

The Light on the Lampstand

For those of you who know the church in Chamonix, you will know that it stands in a prominent place on a hill overlooking the centre of the town. We have long tried to bear witness to our calling by being prominent in the town in other ways, and none more so than our “dear departed” pastor Graham Beeston. Sadly Graham has had to move on to pastures new – not so far away in Bellegarde, where he will do hospital and prison visiting and part-time pastoral work. His final service in the parish was on the 15th June 2008. An astonishingly varied group of people were present to see him off at the service and lunch in the church grounds. When we looked at the people present, and all those who could not come, but asked to contribute to his leaving gift (a cheque towards a new car), it was very clear that Graham had done what we had asked him to do when he first came to us – he engaged with the community and carried out the work of an evangelist. In recent days, everywhere I have been, not just in Chamonix, but in Passy, Sallanches, and down the valley as well, casual acquaintances, work colleagues and friends have said to me “I hear your pastor is leaving. What a shame - he’s a great bloke! I

didn’t know pastors were like that!” Which in turn has led to conversations about the church, faith and those things which we seldom get chance to discuss with our non-christian acquaintances. Even after his departure, Graham continues to open doors for us to witness through! So many people said to me that their experiences of life’s great events, accompanied by the love and compassion displayed so naturally by our pastor has made them see the church in a new and more positive light.

I think Graham’s legacy, if we need to define one, has been to show us, in a very practical form, the way to demonstrate our faith in the way Christ demanded of us – not only in theology and sermons, but in love and compassion; not just in preaching and teaching, but in accepting others and sympathising with their sufferings, and indeed, rejoicing in their joys. We are all called upon to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Similarly, I would like to publicly say to Françoise Beeston a big thank you for being a shoulder in the moments when I have needed a good weep – not often, but timely!

Also for her great work in the brocante sales, which have been so much fun.

We wish both of them a very happy time in Bellegarde, and I pray that we will be able to continue being a light on a lampstand in this parish in the same way – not only in words, but in very visible deeds.

Another regretted member of our parish, who also demonstrated that highly visible form of love, was Raymond Heller, maths teacher, thespian and faithful member of the council for many years. After a very short struggle with cancer, Raymond died in the Spring. His funeral was attended by many people not only from the church, but from the local community, and other churches, all of whom had been touched by his love and his infectious *joie de vivre*.

During the year in which we will be without a pastor, the work of taking the services will be shared by the lay preachers of the parish – Jean Louis Kientz and Chantal Chambet in Cluses, Megeve and the lower valley, Barbara Falkiner and myself (Cathie Gregg) in Chamonix, with some visiting pastors and lay preachers from other parishes.

The other activities will go on as normal: the little choir in Cluses, the Bible studies in Chamonix, Megeve, Bonneville, La Roche sur Foron; the Sunday schools – once a month in Cluses, and *this year the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month* in Chamonix (in English and French). The young people's ecumenical group Nous les Jeunes will meet every 1st and 3rd Sunday at 7:30pm. Not forgetting the 6pm prayer and praise meeting in English and French every Sunday evening in Chamonix.

Parents and Toddlers meet on Thursday mornings in the presbytery at 10am for coffee and chat and a bit of sanity with Barbs, during the school terms.

We will be starting a women's fellowship again on Monday mornings – breakfast and prayer – contact Barbs or me (06 14 19 35 36) for details of any of these, or other activities.

We hope you have had a great summer and return re-invigorated in the Autumn. The service "de la rentree" will be 14th September at 10:30 a m in Cluses.

Cathie Gregg