

ROGER & SUSAN PETERSON – VISION STATEMENT

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON EVANGELICALISM IN FRANCE



- Population: over 66 million
- France - number one tourist destination for a country
- Paris - most visited city in the world
- 70 million visitors annually
- Evangelical Christians: between 0.8% - 1%
- There are 36,551 cities/towns/villages in France. The vast majority of them (35,000) are without an Evangelical church.

For years, intellectuals proclaimed the end of Christianity in France, swallowed by the tides of modernity, science, and reason. Protestants were mostly evicted or "invited to leave" during the Counter-Reformation in the 17th century. The use of religious language and symbols was outlawed in public in the years after the French Revolution against the Catholic nobility. "Having faith" or "being spiritual" is often seen as odd, or a form of ignorance, or superstition.

Evangelical Christianity, required two centuries to take root in France, and germinated as the context transitioned from a closed and hostile religious market to a much more open spiritual marketplace with a plurality of options. "French society has gotten more horizontal and associational," says Mr. Fath, author of a 2011 study titled "A New Protestant France."

Evangelicalism has been growing quietly since the 1950s. The number of believers has risen from 50,000 to 600,000 today. Half of the country's Protestants are evangelicals, according to France's National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) figures. "France itself is changing, and this is a reflection of this transition," says Sebastian Fath, a researcher at (CNRS) and an expert on evangelicalism.

The following information is taken from Daniel Liechti's, vice-president of the CNEF, 2015 publication, **Evangelical Protestant Churches in France by the numbers:**

- **600 000** - Out of a total of 1.7M French Protestants, 600,000 regularly practice their faith (all ages).
- **460 000** - Of these 600,000, 460,000 identify themselves as Evangelicals and 140,000 as Reformed/Lutheran.
- **3/4** - Evangelical Protestants represent 33% of all Protestants but 75% of those who regularly practice their faith.
- **10** - The number of Evangelical Protestants has increased 10 times in the past 60 years (in 1950, there were 50,000 practicing Evangelicals)
- **2,442** - There are 2,112 local churches in France, counting those communities that offer at least 3 services per month on the weekends (in 1970, there were 769). Additionally, there are 430 more places of worship that meet less frequently.
- **10** - A new local church is born every 10 days – about 35 new churches per year.
- **45** - The majority of local churches belong to one of 45 denominations.
- **70** - Out of all the local churches who belong to a denomination, over 70% are affiliated with the CNEF.

In fact, French scholars say, evangelicalism is likely the fastest-growing religion in France – defying all stereotypes about Europe's most secular nation. The reasons are manifold: growing minority populations in France from Africa and Asia are less strictly secular and more religious.

Evangelicals offer a “friendlier” and less hierarchical model of worship, with more community warmth and room for emotive expression, “speaking to the heart” of people in a Europe preoccupied with wealth and worldliness, and providing a haven in times of harsh economic setbacks.

Most of this activity takes place far off the French cultural radar, although the phenomenon stretches beyond smaller suburbs and towns.

That’s a contrast with the Catholic vertical and hierarchical model. French society is more decentralized. There’s greater emphasis on consumer and citizen power, shaping local policy, and a growing impatience with approval or dictates from the top.

French evangelicals face tough cultural hurdles. Faith in France is viewed with skepticism if not hostility. French enlightenment philosophy contained an “animus against Christianity,” as the late US historian Page Smith noted. French discourse is Marxist, atheist, and secular. Religion is mostly Catholic or Islamic. French evangelicals proselytize far less openly. Sharing is often discreet and relies more on deeds than words.

The French church model is more modest than the American megachurch. When William Ayers, pastor of the Willow Creek Church and innovator of the megachurch concept, on a visit to Paris, suggested to us that France build “100 churches of 10,000 members” the overall response was: “we would rather have 10,000 churches of 100 members”

In 2010, the National Counsel of Evangelicals in France (CNEF) was officially created as a separate association. It remains a place of dialogue, reflection, and prayer – a platform aiming to reinforce the visibility of and connections within the France Evangelical Protestant world while respecting its diversity.

The CNEF now represents 70% of all French evangelical congregations connected to a church group.

Church groups and individual churches that are members of the CNEF are all committed to the goal of seeing the creation of 1 evangelical church for every 10,000 inhabitants in France. Currently there is 1 church for every 32,000 people in France. In order to reach the goal of 1 church for every 10,000 inhabitants, there is a need to triple the number of churches in France! Churches are being planted at an increasing rate (a 15.5% increase in the number of churches from 2012-2015!)

To help achieve this goal, the CNEF has started establishing Regional Church-Planter Training Centers (CFRI in French, for “Centre de Formation Régional planteurs”). We are actively involved in this training of national church-planters.

II. OUR CHURCH-PLANTING VISION AND GOALS

We have been involved in six separate church-plants in the Paris area since 1978. Since October 2000, we have seen three of them occur in the department of the Yvelines (western suburbs of Paris). The department of the Yvelines stretches out for 1 427 square miles with a total population of 1 421 670 people living in 262 towns and cities. There are currently 42 evangelical churches in the Yvelines, roughly 1 church for 33 850 people.

Our vision is to see an additional 100 new church-plants in the Yvelines over the next 10 years through the multiplication of daughter churches by already existing churches. We are looking to recruit 10 missionary couples within the next 10 years to be involved in this project. We are also looking to train, equip and mentor 20 national church planters during this same period.

We partner with the AEEI (Evangelical Alliance of Interdependent Churches). Presently, there are 36 churches in three regions of France that are affiliated with the AEEI.

There are three main elements to the vision of the AEEI and partner mission boards (TEAM, BMW, GEM & SIM): planting new churches, supporting church growth, and developing new leaders.

All of this is summed up in our French slogan: *Bâtir des Églises qui se multiplient* (literally: "Building churches that multiply themselves").

We have helped the national leadership of the CNEF and AEEI develop - through our involvement on the AEEI 's Vision and Strategy Committee and active participation at the CNEF's bi-annual church-planting seminars, a strategy to help flesh out this vision during the past few years. It revolves around five key areas which feed into one another:



And this is what we're praying the Lord will help us to do in each of these five key areas:

Leadership:

- selection of new leaders for existing churches and new church-plant endeavors
- training & equipping them well
- providing a well-structured support for their ministry

Church growth:

- encouraging healthy church growth
- leading to more mother churches planting daughter churches

Church services:

- promoting services that are focused on God
- culturally relevant and accessible to non-believers

Discipleship:

- developing a culture of discipleship within every church
- encouraging all believers to live out the gospel

Community involvement:

- helping churches develop appropriate activities
- so that God might be glorified