



## The MARCH family wishes you a very 'Happy New Year!'

Dear friends,

On 31 January 2015, we left France with heavy hearts, but with many precious memories of our 14 years spent in Villy en Auxois. Since then the time has flown..... our new life in the UK is gradually taking shape. But it is a process that involves both grieving for things lost (relationships, experiences, etc.) and also the challenge (sometimes exciting, sometimes frightening) of a new existence, a new mission, a new adventure with God.

Stephen's work with an Anglican parish of St James and Our Lady and St Nicholas here in Birstall and Wanlip is starting to take shape. We have been truly welcomed by the whole parish, although the idea of having some sort of pioneering project is a challenge to many!! The goal is to leave church-based activity and create a place 'outside' where people who are uncomfortable with traditional church can explore faith and encounter Jesus. We want this space to be accessible, user-friendly, open to all, creative, and relational.

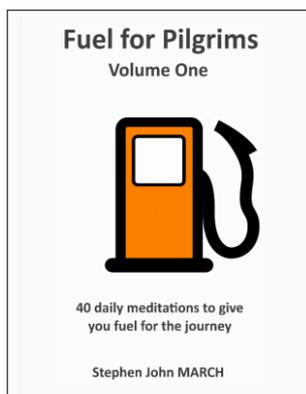
Our group is called NEARER, with the motto "NEARER to God, NEARER to Jesus, NEARER to each other." We are a small group of about a dozen people, and things are progressing slowly. We meet every week in our home to share together and explore what being a disciple of Jesus might mean for us, here, today. We also have a monthly Sunday afternoon 'space' where we invite not-yet-Christians to come and explore such real-life issues as anger, forgiveness, worry etc. We look at these issues in a variety of different ways and imagine how faith and a relationship with Jesus might make a difference in these areas.



One of the highlights of our year was our appointment by the Bishop of Leicester as 'Pioneer Ministers' to the NEARER Fresh Expression of church. This ceremony took place in Leicester cathedral and was part of a major diocesan celebration of lay ministry. We also had the pleasure of celebrating our confirmation into the Church of England, so for the first time in many years we now have an official spiritual 'home'. We are impressed by the leadership of our diocese and the quality of all those in responsibility we have met. Things are growing here in Leicester. Many new homes are planned for our area in the immediate future, with all of the challenges that brings. Stephen still hates driving (or rather stop - starting, as he calls it) on our busy roads, but Sharon is happy to be able to walk to the shops!

Sharon recently found a part-time job working at an adult education centre teaching English to people from Asia and Eastern Europe. It has taken a few months to find her feet, but she feels that she is getting there now. It is great to be able to get to work in 10 minutes, or even walk there around our lovely lake!

Our home, a large curate's house which we rent from the diocese, is a busy place. We often have people round and continue the French tradition of good food and good wine whenever possible! We have had many of you visit us too, renewing old friendships and making new ones. All of our boys have made it to see us, and we had a great 3-day period in the summer when we were all together. We were even able to celebrate Caleb and Carole's engagement then in good summer weather! We also had the pleasure of welcoming Father Yves Grosjean to our home for his summer holiday. He tasted British beer and British food. Everything went well, he even survived! His visit also helped us to keep our French language skills honed.



Stephen continues to write his books. This year, two new ones have seen the light of day. These books were created from his blog 'www.fuelforpilgrims.org' (also available in French on "www.lepaindespelerins.org").

Each volume has 40 daily meditations to give you 'fuel' for your spiritual pilgrimage. The third volume will be released in January 2016 ([www.lulu.com/spotlight/stephenjohnmarch](http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/stephenjohnmarch)).



Just as we arrived back from France, you may remember, the Euro crashed in value, and so we were unable to buy anything reasonable, or long-term, car-wise. So we just went mad and bought an old two-seater sports car (a 16 year old Mazda MX5)! This has turned out to be a great blessing! We had tremendous



fun in the summer, tootling along country lanes with the top down! However, now that the winter weather has arrived is a bit less amusing. We would love to have a car we could take to France, but so far this hasn't been possible.



Our children are well. Benjamin is still in Strasbourg, where he works as an IT engineer at KUHN. This summer he made a trip to Sweden and became a fan of Nordic life! Joshua is still in Stirling in Scotland where he continues his doctorate in psychology, attending quite a few conferences this year all over Europe. Caleb is still in Dijon at the National Police, and is part-way through the process to move up a grade. It is hard for us to know that we have no family home, and we really felt that at Christmas. It was the first time we had not been together since the birth of Benjamin in 1990. But other people have greater sadness to deal with.

We have hope! Hope in the Christ who came as a baby, who grew and experienced our human state with all its joys and sorrows, who died and who rose again and who will come back! So we look forward to 2016 in anticipation! Happy New Year to you all!!

### Stephen, Sharon, Ben, Josh, and Caleb

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