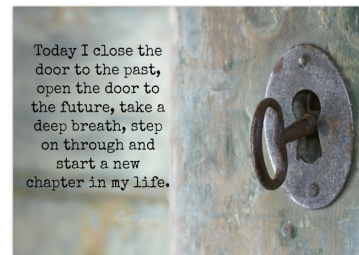


# Martin's Message

Dear Friends

This is the first real opportunity since Charlotte and I arrived in Leicester to pause and reflect upon the many challenges and events that have brought us to this point. Who would have thought that following my preach with a view, the world would be thrown into chaos and we were put into a national lockdown? This delayed our move to Leicester, which resulted in us living amongst packed boxes for longer than anticipated. However, on a positive note, since being here and through the advances in technology, Charlotte and I have been able to get to know many of you through Zoom. Our delayed move allowed extra time for the Manse to be prepared for us, which wasn't easy, organising all the trades to do the work during lockdown. But due to having an efficient project manager, the work was completed in good time with only a few jobs left to do. Maybe God had other plans for when it was right for us to arrive!



You may be interested to know that on average a person moves home eight times in their life; for us, being our third move is enough so far! Throughout the whole moving process, we experienced a plethora of emotions, getting to know a new area, new churches, new people and a new home. But at all times feeling blessed and looking forward with excitement towards the future as we embark on new and exciting times together. Through social media I have read many interesting threads of how churches have undertaken new ways of communicating the Gospel. The responses state that congregations have grown, albeit virtually, by those who may not have crossed the threshold of a church pre Covid. I've been very encouraged by the way the folk of Abbot's Road have embraced technology in a way that's opened up many opportunities for the life of the church.

Since my induction, I have not allowed the grass to grow under my feet. There has been many conversations and meetings to discuss the formation of my role and how we, now known as a resource church, will function within the new South and East Leicestershire Area. It seems quite apt that God has called me at this time to run towards new challenges; working with churches to look at new strategic ways of being church, rather than just doing! We are venturing into uncharted waters and will do so for many years to come.

I understand that many of you may not feel comfortable with technology or have the facilities to access online. Please be assured, the Eldership and I are looking at the best way forward to make the services as inclusive as possible. We have had two opportunities to test the opening of the church premises to assess the measures that have been put in place to conform to Covid 19 regulations. I also understand that many of you have been isolated for some time now and the church has been a lifeline for the fellowship it offers and sense of normality to one's life.

When we take time to reflect upon the scriptural significance of the church and its origins, we only have to consider that much of Paul's ministry was undertaken whilst in prison; isolated from the communities he loved. Paul didn't have the technology that we have, but his letters would have offered comfort and support to those early Christian churches. But where did the early church start? We don't have to look far to discover that the early

churches started in the home. There were at least seven individuals recorded in scripture who founded the early house church movement; those being Mary, Lydia, Priscilla and Aquila, Nympha, Philemon and Apphia (*Acts 12:12; 16:40; Romans 16:3,5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon V1-2*). Therefore, it's not surprising to suggest that we are returning to the roots of the early church. These are strong role models for us to follow, whilst we are unable to gather together. Let us give thanks for their generous dedication to Christ and the faithful building up of his Church.

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" Acts 2:42.*

The last few months have seen churches worship in many different ways. There is no doubt that the many changes that have been adopted are probably the most significant within the last forty years or so. When we eventually gather together again, what will happen to the new methods of worship we have discovered? We are already seeing a world from a different perspective, but what will the Church look like?

Charlotte and I look forward to meeting with more of you in whatever form that may take, and please be assured that you all remain in my prayers.

Keep safe and well.

Shalom

**Martin**