

Dear Kircubbin Community Church,

Mat will be concluding his time as Pastor of our church next week on Sunday 24th April (finishing completely on Friday 29th April. This will mean that our church leaders will be Alan and Phil as elders with Andrew and Robert as deacons. I had hoped to give you more details a lot sooner about where we will be heading and what we will be doing as a church during the period after Mat finishes. However, as many of you know, Alan and Caroline have had a very energy- and emotion-consuming time with Caroline's Uncle Cecil moving in with them and then being taken to hospital. This was combined with Alan having to spend more than a week in hospital. At the same time, very soon after the AGM and being voted in as elder I had Covid and have had one of the most challenging terms at school that I remember. There have also been through this time some challenging situations in the background in church. It would be true to say that both Alan and I are still feeling the after-effects of our illnesses and the emotional impact of other issues. This is not how I planned to approach a vacancy in our Pastor's position. We need your prayers personally and for us to be able to continue our role as elders. We also need your love and patience.

I have thought of ending this letter here, so that you are aware of how hard and challenging and beyond Alan and I, as men, that our roles feel at the moment and so that you don't just gloss over this and think 'it'll be alright...' Please take time to pray for us now.

"My gift of undeserved grace is all you need. My power is strongest when you are weak." 2 Cor 12:9

Sunday mornings

After Mat finishes, we have a rota mostly filled to ensure that Sundays run in order with preaching through to the end of June. The worship group has been strengthened and I think we are all encourage and led by this ministry each week. WhizzKidz and Creche ministries are mostly covered and ready to continue. From July we have a teaching series in the planning stage based on 1 Timothy and then moving on to Luke's gospel in the Autumn up to Christmas. We have three main teachers/preachers in our church with Alan, Blair and Phil who will generally preach once a month. We are hoping that Robert will be able to do a couple too. We plan to approach Baptist and Belfast Bible College about having one or two students to come and preach as part of our series and we are open to other suggestions from the church.

Ministries

We plan to approach people to take on leadership/coordination of different ministries in our church and give them some clear guidance on the elders' thoughts for direction in their ministry and then release them to seek God's vision for that ministry to bring back to the elders for oversight before implementing it with God's help. Please be ready for us or a ministry leader to approach you to ask you to either lead or serve in a ministry - we are a small church and it is hard to cover all bases and it is also very easy for just a few people to become very overburdened - this stage of our church's journey needs people to stand up and take responsibility and serve.

BYE Team and Outreach

Every time I feel a real '*this is the moment*' for planning and leading people in outreach to Kircubbin and the Peninsula big things happen in church or at school and my capacity is directed to those things - these last few years this has happened significantly several times - but the passion and the desire to motivate and equip our church to reach out to people who are not just heading for, but currently living a lost eternity, is still there and in God's strength and his timing we will see something come out

of this. As many of you know this is where the vision for Kircubbin started with Summer WhizzKidz starting 25 years ago this year - long before KCC was established!

In the summer we have a BYE (Baptist Youth Evangelism) Team coming for a week (23rd-31st July.) They will be taking charge of WhizzKidz and we will be joining them in this. They will also do some outreach with the youth of our local area as well as encouraging and growing our own teens (and slightly older ones!) This is full of potential and we need people to offer the young people coming as part of the team accommodation so please contact Sharon if you can offer a bed or two for the week (sharond69@yahoo.co.uk.)

Pastoral Care

A number of years ago we had a pastoral care team which was very helpful and successful in caring for the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of our church. This came to a natural end and since then there has been less capacity for formal structured pastoral care in the church and we know that many have found this challenging. It is very easy for us to always look to someone else to take on the role of pastoral care. I would strongly encourage each of us to take responsibility in a small way for the pastoral care of each other - this is Biblical. Look out for each other, provide for brothers and sisters when we see they have a need, offer to pray with people and above all actively (not passively) love and grace each other. It is important that we offer and accept pastoral care to and from people not just from the elders and yet value both equally. Having said that, if you find yourself or someone else in the church in an urgent or serious (or both) situation then call on the elders to come and visit you or them, don't wait for the elders to notice - the Bible says in James 5 to '*call* the elders of the church to pray.'

The elders are also hoping to have a pastoral surgery on Monday nights once a month in the new Room 2 where one or both of us will be there for 2 hours with 2 available appointments - if you want to book to see us then get in touch otherwise, we will be planning to invite people from church to come and share with us and let us pray with you. This may be a different approach to pastoral care than many people are used to, but please work with us remembering the context that I have outlined above. It means it is a sustainable approach that the elders can hopefully maintain and every family in the church should get the opportunity to meet with the elders at least once in a twelve-month period. *(If people have young family or can't get to the new Room 2 then the elders will travel to them.)*

Pastor's position

It was agreed at the AGM that Mat would finish at the end of April and then the church would continue to pay him for the following three months as an act of gratitude for his work and a period of Sabbath rest for him as he looks to what comes next for him and his family. They will take a number of weeks away from the church and then may possibly decide to return and continue to be part of our church but not as pastor or in a paid position - the elders will seek to continue to support them prayerfully through this period and we ask that the church continue to pray for them and God's guidance in to his next steps for them.

It is very important for all of you to know that this whole process of coming to this point has not been rushed - prayerful discussion was over a period of about 6 months - it was a humbling and God-honouring process where the leadership of the church, Mat and Claire grew clearer and clearer together that this was God's way forward for them and for our church.

There will then be a vacancy for at least a number of months, without a paid worker as there is no one in mind for the role at the moment. This is a challenge because we will then have a 33% smaller leadership team and no one doing the 3 days per week which Mat was employed to do. The capacity of the leaders to do more than they have been doing is very limited, especially as I have described at the beginning of this letter - *I assume at this point, in the US someone would say - "You do the Math!"*

We don't want to rush into appointing someone without praying through what we feel the church needs but we do need someone with dedicated time at least 3 days a week to administer our church and provide pastoral care as a minimum. We ask God to give us all wisdom and guidance about this and the strength, love and patience in the interim.

The Most Important Part of the Vision

Love.

We have vision for the church to be united in love.

***"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* John 13:35**

This bit takes guts, it takes swallowing your pride, it takes humility and submission - it will cause you to sacrifice yourself as a living offering. As part of this we want to strongly encourage you all to invite each other into your homes for coffee, tea or a meal to share about your stories, to get to know each other, to encourage each other and to pray with each other. Can you plan to invite someone in the next month and then someone else before the end of June? This fellowship and togetherness is so important to our church.

Grace each other, grace each other, grace each other, keep on gracing each other and then...grace each other some more. Keep on gracing each other. When it gets really tough then continue to show grace! As Robert made clear last Sunday - not one of us is perfect, not one of us is going to get life, church, relationships right all the time. God has shown each one of us awesome, amazing grace - so undeserved - let us allow this to fill us and guide us when times are hard, when people 'rub us up the wrong way,' when the way forward seems wrong to us. It is amazing what love can do in and through us but "me" and "my way" have to come off the throne to allow love for God and love for his people to reign in us.

Grace, grace and more grace to you all.

Love from,

Phil and Alan.