

# FRANCE NEEDS MORE PASTORS

“Don't worry about having an accent. Everyone has an accent here, even the French.” That's what my Chilean room-mate said at the national church officers' meeting in the Cévennes. And he was right. With the South Africans, Dutch, Central Africans, Swiss, Americans and Brits, there's a lot of missionary pastors in France. What are they all doing? Well, they're doing what pastors do. Some are church-planting, some are pastoring churches, some are teaching in seminaries like the Free Faculty at Aix-en-Provence, which has had a very helpful relationship with Westminster Seminary in the USA. French Christians make these missionary pastors very welcome and value them very highly.

But why are there not more French pastors? This could be the title of a book, but it is true to say that it is not as easy or acceptable to be a pastor in France as in Britain. Where Catholicism utterly dominates the religious landscape then to be a pastor in an evangelical church is seen as being obviously sectarian. Christians are often seen as being “Bushist”, and sometimes we don't help ourselves in this – a recent witness march here proudly waved the Israeli and the US flags. Tactful? I think not. Churches in France are generally small and can't pay a pastor properly. Being able to get a flat or a house in low-cost social housing helps, but many pastors end up with two full-time jobs, their ministry and their *gagne-pain* (wage-earner). Then while being a pastor's child in Britain is unusual, in France it's weird – aren't priests celibate? And where churches are small then there are going to be fewer people who could receive a call to pastoral ministry, so the seminaries sometimes struggle because there are not enough students. Because of the shortage of French pastors it can be quite hard for men to have a role model, and where pastors come from all over the world they sometimes come with their own style and national characteristics – which are not necessarily helpful in a French context.

So how do we fit into all this? Are we going to start another church? Look for a pastorate? Aim to teach in a seminary? It's very tempting to plunge ourselves into a pastorate in one of the delightful small towns of Aquitaine, and that would not be a bad thing to do. It is even more tempting to try to plant a church – our North Wales home church if possible – right here in South West France! Hmm.

In fact the UFM team here is involved in a church plant in partnership with a French



pastor and our first priority is to do all we can to see this Bible centred church become stronger, more radiant and ever more student-friendly – and stay French! And there's another priority – to reach young people with the gospel and to encourage young men to be strong Christians and to consider a life devoted to Christian ministry – perhaps in mission outside France, perhaps as French pastors. Not being *the* pastor of a local church, but rather a kind of minister without portfolio gives me the opportunity to do things that pastors often simply don't have time to do – to spend time working with men individually and in groups – passing on the baton in the relay. I describe myself as a *pasteur libre* (a free pastor) and people seem to understand.

Here in the South-West of France there are large towns untouched by the gospel. Our churches are small. There aren't enough workers. We need a lot of young French people who will take the gospel throughout the whole region – as many as God will give us! And some of those young people we need to see going to the seminaries, training for pastoral ministry. And who knows – maybe one day there'll be lots of French pastors in the UK. We can dream, can't we? ■

Alan Davey

