

TWINNING IN THE DIOCESE

By Diana Webster 18.2.22

Diana gives a fascinating insight into how St Nicholas' Chaplaincy in Helsinki came to be twinned to St George's in Sicily! ...

Many moons ago, when I was on the General Synod and therefore also the Diocesan Synod, a member of the Diocese suggested it might be useful to have a twinning scheme between our chaplaincies. I don't remember if the suggestion came from me, but I volunteered to organize the pairings, with any chaplaincy that was interested writing to me to say so, after which I would put them in suitable couples. The idea behind the scheme was that we would learn about the enormous differences that existed between us all over Europe, not just in size and wealth (or lack of it) but especially in our congregations: some were made up of ex-pats and the elderly (e.g. the south of France and Spain); some had a great many British wives - not so many husbands - of locals (e.g. Italy); some had many immigrants from Africa (e.g. the Netherlands); some were mostly diplomats (e.g. Moscow); some were a mixed bag of English-speaking nationalities and occupations (e.g. Helsinki, Hamburg). These all naturally had different problems and solutions, but, tucked in our own customary chaplaincies, we seldom knew anything outside our own.

About a dozen out of the 120 or so chaplaincies at the time asked me for a twin. The principles on which I selected them were very simple: a twin should be from another deanery at least, preferably from another area completely, and the congregations of both should be of about the same size. This last was so that a small congregation should not be swamped by the possible arrival of a large number of visitors from the twin. I thought the task might be difficult, but in fact it turned out quite easy. The one real problem was Taormina, as (at least then) the congregation of Taormina was tiny and no other of the applicants really fitted it. Finally I decided the only solution was to twin it with us, Helsinki. We had then a much smaller congregation than now and one thing was sure: we neither of us knew much, if anything, about the other. David Bullivant offered to be the official correspondent between our chaplaincies and was a very faithful one. He also went down to visit them one summer.

By the way, those were also the days before email, the internet, and WiFi – at least for the Diocesan Office. At this particular Diocesan Synod, I went around the participants asking for their email addresses, hoping to improve and simplify communications within our Diocese. I ended with exactly three: that of a woman representative from Zurich, my own – and Bishop John Hind's. A senior official in the Diocesan Office told me it was just a modern fad and would never catch on...(!)