

Memories of the The Early Years of Christ Church Brittany by The Revd John Marvell

Beginnings

Robin has asked me to write about the early days for Pat and myself at Christ Church, Brittany. Looking through my diaries from 2000 until 2008 has brought back a host of happy memories. Roger and Beri Fray came to St Bartholomew's Dinard for a few weeks while waiting for Roger's licensing as chaplain of Christ Church, Brittany, and Beri for her Permission To Officiate (PTO). We got to know each other. They asked if Pat and I would like to join them in the work they were starting and also, would I be happy to join in leading the services. My diary tells me that I was at La Chapelle-Caro on 9th September 2000, to assist with this first service in Roger and Beri's house. Robin and Laura Hillman were also with us and Robin joined us in leading the services. It is good to still see people in the congregation today at Ploërmel who were there with us in Roger and Beri's home at the very beginning.

Progress and growth

These were exciting times as under Roger's leadership, the new Church began to grow. Roger, Beri, Robin, Laura (who qualified as a Reader a little later on), Pat and myself met about once a month to plan our work together. As numbers grew the Frey's looked for somewhere in nearby Ploërmel for the Church to meet. The Catholic bishop was very helpful. This led to us being offered the use of rooms in the Catholic Lycée of the Frères de La Mennais. We had the use of a large room, looking out over the grounds for Sunday and Wednesday afternoon, together with a smaller room where we could have coffee. In addition, we had a room, which we were allowed to use all the time as a vestry. We had started shared lunches at Roger and Beri's house. Members of the congregation then opened their houses for us to join in having a meal after the Ploërmel service. For occasions such as the visits of the Archdeacon, the General Secretary of the Inter-Continental Society and other special events we had the use of the Lycée dining hall. The shared meals that we have enjoyed recently at Ploërmel are very reminiscent of those fun times.

Roger and Beri were soon, with the team, organising conferences and courses to help us all to grow spiritually. The Revd. Debbie Flach (now Area Dean for Northern France) led a very stimulating day for us at the Couvent de l-Immaculée Conception in St-Méen-le-Grande. We had another very helpful weekend at the Lycée led by the team and members of the congregation. There were also away days for fellowship and worship. Alpha courses were soon started which resulted in people coming to a personal commitment to our Lord. Pat and I had the privilege of leading the course at Langoorla in 2003. For the Holy Spirit day, to which all the Alpha course groups came, we met at the Couvent de l'Immaculée Conception.

Expansion

In 2006, the Catholic Bishop in the Bonen area told Roger that there was a little used Catholic Church at Bonen that he could put at the disposal of Christ Church Brittany.

He expressed concern that there were a large number of British people in the area without spiritual support. The work there started with a service once a month from July 2005 to October 2007. The first service for me was in January 2006, with Roger taking a Communion Service assisted by Robin and Laura. Roger asked me to be responsible for the second service. As the journey from Dinard was a long one Laura and Robin kindly let Pat and I stay at their house on the Saturday nights. They have done the same for us many times since. The catholic community only used the Bonen church once a year, and consequently it had become a home for countless mice and bats! This meant someone sweeping and cleaning on Saturday followed by another quick clean before the service on Sunday.

Also, from very early on Roger and Beri started the branch of Christ Church Brittany, which is now at Huelgoat. Revd. Michael Grainger joined us at Ploërmel, later on in Roger and Beri's time. He also led services at Huelgoat and Bonen as well as Ploërmel. Michael also became the Chaplain to the South Brittany Branch of the Royal British Legion. This required him to make many long journeys.

Moving on

Roger and Beri moved on to a new work in the Vendée in April 2006. Michael and I undertook Holy Communion services during the interregnum before Hazel Door arrived as chaplain. During the interregnum I had to take a Christmas service at Ploërmel on the 24th December 2006. I was pleased to be asked, until the music group followed by our two keyboard players gave their excuses, as they were all going to the UK for Christmas. I still had my electronic keyboard and practised all the carols, playing the melody line in octaves. I had to go back and forwards to the keyboard, lectern and communion table rapidly, with flowing robes! We had an enjoyable shared lunch, and I went upstairs to the chapel. It was to be the service of Nine Lessons and Carols. I thought it would all be quite simple and I could stay seated at the organ. To my horror the chapel started to fill with a large number of local French people, until it was packed. I was now challenged to explain everything in French and make all the announcements in both English and French. However, it all finished happily and well.

A new chaplain

Hazel Door became our chaplain from January 2007 until July 2010. Hazel asked Michael, Robin, Laura and I to join her for a staff meeting just after she arrived. I was on the rota to take services for two months until Hazel was settled in. I undertook a holiday cover for Hazel in later 2007. Since then I have been kindly invited to take one or two services over the years, including a very enjoyable Harvest Festival service and shared lunch at Rostrenen.