



1st September 2009

Dear friend,

As we enter a new church year in First Antrim it is with much personal thanks to God that I reflect on the past five months. Since we as a family came to Antrim at the end of March, and since my installation as teaching elder on 9th April, you as a congregation have helped make our transition a smooth one. Esther and I are so grateful to the Lord for your welcome and continuing kind words, cards, encouragement, support, love and concern.

This letter, however, is not just about expressing my personal thanks to you as a congregation. At our June meeting of Kirk session, it was felt it would be helpful for the congregation to be informed about some of the important matters session were looking at and seeking to address, and also to be informed of some of the plans for the new church year (particularly with regard to our acts of public worship on the Lord's Day) and the paid ministry team.

For some time now session has been concerned about the decline in the numbers of late-teens to 30s associated with the congregation of First Antrim and attending our acts of public worship. This is not just an issue here. Unfortunately it is an issue affecting very many congregations. We have been asking the Lord to come down and fall upon our acts of public worship because we believe that the presence of the Lord will draw people to Him but we have also been asking the Lord for wisdom regarding any practical ways we can address the problem. As we have prayed over this issue we have felt led to make some small adjustments to aspects of our public worship and youth programmes. They are as follows:

- **Sunday Youth Programme** - Junior Bible Class (JBC) and Elevation will merge to form one organisation meeting on two separate occasions. [It is hoped that in linking the programme planning for JBC and Elevation we will better cater for the young folk.] **Elevation AM** will meet on Sunday mornings twice a month and will cater for young people in first and second year of high school. **Elevation PM** will meet most Sunday evenings and will cater for all young people of secondary school age.
- **Together** - On the *fourth Sunday* of each month from September to May, there will be a morning service in the meeting house at which FOG Club and the newly formed Elevation AM will remain and that will take a similar format to our current evening service. It is hoped that younger members will participate in the service and worksheets relating to the sermon will be provided for the children and young people.

I also plan to introduce to both acts of public worship an additional Scripture reading. We will systematically read through books of the Bible, a passage at a time, beginning with Proverbs. Historically, this practice has been blessed of the Lord as the Holy Spirit has taken the Word of God and applied it to the hearts of those who listen.

As far as preaching is concerned, I intend to continue with the ***exposition of Philippians on Sunday evenings***. On Sunday mornings I hope to address some important issues in a number of short series: ***The Whys of Worship, What is the Gospel?*** and ***Marriage and the Family***, followed by a longer series entitled ***Death, the Afterlife and the Last Things***. Some of you have been asking questions about Heaven and Hell and these are the kind of subjects that will be dealt with in detail in this series. Of course, these plans are all subject to the leading of the Lord as we journey through the year.

As you may be aware, session has also been giving much time over to prayer and seeking the Lord's will regarding a paid ministry team. We believe that the Lord has been showing us that ***there is a need in the congregation for a deaconess so application will be made early in the new church year***. Scott Moore, our summer assistant finishes his placement with First Antrim on 13th September but we ***welcome Reverend Colin Jones as assistant minister until the end of December***. We continue to be grateful to God for the pastoral work carried out week by week among members and adherents of First Antrim by Reverend Dr. Crawford Ballantine. ***Session are also continuing to work on the 'Let's Put Antrim First' forms and hope to respond (DV) during the autumn.***

As the 2009–2010 church year begins let us all seek to walk closely with the Lord so that the transforming power of the Gospel may be seen in our lives and that our ... *love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9)*

Your friend and minister,

WJM Parker

If you have access to the internet log on to ***www.firstantrim.com*** to get up-to-date information on our ***public acts of worship, our youth programmes*** and the multitude of other organisations and activities that take place in First Antrim.