

Thanksgiving 2021



Bonjour !

We would like to give thanks to God for His goodness and faithfulness throughout these last years. It has been very intense and challenging, and still is. 2022 will mark our 25th year of ministry in France. Many of you have supported us from the beginning in various ways, others have joined along the journey. We are very grateful for your spiritual and financial support that have helped us so much. So THANK YOU for all you do and have done for us!

Lobbyist. The French government has been working hard to change an old law on separation between State and religious institutions. As soon as the *National Council of French Evangelicals* (CNEF) got wind of the content, they (and others) have been working hard to understand the implications of the proposed changes. The stated motivation was to deal with extremism, especially to fight against terrorism. The new law, voted in July, is officially named “The Law for Reinforcing Republican Principles”.

However, several parts have nothing to do with fighting against terrorism or respectable principles. So, in February and in March, as the regional representative of the CNEF, I met with our senator to discuss this project and its problems. Chapter 2 of the law was almost solely focused on (and against) protestant churches, and chapter 3 on forbidding almost all homeschooling. Though our arguments were heard, the majority in parliament willfully ignored most of the needed changes. In short, there is still a separation between State and “church” (that is, the religious institutions still have nothing to say), but the State can now interfere with religious affairs through increased surveillance. We cannot speak of persecution or repression, but church life becomes more complicated with extra financial and legal procedures that may cost a lot of money, which is especially harmful for small churches with little means.



This new law shows either the French government’s utter ignorance of Evangelical churches, or its contempt of Evangelicals (or both!). The minister of internal affairs who is responsible for religious affairs, said in public that “Evangelicals are a big problem in France”, admitting later that his words were “unfortunate.” Indeed, that wasn’t very helpful.

“J’ai une question.” Meanwhile, between two lockdowns, a young man of 21 years named Axel stepped into our church mid-February. Because of a former girlfriend’s conversion, he started his search for God. One of the first things he did was volunteer with the renovation of our building. Whenever he had a day off, he offered his help. While he did work, he mostly talked and asked questions, a ton of questions!

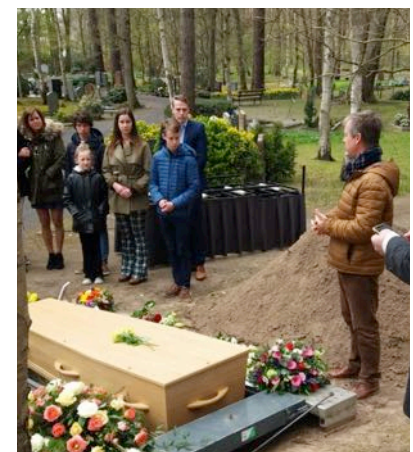
God was clearly drawing this young man to Him, and I told him so. Through the weeks and months, we talked about anything and everything for hours and hours. So much so, that I was convinced that he had come to our church at least a year ago! But what a joy to see this former atheist being transformed before my eyes. In May, while not yet a believer in Jesus, he said: “I’m convinced of one thing: the wages of sin is death.” As our conversations went on, the Spirit pushed me to ask: “Who is Jesus to you?” This led in time to an almost weeklong repentance. Over the summer, it became clear to him, that Jesus is who He said He is: the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Recently, he said: “I haven’t said it yet, but I want to say it up front to you: Jesus is the Truth across the world. I may not express myself as you do, but Jesus is the Truth across the world.” Moments later, he completely teared up. Now we are studying the letter of Romans together and talking about baptism.



Death. I have lost count of the number of funerals I’ve attended since the beginning of the year. Most of them from the charity organization that I direct and unrelated to the virus. Unfortunately, we were not able to attend physically Jody’s cousin Jeff’s funeral in May, and her uncle Eldon’s funeral in July. But we were able to attend my mom’s funeral in April, in the Netherlands (with the necessary paperwork to cross borders during lockdown). Her death was completely unexpected and happened very quickly, after her first shot of the vaccine.



There is such a difference between the funeral services of those who die knowing Jesus and the services for those who do not! In May, I was asked to do the funeral service of a young man who committed suicide, since I’ve known the family for years in various settings. He had lost complete hope in mankind. Really sad. The



grandfather was surprised to hear me speak of Christ, because we had the ceremony in a funeral home and not in a church. It never crossed my mind not to speak of Him, since He is our living hope!



Funeral service in the local Catholic church



Celebrating God's Goodness

Discipling and counseling. As someone has said: "Missions is messy!" It sure is, but when God does something beautiful, it changes everything. One person from an abusive and emotional unstable background had a major breakthrough this summer, as she learned to abandon herself solely to her Heavenly Father. Every relationship was on shaky grounds as she hoped incessantly for approval and feared rejection. As a result, her own father reached out to her, and even pronounced the very words her soul longed for for: "I love you." Their relationship has taken a new and healthier dimension. The life of Christ is restoring people indeed!

Another person is learning what it means to love his wife as Christ has loved his Church. After yet another big crisis, he finally came to the point of choosing to live for Christ and out of grace. Living in obedience to Christ's law of love, his mindset and attitude was being transformed as well as his marriage relationship, for the better. Instead of seeking to fulfill his own needs first, he's daily looking for opportunities to love and encourage his wife through serving and sharing his thoughts and feelings. Though we've gone through many shaky moments, true faithfulness to God is starting to bear its fruit. The battle is not over yet, but we are hopeful. Please do pray for this very delicate situation and real victory over temptation and sin.

Yet another young man went through a painful process of repentance, breaking with manipulation and arrogance. Even the offended party was deeply moved to see the power of the Gospel, and as they witnessed the level of repentance and change of attitude over the last year. Important growth is brought forth through great pain as we learn to die to ourselves and to Christ in everything.

During a special wedding ceremony mid-October, a French-Brazilian couple celebrated their 10th anniversary. They shared their testimony of how the husband had come to faith and was baptized, and how God had helped them in their difficulties. Friends and family were deeply touched. For many of them it was the first time to hear a pastor preach.



Jan-Willem as scout leader



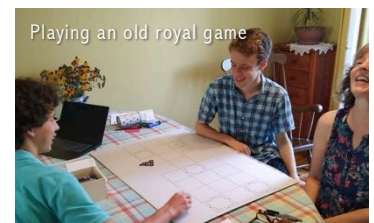
18 years old!

Family. Our oldest son, **Jan-Willem**, turned 18 years old in June, finished his high school with flying colors and the honors. He's now enrolled in a special two-year course (literature, ancient languages, history, philosophy) to prepare for further education. This new program is very demanding. On top of that, he is now

a scout's leader and enjoying it.

Our youngest son, **Jack** (15), has one and a half more years of high school. He will probably follow his brother's path. Meanwhile, whenever the opportunity presents itself, he goes out to kick a soccer ball around. And yes, we still play soccer every other week with a bunch of other kids and dads. It is great fun and sometimes great pain!

Jody has been studying and sharing the books of Ruth and Habakuk with kids and adults alike. She even made a copy of the royal game of Ur, a board game from the 3rd millennium (BC)! As for me, I'm spending a lot of my time doing renovation work, while listening to classes on historical theology or counseling. The renovation should be done before the Spring of 2022. My shoulder and neck problems are almost gone or have descended to my hamstrings! But I am doing well enough and am waiting patiently for the resurrection of my body! 😊



Playing an old royal game



Jack playing at the recital

Thank you so much for partnering with us through prayer and financial support. We are really grateful for your involvement in our lives and ministry! May our Lord Jesus bless you with His peace and joy!

Marc & Jody
Jan-Willem and Jack



Jody's friend Angela visiting during the summer

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