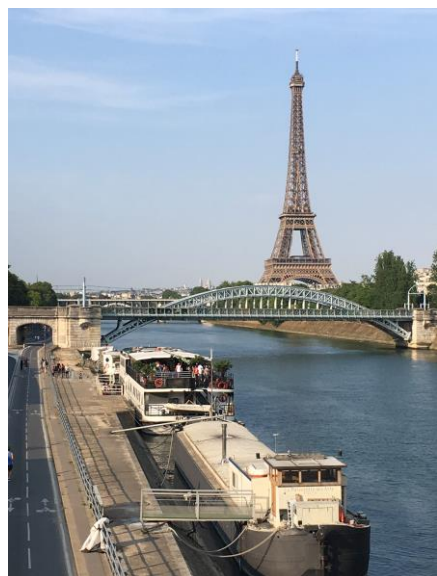


Church planting in Paris 2018 – ‘Bouge ma Ville’ (Shift my town) week of activities

Last summer in July, following the sense from 2016 New Wine for us to go and do some short term activity for the Kingdom of God, Rob and I joined a church planting project in the north western suburbs of Paris. Returning there for this year’s ‘Bouge ma Ville’ week we had a team of three, being joined this year by Val Praud.



The ‘mother’ church is based in the community of Taverny, and is itself a church plant about 10 years old from its mother church in nearby Argenteuil. It is an evangelical church with, I believe, about 60 members. This is a good size for a church in the French culture, where the evangelical constituent of Protestantism is much smaller than in the UK. On average there is one evangelical church to 30,000 population and the CNEF (French Evangelical Alliance) has prayerfully set a church planting target of one evangelical church to 10,000 population. For reference the whole of Mole Valley has 85,000 population, so in France that would equate to a choice of about 3 evangelical churches in the area between Leatherhead, Dorking and Charlwood.

The Taverny church has been carefully and prayerfully working towards planting in a nearby town called Corneilles-en-Parisis, and it is here that the focus of our week’s activities lay, following on from last year’s first ‘Bouge ma Ville’ week of action. Church planting in France is a different process to that in the UK, mainly because evangelicals are perceived as a sect (and therefore dodgy) and because the French government excludes the church from all state and government matters (affecting things like whether churches can use council property, send workers into schools, etc.)

The strategy of the vision for the Corneilles church plant is to have a small team who through the non-religious (but church run) Association Harmonie, make good contact with members of the community and the Mayor, and thus build up trust. Association Harmonie focuses on intercultural and intergenerational activities, especially Gospel Music choirs. The French love the gospel music genre. From that place of trust, individuals in the church core team may then invite their friends to one-to-one Bible study, or to the new monthly celebration meetings which are planned to start in the Autumn. This is a long term work, since there are significant cultural barriers for French people to cross as they head towards Christ. Indeed, we spoke to some church members who had been disowned by their traditional Catholic parents for their profession of faith and subsequent believer’s baptism. It is perhaps a surprise to discover there is a level of persecution and misunderstanding in France for some who turn to Christ, and that church planting strategies are different from the UK because of this.

So our week’s activities, whilst being a key part of the church planting plan, were actually with Association Harmonie. We were part of a group of French locals and Swiss students. It

was quite a culture shock being in a multi-lingual group, but most people spoke either some English or some French (our Swiss German not being so good!)

In the mornings after a Bible study and prayer time we helped with the children's gospel singing workshop, with about 10 children attending. Running at the same time, the young people had a gospel music workshop too. It was harder to participate in the children's songs in French, than the main Gospel choir which was sung in English.



All the mornings were used in preparation for the concert on the final night, to which many friends and parents were invited. A good number of contacts and others came along to this, including one of Val's friends (see her report later). It was quite emotional seeing non-believers singing "When I feel the Spirit moving on my soul" but not understanding (yet) the how profound the words are.

The rest of the time was spent doing activities for young people and children in the local park, including an eco-trail put together by one of the people from the local community. This was a really good example of giving a new contact the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Association, whilst not being part of the Christian core team. Also a team of students did some garden work, we had a planned event for older people, which didn't actually happen as planned due to lack of attendance, but strangely two older people just walked in off the street and had a good afternoon with us.

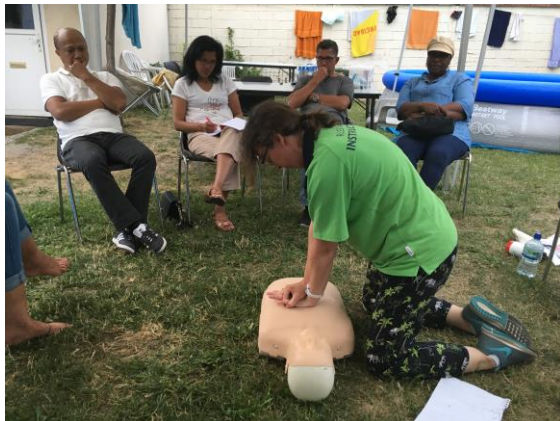
We think what has amazed us as we reflect on our trip has been the massive amount of encouragement to the core team that our visit gave them. It seems like all we needed to do was turn up, and God made that into something huge for them. In reality, it wasn't a matter of just turning up, we did do a lot of preparation for the activities both before and during the trip, although much of our preparation didn't get used on the day. God was working anyway and we went with the direction He was going in with our activities.

Indeed the encouragement was very welcome to the core team, who having been committed to the church planting programme for 3 years, have not seen anyone yet turn to Christ. Many of the people we first met a year ago are now fully committed to the Association element but have not yet shown much interest in church. To work through this lean time, we felt that God was reminding us of Isaiah 49:19-21 and of how, when God acts, He can bring something from apparently nowhere after a period of barrenness.

We are now thinking about how we can support them and help them to remain firm to God's calling and fresh in the faith as they continue to work for new disciples. As our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:12), it was important to remember that what we saw happening in our activities was

only the tip of the iceberg, and that the substance of the kingdom was also happening in a different and generally unseen realm.

For us, the most challenging things were dealing with a continuously multi-lingual context (ie, French, Swiss German and English), and not always knowing what was planned and what preparations to make. In addition, for Karen trying to express herself in French carefully without being a bull in a china shop was a challenge, as she had to trust that the people she was talking to would be gracious towards her. She was always feeling her expressed thoughts were so clumsy and heavy handed, but in fact everyone was fine and understood well enough. This was particularly challenging with the technical language necessary for teaching First Aid in French.



We felt assured that we had prayer support throughout the week. Things went very smoothly, and whilst this is not always the case, we had a sense that the work of value was being done by God, and our job was to turn up and do what we could as individually chosen members who were part of the team.

Val's perspective - Bouge ma Ville 2018

I, Val Praud of Dorking, align myself with the cowardly lion of Oz.



The phrase "courageous for Christ" leaves me trembling in my boots, because I don't do courage.

On one hand the trip to Paris really excited me... using my French, Gospel singing with kids. On the other hand ... Greg didn't want to come and I wasn't sure about taking more time off work. I was on a real shall I, shan't I pendulum. I think making the decision to go was the most "courageous" thing I did! Maybe we just have to make the effort to climb onto the eagles wings before we can soar.



So Karen, Rob and I headed off to France on Sunday 8th July. The journey went smoothly. We lodged with a delightful couple Christiane and Gérard. They are not members of the church but have a link with the pastor's wife through chickens!

The pastor has a team come out from his home church to support the week. This year there were about 20 young Swiss.



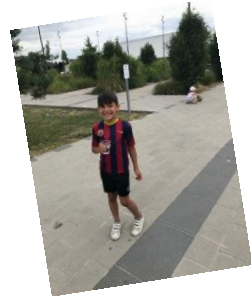
Every morning there was a gospel choir workshop for teenagers and we helped with a small team of children. In between singing we had some craft activities and games and some balloons. Yeh!

In the afternoons we had various community based activities:

Monday – some people went to help tidy up an elderly person's garden.

We went to a local park and just started playing games and inviting children come and play. This lad was very enthusiastic about our skittles offering and won 4 times!

I wondered whether churches together in Dorking could do something similar in Meadowbank?



Tuesday-

In the afternoon one of the gospel choir members gave us an eco tour around town. As part of the scheme 'Incredible Edibles', a grassroots gardening scheme, the Council has donated pieces of flower beds around town for fruit and vegetables to be grown and picked by all.

We spent the evening with a family from the church and watched the France- Belgium semi-final. There were a lot of car horns going when France won (Karen's included).



Wednesday-

Some of the youngsters went into Paris to work with refugees. It was quite a shock for some of them who'd not seen people living on the streets before, as homelessness is not common in parts of Switzerland.

Karen and I baked scones for our tea with the elderly the next day. In the evening was our Intercultural evening. Five nations were represented: UK, China, Madagascar, Congo and Switzerland. We each had a stand representing our country and then a slot for a song, dance or a talk about our country. We presented the Hokey Cokey as a traditional English dance. They all joined in and had fun!

Thursday-

On Thursday there was a transport problem for the elderly so they didn't come to the tea. No worries. We got to eat the scones ourselves and be entertained by Karen and Rob's karaoke presentation of "Yesterday".



Karen was super brave that day as in the evening she ran a first aid training session in French for members of the church



Friday:

Friday was the day of the concert. There was a great atmosphere in the room during the concert. The last number was “Blessings are falling, are falling, like sweet sweet rain”. There were indeed blessings falling. A non-Christian friend of mine came out from central Paris for the concert and was struck by the “warm atmosphere”. God is really working here and yet some of the people don’t yet recognise a saviour knocking at the door of their hearts.

Saturday-

Was a free day. I spent the day in Paris with friends and played Rummikub in the evening with our hosts.

Karen and Rob did a 5km parkrun in the Bois de Boulogne (as you do!) and went into Paris in the evening with the Swiss team to enjoy the Bastille day fireworks.

Sunday -

We stopped off at the church on our way home. To say our goodbyes and be thanked for our efforts.

Adhoc thoughts

- Pierre the pastor would like to do more work with our church and wondered if we had young people who might like to join
- They are measuring their success by the number of conversions and seem despondent because there have been none. We could see however that there is a group of people that are being touched by something that they don’t yet recognise as their saviour!
- Sometimes it feels a bit of a thankless task to the resident church team and so a week of the enthusiasm of a team around them is very encouraging for them