

Application & Proposed Sabbatical: Stephen McNie

Title: Creating Gospel Culture Centred on Gospel Preaching Rather than Programming in the methodology of Immanuel Church, Nashville

Project Plan:

I propose to travel to Immanuel, Nashville from 11th – 22nd March 2024 for study leave and sabbatical to meet Ray Ortlund, Pastor TJ Tims and the current leadership of Immanuel Church. My intention is to explore the formation of ministry that focuses on expository preaching which creates a vibrant gospel community.

Background & Significance:

Since my installation to Muckamore, the Kirk Session have been using 'The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ' as the basis of our devotional sessions and vision shaping decisions during my first year. This has proved to be formational in shaping the leadership and direction of ministry in the congregation, as we seek to develop our gospel doctrine and gospel culture.

With the distinctive approach in mind – using preaching as the primary tool for promoting all areas of church life and mission – I want to use my sabbatical to examine how this model, demonstrated in the life and leadership of Immanuel, Nashville, may be developed in the PCI context, to the benefit of our congregation. Our denomination, for which I am grateful, has produced sound and helpful courses/materials to equip leaders and members in various spiritual disciplines: evangelism, discipleship, hospitality, mission, etc. While this is, of course, of value, I am left wondering if it creates a 'how to' approach in our Christian ministry, rather than seeking the Lord's transformative power and presence, primarily through the preaching of God's Word.

In a discussion on Expositors Collective, Ray Ortlund commented on the *"distinction between educational Bible teaching and heart stirring, encouraging true preaching. He believes that the goal of preaching is new life, liberation and freedom, not bondage, heaviness and law. And as the wonderful gospel of Jesus is placarded in a church, a culture of safety, warmth and welcome is created."*¹

Goals / Objectives:

Having the opportunity to meet with Mr Ortlund and the staff of Immanuel would facilitate a deeper understanding of their ministry formation, the challenges faced and lessons learned. Attending a service of worship would also afford me an opportunity to assess the outworking of gospel culture stemming from gospel preaching.

Following this study leave, I would endeavour to continue in developing this model within Muckamore. I would trust that through this endeavour it would lead:

- to a true and lasting gospel ministry, rather than one of programming;
- creating and sharing this cultural vision with the Kirk Session;
- equipping elders and leaders to participate in the preaching of God's Word, reflecting the developing vision and culture of the church.

¹ Vickers, G. (2020) How Gospel Preaching Creates Gospel Culture: Mike Neglia with Ray Ortlund. 18th August 2020