



3 September 2021

Dear Friends,

Recently a friend expressed something that I too have been sensing. His words were these: “What the Holy Spirit is putting on my heart is that we need to move into a new season of renewal”.

We are living in days when society around us desperately needs a Church and a people whose love for Jesus, whose influence in society and whose truth, power and integrity bring hope and comfort, life and healing into weary homes and communities.

As a Church we need to rediscover the presence of God and his power to change lives. We want to see the Church renewed to transform individuals and society with the life of Christ and the good news of forgiveness, peace, healing and joy that is given to those who would submit to Jesus.

Any season of renewal is always given to us by God. It is God’s gift and God’s doing for, as it says in John 3:8, ‘The wind blows where it wills, and we cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.’ Nevertheless, if we are to move into a new season of renewal there are responsibilities and challenges that rest with all of us.

Firstly, every historic move of God and every season of renewal in the life of the Church has been preceded by the people of God pursuing him through prayer. To encourage a fresh approach towards prayer in our local parishes three diocesan prayer events have been planned for this autumn. The first of these is an Agape Meal in Down Cathedral on St Matthews Day, 21st September at 7:30pm. The evening will be very simple and safe in its format as we enjoy some food, pray together, and conclude with Holy Communion.

Two further prayer events will follow, and details can be found on the diocesan website.

Secondly, every season of renewal in the Church that has lasting significance involves a rediscovery of biblical truth, a fresh commitment to preaching and teaching the scriptures and a new love for studying the bible. To that end I will be asking every church to promote a bible reading plan for 2022 that enables all of us to read a portion of the bible every day. Watch out for details of this in the coming weeks.

Thirdly, every significant season of renewal in the history of the Church has seen an increase in signs and wonders following the preaching of God’s word. Renewal gives way to miraculous works of God with demonstrations of the Holy Spirit’s power at work in people’s lives, especially in bringing them to repentance and faith in Christ.

Fourthly, every season of renewal among God’s people is accompanied and often preceded by an increase in faith and in generosity. It has struck me that we must step more and more into a lifestyle of faith and generosity, and I would like to suggest some ways in which we might do this.

Emerging out of Covid-19 our government has pledged to give all of us a £100 gift voucher. Rather than this being absorbed into our weekly shopping, may I encourage you to spend it in a local business that has been adversely affected by the pandemic. Please also consider making a matching donation of £100 to a local charity of your choice.

Secondly, please take some time to review how much you give to your local church and consider increasing it.

And finally, please consider enabling our diocese of Down and Dromore to plant new congregations by taking out a standing order for our Diocesan Church Planting Fund. Alternatively, you might like to help us revitalise and reenergise parish ministry as needs arise by taking out a standing order for our Diocesan Rejuvenation Fund. The appropriate forms may be downloaded from the diocesan website.

Together, let's step up in generosity and step out in faith together, believing and crying out for a new season of renewal. Let's join as one across our diocese to pray, to be strengthened by God's word and to be expectant for signs and wonders as God the Holy Spirit brings new life to his Church.

I love a prayer that's found in the Book of Common Prayer that I recall being used a lot when I was much younger.

'Holy Spirit, come in power and bring new life to your church, renew us in love and service and enable us to be faithful to our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.
Amen.'

Yours and His,

+David.