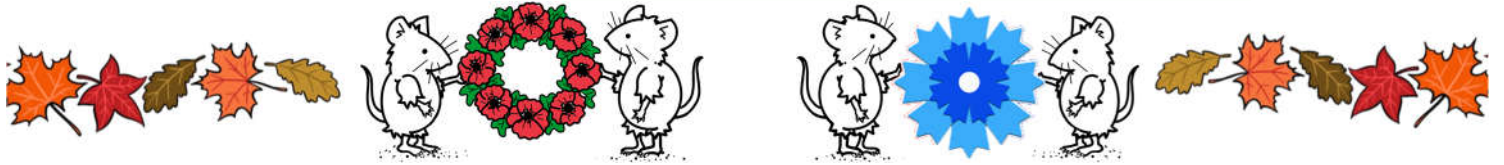




ECHO

NOVEMBER 2023 EDITION



THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH OF OCCITANIE

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X @occitaniechurch



A TIME OF ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION

During October, members of ECO were privileged to be invited to join more than 200 people who gathered to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the Protestant Church *Nouvelle Vie*.

Based near Saverdun in the Ariège, *Nouvelle Vie* is the fulfilment of a dream in the 1980's, when farmer Raoul Mazel and his son Jean-Hubert bought a farm with the intention of creating a Christian Community there.

Over the years, an open barn was converted into a magnificent worship-space, a school was opened and a

Protestant Ministers Jean-Hubert Mazel (left) and Damien Meunier were allowed to have the first taste of the magnificent birthday cake

whole arable and livestock farm created.

Missions were founded overseas and Christians welcomed from around the world.

Representatives of many other churches in the Ariège came to join in the celebrations.

We sang, we prayed, we heard reminiscences from members of the congregation and watched a film which collected together photographic records spanning 40 years of worship and ministry. Then we shared a delicious birthday cake !

We wish *Nouvelle Vie* every blessing for the next 40 years of its Gospel mission in the Ariège





GIVING THANKS FOR HARVEST AND HOLDING OUR AGM



By kind invitation of Margaret Cross, on 5th October ECO held a Barn Service in the Lot Valley to give thanks for the Harvest and also to hold its third Assemblée Générale.

Around 25 people gathered on a brilliantly sunny and warm October afternoon in Margaret Cross' lovely barn near Montaignu de Quercy in the Lot Valley to celebrate the Harvest.

Some people travelled quite a distance to be with us, as we sang the traditional Harvest Festival Hymns and shared communion. As it had been the Feast of St Francis of Assisi on the previous day, we also gave thanks for his ministry.

For our Harvest Offering, this year we invited people to bring donations of food and toiletries to pass on to the local branch of Restos du Coeur, who are currently experiencing an almost unmanageable increase in requests for help. The photograph above of the display of gifts does not do proper credit to the huge generosity exhibited by people who brought in great boxes of items to be presented.

These were all passed on a few days later, and we have been asked to express the gratitude of the Restos team to everyone who donated.

It was also a great pleasure to welcome Linda Trew as our guest preacher. You can read elsewhere in ECHO about Linda's recent graduation at the end of a year's study at the Waverley College.

Setting up a church service in a barn takes a certain amount of work, and so the ECO Team gathered in the morning

to put everything in position. The very bright sunshine gave us a special challenge in how to ensure that the slides on which we had set out the Order of Service and which we would project onto a screen would be easy to read. We were grateful to Margaret for sustaining us with a delicious bowl of soup.

After the service, which lasted about an hour (including short delays while cameras were re-positioned and microphones re-clipped to lapels because the service was being filmed for broadcast on the following Sunday), we adjourned for tea and some delicious home-made cake.

And then, our physical and spiritual needs fulfilled, we held our Annual General Meeting in which we looked both back over 2022/3 and forward into 2023/4.

Our meeting spent a moment in silence to commemorate our good friend and co-founder of ECO, Ralph Worswick, who had died since the previous meeting and to honour his enormous contribution to our church.

Our President's and Treasurer's Reports reported continuing growth in the size of our worshipping community as well as a strong financial position.

We also formally adopted a new Safeguarding Policy (which you can read about separately in ECHO).

When the service was broadcast on the following Sunday, our YouTube Channel reported over 300 viewings. (If you haven't watched it yet, it is still available on our website).



We have been asked to draw our readers' attention to the bright pink boots which Linda Billenness wore to mark the October Rose campaign for Breast Cancer Awareness.





Welcome to Dr Katharina Schächl

On 8th October, Clive and Linda Billenness were delighted to be able to join the congregation of the Église Réformée de Mazères as they welcomed their new Protestant Pasteure, Dr Katharina Schächl, who has been appointed to take up the post of Pasteur of Ariège 2, the group of parishes of Calmont, Mazères and Saverdun (which surround Pamiers).

Katharina was born into a non-practicing Catholic family in Hanover in Germany, and after leaving school she sought a religious life, spending time in a number of religious communities. After 2 years of medical studies, she changed to study theology at the Protestant School in Montpellier.

She undertook first a Master's Degree and then a Doctorate in Theology, and was appointed by the Église Réformée to found a new distance-learning faculty for Bible and Theology students. This was named *Théovie*.

Ordained as a Protestant Minister in 2010, Katharina was placed in charge of Théovie which by happy coincidence led to her coming to live in the Ariège.

In 2023, with her period of attachment to Théovie coming to an end, Katharina was appointed as the new Pasteure for Ariège 2, and on 8th October, the congregations of the three parishes gathered in Mazères to welcome Katharina and to take part in her official induction.

The second photograph above shows the moment when representatives of each congregation, as well as Anne-Marie Feillens, the Regional President of the Church, stretched out their hands over Katharina to pray over her as she took up her new post.

After the service of welcome, the 60-strong congregations adjourned to the garden of the Protestant Temple in the unseasonably sunny weather to share refreshments.

We wish Katharina every success and fulfilment in her new ministry here in the Occitanie.

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS ON THE ARK

The Sunday School were hearing the story of Noah and the Ark and God's promise in the rainbow.

The teacher turned to little Sally and asked her:

"Do you think that Noah was able to do a lot of fishing while they were adrift on the Ark?"

Sally's brow furrowed in deep thought, before she replied

"No I don't think so"

"Why not?" pressed the teacher

"Well", Sally replied quite logically, "He only had two worms."

THE TYPO IN THE GRAVEYARD

A Yorkshireman wanted an inscription on his wife's grave to read: 'She was Thine'.

The engraver mistakenly put 'She was Thin'.

The man contacted the engraver to explain that they had left off the 'e' and asked them to correct the error.

After a fortnight, they phoned to say that the correction had been made.

When the man went to lay some flowers on his late wife's grave, he found that the stone now read:

'E, She was Thin.'



Reverend Jackson found it hard to forget his previous career as the lead singer for a pop group when it came to singing hymns



26th November is the Feast of Christ the King

The last Sunday in November is the last Sunday of the church year, and in some ways the most important.

Why? Because everything else in the Christian year looks BACK on what happened 2000 years ago. The Sunday of Christ the King looks FORWARD to what we can expect next.... the return one day of Jesus Christ to this earth, as King of Kings.

Does the idea of Jesus of Nazareth literally returning to earth seem a bit quaint to accept, in our computerised world of e-mails and the internet? Well, that is what the Bible says will happen – it is promised more than 250 times!

The Bible is quite clear: the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as King of Kings will take place personally, powerfully, bodily, visibly, publicly – and INSTANTLY. (Read Matthew 24:30,31, or 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:3.) Here are words of Jesus Himself:

For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. (Luke 17:24)

This will be no local story for a BBC TV reporter to cover if he gets time. That day he won't be interviewing the Carpenter of Nazareth, wearing Galilean homespun. Jesus will be in His incandescent brilliance as the 'Son of Man' – a bit of a challenge even for TV reporters! Certainly when Peter, James and John were witness to their familiar Master 'transfigured', as the same irradiated Person – in a dramatic preview of Christ's triumphant final rule (Luke 9:28-36), they did not feel very confident.



The martyred Stephen, about to die, had a similar glimpse: "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). The exiled apostle John on the island of Patmos saw the same figure: '...His face was like the sun shining in full strength' (Revelation 1:16.)

When Christ one day returns, the whole world will finally witness this same spectacle (Revelation 1:7). His return will mark the end of history, as we know it. It will inaugurate the final Judgment. It will re-unite the Lord with His Church on earth.

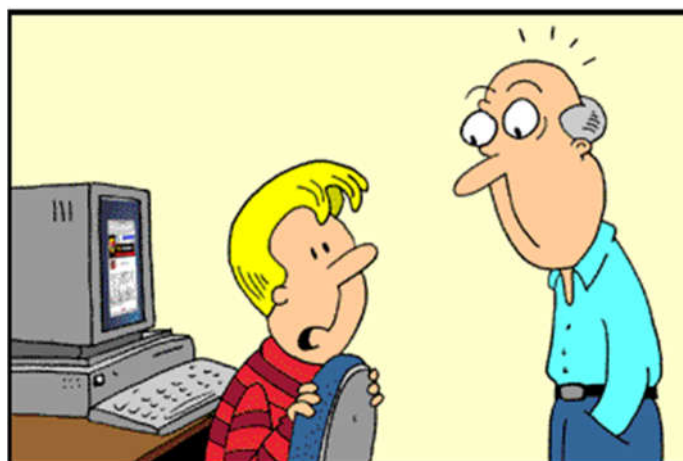
Jesus' return to us will bring about the new heaven and the new earth. Pain, death, persecution, privation and sorrow will all be banished. The entire edifice of evil that has raised itself against the rule of God will be dismantled in a moment.

We have been warned all along not to place a date or a time upon the Second Coming of Christ. (Matthew 24:42-44)

Sadly, many people ignore this warning and waste endless time in calculations. The way in which we should be spending our days before the end is to work, watch and witness to our Lord Jesus – whether or not ours is a world of computers, e-mail and all the rest!

In the meantime, where is Jesus now? The Bible writers tell us that Jesus has returned to the place of privilege and power, and is 'seated at the right hand' of the Father (Ephesians 1:20-21; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3), and is waiting for the Father's timing for Him to return to earth in glory (Mark 13:26-27,32), to raise the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and give them their resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-44).

Jesus will never be a baby again. He is now Christ the King – today, tomorrow, forever.



If God really loves us, why does He allow slow WiFi connections ?

Lot House Group - October 2023

lot.group@ourchurch.fr

Janet Varty

We met on a very wet afternoon to ponder and pray for the lives of those caught up in war.

Aware of the sensitivities around flag waving in various countries we chose to surround the world with white flags to represent the hope of ceasefires and reconciliation.



We opened with that classic 'All We Are Saying Is Give Peace A Chance.' From John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Reminding ourselves of the lack of progress in the world order.



During our service of worship we prayed through Make Me A Channel Of Your Peace by creating 'prayer doodles'. It helps focus our prayer thoughts and fun to share ideas afterwards. Thanks for the idea from Linda. We met around a warm fire for refreshments and friendship.

We will meet next on 30th November.



It's Official, I'm A Waverley Abbey Chaplain

Many congratulations to Linda Trew

On 17th October 2023, following a year of study and placement I was commissioned as a Waverley Abbey Chaplain.

Since 1987 Waverley Abbey College has equipped Christians for their vocations with skills in spiritual formation, mental health and wellbeing, and leadership. They are one of the largest providers of Christian Counselling qualifications in Europe and so when they introduced a new 'Contemporary Chaplaincy' course I was intrigued to learn more.

The Contemporary Chaplaincy course was designed to equip people to support others and share God's love, wherever that may be – in your place of work, school, hospital, community etc.

When I learned of the course, I instantly felt called to apply. As I settled in France with my husband, we were excited to be 'living the dream', however I was conscious that for many people their dreams can be shattered. Illness, guilt of having moved away, bereavement, loneliness, a strain on relationships, financial worries, etc are still very real, wherever you live.

And although you may have lived here for some time, and be fluent in French, I felt the opportunity to speak with someone in your native tongue, during times of difficulty, to have someone that understands your language and will listen may bring comfort. So, with trepidation, I signed up.

I had my placement with ECO where I was able to learn from others on the team. I helped with services, recorded readings, wrote prayers, and more recently delivered my first 'live' reflection during our harvest celebrations. I also enjoyed writing articles for this monthly magazine.

A year on, I have journeyed with people of faith and no faith, from short encounters to longer journeys through bereavement, illness and marriage breakup. It is a real privilege to be there for others.

The commissioning ceremony was a real blessing, coming together with my fellow students and celebrating together. We were presented our certificates in the morning by the College Principal, before a day of prayer, worship, and reflection in the stunning, sacred, ancient abbey grounds.

So now what? Well, I am interested to see where God takes me, and how I can bring His love, comfort, and peace to others.

ECO HAVE ADOPTED A NEW SAFEGUARDING POLICY



Because ECO operates for the greater part of its time online, and therefore almost never comes into direct contact with its worshippers, the risks relating to possible breaches of Safeguarding Protocols are very small.

However, with the increasing instances of hi-tech crimes such as cyber-fraud and cyber-stalking, it is important to always remain vigilant about these matters.

Through their many professional connections, the ECO Team are all very experienced in following Good Practice in areas where Safeguarding Risks might arise.

The French Government make it very easy to obtain criminal records clearances (known as the *Bulletin 3*) a process which is far less complex than its equivalent in the United Kingdom. Criminal records checks can be completed in days as opposed to weeks in the UK.

Our Ministry Team members all therefore maintain up-to-date Criminal Records certifications.

At its inception, it seemed sufficient to make a declaration of conformance with published French Government standards and procedures.

UK reference material can be very unhelpful because it makes reference to safeguarding bodies, procedures and legislation which do not apply in France.

Recently, however, the Conseil National des Évangéliques de France (CNEF), the representative body for all Evangelical Protestant Churches in France, have published a set of policies and guidelines for the

safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, intended for use by any church, and have published alongside it a full translation into English.

Entitled in English “Good Practices to Fight Abuse”, the 44 page document addresses dealing with abuse from a theological, legal and practical perspective, and includes contact details of all the relevant French agencies to which one can turn for help, advice and support.

This document shows how an organisation must conform to French Law in all Safeguarding matters including where there are obligations of professional confidentiality.

At its Annual General Meeting in October, members of ECO voted unanimously to formally adopt the CNEF document as its official policy on Safeguarding.

Copies of both the original French document as well as its English translation can now be accessed from the Safeguarding page on our website as well as details of how to contact someone if you wish to raise an issue about Safeguarding.



November 19th is Safeguarding Sunday

The UK Charity 31:8, named after Proverbs 31:8 “*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute*” has declared November 19 to be Safeguarding Sunday.

ECO is currently planning to broadcast a special Safeguarding Sunday service in collaboration with the online church The Ordinary Office.

We are still finalising the details, but we do hope that you will consider logging in to join us as we consider this important issue which affects so many denominations of Church, including churches here in France.

Church Mice

Karl Zorowski





“He gave us eyes to see them”

A Wall Painting in Pompeii

Rev Canon Michael Burgess consider a portrait found painted on a wall in the ruins of Pompeii

As we examine works of art, we appreciate how they celebrate the wonder of our world – the seasons, the elements, animals and fish, flowers and fruit. They manifest the glory of God the creator. Irenaeus, the 2nd century theologian, went further and wrote that ‘the glory of God is a living person.’ He was echoing Psalm 8: ‘What are human beings that you are mindful of them... you have crowned them and put all things under their feet.’ Yes, the universe teaches of God the creator, but in becoming one of us, the Son of God has put human beings above all Creation.

The nobility of that vision is captured in this 1st century wall painting from Pompeii showing the baker Neo and his wife. They lived at a time when St Paul was preaching and the gospels were being written. We don’t know if those events made an impact on their lives. But we do know that St Paul was executed around AD67, and just twelve years later this couple were victims of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

Their almond-shaped eyes are like windows into their souls. We sense the beauty, but also the fragility. They tell us that life is a gift to be cherished precisely because it is so easily taken from us. Neo’s intense eyes look at us, while his wife looks beyond into the distance. She has the eyes of hopes and dreams that were cruelly shattered by the volcano.

Living men and women, like this couple, are tokens of the wonder of creation, but they also tell us of the transience of that very gift of life. ‘Where can we place our hope?’ we ask ourselves. The feasts of All Saints and All Souls tell us that the end of life here is a door opening into a greater glory and a brighter light. There is wonder and beauty in life here, and with the eyes of faith we can look beyond to glimpse the wonder of eternity.

DON’T FORGET THE WINTER TYRES

Just a reminder that the obligation to equip your car with winter tyres or to carry chains or snow socks in designated areas resumes on 1 November. This year the police will simply issue reminders to drivers who are found without them, but in future years there will be fines for non-compliance.

You can view an interactive map of where snow equipment is required at

<https://bit.ly/snowtyres>

PLANS PROGRESS TO RESTORE EXPATS’ LOST VOTING RIGHTS

The final stage of the process to enable expatriate British citizens to recover their right to vote in the UK, which was restored for people who have resided abroad for more than 15 years by a change in UK Law last year, is expected to be completed shortly.

The regulations necessary to permit people to re-register to vote were laid before Parliament recently and are expected to clear the various scrutiny stages before the end of December 2023. It is expected that re-registration will begin in January 2024, hopefully leaving enough time for re-registrations to be completed before the next General Election, which legally must be called before January 2025.

We hope to be able to include a report on progress on this in the January 2024 edition of ECHO.



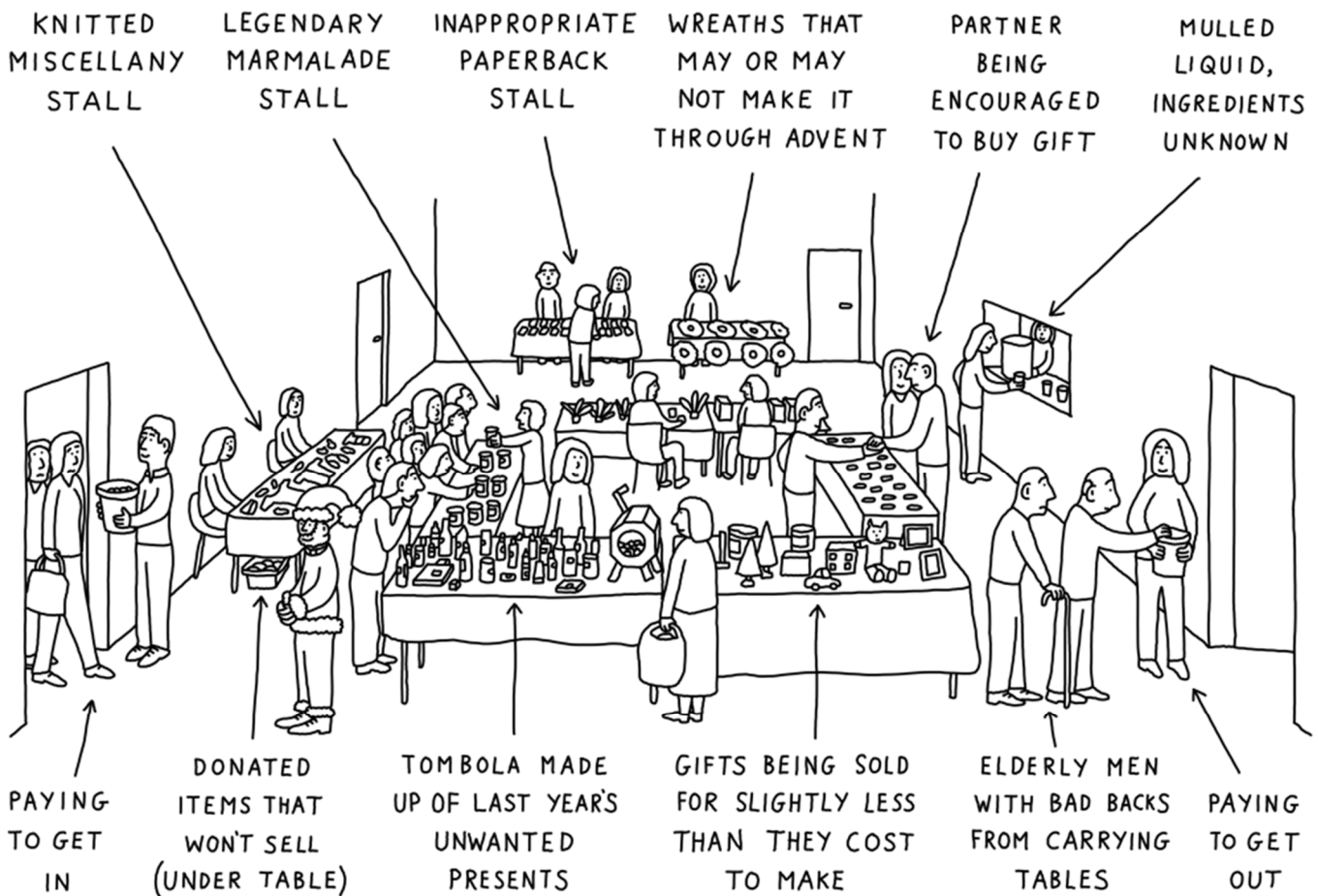
Then the Treasurer came up with an ingenious new fund-raising idea...

ECO WORSHIP CALENDAR NOVEMBER 2023

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
						1		2 20:00 Special Online Service of Prayer for Healing for All Souls Day		3		4	
5 10:30 Online Communion for The Last Sunday After Trinity		6 20:00 Live Evening Worship on Zoom		7 20:00 Service of Evening Compline		8		9 20:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing		10		11	
12 10:30 Special Service of Prayer for Peace and Justice to mark Remembrance Sunday		13 20:00 Live Evening Worship on Zoom		14 20:00 Service of Evening Compline		15		16 20:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing		17		18	
19 10:30 Online Communion for Safeguarding Sunday		20 20:00 Live Evening Worship on Zoom		21 20:00 Service of Evening Compline		22		23 20:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing		24		25	
26 10:30 Online Morning Prayer for The Feast of Christ The King		27 20:00 Live Evening Worship on Zoom		28 20:00 Service of Evening Compline		29		30 20:00 Online Service of Prayer for Healing also Meeting of the Lot Valley House Group					

With thanks to Dave Walker...

PREPARING FOR THE CHURCH CHRISTMAS MARKET (which is why ECO don't organise one...)



CartoonChurch.com

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