

Signs of Spiritual Renewal Surface In France as Christians Focus on Prayer

Participation in an annual prayer campaign called 'Objectif France' has more than doubled in the last four years

After four years of organized prayer effort, French Christians are seeing their nation of 60 million people change before their eyes. "Many things are changing in the spiritual realms of our country," prayer campaign coordinator Jacky Minard said, "and we are hearing many testimonies of a new openness to evangelism."

The "Objectif France" movement—dubbed France 2003 this year—has steadily gained momentum among churches and prayer groups since its initiation in 2000. In a nation where fewer than 1 percent of the population are Christian, the prayer effort has doubled, growing from 700 churches and prayer groups participating to more than 1,500.

Central to the campaign is a comprehensive prayer guide. Written by the movement's organizers and other French Christian leaders, the guide rallies churches and prayer groups around a common theme each year, inspiring prayer for France. To promote informed intercession, each guide contains historical and current information with prayer focuses for each of the 40 days.

The 2003 prayer guide, *Shine Your Light On Our Nation*, featured six sections covering France's spiritual outlook, the church, public life, the Francophone world, society and prayer

for cities.

Some 4,600 prayer guides in the French language were sold this year, an increase of more than 30 percent over 2002, Minard said. A free English version of the guide is accessible online at .

Throughout the annual campaign, which occurs the 40 days before Easter, churches and prayer groups encourage members to pray individually and to attend corporate prayer gatherings. "We have everything from Protestant Reformed churches to evangelical churches to charismatic Catholic prayer groups involved," Minard said. "The campaign is becoming well-known throughout the French church."

The 2002 campaign focused on the transformation of French society—specifically for repentance of France's transgressions against its African colonies, reforms in the educational system and the reversal of government corruption.

Organizers have documented a number of answered prayers since then:

* In March 2003 French President Jacques Chirac made a historic visit to the former French colony of Algeria and expressed a desire for reconciliation.

*In 2002, a French minister of education asked his cabinet to reintroduce a religious studies curriculum for French schools after a 27-year vacuum of religious studies in the educational system.

* Perhaps most encouraging, after a 20-year hold on the government by the left-wing majority, the right wing took the National Assembly last year.

“With a Catholic-Christian heritage in the right wing you could say there is some fear of God there,” Minard said.

Since the 2002 elections, France has experienced a major transformation in the way the government views religion, specifically Christianity, Minard added. Before then, the government looked upon evangelical churches with the same suspicion as religious sects.

“Officials here recognize the failure of ‘republican’ values to change behavior and feel that only religion can give us a moral base,” Minard said. “They think the only religion that can really bring development is Christianity and that the most dynamic Christian churches are evangelical.”

For John Beynon, a British missionary with World Horizons who conceived the idea for the prayer campaign, these are signs of the power of prayer. “When you get the majority of the body of Christ in a nation to fast and pray, God answers, and it starts to change the country,” he said.

Beynon and Minard hope to see more changes such as these resulting from this campaign, which they plan to continue through 2005. Beynon said: “We want to keep praying until there has been a total national transformation.”

Jeff Slaughter in Lille, France