

PERSPECTIVES

No. 15 | Autumn 2023 | www.francemission.org

Registered Charity 1176433



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It's nice in Nice

Reflections by Paul Cooke, France Mission's Director

Although I visit France fairly regularly on FM business, it's very rare for me to **holiday** there. In fact, the week that my wife and I recently spent in Nice was the first time we'd had a French holiday for over 30 years – and we loved it!

The British have been loving Nice and the French Riviera since the publication of Tobias Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy* in 1766. Alongside many streets and buildings with English names, there's the **Promenade des Anglais**, of course, and



Nice seafront with the Promenade des Anglais



Old postcard of the Hôtel Régina

also the Hôtel Régina, named after Queen Victoria, who used it as an unofficial winter palace at the end of the 19th century. As

Nice was hosting Rugby World Cup matches during our visit, the number of British voices around was even higher than usual.

All of these ties reminded me of how appropriate it is, therefore, for anglophones to be **committed to praying for and supporting** the spread of the gospel in France. The present issue of *France Mission Perspectives* underlines this commitment. I hope you'll be inspired by the example of a South Australian congregation's investment in prayer for France (pp.4-5). Rebekah Hook (p.3) and Joy McClean (pp.8-9) have recently returned from short-term service in France, while Dave Brown and Gordon Margery (pp.10-13) have both now spent far more of their lives serving the Lord in France than in the UK. Jonathan & Rachel Vaughan (p.14) are well on their way to falling into the same "long service" category, while Adrien Ropert (pp.6-7) is a young Frenchman whose ministry this past year has been possible thanks to the generosity of FM supporters through our Education & Training Fund.

There's so much here for which to give thanks, and it's my prayer that our **50th anniversary event** in 2024 (p.15) will be a wonderful time of celebration for the Lord's ongoing work through France Mission. Thank you for being part of this.

Every blessing in Christ

Paul

Front page photo: FEU beach trip



Paul Cooke

Six months at the Nogent Bible Institute



Rebekah Hook shares about her experience as a student-volunteer



I'm a French and History student at Durham University and have recently finished my year abroad in France. I spent the second semester of 2022-23 living as a student-volunteer at L'**Institut Biblique de Nogent** (IBN), being fully immersed in French language and culture, and getting to experience life at a Bible college!



IBN staff and students



The IBN volunteer team

Moving to a new place always comes with **challenges**, especially when that new place is in a different country, but I saw so much of **God's grace and provision** in these months. Beyond getting to immensely improve my level of French (being forced to live 24/7 in another language does wonders for your fluency), it was a privilege to do life with this community of supportive, passionate Christians.

As a student-volunteer, I divided my time between **studying and working**. In the mornings, I followed courses with the other first-year students (Acts & the

Epistles, Church History, Doctrine, History of Israel, and Minor Prophets), and then spent four hours each afternoon doing general housekeeping, running errands, and preparing the evening meal. Alongside these commitments, I was fully involved in the community life, attending the weekly services, prayer groups, and even the optional Wednesday-morning sport sessions! I was also able to participate in the evangelism and outreach week, connecting with several churches around Nancy, and helping at a youth weekend away with four other students, as well as joining the gospel choir for their tour in the South of France.

It was possibly the most **non-stop** six months of my life, but I'm grateful for every second and I feel so blessed to have had such a special experience. I'd **appreciate prayer** for my final year of studies and, as I begin to decide what comes next, that I'd fully commit these plans to God and have the courage to go where He calls me.

You can contact Rebekah at rebekahook@gmail.com and see an interview with her at bit.ly/RH-IBN



Seven weeks of prayer for France down under



A report from Philip Galley, FM supporter and pastor of Lucindale Bible Chapel

Lucindale Bible Chapel (LBC) is a Christian community in the rural southeast of South Australia. We exist to “bless the community of Lucindale and the worldwide body of Christ through Bible teaching and preaching, through prayer and intercession, and by connecting people in fellowship and community”.



LBC Pentecost Prayer and Praise weekend

Following a full weekend prayer workshop in February 2023, the LBC community began to seek the Lord regarding His desire for our **Pentecost Prayer and Praise weekend** at the end of May. With the recognition that Bastille Day fell around seven weeks from Pentecost this year, the conviction grew that we should host “Seven Weeks of Prayer for the Nation of France”, starting on Saturday 27th May. The season of prayer would culminate with a special “Celebrating God’s Love for the Nation of France” service on Sunday 16th July.

We produced special **prayer cards** focusing on cities and regions of France, French congregations, political leaders, and specific immigrant communities who have made France their home. These had colourful and appealing designs, along

with the LBC logo. The cities and regions chosen were Marseille, Lille, Brittany, Paris, Montpellier, and Nîmes.

“Subsequent feedback from families was that their children had been captivated and inspired to pray.”

There was a wonderful sense of excitement and anticipation as the prayer cards were distributed at our gathering the day before Shavuot (Pentecost). Subsequent feedback from chapel community families was that their children had been **captivated and inspired to pray**, especially when one family put a large map of France on their breakfast room wall. Other people swapped prayer cards, to have the opportunity to intercede for and learn about another city or region in France.



A church farming family at the 16th July service

A large tricolour was also raised on the flagpole adjacent to Lucindale Bible Chapel. This became quite a talking-point amongst locals in our small rural township. “Why is there a French flag flying outside the chapel?” Answering this question was

a total joy as we were able to point to the **power of prayer** and to God’s delight in connecting His people across the globe.

As the tragic events of late June and early July racked the French nation, the LBC community rose to the call to pray and **intercede with greater fervency** for our Christian brothers and sisters – along with mayors, shopkeepers, schools and others affected by the riots – in France.

Personal communication followed with Laurent & Prisca Robitzer, involved in a Christ-centred initiative in the city of Brest.¹ By the time our celebration service occurred on 16th July, these dear people had been well and truly taken into the hearts of our Aussie farming community. **God richly blessed** the 16th July service, as several newcomers and visitors “found their way” to the chapel. One lady “just so happened” to be visiting the region all the way from Melbourne (486km away) and was able to join us for the service and the French-themed lunch that followed. This dear woman even has a French surname – de Caux!

One thing is certain – praying for the nation of France over a **seven-week period** blessed LBC at least as much as it may have blessed and encouraged our French brothers and sisters! In the words of King David, as his prayers find their fulfilment: *“Blessed be His glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with His glory! Amen and Amen!”* (Psalm 72.19).

¹See the report on pp.6-7 of the spring 2023 issue of *France Mission Perspectives*, available at francemission.org/magazine-archive.

For further information or details about the prayer cards or the initiative itself, please feel free to contact Philip at lucindalebiblechapel@outlook.com



Welcome to Lucindale



A year serving in Amiens



Ministry trainee Adrien Ropert explains what your support has made possible

Thanks to your support through FM's Education and Training Fund, I experienced God's grace in many ways in 2022-23 as I served at the Foyer Évangélique Universitaire (FEU) in Amiens and in the Perspectives church in the city.

There are several FEUs in university cities



Adrien preaching

across France and they run in collaboration with local evangelical churches. The **aims of the FEU** are to provide a warm welcome to any student, Christian or not; to share the gospel, both at the FEU centres and on campus; to help build up Christian students; and to serve local churches.

In the Amiens FEU, we had a team of eight volunteers who helped out in various ways – communications, events, teaching – and



Inside the FEU house

were able to work with **80 students**. My role was to support the volunteer team. Local churches gave us the responsibility of organizing two full services in the year. We led 33 Bible studies for about 30 students on the Book of Ecclesiastes and also studied the Gospel of Luke, focusing on Jesus' teaching after he "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9.51). One of our aims was to provide students with tools for Bible study so that they could feel more confident in teaching others themselves.

Through our evangelism, we were able to run two **Bible Discovery groups** looking at "the big story of the Bible" and the seven signs in John's Gospel. Among the various other events we organised were cultural evenings where we were able to meet new people and witness to them. These various activities provided me with the opportunity to lead Bible studies, share my faith, and disciple around 10 students.

I was encouraged to see the **fruit that**



FEU event

God produced in the lives of believers. The students were always keen to grow in their faith and in their knowledge of the Lord, wanting to serve in local churches and to share the gospel. Three students got baptised during the year and many of those I worked with have now gone on to Bible College, or have become volunteers at the FEU, or are serving in their church.

I found the rhythm of ministry **challenging** at times, but God always upheld me. I saw how He takes care of us in His grace and realised that it's only in Him and for Him that we can make progress.

"Several of the young people, including a boy I was mentoring, asked to be baptised."

This past year also gave me the opportunity to serve at the **Perspectives church in Amiens** through preaching and helping with the youth group and baptismal preparation. It was a great joy that several of the young people, including a boy I was mentoring, asked to be baptised. The year wasn't easy for the church because our premises (which had become too small) had been sold. But I was encouraged to see that the unity of the Body of Christ relies more on the



Adrien baptising

love, welcome, and generosity of church members than on a building.

It was a great year for which I give thanks to our Lord for His faithfulness despite my weakness. In His grace, He's the one who provided all these blessings and encouragements, so to Him be all the glory! But **thank you** too for the generous support that made it possible for me to have this year of practical ministry experience. I'm currently in the **USA** to be closer to my American girlfriend (whom I met in a Perspectives church in France). If possible, I'd like to return to theological study in a year's time to prepare for ministry.

You can contact Adrien at ropertady@gmail.com. Find out more about the FEU at facebook.com/feuamiens or about the church at eglise-perspectives-amiens.fr



Time travelling with the gospel in Mayenne!

FM supporter Joy McClean shares about one of this summer's InterAction camps



Note from Paul Cooke: like Adrien Ropert (previous article), Joy has been another beneficiary of FM's Education & Training Fund this past year. After her service at the Perspectives church in Le Pré-Saint-Gervais, she returned to France to help with an InterAction camp.

Had you happened to pass through Pré-en-Pail (Mayenne) in late July 2023, you may have witnessed some **strange sights**: ninjas, Egyptian queens, Mayan emperors, cowboys from the Wild West, and, most importantly, two time-travelling Gauls accompanied by around 60 campers and 30 leaders. What on earth was going on? Well, InterAction 2023, of course!

In case it's not immediately obvious from the above, the **InterAction theme** this year saw us travelling through time with Asterix and his trusty scientist friend Calculatrix, whose malfunctioning time-machine brought us to a different era each day. Once there, the campers were tasked with helping to find a necessary part to fix the machine so that everyone could return safely to the Gaulish village for the feast at the end of the week. The campers took to the theme straight away, and it was always a pleasure to see them gelling together in their dorm as they got stuck into the challenges and activities prepared for them.

“For some this was the first time they had opened the Bible.”

We had a mix of campers from all over France, some from England (and even some from as far as Ethiopia!), and, as well as having a linguistic mix, we had campers from a whole range of spiritual backgrounds. Some were already living as committed Christians, for some this was the first time they had opened the Bible, and others were somewhere in between. There were two **main meetings** each day, where we would spend time hearing God's Word explained to us by one of the leaders, as well as singing some songs –



Outdoors game

Campers assembled



with everything always being translated in French and English. This year, the main meeting talks focused on John's Gospel: who Jesus is, why He came to Earth, why He died, and what all of this means for us.

We also had daily Bible studies in our **dorm groups**, this time looking through Genesis chapters 1-3. It was such a joy to get to know the girls from my dorm group over the course of the week. They were open and at ease as we looked at the passage together, happy to dig deeper into the text and ask questions. For two of the girls, this was also the first time they'd ever spent any time looking at the Bible for themselves, and both left at the end

of the week with their own personal Bible gifted to them by the camp – one even messaged our dorm group-chat a few days after the end of camp to say that she'd read the whole of the rest of Genesis because she wanted to know what happened next!

I learnt much from my fellow leaders, whose **tireless service** so clearly modelled that of the Lord Jesus. And InterAction would not have been possible without the cooks and junior leaders (who, as well as following their own Bible-teaching programme, looked after the cleaning, service at meals, and helping with activities). How reassuring to know that while we had to say goodbye to the campers at the end of the week, we can trust that Jesus goes with them where we can't and continues His good works in their lives far beyond our limited efforts. May He continue to grow the seeds sown so that, in the words of the apostle John, many campers may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing they may have life in His Name.



Indoors game

You can contact Joy at joy.mcclean@live.co.uk and find out more about InterAction at interactioncamps.org/en/



400th anniversary of the birth of Blaise Pascal



Church-planter and author Dave Brown explains the ongoing relevance of Pascal's thought



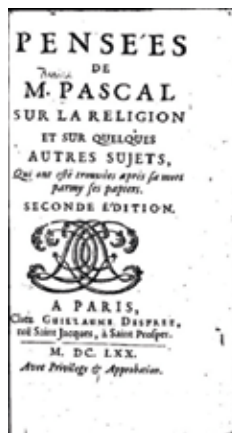
Blaise Pascal, 1623-62

Blaise Pascal is a very well-known historical character in France. This year marks the 400th anniversary of his birth in 1623 (he died at the early age of 39). In many ways he was a **genius**. He was a great scientist who proved the existence of a vacuum and a remarkable mathematician who first invented probability theory and then opened the way to infinitesimal calculus. But he was also a practical inventor who made a calculating machine that was not surpassed until the 19th century and also (surprisingly) invented public transport by setting up a company of carriages crossing Paris on set routes and at set times.

“The most remarkable thing about Pascal is his dramatic conversion to Christ at the age of 31.”

However, he's best known today for his book called the *Pensées* (that is, his thoughts), published posthumously in 1670. The most remarkable thing about Pascal is his dramatic conversion to Christ at the age of 31. His writings were aimed at his “free-thinker” friends. He wanted to convince them of the truth of the Christian faith and he approached it in a way which is still very relevant today. Instead of using abstract arguments his book contained two main parts. I quote:

1. The wretchedness of mankind without God. To be shown by observing the world.
2. The happiness of mankind with God. Because there is a repairer. To be shown through the Scriptures.



An early edition of the *Pensées* (1670)

This was followed by his famous **wager**. His free-thinker friends were always betting on cards and so Pascal wanted to shake their indifference towards God by using the idea of the wager. “If God exists, you can be happy for eternity. If he doesn't, you have lost nothing. So, wager that God exists.” In fact, this wager isn't optional: “vous êtes embarqué” (you're already on board). Even if you've never thought about the question, you've already made an implicit choice against the existence of God because not to consider His existence is effectively to deny it.

The point is that so many people don't even start to seek God even though, as Pascal says, “This is not to be taken lightly. We are not talking about someone else but **your own destiny**.” So, he encouraged his friends to read the Bible and to spend time with Christians.

One of Pascal's “thoughts” is very **relevant to evangelism** in our secular society:

Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is.

So, we must build **relationships** with people, so that they can begin to see the plausibility of our faith and hopefully will want to go further as we explain the reasons why it's true.

Veritas Forum

For the last 15 years the French GBU (the equivalent of UCCF in the UK) has been hosting Veritas Forum events, mainly in universities but more recently, since Covid, on-line. These **are public debates** between a Christian and a non-Christian, followed



The debate in Clermont-Ferrand

by a time of Q & A. This gives us access to secular universities and attracts considerable interest.

This autumn two of these debates are centred on the writings of Pascal with the title “Is it reasonable to have faith in God?” In September I debated with an agnostic philosophy lecturer in Clermont-Ferrand (the city where Pascal was born) and on December 9th I'll be debating with an atheist writer and philosophy teacher in Paris. These debates can both strengthen the faith of Christians and hopefully sow doubts in the minds of the non-Christians about their unbelief. **Please do pray** that this will be the case.



Forum Veritas flyer

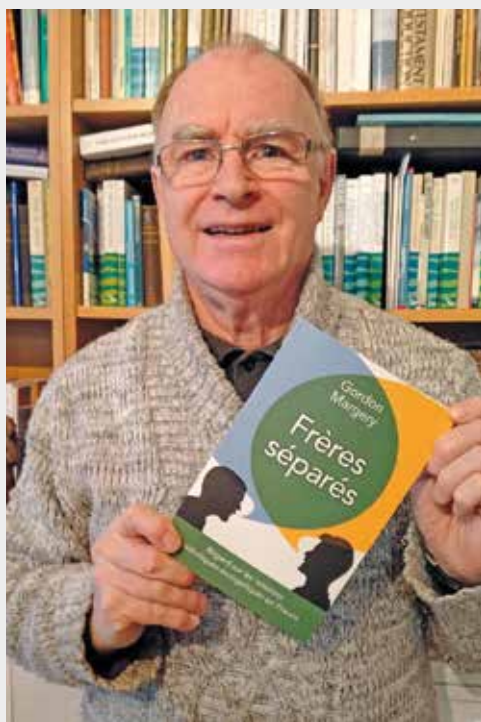
You can contact Dave at david.brown.paris@gmail.com. If you read French, you might also be interested in buying Dave's book *On parie combien? Lettres à Blaise Pascal* (Farel, 2011) available, for example, from blfstore.com

Relationships between Catholics and Evangelicals in France

Paul Cooke introduces a recent book by Gordon Margery

France is a traditionally Catholic country. Although fewer than 5% of the population regularly attend Mass, just under half would still describe themselves as Catholic,¹ while Evangelicals account for a mere 1%. No wonder, then, that I'm often asked about the relationship between Catholics and Evangelicals in France. Some who ask the question are simply curious. Others have **strong views** on the subject – whether ardent supporters of ecumenism or passionate defenders of separation. Given the violent religious conflicts from the 16th to the 18th centuries and the polemics of more recent history, emotions can run understandably high. But whatever your views, if you're able to read French, I highly recommend Gordon Margery's recent book, *Frères séparés* (literally, Separated Brethren: the term used by the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council of 1962-65 to describe Christians from other traditions).²

Gordon's name will be familiar to longstanding FM supporters, since he and his wife Avril went out to France in the late 1970s, spending a couple of decades planting and building up the France-Mission (now Perspectives) church in Rennes. Gordon went on to serve as a pastor with the Association Baptiste. In 2007 the French Evangelical Federation asked Gordon to be their representative on



Gordon with a copy of his book

the delegation of the French Evangelical Alliance in what would become the **National Evangelical-Catholic Discussion Group**. The Group consists of six Catholics appointed by the Conference of French Bishops and six Evangelicals appointed

by the CNEF (National Council of French Evangelicals), and Gordon served as joint Chair from 2014-2021. He was therefore particularly well placed to write this book.

Gordon notes that in an increasingly post-Christian world, French Catholics and Evangelicals are often "**objective allies**" since the two groups tend to share similar views on most ethical issues and to participate in the same humanitarian programmes; both use the Alpha Course and often have similar worship music; both have charismatic wings. Despite the different weight given to the Apocrypha by Rome, Catholics and Evangelicals also share the same Bible, three historic creeds (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian), and four

reverence of Mary and the saints; the nature and number of the sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist (with the dogma of transubstantiation). Gordon considers these various issues (and many others!) with admirable clarity. He writes as an Evangelical, but in a spirit of openness, alert to the foibles and failings on both sides of the debate.

Gordon takes seriously our Lord's prayer for **unity** (John 17) while also acknowledging the different ways in which the New Testament handles **tensions**, ranging from an acceptance of diversity (Romans 14-15) to a hard break (2 John) via the provision of clearer teaching (1 Corinthians 7). He points out that some very successful evangelistic campaigns (including Billy Graham's) have involved collaboration between Evangelicals and Catholics but suggests that denominations are best left to pursue their own follow-up once the basics of the gospel have been shared. Personal experience convinces Gordon of the value of dialogue and genuine friendship with Catholics, since such relationships allow us to maintain our own identity, while encouraging us to see it from a different angle. Surely no bad thing!



From the website of the Pôle Missionnaire Catholique de Fontainebleau – one of the many Catholic ministries using Alpha

church councils (Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus, Chalcedon).

And yet, even when avoiding caricatures on both sides, **major divisions** remain: the significance of the Apocrypha; the respective weight given to the Bible and Tradition; papal authority and infallibility;

¹Gordon gives the figure of 68% based on a book published in 2018 (p.183). A 2023 study by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies states that 29% of 18-59 year olds in France describe themselves as Catholic (see bit.ly/INSEE2023). A 2022 American study, using data from 2020, estimates that 47% of the French population identify as Catholic (see bit.ly/USDS22).

²The full title is *Frères séparés: Regard sur les relations catholiques-évangéliques en France* (Excelsis, 2022).

If you'd like to buy a copy, it costs 19€ (+ p&p) from French Christian bookshops such as clcfrence.com or maisonbible.ch or via amazon.fr. You can also watch an 18-minute interview (in French) with Gordon about his book at bit.ly/TGCMargery



“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth” (Ecclesiastes 12.1)



Missionaries Jonathan & Rachel Vaughan report on a new joint youth venture in Paris

This term we've started a new *collégiens* (11-15s) youth group, run in partnership with the Perspectives churches in Clichy and Asnières, and also the Église des Ternes Baptist Church. Having been blessed by the Ternes youth group, who welcomed our teenagers for the past three years, we've decided to **increase the number of churches** and hopefully enlarge the group. The monthly event is being organised by Rachel Vaughan and Thomas Parfitt, and we've recruited some young leaders from our church, Eunice and Halim. Do please pray for the group to grow, for the teenagers to invite their non-Christian friends, and also for training the new leaders.

The *lycéens* (15-18s) run their own group, with teenagers from local Baptist churches as well as our own church. They've been really well trained through **Groupes Bibliques Lycéens** (the high-school section of **Groupes Bibliques Universitaires**) in particular at the “Form'action” week at the end of October. Not only do they learn how



From the GBL website: GBLs are about building one's conviction



Relaxing in the shade after one of the games at the recent joint church weekend

to lead Bible studies, it also prepares them to respond to the challenges they face at their age as Christians, for example in the compulsory philosophy lessons. **Do pray** for those attending the training week this year, including Naomi and Zoe Vaughan, and Anna and Sophie Calvert. They're also running GBL Bible study groups with non-Christians from their lycées. Do pray for many non-Christians to come and for those leading to find time to prepare well. Pray also for the regular online outreach events.

At **Cardinet church**, we're currently learning from the book of Joshua on Sunday mornings. Small groups have been reorganised to include some new church members, and there are three people preparing for baptism. In November we're planning another art exhibition, this year on different kinds of “intelligence” (artificial, human, spiritual, ...). **Do pray** for opportunities to invite friends and meet people who live near the church.

You can contact Jonathan & Rachel at jony.v Vaughan@gmail.com and find out more about the GBU/GBL at gbu.fr



50th anniversary France Day (27th April 2024)

Your invitation from UK Director Paul Cooke to this special event

2024 will mark 50 years since France Mission was first established. To celebrate this milestone in God's faithfulness, we'll be holding a special anniversary France Day at **Bishop's Stortford Baptist Church** in Hertfordshire (CM23 3LJ) on Saturday 27th April, God willing.



- and Patrice Niveaux (the current President of Perspectives)

Professional caterers will be providing a **sit-down, cooked lunch** with a French flavour and there will be plenty of time for prayer and fellowship.

Bishop's Stortford Baptist Church is a lovely modern building with **excellent facilities**. Most of the activities will take place on the ground floor, though lunch will be on the first floor. There is a lift between the ground and first floors for those who need it. The church has **45 parking bays**, including 4 disabled bays; there is also free (but limited) parking on some roads near the church on Saturdays. The nearest public car park is at Bishop's Stortford train station, a 10-minute flat walk away; it currently costs £6.50 for all-day parking.

We aim to finish by 4.30pm. **The event is free** to all supporters but there'll be an opportunity to contribute to an offering for anyone who'd like to do that. If you'd like accommodation before or after the event, any of the hotel chains at nearby Stansted Airport would be best.

To **reserve your place** at the Day, please contact me via any of the means on the back cover. I'll then provide you with more practical details. I'd love to see you there if you can make it!

I'm also planning an anniversary publication. If you have any FM-related photos that you think might be suitable for inclusion, please let me know. Thank you!

The venue will be open with refreshments from around 10am, but the formal part of the day will **start at 11am** to allow people time to time to travel on the morning. Talks will be given by:

- Peter & Liz Farley (two of the original team that founded FM in 1974)
- Dave Brown (one of FM's first missionaries in the 1970s and still going strong)
- Peter Calvert (who's now been serving in France for about 20 years)



France Mission: Love France – Love Mission – Love Church

France Mission's vision is to see increasing numbers of people in France encountering God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – through the work and witness of local evangelical churches. As a support organisation, we provide targeted, strategic support to help the French evangelical church move closer to achieving its own goals. To find out more, please visit francemission.org.

If your church or small group would like to hear more about the Lord's work in France, please contact Paul Cooke to book a speaker:

- Email: paulcooke@francemission.org
- Phone: (+44) 07980 450462 or (+44) 01392 213275
- Post: PO Box 743, Exeter EX1 9RN, UK

Support France Mission when you shop online

We've registered with two websites – **easyfundraising** and **TheGivingMachine** – that enable you to raise funds for France Mission whenever you shop online. Both sites provide access to a wide variety of popular retailers, are easy to use, and don't cost you (or us) a penny!



So, if you shop online, please do consider signing up either at easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/francemission or at thegivingmachine.co.uk/causes/france-mission and help us raise more funds to support the Lord's work in France.

Thank you!



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