

History of Christ Church Brittany

“Looking back to the very beginning of Christ Church, it all started in 1999 when the Revd Roger Fray and his wife Berenice, affectionally known as Beri, decided to live full time in their holiday home at La Chapelle Caro near Ploërmel. Originally a primary school teacher, Roger had been a curate and a children’s advisor in the Oxford Diocese. With permission from the Diocese in Europe, Roger and Beri started a church in their home, monthly at first, then fortnightly and finally weekly. After a year or so they were offered a classroom at the Maison Mère of the Frères de La Mennais in Ploërmel.

Here Beri takes up the story in an article she prepared some 15 years after the inception of Christ Church Brittany.

“In worldly opinion refusing the incumbency of a vibrant parish, with all that promised, great people, lovely vicarage, pastoral support of a caring bishop and, yes, a stipend made no sense at all according to many we met. And for what? A new work in a foreign country which we only knew as a holiday place. But we had a promise from our great God;

'Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.' Psalm 37 verses 3&4

So, with the encouragement and promise of pastoral support from ICS (Intercontinental Church Society) and licensed by the Diocese in Europe, we came to Brittany as joint Chaplains in 1999. There was no finance, therefore no stipend, but we had amazing friends who sponsored us for this new work and some still do!

The first challenge was to make ourselves known to the local Catholic Bishop and his clergy who were very welcoming and helpful. Then we needed to make contact with as many English speakers in the area as possible, as we only knew a few. Our estate agent was invaluable in giving us addresses so many letters were sent to people with 'English sounding names'. Advent Sunday 1999 saw the first service of the Brittany Anglican Congregations held in our home with, to our amazement, 18 people attending. We continued to meet there for 10 months when Les Frères de La Mennais made rooms available to us in La Maison Mère, Ploërmel. This was such a blessing and was the first of 4 congregations throughout Brittany that we were enabled to establish. The 2nd, in Nantes, met once a month, and was soon followed by Guerlesquin (now Huelgoat) where an existing Home group asked to become part of Christ Church. The 4th began in Bonen (now Rostrenen), under the leadership of the Hillmans.

Our Father God was, of course, faithful to his promise, and enabled us to minister to a 'parish' the size of Wales from our home in La Chapelle Caro.

Many good people came and joined us. Some stayed, others found it difficult to adapt to life in France, returning to the UK. But it was with joy that we joined so many on Advent Sunday 2014, some 15 years on, to celebrate what God has done and continues to do. We caught up with old friends and made new ones. We felt welcomed and, yes, loved by so many and were greatly encouraged to see that CCB continues to flourish. In a moving service we were reminded of God's mission which He entrusts to all who seek to follow Him. I had the privilege of lighting the first candle on the Advent Wreath as we prayed 'Lord, make us one as we walk with Christ today and forever.' and through music, the Word, prayer and Communion we drew closer together.

During our time in Brittany, when things were rather tough, we were given these words from Habakkuk 1:5; 'Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.'

At that service, this Advent Sunday, I found myself in tears several times, as I recognised how faithful our great God is. I am amazed and honoured to have been part of establishing Christ Church Brittany and helping people 'to know Jesus Christ and make Him known'.

Berenice (Beri) Fray

“At precisely the same time as the Frays, October 1999, we also came to live in Brittany and were put in touch with them by the Diocese in Europe office in London. Robin had been a Reader for many years and offered his services. Beri Fray was also a Reader. In addition, we were greatly helped in the early years by the Revd Dr John Marvell and his wife Pat who occasionally came over from Dinard.

Eventually, after a change of Bishop in the diocese of Vannes, we were offered the use of the Sainte Famille chapel in Ploërmel, which had been converted to include meeting rooms as well as kitchen and toilet facilities. It needed a coat of paint and a thorough clean but has proved to be a most useful facility, which also houses an English library and a room where social events can be held.

At about the same time as the Guerlesquin (later Huelgoat) congregation came into being, David Ray, a retired diplomat, and his wife Margaret, bought an old manor house at Maël- Carhaix not far from Rostrenen. His work had taken them all over the world and they had experienced the

Anglican church in many different settings. Finding there was nothing similar round here they got together with a French couple, the Dallongevilles, and started the Locarn carol service which has continued to this day. It became evident that there were many English speakers in this area who might appreciate a more regular service in their native language. We put out a questionnaire and were encouraged by the response. Before the Frays left to go to the Vendée, it was agreed that we should hold monthly and later fortnightly services at Bonen in the church there which was not needed by the Catholics, except for funerals and the annual Pardon”

As we spoke it was evident that other preachers had offered their services freely and kept our church vibrant and one both Pam and I were able to recall was Michael Grainger who in our early days was regular in attendance at Rostrenen, but Laura was very mindful of others, including the Revd Dr John Marvell (2000 – 2017), The Rev David Clark (2007 – 2010), Revd Lionel Stock (2009 – 2012) and locum priests in 2011 -12 were Revds Ray Jones, John Murray, David Ineson, Roger Wikeley & David Hart (for 3 mths each).

“Our next Chaplain was the Revd Hazel Door, who had a permanent home in the Charente. With her husband Martin, she moved into Josselin and ministered to us for three and a half years before moving back to the Chaplaincy of Poitou-Charentes. The Bishop of St Brieuc at the time, Mgr Fruchaud, was not happy about a woman priest officiating in one of his parish churches so we appealed to Abbé Champion, the Catholic priest in Rostrenen, to help us find somewhere else which would be acceptable to the Catholic hierarchy. That was when he came up with the idea of our using the chapel of Campostal and the Manoir next door. As the boarders now go home at weekends the school didn’t need it on a Sunday and the Headmaster readily agreed to our using the premises free of charge. That was 10 years ago and we are still there. In addition, we have an arrangement with the parish church of Rostrenen to use the parish rooms behind the Presbytery for our Fellowship Group and occasional Chaplaincy Council meetings.

We must especially mention The Revd Jeremy Cross and wife Suzanne who have supported every chaplain and covered the gaps between chaplains.

Most of you will know the Revd Fred Trethewey, our most recent Chaplain, who did a great job in consolidating our various communities and who has now gone to live in Moreton-in-Marsh with his wife, Margaret. We now

await with anticipation the arrival of the Revd Robin Adams and his wife, Donna, who are due to start work in early February 2018.

Well, that in a nutshell is Laura's story, highlighting the amazing way in which God's hand has been evident in our development over the years. As Laura concludes.

“It is now up to us to keep Christ Church going and to ensure that it continues to serve the needs of its members and the wider community. So, as we look back over the past with gratitude, accept the present with all its uncertainties and questions and look to the future with hope, we pray that Christ the King will reign in our hearts now and always. Amen”

Here, from John and Judith Lawl is a small nugget of information which adds to the spirit of involvement in the early days.

“John & I have been involved with Christ Church since services were held at Roger & Beri's home at La Chapelle Caro, then moved to a ground floor classroom at the mother house of Les Frères de La Mennais.

The church set up a drop-in centre in the town and I believe that was how Chris & Elaine came to be involved.

I first met Elaine in 2004 when Colin & Lesley Bessant held a worship & workshop weekend, including dance, creative psalm writing and banner making. We stayed overnight in the big square enclosure there in our camping car, as did several others.

The Bessants came again in 2005 when they organised worship & workshops, did some sketches and had a praise party with a picnic lunch at the campsite they were staying at just outside Ploërmel.