What’s going on in Paris?!

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Hello dear friends!

In September, we returned to France after two months in the United States. We were so grateful to travel the US and visit with many of you, and we are glad to be back in France. We have so many stories to share, here are just a few highlights.

Summer travels, Autumn returns

We spent this year’s summer break in the United States for our “North American Ministry,” marking the end of our first term (2024-2026) with Mennonite Mission Network and in preparation for our second term

starting this fall (2026-2028). The first few weeks had us traveling across the eastern half of the country for a family reunion, church visits, and wonderful time with family and friends. In August, we returned to Newton, Kansas where our kids could get **double** Grandma time, and we could all reconnect with our Kansas community. To everyone we saw, thank you for your welcome and for making us feel at home. We miss you all!

School for Auden and Ludo started just a few days after our return to France where they were back in class with friends from the previous year! Laurel is no longer teaching at the Montessori school where she was for the past two years, so we are finding new family and work rhythms with Ben and Laurel both at the Paris Mennonite Center (CMP). Laurel led an introduction to circle processes for an inter-church day in September, which was very well received, and she is also working on making CMP's hospitality spaces more welcoming and practical. Ben is contributing nearly every month to the French mennonite magazine, *Christ Seul*, participating in the French Mennonite Peace and Theology groups, and joining in the effort for an ecumenical peace witness in France.

Many groups have used CMP as a place to learn or work in Paris: in October we were especially happy to have a group of Swedish 19- and 20-year-olds who were touring Europe to learn about peace and discipleship, and the European Advisory Council of Mennonite Central Committee. The Paris Mennonite Center continues to be a hospitable

meeting point for learners, researchers, peace workers, and the global church. We feel grateful to be a part of it.

And what about the protests in France?

Many of you have asked us about the recent protests in France. First, to respond to your questions: yes, we are safe; no, we are not fearful. It seems to us that a lot of the English-speaking media have given a skewed impression of the situation here, focusing heavily on violence and trying to make its readership afraid of the protests. Here is a very brief timeline of the protests, the way we understand them.

Shortly after school began in September, high schoolers began to protest the poor conditions in their schools: classes without teachers, buildings falling apart, rats in the classrooms, no heating for the winter. While this started in the southwest outskirts of Paris, near us, it quickly spread across the country. The government then decided to quash these student protests with tear gas, fire hoses, etc., which caused serious injury to protesters and caused more French people to come join the protest in solidarity with the students. Today, it is no longer just a student movement, but a mass movement of disaffection with cost of living and lack of government support. The past several Saturdays, there have been nationwide planned protests. While some bad actors have used the opportunity for property damage and theft, the overall atmosphere has been celebratory solidarity. Our greater concern than the actions of protesters has been the actions of the police: combat

tactics, misleading directions, attempts to infiltrate and influence student organizing, and outright violence against protesters.

The story the US media seems to be telling is this: these protests are a sign that French society is on the verge of collapse. But in some circles in France, we hear a different and more compelling story: this is a sign of an engaged, functioning political society. French people have high expectations of their government. When those expectations are not met, French people believe they have a right to demand better, and so they do demand better.

I wonder why the USA might be nervous about that second story? In the US, it seems that there's been a steady destruction of the population's sense that their voice can be heard or that they should have any positive expectations of their government. If disaffected citizens spoke up in the US like they did in France, what might change?

A final thought on Mennonite history: much of the global movement of European Mennonite populations over the past 500 years has been in search of the political privilege of not serving in the military. So even though one story about Anabaptist history is that we "don't participate in politics," that's not entirely true. We have been happy to seek and use political privilege for the wellbeing of our community. Voting is also a political privilege that we shouldn't take for granted. So - be an Anabaptist! Use the privilege available to you for the wellbeing of your community. Go vote!

With love,

Ben, Laurel, Auden, and Ludo

From *Voices Together* #1043

With gratitude for the home God has made for us on this planet we pray,

Send your Holy Spirit

to strengthen our resolve

to strive for communities

where foreigners become neighbors

and strangers become friends.

Revive our desire for the reign of Christ,

who releases prisoners

and liberates the oppressed,

who frees the world from greed

and proclaims God’s peace.

Make justice roll down like a river

and righteousness flow like an everlasting stream. Amen.