

News from Normandy



October 2007

Normandy Vision, A Christian Mission working in Normandy, France

Greetings from Normandy

It has been a busy summer for us. Given the weather during most of July and August, summer is perhaps not the right word! While everybody knows that Normandy is a synonym for rain, this summer was incredibly wet at times.

Our work with English-speaking residents continues to develop, and we held weekly Sunday morning services again this summer for the many English-speaking visitors that braved the sometimes appalling weather conditions. Of course the sun did shine some days, just not very often. It was nice to meet various friends from our home church in Danbury, Essex, who visited Normandy while on holiday. We were equally delighted to make several new friends from among those who came to the summer services.

In this edition of *News from Normandy* you can read a report about our work among English-speaking residents and visitors, together with information about our plans to develop that work further. We also talk about our plans to hold an "Expo Bible" (Bible Exhibition) next summer. There is much that is happening here, many plans for future activities. Please pray for us as we continue with all the different aspects of our work week by week, and as we think and pray about the plans for the development and extension of our ministry here.

Psalm 127 begins with the words: "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain". Pray that we will always keep that in mind as our work grows.

Thank you to all those who continue to support us in many ways. We do appreciate the prayers, encouragement and gifts that we receive.

Philip & Simone Loose



The village of Beuvron-en-Auge, a few miles inland from Dives-sur-Mer. This village is one of the many attractions in Normandy that draws people to the region from all round the world every summer.

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Review of English-language Activities

A lot of our work over the last six months or so has seen us working with English-speakers, both those who are residents in the region and also the many visitors and holiday-makers that come to Normandy during the summer months. The map below shows some of the locations referred to in this report.

Flers: Monthly Services

Since starting this part of our work at the beginning of April we have continued the monthly services in the region to the north-east of Flers. So far we have met in different homes in the villages of Ste Opportune and Notre-Dame-du-Rocher.

Numbers continue to grow, as does the level of enthusiasm and commitment of those coming along regularly. If everyone was around on a particular Sunday – which throughout the summer has not happened! - then we would be up to about 20 people.

Houlgate: Monthly Services

Outside of the summer holiday period we have continued to hold an English-language Worship Service on the first Sunday afternoon of each month. Numbers attending have varied, averaging only about seven people. One of the ladies who regularly attends these services, a French lady, was recently baptised in the sea one Sunday lunch-time by Houlgate Evangelical Church, the French congregation of which she and her family are a part. At least the sea was calm and not too cold.

Houlgate: Summer Services

During this year's summer holiday season, from July 8th through to September 2nd, we again held weekly Sunday services at 9am. Numbers were up from last year, averaging around the 20 mark, with up to 30 on one occasion. Once again, in addition to people from the UK, it was good to see many visitors from Holland coming along.

Chez Nous: Ladies Bible Study

Simone continues to run an English-language Ladies Bible study at our home. Before the summer there were three other ladies who came along, one English, one French and one American. The English lady cannot come along anymore because of her involvement in activities in her own church, but another French lady hopes to start coming along soon.



Philip and Simone's home in Dives-sur-Mer

English Bibles Needed

There is a need to get hold of some English Bibles for use in our work. As well as being used in the developments planned for the Flers region, they are also needed for the summer English language services at Houlgate. For some visitors English is their second language, so having the English text in front of them would make following the lessons much easier. During past summers we have printed the lessons in "handouts" each Sunday morning, but having Bibles would be preferable.

Map showing places referred to in the reports



Developments in our English-language Ministry

With increasing numbers of people coming along to the monthly meetings that we have been holding in the Flers area – see the map on page 2 - and with the high proportion of English-speaking residents in that part of Normandy, the Trustees have decided to develop further this English-language ministry.

Proposed Developments

Firstly, we plan to increase the frequency of Sunday services, maybe holding a service every Sunday. The services would normally be held during the afternoon, but as there is also a service at Houlgate during the afternoon on the first Sunday of the month, we may need to consider holding it in the morning that week.

Secondly, in addition to meeting in people's homes, we have decided as the group grows in size that meeting in a recognised public building, preferably a church, would enable us to reach out more widely to people in the area, and also to prevent the possibility arising of the group being viewed as some form of "cult".

The English Invasion?

The region of Normandy that includes the towns of Condé-sur-Noireau and Flers has a relatively high population of English speakers. Recently a *college* – a school for children aged around 11 to 14 - in a town to the west of Flers reported that 10% of its pupils were English-speaking.

With many of the English-speaking residents not being sufficiently fluent in French to gain much benefit from being part of a French service, there is a great need for an English-language Christian ministry, particularly in that part of Normandy.

Contacts in Condé

In the summer we were able to make contact with the French Reformed Church at Condé-sur-Noireau, and we have received permission to use their building for some services, typically one Sunday afternoon per month. Services will continue in homes on the other Sundays of the month for a while longer yet. The church at Condé would like to develop a closer relationship with our English group, so over the coming months we will have to explore how this might develop, bearing in mind various practical matters. We will also need to explore the theological aspects of any form of closer relationship between us.

There have been requests for an English language mid-week Bible Study or "House Group" to be started. This could be weekly or perhaps fortnightly, especially during the winter months.

English Carol Service

We plan to hold an English "Carol Service" at the French Reformed Church at Condé-sur-Noireau. This will be on

Links with other English-speaking Christian groups

There are a few other groups of English-speaking Christians that meet together in Normandy throughout the year, such as the Anglican services in Caen, the regional capital, and Coutances, a town about 50 miles south-west of Caen.

We hope to be able to make contact with these groups and see whether it is possible to develop some link of fellowship with them.

Sunday December 16th, starting somewhere around 5pm. It will be aimed at both English and French-speaking communities in the region.

At the moment we are trying to recruit a choir and musicians to add to the *ambience* of the event, and to develop a program of music and readings etc. that will work in a bilingual context.

A Carol Service at Christmas should prove attractive to many people in the area, both English and French, who might otherwise not come to a church, or who have not yet "plucked up the courage" to visit a church since moving to Normandy.

We are hoping that it will generate many contacts with people in the area, particularly families with children.

This event will also be an opportunity to present the Gospel very simply in the context of the Christmas story.

Expo-Bible 2008 - Bible Exhibition

French people love exhibitions – expositions or expos as they call them.

The exhibition will be during the summer holiday season of 2008. Discussions are still ongoing as to whether the exhibition should be based at just one location throughout the summer, or whether it would be beneficial to stage it at a number of locations.

This is a big project to organise and implement, so please put it high on your prayer list in months to come.

Focus on the Bible

The main part of the exhibition will focus on the Bible, for example on aspects such as the contents of the Bible, the credibility of its texts, the translation and spread of the Bible.

The theme of the Bible, while “religious”, would generally be seen as also “historical”, “cultural” and “educational”, and thus would be acceptable and draw visitors into the exhibition.

The materials needed to put on the core displays of an exhibition focussing on the Bible can be obtained from several French Evangelical organisations. Which of these exhibition sets to choose has yet to be decided upon.

Other Materials Needed

At the end of the main “trail” around the exhibition there will be opportunities for people to learn more about the Bible – to pick up free leaflets or Gospels for example, or to

buy Bibles, CDs, DVDs and Christian books that will help them understand the Bible more and learn about the Gospel message.

All these materials have to be found, and so research is under way to try and locate suitable sources of Christian literature and media products, particularly in French, and especially items that can be given away, such as Gospels, Leaflets, CDs etc.

Team Needed

A team of Christians will be needed for the exhibition. They will be able to talk with and witness to the visitors, who will be from a variety of countries, so both French- and English-speaking helpers will be required.

Refreshments could be served throughout the day, preferably in a second hall in the building where the exhibition is held. This will give visitors a further opportunity to talk and discuss what they have seen in a relaxed setting.

DVD Presentations

It is also hoped to be able to show in the second hall short DVD-based presentations about various aspects of the Bible, the Christian Faith and the Gospel.

Some of these presentations will be sourced from other evangelistic agencies, but we are planning to try and produce a DVD with testimonies and items of local interest. This DVD would not be for distribution, but only for

showing to visitors as part of the exhibition.

French Testimonies

An example of what we have in mind is the testimony of a French Christian lady who lives in our part of Normandy. She is suffering from a very serious illness. One item on the DVD would tell her story of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ despite all the pain and suffering that she experiences day after day.

We are also working on the idea of producing other short documentary-style items that will be included on the DVD. These will be based on French believers throughout recent history who would be known about locally. We are still researching suitable subjects for these documentary-style items and the backgrounds to such possible stories.

One possibility being investigated as to its suitability for this project is the life-story of a young lady known in the Catholic Church as Saint Thérèse of Lisieux – see panel on the next page for more background information. Lisieux is a town situated a few miles inland from where we live in Dives-sur-Mer.

Normandy

Area: Same size as Belgium

Population: 3.4 million

Evangelical Churches: Less than 200

Christians: Not many

Solutions: More prayer, more support, more workers

News in Brief

Trustees Meeting

The Trustees of Normandy Vision UK Trust met together in September to review the activities of the past few months and to plan, think and pray about Normandy Vision's future direction and work. The main thrusts for the next few months are to be:

Firstly, the development of the English-language ministry in the region around Flers, including the developing of links where possible with French churches in that region;

Secondly, the project for a Bible Exhibition next summer in Normandy that will enable a large number of people to be contacted with the gospel in a way that is culturally acceptable in France.

Find Out More...

Visit our web site at:

www.normandyvision.org
to find out more about the work of Normandy Vision and to keep up to date with developments and news.

Keep In Touch...

If you would like to be added to our mailing list, please get in touch with us at:

info@normandyvision.org

Milland Evangelical Church

This summer Philip and Simone have been made Mission Partners by Milland Evangelical Church, which is on the borders of Hampshire and West Sussex in southern England.

This came as a great encouragement to us, and we look forward to seeing the relationship between Normandy Vision and Milland Evangelical Church developing in the months ahead.

Houlgate: Craft Club

Simone continues to organise a craft club which is held one Saturday afternoon per month in the hall at the back of Houlgate Evangelical Church.

The ladies who come along, both young and old, enjoy not only the craft-work but also the opportunity to chat – with *franglais* seeming to be the language of choice.

Des Etudes Bibliques

For most of October, Pastor Tom Fohner of Houlgate Evangelical Church is taking a short break. At the end of October and into the beginning of November he is taking a small group of adults and young people on a trip to stay with a church in the USA.

During this period the church at Houlgate have asked Philip to lead the Wednesday Bible Studies – in French. More news on how this went, and whether he and the church survived will be in our next newsletter!

St Thérèse of Lisieux

Thérèse was a young lady who lived in Normandy during the second half of the nineteenth century. Telling the story of her conversion experience at an early age and her faith in and love for the Lord Jesus using her own words, in contrast to the way she is so often seen by some Catholics, could form the basis of a useful opening with those who have been brought up in Catholicism.

She has been made a Saint by the Roman Catholic church, and a huge basilica built to commemorate her. Much activity there seems to be based around misconceptions and misinterpretations of her life. The result is that many people are kept in darkness and away from the light of the good news of salvation only and completely through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom Thérèse came to love and in whom she put her faith for her salvation.

More research has yet to be done into the life of Thérèse of Lisieux and to see whether her story can be presented in a suitable way that will open the eyes of those maybe brought up nominally as Catholics to see the truth of the Gospel.

