

## 2020 FRENCH STAFF CONFERENCE



### Current events

We were just about to begin writing you an Easter card when everything changed. Because of the current situation we are sending this letter by email only. Restrictions on our lives seem to change almost daily. For some these restrictions are simply inconvenient. For others they're scary. Even though the spread of the virus may seem out of control, God remains in control. The theme of our staff conference was well-timed.

### A Christian World View

This was the main subject of our annual gathering in the February holidays – the one time each year we all get together. Around 100 of us (including kids) descended on a holiday village in the Ardèche region of southern France.

We were quick to realise just how important our world view is. It's the lens through which we see and interpret reality. A world view provides the answers to these questions : *Who am I ? Where am I ? What is the problem ? What is the solution ?* Our world view is part of our culture : most of the time we don't even realise it's there but it affects everything. We were challenged by the idea of a "dualist" world view where things are divided into 2 opposites : holy and secular, Christian and non-Christian, inside (the church) and outside, spiritual and material. But this dualism finds its roots in Greek philosophy. A view our speakers felt is more in line with scripture could be summarised as : *creation, fall, redemption, final completion*. To unpack that a bit : God created the universe and people *good*. Then the fall happened, which marked or stained everything but did not *entirely ruin* mankind or the world. Mankind and the world are of course still in need of redemption which was accomplished by Christ on the cross, and final completion will come at Christ's return. A dualist worldview tends to focus mainly on *fall and redemption*, sometimes underemphasizing the good that still remains in the world. We had very interesting discussions in our small groups.

Each year we recognise staff for their years of faithful service, but this time we had a very special one for **Claude & Katia Billard**. They are already semi-retired and this was their last national staff conference. Claude has been in ministry over 40 years and has worked with students, in HR and has run operations. And we have lots of personal history together. Claude and I shared an apartment, along with another staff guy, when I first arrived in France. My French vocabulary greatly increased thanks to Claude, in particular when I was a passenger in his car... Claude was my best man, and gave one of the funniest best man speeches I've heard – in English no less ! I also had the privilege of being his best man, and Claude & Katia looked after Paul several times when he was small. For years we worked side-by-side with Claude & Katia at the office. They will be greatly missed.





### Couples' day

Rewind to last November (well before Corona in France). Not long before the event, I was ill in bed and we thought about cancelling. Plans had been in the works since the Spring. In the end we went ahead with A Day Away in a southern suburb of Paris. We were glad we did.

Here are a few comments : *"We understood that we need to face things together to move forward together."* *"It motivated us to make our marriage our first ministry."* *"It was a one-on-one time*

*where we spoke about our marriage and difficult subjects."* *"We forgave each other."* *"I learned how to communicate effectively."* *"It helped us understand each other."* *"We understood the importance of having planned, dedicated time together."*

### Family news

Paul, Julianne & Lily are all well. Both Paul & Julianne are working from home (photo) and Lily's childcare person isn't working at the moment, so she's at home during the day too. Lily is talking more and more and likes to imitate her parents, doing things like pretending to read a book to her bunny rabbit.

### For Prayer

- Please pray for all of us here in France as we are now in lockdown, as you may be. We just barely had time to set up distance working for us at the office. All conferences and ministry gatherings have been cancelled until further notice.
- Pray for creativity and technology that works well as we re-arrange every gathering we can to go on line. One campus staff person told me she seems to be having deeper spiritual conversations with people now than before the crisis.
- Please pray for Janette and our accountant as they complete our 2 audits remotely.
- Pray we see and seize opportunities to love and serve our neighbours and to share the hope and stability we have in Jesus
- Pray that God will show us how we should continue our ministry after the crisis.



*God Bless,  
Rick & Janette*