

Friday 18 September 2009

Greetings,

This is a hard letter to write, for the Taylor family have been sensing a fresh call to another adventure with God, into another sphere of Christian service. We think we've heard a "man from Macedonia" asking us to cross the (Tasman) sea (Acts 16:6-10).

After almost six years of ministry at Opawa, Steve has been called by the Uniting Church of South Australia, to be Director of Missiology at the Uniting College. The role will include lecturing, writing, building a team of lecturers, serving the wider church and forming of leaders both ordained and lay. We see this as a missionary call, a season in which our talents might serve God's mission work in Australia. We consider ourselves Baptists on loan!

At Pentecost this year, Steve felt challenged to preach on the theme of being surprised by God, little knowing that in the week ahead would come a phone call from Australia asking him to consider a new position created by the Uniting College.

Over the last two years the Uniting College has re-visioned and reoriented itself as a centre to develop mission leaders for the future church. They believe that Steve has a unique set of gifts and graces and experiences that would could contribute to their new direction.

For us, this has been a family decision. We informed our children of the possibility a few Tuesdays ago and asked them to pray with us over the week, each of building a list of positives and negatives. We then met on a Monday evening. Kayli suggested we read the lectionary text for the day, which was John 1:43-50. Shannon announced, "To me it sounds like God is calling us to Adelaide." Over an hour, as we talked and prayed, there was an overwhelming sense that we need to trust God into a new adventure. And that the God who gave us such good friends, and good school and a great church here will give us that in Adelaide.

We have processed this thoroughly with the Board. We have so appreciated their grace, wisdom and insistence that we must follow God's voice. We have also been blessed by the maturity of the staff team and ministry leaders as we have shared this news with them personally over the week.

With the Board we have considered the life of the church and all of us have confidence that the directions God has led Opawa in recent years - the multi-congregational approach and so the diverse ways people are growing in God, the ministry led model and the outward and community focus - will continue.

God has done much among us all for which we must give thanks to God. We've grown together, risked together, laughed and cried together. God has done immeasurably more than we hoped or dreamed - new congregations, new members, new community ministries, new buildings.

Equally God has begun some things that are far from complete. For that we all will have to trust God. We are confident that we will leave the church in good hands with the existing Board, staff and ministry leaders.

We are both excited and sad about moving. We are dreading telling you all, for you have become good friends and a great church family to belong to. We have loved being among you. You have welcomed us, believed in us, cared for us as a family. Thank you so much. It has been a great season. But being too scared to tell you all is not a good reason for staying! As a family we need to practice what we preach: to follow God's voice: to risk and adventure and to trust.

We expect to conclude at Christmas. The Board have talked about a thanksgiving evening Saturday, January 16th. There will be a church meeting on Wednesday, October 14 at which we will share more, and the Board will outline steps to calling a new minister.

This has been a difficult and painful decision made, we believe, at God's urging. We pray hope, peace and courage for us all and look forward to bright futures for the Taylors and for Opawa Baptist Church.

Because we are a multi-congregational church, we would ask you to be sensitive to the fact that different congregations will hear this information at different times. On Wednesday this will be placed on the church web-site, emailed and posted, once the congregations meeting over this week have been told by Steve and Lynne personally.

With our love, thanks, and prayers

Steve, Lynne, Shannon and Kayli Taylor