

## **Sabbatical Space to See (4.9.22) – for La Côte Anglican Church**

**THANK YOU** – for generously giving me space to step back. I realise this is a luxury that some professions are encouraged to take – but many others are not. I am so grateful to have had this time of refreshment and renewed focus. Thank you La Côte Church - for stepping forward to help this community thrive – in worship, spiritual nourishment, care, governance and outreach. Wardens, Council, Ministry team, group leaders, IT, Locum priests and many individuals – I have been catching up with some of you and am so thankful for all that has been going on.

### **I have appreciated SPACE TO SEE – A MIX OF CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION**

#### **Five areas of space to see have opened up:**

1. **Most importantly - Space to look within** at the inner landscape of my faith, to pay attention to my relationship with God – above all to have some focussed “heart time”.
2. **Space to look at how we accompany people on the move** – personally and across the Diocese in Europe.
3. **Space to connect locally** with organisations involved in accompanying people in exile.
4. **Space to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and see the other there**
5. **Space to reflect on my leadership and ministry** – looking back and looking forward.

#### **1. SABBATH – TIME TO SEE WITHIN**

<sup>5</sup>**For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. (Maybe a verse for us all to think about how we can do this – on a regular basis)**

It took many days to acclimatise - to find ways of slowing down, sleeping, **finding rest in God** (which became a motto for the sabbatical). But gradually I began to see the wood from the trees – to see with more clarity – **what mattered and what I needed to let go of.**

The heart question running through this time out was **“Jesus’ question to Peter: “Do you love me?”**

**At the start of the break – I spent a week in two different religious communities:**

**Firstly – in St Loup, Pompaples**, which is the home of protestant deaconesses. <https://www.saint-loup.ch/accueil> In addition, there are men, couples and families who live outside the community, coming in to participate in worship and events and meals.

I appreciated the luminous, spacious rooms, the tranquil natural beauty, the prayer walk in the grounds which charts the lines of the Lord's Prayer, and breathtaking walks along the little river – taking me as far as the waterfall, Cascade du Dard, (cold water dips along the way!) and the peaceful grandeur of a Romanesque monastery, Romainmôtier priory.

While at St Loup I discovered the writings of **Daniel Bourguet** – a French Reformed Protestant pastor - who looks deeply into Scripture – through **the Desert Fathers**. “Rencontres avec Jésus” – where he leads the reader deep into the encounters that Jesus had with different individuals. I was especially struck by Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus, and then with the widow offering her gift at the door of the Temple. Bourguet **stays with the encounter and, peels away layer upon layer of meaning like peeling an onion..**

“Désir de voir Jésus, regards, paroles, silences, gestes... et survient la rencontre qui change tout l'être, ouvre à la parole, à la relation, met et remet en marche. »

“Through a desire to see Jesus, looks, words, silence, gestures... there comes an encounter that changes the whole being, so we become open to The Word, to relationship, to being put back on track.”

**Next I moved to Grandchamp** – <https://www.grandchamp.org/communaute/> (near Lac de Neuchâtel), a community of monastic sisters from different church traditions. The vocation of Grandchamp is reconciliation, building their common life around prayer, community life and welcome.

There on the shores of Lake Neuchatel, in the cold dawn light, we gathered for a charcoal breakfast of bread and fish and read John 21. Jesus welcoming the disciples for breakfast – Jesus offering to feed me – inviting me to move away from the feeding, caring, leading roles for a while – to be fed, nourished, led – and to stay with the question “Do you love me?” which points to the relationship at the heart of our Christian faith.

In the 1970s – 80s, David Watson, a renowned, much loved international Christian speaker and leader was struck down by cancer in his prime and wrote the book “Fear no Evil” to recount his struggles:

**“[God] showed me that all my preaching, writing, and other ministry was absolutely nothing compared to my love relationship with him”**

Grandchamp is mainly a silent community – where I was able to learn the richness of being silent with God and with others in community.

The founder of Grandchamp describes silence as cleansing: using the image of clothes falling away **“unnecessary clothes, images imprinted on our mind, our wealth and poverty are set aside... the opposing voices have to quieten, the proud voices, the pressing voices, the feelings of hatred, grudges, the domesticating will, the personal demands. Silence is cleansing.**

**“When you have lived in silence with God, when God baptises us in silence, this sacrament of silence, this inner cleansing, of humility, of love, this creation of the new human being, then you can return to your life without fear, without terror, for the silence of God is inside you.”**

**“In this way we can live our lives and accept the life that God wishes us to live with a pure and loving heart, knowing that the Spirit blows in every corner; living with a liberated heart** and among our brothers and sisters whoever they are and wherever they are; not in separation, but as part of our everyday life, within the daily noises, amidst the sins and the chaos.”

**“There where God has put us, is our sacred place. It is where we find silence.”**

This was a time for **stripping back** and **letting go** of the bustle of busy ministry, **to dwell in the deeper stuff of the heart.**

**Cynthia Bourgeault**, (modern-day mystic, Episcopal priest, and theologian) sums it up well: (Richard Rohr daily meditations, Wednesday, June 22nd, 2022)

**Finding the way to where our true heart lies is the great journey of spiritual life.**

**“The core practice for cleansing the heart, for restoring the heart to its organ of spiritual seeing, becomes supremely, in Christianity, the path of letting go, [kenosis]. The real heart of emotion is the willingness to let go of... your personal drama, so that you can begin to see.”**

I was much helped by a religious sister, half Icelandic / half Swedish Lutheran in Grandchamp. She encouraged me to keep coming back to the present when my mind raced ahead anxiously to returning to ministry in August. She also invited me to look upon myself with “bienveillance” – “kindsight”, commenting that it is easier to do this towards others and less easy towards ourselves.

**2. HOW WE SEE AND TREAT “THE OTHER”** – with my focus on people who are displaced, seeking refuge and in exile, (unable to return to their homes).

Having taken space to see within myself, I was able to narrow my focus as to what I could do in the remaining 4-6 weeks of my sabbatical which would be of any use to others and of interest to me.

**1. ON THE SHARP END with those in exile**

- a. **Ukrainian refugees:** I was deeply humbled by hosting two Ukrainian visitors for several months which was extremely challenging both for them and for us.

It was an experience that left me emotionally drained. It raised numerous questions and reminded me how complex each human being is, even before we add in the trauma of war, displacement and exile.

- b. **With contacts: strangers who have become friends:** I had the privilege of spending time with asylum seekers who were with us here in Switzerland and who had found their way to UK, when they had been refused permission to stay in CH.

Again, my eyes were opened to their individuality – their coping mechanisms – their isolation – their extreme material poverty in some cases – and yet their generosity, hospitality, resourcefulness and courage. (E.g., one friend bought me a huge bunch of flowers costing £10, over a quarter of his weekly income)

**2. ANECDOTAL RESEARCH Grounded in my personal experiences, I approached chaplaincies and people on the move with a renewed sense of my limitations.**

- a. **Humility** – especially that we are not there to “fix” people, but to be open to mutual challenge and change in us, maybe more than in them. A shared space.

- b. **Curiosity** – stay curious without being intrusive, yet open to learning from the other.
- c. **Bienveillance** – to really see the other with good will, keen to note their potential and what they bring rather than what they may lack!

From online conversations and in-person visits, I gleaned a set of **FIVE observations which I hope will help chaplaincies as they approach people who are refugees and asylum seekers. The observations are entitled:**

**“Five ‘C’s for accompanying people on the move”**

**Celebration**

**Capacity Building**

**Connection**

**Communication**

**Conversion**

I would love to see a more coherent, supportive network across the chaplaincies in our Diocese involved in accompanying people on the move. I hope we can collaborate with the Episcopal Church in Europe who have recently employed a support worker for churches in this field of ministry. My aim has been to encourage our Diocese to keep these challenges and opportunities of migration on the agenda.

**3. HOW WE SEE THE OTHER – in local organisations** – I had time to invest in partnering with local associations seeking to accompany people on the move, helping integration locally or simply to survive complex migration challenges:

**Coup de Main**, a local association – started with members of La Côte Church – supporting the integration of people seeking asylum and refuge locally.

**The Lost Food Project** (tackling food waste, sustainability and food insecurity),  
**Le Lieu-dit**

**Stronger Together** – Association supporting host families for Ukrainians,

**Point d’Appui** – a Churches Together drop-in running in Lausanne for all people in exile.

**4. HOW DO WE SEE THE OTHER – in Palestine – Israel?**

In June – out of the blue, Clare Amos asked me if I would join her on a pilgrimage to The Holy Land to accompany a small party of ten Ministry Experience Scheme interns who have been exploring their vocation in the context of different chaplaincies in Europe. I took a nano second to say yes!

Also accompanying the party and helping to lead were Canon William Gulliford, Diocesan Director of Ordinands for the Diocese in Europe and Bishop David Hamid.

Among many rich experiences and lessons was the question of how people see the other:

Do they see the other as a threat to land / culture / history / faith, or with the potential to become allies with mutual understanding?

Among the ancient rubble and monuments, I met Living Stones; people who were courageously finding ways to reach out across the divides. I was especially struck by Elias of the Holy Land Trust in Bethlehem who is caught between a rock and a hard place. On one hand the Palestinian authorities do not like what he is doing because he is reaching out to Israelis in peace. On the other hand – the Israeli authorities are also against the work – as he is a Palestinian wanting to build bridges between Palestinians and Israelis.

I asked him why he does what he does – what keeps him going. He explained that he feels that this is his calling – to follow Jesus Christ – is to do what he feels called to do – finding ways of bringing the different sides together to understand each other.

**Finally**

## **5. SABBATICAL SPACE TO look with fresh eyes at MY LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY**

Here I am keen to hear from you what you have experienced and where there has been new learning and growth among our community.

I have had time to look afresh at my ministry and leadership to see what I could do differently. I have recognised the need to build in more quiet.

**I plan to make Fridays a quiet day of prayer, thinking and preparation and Saturdays a day off – a quiet day of rest and refreshment stepping back from la Côte Community.** I hope this pattern of rest will enrich my ministry and make it sustainable.

I am also aware that I do not need to dive back into everything with the risk of becoming a bottle neck which inhibits the creativity of others rather than enabling others, which I would hope to do.

I am so thankful for La Côte Church - a faithful, resourceful and creative community of individuals who enjoy taking the lead in areas of life. I hope you will continue to do this with the right sort of support.

Please do be in touch with your ideas and your learning so that by God's grace we can travel this road and grow in love and faith together.