

WAGG 2015
Hannah Warwicker



I have been taking part in the women's exchange programme between the churches of Anhalt, Germany and the Yorkshire Synod for almost a decade now, and the most recent gathering, this August in Anhalt, has to have been the best yet. We spent some days with host families across the region, experiencing everyday life with the women and their families. My host family live on a smallholding in a rural village, so it was lovely to experience such a change from my normal routine and, of course, to help out with the animals they keep! There was also time for discussion about our faith and the faith communities we are part of, as well as opportunities to explore some of the ways through which rural religious communities find new ways of being Church in the face of falling numbers and the increasing age of churchgoers. Particularly interesting was the partnership between local artists and churches to form permanent art installations in some churches, reflecting different parts of Jesus' life, as well as an initiative of 'open churches', where retired members of the congregations of some particularly ancient and beautiful churches made themselves available to welcome visitors to the churches on week days.

The second part of the week was spent with the whole group, gathered in the beautiful Harz mountains, discussing our ideal pictures of the church, the main theme for our time together. The overwhelming conclusion coming out of the week was that the concept of 'welcome' should be a high priority in Church Life, both in terms of providing welcoming spaces as well as being welcoming as people.

We also went on a number of excursions to places that were (or had been) home to inspiring women of faith. The most interesting of these was, undoubtedly, the visit to a community of sisters who did much work in their community. In spite of their age and dwindling numbers, these sisters had worked hard to continue to be relevant in the modern world and to find new ways to fulfil their calling. One of their most notable projects involves running a centre for the rehabilitation of those facing addiction and mental health problems.

I also had the opportunity to be part of the translation team, and hope that in the future I might be able to expand the web and social media presence of the exchange.

All in all, WAGG 2015 was both an enjoyable experience and one that provided much food for thought.