France Mission

PERSPECTIVES

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Paul's page: Retirement

Reflections by Paul Cooke, France Mission's Director

If you've been keeping up with the international news over recent weeks, you'll know that France is locked in a major political battle over a proposed reform to the retirement age. On the one hand, President Macron and his centre-right government want to raise the state retirement age from 62 to 64 on economic grounds. France is said to have a structural deficit of £11bn; raising the retirement age would help bring this figure down and increase tax revenue to allow investment in other areas. On the other hand, trade unions estimate that 2.8 million people have been involved in recent demonstrations across France to protest against this reform.

As the current retirement age in the UK is 66 (and will rise to 67 for somebody of my age), one might feel that a move from 62 to 64 is hardly shocking. However, as somebody who loves their job and who doesn't have to endure harsh conditions (what the French call *pénibilité*), I hardly feel qualified to comment!

I do, however, remember a comment made by missionary Dave Brown when he stepped down as pastor of the Paris-Cardinet Perspectives church in 2020: "I don't see the word 'retirement' in the Bible." Dave was intending to focus on writing and training – and part of the fruit of that is a new book mentioned on p.15 of this magazine. I don't think Dave imagined that the Lord would also call him and Mary to plant another new church, but that's in fact what happened (see the update on the next page)! The Lord remains sovereign over all phases of life, including the season when the world encourages us to put our feet up and take it easy. As John Piper writes in *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, his book on world missions: "If we have [...] saturated our mind with the ways of the supremacy of God, we will invest our time and energy in this final chapter very differently than if we take our cues from the American *[or British!]* dream." I'm grateful to the many "senior saints" who show me exactly what this looks like in practice.

Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

Every blessing in Christ

Paul

Paul Cooke

Front page photo:
Church-run café in Strasbourg

Tom Parfitt

Church planting in Clichy

Tom Parfitt and Dave Brown share the latest news

Dave Brown

Our church-planting project is in Clichy, a borough next to the 17th *arrondissement* in northwest Paris. There are **63,000 inhabitants** in Clichy and no other Protestant church. The project began 18 months ago with three couples. Today there are around 15 of us meeting regularly.

"God has opened a new door for us in Clichy."

Since we last wrote, God has opened a new door for us in Clichy. You may remember that we were meeting in a hotel on Sunday mornings. The hotel closed its meeting rooms in February, meaning we had to find a new place for our services. Without us having to ask, **the local council offered to help** us in our search. Quite extraordinarily, the council then offered to rent a room to us for two Sundays a month. We had our first service in this new space at the end of January and have been enjoying it ever since. The room can hold 200+ people, so we have a lot of potential for growth! It also makes doing children's work easier and means we can serve coffee before/after the service. Join us in **giving thanks** for it.

Having opened this physical door, we're praying that the Lord would open a spiritual door for the gospel in the hearts and minds of those around us. We look forward to celebrating Easter and are hoping to organise an event around the **400th anniversary of Blaise Pascal's birth** in June as a way to connect with more people.

Église protestante évangélique de Clichy

Regular ministry continues through services (going through Philippians) and Thursday-night Bible studies (1 John). The women of the church met for the first time in February to get to know each other better and encourage one another.

Look us up at www.egliseclichy92.fr, and stay up to date with the latest happenings on our Facebook page (search for *Eglise protestante évangélique de Clichy*).

You can contact Tom at tparfitt.paris@gmail.com and Dave at david.brown.paris@gmail.com

A recent service

Serving in Strasbourg

Student Dan Rees reports on his current Year Abroad in a Perspectives church

Dan is studying French and Music at the University of Birmingham and is spending the third year of his course in France, developing his language skills. Every year, France Mission is delighted to be able to help students like Dan find an evangelical church where they can worship and serve.

In September 2022 I moved to Strasbourg for nine months to help out with the day-to-day activities of the Perspectives church in the city's **Krutenau district**.

The Krutenau district

I'd firstly like to thank everyone who's been praying for me this year; I've seen **God's provision** for me clearly as I've settled into life and work here. I'm particularly thankful that He's provided me with a visa, accommodation, and a supportive church family. In these past months, it's been a joy to have fellowship with God's people in another country and to witness first-hand how He's working in France.

Each Sunday, the church meets in the local **hospital chapel** where God's word is read and preached. In these services I've been involved in playing the piano

A service in the hospital chapel

as we sing together. We recently held a joint service with the other Perspectives church in Strasbourg, L'Eglise de la Gare, where it was a joy and encouragement to spend time praising God together. I've also been enjoying the bimonthly **"Living Rooms"** as a time to get to know certain members of the church better through reading, discussing, and praying together. I've further been blessed by the regular meetings I've been having with three other men as we discuss God's work in our lives and pray for each other.

I've been especially encouraged to see God working through the outreach of the church here. One of the main elements of this is the **community-centred café** (called "Oh My Goodness!") which was set up by members of the church to care for and develop links with local people. This is done through providing coffees and food for the homeless as well as various workshops and events throughout the week. I've been blessed to get to know many Christians and non-Christians through volunteering in the café three afternoons each week and am thankful for the opportunities it's given me to share the gospel with them. I've also been

The church's community café

accompanying the **gospel choir** associated with the café which is comprised of people from nearby churches as well as many from the local community; I pray that God would provide opportunities for me to witness there too.

One of the new ventures we started in September is the **"Bénévole Day"** where the café is run exclusively by volunteers

Dan enjoying a meal with other volunteers on a "Bénévole Day

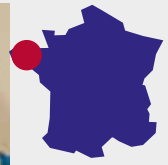
each Monday afternoon. Every week, a percentage of the profit from these afternoons goes towards a charity; in January, for instance, 280 € was donated to a charity combatting homelessness. Before each shift begins, the volunteers eat a meal and pray together. These afternoons have so far been **particularly effective** for opening up conversation with customers and creating deeper relationships with the community.

In recent weeks, the church has been holding evenings in the café aimed primarily at giving non-Christians an **overview of the Bible** through a popular series of studies called "Parcours Découverte de la Bible". These evenings have been receiving an encouraging level of interest from café regulars, workshop attendees, and friends of church members. A few guests have also been asking further questions and **continuing discussions** in one-on-ones and smaller groups, so we're praying that God would save people through this work.

Please do continue to pray for the Church here in Strasbourg, that it would grow both in size and in unity, and that God would continue to bless the inward and outward work being done.

You can contact Dan at 4djrees@gmail.com

Challenges and opportunities in Brest



Pastoral couple Laurent & Prisca Robitzer share about God's work in this major Breton port

Church:
Welcome to the Perspectives church in Brest! We're a community of about 100 people, including children, representing about 15 different nationalities. We see a lot of people in their 40s with children and also younger single people (mostly students). We love this cultural diversity, which is typical of Brest as a major port and university city with a welcoming ethos.

Brest has only four Protestant churches for a population of 250,000 – a long way from the goal of one evangelical church for every 10,000 people established by the CNEF (National Council of French Evangelicals). The situation is similar throughout the department of Finistère in which Brest is located. Finding relevant and sensitive ways of sharing the gospel with those around us remains a significant challenge, especially as so many church members have busy family and professional lives.

Ministries:
I (Laurent) spend a quarter of my time working as a gardener. For the remaining 75%, I focus on teaching, administration, and baptismal preparation within the church. I also offer French lessons to foreigners seeking to learn the language so that they can better integrate into French life. Professionally, Prisca works as a Psychology lecturer at the University of Brest. In church, she focuses particularly on spiritual guidance. She coordinates the team offering an in-person welcome at the church throughout the week and trains other Christians throughout Brittany in the principles of spiritual guidance.

The Annexe from the outside

Prisca in the Annexe with works by local artist, Faby

A recent Sunday service

Development:
Having spent several years thinking and praying about the possibility of purchasing new premises to better accommodate our activities, God finally led us towards a solution that is better suited to our current human and financial resources. Since October 2022, we've been renting a small space (34m²) in a lively area near the city centre.

This location provides a space where people can come and chat over a coffee, find a listening ear, or just work quietly; a place where children can be helped with their schoolwork and where the unemployed can receive help finding work; where we can run French classes for immigrants and various other workshops. People with relevant professional expertise and volunteers from our church offer these different services according to their availability, their gifts, and God's call.

Opportunity:
Thanks to the presence of a Ukrainian family in our church, we were delighted to welcome a local Ukrainian charity to make use of our premises at Christmas. About 70 Ukrainians living in and around Brest were able celebrate Christmas together and to pray about the joys and sorrows that are so much a part of their life at the moment. In addition to the French classes we offer, we're seeking the Lord's will as to how we might develop this connection, providing welcome and hope for these Ukrainian families and for other isolated people.

Outside of the church

Prayer points:
For the church:
- Spiritual protection and unity
- Raising up new leaders post-Covid, especially for the church council
- Connecting members' life and vision to our new missional opportunities
- Wisdom for the AGM: extend the rental on the annexe for another three years or not?

For the annexe:
- Create connections between various users
- Relevant evangelism for the local demographic
- More male volunteers

For us:
- Renewal for Laurent and strengthening for Prisca
- Clarity and conviction for future in ministry
- Spiritual protection for our three children (aged 10, 12, & 14)

You can contact Laurent & Prisca at laurent.robitzer@gmail.com

New year, new challenges!

Staff member Rachel Vaughan provides an update from the Nogent Bible Institute

"Enlarge your house; build an addition. Spread out your home, and spare no expense! For you will soon be bursting at the seams." Isaiah 54:2-3 (NLT)

Last September saw a marked increase in student intake, following a dip owing to Covid, with 24 new students enrolled in full-time study. The new accommodation block has no doubt played an important role in this **encouraging recruitment**, and all the rooms are currently occupied. Building work continues in another building on our campus, converting the old dining room into a new classroom and the old kitchen into new offices.

We praise God for His provision of this new accommodation block, but the Institute's development plan doesn't end there. It's estimated that **1,000 pastors need to be trained in the next 10 years** to meet the needs of the growing French evangelical church. So, the Institute's president has suggested an ambitious goal for 2025: 50 new students enrolled each year!

There are two major challenges to meeting this goal:

1. A financial challenge:
The Institute was founded in an old *château*, a beautiful 18th-century building which has been home to students and staff for over 100 years. This building is essential to the work of the Institute and is an emblem among French Evangelicals. Yet its **maintenance** represents a considerable challenge. For many years, repairs have been kept to a minimum. However, renovation work (roofing, plumbing, electricity, insulation) is now urgent and may cost as much as €200,000. We've hired a full-time site manager to oversee the refurbishments and renovations for our campus. Taken together with increased costs due to the current energy crisis, the Institute is facing considerable financial challenges this year. **Please do pray with us** that the Lord would provide, so that the Institute can continue its ministry training pastors and Christian leaders for many years to come.

"Renovation work is now urgent and may cost as much as €200,000."

2. A recruitment challenge:
In France, the growing evangelical church and the aging pastorate means there's an **increasing need for trained church leaders**. However, few people are willing to commit to full-time theological study. So, as well as increasing student capacity, Nogent Bible Institute has been developing its recruitment strategy, with youth events, open-days, and online taster courses.

Beautiful, but expensive to maintain

Renovation well and truly underway!

The historic building seen from the new accommodation block

During the Institute's centenary year (2021-2022), teams visited a number of regions to raise the profile of the training it provides. Two students enrolled in September as a direct result of these visits.

And now Matthieu Gangloff, a new lecturer at Nogent, is working on a **"theology taster course"**, a new resource for churches to use, to identify and encourage those that God is calling into full-time ministry. It will be designed for Christians who already have responsibilities in their churches and will not only deepen their doctrinal knowledge but also encourage them towards further study, such as part-time courses or, for some, full-time theological study. **Please pray with us** that God would raise up a new generation of pastors and theologians, to faithfully lead and teach the French evangelical church.

Picking up the terms from Isaiah quoted above, I can say that, at Nogent, we have indeed enlarged our house, built an addition, and spread out our home (although we've been as cost-efficient as possible!). **Pray for God** to raise up more workers for His harvest field, so that we may soon be bursting at the seams!

You can contact Rachel at rachel.vaughan@ibnogent.org

Hope and fun for the youth of France's empty centre

Missionaries Peter & Rachel Calvert ask you to pray for a youth conference

"What hope is there for young people in 2023?" With war on the fringes of Europe and the ecological crisis looming, young people are more and more in need of hope. As Christians, we believe the gospel of Jesus offers the only fundamentally robust response to this need and so we've made it the theme of a **new weekend youth conference** for the young people of France's central region: the "Weekend Boost 2023" (29th April – 1st May).

The central region is sparsely populated and has a very thin coverage of evangelical churches. Churches are often so small that there aren't enough young people to form a youth group. So, gathering together for a youth conference can be an especially **energising experience**. That's at least the hope of the team from the region's Perspectives churches that has got together to organise the weekend.[1]

In previous years, a few keen young people from the region have joined in youth weekends in the east of France or in Switzerland. But this is beyond the means of many. This time we hope to bring together several dozen young people aged 12-18 at the **Orangerie de Beauregard** (orangeriedebeauregard.com), a beautiful campsite near Tours, run by a British Christian couple with a missionary vision for supporting the French church. There'll be Bible teaching, thematic workshops, worship times, and lots of fun and games.

Lots to do at the Orangerie de Beauregard

So **please pray** with us for this new initiative:

- For young people (whether believers are not) to want to come along and bring their friends
- For the team of organisers, especially Joel Fluckiger, a young Perspectives pastor from Alsace, who'll be leading the main sessions
- For good relationships amongst the young people and between the young people and the adults
- For good weather (we'll be sleeping in tents)!

You can contact Peter & Rachel at pierrerachel.calvert@gmail.com

[1]In addition to Peter, the other British missionary on the team is Sarah Winterburn who's serving with ECM at the Perspectives church in Tours.

Working out Christian ethics in Paris-Cardinet

Pastoral couple Jonathan & Rachel Vaughan reflect on putting faith into action

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." James 1:22

In our evening services at Paris-Cardinet, we recently finished a series on **ecology** (using the study guide *The Bible and the Environment*, produced by A Rocha France). We've been challenged to put the teaching into action, and there are no doubt many ways we need to change our habits and lifestyles, both individually and as a church. One first step has been to register our church with **"Eglise Verte"**, an interdenominational Christian organisation which encourages churches to become more environmentally aware: reducing waste and electricity usage, for example, but also including care for God's creation in our teaching, praise, and prayers.

We've now started a new series on **poverty**, using a resource produced by SEL, a Christian charity and partner of Compassion International. After the first study there was a strong desire to partner with a local group of Christians in Madagascar. Following the pattern of New Testament churches, we want to establish a two-way relationship, where we can both support them financially and in prayer, and they too can support us through prayer and encouragement!

Opening night at a recent church art exhibition

In our morning services we've started a new monthly series on **Leviticus**, seeing how it applies to us today. These are interactive services, and the aim is to train Christians to develop **biblical Christian ethics**. We want our church members to be biblically informed, so they can be faithful disciples as they navigate the ever-increasing complexities of our culture.

Please pray for us, that we would indeed be doers of the word, not just hearers. Pray for God to inspire us and transform us, that we might be faithful witnesses for Him.

You can contact Jonathan & Rachel at jony.vaughan@gmail.com

France Mission needs new Trustees!

An invitation from Chair of FM Trustees, Bob Crockford

Why do we need Trustees?

Apart from being a legal requirement for any charity, Trustees have the privilege and opportunity of using their skills, experience, and passion to help an organisation meet its aims. The background work of Trustees provides a vital framework for frontline activities. The New Testament encourages us to ensure that things are "done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14.40). The work of the Trustees is crucial in helping France Mission achieve this goal via a mixture of faith, prudence, and God-given common sense. With periods of office coming to an end, we're currently looking to recruit new Trustees to join the Board.

What do Trustees do?

Trustees are there to ensure the organisation is well run, meets its obligations (both legal and moral), and serves its purpose – in our case helping to build God's Kingdom in France.

But I'm already a busy person… will I have the time?

France Mission is relatively modest in size, so the work is not hugely time consuming with around four meetings per year, either remotely by Zoom for a couple of hours or in person at an accessible location. Then there are emails and documents that come along for review and occasional short discussions as need arises. An average of an hour per week outside of meetings is probably a good guide. The Trustees have different skills so some will focus more on their area of knowledge/interest.

How long might I be signing up for?

The general expectation is that a Trustee would serve a minimum of 2 years in order to be able to contribute well and then, after 6 years, continuing as a Trustee is reviewed annually. Trustees can step down at any time.

Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay

Do I need to speak French?

In a word, "No"! The vast majority of what is communicated is in English, but some ability to understand written French can be advantageous. However, important documents can be translated as necessary.

How do I find out more?

Please contact me at bobcrockford@francemission.org for an initial chat about how you might be able to help. We can discuss your gifts and skills in general terms and see if there are areas where you may have specific knowledge/experience such as Admin, IT, Finance, Employment, Fundraising etc. I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Paul Cooke adds…

FM's amazing Trustees are absolutely invaluable to me – I literally couldn't do my job without them! The other wonderful group of volunteers who enable FM to function are our **Area Reps**. **Carole Edrich** has performed that role in southwest England over recent years but is now stepping down.

Carole Edrich

Carole writes: *"I've been an Area Representative with France Mission for the past eight years. During this time, I've attended university Christian Union meetings, Christian events, and spoken in churches. This has given me opportunities to tell others about the work being done in France to bring people to faith in Jesus. It's always encouraging to meet those who are already supporting the spread of the gospel in France and to explain to others why mission work in France is needed. I've enjoyed my time as a representative. It's been a blessing meeting the students and getting to know other mission organisations."*

As Carole steps down, **John Adamson** has joined the team as the Area Rep for northwest England. If John's name sounds familiar, it may be because I've mentioned some of his novels before – stories with an overtly Christian dimension and set partly in France. If you'd like to invite John to visit your church to talk about FM, just drop me a line (paulcooke@francemission.org). Please also contact me if you'd be interested in finding out more about becoming an Area Rep yourself.

John Adamson

One of John's novels

A **huge thank you** to all the Trustees and Area Reps for all they give to FM!

Creative approaches to sharing the Good News

Missionaries Steve & Miki Thrall report on a new series for teenagers

Our desire is to partner with the French Church to advance the Kingdom of God in France. We do this by focusing on artists. The two guest houses on our property, **La Pommeraie**, in Normandy are where we welcome artists who need to do creative work. We also provide artists with rest, support, encouragement, and a pastor's listening ear.

La Pommeraie

Our **ministry among artists** began in earnest back in 1997 when a French friend shared his vision to create a Christian theatre company. We helped him launch this new ministry venture: **La Compagnie des Actes** was born (lacompagniedesactes.fr). In 1998, when we formed the non-profit structure together, Steve became its first president. For 25 years the company has performed in theatres and churches all over France, Belgium, and Switzerland and is still as active as ever.

Since they could not perform in public during Covid, they developed a series of podcasts for children based on Bible stories and began writing a script for a three-part **made-for-television series for teens** that follows the daily lives of a group of high-school students, focusing on their struggles at a time in life when their identity is being formed. In the light of the message of the Bible, it addresses issues they face such as self-image, bullying, addiction, and pornography. This new series, entitled *Identité en Question*, is being launched this March. **Please do pray** for its impact.

Recently Steve has had the privilege of working with a young woman who is in **seminary in Montreal**. She is trained in theatre and is eager to use it as a way of reaching out in secular society with the Good News. One of her key inspirations has been La Compagnie des Actes. We're pleased to see a new generation following in their footsteps, learning how to use this valuable creative gift to honour God.

You can view the trailer for *Identité en Question* at youtube.com/watch?v=luzqGxw8b70

You can contact Steve & Miki at pommeraie.art@gmail.com

Other news from Paul Cooke

Holiday in the south of France (17th-23rd September 2023)

You're invited to join me and several missionaries (Simon Allchin, Rachel Calvert, and Rachel Vaughan) for **a week at Les Courmettes**, a conference centre managed by Christian environmental charity A Rocha France (arocha.fr). The 600-hectare *Domaine des Courmettes* is situated on

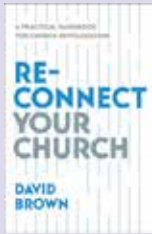
Les Courmettes

the edge of the Southern Alps, about one hour inland from Nice, with stunning views over the Mediterranean. Senior staff from A Rocha, including the National Director and the Director of Les Courmettes, will help us think about how we can help steward God's creation wisely.

For more information, see the flyer at bit.ly/LC-flyer

Reserve your place by signing up at bit.ly/LC-book

Dave Brown's first book in English!



Dave has published many books in French, but now you can benefit from his wisdom and experience in English too! Building on Dave's work on church revitalisation with the European Leadership Forum, *Reconnect Your Church* provides a practical, road-tested vision and process to equip church leaders and willing members to reinvigorate their church. I found it a very encouraging and thought-provoking read and recommend it to you warmly. It's published by IVP and can be ordered via their website (ivpbooks.com) or via Amazon etc.

Fundraising via online purchases

Speaking of Amazon, I'm sorry to say that their "Smile" programme has been discontinued. Thank you to everyone who made use of this giving mechanism while it lasted. Other similar schemes – such as **easyfundraising** and **TheGivingMachine** – still exist and more information about them is available on the back page of this magazine. As it happens, FM supporter and former Trustee, Helen Robinson, recently contacted me about this as follows: "I was concerned when I went back to studying that I'd no longer be able to give regularly but with EasyFundraising, anything I need to buy online (as long as the retailer is linked) – from essentials to birthday and Christmas gifts – EasyFundraising gives a percentage of the cost to France Mission as my nominated charity. It's amazing how quickly funds add up. *Tous les dons sont les bienvenus!* (= Every little helps!)"

France Mission:
Love France – Love Mission – Love Church

France Mission's vision is to see increasing numbers of people in France encountering God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – through the work and witness of local evangelical churches.
As a support organisation, we provide targeted, strategic support to help the French evangelical church move closer to achieving its own goals. To find out more, please visit francemission.org.

If your church or small group would like to hear more about the Lord's work in France, please contact Paul Cooke to book a speaker:

- Email: paulcooke@francemission.org
- Phone: (+44) 07980 450462 or (+44) 01392 213275
- Post: PO Box 743, Exeter EX1 9RN, UK

Support France Mission when you shop online

We've registered with two websites – **easyfundraising** and **TheGivingMachine** – that enable you to raise funds for France Mission whenever you shop online. Both sites provide access to a wide variety of popular retailers, are easy to use, and don't cost you (or us) a penny!

So, if you shop online, please do consider signing up either at easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/francemission or at thegivingmachine.co.uk/causes/france-mission and help us raise more funds to support the Lord's work in France.

Thank you!

France Mission

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