonesian Roman Catholics, persecuted Chinese Methodists, to Orthodox Ordinands.

It is also worth noting that I will be completing all the learning outcomes required for the Oxford Brookes PG Diploma in Ministry [which is the usual third year course for those who have completed senior status Oxford University BA in Theology] by the time I leave Cuddesdon – some of the work done as part of the Masters in Ecumenical Studies [such as how the church deals with the memorialisation of the Holocaust] will be adapted to achieve the learning requirements of the Diploma, thus showing how my work [and indeed experiences and theological reflections] in Bonn can be interwoven with my work at Cuddesdon.

### **Accommodation**

I lived at the Döllingerhaus, which is the Old Catholic Seminary in Bonn.

<http://www.alt-katholisch.de/bistum/ausbildungsstaetten/bischoeffliches-seminar-johanneum-doellingerhaus.html>

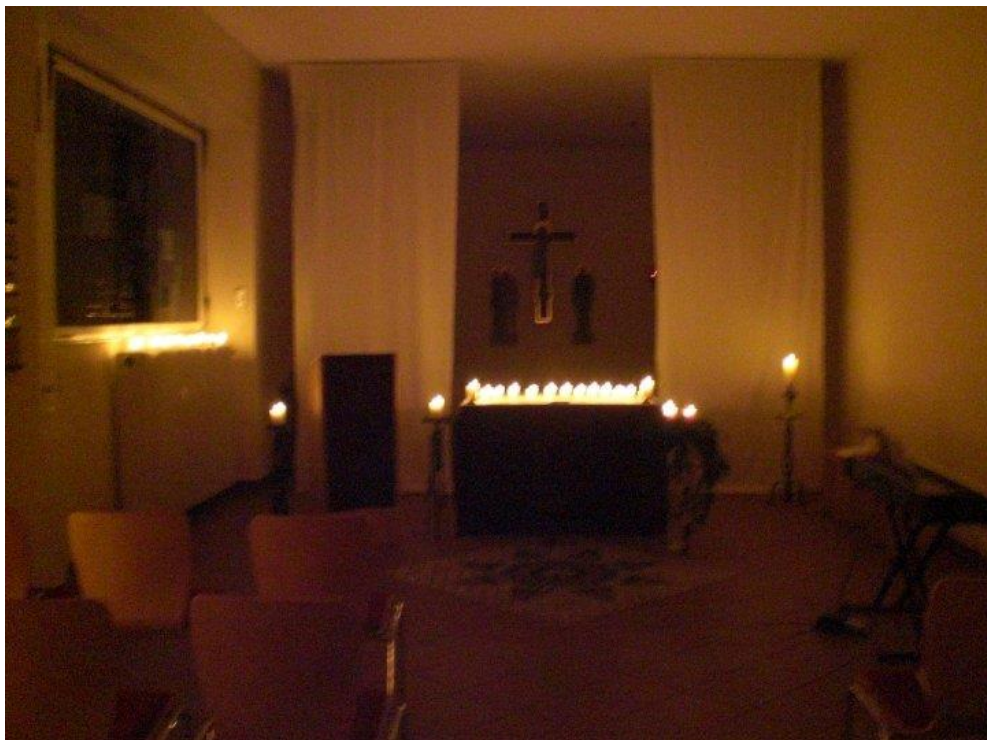
This proved to be an ideal location for several reasons.

Firstly by living with Old Catholic ordinands I was able to gain an insight into their method of ministerial training, which differs significantly from that in England, in so far that one completes a five year degree in theology before beginning curacy; it is during the curacy that one actually start to do ministry, pastoral visiting, preaching and so forth. For example, I attended a series of seminars on pastoral theology, discussing how one goes about a hospital visit, but we never actually went visiting the sick. This is in complete contrast to the English system whereby from the first term we are assigned practical / pastoral placements. I feel very strongly that ministry should be a mixture of theory / academic theology, and hands on learning, and I am grateful to have had the chance whilst at Cuddesdon to do more practical placements than my German colleagues, as I feel this better prepares one for service in the ordained ministry.

Secondly the Döllingerhaus has a chapel, and this allowed me to continue the pattern of praying the daily office with others, something which I feel is vital to one's survival.

Thirdly living with other people who are actively thinking about God and the church was stimulating, especially conversations over breakfast and dinner. Not all the residents were ordinands, but most were church goers, so it was really useful to get another perspective of the church, as well as generally making my time in Bonn more enjoyable.

From an entirely practical point of view, the accommodation was very decent – I had a 12sq m room, which was furnished, there is a communal kitchen, two bathrooms, as well as a library, seminar room, function room, smart dining hall, balcony, and outdoor space. Furthermore the rent was incredibly cheap [€185 a month], and it had a very central location. The new director of the house is the Revd Ralf Staymann, and his assistant is Dr Andreas Krebs; the email for the director, should this placement be done again is [a.krebs@uni.bonn.de](mailto:a.krebs@uni.bonn.de)



**Figure 1: Johanneskapelle in the Döllingerhaus**

### **Finances**

Rent was €185 a month, University fee €100 per semester. Due to the location of my Sunday placement church, it was necessary to spend about €12 a week on public transport. As I had lived in Germany before, I had a German bank account: if someone were to do this placement again, I highly recommend that they set up a student account

[thus avoiding bank fees]. I would like to especially thank Mark Hodge for all his work and help.

## Personal Development and Reflection

The greatest advantage of living, worshipping, studying, and working in a different community is that one gets to appreciate one's own tradition, through comparing with what one is surrounded by. This has perhaps been the most significant personal development I have made whilst in Bonn. I was forced, through having discussions and debates with other theologians, ordinands, and parishioners, to be able to articulate an understanding of Anglicanism, something which can be quite difficult in a church governed more by *lex orandi lex credi*, than dogma.

What I have gained from my time in Bonn is incalculable. I have had so many positive experiences, ranging from ideas for sermons to larger concepts of what it means to be the church. I will be doing my curacy in three semi rural parishes, one of which has a particular focus that the church is just the building, and this is becoming a serious problem as the congregations gets older and dwindles in size. The theme of the first communion classes, which I co-lead was '*Gott baut ein Haus, das lebt*' [God builds a house, which lives], and through this we explored what the House of God really is; the people who comprise it, the physical space it occupies, what people do in the building, how people use this in their daily lives. Something which I quickly learnt when working with children is that one needs to know exactly what one is teaching, because children can very quickly spot when one's waffling! Furthermore when they ask 'what is grace?' they need to have an answer, which they can understand, but which does not dilute the meaning of what grace is.

Having helped run the first communion course [working with children aged 7 – 9], and then



**Figure 2: Painting the altar frontal for First Communion Service.**

supervising a sleep over for 25 children aged 6 – 13, I feel that I have conquered my apprehensions of working with children [especially as this was all done in German], and I found it very rewarding that the children were happy to come to church, that church was a weekly fixture in their lives, just as football training is, and that they really look forward to coming to church each Sunday.

Perhaps one of the surprising benefits of the Allied forces having bombed most of Germany during WWII is that after the war many modern church buildings were built, which differ substantially from the traditional model, which still dominates in England. I found this reinvention of church space particularly interesting, as I am very much interested in liturgy, and how this translates into praxis. When leading services, I feel it is important that there is a starting point and a conclusion, thus involving some form of

spiritual, and perhaps even spatial journeying. By observing different uses of liturgical space, I believe that I am more confident in my understanding of how the liturgy [both Eucharistic and non Eucharistic] can work effectively, as well as how certain arrangements can be disastrous.

Related to the use of liturgical space, I, together with the other Old Catholic ordinands, had classes in practical liturgy from the Old Catholic bishop, Joachim Vobbe. This was of particular importance, because whilst I could not attend liturgy classes at Cuddesdon, I have not missed out on learning some of the practicalities of doing liturgy. The classes focussed not only on the practicalities, but also on how one's theological understanding of the liturgy manifests itself in the actions of the minister. This was even more useful as there are very few differences between Anglican and Old Catholic liturgy, another sign of the close relationship between these two Churches. I also attended seminars on pastoral theology [see above] and spirituality [see below], offered by the Old Catholic faculty.

In previous reports from Cuddesdon, issues surrounding voice production have been raised. I've sought to address this whilst in Bonn by having a few voice training classes, and also doing lots of exercises. When preaching [especially English sermons], I asked some of the congregation [including a TV presenter, speech therapist, as well as a couple of hard of hearing people] for comments and criticism, which I have taken on board, and have worked on. I, as well as my commentators feel that I have improved considerably over the past six months.

## **Placements**

It is necessary to note that, especially in the German Protestant tradition, it is virtually unheard of for an ordinand to do a placement at a church. Occasionally ordinands may spend a couple of weeks during the university vacations at a church, but a weekly placement is an alien concept.

*Evangelische Kirche Deutschland* [EKD, German Protestant Church]

Principal Sunday and mid week placement was at the Matthäikirche, Duisdorf.  
[http://www.ekir.de/bonn/KKBonn\\_Gemeinden\\_17723.php](http://www.ekir.de/bonn/KKBonn_Gemeinden_17723.php)

The Matthäikirche is situated in the suburb of Duisdorf, on the outskirts of Bonn. The majority of the population of the parish is retired; there are approximately 4,000 Protestants in the parish, although Sunday attendance is between 50 – 80. The average age of the congregation was between 60 – 70; although this reflects the aging population problem which Germany is facing, it is much higher than the average age for the residents of the parish, which falls in the 30 – 40 grouping. Like all Protestant Churches in the Rheinland it is a United Church; this stems from the Prussian King Frederick Wilhelm III's amalgamation of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in 1817. Whilst some congregations are predominantly Lutheran or Calvinist in tradition, the Matthäikirche was a mixture of both. For example, the pastor was from a Reformed tradition, but his assistant from a Lutheran congregation. The Church is part of a larger *kreis* [circle], which consists of three other churches, although each church has its own pastor, the Matthäikirche having a pastor, an assistant [the equivalent of an NSM], a director of music, as well as several 'key' lay people who introduced the service and generally helped in the running of the parish. [Their English equivalent is approximately a churchwarden].



My placement consisted of an introductory meeting with the pastor and his assistant, attending Sunday morning services and mid week events, such as tea parties for the elderly, 'open door' sessions for adults, coffee mornings with slideshow presentations [ranging from previous holidays to Portuguese literature]. What I observed and learnt from an early stage was the lack of the centrality of the Sunday service [see Ecumenical, Meißen report] in the life of the parish. For example, the parish scheduled a walking group every Sunday morning which met at the same time as the main service. However, there was a very strong focus on how church reaches out to all parts of the week, and not just Sunday mornings, so for example, the coffee mornings all started by singing a few hymns, having a reading and a short talk. I found this a good way of the church's mission to a wider audience: most of these people did not attend Sunday worship.

However I was discouraged with my placement in so far as I was never introduced to the congregation, thus meaning that every Sunday at coffee after the service I would explain [often to the same people] why I was at church. This principally stems from the difference in systems and understanding of ministerial training between the Anglican and Protestant churches. Furthermore, it is the convention of final year students at Cuddesdon to use Sunday placements as a time to gain preaching, and general liturgical experience. This was not to be the case at the Matthäikirche. However, I did find opportunities for acquiring, learning, and developing these skills elsewhere, principally thought the Old Catholic parish of St Cyprian and the Anglican Chaplaincy of St Boniface.

The Matthäikirche was found for me through personal contacts from Cuddesdon. Whilst I feel I learnt a lot both about my own spirituality [see below] and how a church functions, I feel that perhaps in future years another church could be found – two suggestions are [a] the Christuskirche [part of the Thomas Kirchekreis] <http://www.thomas-kirchengemeinde.de/>, as the pastor at this Church, Oliver Ploch regularly has joint services with the Anglican Chaplaincy [this is of especial interest given the Meißen dimension to the placement], or [b] the Lutherkirche, in Sudstadt Bonn, [http://www.ekir.de/bonn/07/lut/KKBonn\\_Lut.php](http://www.ekir.de/bonn/07/lut/KKBonn_Lut.php), as many protestant ordinands attend this church, and it has a lively weekly programme. Also these churches are centrally located in Bonn, whereas the Matthäikirche lies 30 mins from the city centre by bus.

By virtue of living at the Old Catholic Seminary, I became very involved in the Old Catholic church: every Wednesday evening there is a Eucharist in the chapel, at which the ordinands help out, ranging from serving, arranging the service, to preaching. I did all of these, as well as providing music for the services. Of particular interest perhaps is the carol service I organised and arranged for Advent, combining English and German music and readings, as together these two traditions explored the meaning of 'the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.' I also decided to transfer a Cuddesdon tradition of having a meal after the mid week Eucharist, which proved to be a great success, giving more opportunities for theological discussions, as well as simply relaxing and growing in fellowship with each other.



**Figure 3: Dinner after Eucharist in Döllingerhaus**

#### *St Cyprian's*

Historically Bonn has been the centre of the Old Catholics since their formation in the 1870s, and the Old Catholic Parish of St Cyprian's is one of the larger, most active Old Catholic parishes in Germany. <http://www.alt-katholisch.de/gemeinden/gemeinden/gemeinde-bonn.html>

Together with the other Old Catholic ordinands, I attended midweek services here: especially the mid-week Eucharist. I found the congregation lively and friendly. The rector of the parish had previously been the director of the Döllingerhaus, and she was keen that I gain as wide an experience of the churches in Germany as possible, so together we taught and ran a course for the first communion children, including a weekend retreat. This gave me an opportunity to work with children, something which I previously had little experience of, and I feel that I have developed quite a lot in this area, including being left alone to supervise 25 children at a sleep over [where very little sleeping happened!] at the church on Maundy Thursday. I also had the opportunity to preach here.

#### *St Boniface's Anglican Chaplaincy*

When I lived in Germany in 2004 – 2005, I played the organ and set up a choir for the Anglican Chaplaincy in Bonn and Cologne. Whilst I did not spend much time at the Anglican Chaplaincy this time round, I did preach twice [thus fulfilling College obligations on preaching practice], took morning prayer once when the chaplain was suddenly ill, helped to organise a new evening service once at month aimed at students, and I also attended, and then led a midweek house group for Lent looking at the Eucharist and its meaning in our lives.

By spending quite a lot of my time at these three different places of worship, within three different traditions, I feel that I was able to gain an insight into what is important for each church, and how they unpack the message of Christ to their congregations. For example, the Protestant Church is very much focussed on the Word of God, with very little emphasis on the Eucharist [the wafers which were not eaten during the Communion were simply put back into the tin for the next month's service], whereas St Cyprian's has a modern catholic interpretation of the Eucharist at the centre of its

spiritual life, and the Anglican chaplaincy offers a traditional English service, providing some resemblance to worship, as one parishioner said, 'back at home'.

### Supervision

Whilst in Bonn I was mentored by several people. Firstly, I remained in close email contact with my college moral tutor [Canon Dr Charlotte Methuen, who has worked in the German university system, is an Old Catholic priest, and lives in Germany] and my college vice principal, Dr Mark Chapman, who is a visiting professor at the University of Bonn, and to whom I would like to thank for all his work in helping to set up my time in Bonn. I also was in touch with my DDO. In Germany, I was taken under the wing of Bishop Joachim Vobbe, the Old Catholic Bishop in Germany, as well as the director of the Döllingerhaus. Furthermore, Professor Günter Eßer, of the Old Catholic faculty helped ensure everything [ranging from spirituality to bank accounts] went smoothly. I was also in close contact with the Anglican Chaplain: I think he was very happy to have someone to talk 'shop' with, as chaplaincy ministry abroad can be very lonely.

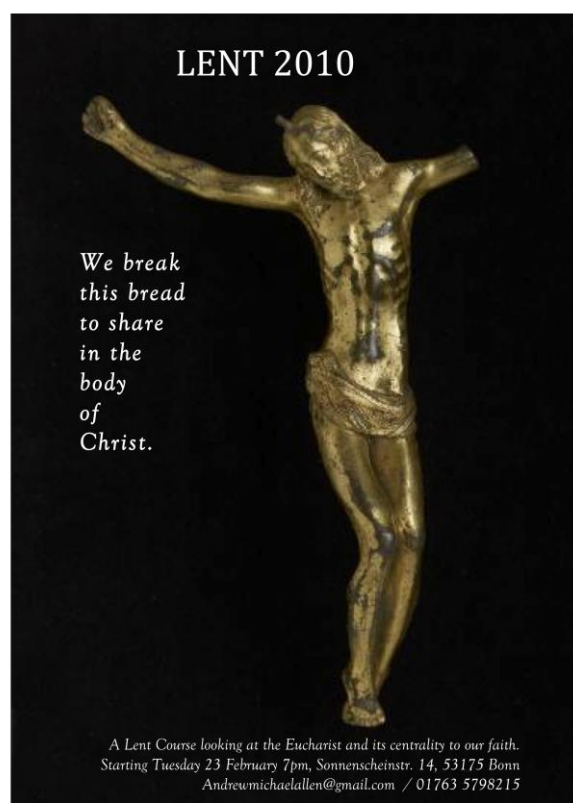
My time in Bonn has afforded me space to process and apply the previous two years' worth of theological education, both academic and practical. For example, I wrote, and ran a Lent group for the Anglican chaplaincy looking at the Eucharist. In my BA in Theology I took a liturgy paper, which focussed mainly on the emergence and development of the early church's concept of the sacraments, but stopped with Thomas Cranmer. In compiling the Lent course, I was able to draw on what I had already learnt, but also to investigate more modern developments of the Eucharist, as well as finding texts, images, sounds, and so forth which help us to understand the Holy Communion, and why it is central to Anglican worship. This is just one example of how I have made the most of the opportunities given to me by my time in Germany, and how it has contributed to my personal development.

### Spiritual Development and Reflection

My spirituality has hitherto been based on the grandeur and mystery of God, and

how this can be experienced in worship, in prayer, and in life. I come from a very

liberal, high church background, with an emphasis of trying to understand where and how the transcendent meets the immanent. In many aspects my concept of spirituality has not changed from this, but rather it has been enfleshed through my time in Bonn. At the Matthäikirche, I discovered the need for Eucharistic sustenance; in the EKD tradition, the Communion is only celebrated once a month, and I was quite surprised to discover that I felt that I needed to communicate more often – this was surprising as I had grown up partly in the Church of Ireland, with choral mattins three Sundays a



**Figure 4: Lent Course Poster**

month, and a Eucharist only once a month. Perhaps too, the lack of liturgical elegance in the Matthiäkirche [for example one Sunday, after having sung the Gospel Alleluias, the reader starts the introduction to the gospel by saying 'I forgot to announce at the beginning that the art group meets at 7pm and not 7.30pm this week.'!] helped to highlight my yearning for liturgy as a way of acting between humanity and God. For me it is important that liturgy offers an opportunity to bridge the gap between the immanent and transcendence, and to allow us to 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.'

At Cuddesdon the pattern of daily offices of morning, evening prayer, and compline is instilled into the students, and initially after finding the early mornings a bit trying, I have grown to appreciate, and indeed rely upon this discipline of prayer. At the beginning of the semester, the bishop insisted that the ordinands said morning prayer together on Monday mornings, attended the Tuesday evening Taizé service at St Cyprian's, the Wednesday evening Eucharist in the Johanneskapelle [in the D'haus], and the Thursday evening Eucharist at St Cyprian's. I felt that saying morning prayer only once a week misses the point of a sustained, daily rhythm of prayer, and convinced my housemates that we should have daily morning prayer, Monday to Friday. We discovered that there weren't any copies of the Office book which the bishop recommended, but rather that there were twenty copies of the Book of Common Prayer, so we decided to alternate between 1662 Mattins [although chanting the psalm in German] and the short service of Laudes printed in the Old Catholic hymnbook. The Old Catholic Church is heavily influenced by both Anglican and Orthodox liturgy, and perhaps the most beautiful service in their possession is 'Lichtvespers' [Light Vespers], which we sang on feast days. Although non Eucharistic, the language, music, incense, candlelight, and darkness was very moving, and I am currently working on translating it into English.

In addition to services, I attended seminars on Spirituality, a weekend retreat with my housemates, and spend quite a lot of time reading the spiritual writings of the desert fathers, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as well as spending time meditating on the Scriptures. I also made the most of having a piano in the chapel. I am currently [April '10] in the process of finalising a cell group, and I will be returning to Germany to go on retreat to Maria Laach with the Old Catholic ordinands and director in June. Plans are also afoot for us to try and meet up once a year either in England or Germany for a few days' retreat, as we all recognise the vital need for a support network to help us with our ministries and indeed with our lives, and in particular being able to talk about the different problems and issues facing Anglican and Old Catholic clergy helps to appreciate our own traditions, as well as developing relations between the two churches.

## **Conclusion**

Although there are several paradigmatic differences in the organisation of ministerial training between Germany and England [as mentioned above], I feel that I have been able to make the most of being in Germany and learning from the German churches, whilst also ensuring that the fundamental core of what is offered to third year students at Ripon College has been covered. Throughout all my work in Germany, I have been able to engage in theological reflections with a wide range of people, from the Old Catholic bishop to ordinands, to Orthodox priests, Lutheran parishioners. It has been through detailed theological reflection, with others, but also reflecting by myself that I have been able to provide a basis for what I have been doing, be it talking to the elderly at tea parties, writing sermons and preaching, or just experiencing how different traditions do



Church and how they struggle to unpack the great mystery which is the love of God for all humanity shown through Christ.