

Hello everyone, greetings from Vienna. I am just approaching the end of my first month as CEMES Intern at Christ Church. In this first post, I wanted to share some of my highlights from the first month, as well as reflecting on my reasons for taking part in the scheme.

It was a real privilege to head to Kiev, Ukraine, for the Synod of the Eastern Archdeaconry. Hearing from the leaders and representatives of Anglican chaplaincies in Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, Serbia, Romania (and many others), each with different situations and focusses, was a pertinent reminder of the role that church groups play in building bridges and working for peace – especially in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, where it is estimated that 1.5 million Ukrainians have been displaced. It struck me how little this reconciliatory work of the Diocese in Europe is known about in the wider Church of England, and hopefully these reflections and contributions made by the CEMES Interns throughout the year will help to raise awareness!

We have, at Christ Church Vienna, been hosting a series of talks entitled ‘Everybody Welcome,’ thinking about how to make the church more welcoming to visitors, as well as helping them to make the transition to being integrated members of the community. Among other things, it has been a useful way of appreciating our different status, in a country where the Church of England is not the established state religion. I have personally received such a wonderful welcome from clergy and congregation members alike, for which I am so grateful, particularly to the Chaplain, Fr Patrick. There has been a real openness and keenness to share stories within the community and I was particularly struck by this at a recent family activity day at Schönstattzentrum – hearing such honest and open accounts of people’s journeys in faith has been one of the most humbling but rewarding experiences of my internship so far.

My regular duties at Christ Church include assisting in leading the Daily Offices, serving at Masses, and leading the church’s Bible Study. This month we have been looking at the first five chapters of the Book of Amos. I started my placement at a time when we were joined by an Ordinand on placement from Ridley Hall theological college in Cambridge for a few weeks. Being able to share experiences of settling in and finding our way around the city was very rewarding. It was, for both of us, a busy but hugely enjoyable month, and I look forward to the next nine! Exciting things are being planned, including a reconfiguration of the style of the Six O’clock Service (a more contemporary, less formal setting of the Eucharist) – perhaps more to follow in my next bulletin.

So, what encouraged me to take part in the scheme? I am currently going through the discernment process in my home diocese. I had sensed a vocation, perhaps for later in life (!) beforehand, but it was covering the Chaplaincy at school that made me take it more seriously. It was then upon starting at university that the Chaplain there encouraged me to get in touch with my Bishop to discuss it further. So, seeing the role that chaplaincies have played in my journey, it seems fitting that I am spending this year serving in one.

I am also studying Modern Languages and Classics at Peterhouse, University of Cambridge. Being able to complete the CEMES programme in a German speaking country seemed a great way of fulfilling the requirements of my degree (I will be completing courses at the University of Vienna throughout the year, continuing to specialise in Medieval German), while gaining experience of working in a church environment. The Diocese in Europe is also a great place to experience breadth and diversity; unlike in the UK where there is a lot of choice in finding a church that matches one’s tastes, when there is only one Anglican church for (in most cases) many hundreds of kilometres, it really is a diverse place, where growth in unity is promoted. And what a wonderfully diverse community we have here!

To all that is to come, yes!

Best wishes,

Ben

Christ Church, Vienna.