



Report to Synod members 2017
**St Michael's Anglican Congregation
in the Gard**



10 years ago this year St Michael's officially joined the Church of England. The previous year a group of like-minded Christians got together and decided that as there was no English speaking church within a 2-hour drive they should set up a church themselves. Fortunately a retired priest, Jenny Deverill, was living in their midst and after much hard work St Michael's was formed.

This year we are therefore celebrating the anniversary and have just had a concert when the male voice choir from Bury St Edmunds joined up with a local French choir to fill the church of St Etienne with delightful music which was appreciated by a packed church. Later in the year we welcomed Bishop Robert to an ecumenical service in Uzes Cathedral and to Bagard Temple for a confirmation.



After a number of years of continuous growth, more recently we have seen a significant number of our congregation returning to the UK which has almost halved our congregation over the past four years. This has considerably reduced our income and has thrown into confusion our plans for a replacement chaplain. In recognising that the present uncertainties over Brexit will hold back people from moving to France, a long interregnum is most likely following the retirement of the present chaplain later in the year. In preparation for this and the departure of our Reader we have been training worship assistants who will be maintaining the service rota alongside locum clergy who will take the communion services.

One of the joys of living in rural France is the ability to travel around the countryside free of traffic and to be able to enjoy the views. The downside is that the parish is extensive and the congregation is widely dispersed. This means that the times people meet are infrequent, short and very important. It also means that it is difficult to get to know people properly as we all glance past each other during the aperos after the services. Unlike a close community parish where people bump into each other and share the gossip, members can have been through traumatic experiences and return to church without anyone knowing - often assuming they have been back to the UK. The consequence of these casual encounters is that one is unaware of people's joys and sorrows or unable to share their spiritual journeys.

Maintaining and developing our contacts with the local churches has also been a priority during the year. We continued our links with the local Pastorale in Anduze and the priests of the catholic churches we use, as well as the Pasteur in Uzes.

In January we were invited to join with the church leaders in Uzes to share in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and were privileged to be treated as being on an equal footing with all of them.

We look forward to the challenges in the coming year with optimism and hope.