

Bernard Mizeki Trust Report:

Eric Prachar

Chapel Intern at Pusey House, Oxford, Nov 2018-Aug 2019

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Dear Trustees of the Fellowship of St John,

Thank you most kindly for sponsoring my internship at Pusey House through the Bernard Mizeki Trust. As you may know, Pusey House functions as a sort of unofficial Anglo-Catholic chaplaincy to the University of Oxford. There are three main strands to our mission: the liturgical/pastoral, including daily offices and mass and spiritual direction; the academic, including the library and special guest lectures; and the social, including recurring public meals and social events to draw people in and build up a sense of community. As a chapel intern I had the opportunity to engage with all these different aspects of our common life in different capacities.

In common with the other chapel interns, I helped to lead the daily offices, serve at mass, preach at evensong, visit members of our congregation, and support the general day-to-day running of the house through office administration and other tasks as assigned. Additionally, my particular role was the House Manager. This meant I had the primary responsibility for our hospitality ministry, including liaising with external groups who rent our space, room set-up and clear up, stocking and maintaining the kitchen, and hosting socials and special events. I used this role to support our mission by completing my tasks with attention to detail and providing a friendly welcome to guests, many of whom had never encountered the house before, in order to ensure a positive and memorable experience. For example, several members of the Oxford Scriptorium which we host (a graduate student study group with a focus on Christian fellowship) ended up joining us for worship, and a few were even confirmed and baptised. After term ended I also supported the library by shifting and re-sorting the collections to make room for future expansion.

I also took advantage of the opportunity for a part-time parish placement at St Barnabas with St Thomas the Martyr, Jericho. This was an interesting time to observe at the parish because for my first few months they were operating in an interregnum, and then for the last few months I got to observe how the new parish priest integrated into the community. Besides attending weekly ministry-team meetings and helping to serve at mass for major festivals and events, including Christmas and the Induction of the new vicar, I helped lead faith-sharing assemblies at their accompanying primary school and volunteered at “Prayer Space” workshops. This parish connection helped me to round out a range of different ministry experiences that aren’t strictly available at Pusey, particularly children’s ministry. I was also grateful that the relationships which developed through the parish community functioned as a second source of support and encouragement in my exploration of ministry.

Under the umbrella of the “Common Good” scheme, our social justice ministry, I also did some volunteering with the local winter night shelter programme, served regularly at another parish’s lunch programme for disadvantaged members of

their community, and visited a local prison to observe a restorative justice/victim awareness course. I also co-initiated and co-led a successful book discussion group on “Christianity and Social Order” by William Temple, filling a gap in our existing programming and engaging intellectually with the question of how to live out our Christian social commitments today. I found there was a hunger within the group to hold together concern for the truth of Christian doctrine with a practical concern for the poor, while transcending the liberal/conservative and evangelical/catholic dichotomies.

Beyond my assigned tasks, however, most helpful was the opportunity to pray and worship together in community in an almost monastic daily rhythm, and to participate in the weekly vocations discussion group with peers at a similar stage of discernment. Some of the memorable topics at this group included the relevance of Benedictine spirituality to the parish context, and the role and vocation of Licensed Lay Ministers in the church. At the one-on-one level, the supervision and spiritual support from the clergy at the house was invaluable in helping me sort through both the immediate and big-picture challenges that living at the house brought up for me. I learned a lot about myself and grew in unexpected ways, including developing a greater awareness of my particular gifts and vulnerabilities and the areas I still want to work on. I also got to meet a wide variety of fellow Christian friends in different walks of life, at different stages in their faith journeys and with varying beliefs and practices, who have all challenged and encouraged me in some way and deepened my own Christian discipleship.

For me personally, I arrived with the intention of discerning a vocation to ordained ministry in the Church of England, having previously completed my theological studies and a selection conference in the Anglican Church of Canada, where I am from. I had been living in the UK for five months prior to arriving at Pusey, working at L’Arche in Bognor Regis as a live-in care assistant. I met the Principal Fr George Westhaver at the ACS conference last September and mentioned to him that I was looking for some kind of pastoral assistant scheme, not realising that there was one at Pusey, and it went from there! In the end I decided that ordained ministry in the Church of England is not for me. However I am still very grateful for the experiences this internship provided which helped to clarify my sense of vocation, form me in Christlikeness, and gain transferrable skills for future employment contexts. The house would not be able to function at the highly efficient level it does without the hard work of the interns, and in turn without the financial support from charities like the Bernard Mizeki Trust which makes it possible.

Photo: Myself preparing to subdeacon a Sunday solemn high mass at Pusey

