



Bonjour !

Last time, I had some not so nice news to share. I can't say that it is all over or that we are all happy. In many ways we are still suffering from the unfortunate and premature departure of our pastor to be. People were upset, hurt, and confused. We do not feel any different just because we are the missionaries!

Meanwhile, I have had quite a few talks with different people, listening, explaining, and praying. This has been tremendously good. People talk, don't they? But not always in a constructive way, especially when feelings are hurt! Some things have been simmering under the surface, because people rub each other in the wrong way. However, many honest and open conversations have provided a new basis to build and live together.

Being church is quite a different story from being a church organization or club! It's being the body of Christ *together* and learning what means: "to live is Christ". It is all about relationships based on the relationship Jesus has with us.

When the relationships are not right, people don't see "it" anymore. The vision gets lost. Programs are not meeting the needs anymore. Sermons get boring. Why do it all? The 'funny' thing is that on the same Sunday, one person may complain about how cold the church had become, while another tells me how welcoming we are! One Sunday the music wasn't all that good. I noticed it, but it didn't really bother me that much because I was concentrated on the words and wanting to worship God. My point is simply this. Church really gets messy if our eyes are not fixed on Jesus but on others or ourselves, and our desires. Do I not want the music to be good, the sermon to be inspiring, and the children happy? Of course I do. But it should really be secondary to Jesus and to loving one another. Really it should.

At the beginning of the year we had an "extended board" meeting to see how we want to continue together. The second in February went well and was constructive. More have been planned as well. This is very encouraging, since it shows that people want to continue to be part of the church and its future.

We want to praise God for letting us grow together in the midst of challenges. And we are very grateful for the many prayers on our behalf and for the many words of comfort we received. Thank you very much! As I have said several times lately: "*La bonne guerre est dans la prière.*" (The good war is in prayer.) Indeed our fight is *for* each other! So please continue to pray for us!

Our ministry involves quite a few dimensions; all are necessary to create a favorable environment for people to grow, for churches to become more bold and autonomous, and for new leaders and new communities to come to life. France is still very much a mission field that requires a lot of pioneering (the Evangelical world represents less than 1% of the population). There are some good structures in the big metropolitan areas, like Paris, but not so in the more rural ones like central France, where we are. For example, the one evangelical psychiatrist that we knew of is now retired, and she was already overbooked... Specialized counselors and teachers are almost all in Paris.

This means that we have to put into place and develop structures to support churches and local church leaders. Together with a few others, do I try to do just that through *ThéoCentre*. A small training center for church leaders and those who want to learn more in terms of leadership,



ThéoCentre

biblical and practical theology. Internet might provide knowledge, but it does not provide human contact and a nearby relational support network!

Some churches are so small (10 to 30 people on a Sunday) that they have no trained people or enough competent people to provide all the help that a small community needs. This means that our church in Tours “lends” me to other churches to accompany them with advice on issues and with teaching.

It might seem easier to merge two small churches, but there isn't the other one to merge with! One of the things we look at is how to be church rather than how to do or play church. Fellowship does not depend on numbers nor does praying together and encouraging the other with what we have learned from the Bible, right?

During a “learning community” weekend with church leaders from our network, one speaker asked if I had relationships with non-Christians (since a lot of Christian workers are so involved in ministry). Well, Jody and I do have friendships with non-Christian, and that because we like them! Besides that, as a Christian I have always believed that we should incarnate the Gospel in society and be among people. Years ago I expressed to God that I don't want to “just” preached but to be involved practically to help people live their life. Right at the time the *Maison de la Solidarité* (House of Solidarity) popped up in our neighborhood, so I decided to join as a volunteer. In the last 17 years, I have been teaching computer classes there. Very recently I was asked and nominated to become their president. It's a quite big non-Christian charity organization with over 100 volunteers creating links between people and helping those in need. As you can imagine, it will provide plenty of other relationships with city official and other socio-educational organizations. So please pray for me as I take up yet another important responsibility to help churches to take their place as a beacon in this world.

Let me finish with a word on our family. The boys are great and greatly appreciated by their teachers. These non-Frenchies have the best grades in French of their class! Jack (11 years old) likes to play table tennis, and just has discovered an outdoor one near the public library, so now we can go there! Jan-Willem (13¾) still enjoys Latin, geography and history. This winter he read about 5000 pages of heroic fantasy. He's well on his way to become the tallest in the house (about 5'4). Jody has learned to knit, but might not finish her scarf for this summer but rather for next winter. She also made (very good!) donuts for the first time. And this summer we are visiting the US again to see family, friends, and supporting churches.



Thank you very much for supporting us so faithfully throughout the years! It's much appreciated!

Love,
Marc & Jody,
Jan-Willem and Jack



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