

500 Luther
Protestant 2017

What a joyous celebration to the glory of God!

It all started, not as a celebration, but as a profound conviction that the Bible, God's Word, was the only access to knowing our Lord and Saviour and coming to salvation. Unfortunately, the message was not received positively – Luther's whole life was a living crusade to bring his fellow Christians to discover a personal relationship with their God.

Of course, none of this happened without friction, jealousy, hatred, bloodshed and murder – persecution of those who followed this Reformed way of worshipping and living. Many other Reformers appeared throughout the ages with different viewpoints, but Christ and our salvation through His love and forgiveness without going through other entities, and the Bible as centre piece in faith, remained the foundation of Protestantism.

Since the 19th Century it has been endeavoured to celebrate the work of Luther “world wide”, but warfare and economic hardships forbade festivities. During the last century all factions, Protestant, Evangelical, Roman Catholic and Orthodox, have, through active reconciliation, come closer together and decided to defend the Christian Faith together. Ecumenism has done what was needed. In 1917, unfortunately, the First World War stood in the way of a joint celebration and therefore, 2017 is a magnificent occasion, in spite of the multiple crises in the world, to celebrate together and declare together that persecution is still taking a tremendous toll on Christianity.

Saturday, 14th October heralded the opening of all the stands of a great variety of associations and organisations working towards spreading the message of Christ, assisting Christians, providing Bibles and working to the glory of God, gathered on the Place Pey Berland, between the Saint Andre Cathedral and the Hotel de Rohan, the Bordeaux Mayoral seat. Pasteur Valérie Mali welcomed everyone and was seconded by the President of the French Protestant Church in France, Pasteur François Clavaroily, the Cardinal of Bordeaux, Monseigneur Ricard, and the Representative of the Orthodox Churches, Père Philippe. Each gave a short talk about the importance of protecting the Christians all over the world who are seriously persecuted and even killed in many places. Special mention was made of the systematic massacre of Christians in the recent past in the Middle East, where the first Christians resided and were the Apostles brought the Good News first hand.

A procession led by the above mentioned Clergy left for the Orthodox Church of Saint Joseph, then the Protestant Temple du Hâ (with an exhibition of the life, work and influence of Martin Luther) and finally to the Cathedral Saint André. In each case, after a short blessing and prayer, a declaration of the denunciation of the persecution of Christians the world over was affixed to the church door. One of the Bordeaux Local Wardens, Nellie Salvi, represented the Anglican Church during the afternoon and the procession.

That evening there was a cocktail party at the Hotel de Ville, hosted by the Bordeaux Mayor, Monsieur Alain Juppé. Another of the Bordeaux Local Wardens, Peter Luson and his wife were there to represent the Anglican Church. Commemorative medals were handed to several church and association personalities by Pasteur François Chavaroily. He joked about the use by Protestants of “medals”, which during the Reformation were used to indoctrinate and to enforce taxes upon the Protestants.

During the weekend several debates took place and presentations were made in various venues around the Place Pey Berland; in the Mairie, the Librairie Mollat and the Athénée.

The culmination of this celebration took place as a combined service of worship of all the Bordeaux Protestants, including the Anglican Church, represented by Nellie Salvi. This took place in a filled to capacity Anthénée, a first time ever that this historic théâtre in Bordeaux, belonging to the Municipality, was used for a religious service. The Bordeaux Madrigal performed the old Reformation hymns, many still used in all churches today. This choir was formed just after the Reformation in Bordeaux and has continued performing in churches and homes ever since and until this day, in spite of persecution during the years of conflict with the Kings of France and then the Revolution. Scripture were read, the creed was said, hymns of praise and thanksgiving were sung as well as prayers and intercession was heard. Pasteur Mali led the service, while Pasteur Clavaroily, who is from Bergerac, delivered the spirit filled sermon based on the Prodigal Son.

The weekend celebrations were rounded off with further debate and an open air shared picnic in the beautiful gardens of the Mairie. The Lord provided glorious weather throughout!

Pasteur Valérie Mali did express her wish for a much closer collaboration between the Eglise Protestante Unie in Bordeaux and the Anglican Church in Bordeaux, and of course with the Chaplaincy as a whole . Christine Rychlewski, as our Ecumenical Contact, will lead this drive in Bordeaux. I assured her that we shared her vision of and desire for closer contact to the glory of our Lord, Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the World.

Nellie Salvi
Bordeaux Local Warden
Chaplaincy of Aquitaine