

# **CHURCH TWINNING VISIT TO SCHONGAU**

## **including Oberammergau, 7-11th July 2022**

On Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July a group of 11 set off from Abingdon to a chaotic Heathrow to fly to Munich on a Church Twinning visit to Abingdon's twin town of Schongau in Germany and the Oberammergau Passion Play, under the leadership of Eileen Bontempelli whose daughter Annis joined us later. This visit had to be postponed from 2020 because of COVID lockdowns. We were a motley crew from a wide assortment of local churches and denominations, but seemed to gel well, especially as we had already met at Eileen's house for a briefing. From Munich Airport we went to Schongau via the metro and 2 trains, and were met at the station by our hosts who took us to their homes and made us very welcome.

Irene Lederle, in charge of Church Twinning there, had worked hard to make all the arrangements for our stay and we owe her a big thank you. On the Friday morning we attended a Welcome Reception at the Town Hall hosted by the Deputy Mayor, who was very friendly and told us how the local churches cooperated today.



After this we travelled with our hosts to Oberammergau through the lovely countryside with a full view of the mountains, and checked into our hotel where we had to spend the night. After a light lunch we went to see the performance, which began at 2.30 and was in two parts with an interval for dinner, and finished late in the evening.

The play is held every ten years and was first performed in 1634 after much of the village was wiped out by the plague, and the local council decided to put on a play about Christ's Passion in the hope that the village would be spared future affliction. Fortunately we all seemed healthy throughout the trip and we were blessed with good weather. In the Passion Play theatre which has a partly open-air stage and an auditorium with 4,100 covered seats, we sat as a group in the fourth row back from the stage, giving us an excellent view.



We felt really involved in the action despite the dialogue in German. It was a profound spiritual experience which demonstrated God's unconditional love for us in sending His Son to suffer and die. Most of the music was composed over 200 years ago but its depth of feeling made a fundamental contribution to the overall atmosphere. It is awe-inspiring to think that all the musicians in the classical symphony orchestra, singers, actors and stage hands - about 2000 villagers - are involved in the production which runs for 6 months.

On the Saturday morning in Oberammergau the members of our group chose to do different things, from riding up in a cable car to browsing through the craft shops with their wooden figures to visiting the Baroque parish church. Many of the 18th century house facades are brightly painted with religious or rustic motifs. The local museum had an exhibition of a route marked by thread spun from strands of human hair collected from the male actors at the end of the Passion Play season when they were allowed to cut it and shave their beards! The long thread was a symbol of how people can work together in harmony, pulling on the same strand so to speak.



Our hosts took us back to Schongau, and in the afternoon we had an interesting trip, guided by Helmut Schmidbauer, to the Romanesque Basilica at Altenstadt with its magnificent proportions, outstanding frescoes, font and crucifix group on the rood beam.

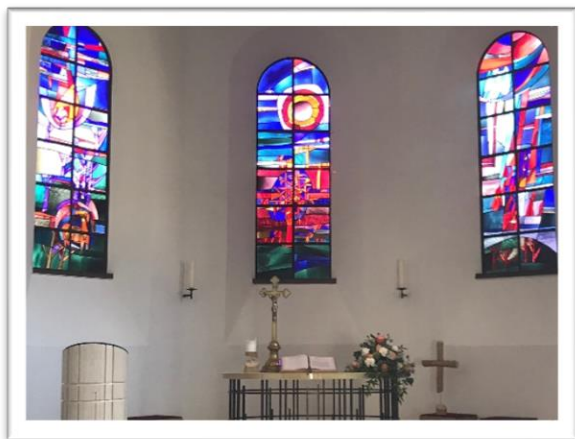


On the Sunday morning we attended church with our hosts, and at the Catholic Mariahimmelfahrt Kirche we were welcomed in English by the parish priest. In the afternoon most of us enjoyed a leisurely raft cruise on the river Lech while being serenaded by a Lorelei in the form of a harpist in full Bavarian costume including a beautiful jumper.





We later visited the Lutheran Trinity Church, followed by a farewell party outside. The ecumenical feast was outstanding with a table laden with savouries and cakes. Sally Mears stood on a bench and sang "Summertime" for us as her contribution to all the jollifications, speeches and present swapping. It was evident at this collaborative tea how their churches and congregations cooperated, with very cordial relations between the different flavours of Christianity. The Catholic Priest, Father Marxer, sat next to the Lutheran Pastor, Pfarrer Hermann, and discussed the Church Twinning leaflets and photos of Abingdon Churches which we had brought for them.



Finally, on the Monday morning we decided to spend more time in Schongau rather than Munich and Helmut kindly offered to guide us around the Town Museum to see a selection of its interesting artifacts and then on to the main church, followed by a second church associated with a nunnery, now a care home. He was full of remarkable information about many things. In the garden of the care home, we could see Schongau's city walls with a striking war memorial for the victims of both world wars. Some of us walked along the covered walls and down through a gate to the railway station.



We then said goodbye to our hosts and left by train for Munich, where most of us then flew home, after a wonderful trip. We are most indebted to Eileen, Irene, our hosts and other participants from Schongau.

Gruess Gott!

