



# Best Wishes for 2019!

Dear friends,

You may have thought we had forgotten about our prayer supporters! Not at all! However, moving house, new ministry, and technical hold-ups with the magnets have delayed things. Sorry!

2019 finds us at the start of another new adventure... but before we look ahead, looking back over 2018 we see...

**Uncertainty and resolution.** This time last year saw us waiting and wondering where we could go and what we could do in 2018, moving on from heading up our Fresh Expression of church in Birstall, NEARER. Many times we remembered,

*'We wait in hope for the Lord, He is our help and shield' Ps 33v20.*

Come February, however, a new job for Stephen meant change in many ways as he took on a new role as a Pioneer Development Worker with the Diocese of Leicester. This role is only until the end of 2019. After that, well, who knows?

**Standing still and moving on.** At the start of 2018, Sharon was working in 2 places with many ESOL classes to teach. In March she felt it was right to give up half and spend more time at home, watching, waiting and praying to see what God would bring along. She then felt it right to give up work completely in June. Those of you who have made similar choices know how scary that can be! But as usual, it was well worth the wait.

In August she began to work with the Diocese a few days a month managing lay (i.e. non-clergy) training and assessment. This is on-going and a real stretch in many ways, but it is a privilege to be part of a diocese with discipleship and mission at its heart, and to have input from many accomplished speakers.

Then in September a 3 day a week post was advertised in a group of churches in South Leicestershire to help them engage in pioneering work over their 11 churches and 4 schools. We applied and Sharon was appointed to the Avon-Swift family of churches as a Pioneer Minister. This meant a move – this is not a paid post, but we are provided with free housing.

As you can see from this photo, much of our time will be spent gardening!



**Throwing out and gathering in.** Moving is tough! Despite only being in Birstall for three and a half years, we managed to fill all the available space! Cleaning out and sorting through belongings is always good, and a reminder of what really is important to us.

The removal firm was fantastic, but it has taken us a while to find a home for things and begin to feel comfortable here. Our situation here in lovely North Kilworth reminds us very much of rural France, so not exactly new to us. We need transport to do anything, and so does everybody else..... but there is a school across the road, a garage, a pub and a

Post Office, just no shops! We have logs for the fire and apples from the trees, and are beginning to connect with our neighbours.

**Arrivals and departures.** We were delighted to be able to get up to Scotland and celebrate a special birthday for Sharon's Mum in March. We have visited Stephen's Mum in Rhyl frequently too, as well as having her here on holiday with us in August.



Ben made it to Scotland this year in June, coming to Joshua's graduation at Stirling University on the hottest day we have ever experienced there!

It was a proud moment to see Joshua being awarded his PhD in Psychology. We managed to visit Joshua and Lindsay and see their flat in Dundee where Joshua is lecturing at the university.

Ben has moved this year; he has bought a lovely home in Strasbourg.

He was brave enough to invite us all to be there for Christmas – it was such a fantastic time!! Having a few nights all together this year was a real highlight (maybe you could remember that when you are fed up with having your family around!) It is always difficult to manage schedules so

that we can spend time together, but Caleb and Carole managed to add 2 extra days to his time off at Christmas as a surprise present to us – and so made his Mum cry! Christmas dinner was duly eaten and champagne drunk on the 26<sup>th</sup> December.

**Teaching and learning.** We have been able to provide input for many groups visiting the diocese this year, talking to them about Fresh Expressions of Church and helping them to see how they could try it out in their setting. We have spent time with groups from France, Germany and most recently Wyoming.



This is something we really enjoy and are glad to be able to do it together. Our new circumstances mean we have been welcomed as part of a team working over 11 churches and 4 schools, made up of both clergy and now lay people. This is a new model for the diocese and we are praying it will be a fruitful one. The number of people attending services is not growing, so our role is to connect with people where they are and instead of inviting them to come to church, we help them connect with God and move on in a way that will lead to an expression of church they feel comfortable with.

**Rest and relaxation!!** This year sees Caleb and Carole's French wedding in April. We have booked a lovely country house near Dijon to host those who will be coming and for the small reception afterwards. We hope to see Sarah, Stephen's sister, in July as she comes over from Canada. Ben is doing a major road trip there with friends in the summer, so will see her before we do!

Please note our new address and telephone number below.

Be blessed, be a blessing!

## Stephen & Sharon MARCH

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