

We wish you a blessed 2018!
Please pray for us!
Stephen & Sharon MARCH



New Year 2018

Dear friends,

Thank you for praying for us and for supporting us.

We know we say that every time – in fact we've been saying it since 1995! – but we REALLY do mean it. Knowing that people are praying for us and interested in what we are doing is a fantastic source of blessing, encouragement, and hope. So a great big 'Thank You!' Hopefully the enclosed fridge magnet will remind you to keep praying!

As we look forward to 2018 we are really conscious of our need of your prayer. Stephen's contract with the parish ends on 28th Feb and as yet we have nothing lined up after that. Over the past 6 months we have been praying, seeking God, applying for jobs. There were some things that looked like they might be possible; Stephen even had 3 interviews with 3 different dioceses, but so far every door has shut in one way or another.

This leaves us in a somewhat anxious state as the date of our last pay cheque fast approaches! As Sharon's part-time wages are not sufficient for us to stay living in this rented house in Leicester we will have to move, probably to go and live with friends, if nothing else turns up before the end of February.

But as we look back at how God has been faithful since 1995, when we walked away from our secular jobs and followed His call, we have a peace and a sense of security that the God who has never failed us in all of that time will not do so now. Often God seems to take us right 'up to the wire' and to use these situations to sharpen our focus on Him and to test and strengthen our faith. We pray that God will give us the courage, faith, hope, and joy that we need to live this situation well, and come through it stronger and sharper with an increased confidence in His faithfulness.

The past 6 months have been very intense as we have sought to do as much as we could to help and support NEARER, our Fresh Expression of Church, so that the group can continue to grow and thrive after we leave. Please pray for Andrzej, Gill, Jill, and Pete as they seek to lead this community forwards in the coming months and years.

It has been encouraging to see people growing in discipleship, to hear people speaking of how being in NEARER has brought them back to faith, or renewed their faith. It is exciting to see how God has opened up good contacts for us within our community – in care homes, schools, shops, the parish council and various community groups.

We are meeting people who are building the Kingdom of God without knowing it – in that they are caring for people, promoting human flourishing, and building community. Sometimes it is really powerful when we can just say to them 'You know God smiles on what you are doing!' The Bible calls these people 'People of Peace' (Luke 10:6) and they are important allies in the work of mission – this is perhaps one of the greatest insights of the Fresh Expressions movement, to see that there are people who aren't (yet!) part of the Church, and yet who can and will help us in the building of the Kingdom of God.



As we look back over the year we have seen many changes. We were thrilled to finally be able to visit Rome for a few

days in April and thoroughly enjoyed it – even if our feet were aching by the end of the trip!! Our return was not so great – we had a ‘rat invasion’ that meant our kitchen floor needed to be removed... we were out of the house for weeks staying with friends, and the mess and subsequent clean-up took its toll.

Sharon had to do jury service which saw most of June fly by. July saw NEARER help with the installation of furniture at the new school where Sharon is Chair of Governors and it was great to see it open in August – a fantastic answer to prayer!

Family life has been a source of joy for us this year, especially with Joshua and Lindsay’s wedding in Inverness on August 10th. It was great to see so many friends and family gather to celebrate in true Scottish style and begin to get to know each other. But the day was tinged with sadness as Caleb and Carole couldn’t be with us. His studies at Police Academy meant his final exams took place the same week as the wedding.

Thankfully Caleb passed everything and was able to choose his preferred posting, so September saw us back in France for the first time since we left in 2015 to be at his passing-out parade. It was a tough course and an emotional reunion – we hadn’t seen him for 20 months and that was too long for all of us. We are very proud of him and he has settled well into his new job in Lyon.



November saw a nail-biting end to Joshua’s studies as he defended his PhD thesis. He was delighted to be asked to make only minor corrections and will soon be Dr March!! Needless to say we are all very proud of his achievement. He and Lindsay are settled in Dundee where Joshua is lecturing in Psychology.

For once we were all able to be together for a family Christmas!! That hasn’t happened for a while, and it was just great to have everybody at one of our favourite places – a gîte in rural Champagne where we have gotten to know the lovely proprietors of the vineyard. It really was a cause for celebration, and celebrate we did!!

Finding joy in each day is easier at some times than others. But it is always hard to say good bye, especially, as at this time, when we don’t know how we can plan for the future or when we will see each other again. Modern life is complex, and we realise that many of you also experience this.

Thank you for your prayer for us and for those who support us financially. Please uphold us in this stressful time of transition and pray that God would keep us in the centre of His will for our lives.

Be blessed, be a blessing!

Stephen, Sharon, Ben, Josh, and Caleb MARCH