

A GLORIOUS GATHERING IN GONSENHEIM

In the end, because our Vicar, Dick Lewis, was unable to travel, only ten of us went to join the celebratory weekend with our link congregation at the Evangelischkeirche, Gonsenheim, in Mainz, Germany. But, despite that disappointment we had a wonderful time. Our hosts are generosity itself and so welcoming and thoughtful. Our conversations were wide ranging but always held with a warmth, a willingness to share feelings, and a trust which has come over many years of friendship between our two churches. We felt glad that we are part of a church which enjoys links with other congregations. These lift our eyes and broaden our horizons. Indeed, though we went knowing we'd have a great time, we all came back saying we'd enjoyed it even more than we'd expected!



Meals in restaurants, sampling wonderful local wine, a lovely trip down the Rhine and a picnic at a castle, a meeting at the Town Hall with the Twinning officers and the Mayor of Gonsenheim which reminded us of the importance of the link between our two towns, a night-watchman's tour of Gonsenheim, and a guided tour of Mainz were some of the activities we joined in together with our hosts and other friends from the church. And Mavis Garrett particularly enjoyed visiting her host's al-

lotments and looking enviously at the stone free and fertile soil!

The weekend was a special one for the parish in Gonsenheim as it was the opening of their new Kindergarten and the refurbished parish hall (Gemeindehaus). On Saturday evening there was a benefit concert in the church given by Peter Paulnitz, their organist, and two trumpeters. It was delightful. A lovely selection of music played in a lovely setting.



But the highlight of the weekend was the Sunday. It started with choir practice, the first time we'd joined their choir in the balcony. They had kindly chosen three pieces with English words so we didn't have to struggle with the German. Two pieces were relatively easy to pick up but one, *Glory be to God on High*, was particularly tricky. But with Peter's careful practice and immaculate playing we were all able to pick it up and sing it with vigour at the end the service. We have invited Peter to come and give a recital in Christ Church and, if he does, we'll get him to accompany our choir and we'll sing it at a service.



The congregation was delighted by the way our voices swelled the sound of the choral pieces. The children sang a song too, which was great fun, and we were asked to help lead the intercessions. One unexpected moment was when Chris Long received a gift on behalf of our parish - a very generous gift of money which she graciously acknowledged in very good German!

After the service it was the Gemeindefest - the parish party. There were wonderful cauldrons of thick soup, barbecued sausages and meat, cakes, and plenty to drink. There were also the official speeches during which we made our presentation of the picture to go up in the Gemeindehaus.

We were able to admire the new Kindergarten and buy saucepans and kitchen utensils to help equip the children's kitchen. There was entertainment - a recorder group, young people playing flute, clarinet and keyboard, the kindergarten children



singing songs (a version of 'the wheels on the bus' in German!) and, to end the evening, the Elsa-Chor, a newly formed community choir from the high-rise flats in Gonsenheim. They were good fun and sang, accompanied by a violin and guitar, such delights as 'Yellow Submarine', 'Wymoweh' and 'When I'm 64'.



We'd love to have them come and give a concert here, too!



But the funniest highlight was the equivalent of our raffle. There was only one prize - a top-of-the-range bicycle. We all bought tickets as the money was going to fund more things for the Kindergarten. Each ticket had three numbers on it and the winner was determined by throwing three special dice with numbers 0 to 9. The first one was a 3 so we knew the number was in the 300s. Chris Long, Mavis Garrett and Janet Lewis each had a ticket in the 300s - we were in with a chance!



The second number was a 9 and we realised that Chris now had a 10% chance of winning. The final number was 3 and, yes you've guessed it, Chris had the winning ticket!!! Everyone saw the funny side, but what to do? She'd been thinking about buying a new bike, but how could she get it home? In the end she gave the bike back to be auctioned in order to raise more funds. After some fierce bidding it was bought for 450 Euros (about £450) by one of the architects of the new building. We hope he enjoys it! Everyone was delighted by these extra funds for the Kindergarten.



We want to thank everyone at the church in Gonsenheim - Angela Rinn-Maurer and Andreas Nose, their Pastors, Peter Paulnitz, all our hosts (too many to name, but they know who they are), and all the congregation - for giving us such a fine time. The weather was very kind to us but it was the warmth and sunny smiles of the people which really made it such a wonderful occasion.

