

# ENCOURAGEMENTS IN BRITTANY

In the last secular job Emmanuel had with the electricity board, he had the delicate task of visiting people who were late in paying their bill. It was a dramatic change, some months later, when he began full-time ministry here in Brittany – instead of reminding people they had a debt to pay, he took on the more rewarding task of telling people their greatest debt has already been paid on their behalf. If he had said the same thing about the electricity bills, he would no doubt have been warmly welcomed at every house – though he would probably not have lasted long in the job! A cancelled electricity bill would have led to great rejoicing but it's hard to interest people with the vitally more important news that Jesus has paid our debt on the cross.

Between September and December, our church at Guingamp distributed 5000 evangelistic tracts. To date, we've had one reply slip returned, requesting a series of Bible studies. One reply for so many tracts put into letterboxes reflects the reality of the work here in Brittany. Even though the Catholic Church has lost much of its influence in France, Brittany's Catholic heritage remains an important part of its cultural identity. Add to that a general apathy and atheism in a country that is increasingly secular, as well as a suspicion encouraged by a distorted media presentation of evangelicals and you have some explanation for the lack of interest in spiritual things (apart from the occult, of course).

That may sound depressing but, in spite of the disappointments and challenges in presenting the gospel in Brittany, there are also many encouragements. In the last 2 years church attendance has grown through Christians moving into the area; 7 of them became members this year. For a small church, that is no small deal! We have seen the Sunday school grow from 2 (ours!) to 8. Another highlight last year was when Emmanuel baptised a local Christian lady who is really growing in her faith. Many church members have advanced from passive attendance to more active involvement in the life of the church. A deeper sense of fellowship and love amongst us has also been a source of encouragement, as has a keen interest amongst believers to study the Bible and



to evangelise. We have held special weeks of prayer which have been times of blessing, with the Lord moving in a particular way each time. But we still have a lot to learn.

As a result of an initial contact through our tract distribution, we have had 3 people come along. One continues to attend Sunday services; another attended for a while, but has now moved away. The third, 'J', came regularly both to Sunday services and to Bible studies for a few months but then cut off all contact with us. We continue to pray for him and the seed sown in his heart. We have also had a handful of contacts that Emmanuel has visited or who have asked for more literature.

One of the results of our numerical growth, albeit small, is that we will be needing a bigger and more suitable building in the not-too-distant future. Only a miracle can supply that need – please pray with us for that miracle.

So the Lord is at work in Brittany, even though there may seem to be little visible evidence. Please pray for perseverance for believers in Brittany. Pray for more workers in this harvest field and for the Lord to raise up leaders and pastors among French Christians. More than anything, pray the Lord would be merciful and move in a mighty way in this land that many might receive the Good News of the forgiveness of sins through Christ.■

**Emmanuel & Maria Hartiel**

