

Dear brother in Christ,

Greetings in the precious name of our soon-coming Saviour. It certainly won't be long till we hear His "shout"!!

Please pass on to the saints at Barrhead our sincere thanks for the extremely kind gift of ***** which was transferred recently. Mary and I deeply appreciate this token of fellowship with us as we seek to serve the greatest of all masters. Your kindness enables us to meet, not only our own needs but some of the needs of many of the needy folks we know here in the community and further afield. God is no man's debtor. We can't even begin to imagine the impact on the atmosphere in heaven, as our sacrificial giving here on earth ascends into the presence of God as a sweet savour. That elevates our giving from the realm of the practical to the realm of the spiritual!!

For all of us 2020 was a "strange" year and one in which we constantly had to remind ourselves of the sovereignty of God and his faithfulness to His people even as He allows us to pass through times of difficulty. It's been a time of restrictions and challenges and yet a time of great opportunities and of learning lessons in the School of God.

During the first lockdown the food bank went to the people rather than the people coming to the food bank!! We did weekly deliveries to around 70 homes each week in Auchinleck and surrounding villages. We relied heavily on a team of volunteers from the area, some of whom were unbelievers, so it was good to have a measure of spiritual input into their lives during the period we worked together.

Our two food banks are almost back to running the way they were pre-COVID. We are operating from our own hall in Auchinleck on a Thursday afternoon and the Community Hub in Muirkirk (which we get the free use of) on a Friday morning. Last week, between the two locations, we had around 35-40 folks. Each of them goes away with a load of tinned food, cereal, bread, milk, tea, coffee, sugar, eggs (sometimes), biscuits, toiletries, fresh fruit and vegetables plus a good selection of chilled and frozen food but more importantly they also each receive a Gospel Tract and as circumstances allow, they hear a Gospel Message. Due to the higher risk of Covid 19 infection in this third lockdown we are trying to move people through the premises more quickly, rather than having them sitting around drinking tea and coffee as they used to do. However, as opportunity arises I do try and slip in a few minutes of the Gospel. This past week I got a good opportunity at both locations and the people who were present at the time listened well.

Since the beginning of the year sadly, five of our friends from the Auchinleck food bank have passed away. Ailsa would have been in her fifties but totally broken and destroyed by addiction – a real tragedy. Her son Willie is also a poor soul and I don't know how he will cope. Many times he has spoken to me about taking his own life. His brother committed suicide a few years ago. The whole family has had contact with "the hall" for many, many years. Gary also died a few weeks ago. We have known him since the days of the drop in centre. Over the years I had a number of good talks with him. Then two women, Dawn and Marion, who we have had contact with for a long time also died. We lost count a long time ago of the number of folks in the area that we had the privilege of ministering to that have died in very sad circumstances. Marion and her partner came to our family service regularly and Mary has been involved with Dawn for many years. Just this week another friend (John) threw himself in front of a train. Two weeks ago, Stacey and Isabel came to speak to us, on separate occasions, telling us that they don't want to live any more. So many broken, empty lives -- at times the need is overwhelming. Both these women know the Gospel.

I continue to teach the Word of God on Zoom with various groups of believers in India. I would do two or three meetings each week. I have also recorded some Gospel Messages (me preaching and a brother translating) which he and his fellow-evangelists can transmit

in remoter areas where they can't get an internet signal. They recently visited a very remote village where there are no believers and where there has been opposition in the past. A number responded to the preaching and will be baptised in the next few weeks. They are visiting another village shortly, where alcoholism, even among the children, is a massive problem. This past week I spoke to girls in the hostel of a Hindu Girl's School.

Through social media I am in daily contact with several brothers both in India and in Africa seeking to encourage them in their walk with the Lord. Many brothers from India, and some from Uganda, join our Sunday afternoon Zoom Bible Teaching Meeting at Auchinleck, which is encouraging. The last few Sundays a sister from Brazil has joined and for a number of weeks we had the pleasure of the company of a sister from Norway. We have far more folks joining us from elsewhere than from our own fellowship!!

Another blessing of the lockdown has been the opportunity to meet regularly to pray with brothers from various places. I meet twice a week on Zoom with a group of brothers from Ireland and sometimes once a week with some brothers in the Ayrshire area. These have been real times of challenge and encouragement as we seek the Lord together.

As a fellowship we have sadly suffered the loss of two brothers in the last few of months -- both in their sixties, both with massive heart attacks and both desperately missed!! This loss leaves a big hole in the assembly here. One of them, Big Steve, was one of the first guys we saw saved in this area and probably the worst alcoholic that we have ever worked with. The other was Robert, a brother who, along with his wife, joined us about 18 months ago. They weren't from our kind of background, but they certainly threw their weight behind everything the fellowship here was involved with. He was a great "people person" and will be missed.

I write for and compile our local Gospel magazine called "Hope". We normally distribute it quarterly but due to the restrictions we have missed a couple of issues. We did an issue, at the beginning of lockdown when we printed 10,000 copies and contracted Royal Mail to distribute them throughout our post code area. Just before Christmas we printed 3,200 and got a local leaflet delivery company to deliver them, along with a calendar, to every home in Auchinleck, Ochiltree and Muirkirk. We sow seed and look to God for the harvest. Currently planning another large-scale delivery of 15,000 magazines to every home in a radius of ten miles or so from Auchinleck.

Please pray for a group of young, in the faith, believers in our area, who we have had the privilege of ministering to, in one way or another, over the past few years. Each of them has a remarkable story of conversion and each of them is full of zeal for the Lord. They have all attended meetings at our hall at times but prefer to be a bit more free-lance!! Over the first lockdown they were meeting together in a forest, and in fact in that period, they baptised several people in the local river. One of the brothers, Michael, helps us out at the Muirkirk food bank and he told me recently, what I had suspected, that there has been a bit of friction among them and some of them are going separate ways. We are praying that the Lord uses this period to do a deeper work in each of their lives and that there might be a time of "dying to self" leading to a more humble and submissive spirit. (Mind you we all need that in our lives.) These folks would transform the local assembly here in Auchinleck but to be honest we couldn't have handled them as they were and have been recently -- they are all strong characters!! Hopefully, due to what they have been through together they will see the need for a more established spiritual home with spiritual guidance and under spiritual discipline. I mention this not to condemn these folks -- we love them -- but that you would pray for their spiritual preservation. They have all been saved from a background of criminality and addiction.

Mary and I are well by God's grace. Family, as well as assembly, issues keep us exercised in prayer. Thankfully, we have a God who is "able to do exceeding, abundantly above all we ask or think."

Many thanks again for your kindness. Trust you are all well. Take care, keep safe and I pray you that you will know the wisdom and grace of God as you move through this year with the many challenges that it will no doubt bring.

Yours in Christ, our Life and Hope,

Ian and Mary Robertson