

All Saints, Hérault: Chaplain's Report for 2022

When we decided to move to France, which we finally managed to do in the Spring of 2011, I had no idea what kind of ministry I would have here, not even whether it would be with the Church of England. I did expect to have a ministry of some sort, because becoming a priest involves a sense of letting go and trusting in God. The annual Methodist Covenant Prayer puts it like this.

*I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will,
rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing,
put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you,
or laid aside for you,
exalted for you,
or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be
ratified in heaven.'*

I certainly did not expect to be asked by Bishop David to lead the new chaplaincy of All Saints, Hérault, which came into being on 13 January 2013: but that's what happened.

The main team remains much the same as it was then and it's time to start planning for the future, when one or all of us are no longer willing or able to continue. I have already announced that I intend to retire on 31 July 2024.

When I first worked in industry, many years ago, it was organised rather like the armed forces, with strict grades and rankings, each with their roles and job descriptions. Later on this evolved into people doing what they were good at doing, which was far more satisfying for everybody and more productive too. That's how our chaplaincy works, but it does make some of our acts difficult to follow.

To try to untangle all the practical things that will need to be done as the All Saints team evolves, I have started to put together a 'handbook' for All Saints, a description of the jobs we all do, large and small. So far there are well over 30, from setting up the worship space to providing Communion bread, and the list is still growing.

Our task over the next year or two is to try to find new people to carry on the good work that we started on 13 January 2013. No pressure, folks, but volunteers are welcome. For many of the tasks there is no need to be on the Chaplaincy Council if that isn't your thing. More information will follow over the next months.

2022 saw other signs of change in our chaplaincy. We started with COVID still a big factor and Lent groups were still by Zoom. Then in April we had our first visit by the Diocesan Bishop, Bishop Robert, for our third Confirmation service as a chaplaincy. This was for Ellie Wilmot Hall, the youngest of five sisters, four of whom were confirmed here in the autumn of 2013.

Bishop Robert was accompanied by the Archdeacon of France, The Ven Dr Peter Hooper, and our Area Dean, Rev Tony Lomas. In the afternoon a meeting took place between this leading group in our diocese, members of All Saints and also of the chaplaincies of St Michael's in the Gard (100 km from St Pargoire) and St George's, Vernet-les-Bains (180 km from St Pargoire), which have been without a chaplain for some time. Archdeacon Peter and Bishop Robert suggested a scheme to recruit a chaplain to be shared between the three chaplaincies.

With a lot of help, in October I wrote a proposal for a scheme, with detailed suggestions about organisation and costings. We would, basically, provide housing and expenses only for the new chaplain, quite a common system in the Church of England. The three chaplaincies would stay independent but the chaplain would 'captain the ship', provide pastoral support, offer mid-week activities, build relations with other denominations and generally be our leader. 'Going it alone', without the other two chaplaincies, would cost more and give us only 3-5 years if we started spending our Succession Fund 'capital' on 'running costs'.

We are planning for the current pattern of services at St Pargoire to continue. To help the new chaplain with this, I hope to be available still, along with people who are in France part-time: Priests Gwilym Richards and Kevin Conroy and Reader Jane Griffin have all acquired Permission to Officiate with us, to join Reader Julie Johnson and me. A Worship Leaders' course should be available soon to add more possibilities.

Discussions have been going on since the first meeting last April using Zoom. We still don't know whether it will happen, but please be

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assured that no decision will be made without consulting the congregation.

As I wrote in my report last year, we shouldn't worry about what the future may hold for our chaplaincy. All that we need to do is our best and God will do the rest.

Many thanks as usual to our two hard-working and dedicated Churchwardens, who both do much more than the standard job description for that post requires. Thank you Julie, Gwilym and Kevin for your input over the year and thank you in anticipation Jane. Thank you Music Team and Council members.

A final word from Albert Einstein: 'The measure of intelligence is the ability to change'.

Roger Smith
Chaplain

March 2023