

THE SCOTS KIRK PARIS

Report to the International Presbytery March - October 2020

The lockdown period in France, which ran from mid-March to mid-May, was a very challenging time for the Scots Kirk Paris, as indeed it must have been for all congregations everywhere. Meeting together became impossible, pastoral visits were out and our income looked set to drop drastically. It was all very disconcerting.

And yet during these bleakest of times our fellowship strengthened and we discovered a renewed sense of what it means to be a "church".

During the very early days of the lockdown our minister, Jan Steyn, set up a Scots Kirk WhatsApp group to help those who wished to stay in touch. The response was overwhelming and the group proved to be an important source of support, not only for our members struggling through lockdown on their own but also for those needing help with technical problems (how do I print from my phone?) or updates on the latest safety measures being taken. And of course as life ground to a halt and we were all forced to stop and look around us in the silence, it was a great way of sharing photos of God's wonderful creation. Needless to say we also kept our spirits up by exchanging numerous lockdown-based videos and quotes. Human imagination and creativity have no limits!

Week 4 of our lockdown saw the first of a series of "newsletters" which carried on for seven weeks until the restrictions were lifted. Each lighthearted issue was built around the number of the week in question and contained a mixture of Biblical facts and random information on a wide variety of subjects. This was all in sharp contrast to the gruesome statistics we were being bombarded with every day.

The lockdown also gave us the boost we needed to turn our minds seriously to our online presence. This was something the Session had discussed many times without actually taking any decisions but within a very short space of time, there we were with our very own Youtube channel, reaching out to more people than could ever fit into our physical building. Our sincere thanks go to Jan for the immense amount of work he put (and is still putting) into these online services, to all those who participated in them and last, but not least, to Jim Amekporfor for the technical editing. We have now upgraded to a fibre internet connection giving us the possibility of livestreaming our Sunday morning services if we wish in order to continue reaching into the homes of our members in Paris and beyond.

We have been worshipping again in rue Bayard since mid-May, with numbers in the sanctuary limited to make allowance for social distancing. Attendance varies; we have quite a few members with underlying conditions who do not feel ready yet to take public transport. However, those who do attend are enthusiastic about the future and Sunday School has resumed with new floor cushions spaced well apart!

Contrary to all expectations our income has held up well despite the absence of the groups who use our church building. This is mainly because our drive to encourage people to contribute to church funds by direct debit has borne fruit. Also a number of members who are unable to come to church have been making substantial donations which is very heartening. Donations have also come in from some of the groups even though they are unable to meet. Our treasurer is quite satisfied that we have stayed on an even keel despite the circumstances.

Some of you may remember that I began my last report by talking about the *gilets jaunes*. On 13th September they made a tentative comeback and there was sufficient unrest for 30 metro and RER stations to be closed around the central area. We have no idea how this is going to develop or what it will mean for our church groups; hopefully it will all just fizzle out and things will get back to as normal as they can be.

On another subject altogether, our pianist, Paul Snelgrove, has stepped down after many years of loyal service. He and his wife Jane have decided they would like to spend more time out of Paris and who can blame them :) However, we have not been left in the lurch and we are currently being accompanied by a young Brazilian pianist and a South African pianist, both introduced to us by Jan. They play with great gusto and make us want to sing even louder behind our masks. Paul has indicated that he would like to continue organizing concerts in the church. The money from these concerts is an important contribution to church funds and we are grateful to him for his continuing support and involvement.

Like everyone else, we have no idea what the future holds but we put our trust in God and thank Him for the Scots Kirk community and His guidance throughout this unprecedented period.