

May 2024, Michael & Rani Grivas-Allison



Michael and Rani Grivas-Allison

Serving the Lord in Belgium



Dear Friends,

Despite still being rain and jacket-weather, it's the last week of Spring here and the 'end of the year' in Europe is just around the corner. In this last month we've begun 'intermediate French' (which will take us up until the end of October) and have been so thankful for good health and a fuller capacity for life and study. Thank you so much for praying!

Below we've shared two recent stories which we think give a good insight into some of the delights and challenges of our growing language skills. We hope they help you to pray with insight and love for Belgium, and encourage you to keep

persevering with us as we work towards being able to serve and proclaim Christ in French!

With love in Christ,

Michael & Rani



Above: the last offerings of Spring, including giant poppies (hand for scale!) and never-ending puddles (otherwise known as toddler heaven).

Welcome to intermediate French!

A.K.A. becoming 'knowable'...

This month we celebrated a language-learning 'first' and had dinner with a family from our church...entirely in French! We chatted about life things, played with their kids, and enjoyed the fact that we could understand most of what they were saying (and that they seemed to generally understand us too!)

Our grammar may have started breaking down about halfway through, we left utterly exhausted, and our friends very much held the evening together with their patience and grace...but it was a lovely first!

During our time at St Andrew's Hall (CMS' training centre), we were encouraged to think about language learning in terms of becoming more 'knowable' as people. We're not sure how 'easy' we are to know in French yet, but

we praise God for encouraging us as we slowly grow in our capacity for relationships!



Above: our main 'professeur' this session, Julien, who is a brilliant teacher, a fountain of interesting facts about the French language and a lot of fun in the classroom.

...and dangerous?

This month we also had a different kind of 'first' when our teacher explained to our class that, "religion cannot be addressed in any form" in our upcoming presentations.

Interestingly, this seems to be a fairly standard rule at our language school, but one which isn't flagged until the higher levels when students start learning how to express opinions and abstract ideas. **Apparently with more French at our disposal, we're also becoming more 'dangerous'!**

It was insightful for us to have this 'cultural explainer' moment as our teacher

reasoned out the 'logic' of 'neutral spaces' to a room full of foreigners. For example, that talking about religion would cause emotions to run high in the classroom, that it may look like trying to force our beliefs on others, and cause us to be overcome by strong feelings ourselves.

To be honest, we found this quite confronting. After all, as Australians no one has ever told us that we're not allowed to talk about our faith! We found ourselves working through feelings of disappointment, anger, and sadness, and needing to pray against a spirit of timidity on the one hand, and defensiveness and bitterness on the other. Discovering the way something like this 'pressured us' was a relatively new experience for us. However we realise that **this is the norm for Christians in Belgium, in their schools, universities, and workplaces.**

In the scheme of things, this was a pretty tame experience. But it was a strong reminder to us of how valuable (and counter-cultural!) the ministry of GBU is - as it works to equip students to be 'public Christians' who resist cultural pressure to hide their faith and instead let it shine for the praise of their Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

You can pray for the GBU as it continues to labour to that end! And that God would help us to conduct ourselves with godliness, prayerfulness and creativity as we keep figuring out how to be 'politely impolite' in our new culture.

Please thank God...

- **A strong start to our new level of French**, with good health and great teachers.
- For answering your prayers to resolve **an administrative hurdle** last month.
- **For His goodness, power and presence**, which spill over even into spaces where He isn't 'allowed'.

Please ask God...

- **To strengthen Christians in Belgium** to live as 'the light of the world'.
- **For godliness, prayerfulness and creativity** as we keep learning

how to represent Jesus in this culture.

- **For greater 'synergy' in speaking French together and in the same conversation** (something we've recently identified as a challenge).

From Michael and Rani



“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in

heaven." Matthew 5:14-16



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We're so thankful for your partnership with us to see a world that knows Jesus!

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