

Saint Maurice, France
Octobre 2015



Dear friends and family,

It's about time for us to give you some news about what has been happening in our lives here. Each one of us will share about some recent occasions where we have been able to share in ministry with others.

News from Janie



The voice of Isaiah calling out, "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD", and proclaimed by John the Baptist, draws our attention to the rapidly approaching Advent season,

as their words continue to mark our thoughts and work. Preparing hearts and minds through the teaching of worship and worship renewal continues to be one way in which we continue to strive to help church leaders and lay people to plant solid worship practices in order prepare themselves and their congregations for God's Kingdom. A recent worship seminar is but one example. At the end of the summer, thirty-five people, aged from 18 to 65 and principally from Pentecostal and independent evangelical churches, gathered for a week-long seminar to explore the biblical, theological, and practical dynamics of worship and congregational song. (A waiting list of fifteen people clearly illustrates a growing interest in this subject.) Participants clearly demonstrated their strong interest in the subject matter by braving 11- hour days of theory and practical application workshops. Their attention and perseverance was truly inspiring! The teaching team was composed of Eric Pires-Antunes, the coordinator of the seminar, Oscar Balezou-Gloom, a jazz pianist and church elder, who, along with Eric, was responsible for worship music and its practical application in the worship service. I, along with Eric, was responsible for the biblical and theological aspects of the worship and their impact on congregational song repertoire and choices for worship services. Word is getting out and an increasing number of churches are requesting intensive sessions on worship and worship renewal.

Ecclesiastes states that there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity. The season seems to be ripe in France for teaching about worship. Follow up teaching has also included involvement in an evangelical, continuing education program for adults. Future training sessions in the various aspects of worship are in the offing. What a learning experience for me. I hope as much for those participating in these future events. It is my prayer that these various workshops contribute to the building up of God's Church and God's mission to the world.



News from Neal

In late September, I had the privilege of spending three days teaching in London at the Community of St. Anselm at Lambeth Palace, which is the headquarters of the Anglican Communion. This is the first year of existence of the community, and I was one of several people invited as a guest lecturer.



The following paragraph, taken from the website of the community, describes its purpose:

The Community of St Anselm is being established by the Archbishop of Canterbury to draw young Christians aged 20-35 from all over the world together for one year of prayer, theological reflection and service in local communities. The community will be based at Lambeth Palace, the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury in London.

Several videos found on the following link describe the community, its origin and purposes. I encourage you to watch them if you are able to access them.

<http://stanselm.org.uk/video/>

I was asked to teach about 16th century Reformation history, presenting the variety of movements that became Protestant, as well as the reform movements within the Catholic Church. Since members of the St Anselm community come from Europe, North America, Africa and Australia, as well as from various Christian ecclesial traditions, the goal was to take into consideration the reasons for the breakup of Western Christianity in the 16th century onwards, and to reflect on current efforts to heal the many breaches.

As was my case, you might be wondering why in the world I, as a Mennonite, would have been asked to teach in such a setting, an experience which included sharing a meal with Justin Welby, the current archbishop of Canterbury. This surprising opportunity can largely be attributed to our long-term relationship with the Chemin Neuf Community. This has been reinforced in the last several years by the fact that one of the associate staff members of the Paris Mennonite Centre, Anne-Cathy Graber, a French Mennonite, is also a member of the Chemin Neuf. Chemin Neuf is a Catholic community with an ecumenical vocation that was begun in France in 1973. This community is comprised of members from different Christian traditions. The development of a relationship between Chemin Neuf and Lambeth Palace is an interesting story in itself, but one too long to share here. My own relationship with the Chemin Neuf community has been primarily as a teacher, as I have taught in several sessions in their theological training programs over the years. For those interested, the following link speaks of both Chemin Neuf and its relationship to the St. Anselm community.

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/pages/chemin-neuf-at-lambeth-palace-.html>

Needless to say, this was a surprising, invigorating and rich experience for me. Once again, the benefits of long term presence and the relationships built up over the years have led to a unique opportunity to teach 15 young people from various origins, and to hopefully contribute in one small way to building bridges of understanding and reconciliation within the body of Christ splintered into many sometimes mutually-excluding groups.

More recently, I spent this last weekend at a retreat center on the Franco-Swiss border with a group of fifty people connected to the “Service Fraternel d’Entraide” (<http://www.sfe-laos.org/wp/>). I was invited to give input in three sessions on missiology in the context of an organization that is primarily involved with health, sanitation and community development projects in Laos, the country that was the most heavily bombed during the Vietnam War and still living in the midst of consequences dating from that period. This bi-national organization (France and Switzerland) is interdenominational, but is strongly linked to the French Mennonites. These people are doing amazing work in a country where it is difficult to openly proclaim a Christian identity.

Many of you have followed the building project of the Châtenay-Malabry congregation of which we are members. The first worship service in the new facility took place on October 11, and the congregation is now entering into a learning process of occupying a new and bigger space.





As we continue our other, regular activities, your ongoing support, emails, letters and prayers continue to encourage us in this Kingdom task which is both ours and yours! May you be blessed! May you be a blessing!

With warmest greetings,

Janie & Neal Blough

