

MuskNews: "Please pray for us!"

February 2012

1 Christmas couscous!

: our house was bursting at the seams with more than fifty mostly youngish people enjoying a turkey and couscous lunch with Hilary and myself on Christmas Eve. In December 2011, Christmas Eve fell on a Saturday which is the day when our Arabic-speaking congregation meets. Before their afternoon meeting we invited them all to lunch. It was wonderful having these precious brothers and sisters enjoy a meal together with us in honour of the Christ-child. As one of them said to me with such excitement: "This is my first Christmas!" Souad, our home-help, plus her dear mother and three daughters came to help Hilary feed our consistently growing congregation of national brothers and sisters. On Bishop Mouneer's behalf, in their ensuing worship service, I licensed one of the more mature members as a lay assistant to Rev Emil.

: life and work was pretty full on up to Christmas – Hilary wrote and directed another of her Christmas plays and, with help from many, took a Saturday to help children and youths prepare to perform it the following Sunday. It was full of fun and very moving. Fortunately I did not have to play the part of some unfortunate female character as in previous years!

: after our informal, joyful, all-age celebration on Christmas Day morning, Hilary and I caught a plane to Heathrow to spend over a week in UK, visiting many family members and some friends.

2 St George's, Tunis

: we are seeking to move forward our vision for the St George's of the future. Friends from the Africa Development Bank (ADB) are gradually leaving, and over the next two years many more will most likely be relocated away from Tunis. Our burden, whilst they remain with us, is to seek to set up in Tunis a training/mentoring centre for the formation of ministers; plus open up the church to be involved in ministering to the needs of the local, poor community in which it is set. Three different groups, each composed of representatives from our three congregations, are meeting to give direction to this project: how to bless our local community; what kind of building needs might be required for a training/mentoring centre; fundraising.

: our music team hosted a wonderful evening of celebration and praise in church just before Christmas. Members of our Arabic-speaking congregation participated with songs and a moving poem, a Malagasy

- group sang and played, Hilary and I sang (Hilary sang, not me!) and played, and our music team sang and played.
- : apart from missing family very much, we love being here at the moment. It's not nice seeing all the razor wire we are having to put up round the walls of the site in order to protect the church from petty criminals, but what takes place within the church and at the hands of the members of our several congregations is awe-inspiring. Most of the African members are working with the ADB to bring huge change at regional, national and local level to communities on this continent. Others in our congregation work with different "companies" seeking to represent Jesus to friends and colleagues in Tunisia. Some give renewed leadership to a wonderful, openly Christian NGO which is much appreciated by many people in different parts of Tunisia.
 - : for two months or more, we have also been heavily involved in assisting a group of Egyptian, Christian asylum seekers who landed here in Tunis and who found themselves almost immediately in serious difficulty. We thank the Lord that from the beginning of January 2012, all of them have been issued with temporary papers from the United Nations confirming their genuine refugee status. We thank all who have helped us give them support in different ways. We are praying with them for the Lord to open the way for them to move on to a safe haven in another nation. Every now and then, a Coptic Orthodox priest visits to meet with them and to offer them a service of holy communion in our church. You can tell when he has visited by the beautiful, lingering smell of incense in the building!
 - : I am actually writing my part of this letter on the 14th January, which constitutes the anniversary of the revolution that occurred in 2011 in this country. That revolution kick-started what has become known as the "Arab spring" – and who knows what the nations in this part of the world will get to look like by the end of 2012? So far today, a national holiday, the only momentous event is a reported demonstration by Communists unhappy with some of the manifestations of increasing religious control of the institutions of the country.
 - : we have also organised a pilgrimage for two coach-loads (80 people) from St George's to some of the ancient Christian sites around Carthage. We stood on the spots where sisters and brothers were tried and martyred for their faith. We considered some of the ministry of pastor-bishops and theologians who strongly influenced the theological and ecclesiastical development of Christianity in the West. We heard about some of the internal squabbles amongst Christians, one of which practically saw the demise of a more indigenous, North African expression of "church" to the advantage of the Roman-dominated, imperialist, Catholic expression. Can we do differently today?

3 North Africa Episcopal Area

- : I am so relieved that Rev Vasihar and Malini have managed to return to Tripoli where Rev Vasihar is now responsible for the life and development of ministry at Christ the King, Tripoli. Rev Gus and his wife Marliese are also present in that city, teaching and assisting at the church. Rev Hamdy was able at last to return to Egypt for some well-earned rest and recuperation. He intends to join an Anglican religious fraternity later this year. We are praying for Rev Ayo to get his papers/residence in Italy sorted out soon so that he can join the ordained team in Tripoli. He needs to do this because his pregnant wife is at present located in Italy under UN refugee status. More expatriates continue to return to Libya to pick up work again.
- : suddenly, at the end of 2011, I received a phonecall from the Algerian Consulate in Tunis telling me I had been granted a visa to visit Algiers. I discovered that Roman Catholic colleagues, who like me had made applications for visas to visit Algeria a good number of months previously, received similar phonecalls! I plan, God willing, to visit Holy Trinity, Algiers towards the end of February. Efforts to get locum chaplains there have proved frustratingly fruitless (because of the Algerian government, not because potential locums have failed to come forward), and we really are in need of a miracle to get a clergyperson on site who can manage to live well in that environment and give mature and consistent pastoral care to the church community there.
- : this year there is no Diocesan Synod in Cairo (it is called every other year) so I am planning on briefly bringing together in Tunis all those in the North Africa Episcopal Area who hold a license for ministry from Bishop Mouneer. Again, we need miraculous grace to obtain visas and/or permissions for some colleagues to be able to leave/re-enter certain countries. Nothing is easy, but I think it would be great for us to come together to pray and laugh and support one another. I am hoping that such a meeting can take place in April.
- : a new Bishop-elect for the Horn of Africa Episcopal Area has been appointed by Bishop Mouneer. It is so great that Hilary and I were able to make our pastoral, episcopal visit to Addis Ababa and Gambela last autumn as it gives us such insight into the situation awaiting my new colleague-elect, whose name is Grant, and his wife Wendy. Grant will be consecrated in All Saints' Cathedral Cairo at the end of April and then installed by Bishop Mouneer in Gambela a little later.

4 Contrasts

Preparing for visitors makes me think about the impressions they will have when they come... the contrasts here are astounding!! Battered lorries precariously balanced, piled high with hay, set against shiny new 4 x 4's and BMW's; supermarkets such as Geant and Carrefour set

against wonderful local markets piled high with fresh vegetables and fruit; bustling city life with traffic jams set against amazing countryside with locals making their way to and fro on donkeys. Chic city workers in black suits, women coiffured and wearing make-up set against traditional Berber costumes in bright red and widows with cream coloured cloaks; the white yachts of the rich set against bright little working fishing boats.

- : Even in the architecture there is beauty alongside decay, modernity alongside the old and ancient. Tunisia has abounding visible evidence of Phoenician occupation from 1,000 years BC, some of it in amazing condition! We have sat in Phoenician hip baths overlooking the Mediterranean in Kerkouane, a Phoenician town dating as far back as 6thC BC!
- : There are innumerable Roman sites each more wonderful than the last! It is said that 70% of the remains are still under the ground! On our church visit to Carthage on Saturday we stood in the remains of what was the largest church in the whole of N Africa from 3rdC BC, in which the 2nd Synod of Carthage was held, to which many North African Bishops came and at which they discussed the major question of which books should be in the canon of Scripture! S Cyprian, S Augustine and Tertullian were major, ground breaking church Fathers and theologians on whose teaching much theology is still based! These men were from Tunisia! What a privilege to be here and see the seed of the martyrs begin to spring into new life again!
- : Shortly after the Romans came, the Byzantines arrived. There is much evidence, from fortresses to churches, although their architecture was a bit random! They seemed to take Roman stones and stick them up[higgledy-piggledy, even using inscribed stones on their sides! The beauty of visiting these Phoenician, Roman and Byzantine sites is that they are always in stunning countryside with pastoral scenes, bright flowers, sheep, donkeys and mountains all around, not shut away in a sterile museum! One site we visit is uncovering new artefacts and beautiful mosaics daily! The only thing they seem to lack is café's!! Health and safety is not really seen as an issue here either, which is why the sites are so 'organic'! The downside is that there are huge holes one could fall down!!
- : Of course there is plenty of very early Muslim architecture some dating back to the 7th century, with beautiful sand coloured ribats and medinas which have been kept under excellent repair ever since, so have hardly changed over the centuries. After various Muslim dynasties, the Ottoman Turks took the country in the 16th century. The cannon we unearthed in our garden was probably Ottoman; our house and church are very close to the old Medina walls, so it makes sense. Yesterday a friend showed me a decaying ottoman palace; decaying because the plentiful legal heirs are arguing over who should maintain the building!
- : Following the Turks the French took over and the country has many beautiful old Colonial buildings, some of which are being restored and

some of which are looking the worse for wear! Alongside all this there are picturesque seaside towns painted white and blue, beautiful seaside villas and, in Tunis itself, we have amazing modern architecture! The big seaside resorts' tourist zones boast hundreds of huge 4 and 5* hotels! Truly a land of contrasts!

: I neglected to mention the original inhabitants of Tunisia, the Berber or Imazighen people. There are troglodyte dwellings in the south where the people dwelt in homes hewn out of the rock. The Star Wars episodes of Tataouine and Matmata were set there. In the north they favoured high cliff top, fortress like villages. Bill and I visited one called Takrouna which is gradually becoming uninhabited because they cannot get water up to it so they are all moving into a new town they are building on the plain; very sad.

5 Prayers please for

- : folk in Tunis on staff at St George's – Bill, Kwame, Emil, Khaled, Souad and Mohsen.
- : Rev Vasihar and his wife Malini with Rev Gus and his wife Marliese (in Tripoli), Rev Ayo and his wife Rosemary (in Italy – Rev Ayo needs to put in order his marriage/residence papers there so that he will be free to join the ordained ministry team in Tripoli; plus Rosemary is due to give birth to their first child in February), plus various scattered lay leaders and former members of the congregation at Christ the King, Tripoli. For an Egyptian clergyman (in place of Rev Hamdy) to come from Egypt to complete the ordained leadership team there.
- : the various African students making up the Church Council in Algiers. The finding of a permanent minister for Holy Trinity, Algiers.
- : pastoral ministry amongst different groups of people at St George's.
- : provision of a ministry mentoring/training centre on the church site in Tunis.
- : protection and growth of national believers in North Africa; especially the congregation led at St George's by Rev Emil with assistance from Sadak.
- : the impact of the work of members of the Africa Development Bank throughout the continent of Africa; pastoral care of such folk in Tunis.
- : pastoral care of the many folk who are here in Tunisia with "companies" and who attend St George's.
- : the preparation for consecration in April of Grant as Assistant Bishop for the Horn of Africa and for him and Wendy his wife as they move to Gambela, Ethiopia.
- : the general situation in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, the Arab Gulf, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan – where not?!? and in the current shaking of several of those nations, for God's Spirit to be unleashed in a wonderful way.

Bill & Hilary

Bill & Hilary Musk are mission partners with I.C.S. (Intercontinental Church Society: registered charity no. 1072584). If you would like to contribute financially to their support, please go to www.ics-uk.org and follow the link to "Make a donation", then select "Tunis–St George's–Musk" from the drop-down list. Thank you.

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Please be circumspect in what you write or speak to us. Thank you!



Our church trip to Carthage: the coliseum where many 2nd and 3rd Century Christians were martyred.



Souad's mum helping us prepare food for our big Christmas gathering.



The old Medina in Tunis, restored.



Ultra modern Hotel Afrique and old Colonial buildings side by side.



Ancient Ribat, Monastir built 7th century.



Bill looking at yachts in modern Jasmine Hammamet.