

## All Saints, Hérault: Chaplain's Report for 2023

This will be my last report to you as Chaplain. We have no plans to move and I don't know yet how it will feel to be living here without my finger on the pulse of our little chaplaincy.

Having nurtured the chaplaincy since its birth, I feel a bit like a parent whose child has now grown up. I shall try to take the advice in a book called 'The Good Granny Guide' by Jane Fearnley-Whittingstall. A friend gave this to us when we first became grandparents. The idea is that a good granny or grandad doesn't interfere in how their children bring up their grandchildren. Here is a quote.

*'All in all, do your best to be an asset rather than a hindrance. It is sometimes difficult to resist the urge to protest if you think the parents are getting things wrong ... But Good Grannies do not indicate by so much as a twitching eyebrow that in their day things were done differently and, in their opinion, better.'*

In England the priest must stay away from the parish for a matter of years. This a good thing, to give the new person space to do things their way without interference from somebody saying, 'I wouldn't have done it that way'! A retired priest there can usually just go a mile or two down the road to find a new church to attend. Here in France it's different: the nearest Church of England worship centre to us is at Carcassonne, at least 100 km away, so we shall keep attending worship at All Saints.

At the time of writing the prospects are looking good for someone to replace me before the deadline that I have set of my birthday in July. The new priest will have quite a challenge, looking after three very different chaplaincies a long way away from each other. There will be help, of course, from the old team, to assist the ministry of the new chaplain.

A tremendous amount of work has gone into getting the project of appointing a chaplain off the ground. Special thanks go to Ian Thomas, who has used his HR (Human Resources) expertise to keep us on track.

I should also like to mention the excellent 'Chaplaincy Council plus extras' meeting that we held on 6 June. We managed at that meeting to work out what we all value about our chaplaincy now and how we would like to see it looking in five years' time. That information formed the basis of our part of the joint Chaplaincy Profile, which is the 'shop window' for prospective chaplains. I think that we produced an excellent

and forward-looking document. It would certainly have attracted me if I were ten or more years younger!

Many thanks as usual to our two hard-working and dedicated Churchwardens. Thank you Julie, Jane and Gwilym for your help and support. Thank you Music Team and Council members.

As well as services and related events, our other regular meetings continued through the year. The prayer group, organised by Jenny Morgan, continued to meet on the second Wednesday of the month, usually at the monastery of Saint Joseph de Mont-Rouge at Puimisson. I am pleased that Lent groups and lunches, in the flesh rather than on Zoom, restarted. The groups were as successful as they were before COVID, with an average attendance of over 14.

Thank you everyone for the support you have given to me and Delia over the years since we moved to France in 2011. We knew that there would be some kind of ministry for us here but never expected it to be so demanding and fulfilling.

As Dag Hammarskjöld, Swedish diplomat and United Nations Secretary, wrote in 1953, 'For all that has been, THANKS, for all that is to be, YES!'

Roger Smith  
Chaplain

March 2024