Chaplain’s report AGM 2023

I have just been reading my report for last year’s AGM and I am struck by how far we have progressed. Last year we were only just emerging from the liminal time where so much was uncertain. Today we are in a good place, and I am optimistic about our future.

To me, statistics are amusing as a species as it’s possible to interpret what you are shown in different ways. Measurable outcomes are my personal dislike when it comes to looking at our life together as a church. That said, Alexis and I were comparing church attendance on Easter Day this year and last and there were 30 more people of all ages this year. Our financial situation, always delicate, is much stronger. At last year’s AGM we were looking at a shortfall of 1,000€ per month, and thus a deficit of some 13,000€, however, due to continued tight control of spending, gently increased income over the year, some very generous gifts at the end of the year, and a second hardship grant from the diocese of £4,000, we broke even.

Those are the measurable outcomes, but what about the aspects of our life together that are difficult to measure? Lives changed by encounters with God either for the first time, or a deepening of faith; Baptism, Confirmation and wedding preparations all include talking about our faith, the reasons why we are returning to church, why we want God to be present in our lives (even when that is difficult to articulate); those searching for a Christian community, looking for a welcome when they are unsure of receiving one; asking for prayer; attending Women’s Bible study online, or the Working with Christ group in person; Sunday Club growing in numbers; the Music Group expanding with the arrival of new members.

Our need to be together at worship, over coffee and tea afterwards, and the resumption of a shared lunch speak to me of a greater sense of community, of the need to nurture our friendships, to receive as well as to give.

Not all our plans have yet worked out, particularly to redevelop the entrance to church and open our café again. Maybe the answer to our prayers is “no”, or “not yet”, but we still hold them before God, always asking for guidance, always wanting to be and to do the people and community called by God. Take time to look around you at church and see how many people are setting aside time and finance to be involved in our life together.

This AGM marks the end of 15 years service by Frances as Treasurer. Since taking over from Peter Hawkins shortly after your retirement from La Redoute, you have taken our accounts in hand and taken us forward into online accounts. At the same time, you have kept a watchful eye on our outgoings, trying to make sure we cut our coat according to our cloth (a reference to Frances’ former paid employment….) but at the same time supporting all our endeavours for our church here in Lille.

We’re not saying goodbye, but a wholehearted thank you. You remain a valued member of this church, who is always the first to volunteer, whether it is cleaning the kitchen, making cakes or soup, or welcoming visitors to lunch. So, thank you Frances, very much indeed, for all your work as Treasurer over the past 15 years, and we are glad you are able to hand over this task over to Ann.

I would like to conclude with thanks to each of you, for without you we would not have and be a worshipping community.

Without Anthony we would not have his smile nor his gift to the church of keeping it clean, it is the house of God.

Without the Churchwardens, David and Calvin, I would not be able to discuss how things are going at church and to pray for the business of the church council each month.

Without the members of the church council, we would not have wise and thoughtful stewardship of our church, our buildings, our finances, and our projects.

Without Rosemary and Maggie, we would have no newsletter, no website, PowerPoints for the Sunday services and so much more.

I am grateful to be part of this community where each of us plays a part that builds and grows together at Christ Church, may God bless you and encourage you.