

# MARCH NEWS - May 2012

Dear Friends and Family,

In March our Canadian niece Amber came to France. Sharon spent a weekend with her showing her the delights of Paris and then I spent the rest of the week showing her some of the interesting places close to where we live.



It was great fun for us, and I think for her! Our ability with the French language and our 12 years of experience of French culture meant that we were able to help her appreciate some of the glories of France.

As I reflect on this experience, it occurs to me that this is also applicable to our experience of living and ministering as Evangelicals in the Catholic world. Our experience and insiders' viewpoint of both traditions gives us a unique perspective that means we can help Catholics better understand Evangelicals and Evangelicals better understand Catholics.

As we contemplate what may be God's direction for our future, maybe this ability to help each community understand and appreciate the other is something that will develop? Certainly my Masters dissertation research has given me a much better understanding of how recent changes have enabled Christians from these two different traditions to consider working together in evangelism in a way that has never been thought possible in the past.

Please pray that God would open doors for this bridge-building ministry if this is his will.

## News for Praise and Prayer

### Parish Life:



We mentioned 6 months ago that we were prayerfully considering whether we should respond positively to the invitation to go forward for confirmation made by Father Yves. We do thank the one or two people who wrote to us / called us to share what they felt God might be saying. Some people considered it a wonderful invitation and a real affirmation of our ministry, others were concerned about how that might change the nature of our relationship with the Catholic hierarchy.

We have prayed a lot and talked with different people including a great lady who is responsible for the confirmation of adults in the diocese. Our final conclusion is that we do not feel a peace about going forward for confirmation at this time. Maybe there will come a time in the future when we do, but at present it does not seem like the right thing to do. Our

'between two stools' relationship with our Catholic brothers and sisters – although often uncomfortable for us and them - seems nonetheless to be the kind of relationship God wants us to maintain, at least for the time being. We do thank you for your prayers about this difficult decision.

### **ALPHA:**

The third ALPHA course in our parish continues with around 16 guests, mostly retired people who are regular church-goers. Please continue to pray that through this course they will each encounter God in a deeper way and move forward in their discipleship.

This course has been particularly encouraging as lots of different people have been willing to do the talks. It has been great to see people taking their first steps in this type of ministry and developing their gifts in this way.

We are delighted that 6 people from the Vitteaux parish are attending this course. Thus, if they choose to be involved, we could already have the makings of a nucleus for the team that will lead the first Vitteaux parish ALPHA in September.

On 20/21<sup>st</sup> October a national ALPHA training weekend will be held in Dijon. It is the first time a national ALPHA event has been hosted in our city. All the Dioceses in Eastern France, where as yet there is little ALPHA activity, have been invited to attend, in order for them to discover the ALPHA tool and find out how it has been helping parishes, and also to be trained and envisioned for evangelism.

Please pray that this event will be really significant in putting evangelism back on the agenda in this spiritually neglected part of France.

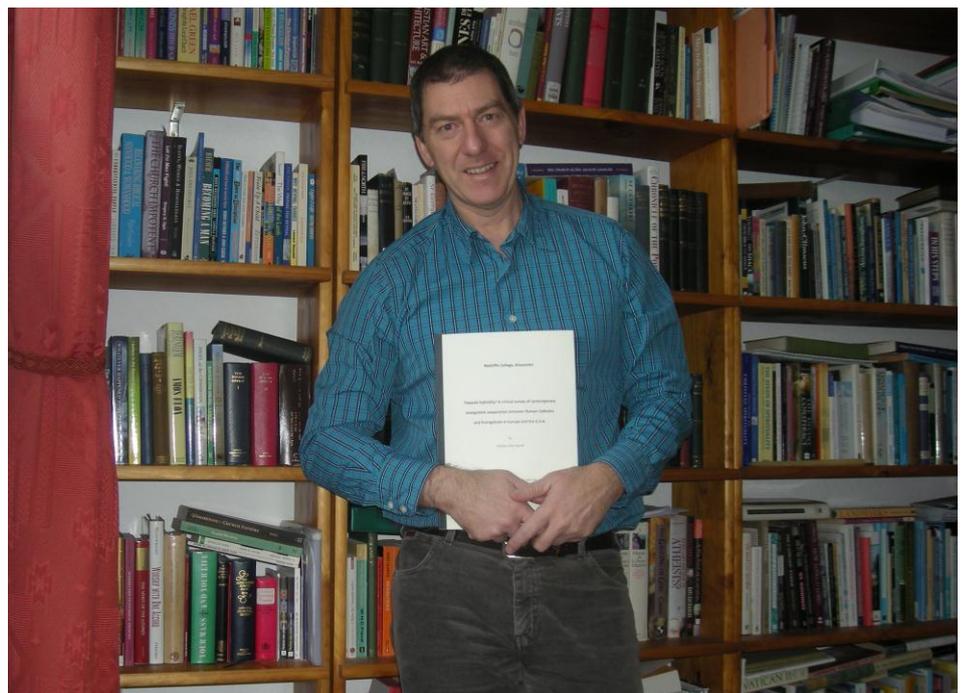


### Teenage Group:

Once a month on a Friday evening, Sharon and I now hold a group for 13/14 year olds in our parish. We have between 4 and 6 girls who regularly come along. They seem to really enjoy coming and we are trying to gently inspire them to go deeper in their engagement with Christ. Please pray for these girls.

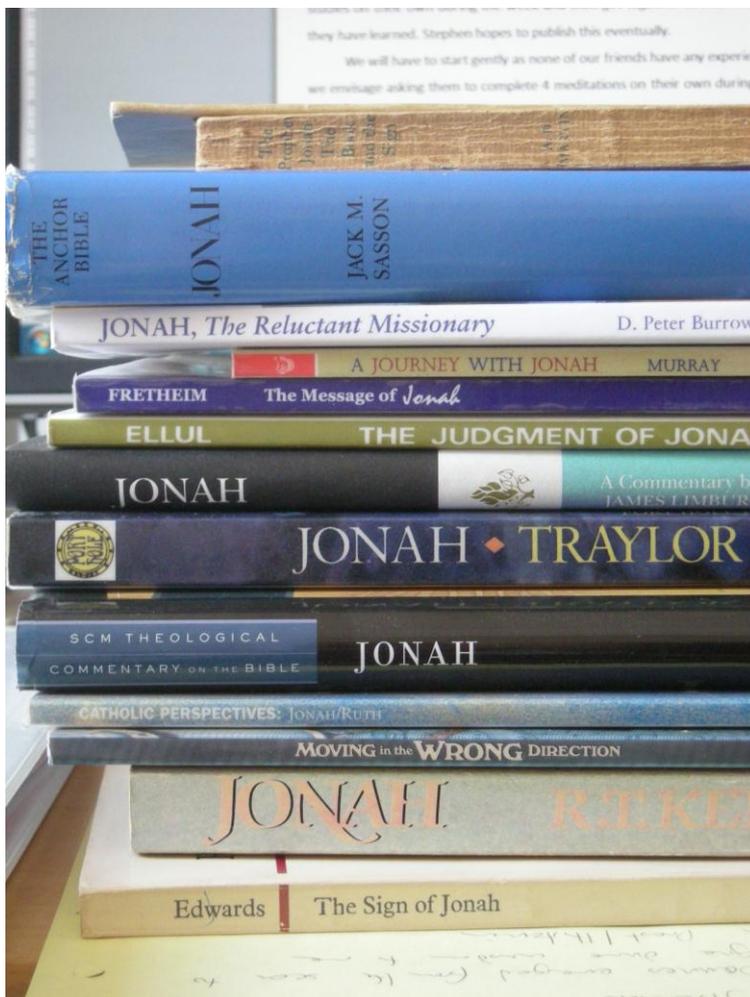
### Masters Studies:

Stephen finished his Masters dissertation, on the subject of Evangelical / Catholic cooperation in evangelism, in February and duly got it printed and bound and sent off to the university. He now awaits it being marked (nervous biting of finger-nails!).



If all goes well and he passes, this will mark the end of his Masters studies. We thank you for the prayers and the financial gifts that have made these studies possible. Stephen has greatly benefited from and been encouraged by this opportunity to research matters of great interest and significance for us as mission practitioners in Europe.

Now Stephen needs to know what God wants him to focus on next. Should he look for full-time / part-time secular work in order to improve our unsustainable financial situation? Or does God have something else in mind. We would ask for your prayers for the way ahead to become clear for us.



### Post-ALPHA Group:

Our post-ALPHA group has continued to meet once a month. We have about 4 or 5 former guests who come along. We have decided to encourage them to engage with the Bible by trialling a 40 day Bible study Stephen has been working on for some years. This study entitled "Jonah – The Epistle of Wild Grace" is envisaged as a course, where people do 5 studies on their own during the week and then get together to share and pray through what they have learned. Stephen hopes to publish this eventually.

We will have to start gently as none of our friends have any experience of Bible study. So we envisage asking them to complete 4 meditations on their own during the month, then we will gather together on a Saturday morning to share what God has been saying to us through

these studies.

Please pray for Stephen as he translates / re-writes his material for the group. Please pray that as our friends start to engage at a deeper level with God's word they will meet with God and be transformed by that meeting.

### **School Account:**

We set up this account some years ago for people who wanted to give specifically towards our boys' education. Now that Caleb is set to leave school this summer – all going well! – we have decided to close this account. We do thank those who have given, and continue to give towards our boys' education. It is a constant source of amazement to us that we have 2 boys at university and yet we are still managing to survive financially. Given our feeble resources we have no idea how this can be happening. Truly God's mathematics are very strange (and wonderful)!

Any future gifts should therefore be sent through the normal channel for gifts i.e. our friends at the "Scriptural Knowledge Institute", who bless us by kindly gathering our financial support each month and forwarding it to us. We can give SKI contact details / information to anyone who would like to give us a one-off, or a regular gift.



On the family front, Ben is still in the process of looking for a work placement for next year. He doesn't yet know where he will need to be in September, but has given up his apartment in Belfort and we need to move him out at the beginning of July.

Joshua has had a tough term. He damaged his left knee-cap very soon after going back to Scotland in January, followed by the other one month later. He has been on crutches for a long time now and has not been able to get around his very large campus easily. He is still having physiotherapy and needs to take things very carefully. Please pray that he would not experience lasting damage from these injuries.





Caleb has applied to the French military to join up as a 'gendarme'! He has a competitive entry exam on May 10<sup>th</sup>, and his final lycée exams at the end of June. May God's will be done!!

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