

# Remarks given at the Choir Reunion to mark Judith's retirement

24th June 2023

Corpus Christi College, Oxford

I'm really delighted to have the opportunity to share a few words this afternoon. Judith has been the source of many fond and happy memories of our time as students here at Corpus, especially for those of us caught up in the hive of activity around the chapel and the choir.

I took my place on the conveyor belt of organ scholars in 2016, and in the early days since taking up the offer, I was dreading the responsibility that I'd taken upon myself. I'd made a provocative comment in my interview with Judith along the lines of 'well, what is a college without a choir?!', hoping to underscore my commitment to the role for which I was applying. At the time, I thought that that was what had clinched it for me. In hindsight, I think Judith actually took me on board to prove me wrong on that point - because I now know that the real question is, 'what is a college without a chaplain?!'

What I really mean to explain is that the sheer ease and speed with which I felt that burden of responsibility as an incoming organ scholar lifted off my shoulders wasn't just because Judith had established a wonderful system by which organ scholars are supported both musically - thanks to Katie Pardee and others - and academically.

It's also because Judith had a way of really making me feel part of, and at ease with, the institution of the college, and introduced me to a way of living out my student vocation, within a community, to the fullest extent. And she did this with the lightest touch, and with such sensitivity.

Even a year out from the start of my Oxford journey, I began receiving beautiful Corpus Chapel term cards in the post, which we now all wait for expectantly, each with a different image on the front giving us some new access, some new take, on our shared and lived heritage as a college. I was periodically briefed on the progress of the chapel renovation and on the good work of the choir, and Judith helped me to piece the college together in my mind's eye.

And so it took no time, thanks to Judith, for me to feel utterly invested in the work of the chapel and choir, rooted in the wider context of what it means to be a member of the college, in a mission to stimulate the life of the college in all its aspects and to see the chapel - not the hall, not the porter's lodge, not the beer cellar, perhaps not even the library (!) - as the beating heart of the college - with its regular pattern of worship and celebration of important occasions in the life of the college and of the church.

And in that sense, Judith as chaplain has been central to my sense of what it means to be a Corpuscle - to feel supported by and anchored in the rhythm of our common worship and fellowship and to explore the often radical possibilities that this can open up to us as musicians and academics.

Personally, I would add that as well as understanding better the roots and outworkings of my identity as a Corpuscle, thanks to Judith, I learned something of what it meant for me to be an Anglican. Which would come as a surprise to any Irish Catholic, wouldn't it?

And that's not just because Judith was most of the reading list for the second week BH4 essay on the Elizabethan church. It's also because I think that we in Corpus Chapel have been privileged to understand something of the intersection of history and theology and how we can draw upon the Church of England's rich heritage - much of it played out within these walls - to inform some of the issues of the present.

This is not something that we are always called to do as historians, as we know, but many of us understand the church to have a unique relationship between past and present, and Judith has brought that to life for many of us.

On a slightly more trivial note perhaps, I know that former members of the choir will share my appreciation for the way in which Judith embodies the very best of that humane and not overbearing Anglican liturgical spirit which somehow doesn't stop at the doors of the chapel! We will remember fondly, for example, the procession from the chapel to the Rainolds room for a post-Evensong glass of sherry, the ever so gentle ushering thereafter to the *ad hoc* chapel table in the hall, with an 'ad hoc' bottle of wine waiting for us.

Or the even more riotous occasions of post-compline hot chocolate and cake in the chaplain's office, or the outrageously fancy sandwiches after weekday Holy Communion, all timed, of course, for those who need to be away by 2pm.

And within the context of our liturgical life, which I've just interpreted rather broadly, I and others are so grateful for the intellectual rigour and creative flair that Judith has promoted, with inspiring and incisive sermons, a host of guest preachers from various walks of life and learning within the church and beyond, and of course for cultivating a deep appreciation for the role of poetry in liturgy and worship.

We are also thankful for those opportunities, spearheaded by Judith, which expanded the choir's horizons - from our links with places as close as the University Church, to places as far away as Christ Church Cathedral, where we were privileged to sing a termly Evensong, and for sustaining the life of the chapel and choir through the lockdowns.

We are grateful that you have made the chapel such a welcoming and inclusive space, for your willingness to find compromises in difficult situations, but also for taking a firm stand where it matters most.

So thank you, Judith, for everything you have done in this college, and for everything you have done to make me and others feel truly 'of' the college. In that sense, your legacy lives on within each of us, and as much more than a collection of fond memories. I know that I speak for all of us in wishing you every blessing in all that lies ahead.

Matthew Murphy (CCC 2016)