

## **Report on ecumenical placement September 2014-January 2015**

### **Brief overview of the placement:**

My name is Darcy Chesterfield-Terry currently studying at Ripon College Cuddesdon and in September 2014 I headed to the Venerable English College (VEC) situated in Rome, a seminary for young (18-30 approx. at age of entry) Roman Catholic men. The college, which was established in 1579 (having previously been a hospice for English pilgrim to Rome), was setup for the training of priests to return to England and Wales into the new and dangerous protestant kingdom. 44 of their alumni have been martyred. The martyrs (known as the 44) are still current for the staff and students, representing a model of priestly ministry.

The college currently has around 40 seminarians (across the seven year groups) who study at one of two pontifical universities (Angelicum and Gregorian) initially in English (Angelicum) for two years then in Italian at the Gregorian. The format for examination varies from a 10 minute oral (Angelicum) to a 10 page (approx. 3000 word exam essay) at the Gregorian.

For my placement I had the choice of attending both universities, due to my limited Italian I chose to attend English lectures only, I also chose to complete work for my college in England rather than to complete the local exams, as I found this to be more compatible with my own studies. The academic tutor was very kind and spent an evening going through the course catalogues to find the subjects that were of interest, relevance to my studies and during my time in Rome.

From the moment I arrived at the college I was overwhelmed by the generosity and friendliness of everyone at the college, I was fully welcomed into college life and taken in as an equal member of the community.

### **What ecumenical issues arose:**

There was a great deal of banter around the differences between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic church, all in very good humour.

There were discussions around the use/veneration of relics. under the altar the VEC is a copper casket containing bones and other relics from some of the 44, on martyrs day they are displayed, this is part of a wider veneration of more recent saints (post reformation) and something which I struggle with as it feels at times to be more about the cult of personality and to me gets in the way of praying to God. However it was also argued to me that relics are used in the same way icons are used to aid prayers, the relic being used to remind the person of the good life that has been lead, and asking the saint to intercede on behalf of the prayer.

The hierarchical church. The Catholic Church's power is centred on the person of the Pope, what he says is church policy, completely different from the Church of England in which the synod and by

extension the parish has the voice, church policy and doctrine is discerned by all. This difference in style and that the Church of England is focused on a smaller province (as opposed to the global view of the Roman Catholic church) has led to significant differences in direction, the most prominent of which is the female priest/bishop issue which is seen by some to be a slap in the face to the ecumenical work that has been accomplished by the ARCIC, as well as drive a wedge deeper between the two churches. This is, along with the Church of England preserved desire to air its dirty linen in public has led to several ex-Church of England members to 'swim the Tiber' (the euphemism for those who become Roman Catholic from other denominations) who explained that they felt disillusioned with the divisions within the Church of England. The hierarchical nature is extended into the VEC where the staff eat on their own table, are addressed as Father X and the rector (principle) is Fr Rector, an arrangement very much so different from my own college, which is far more informal in its approach.

Reforms within the Catholic Church. During my placement, the Pope called the first stage of a synod to look at the church and family life. This primary stage which was to be a sounding board and discussion arena for things such as divorce, human sexuality and the role of women in the church.

The Bishop of Durham, who was invited to attend as an ecumenical observer in a non-voting capacity, said that the discussions were fruitful but due to the vast nature of the Catholic Church it is hard to reach consensus on reform (such as those who have remarried receiving communion – an African synod member said that it is the same as having someone who has multiple wives, common in some tribal regions of his country, so where is the line drawn?) as well as the role of homosexuals in the church. These issues which the Church of England has wrestled with and has reached some conclusions, though not to everyone's satisfaction, these are issues which congregations are concerned about, the Pope is being forward thinking in gathering groups to discuss this, to ensure that church is still relevant to society, but at the same time ensuring that it remains true to the teachings of Christ, as it perceive it. This was of particular relevance as the vote to install women bishops had been passed earlier in the year; there are some who see this as a slap in the face for ecumenical relations, by allowing women bishops it further drives a wedge splitting the Roman Catholic Church from the Church of England, I personally do not agree with this, I do not see that female bishops as a wedge more than female priests, which I acknowledge as being a sore point, the ARCIC group have worked hard to find the common ground we have theologically and I feel that these are the issues which should be focused on rather than what is a natural progression from 20 years ago.

The view points on receiving of communion. During my selection interview it was discussed that I wouldn't be allowed to receive communion, something which I knew at an intellectual level, however attending Mass each day I felt this far more keenly than I had expected. I discussed this and the fact that the liturgy used is so similar between common worship and the divine office, I suggested that the Lord's table is a place where all are called, all are equal, there is no high or low, no rich or poor just penitents accepting the Lord's grace and sacrifice through the breaking of bread. However it was counter argued that communion is the result and reward for being in full communion with each other rather than the means of getting there. I'm not sure that I agree with this view point, I quote Gregory Dix view of the Eucharist

*'Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the soul of a dead lover; in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia; for a village headman much tempted to return to fetich because the yams had failed; because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna; for the repentance of Margaret; for the settlement of a strike; for a son for a barren woman; for Captain so-and-so wounded and prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre; on the beach at Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church; tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonisation of S. Joan of Arc—one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to make the plebs sancta Dei—the holy common people of God.'*

I don't feel that to restrict the Eucharist to one Christian community, especially when there are other communities with so many similarities is right or in the spirit of the Eucharist.

### **Key points of learning (theological, communal and personal):**

I was surprised by the similarities between our two liturgies; the words used at a normal weekday Mass differ very little from a Common Worship weekday Eucharist. I was also surprised at the good will and hospitality which I experienced. I was given warnings that I would be entering into a hostile and combative environment. There is a want to know and understand the Church of England as well as the journey that it's priests are taking to ordination as well as the organisation and setup of the church.

I am more aware and appreciate of the sacrifice that the men approaching priesthood have to make. The lonesome path they are taking, the uncertainty of what they will be asked to study (they bishop decides as he sees the need), where he will live and minister (he may not know until after his ordination) and how long he will remain (again at the discretion of the bishop). But at the same time the brotherhood and comradery that exists between the priests, I was lucky enough to be invited to worship and spend some time with priests visiting, celebrating 40, 50, 60 and 70 years of priesthood, speaking with these men I could see the deep spiritual commitment they had made and the bond that had been formed during their ministry.

I learned more about myself and my churchmanship I feel more comfortable being able to vocalise and express myself on the subject. This is due to one class that was being taken by some of the seminarians was ecumenical studies, part of this required the students to interview someone of a

different denomination (i.e. me) despite the friendliness of our relationship there were some searching questions around the Church of England as well as my own views, on the sacraments etc.

I have come away from this placement with a greater understanding of the challenges which ecumenical relations are under, a desire to bolster ecumenical endeavours in whatever way I can, this will most likely be at a local level and having spent time with the 'new crop' of priests as they continue on their journey I hope to be able to relate to the local Roman Catholic priests when I get into parish.

**Any particularly creative issues/events and any particular difficulties:**

There are a number of significant events, which occur annually during the placement, the Jubilarians visit, which I mentioned above, more importantly is Martyr's day, a day of remembrance of those priests who were martyred in England, one of the most significant events in the college's calendar. Two other events which are worth noting are the 'New Man' show and the Advent show. The new intake of seminarians are classed as 'new men' until they have performed in the 'New Man show' which is a sketch/skit/entertainment evening, it is not compulsory to be involved but placement students are most welcome and it is an excellent bonding experience and is to be highly recommended. The Advent show is a similar event but for all the years rather than just the new men, and is a good way for the students to blow off steam/decompress prior to the Christmas holidays.

**Any practical or financial issues:**

I had no financial issues during the placement, expenses were reimbursed in a timely manner. I would recommend attending the 4 week intensive Italian course, it is a good time to build friendships with the new intake as well as better your Italian, which is most useful when living out there. One thing I wasn't expecting was the heat and humidity in Rome in September, much higher (in both respects) and something to be aware of it never really got too cold however the rain was intense at times.

**Any comment you wish to make to your successors or those selecting your successors:**

This placement is not a testing ground to see if you would like to be a Roman Catholic, nor should you go around saying you are Catholic (as a previous placement student did) or that the two churches are the same. There are similarities, which should be celebrated but there are also differences which should be acknowledged.

I would strongly press those who are looking at the reciprocal exchange to try and find solutions as I feel that the seminarians would benefit from seeing life in an Anglican college.

I would also like to extend my thanks for the opportunity to undertake this placement as well as the support in the run-up and throughout the placement.