



The Friends' Annual Service and Celebration 2020 'Vocation and Service'

The day for the Friends' Virtual Service and Event with the theme Vocation and Service had finally arrived. It was a first for the Friends and there were more than a few butterflies (mostly mine) dancing around as the active participants gathered pre-service to check presence (fast messages to missing persons) connectivity, sound, visuals (too close/not close enough to the screen) and be given last minute instructions by the very able Technical Coordinator aka the Diocesan Secretary, Andrew Caspari. There is no way of knowing but something similar must go on in any church vestry before a service. Pre-service beautiful music was provided by the new organist of St Matthew's, Westminster, who generously allowed use of some of his recordings. As the start time approached, more and more people were seen to be joining: a relief to know that there would be a congregation after all. Fifty-five people attended.

Welcomes were extended by Bishop Robert before he handed over to Bishop David to introduce the Liturgy, which was led by the Chaplain of St George's, Malaga, Fr Louis Darrant, who had written it for this special occasion.

The Friends had supported the Ministry Experience Scheme with grants so to have Dr Clare Amos, the Diocesan Director of Lay Discipleship, give the background and current status of the scheme was enlightening. Two of the participants in the scheme, now interns in the Diocese, Rebecca Mathen from Brussels and Chaja Verkerk in Rome, spoke with enthusiasm and obvious excitement about their journey thus far and their placements. Every good wish goes to them as they continue to explore their sense of vocation. They answered questions put to them by the congregation with candor and confidence. There are four more interns placed in the Diocese of equal talent.

Along with other funding partners, the Friends are to support the long-awaited initiative for stipendiary title posts (curacies) in the Diocese from 2021 for three years. Andrew Caspari and Bishop Robert were able to give an upbeat progress report.

Damian Thwaites, Bishop's Attaché to the European Institutions and Director of Communications gave an update on Brexit. Noting that future residency rights in the EU has been the most commonly raised concern among people in the diocese, he outlined the launch on 12 October of a £250,000 diocesan Residency Support Project to help UK Nationals in France, fully funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. This Project is offering services free of charge to support people who may need

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Charity Commission Registration Number: 250186

additional help applying for residency, notably the elderly and vulnerable. The Project website at www.frenchresidency-support.org has further information, including contact details, and links to official Government guidance as well as other resources.

As is normal in church-type events, there were announcements and updates from the Chairman of the Friends, Mark Pellew, before moving on to the closing prayers and the Blessing.

By technical wizardry, the gathered congregation were split into groups for chats and refreshments (only if you had remembered to bring a thermos flask or glass of wine).

At this time when everyone's life has been very much restricted it was amazing that this remarkable Diocese was able to gather people from the UK, mainland Europe and perhaps even beyond helping to expand horizons, bring a sense of much needed joy and togetherness as well as optimism for the future of the Church.

Jeanne French
Honorary Secretary