

“What do you do over Christmas?”



That’s a question we are often asked. Well on Christmas Day services are rich in music and liturgy. We begin on Christmas Eve with the 1st Evensong of Christmas, then at 1130 begin Midnight Mass. At the end of the mass we go in procession carrying an image of the Christ Child to place in the crib. Next morning some Brethren celebrate the mass of the dawn before breakfast while it is still dark. Later in the morning we have the main mass of Christmas and go straight from that into a drinks party and then the traditional lunch. On Christmas afternoon about half the Community go for a corporate walk. After that it is quite a strain getting going for 2nd Evensong and by the time Compline comes it is definitely time for bed.

The next three days are observed as solemnities – St Stephen, St John and Holy Innocents so they have a Sunday feel about them. Then we go into retreat for three days which is a very welcome time of silence before Chapter begins just before New Year.

It’s been a good year. At the beginning we re-elected Fr George as Superior. In February we received Brother Jacob’s first profession. In the last few months some quite serious enquirers have been coming and we hope to have a novitiate again next year. During this year we also lost three brethren – Andrew who died just before Christmas, Timothy who died in February and Dominic who died in June. That had its element of sadness but as they were respectively 87, 95 and 98 when they died we can see their lives coming to a triumphant close and the new life beyond the grave as a great reward. As I write Fr Vincent Girling is very poorly and has been mostly in bed for several weeks. He is quiet and peaceful and quite ‘with it’. Please pray for him.

The College, too, has begun its academic year well.

They include a number of students who take prayer really seriously and are constantly found in dark places of the Church! One student writes: “This year we have grown to 30 ordinands with many partners and children sharing our life. By the end



of the first term as many of us go our separate ways for the Christmas vacation it is hard to imagine that we have only been living together since late September. There is something about the rhythm of prayer, work and meals, and the uncompromising proximity in which they are done, that forms a college community of the like not found anywhere else in the Church of England. There is an extraordinary mix of people at the College with so many ‘previous lives’. This year we have a telephone engineer, a sports-fashion designer, a Methodist minister, a sign language interpreter and an RAF Bandsperson to name a handful. It is a wonderful (and certainly formative) thing to live with so many talented and different people. This is the moment when I cheese-ily add the College

prospectus 'strap-line': *A theological college like no other.* I shall leave those of you who know the College well to imagine the fun that was had with this slogan at the Christmas Revue...

Amongst the highlights this term was the College's Foundation Day dinner and party on the Feast of Ss Simon and Jude. Always a joyous affair, a beautiful Mass was followed by a fantastic dinner and party. Each time we enjoy a big dinner the College flower officers (who decorate the refectory), the kitchen and DJ Ken (known in the daytime as Dr Ken Farrimond, Director of Studies) out-do themselves spectacularly. Within days of finishing an excellent theme week on 'engaging with Islam' (see photo) we were plunged into Advent with a weekend retreat conducted by Father Stuart Burns, the Abbot of Mucknell. The last three weeks of term flew by amongst last-minute essay writing, a wonderfully atmospheric medieval banquet and carol singing in local care homes and the College 'local', The Pear Tree. It was all rounded off by the Christmas dinner, revue and party after our last Thursday night College Eucharist. As ever, a great night was had by all even if some students regretted it the next morning at 7.25am as they got to Church for Mattins. One student has a T-shirt that rather nicely sums it up (a phrase that could serve equally well, perhaps, as the prospectus slogan): *work hard, pray hard, play hard.*"

Christmas really starts on Christmas Day and runs through to Epiphany, or to The Baptism of Jesus in the new liturgical order. This is the great celebration of one of the greatest mysteries of our salvation. Enjoy it well and come out of it enriched by your meeting with the new-born Christ.

Edited by Fr Nicolas Stebbing CR