



## Happy 2017!

Dear friends,

Firstly let me offer you our prayers and best wishes for 2017. May this year be one in which you go with God into whatever adventure he has in store for you and may it bring you joy and fulfilment.

A great writer on Fresh Expressions described pioneering as feeling like you're at the top of the roller-coaster and at the bottom at the same time<sup>1</sup>. There is joy, excitement, and hope as you meet people and they start to connect with your community, as you see them starting to respond to the love of Jesus and begin to be transformed by it. But at the very same time there is also strong sense of anxiety that everything is very small, very fragile, and could disappear in a puff of smoke at any moment!

When I read that in a book it resonated with me immediately. That is where we live most of the time! I actually met the author, Dave MALE, at a conference this summer and thanked him for writing it.

As followers of Jesus we have to hold two things in tension:

*Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5 :19 NIV)*

*I can do all things through him (Christ) who strengthens me. (Philippians 4 :13 ESV)*

In the first text Jesus states his inability to achieve anything by himself except in those moments when he has aligned himself with God's will and God's power is working through him. In the second text St Paul affirms his conviction that with God's indwelling power he can face up to anything life can throw at him.

So we have this joint sense of frailty and invincibility! It is hard to hold both of those in tension, but it is our calling as followers of Jesus. Perhaps the phrase 'hopeful anxiety' best sums up how we move forward into 2017!

For us 2017 already looks like being an eventful year!

Stephen is about to begin his final year in the 3-year Pioneer Minister post; we wait to see whether this will be extended, or if God has something else for us in 2018, or maybe a combination of both – who knows!? Training and coaching pioneers is one thing that appeals.

Sharon continues to work part-time teaching English as a foreign language and also runs a community choir that is now up to 30 members!



<sup>1</sup> Dave MALE, Pioneers 4 Life, BRF : Abingdon, 20111, p67



Caleb has just begun a year-long training course at police college in France in order to move up a grade to 'Gardien de la Paix' (Police Constable).

Here is a photo of him, his fiancée Carole, and Piou-Piou, the cat!



Joshua is set both to complete his doctorate in psychology and to get married to Lindsay in August!

So far Benjamin has not announced to us plans for any great upheaval ... so at least there is some stability there!

Here he is with his girlfriend Mélodie who seems to be lovely; they seem to be very happy.



So lots to look forward to in 2017! Our NEARER community has been praying that God would give us a place to meet on Hallam Fields. Imagine our joy when a brand new and very large Care Home invited us to have our weekly meetings on its premises and to have them open to its residents, families, and staff! So last week we had our first session in their rather swish community lounge and we look forward to where this might lead.

Later in the year a new primary school is scheduled to open on the estate. Imagine our joy when Sharon was invited to be the Chair of Governors! This will be a major investment of her time and energy but we really see this as God's invitation. It will provide us with lots of opportunities to build community, to offer loving service, and to show and share God's love with the community of Hallam Fields.

So lots to think about, to pray about, and we need to keep alert, watching for any signs of God moving. I once heard mission described as, 'Praying until the Holy Spirit starts to move, and then when He does, trying not to fall off!' Sounds pretty accurate to me!

Thank you again for your faithful prayers and support which is the only reason we are still here, loving God, having fun, and involved in His mission in the world. Be blessed, be a blessing!

**Stephen, Sharon, Ben, Josh, and Caleb MARCH**

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