

Rev. Mike French, Chaplain 2001 - 2008



Sarah, Tom and I arrived in Geneva in September 2001 at the start of my 7 years as Chaplain of Holy Trinity and the daughter congregation of Gingins.

One of the highlights was that we took the bold decision to launch Gingins into a separate parish - what is now La Côte Church.

In 2003 we celebrated the 150th anniversary of Holy Trinity. Key themes during those years were being an open, welcoming, diverse, engaged and celebrating community. It was a time of growth, of humour, enjoying the huge cultural richness of members from around the world.

That international flavour had been a big part of my vocation before coming to Geneva. Since my teenage years I had a sense of calling to involvement in issues of international social justice, human rights, and humanitarian solidarity. I approached that calling from various angles. First through my studies at Cambridge which led me to starting my career as a water engineer, working initially in research and consultancy in the U.K., and then for several years in the field in Peru and Bolivia where Sarah and I worked with communities in the Andes. While there, I saw more than ever the potential of faith communities as actors for justice, peace and human rights. The possibility of playing some kind of leadership role in that, together with my personal spiritual journey, prompted me to explore ordination and I was accepted for training at Ridley Hall in Cambridge. I went from there to a curacy in Hazel Grove near Stockport, with further studies in International Development, followed by 5 years as chaplain and lecturer at the University of Chester. In that role I founded and directed an initiative in development education, a collaboration between academia, the church and Christian Aid, with programmes in Kenya, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, Honduras, Peru and the World Bank. All of these were part of my background when we arrived at Holy Trinity, as I was just turning 40. For me, it was a profound experience to find myself as a focal point for a faith community, in a place which combined the huge global issues of our day with the intimate and personal matters of life lived out as simple human beings, exploring faith.

After 7 years it seemed right to move on and after much reflection a door opened to work with World Vision as Director of Advocacy, based in the U.K., followed by several years as Geneva Director and UN Representative for Save the Children. In 2013 I took on a more operational role with the Lutheran World Federation (based in Geneva in the WCC building) responsible for Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as being global focal point for Human Rights.

These various roles have taken me around the world, to beautiful and challenging places : Haiti, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Yemen, Central America, South Sudan, and many others. Always, what impresses me is the resilience, creativity and dignity of the communities and the people I meet.

Geneva is special, somewhere that - even long before we came here - I felt would have a central place in my life. That has proved to be the case, we are still here, and we were proud to become Swiss in 2017.