

Summer 2018

Dear friends,

“All Change!!!” might be an appropriate title for this letter. At least, that’s what life has felt like since Stephen started his new job in the diocese of Leicester in February.

Stephen has settled in well to his new role. God seems to be using him in networking - connecting people in a mutually beneficial way – and also in listening to and supporting pioneers who are often working alone and without much encouragement and oversight. Many of them have already said how important these conversations have been for them.



It has been a big change for us both. We are no longer involved in NEARER - not totally through conscious choice. We had felt that it was right for us to step away for a few months in order to allow the new leadership to take over. But once this period had ended – with the new leaders are doing well and taking the mission forward - God seemed to bring along other things which happen on Wednesday evenings and which have often prevented us from attending NEARER. We also have a growing sense that our time in the community has come to an end. We still see the NEARER community members socially – they are our dear friends - and we are still committed to pray for them and support them as we can, but at the moment we are much less involved in their activities.

Stephen finds his new role very interesting. He has met the Bishop and delegates from our sister diocese in Wyoming. It is a very different place from Leicestershire. They have the same population in the state as we do in Leicestershire (600,000) but they have more than 120 times more land! We have 746 people per square mile, they have 6!

The Wyoming delegation has visited Leicester so that we can share with them what God is doing through Fresh Expressions of Church in our diocese. They are keen to adopt the same approach to mission and a further delegation will be visiting Leicester in November.



Stephen also gets to meet with people in similar roles to him from other dioceses in the UK through various conferences and being part of different learning communities. It is very exciting and enriching to learn from each other’s’ approaches and experiences.

Meeting different people means that Stephen has opportunities to share his books, and it is great to see that nearly 1400 copies of the various titles have now been bought or downloaded. As all the eBook downloads are free, they are a useful resource for churches and Fresh Expressions to use for Bible study and discipleship groups (www.lulu.com/spotlight/stephenjohnmarch).



For Sharon, things are coming to an end in her paid employment as a tutor for 'English for Speakers of Other Languages'. This role has been a challenge! She is happy that many of her learners have succeeded in their exams and are moving on to find work. But the paperwork, hierarchy and demands on time outside the classroom have increased to the point where they cause more and more frustration and teaching is no longer the primary activity. Alongside this growing frustration about the nature of the job has been an increasing sense of God's call to 'make a space' for God to do something. Obviously this has an impact for us financially, we are so appreciative of those who still support us through SKI each month; your gifts make this step of faith less scary.

So Sharon is following God's prompting and giving up work to 'make a space' and will wait for God's invitation. As part of her exploration about what God's call might be, she has had a conversation with the diocese about the distinctive diaconate, i.e. being ordained as a 'permanent deacon' and not just becoming a deacon on the way to becoming a priest. But the Church of England system is designed around traditional parish ministry and as we have been involved in a Fresh Expression of Church for the past 3 years it is hard for them to adapt their system to Sharon's particular case.

MAKE ROOM

CREATING SPACE FOR GOD



This is frustrating, but Sharon has clearly felt God telling her that this was 'a battle she did not need to fight' – Exodus 14:14 "Stand still, the Lord your God will fight for you!!" So she is happy to wait, listen and support Stephen by doing more at home. In fact it often feels as though we have swapped roles compared to our time in France!!

Joshua and Lindsay are adapting well to married life. Lindsay has a part-time job in administration and Joshua is coming to the end of his first teaching year at Dundee University. They are happy in their flat and we look forward to seeing them over the summer. Josh has another year to do in Dundee before looking for a permanent job. He graduates finally from Stirling University and is awarded his doctorate on June 27th. We are travelling up to be there and celebrate!! Who would have thought it???? We praise the Lord for the many among you who have been involved in supporting our family in practical ways over the years, and give thanks!

Ben is coming over for 10 days and will travel up to Scotland with us and then holiday here with us in Leicester. He enjoys his job and has taken the plunge - he is buying a lovely flat in Strasbourg with a balcony - you can even see the cathedral from it, he says! We hope to get over there later in the year.

Caleb is doing well in Lyon. He is taking more responsibility in his job and has had to deal with challenging cases for the first time recently. He is under pressure to pass his driving test in order to have his permanent contract at the end of his probationary year in October – your prayers for this would be very much valued. Driving lessons are very expensive, and working shifts makes it difficult to get enough driving time to improve.



Our own future is not so clear - we are still in the same house at the moment - but a quarter of Stephen's time is allocated to being personally involved in a Fresh Expression of Church. Until the end of July, this time has been allocated to a consultancy role researching a parish and writing a report for the Archdeacon that will enable her to design a complementary 'House for Duty' role to advance mission in the parish. Once this project is complete we do not know what Stephen will be tasked with for this part of his role – and what he has to do may affect where we are required to live. So we would appreciate your prayers about this.

Be blessed, be a blessing!

Stephen and Sharon MARCH

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NEARER Resources - FxC Resources - <https://tinyurl.com/y7yf7gvm>