A very warm welcome as you prepare to come to Pembroke as your home and community for the next few years. It’s a massive step in life, and a time where friendships and the inevitable stretching of your identity will be as thrilling as it is exhausting. There is a welfare team here to support you, and people who will listen and show an interest in you and your aims, and try to do what they can to enable you to get the best from your time here – academically, personally, in realms of sport, relationships and who are here to listen confidentially - whatever your background or issues.

1: INTRODUCTORY STUFF  As you arrive you will be bombarded with data, people, new processes, work, and invited to join lots of societies. Obviously if you have any extraordinary interests or gifts, and you feel it appropriate to share them, please tell us about them! Specifically, if you would like to sing – regardless of your experience – you can come and join the choir and come along and learn how to sing together. And of course, if you would like to come and see me, for a chat, for a coffee, or just to say hello, or if there are any questions about life in College, the Chapel or issues you want to explore, please make space in all the hectic get in touch.

2: CONGRATULATIONS AND WELCOME TO THE FRIENDLY OXFORD COLLEGE  We are delighted you are here. During your first week amidst business and introductory academic work, do try to make some space to relax and reflect amid the maelstrom. Enjoy finding out about the College, University and others in your year and college. Sometimes people object to the description ‘The Friendly College’ as if others are not, and as if there’s nothing else worthy of note. But I think it’s a rare and wonderful description. Friendships forged in university years can, and do, last a lifetime – invest your time and energy well and wisely. I really hope that you will flourish in the years ahead, and settle into the community. The College is unashamedly focused on academic excellence – but it’s also a place where we trust each other, get to know each other very well, enjoying diversity and benefitting from what each brings. Pembroke is a good place, but there are times when people don’t feel happy. If that’s the case, there is a network of support at hand (more of which below, 4).

3: FRESHERS’ WEEK  You may well relish the possibility of a raucous Freshers’ Week – enjoy, but do be careful – if you’re not really into some aspects of it, then simply do what you do feel happy doing. The JCR and MCR are a great bunch of people, so please do talk to people about any issues that arise in Freshers’ Week. Above all, don’t be pushed into stuff you don’t want to do.

4: WORK AND WELFARE  You will also have to meet tutors and be set work, just to set the pace. Oxford is not like many other universities in terms of assessment and teaching and learning, it’s 8 (or more)
very full weeks three times a year. Lectures may be what you expect, but at weekly tutorials undergraduates will be required to do lots of reading of material and come to their own measured and justified conclusions having produced a careful analytical essay, with evidence backing up their arguments. This means a lot of hard work, even if you've managed thus far to get by thinking on the head of a drawing-pin¹ (through superfluity of intellect), you will have to read and think and write a great deal. This can mean a lot of pressure – but there is a network of support and welfare services of which I am but a part. There are JCR and MCR welfare reps, peer support and mentors, Junior Deans, your tutors, and people find the Academic Office a place of welcome, understanding, and academic support.

5: CHAPEL, CHOIR, AND ULTIMATE MATTERS  The oblong building on your left as you enter Chapel Quad is the Chapel; sober as a shoebox on the outside, ornate with chubbly cherubs and exuberant, superfluous detail on the inside. It is a place for everyone, sober or chubbly, for whatever you need it... within reason. It’s a place where people come for a moment of quiet, or to practise bagpipes (the two are not entirely compatible I know, but both are true). It has a grand piano, and a fine Létourneau organ. There’s a lively choir which tours and leaves Pembroke’s mark in many European cities: so if you can sing, or play the organ or piano, please contact me and I can pass on your details to the relevant people. Your chapel is a place of presence – there is often a votive candle lit to intimate the presence of an enfolding Mystery, in whose dazzling presence we begin to see ourselves as we are, and yet as valuable and worthy of love. The chapel inherits many generations’ interest and commitment, where ancient wisdoms can bring tolerance and challenge us. You may notice weddings, baptisms and funerals taking place here of former members – it’s your chapel from now on.

That’s not to say that the Chapel doesn’t ask hard questions of faith – speakers on Sunday evenings include members of many faiths and none, (there have been the spectrum of Christian denominations represented, feminist, Jewish, Muslim, & Hindu speakers); the Chapel has been the context for rigorous debate about the nature of religion (a theist-atheist battle between Professors Atkins and Swinburne), you can see next term’s programme of visiting speakers on the chapel page on the website. There is a regular Catholic Mass, the Christian Union meet regularly in the college, chaplain’s room and chapel as well as taking responsibility for a Sunday evening service once a term, there is an Armenian Orthodox Liturgy there each year. This year there will also be Russian Orthodox Vespers presided over by His Excellency Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev of the Moscow Patriarchate.

If you’d like to be a part of any of these things, please come and see me – I’d be delighted to explore your ideas and get to know you.

With my very best wishes,

Andrew

(Revd Dr) Andrew Teal
Chaplain, Fellow, Lecturer in Theology & Religion

¹A really curious metaphor – any more interesting ones very welcome!