

Girton Review Chapel Report 2007

2006/7 has been an eventful year for the life of the Chapel; a year in which we have continued some of our old traditions but also had some promising new developments. We were brought back to our roots, but also invited to look forward, in a brilliant sermon for commemoration of benefactors, given by Dr Charlotte Methuen, an Old Girtonian and lecturer in ecclesiastical history in Oxford. She focussed on the significance of the words over the chapel door; *hucusque auxiliatus est nobis dominus* and how in her view they represented a challenge to those who dismissed a women's college as a folly, by claiming God's support in its founding and continuation. "up until now Lord, thou hast been our helper". Can we continue a tradition, which confidently calls for the inclusion of the excluded?

The gauntlet was taken up by speakers throughout the term, who sought to link "spirituality" with the big issues confronting the world.. Another old Girtonian, Dr Elizabeth Burroughs, spoke movingly of her personal experience in the work of reconciliation in conflict zones in the Middle East, whilst ecologist Nigel Cooper pointed to practical ways in which Christians could develop a more responsible relation with the earth and her other inhabitants.

A new development that term was a special requiem mass in college on All Souls day to remember and give thanks for the lives of friends, family and members of college who had died in the last year. It was very well attended and many of those who came told me they found it helpful and moving, so we hope it will become an annual event.

Our theme in the Lent term was reflection on life as a journey, or pilgrimage and we had very helpful stories and meditations to guide us through the term. A high-light was a joint event, on Ash Wednesday between Chapel and the Girton Poetry Group, "An Ash Wednesday Sequence" in which former organ scholar Sam Hudson created a series of brilliant improvised responses to poems submitted by members of the group. It was a moving experience which took all those who were there on a journey through doubt and darkness towards liberation and hope. Term concluded with another "new" Girton tradition, a visit to St. Marks Newnham where both the vicar and the director of music are old Girtonians. It is always good for college chapels to keep living links with "ordinary" parish life, and this link, together with our strong connection with St. Andrew's Girton, our own parish church, is certainly one we hope to continue and strengthen. We had a very good response to last years detailed series on George Herbert's poem *Prayer*, so this year, in the Easter Term we invited all our preachers to choose particular verses from Psalm 139, so that by the end of term the chapel community could feel that they knew this beautiful part of scripture in real depth and detail. As always we were accompanied on our journey by moving music from the choir and organists, and for many, as we reflected on the long tradition of psalmody this term brought a fresh appreciation of the role of chapel music and the particular gifts of our choir.

Perhaps the most significant development, from a chaplain's perspective in our wider life outside chapel itself has been a real warming of relationships, and connections of personal friendship between the different religious groupings and societies. Easter term saw the old JCR packed for a Girton Christian get together in which Chapel, CU and Fusion were all well represented. In that same term the FDR was also packed to the point of standing room only for a debate, organised by college Christians about the necessity, or not, of atheism. Girtonians of many faiths and none were drawn into a really helpful series of conversations, which continued long after the official debate was over.

As always I have been very grateful for the help I have received in my work from Dr Randall, Dr Ennis, and all my chapel wardens. After a stimulating year I look forward to the adventures that the new academic year will bring.