

## A Different Spirit

### Please Pray

For illnesses in the staff team and wider family. Pray for healing and comfort.

For group leaders as they shoulder the responsibility of recruitment and organisation.

For the many students who visited our sites immediately before going off to university again. Pray for boldness and protection.

For new staff and those who have stepped in on a temporary basis to help us through difficulties.

### Give Thanks

Close on 1500 students were inspired and prepared for a new term across various events in Aug/Sept.

The gracious reaction from group leaders to the limited but necessary tariff increases for 2023.

The servant-hearted attitude of staff who have ensured that our centres have operated on more days in this season than I can ever remember before.

God's sustaining through change and interruption to our plans (but not His!)

That He still loves us, even when we forget how great heaven is going to be!

We have just completed one of the busiest years in the history of Centre Ministries, despite only being allowed to operate fully in our Northern Ireland centre in the second half of our financial year. Two very uncertain years, followed by a year of plenty - now the recovery year begins...

In many ways 2021-22 has been a 'bounce' year. Many groups who only go away on alternate years, all wanted to go this year, leading to congestion in our booking diaries.

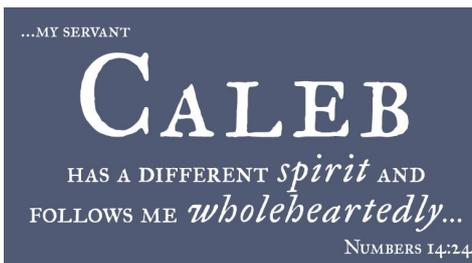
Don't get me wrong - we are delighted! We have been blessed to see so many people sitting under the Word in our centres (after being very lonely and quiet places for too long).

But 2022-23 with its financial crises and international conflicts, coupled with a calming of the domestic reaction to lock-down relaxation, will give a greater sense of the health of our ministry, and

that of so many others.

What have we done during lockdown to reach new people? How are we structured to face the economic challenges ahead? Where have we sought economies so that we can avoid passing on the full effect of price rises to our guests who are already facing these in everyday life? How can we assure busy, tired and stressed people that spending time in Christian fellowship is just what they need?

These are questions for us, but probably questions for you as well, if you belong to a church.



Last Saturday night, I joined with several hundred folk from various denominations in a grand old building in

Belfast, as we gathered to sing old and new hymns together. I must confess, it's been a while since I felt so excited about getting to heaven! Covid & its restrictions has taken so much away from us and I seemed to have forgotten what was lost.

Are we going to stumble and wander the rest of the journey to the Promised Land? Or are we going to stand on the kept promises of God and react with the energy and faith of Joshua and Caleb?

*"If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us ... Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, ... the Lord is with us."*

Faith demands choice, and often action. Will this year be the one that you lead your fellowship to take new ground? A praise night; a prayer day; an outreach event; or, best of all, a church weekend away!

**"BE OF GOOD COURAGE!"**

## First Day at School

With the Castle management moving back to a single-handed operation, we were concerned to put support in place to ensure that John got weekend time off, to protect his family and church life.

And with restrictions around school residences lifted, we wanted to revisit our schools programme, providing a curriculum-based residential experience in a safe environment and with a gospel dimension.

We're delighted to report that we have appointed Joanne Heaney to this combined role and are excited to see how God uses her in the days ahead.

Joanne is one of the vast 'stair surfing' alumni who have worked as casual weekend staff at the Castle over the years and has good memories and great friends from that time!



Joanne is married to James and they have four children: Hannah, Rebekah, Caleb & Reuben. She is a primary school teacher, and has spent the last number of years working in the pre-school sector.

Please pray for Joanne and her family as they make this exciting transition.

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space to grow



## No Water...No Life

Half way through the biggest event on the calendar a(nother) problem struck. The team at Quinta are so resilient that these are usually fixed before anyone realises! But this one was more complicated. Water pressure onto the site was just a trickle. Water that was needed by 1250 people to cook, wash, flush and, most importantly, drink.

The team worked quickly in parallel with the conference organisers to ascertain the problem and also to make preparation for a drought scenario. Water companies were engaged and plant hire arranged at one end, while quantities of bottled water and dry toilets were quickly installed at the other.

The crisis was averted when it was discovered that the problem had been caused by some recent works by a water company, which they were able to quickly reverse.

However, there were some parallels with the ministry that was going on alongside this drama. Students had been elected onto their various CU committees in the heady days of summer, and now they were realising that

they were heading into a spiritual drought. It was their responsibility to bring the gospel to a dry and thirsty land.



The emergency services in the guise of UCCF had gathered to help them make preparation for the season ahead. The site was electric, as seminars, talks, small groups, and large worship times addressed in parallel, the problems of being an effective Christian in a desert place, alongside gazing upon, and drinking in, the wonder of the One who said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again..."

During a short chat with Richard Cunningham, UCCF Director, I was struck by the urgency of the task for him, and the confidence and clarity with which UCCF were tackling it.

I'm so grateful that Alistair and his team got the water sorted, and ensured Forum stayed hydrated. I believe generations will be grateful that Forum took place in 2022, and Richard and his team invested in these pivotal folk.

Pray for a season of refreshing in academia.

## Cloverley is Full... of Thanks!

As I struggle to fill a couple of pages each quarter, I admire a former manager and trustee who is steadily working through the story of his life in one of our Centres. David Burton was the manager in Cloverley for many years, before serving in finance and governance roles for the charity. He often shares draft chapters with me and I enjoy reading about some of the antics that were worthy of a Frank Spencer episode. But I really love reading of the tough times and the blessings - it is another downpour into the reservoir of God's kept promises for me to draw upon.

It is no secret that Cloverley has been a challenge over the past 10+ years. It is an old property, which has been managed on a very small budget for a long time. Consequently, it eats money when you try to improve any aspect: there are always problems behind the problems. More worryingly though, has been our struggle to find an economic model that allows this Centre to simply be viable on a year to year basis. Often, another year's losses has felt like a personal failure for me, and for the senior team in the Centre.

Under Nicky's leadership, significant changes have been made behind the scenes without compromising the guest experience. This has required, and gained, the full support of her staff team. Folk have stepped up to give the best they can in the role that they already occupied, but also demonstrated a flexibility to reach across into other roles, or take on additional responsibility to ensure

the leaner workforce still managed to maintain the Centre's standards.

The most significant of the changes were invoked during lock-down and we emerged hopeful that business would gradually return and we would see the effects of the measures we had employed. But sometimes God needs us to know that He is in charge! Bookings exploded, and whilst numbers within groups had reduced, the number of groups grew. In the financial year just ending, Cloverley has hosted over 120 groups. That's a 20% increase on the best year in the past decade. In the period from 25th March to 30 October this year, the centre will only have been unoccupied on 18 days. For many years, we struggled to attract any groups to midweek booking outside of school holiday periods.

This all doesn't mean everything is perfect and we can sit back. On the contrary, it has been a really tiring and constant year. Seven months of same day turnarounds for housekeeping; Roast dinner after roast dinner after BBQ after cooked breakfast for catering; Trying to get half an hour to get into a bedroom between guests coming and going to fix one of the ever growing list of little issues for maintenance; and a bulging inbox crying out for a day without guests to attend to it for management.

But it does mean we can be thankful to an ever faithful God; and prayerful for the teams across all our Centres.

***"For all your goodness, I will keep on singing...  
Ten thousand years, and then for evermore"***

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