

## ***An update from Jenny Holden***

How do I even start to try describe the past year? Transitions is a key word: from being in discernment to being an ordinand, working full-time to being a full-time student, and moving from Aberdeen to Edinburgh. Throughout all the transition my abiding feeling is that I am in the right place doing the thing God has called me to do. From learning New Testament Greek to experiencing 1929 Prayer Book Communion and leading hymn practice and far more, it's been a very busy and very enjoyable year.

Training for ministry in the Scottish Episcopal Church is through the Scottish Episcopal Institute (SEI), this year there have been 25 of us in the community. This includes people training to be Readers, Distinctive Deacons and Priests. We are drawn from across five dioceses of the church and come together in person at Residential weekends. Stretching from Friday afternoon to Sunday lunchtime, these involve worship, teaching and social times. We have a theme for each weekend and guest speakers come to speak to us on Saturday afternoon, this year the topics have included the environment and money (including being taught how to read a set of accounts). We say Morning and Evening prayer altogether and each member of the community takes a turn in leading and reading at one of these services through the year. I've gradually got used to the format and changes in SEC's Morning and Evening prayer. The residential are at the recently refurbished St Mary's Kinnoull, a Redemptorist monastery on the outskirts of Perth. One of my best memories is the last residential where despite having to do an assessed sermon, we were properly a community supporting each other in tears, laughter, cheese and jelly babies. My group were leading worship and I did far more leading of singing that I ever thought I would be brave enough to do. There is something about getting used to taking risks and trusting in God that this period of training compels me to do.



St Mary's Kinnoull, New College Edinburgh and Forbes House (General Synod Office)

My placement this year was with Ecumenical Workplace Chaplaincy, working with the Together Churches in Edinburgh City Centre. I've spent time with the City Council chaplain, a chaplain to seafarers and a Roman Catholic Priest in his role as school chaplain. I spent time at services and talking to members of the congregations at two Church of Scotland and one Episcopalian church. Chaplaincy provided a very different experience of ministry and lots to think and reflect on.

On Wednesday nights, the SEI community gathers virtually and in person for seminars on subjects such as liturgy, preaching, mission entrepreneurship. In Edinburgh we gather for food, Evening Prayer, teaching (with a coffee break) and Compline at the General Synod Office (Forbes House). For those not in Edinburgh people use Skype to link in from wherever they are from the Borders to Tain. Alongside this teaching I am one of three students in the Scottish Episcopal Church funded to be full-time student at New College, University of Edinburgh. Here, I'm one of a group of ten students training for ministry (7 Church of Scotland, 3 Episcopalian) alongside traditional undergraduates. We have our own weekly prayer gathering alongside the College's weekly Communion service. The latter is lead by members of New College so can be a service from any denomination from around the world, but most are SEC or Church of Scotland. To fit the four year undergraduate degree into three years I do an extra course a year. However, it isn't too much work compared to when I was working but the biggest difference is that I don't get to decide when I have to work. I have gradually got used 9am lectures and seminars (and learnt the optimum amount of coffee to consume).

My courses at New College fall into three groups: Biblical Studies, History and Theology & Ethics. I've looked at Prophets and Oracles in the Old Testament, Letters of Paul the Apostle and learnt enough New Testament Greek to read the New Testament in the original language. In History we've looked at Christianity as a world religion from the early church to the present day. This course includes world Christianity and history of missions. I'd forgotten how much I enjoyed history but it's a lot to revise and in my last exam I wrote about subjects as diverse as Luther's objections to practices of the Catholic Church, African Independent Churches and the fate of the Orthodox church after the fall of Constantinople. I've learnt a lot more about the history of Scottish churches. I've probably enjoyed the Theology and Ethics courses the most, they're the ones with the most applicable theory. Last term I took a course on God in Philosophy, looking at conceptions and arguments for God in philosophers from Plato to Kant. This was a course with a lot of things to get my head around and I wrote an

essay on Islamic and Christian conceptions of God. However, with this degree I have the freedom I choose the courses that will be most useful for my future ministry, not what will necessary get me the best grades. Having said that, I passed my first year with As and Bs and am excited about the prospect of courses next year that go deeper into specific subjects such as Christian Ethics, Theologies of Liberation and Global Theologies.

In Edinburgh I've found a church home at Old St Paul's, a far higher church than St Ninian's with an amazing choir, smells and bells. However, it makes me engage all my senses in worship and connects to the majesty of God. I have been bell ringing and singing in the New College choir as well as exploring Edinburgh's walks, coffee shops and cake offerings!



New College Library, sign outside one of my favourite coffee shops, Old St Paul's, Virginia Theological Seminary

This Summer I'm visiting the Center for Anglican Communion Studies at Virginia Theological Seminary, just outside Washington DC. I'm going to be an ambassador for the Scottish Episcopal Institute, seeing how a large residential seminary works, playing a part in daily chapel services and spending time with their international students. I'm excited to experience a different part of the Episcopal Church in the USA as it's the church I attended when I lived in Munich and I've spent time in the States before. I'm less excited about the heat and humidity that area experiences in August! Before that I'm going to the Diocese of Moray, Ross and Caithness for Summer School to experience rural ministry, have a silent retreat and it ends with a Valedictory service for the students leaving the community to be ordained this year.

A major event this year was the Study Tour to Israel and Palestine I was part of in February. Organised through New College and the Church of Scotland, the group was 30 people, all ordained or training for ordination. We packed a lot into six days and I'm still processing and reflecting on the experiences and continue to do so for some time.



Sign at Tent of Nations, a farm in occupied Palestinian territory, Jerusalem street sign, Dome of the Rock and the Western Wall, Church of the Holy Sepulchre

We stayed in the Church of Scotland guest house in Jerusalem near to the old city and the Church of Scotland hotel in Tiberias on the shores of Lake Galilee. We visited mission partners of the Church of Scotland including Tent of Nations, where we heard about the daily challenges of life for a Palestinian family surrounded by Israeli settlements. We visited the site the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, Masada and Bethlehem. For me one of the most significant experiences was being part of a group of women who got up early to visit the Tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the church built on the places reported to be where Jesus was crucified and buried. We had visited the previous day but it was very busy and we had not had the time to queue to see the empty tomb. Walking through the streets of the Old City as the sun rose, being in a small group and experiencing Catholic and Orthodox worship in the church, alongside seeing the empty tomb is something I'll never forget. Caesarea Maritima (Acts 10) was beautiful by the Mediterranean and we had our lunch on the beach (including paddling in the sea) on a day where Scotland was experiencing heavy snow. The area around Lake Galilee is truly beautiful and there is something striking about walking in the places Jesus lived and ministered. On the last day we had a Communion service on the shores of Lake Galilee at Capernaum, having woken up early to see the sun rise over the Golan Heights and having led worship in a church in Tiberias the night before it was a particularly emotional service. There was a link to St Ninian's as we sang the setting of the Gloria that was sung when I first moved to Aberdeen.

I miss Aberdeen and people, especially at St Ninian's. I knew it was a special place that played such a large part in my faith and vocation journey in being a place where I have been nurtured and able to try doing things, but I didn't fully realise how unusual that is. It was strange to preach and not see your friendly faces in front of me. Be assured that you are all in my prayers and I thank you for yours. I'm looking forward to seeing what next year brings and where the journey goes next.