

Dear all

This is my 21st update letter and the commencement of my 27th month as Pastor of TCF. Thank you again for the privilege of serving God with you.

Membership

It has been an enormous encouragement to meet recently with a number of people who have been coming to TCF to chat through belonging to a local church. My fellow elders have been visiting too as we like to spread the responsibility for this lovely task. The New Testament says that we are members of:

- The body of Christ: 1 *Corinthians 12:27* 'Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.'
- The household of God: *Ephesians 2:19* '...you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the Household of God...'
- Of each other: *Ephesians 4:25* '...for we are members one of another.'

We don't actually read directly that we 'should be members of a local church' but clearly that is how the corporate life of a Christian is to be expressed. Matt Chandler recently wrote a helpful article on this in 2011 and observed that the bible:

- commands Christians to submit to and honour elders (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Timothy 5:17)
- elders are to care for specific people (1 Peter 5:1-5; also, Acts 20:29-30)
- instructs how to practice church discipline (1 *Corinthians 5:1-12*)
- shows a numerical record being kept (Acts 2:37-47)
- records elections taking place (Acts 6:1-6)
- describes how to handle widows in the church (1 Timothy 5:3-16)

These all indicate that there was the practice of church membership but these all help us to understand how our membership of each other and of Christ is to be understood. What a beautiful thing that God has done for His Son and what a beautiful thing our Lord Jesus has done for us in this new community. If you are contemplating membership and want to talk over what it is about, ***please speak to me or any elder.***

Discipleship

You may know that the elders read a book together last year as part of our growing together. It was called 'The Trellis and the Vine'. The basic idea in the book is that all Christian service is a mixture of trellis and vine work. The vine work is about growing disciples of Christ. Trellis work focusses on creating and maintaining the organisational structures that support vine work. We wanted to ensure that we work hard to focus on 'vine work'. This year we have embarked on a follow up book called 'The Vine Project'. This is a resource that will help us think how we can shape the whole culture of our church around disciple-making. A recent testimony from an individual I meet with regularly came as an enormous encouragement: *'although my story is one of sin and failure over many years, it is also one of recovery, hope, grace and God's faithfulness and for that reason at least, maybe I need to find my voice and tell my story...and if I felt I could help even one person by talking to them then I would be happy to do so.'* This is the kind of culture we love to see unfolding in TCF: mutual care and mutual help in deepening our relationship with Christ. How wonderful that this is going on. ***If I can be of any help in meeting one-to-one, please let me know.***

Reading Scheme

I post the TCF Bible Reading Scheme at the beginning of each month. These readings are intended to be 'bite-sized' and easier to cope with in a busy day. So far in the scheme we have read Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Psalm 1-41, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Mark, Luke, Acts, Galatians, Ephesians. We will be reading Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Proverbs, Romans, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews in 2018. This will be 24 books out of the 66 in scripture and although we are taking longer than some will take to read the bible, the readings are designed to match the Bible Teaching, Family Service and Home Group scriptures. ***It would be an encouragement to hear from you if these readings are helping each day or if you undertake your own reading scheme.***

Other Responsibilities

I have occasionally reported on my work and interest with Echoes International and also the Leadership Development Initiative. These continue to give me an external stimulus for my work at TCF but I am preparing for the annual European Leadership Forum in Poland in May 2018. This year I will be accompanied by an Assistant Pastor from Dumfries Baptist Church as well as my usual friend, Jim Turrent, Pastor of Central Baptist Church, Dundee. In addition to undertaking mentoring and some sessions in the Disciple-Making Leadership Network (and the Church Revitalisation Network - a new involvement for me) I will be getting some needed development time to hear Dr Peter Williams, the Principal of Tyndale House in Cambridge. His expertise in the reliability of the scriptures is a very timely set of talks and we look to God to speak through him to us all.



Thank you for your ...

patient understanding

as I try to serve you!