

## **Venturing in Mission in Cyprus and the Gulf**

If you are reading this, the likelihood is that you are thinking about the possibility of embarking on a ministerial adventure. It may be that you simply savour the idea of working in a significant place at a significant time. Or you may have visited one of our churches or know someone who has worked here and experienced the vibrancy of church life throughout our diocese. It may be that you warm to the idea of serving in one of the very few places in the world where you can minister and serve at a holy Biblical site, as you can in Cyprus. Or that the prospect of serving a huge truly international congregation consisting of the young families of high achievers alongside the large numbers of migrant workers from throughout the Middle East and Indian sub-continent, as you can in the Gulf, appeals. You may have become jaded by attempting to manage decline, and want to try your hand at managing growth, in an area where, in some places, resident Christians outnumber resident Muslims. That interface may itself be what draws you, or perhaps, an interest in the Ancient Christian Churches of the East. For whatever reason you are considering ministry here you need to know what special qualities are required, and what choices you will be called upon to make.

This is not the place to describe the diocese in detail. Please visit the diocesan website ([www.cypgulf.org](http://www.cypgulf.org)) to find information about the different chaplaincies / parishes (we are moving from the former to the latter description), the history of the diocese, and the key personnel. The website contains videos from each chaplaincy / parish outlining their recent activities. It gives a full account of the most recent Diocesan Synod: the annual meeting that presents the work of the diocese in microcosm. It gives useful contact information, and includes news of current vacancies. It also describes the geographical limits of the diocese.

### **What's Different About Us?**

On the website you will find plenty of the kind of language that shows that we think we are unique. We are part of the Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, but different from the other three dioceses in that Province in that our primary focus is expatriate English speakers. This is not absolutely true. In Iraq for example we do serve an indigenous population, but that is an exception. The expatriates we serve come from all over the world. That is particularly evident in the Gulf archdeaconry. In order to be an expatriate in the Gulf, one member of the family must be employed. That means that the adults in most church families are people of working age. There are extremes of wealth in the Gulf. On the one hand there are the movers and shakers who are at the heart of a dynamic economy, or helping development of infrastructure and so on. On the other there are the migrant labourers and domestic servants who service the society and make it possible for the rest to live their high-powered lives. In most of the Gulf States, the indigenous population is a minority in comparison with the international community of expatriates. However, power and citizenship resides with that minority.

The Anglican Church enjoys good relations with the authorities in all the States where it operates. In the Gulf, it is usually the Rulers who have made land available for Church building in the first place, and who have encouraged the presence of another faith community in their midst in gracious ways. Usually, there, the Anglican Church is expected to act as a kind of coordinator of other Christian denominations, and its facilities are generally used by many other Christian denominations. This means that the principal worship day of Friday can be very busy on Church campuses. Anything between ten and thirty thousand Christians may well use our facilities in one centre on one day, from dawn to dusk. Also major non-conformist Churches,

familiar in the West and in North America for example, are often not represented in the countries of our diocese, which means that the Anglican Church finds itself serving congregations that might include Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals and, in some areas, Roman Catholics and Orthodox, as well as traditional Anglicans from all shades of churchmanship. This is also true in Cyprus.

The Church is in a position to explore relationships with another world faith in the Gulf, and with major ancient Churches of the East in Cyprus, and those relationships are fruitful. They are based on respect and courtesy. This is no place for those who want to convert Muslims or who have little regard for Orthodox and Eastern Christianity. We are guests in all the countries where we operate, and we have to accept that status, which can be difficult for those whose experience has been of working and worshipping in established churches. It is those elements of our demography, diversity, ecumenical nature and interfaith context that provide our special identity.

In a diocese that spans 2000 miles and covers (depending on how you count them) around ten political jurisdictions, diversity is easy to illustrate and recognise. But unity is also clearly a key feature of diocesan life, and among the key instruments of that unity is the annual diocesan synod. The usual venue for this week-long event, which is normally held in February, is Cyprus, though occasionally meetings are held in the Gulf. Clergy will have their own ideas of what a diocesan synod is like based on previous experience, but our synod is likely to challenge most pre-conceptions! It includes a quiet morning in a local monastery and other reflective input, alongside the consideration of reports that support decision-making, a lively social programme and a regular pattern each day of worship. One feature is a video presentation from each chaplaincy / parish concentrating on a specific theme each year. This helps to spread awareness of the work being done throughout the diocese, and to build a sense of connectedness. Suffice to say, synod is eagerly anticipated. Clergy spouses are welcome and paid for by chaplaincies / parishes. Scene @ Synod, available as a download on the website, describes the event and gives a sense of the atmosphere in which it is conducted.

One other team that brings together members from throughout the diocese is the Spirituality Development Team. The area of Spirituality has a high priority in the diocese and the team has a full agenda. It is supported by a recently appointed Spirituality Coordinator, who will be working with parishes throughout the diocese to resource and develop spirituality agendas. It is also supported by a Retreats Organiser, who is closely associated with the small (and beautiful) house in the Cyprus Troodos foothills, 'Katafiyio,' which is used for day meetings for small groups, and residential individually guided retreats. The house is sometimes used by clergy from the Gulf who want a few days of quiet reflection and recreation.

## **Challenges**

Our identity and uniqueness brings special challenges for ministry. Ministers here need to see diversity as a gift and not as a threat, for example. They need to be people who can respond to very varied spiritual needs: from the spiritual stimulus and feeding that the highly educated and influential might need, to the care and attention needed by the most vulnerable. Ministers need to be culturally aware and observant. They need to be interested in people's stories, and alive to the sense of exile many feel. They need to be able to understand different modes of religious expression, and be able to conduct liturgy in ways that give diverse congregations a sense of having a stake in what is going on. They must be theologically multi-lingual. Many of our

congregations are transient, and that is true throughout the diocese. Some of our Cyprus churches, for example, attract many visitors, and congregations are transient in that sense. Also in Cyprus there are 'swallows:' that is, people who only spend part of the year on the island. In the Gulf, economic conditions can mean that people move very quickly. For ministers used to established congregations, that can be unsettling.

Cyprus congregations have a high proportion of retired people. Many of them have retired from demanding roles and often they feel they have something to contribute from their experience. Being able to manage that for good is a particular skill. In Cyprus most church activity is during the daytime. It is the exact opposite in the Gulf where everyone is working in the daytime. Children's ministry is very important in the Gulf: less so in Cyprus. Other managerial skills are called for in situations where the church employs a number of people to deal with, typically: the care of the site, the administration of the many groups who use the site, the wedding ministry (which can be substantial), a charity shop (found adjacent to many churches), as well as the routine administration of a large organisation. Increasingly, as churches expand, ministers need the vision and imagination to initiate, steer and manage projects.

We need ministers who can cope with isolation. This can take several forms. It may be that you are the only Anglican minister in the country you live in! It may be that even if you have other colleagues, they may live a fair distance away, and that opportunities for meeting and fellowship are few. You may live in a village in Cyprus, say, where there are lots of other expats, but you may live in one where no-one shares your nationality. This is a challenge for both minister, spouse and other family. At a different level it is important that ordained ministers find working with others rewarding, refreshing and an antidote to isolation. We need people who are truly collaborative team workers, getting the best out of, and treasuring, lay colleagues as well as ordained.

Initially, it may seem beyond belief that you could be ministering at a spot St Paul preached at, or where St Barnabas lived, travelling to work through stunning scenery, and making pastoral visits to ambassadors. But actually it is amazing how soon these things are taken for granted, and all the things that amazed us, become just an accepted part of normal life on the job.

## **Church Organisation**

In some ways, the situation of the churches in the diocese would be recognised by St Paul. He too had to deal with churches scattered across a wide region, each having a different history and often different foundations. As in his churches, there can be an instinct for congregational attitudes to prevail. Because we operate in so many political jurisdictions, and because of the various regulations about the transfer of money across national borders, it is in many places not practicable to pay stipends centrally. In those circumstances, stipends are paid by Chaplaincy Councils.

This may be your first introduction to the world of contracts. Effectively there will be two contracts for each employment: one between the cleric and the diocese/bishop which sets out the *rewards* in cash and kind and the *expectations* in terms of a job description and professional guidelines (effectively the contract of employment). The other is a contract between the diocese and the chaplaincy / parish setting out what the diocese expects the latter to provide. There is an attempt to provide as equal remuneration packages for clergy as this diversity will allow, but that has to take account of the different costs of living, and modes of

living in the different domains. It is possible to work from standard clergy contracts *within* political jurisdictions. That is the situation in Cyprus for example, where we are working towards a central payment system. Notwithstanding this, the diocese plays a key role in every appointment, and every cleric is licensed by the bishop and ultimately answerable to him.

The diocese has recently voted overwhelmingly in favour of the ordination of women to the priesthood, and indeed there have been such ordinations in the diocese so far, with the good will and by synodical resolution of the Province. At present, local cultural circumstances prevent the appointment of a female senior Chaplain in some places, but wherever it is possible, applications from women are encouraged when vacancies occur. The different church backgrounds of congregational members can mean that the concept of 'diocese' is not as readily understood as it might be in other places. A great deal has been done to repair this in recent years, but some attitudes may surprise a newcomer. Some details of church organisation might be unfamiliar. Each church has its own Constitution for example (albeit that they have to signed off by archdeacon or bishop). Electoral Roll eligibility is extended to non-Anglicans, and sometimes that can mean non-Anglican Wardens and Councillors. There is a limited number of diocesan committees and written procedures, and, as yet no indigenous provincial or diocesan canon law. Work is being done to achieve what is necessary or desirable in these areas, but this is a relatively new undertaking and these things take time. Some elements of church life perhaps seem inevitably to be rather more 'pioneering' that might have been experienced elsewhere. There is no "Parsonage Board" to which applications for repairs or improvements can be made. The Church actually rents some of its Chaplaincy houses.

### **Challenges for Families**

For families with children, most Chaplaincies are within reach of an International School, and many Chaplaincies fund places. Employment opportunities for spouses are limited, and, depending on the job, may require knowledge of the Greek language in Cyprus, or some other qualification elsewhere. That being said, spouses are particularly welcome at all church and diocesan events, and there is a triennial conference for Clergy and Spouses organised by the Province. It can still be lonely though, and spouses need to make realistic assessment of how they will cope in a new country with foreign ways and language, different driving customs (and competence), and different expectations, in some circumstances, of women. In Cyprus, there is less that is strange to, for example, people from the UK. Driving is on the same side, many people speak English, familiar brands are available in the shops and so on. But still, Cyprus is a foreign country. In the Gulf Chaplains are normally accommodated on the site of the Church and its other buildings: in other words, very much above the shop. The general busy-ness and lack of privacy can be experienced as a problem.

Nowhere in the diocese is less than four hours flying time from the UK. Chaplaincies normally fund one return flight annually for resident family members, but will that be enough? Are there family responsibilities in some other country whose demands are going to make settled domestic life in a new country impossible? These are questions that must be dealt with. Certainly everyone finds that living in a foreign country with perhaps few immediate colleagues, or initially, few friends, calls for resilience, maturity and a particular kind of resourcefulness. It is also worth noting that the diocese is situated in different climate zones from those you may be used to. In the Gulf, the summer months are mostly spent indoors because it is too hot to be outside for long, for example. This too leads to different strategies for living which call for a degree of flexibility.

## **The Rewards**

Whilst these notes deal, inevitably, with the challenges of a new life, the rewards can be considerable. The diocese has a family 'feel' that is probably unsurpassed elsewhere. The experiences it offers of working in this region will enhance any ministry, and the diversity of people you will meet will broaden horizons and enable lasting friendships.

## **Some Personal Reflections**

Sue Smith has been living as a Parish priest / Chaplain's wife for four years in Cyprus. This is how it has been for her.

### ***Life as a clergy spouse in Cyprus - a personal perspective***

#### ***August 2009 to the present day***

Derek and I came out to Cyprus after thirty three years ministry in Salisbury diocese. Although I had lived in Kenya as a child, and Derek and I had led holiday chaplaincies in France and Switzerland, enjoyed a house and duty exchange in San Francisco, and experienced short term mission in Africa through SOMA (Sharing of Ministries Abroad), moving to Cyprus was our first experience of living abroad together.

I left behind a very demanding job as primary headteacher in Wiltshire to come to Cyprus, plus our first two grandchildren. Whilst I did not miss the job very much, I did miss the timetabled existence I had become used to for nearly thirty years, and I did miss the grandchildren deeply. We brought our cat with us, which helped, although Cyprus has many native cats already.

St Barnabas Anglican church is one of seven chaplaincies in Cyprus. It is a small church on a compound, which is also used by the Greek Evangelical church, German Lutherans, Swedes, Persians and Arabs. The chaplaincy house is opposite the church, so it is very much living on site. As the church is so full, and people travel forty five minutes to get to church, we started a new church plant in Pissouri. This now meets twice a month, under the amphitheatre. It is an exciting venture and must now be established as there has been a church outing as well as several meals out together. This church supports a local charity, Isaiah 58, which collects food and clothes for those suffering from Aids and HIV.

Daily life is similar to other church life anywhere around the world, although the context is different. People in need knock on the door, as they do in the UK, but the needs may be different. Across the road from the church is the remand centre and Derek visits people there of all nationalities. The congregation at St Barnabas consists mainly of British people, but also Americans, Danish, German, New Zealanders, South Africans, Palestinians, Sri Lankans, Africans, Philippinas and Indians. As always, Derek is very involved in the wider church and meets regularly with other, mainly evangelical, churches and their leaders. At a recent Churches Together Christmas celebration, around fifteen churches from many nations sang carols together. This was a truly multi - cultural experience, where it was good to be in the minority as English people.

Everything takes longer here. Paperwork work is complex, but we soon became "resident aliens"! Although Cyprus is part of the EU, not everything corresponds directly to systems in the UK. People drive on the left, which helps greatly, but are uncomfortable with roundabouts and not keen on using traffic indicators. Consequently, the rate of traffic accidents is rather high!

People come to church here. They come to see their friends and meet with God. The services are distinctly Anglican, although many worshippers come from different church backgrounds. Fetes and social events are very important and the chaplaincy garden is a popular venue for bring and share lunches under the palm trees. It still surprises me that I can grow Seville oranges and lemons in the garden!

So, life is full and varied. Following a visit from Canadian friends, we decided that I am now a “co-pastor” with Derek. This means that I do lots of work unpaid, but with joy! This includes cooking many meals and learning how to make Sri Lankan curry, as opposed to Indian curry. In order to “fill the gap” left in my life when I left full time employment early, I have started Youth Church for 11-16 year olds, and I oversee the Junior Church. We have run Christmas and Good Friday Workshops and family events with games, teaching and worship, and always food! The children and young people produced “Hosanna Rock” for Christmas, which was quite a change from the normal festive diet. The young people seem more open to faith in Cyprus, possibly because it is a strongly Orthodox country.

So, would I recommend this life? A definite yes, if you have a love of adventure, a desire to serve God in a new context, and a strong marriage. It can be lonely at times and we find new ways of relating to the family in UK. Skype certainly helps. From our recent experience over the last few years, we have started to limit the number of visitors we have welcomed into our home. This has been good as we have enjoyed those who have come out and I no longer feel that I am running a hotel.

The sense of belonging to the wider church family is fundamental here. Synod is a great joy and an opportunity to find out about the joys and challenges in the wider diocese. It opens up our eyes. I have enjoyed travelling with Derek to see parts of the Gulf, when he has had meetings. Again, this gives us a wider perspective on the Anglican family.

Sue Smith  
Limassol

Tricia Butt is married to Chris, the Dean of Bahrain. They have been in the Gulf for three years. Here are her reflections on Synod.

### ***Synod in Cyprus***

As a clergy wife of a priest in the Gulf, I look forward to Synod every year. I've never been to a Synod in the UK and have never wanted to go – it all seemed rather tedious, and irrelevant to ordinary parish life. But I wouldn't miss the annual Synod of Cyprus and the Gulf for the worlds. Some of it is the place itself – the smells and sights of Cyprus in the spring are a revelation, a refreshing contrast for those of us who get used to sandy coloured stones, hot air and blinding light, cars, chrome and glass buildings as our everyday environment, with a sense of homecoming to a place which breathes history; some of it is the actual getting together.

Synod for me has the flavour of Scripture Union camps or conventions I attended as a young person, except that we don't have to rough it in tents or walk miles to the toilets in a campsite, rather have the comforts of being in a hotel. There is the right balance of meeting other people, good fellowship over good food, moving liturgy and worship to start and end the day, business to tackle and discuss, and challenging input from international speakers. We minister to one

another at Synod. The spiritual synergy of meeting up with others with similar goals and situations is enormous. To have over a hundred people joyfully singing their hearts out twice a day refreshes the soul, and the Bishop's address is insightful and thought-provoking. I also like learning new songs, and taking them back to the chaplaincy to teach others, to season our worship with contemporary, and even, international hymns and songs.

The visits we make each Synod are salutary reminders of our theological roots and also of what counts over decades and centuries. Last year, we visited the tomb of Barnabas, a native of Cyprus, reminding ourselves of his ministry with the Apostle Paul. Another year, we experienced the icons of a very old Greek Orthodox church.

I find it's a good time to make friends with new spouses and to renew friendships with those I haven't seen for a year, to celebrate growth and change with them, and hear of the exploits of children and grandchildren and to say goodbye to those who are leaving. And if you don't 'do' crowds, or find the unrelenting communality a bit much, there is a chance to walk or jog on the beach in the fresh, spring morning, to take a swim, to read emails in the meeting room, or to sit absorbing the stillness, leaning up against an ancient wall at the St George's monastery during the quiet morning there. If you want to eat in a more intimate setting, there are local restaurants across the road and down the street, but you may find the local chef has sold his dish of the day to the hotel!

Clergy spouses have the option to attend as many, or as few, business sessions as they wish. I always stay for the reports from the Chaplaincies, which have become more media-savvy over the years, because they are always interesting. To find out what God is doing in such diverse places as we have in our Diocese, geographically as well as culturally, is energising and stimulating. Our unique diversity as a Diocese is enriching.

If the above sounds too much like a travel brochure, be assured – it's all true! The only pitfalls with attending Synod are those of eating and talking too much!

Tricia Butt  
Bahrain

Chris Howitz moved with his young family from Manchester to Muscat. This is his reflection.

### ***Our experience of relocating to the Gulf***

I, my wife and our two-year old child moved to the Gulf at the beginning of 2012 when I accepted the post of Anglican chaplain based in Muscat (the capital of the Sultanate of Oman). We had felt a call to the Middle East after frequent travels in the region, and had always been blown away by the hospitality we received, the rich biblical history we'd encountered, and the great conversations about Jesus that we'd often had on our visits.

Moving is always quite stressful, and moving to a new culture obviously adds a new level of the unknown to the whole equation. It's good to be ready for this and think through what things will help you settle quickly. My wife is Canadian and one of her immediate prayer requests was to make good friends with a North American woman. It's not that she didn't want to be friends with people of other cultures but just that she hoped for one friendship where there would be less effort involved and easier understanding if she was feeling a bit down.

Discovering if you can get your favourite laundry soap and where you need to go to get M10 3/4inch cross-headed screws can be a trial or it can be fun. Part of the trick is to remind yourself that sometimes things might take a bit longer to do than you are used to. People generally want to be helpful and will either offer you something that they think is what you are looking for, or will say they can direct you to where you want to go, or can get hold of what you are looking for, even though that might not really be the case! Try and enjoy the new experience rather than always wishing things were like your home country.

I guess you shouldn't underestimate making sure your family are getting settled. Get to know one or two people who will help you find your feet and reach out to your neighbours who will often want to take you under their wing. In fact, getting to know people is not difficult, and there is a definite sense of community in the expat population, sometimes linked to one's home country, but more often than not transcending those divisions. It's also quite easy to get to know locals as they are practised in the art of hospitality and generally put us westerners to shame with their generosity and openness.

I would encourage people to take the risk and look for housing outside of the expat community centres, but also be aware of your limits and the needs of your family. You have to take into consideration what your transport options are and whether your spouse is likely to end up feeling pretty isolated with no car, no friends nearby and with a complicated school run.

Before we came to Oman we had a sprinkling of Arabic under our belts, and have since sought to learn a bit more. It's definitely not necessary to know 'the local language' (as English is widely spoken, especially in the diverse expat community), but it can be a great way to get to know people if you are seen to be willing to learn their language.

We really love living in the Gulf, and are excited that our children will grow up with such a rich and diverse cultural experience. We are grateful for our friends both inside the church community and outside it, both expats and locals. And we are thankful to God that He has called us here and is using us for His kingdom.

***Fr Bill has been in the diocese for more than thirty years. He shares some reflections about ministry here.***

I am continually amazed at the diversity experienced in ministry in this diocese. Starting with the geography, the politics, the economics and many other aspects of our location which are in the news every day, it is indeed an exciting place to be engaged in ministry. Many assume it is dangerous to live here, and certainly one does need to drive defensively. People assume that the church is persecuted in many of the countries of our diocese; we certainly need to do things differently than in our home countries but relations with governments are historic, favourable and positive in all but one country of the diocese. In most countries in our diocese our clergy enjoy amazing access to government authorities and diplomatic missions.

Our Anglican congregations tend to draw from a strongly international, and interdenominational, demographics; they reflect the demographics of the cities in which we serve. At the same time, the fact that we share minority status in each country of the diocese with Christians of an extremely wide variety of backgrounds and traditions means that ecumenism is much more practical than symbolic. Serving in this diocese has brought



opportunity to learn the history, traditions and piety of worldwide Christianity not possible when serving as clergy in the dominant Christian tradition in a primary-culture environment. We are all expatriates and migrant workers; there is little difference between us all as expats other than the standard of living our employment levels offer, and to some extent the quality of diplomatic relations between our home countries and the host country where we serve.

Most of the countries of our diocese make up the cradle of Islam. Arab Islam is distinctively different from Pakistani or Indian Islam. Experiencing Islam as a culture is very different from studying Islam as a religion, and living under Islamic values brings much opportunity for understanding the reality of God's love and give us greater confidence in his covenant. Pastoring amidst the wide variety of Christian responses to Islam provides a real challenge to guide people in understanding and love. The contrast also gives opportunity to evaluate and teach what of our own cultural values are based on religious tradition and history and what is entirely secular.

The best part of ministry in this part of the world is the incredible mix and amazing quality of relationships we build. Friendships are deep. Exposure to cultures and values other than our own are personal, not academic, because of the friends who identify with these values. I've learned the value of community, having grown up in a very individualistic society. I've learned to appreciate the histories and stories of ethnic groups I would have never met if I had stayed in my home country. I've come to appreciate that learning is the better part of teaching, and that ministry that gives also receives. I am convinced that this diocese is a place which enriches people, because of the lives we share in the grace of Jesus Christ.