



News from Normandy – May 2007

Greetings from Normandy

The locals say that the spring is the best season in Normandy, because it sometimes stops raining and the sun shines! The first months of this year certainly seemed very wet, but we have had some lovely warm, even hot, dry, sunny spells since Easter, and we have been known, on occasion, to sit out in the garden during the day enjoying the sunshine.

The first few months of this year have been a mixture of many things, in other areas besides the weather. For the most part things have gone on routinely, but interspersed with surprises - surprises such as being contacted by the CPCV who invited us to a meeting about how Normandy Vision could get involved in the work of their Centre in Houlgate; surprises such as being given a French car. There have also been sad times, with the illness and then death of Philip's father at the end of March, not to mention some "frightening" times too, such as Philip having to preach in French for the first time!

At a recent English service we sang Tate and Brady's old paraphrase of Psalm 34, which begins:

Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ.

The Psalmist goes on to reflect on the goodness of the Lord to him at all times and in all circumstances, even the difficult or sad times. That is a lesson that the apostle Paul also talks about having to learn when he describes having to cope with his "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12. Despite his prayers, his problems and difficulties continued. Yet in the midst of these circumstances he heard the Lord say to him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness".

Realising one's own weakness and inability to cope with situations and events on one's own is a great encouragement to rely on the Lord's grace day by day, and to find that the Lord's promise to Paul 2,000 years ago is still true today: "My grace is sufficient for you".

As our work goes on, as new opportunities open up, as decisions have to be made, as we face the circumstances and events that each day brings, please pray that we learn to rely more on the Lord each day, and on the truth and certainty of his promises.

This newsletter is a summary of the work we have been involved with since January, together with some news about future events and future possibilities. Please use this information as the basis of your thanks and prayers to God for what He is doing in this part of France.

Philip & Simone Loose

English Language Services

Houlgate The monthly Sunday afternoon Worship Services in English have continued in this sea-side town in the *département* of Calvados (14). The meetings take place at *le Temple Protestant* in association with l'Eglise Evangélique d'Houlgate (Houlgate Evangelical Church), and are usually on the first Sunday afternoon of each month.



Sainte Opportune This is a small village in the *département* of Orne, about 60 miles south of Houlgate. On Sunday, April 1st we held a "Songs of Praise for Easter" there in the afternoon, in the home of Mike and Jeanette Lane. The service consisted of songs and Bible readings for Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

As a result of that initial meeting, we will be holding regular monthly meetings there, usually on the third Sunday afternoon of each month.

Summer Services at Houlgate A programme of weekly Sunday morning services in English will be held again this year at Houlgate during the summer holiday period. They will be based at *le Temple Protestant* and are held in association with l'Eglise Evangélique d'Houlgate (Houlgate Evangelical Church). These will run from Sunday, July 8th through to Sunday, September 2nd, and will begin at 9.00 a.m. so that they can be finished by about 10.00 a.m. in time for the French language service which begins at 10.30 a.m.

More information on all these services can be found on our web site at www.normandyvision.org

Advertising: We have contacted Christian newspapers and journals in the UK to let them know about the English language services we are holding in Normandy, particularly the ones over the summer holidays. We hope they will print the information so that Christians coming over to Normandy in the summer will know about the services in advance.

We have also put a notice about all our services in Normandy's English language monthly free journal, "The Rendezvous". We hope that this journal, which is widely circulated among the English-speaking community throughout Normandy, will let more people know about the services, and thus boost attendance.

Nearer to the start of the summer holiday period, we will send notices out to hotels, camp sites, tourist offices etc. in the area, to let them know about the Sunday morning English-language services, and put notices up outside the church at Houlgate, as we did last summer, so that tourists can see when the services are held.

Ladies Bible Study Simone holds a Bible Study in English each week for ladies in her home. Currently in addition to Simone, ladies from England, America and France make up the group. Different series of studies are followed with the aid of study guide booklets, and it is a time not only of learning more of the Bible together, but of sharing experiences and learning from each other, a time of fellowship and prayer.

Christmas is coming! There is the possibility of an English Christmas Carol Service being held in December in a village church to the south of Falaise, on the borders of Calvados and Orne. One of the residents of that village, a regular attender at our English-language services, is going to contact the local Mayor, and see whether it would be possible to use, borrow or hire the local village church for something like a Saturday evening or Sunday afternoon in December. While it is still a long while to Christmas (when this was written at least), please pray that the Mayor will look favourably

on the application. Church buildings used by the Catholic Church in France are for the most part owned and maintained by the State, and the Catholic Church is allowed to use them. However the State, usually through the office of the local Mayor, can also give permission to others to use them. Many village churches are no longer used regularly by the Catholic church for services.

We hope, too, to be able to repeat last year's English-language Carol Service in December at Houlgate - but that definitely is a long way off in our thoughts and planning at the moment!

Music The English-language services have benefitted enormously from the musical input of Mary Fohner (Clarinet) and Stephen McIlwaine (Guitar). Their ability to pick up new tunes quickly, and to cope with the playing idiosyncrasies of Philip, have made a big difference to the accompaniment of the songs and hymns that are sung.

French Language Ministry

Houlgate At the Annual General Meeting of l'Eglise Evangélique d'Houlgate (Houlgate Evangelical Church), Philip and Simone Loose were elected full members of the church. They are regularly involved in the activities and life of the church there. For example, Philip is part of the music group that leads the singing every Sunday, while Simone helps out with the Creche and the Sunday School class.

Prayer Each Friday morning Philip and Simone are joined for breakfast by the pastor, Tom Fohner, and his wife, Mary, followed by a time of sharing concerns and plans that affect each person, their families, their contacts, their ministries etc. and then praying for all these things.



Preaching in French (or, as it should better be termed, tight-rope walking while blindfolded in a gale and without a safety-net!). Philip had his first opportunity at the end of April to preach in French, as opposed to preaching in English with the aid of a translator. The church was "L'Eglise de la Bonne Nouvelle" (The Church of the Good News) in Le Havre. While at the end of the service many gave their assurances that they understood the French very well - despite the English accent - and their statements that it was just the message the church needed to hear were encouraging, nevertheless it was a very nerve-wracking experience, probably for the congregation as much as the preacher. Philip was also asked to play the keyboard, as the regular pianist was away on holiday, so there was not too much time to get overly nervous in advance of the words, "And now for the message".

Club des Dames (Ladies Craft Club). This is run by Simone once a month at the church in Houlgate, usually on the last Saturday afternoon of each month. There is a session of craft-making to begin with, sometimes led by Simone, other times by different people in the church who have various skills that they can share with the others. The last quarter of an hour or more of the meeting is a devotional time, normally led by Mary Fohner, the wife of the pastor at Houlgate Evangelical Church. It is a time not only of having fun learning to make something, but also for the ladies (young and old) to get to know each other better, and a time of hearing some word of encouragement or teaching from the Bible.

Normandy Vision UK Trust

The Trustees held their first board meeting on Saturday, April 21st at Iden Green Congregational Church in the heart of Kent, where one of the Trustees, Rev. Peter Michell, is the pastor. The meeting unanimously appointed Rev. William (Bill) Matthews as its Chairman. We are immensely grateful for his willingness to serve the work in this way when he is involved in many other activities as well.

In addition to reviewing the past activities of Normandy Vision, and thinking and praying about the future, the Board spent a lot of time discussing the approach made to Normandy Vision by the CPCV in France in April, and Normandy Vision's response. For more about this, see the section **Christian Centre** below.

Normandy Vision UK Trust completed its registration with the Charity Commission of England and Wales in November 2006. Its registration number is 1116858.

The full list of Trustees is:

- Mrs Vivien Bounds (Essex)
- Mr Philip Loose (Normandy)
- Mrs Simone Loose (Normandy)
- Rev Bill Matthews (Hampshire)
- Mr Jack Millsted (Essex)
- Rev Peter Michell (Kent)
- Pastor Andrew Taylor (Warwickshire)

Christian Centre

In April, Normandy Vision was approached by the CPCV (Centre Protestant de Communication et de Vie), which is a nation-wide Christian *association* (charity) in France which runs many Centres throughout the country. One of their Centres is in the town of Houlgate in Normandy. This Centre was formerly known as *la Maison Evangélique*, and it was originally built as a Christian Centre in the 1860s. About 10 years ago it was bought by the CPCV, and they have used it since as a Retreat Centre for Christian and other groups to come and spend time in the idyllic countryside in the area and enjoy the golden beaches and sea that are not many metres from its front gates. They also use the Centre to house a group of young people who for various reasons need somewhere to live in a supportive and caring environment, and also as a base for many socially beneficial activities, especially with young people's groups.

On April 13th, Philip Loose had a meeting with Mme Florence Barret et M Rainer Dumont of the CPCV at their Centre in Houlgate. Pastor Thomas Fohner from Houlgate Evangelical Church was also present, primarily for his translation skills in case of communication and language difficulties. A warm welcome was accorded to Normandy Vision and the discussions were very friendly, focussing on the possibility of Normandy Vision and the CPCV co-operating in various ways in the work of the Centre. The areas of possible co-operation discussed included, for example, organising the visits of Christian Churches, Groups and Organisations from within the UK and elsewhere to come to the Centre at Houlgate for retreats, holidays etc.; organising meetings, conferences etc. at the Centre.

The Board of Normandy Vision UK Trust has forwarded to the CPCV its response to these initial discussions, and it is hoped that another meeting will shortly be arranged with the CPCV in order to draw up proposals of how such co-operation could be implemented in a practical way.

Please pray for the ongoing discussions and meetings between Normandy Vision and the CPCV, that any relationship that is established between the two parties will be based on the right principles, and will enable the work of Normandy Vision to develop and proceed, in its concerns for taking the Gospel to the people of the region, for building up the faith of Christians and churches, whether locally, within the whole of France, or further afield in countries such as the UK.

Gifts to Normandy Vision

We have been blessed and encouraged by many gifts over the last few months. In the period from January 1st to April 30th 2007, regular support from our home church, Danbury Mission

Evangelical Church in Essex, UK, and other financial gifts from supporters in the UK and in France, have amounted to just under £5,500. To all those who have given in this way to our support, whether directly or indirectly, we would like to say a big thank you.

In addition to this financial support we have received a number of other gifts. Among them was the very kind and generous donation of a Fiat Ulysse people carrier by a Christian family in Normandy. We now have to work out how to drive a car when sitting in the passenger seat, and with the gear stick on the wrong side!



We have also been given other practical gifts, such a dining table with four wooden chairs, two reclining wooden chairs for relaxing in the garden, a cupboard unit to help keep books and papers tidy in the study - which aim still remains to be fulfilled! - and a CD-based French-language course for Simone.

Prayer Support Groups

We have also been blessed and encouraged by the monthly Prayer Meeting held at Danbury Mission Evangelical Church, Essex, UK. A group meet together, usually on the third Sunday evening of each month at about 8 p.m. after the evening service, in order to pray for the work of Normandy Vision, for the work of the churches in general in Normandy, and for the people of Normandy themselves, and for the nation of France.

This group was organised and led for a long time by Paul Baker. During Paul's illness, Ken White stepped in admirably to keep the meeting going. They have both now "retired" from this role, and we are delighted to have Christina McMahon as the Prayer Meeting co-ordinator - or *coordinatrice* as they would say over here! We are indebted to those who meet regularly and faithfully to pray for us and our work, and it is a great encouragement to us, especially when we see things happening as a result of the prayers of many.

Why not go along to the regular prayer meetings at Danbury Mission? Or if you are not in that part of the world, why not start your own prayer group? If you would like to do that, or would like to receive the list of prayer and news items that is forwarded to the Danbury Prayer Group each month, please get in touch with us.

In Brief

French Lessons We continue with the uphill struggle to learn to speak French a little better. It often feels as if for every French word that goes into our brains by the front door, five make their escape through the back door. Simone has been helped by weekly meetings with a French-American lady missionary, Josiane, and by a French lady in the church, Viviane. Philip has met for conversation practice with an English Christian who has lived in France for many years, a fellow Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge *alumnus*, and who spends most of his time trying to teach scientific English to the French. Philip will also be recommencing formal French lessons at Inlingua's training centre in Caen from the middle of May.

Contacting UK Churches During the early part of the year we contacted by email a large number of evangelical churches throughout the UK, to give them some background information about Normandy Vision, its work and aims. We had some encouraging responses from that, and we hope later in the year to send out a second information email to these churches to keep them up-to-date with developments during the year.

France: A New President... A New Era... ?

The recent battle for the French Presidency is now over, with the right-wing Nicolas Sarkozy beating the left-wing socialist candidate Segolène Royal by approximately 53% to 47% in the final round of voting at the beginning of May. Many in France hope that his election will mean that major changes in the way France does things can now be implemented, in order to boost the French economy, to free up workers to actually work and to deal with many underlying issues related to immigration and social unrest. Equally, there are many in France who fear that his election will mean that these major changes of policy will destroy what it means to be French, and will stir up trouble and rioting among many sections of the population.



If M. Sarkozy is going to be able to implement any of his policies, he will need a National Assembly (Parliament) that supports him and his policies. There are elections in June throughout France to elect a new National Assembly, and the result of those elections is as equally important for the future of France as the election of a new President. France, many of its citizens think, needs to change. How it should change is a potential cause of deep division and turmoil in the nation, and political and social change do not always happen peacefully in France. So continue to pray for the President, and for the forthcoming elections, and for the people of France as they face a period of change that some will welcome, others will fear.

What will these changes mean for the churches in France? M. Sarkozy, when Interior Minister, visited and spoke at an assembly of the French Evangelical Federation in 2004. He is known as a Catholic. Traditionally his party, the UMP, have been friendly towards Christian churches and towards the morality and structure that Christianity brings to society. It is to be hoped, then, that under M. Sarkozy, French Churches and Christians will continue to know freedom to live and express their Christian faith. Please continue to pray that this will be so.

Supporting Normandy Vision

If you would like to support the work of Normandy Vision through your prayers, please see the section above headed **Prayer Support Groups**.

If you would like to support financially the work of Normandy Vision, you can send gifts to Normandy Vision UK Trust, 13 Danbury Vale, Danbury, Essex CM3 4LA, United Kingdom.

More information about giving to Normandy Vision can be found on our web site at www.normandyvision.org/giving.asp

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