



The Bless Network
January 2010

Proposal for

The Development of Bethanie Christian Centre as
a missional community, training base and centre for
prayer

Executive Summary

The Bless Network is a UK registered charity established in June 2004, building on the work of Cafe-net, a voluntary project active from 1995 to 2003. We offer opportunities in short-term mission service to young people, in partnership with local churches on the mainland of Europe. Combining training, personal development, prayer and practical service, Bless programmes seek to draw out the potential of young people and to see them grow through the experience of 'living for others'.

Supported by an administrative hub and core team in Birmingham, UK, The Bless Network has active team members in two locations in France: Lisieux in the North and Perpignan in the South. Mission placements have been established with local churches in France, Croatia the Netherlands and Spain. Bless operates through four programmes: a 'gap-year' discipleship scheme (*year2bless*), short-term mission teams (*go2bless*), prayer trips (*heart2bless*) and a web-based network (*connect2bless*). Over 14 years we have enabled around 600 people to take their first steps in mission, ranging in age from 16 to 60 and drawn from the UK, France, the Netherlands, Australia and the USA. The Bless Team is made up of 11 people based in the UK and France: all of whom serve on a self-funded basis. In addition we resource a network of around 40 volunteers and youth 'reps'.

This proposal concerns the purchase of a retreat centre near Lisieux in Normandy, to be developed as a hub for training, prayer and mission for the network. The new facility will serve and expand the existing programmes and will greatly increase the organisation's capacity to affect young lives, consolidating the network's position as a significant provider of 'missional formation' in the context of contemporary European cultures. The new centre will provide:

- The residential base for a *missional community* - providing the spiritual and creative heart of Bless.
- A permanent *training base* - offering resources and residential experiences to participants in the *year2bless* and *go2bless* programmes.
- A *centre for prayer* for the continent of Europe - providing ongoing resources and facilities in creative prayer and a base for *heart2bless* weekends.
- A *knowledge centre* for mission in Europe - gathering, exchanging and exploring the many stories by which the mission of God is being expressed across Europe.

*“There is no challenge more pressing
for the churches of Western Europe
than the rediscovery of missional imagination.
This project will make a major contribution.”*
Chris Stoddard, Director, RUN Network

Bethanie consists of two separate houses with 10 bedrooms in all, a meeting space for 50 people, a prayer room / chapel and a number of former agricultural buildings. Planning permission has been granted for the conversion of these into residential units. The property has been valued at €550,000 but has been offered to us for €400,000. The purchase will cost in total €426,000, including a provision of €26,000 for legal expenses. €40,000 of this figure was raised in 2009 and has been paid as a deposit. The remaining sums are due to be paid in June 2010. Additional funds will be needed after the purchase to develop the centre to its full potential.

A Bless team is already resident at the centre, having been invited to begin the project during the period of the sale. Around 100 people have used the centre during this transition time, including participants in the go2bless, year2bless and heart2bless programmes.

Our intention is to complete the purchase by July 2010, to make initial development changes by the end of 2010 and from 2011 to 2016 to pursue a five-year development plan. We hope to have 40 beds available by the end of 2010.

We are seeking financial partners to invest with us in this venture, whether through donation, long-term loan or co-ownership. The property will be owned and managed by the Bless Network in the UK, using our existing Charitable Company, and we are open to making arrangements whereby donors are able to retain a long-term stake in the property.

We believe that missional formation - the combining of training, practical experience and personal spiritual growth - is a vital tool in the shaping of a new generation. The development of Bethanie will provide a significant new channel for this formation, contributing towards a generation of young Europeans committed to a life of service. The young people who join our programmes are challenged to ‘live for others’ and we believe that this challenge, rightly managed, can produce a lifelong affect.

Please consider partnering with us in this venture and investing in a new generation of servant leaders for the continent of Europe.

1. The Bless Story

In 1995 Gerard and Chrissie Kelly returned to the UK from service with Jeunesse pour Christ (Youth for Christ) in France. Aware of the huge missional needs of mainland Europe, and the many opportunities to work alongside local churches, they were dismayed to find so little on offer to enable young people from the UK and beyond to understand and respond to the needs of their continent. They believed it would be possible to create low-cost, high-impact experiences of cross-cultural mission, within the borders of Europe, through which young people could be shaped and formed with a commitment to live for others. Launching this project under the name Café-net, they began to work with local projects in Croatia and France. Formal charity registration in 2004 brought a change of name to The Bless Network. The network now has 11 team members, all of whom are self-funding, working in the UK and France. Short-term mission trips to Croatia and France (go2bless) are complemented by gap-year placements in Croatia, France, the Netherlands and Spain (year2bless). A programme of active prayer (heart2bless) and a network of churches and individuals backing the vision (connect2bless) have together created a wide network of support. All these projects reflect the key emphases of Bless:

- An integration of spirituality with practical service, empowering both prayer *for* and mission *to* the nations of Europe.
- A commitment to the discipling of younger leaders through missional experience.
- A commitment to the local church as God's original and primary agent of mission: all our missional placements are with dynamic, growing local churches.
- A clear focus on the missional needs of the continent of Europe.
- An understanding of the mission of God as the heart of our engagement. Before we ask 'what should we do?' we ask 'what is God doing?'
- An integration of the creative arts into prayer and mission, reflecting the colour and beauty of God.
- A recognition of the value of cross-cultural service as a learning opportunity.
- A belief in the capacity of early-adult experiences to produce a positive lifelong impact.

*“Europe needs strong churches.
Churches need motivated young leaders.
Leaders need quality resources.
Bless is working towards all three:
please join with us.”*

Rt Rev Pete Broadbent, Bishop of Willesden and Chair of Trustees

2. Mission, Vision, Values

Our Mission:

The Bless Network exists to transform the lives of people in Europe by empowering Christians through prayer, personal creativity and strategic partnerships to live for the service of others.

Our Vision:

The Bless Network will be a centre of excellence for prayer, mission, training and research and a bridge for the global church into mainland Europe.

Our Values:

The Bless Network is an organisation whose principles are rooted in the Bible, shaped by prayer and inspired and led by the Holy Spirit.

3. Scope

The work of Bless responds to the needs of four distinct groups of people:

- *The young people who participate in our programmes.* Learning to serve is a vital element in personal growth. Our programmes enable young people to experience and reflect on what it means to 'live for others'.
- *The placement churches these young people serve.* These are young and often under-resourced communities of faith. Our teams make a vital difference, building the capacity of these churches to serve, in turn, the communities in which they are found.
- *These same communities.* Much of our work is with children and young people, and we have had significant opportunities to improve their lives and those of their families: with the local church offering on-the-ground, ongoing support.
- *The churches and neighbourhoods to which young people return after involvement with Bless.* There is a real benefit to these communities, and lessons learned in cross-cultural mission can make a difference in a wide range of career and community settings.

*“A knowledge centre for the churches of Europe;
a L’Abri for the 21st Century.
This is an idea whose time has come
– and Bless are just the people to do it.”*

Jim Saker, Ford Professor in Retail Management, Loughborough University

4. Goals and Objectives

Our goal in developing a Centre for Missional formation is to increase our capacity to influence the lives of young people and through them serve communities across Europe. Our objectives are:

- To increase the numbers of young people impacted through the work of Bless
- To increase the depth and effectiveness of the training we are able to offer.
- To create ongoing, year-round, opportunities for young people to identify and engage with the missional goals of Bless.
- To deepen the impact of our work on the local churches we serve and the communities in which they are found.

5. Location

Bethanie is located in the village of Heurtevent, 4 km from the market town of Livarot and 23 km from the regional capital Lisieux.

Postal address:

Béthanie, Le Val Ingou,
Heurtevent, Basse Normandie,
14140, France
Tel +33974625297

Driving Distances:

Caen (Ferry): 50 km **Le Havre** (Ferry): 80 km **Paris** (Airports): 200 km
Calais (Ferry): 330 km **Brussels**: 460 km **Amsterdam**: 700 km
Perpignan, France: 1010 km **Zagreb**, Croatia: 1650 km
Train Services: Paris 1hr 45

6.The Centre

Bethanie is a 19th century farm in the village of Heurtevent near Lisieux in France. Operated since 1995 as a Christian Centre (www.centre-bethanie.fr), the property has accommodation for 20 people in two houses. Planning permission has been granted to extend this to 50 through the renovation of existing farm buildings, with much of the infrastructure for this expansion already in place. A large meeting room and a chapel / prayer room complement the accommodation available. Both Catholic and Protestant groups have regularly used the centre for Alpha weekends, retreats and seminars and Bill and Jan Gordon, the present owners, are in relationship with the Catholic church of nearby Livarot and with La Source, a fast-growing Baptist church recently planted in Lisieux with whom Bless already have a partnership (www.egliseedelasource.fr)

Bethanie is 20 km from Lisieux and just under 50 from Caen and the cross-channel ferries. Paris is less than 2 hours away by road or train. Lisieux is one of the most significant centres of pilgrimage in France and the most popular after Lourdes, with over 1 million visitors each year (<http://en.lisieux-tourisme.com/>). Having long believed that that the work of Bless should be housed in a physical centre on mainland Europe, we have now found the ideal location. Bethanie is an established residential centre, well located in northern France and known already as a place of prayer and learning. Its development as a centre of missional formation will impact churches and individuals across Europe. The name Bethanie was originally chosen to reflect that of the village in which Jesus so often chose to take 'time out.' This name will be retained in the address of the new centre, pointing to the balance we hope to strike between Sabbath rest and missional task.

*“Gerard & Chrissie bring unusual passion,
commitment and imagination to giving birth
to this Missional Centre to share the good news.
I am looking forward to seeing how
they help a new generation unleash their imagination
in creating new ways to make a difference
for God’s kingdom in these turbulent times.”
Tom Sine, author, The New Conspirators*

7. Timetable

Bethanie Will be bought and developed by Bless in a three-stage process. The property has been made available to us in September 2009 on payment of a 10% deposit. Final completion will be nine months later in July 2010, after which it will be possible to begin work on renovation and expansion.

	Detail	Dates
Phase One	Initiation of purchase; 10% deposit paid; property available to Bless	September 2009
Phase Two	Completion of purchase	July 2010
Phase Three	Expansion and development	September 2010 onwards

8. Budget

	Detail	Anticipated Costs
September 2009	Deposit	40,000 Euro
July 2010	Remaining purchase price and costs	386,000 Euro
	Total (Year one)	426,000 Euro

Further fund-raising will take place after July 2010 to ensure the ongoing development of the property. For its current level of 20 beds, Bethanie was handed over to us in September 2009 functional and fully equipped.

*“The church needs
innovation and inspiration
as never before –
I thoroughly endorse this imaginative vision.”*
Al Hirsch, author, The Forgotten Ways

9. Participant Feedback

Comments from our programme participants of 2007, 2008 and 2009.

It has stretched me in many ways. I've been able to step out in the gifts God has given me. I learned again that God loves me and has a distinct plan for everyone.
Iris, NL, go2bless Croatia

This year has been crucial for my spiritual development. It has been a turning point that will be with me for the rest of my life...
Jonathan, UK, year2bless Perpignan

My understanding of Croatian culture and the way God is moving here and of the war situation has expanded greatly.
Josh, UK, go2bless Croatia

The positives were countless, the people, the environment, the spiritual input, the chance to serve during my year abroad and obviously the language!
Sandy, year2bless Perpignan

It is so great to see how Bless really empowers and trusts young people. You learn so much from doing mission. I am so thankful.
Stefanie, NL, go2bless Croatia

I had expected to be changed a lot by God while I was here - and that has definitely happened. I expected I would learn a lot of things, which for some would be painful but definitely worth learning - and that's exactly what happened, too.
Naomi, year2bless Croatia

I expected so much less than I got! I hoped that the team would pull together and we'd have fun with the kids: but I didn't expect God to do so much in me, in other individuals and in Slavonski Brod....
Ruth, UK, go2bless, Croatia

I feel like I'm coming back to the UK with a greater relationship with God and a better sense of discipline. It's been very challenging at times: but I'm going back changed!
Lee, UK, go2bless Croatia

*“This is a thrilling new project
from an organisation with a proven track record.
I cannot recommend it highly enough.”*

Ian Coffey, Director of Leadership Training, Moorlands College, UK

10. Next Steps

These are the actions you can take to pursue involvement in this project:

- **Contact Us** if you require further information or have specific suggestions or proposals. Gerard Kelly can be reached on gerard@blessnet.eu and David Beasley, our Operations Manager, on david@blessnet.eu.
- **Invite Us** if you would like a member of our team to visit a church or group to share this vision and need.
- **Pray for us.** We will gladly provide you with up to date information to fuel prayer!
- **Spread the word.** Downloadable resources are available at www.blessnet.eu
- **Give us feedback** on this project and your responses to it.
- **Donate Online** through Just Giving. Visit our dedicated page at <http://www.justgiving.com/blessnetwork>
- **Organise a fund-raising event.** We would love to see our long-term supporters mobilised as fund-raisers. Sell cakes; ride a bike; jump out of a plane... whatever it takes to grab attention and promote giving. Register your event at Just Giving, <http://www.justgiving.com/blessnetwork>
- **Donate by Cheque.** For tax efficiency, we channel gift-aided gifts through Stewardship (www.stewardship.org.uk). Stewardship do not yet have a full on-line giving service, though they will launch this service soon. In the meantime, contact david@blessnet.eu to receive the appropriate paperwork. As a registered charity, we can also receive gifts from Charities Aid Foundation and other giving foundations.
- **Donate by bank transfer** to The Bless Network, Cooperative Bank,
Sort Code: 08-92-99 **Account number:** 65149362
IBAN: GB39 CPBK 0892 9965 1493 62 **BIC:** CPBK GB22
- **Donate in the Netherlands** through *Stichting Nederlandse Gemeente voor Wereldevangelisatie* (NGW), Krimweg 74, 7352 AW, Hoenderloo.
Donations made through the NGW are tax-deductible in the Netherlands.
Donations can be paid to the NGW bank account: **48.63.80.335**.
Please make sure you reference *The Bless Network*.

11. Web Links

There are a number of web sites you can visit to find out more about the Bless plans for Bethanie.

- www.blessnet.eu is the online home of the Bless Network.
- A collection of images of Bethanie are shown at <http://ihardlyknowher.com/35758559@N05>.
- www.liveforothers.eu is a collaborative blog for participants in Bless programmes.
- Bless images are archived at <http://ihardlyknowher.com/blesseurope/sets> and videos at <http://vimeo.com/bless>
- Downloadable resources including a digital brochure, poster and powerpoint file are available at www.blessnet.eu/bethanie
- You can make an immediate donation at www.justgiving.com/blessnetwork.

12. Trustees:

- The Bless Network is chaired by **Rt Rev Peter Broadbent**, Bishop of Willesden. Pete is also Chairman of the Board of Memralife, (formerly Spring Harvest) and of St John's College, Nottingham.
- **Marguerite Eccleshall** (Stourbridge) is a teacher and an Elder of Chawn Hill Church.
- **Martin Thomas** (Oxford) spent ten years with CMS (The Church Mission Society) and now works with World Vision.
- **Dr Tom Gwilliam** (Telford) is a Chiropractor and Director of The Centre for Positive Health in Wellington, Shropshire
- **Jim Saker** is Ford Professor in Retail Management at Loughborough University
- **Gerard and Chrissie Kelly** also serve as trustees.



13. TEAM

- The Directors of the Bless Network are Gerard and Chrissie Kelly. **Gerard** holds an MA in Evangelism Studies from Sheffield University. He was from 1996 to 2005 a member of the Leadership Team of Spring Harvest, and from 2005 to 2009 Senior Pastor of Crossroads International Church in Amsterdam. Gerard is the author of ten books published in the UK, USA, France, Germany and Finland. **Chrissie** is an Associate of the London College of Music and an experienced worship leader who has served in leadership in churches in the UK and France and the Netherlands. She co-authored, with Gerard, the 2009 book 'Intimate with the Ultimate.'
- **Dave and Amy Roche** joined the Bless Network (then Café-net) in 2003 and relocated to Perpignan in Southern France in 2005. They serve a local French church, the Centre Chrétien du Roussillon (www.ccr66.org) and are pioneering an English-speaking church, River Church (www.riverchurch.typepad.com). Amy oversees the on-line study programme undertaken by *year2bless* participants.
- **David and Janey Beasley** are based in the UK office in Birmingham, working on General Management and Programme Development respectively.
- **Caroline Gwilliam**, looks after the 'reps' network at the heart of the *connect2bless* programme and manages recruitment and planning for our involvement in the PRAYERhouse programme at Spring Harvest.
- **Naja Skov** oversees communication across the network, as well as inputting into
- **Blythe Toll** is an artist based in Melbourne, Australia. She and her husband Dave served with Bless in the UK and Croatia for 18 months in 2003 / 2004. Blythe now supports the training programme of *year2bless* as an on-line tutor.
- **Jonathan Cherry** is a professional photographer who contributes to Bless in design and mission team leadership. training and programmes



14. Contact

- Our UK office and registered address is:
the bless network,
Chawn Hill Church Centre, Chawn Hill, Stourbridge, DY9 7JD
- Our French office address is:
Bethanie,
Le Val Ingou, 14140, Heurtevent, Basse Normandie, France
- Contact e-mail: office@blessnet.eu
- Team members can be e-mailed by using the formula firstname@blessnet.eu
- UK Company #5156475 UK Charity #1105173



15.FAQ

We have tried to assemble here some of the more pressing questions that we have been asked. If you have a question that is not answered here, please do get in touch – gerard@blessnet.eu or david@blessnet.eu.

Why France?

We are a UK-based charity, but we have always believed that our training should take place 'in-situ' on mainland Europe. Even a weekend training event takes on new depth if you have to cross the channel to get to it! We want to maximize the cross-cultural impact of mission and training experiences, and working with our 'nearest neighbours' in Normandy has proved an excellent way to do this.

Why the big jump in funding?

Bless has operated with an income of around £35,000 pa for several years, largely because our team members (currently 10 people) are self-funding and do not raise funds through Bless itself. Even with that, it is a huge step to move from income of £35,000 to an appeal for £450,000. We are aware of the size of this challenge – but we believe it is the right move to make. It *is* a big step, but it is the right 'next step' for Bless.

Will Bless now focus only on France?

No. Our work in Croatia is growing significantly – in 2009 / 2010 we will have three year2bless students each spending several months in Slavonski Brod. We have new placements opening up in Spain and Germany. We have always been a network with a 'heart for Europe' and Bethanie will play its part as the new hub of this network. We do have excellent local links in the Lisieux area as well as elsewhere in France and we will be developing work with them: but not at the expense of our wider commitment to European mission.

Does Bless plant churches?

We do not operate as a church-planting agency, but do we work alongside a number of church plants. We work as a support agency to existing churches – whether these have existing for many years or are newly planted. Our aim is to come alongside churches in missional settings for whom our people, energy and resources can be a significant help. We believe that Europe's situation calls for both the planting of new churches and the renewal of existing denominations.

How will Bethanie be managed?

Our local team at Bethanie will ensure that the centre is run according to French norms and regulations, but the overall project will be managed from the UK. Bless, the UK charity, will retain the controlling influence over the centre.

Is this a long-term vision?

Yes,. Bless has grown from a dream we first dreamt in 1995. We are here for the long haul and believe the network has the capacity to grow in depth and influence over the coming years. We are looking at Bethanie in terms of decades, not years!