
ARC UK

	2023 Summer Projects	
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Durham Cathedral in the snow

A letter from the President, 2023

As we wrap up another busy year for ARC, let's take a moment to pause and reflect. Firstly, I would like to extend a huge thank you to the ARC board for all their support and hard work this year. It has been a pleasure working with this team and I am excited for what we can achieve together next year.

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In 2023, one of our main goals was to broaden our recruitment pool by reaching out to a wider range of universities. As a result, we saw a particularly strong set of candidates this year with a 50% increase in overall applications. Our summer volunteers had the opportunity to visit France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands to participate in projects and meet members of the international community of ARC. It was a pleasure getting to know this year's volunteers at the training day and witnessing first-hand the insight, experience and knowledge they were keen to bring to their host church. ARC projects can have their challenges. Meeting, living and volunteering within a new community can be a daunting prospect, but I have been inspired by our volunteers' ability to adapt to new environments and experiences while making the most of these unique opportunities.

Looking to 2024, we are keen to establish a domestic project and help enrich visitor experiences in the magnificent cathedrals of the UK and foster a sense of community. The board is also looking forward to the Spring Ars et Fides meeting in Rome where we hope to catch up with the European boards to improve the experience of our volunteers and safeguard the future of ARC.

We are also hoping to raise funds this year to support board activities and the establishment of UK projects. Early in 2024, we will be starting a fundraising campaign which you can find out more about on our website and social media in the coming months. In the meantime, if you are interested in supporting ARC UK, financially or otherwise, especially if you have links to a cathedral or church that might be interested in hosting a project in 2024, do get in touch with us via email: president.arcuk@gmail.com.

Finally, if any volunteers from recent years or sometime in the past are interested in getting involved in the ARC UK board, we would love to hear from you.

Newsletters

Read on for news of ARC in 2023 and to hear from some of this year's amazing volunteers!

Arielle Jasiewicz-Gill
President 2023

Luxembourg

Harry Linnell

Over the summer, I worked at Notre Dame de Luxembourg, the national cathedral of Luxembourg, as an ARC volunteer. Having never been to Luxembourg or volunteered in a religious setting before, I must admit I was a little apprehensive, but it proved to be one of the most enriching and exciting experiences of my life. Beyond the architectural grandeur and historical significance of the magnificent building, the opportunity to share its stories and cultural richness with visitors was profoundly rewarding.

Being a tour guide for ARC allowed me to welcome people from all over the world, introducing them to the cathedral and often to Christianity for the first time. My fellow guides and I, with the help of the open-hearted and helpful local parishioners, became storytellers, weaving together the threads of religion, art, and history that come together within a cathedral like Notre Dame de Luxembourg. A cathedral in a European capital is a vibrant institution at the heart of its local and national community, and Luxembourg's cathedral is no exception. It has been the focal point for centuries of human experiences, and thousands of lives, historical events, and artistic movements have left their mark on the cathedral's structure, in its artwork, and on its traditions and current practices.

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This immense heritage is a wonderful gift, but I think that ARC's role in providing a welcoming and human face to visitors is really vital to make sure the cathedral is still approachable, and its role and history understandable, to people who may be walking into a church for the first time.

One of the most rewarding aspects of volunteering with this organisation was witnessing the diverse range of visitors who come to explore the cathedral. By offering free tours, as non-professionals and laypeople, we break down financial and cultural barriers, allowing all people to engage with and appreciate the cultural and religious heritage embedded in the cathedral's stones. The experience transcends mere sightseeing, creating a space for dialogue and understanding that goes beyond religious affiliations. I remember one particular morning when I gave two back-to-back tours. The first one was for a French Catholic family who regularly made pilgrimages, including a nine-year-old girl who asked me several frighteningly specific questions about Biblical scenes on the cathedral's doors. Immediately afterwards I gave a tour to five Malaysian Buddhists, stepping into a Catholic church for the first time, who had never heard of the Virgin Mary. It was incredibly rewarding and exciting to meet people from all sorts of backgrounds, to be able to get unique perspectives on my own faith, and also to provide a welcoming and informative introduction to a space which is new for most of those who walk through its doors.

Volunteering at the Cathedral provided me with a unique chance to connect with the local community and beyond. Being given the chance to live near the cathedral and to work closely with its current custodians was incredibly important to us, and to the tours we gave; by engaging with the parishioners and clergy, we were able to ensure that our tour represented not merely the objects and structure of the cathedral, but the vibrant community that gives it its life and purpose.

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We met Luxembourgish people from all walks of life, and got a real sense of the diversity and vibrancy of the culture. My group of guides, composed of people of very different backgrounds, was united by a common desire to encounter new experiences, people, and ideas.

The smiles, the awe-struck expressions, and the genuine curiosity of visitors have been a testament to the impact of these free tours. For many, the cathedral becomes more than just a historical site; it transforms into a place of shared experiences and lasting memories. The connections forged during this project, with locals, visitors, and my fellow-guides, show the universal appeal of cultural and spiritual heritage, and the role it plays in bringing people together. The experience has allowed me to develop communication and interpersonal skills, deepen my knowledge of art and religion, and cultivate a sense of responsibility towards preserving cultural and spiritual treasures. It's not just about showcasing the cathedral; it's about contributing to a sense of community, openness, and appreciation for our religious heritage.



Venice

Thalia Marriage

This summer I was able to spend two weeks in Venice, volunteering as a tour guide at the Basilica di San Marco. It was such an amazing experience, and so unlike anything I had undertaken before. We were welcomed by a host of local volunteers, who gave us a set of marvellous tours of the Basilica and various other churches and museums around the city. The project was a great opportunity to meet people from different denominations, backgrounds, and cultures, and I had such a lovely time getting to know the other volunteers. I was hugely appreciative of everyone speaking English so that I could understand, and providing translations of any texts and prayers we were discussing.



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The Basilica was completely stunning, and was so interesting to learn about. The walls and ceilings are entirely covered in sparkling gold mosaics – and we constructed our tours primarily around the interpretations of their spiritual meaning. My favourite story to tell was of the mosaic depicting the loss of the relics of St Mark, and their rediscovery. The mosaic was slightly out of sight, but its story was so chaotic and interesting – it was such fun to tell! I was pleased to see that the visitors seemed to enjoy it just as much as I did. One very memorable moment for me was giving a tour for a boys choir from a school in London, and being able to hear their performance at mass later that day. It felt as if the walls and mosaics themselves were singing! Overall my time in Venice was completely wonderful, we were made to feel so at home, we met some truly wonderful people, and it is something I definitely won't forget!
