



M A R C H N E W S S p r i n g 2 0 1 5

Dear Friends and Family,

“...they passed through the Red sea as through dry land” Heb 11:29

When the people of Israel left Egypt, they were blessed by those they had served and left laden down with gifts for the journey. This has certainly been our recent experience, and the fulfilment of a promise Sharon felt God making a while back.

We specifically prayed that we would be able to “finish well” in Villy en Auxois and our last month there was rich in emotion. We experienced a real outpouring of affirmation and gratitude from people, some of whom we didn't even feel we had gotten to know very well. We remain in contact with many and are hoping they will visit us here! We believe that we may even be able to minister to them as they come and spend time in our culture.

Our move went as well as these things ever do! All of our belongings made it, and despite Stephen's rather random space requirement calculations (oops!) we were able to bring everything we had planned to. A gift from dear friends has meant that we have been able to 'fill the gaps', by buying a new bed, a coffee-maker and a microwave, so thank you!! It has meant starting all over again has been a little bit easier.



The parish here have been wonderfully welcoming! There was a hamper waiting for us, food in the fridge, and even a car in the drive – more of that later! They were genuinely happy to see us arrive! On the left is a picture of our new home.

The first month has already passed, believe it or not. It has been a whirl of meeting new people, discovering the parish and the village, as well as trying to spend time on the estate where we will work and eventually live. Talking of which, plans are moving ahead slowly.

The present situation is that we are renting a property belonging to the Diocese of Leicester. They want to sell this in order to fund a move to a new-build house on the estate of Hallam Fields. Because of their specific requirements (it will ultimately be the parish house for curates) finding the right house has been difficult so far.

Please pray that we would move onto the estate in God's good time. However we believe it has been right for us to be here for the start of our ministry – here we are much nearer the church, as well as the village and all the amenities. We have been able to be involved in getting to know the many, many people involved in parish life every week, and even start to remember some names!! (Perhaps not Stephen!)

In terms of our ministry we are in a time of prayer and observation at the moment. We believe this is crucial for whatever lies ahead. We need to spend time getting to know people, to create a team, then together to discern where God is working and how he wants us to join in with His activity. So please pray with us as we move through this initial phase. We are also 'plugging in' to certain parish activities in order to get to know people, and build relationships. Here is a photo of an "Experience Easter" event that Stephen helped with for Year 5 Primary children.



On a personal note, we wanted to thank all of you who helped us in any way to move back to the UK. We were, thanks to you, able to leave France debt-free, and able to pay for most of the removal costs and one-off expenses – nothing short of a miracle, in our opinion!

Please continue to pray for our family. Joshua is extremely busy, travelling to attend conferences in Austria, Germany and Estonia in the next few months. Ben is working and will be rejoicing on June 1st; after this date he will have the right to paid holidays, so he's hoping to visit at some point in the summer. Caleb is also busy with work, and his shift patterns make it more complicated for him to leave the country, but he is hoping to bring Carole to visit family and friends in the UK this summer. So we are hoping to see all the family at some point – but nothing is fixed.



We would appreciate prayer for many situations over the next few weeks. At the moment Sharon is not working. This has meant she has been able to go with Stephen to many events, 'remind' him of people's names (!!), participate in discussions, and find the nearest shops... all useful but not paid employment. Please pray and let us know if God says anything to you about that.

The picture on the left is from Watermeads Country Park - a 10 minute stroll from our front door. So our locality is not so urban as we feared!

Please also make finding a new(er) car a matter of urgent prayer! It has been great to be mobile from day 1 and a real blessing, but the little Corsa is 14 years old and has already done 110,000 miles. Its MoT runs out in May and it may not be possible or worthwhile to spend money doing all the necessary work to get a new one. In our current location we have 2 small supermarkets, 5 take-aways, 3 charity shops, 4 pubs, 4 coffee shops and a library - all within

a 10-minute walk!! So we can survive without a car for a while. However, we do need a reliable car for longer journeys and for visiting family etc. One complication is that as we have been out of the UK for 14 years we have no credit rating, so we cannot get a bank loan. So please pray that God would provide both the funds and the right car for us. We find buying cars a daunting process.



As soon as Stephen was appointed, we began to pray that God would place the people he wanted on the estate where we will be working. We have found out a bit more about it and would ask for your prayers for this. There is a 50/50 mix of private and social housing. Some of those in the social housing are very resentful of the fact that they have been relocated from difficult areas in Leicester and Loughborough to try to help them make a fresh start away from unhelpful influences. The local builders made many promises about amenities on the estate which have

not been kept. There were plans for a new school, and Stephen will attend a meeting of stakeholders on March 20th, but it looks as though the school may now not even be built on the estate itself but across a busy main road, cutting it off completely and again leaving us with no community space. There is a community centre planned, but has been down-sized from the original promise and won't be completed for at least another year, so any ministry we undertake will, of necessity, be small-scale and based in our home or the homes of other Christians on the estate. There are tensions between the different levels of local government about the estate - a development imposed against the locals' wishes. With no school, no church, no shops, no doctor, no bus service, no pub(!), there is nothing to give a community feel or make the place attractive. So all in all it is a bit of a sad place that only the power of prayer will transform!! (Your mission, should you choose to accept it!)

One blessing of being back in the UK is being closer and easier travel to visit family.

Stephen's mom was able to visit for her birthday - here we are at a very 'frilly' Tea Shop to celebrate her 74th birthday!

Sharon has also been able to make a quick visit to her mom for Mothers' Day.

With our thanks for your continuing prayers and support. God bless you all.

Stephen, Sharon, Ben, Josh, and Caleb



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