



5th September 2010

Dear friend,

**At the end of August 2009 I was facing my first full church year as Teaching Elder of First Antrim and it is now with much thanks to the Lord that I can look back on that first year. It is good to be where the Lord has called and I am not only thankful to God but also to all in First who prayed not just for me but for Esther, Louise, William, Rachel and Abigail. Your prayers and practical demonstrations of kindness and consideration to the manse family have been a source of blessing to us all.**

I mentioned in my September 2009 letter that the Kirk Session was seeking the Lord's guidance regarding additions to the paid ministry team and it is again with thankfulness that we look back to December 2009 and the appointment of Rosemary Spiers as Deaconess of First Antrim. Rosemary has settled in to the congregation so well and I know that many of you have been blessed by, and benefitted from, her pastoral ministry and initiative. Indeed the whole issue concerning the provision of pastoral care in our congregation is something that the Kirk Session has been examining over the past year. We do not feel that there are glaring weaknesses but there may be ways in which we could improve. On behalf of the Kirk Session I would ask you to pray for us as we look at this important area of ministry.

During the Church year we would hope to introduce some new initiatives as well as improving some old ones. It is important that we build bridges with the community in which the Lord has placed us so that we may function as salt and light and bring the good news of the Gospel to our friends and neighbours. To build on our initiative of delivering food parcels to needy families in Antrim town we plan to commence the '**Inspire**' **Homework Club** and also, God willing, to offer **Grief Share** and **Divorce Care** courses for those affected by bereavement or divorce. In December 2010 it is planned to have a representative from the evangelistic Bradford-based agency **Christians Against Poverty (CAP)** come and inform the congregation about this ministry with a view to seeing if First Antrim could become a CAP advice centre that covers a particular geographical area. In the early Spring it is also our plan to reintroduce a type of **First Antrim Annual General Meeting** which we hope will provide not only an opportunity for fellowship and friendship but also prove to be a vehicle to keep the congregation more fully informed about issues relating to congregational life in First.

Over the last thirty years or so the **Small Group Ministry** has proved to be a blessing to many. For the Church year 2010-2011, however, it was felt that we should slightly tweak this ministry and by doing so not only cater for differing interests of those who currently belong to a home group but also see additional groups established with new members. Instead of all the groups studying the same material we plan to offer a choice of relevant subjects that folk can sign up to study. I would encourage you to peruse the information leaflet that has been produced and sign up for one of these studies.

It has been encouraging to see the truth of God's Word, taken by the Holy Spirit, speak into many lives as the Word has been preached Sunday by Sunday. I am conscious that, as well as encouraging us and affirming us in our walk with the Lord, the truth of God's Word often rebukes us and makes us feel uncomfortable when it speaks into our situation. Obedience is the key and when we are obedient to the Lord, pleasing Him, we are in a 'good place'. Last Church year I had hoped to address some issues concerning the afterlife but time did not permit. I do, however, plan to address this issue at morning worship from 12th September. Following this series on ***Death and the Afterlife*** I hope to commence a short series on the ***Conversion of the Apostle Paul*** then one on ***The End Times***. I have also felt a burden to address the issue of aspects of God's grace so this is in my mind as well. In our evening acts of worship I will continue with an exposition of Philipians.

In Acts 17:6 a mob accused the Christians, "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also." What was meant as a damning criticism actually was a glorious compliment! As those of us who are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ walk closely with Him day by day and moment by moment, and as we function as salt and light where the Lord has placed us, we will begin to have a similar effect in Antrim town. May the Lord hasten the day!

Your friend and minister,

*WJM Parker*

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