

## 2019 AGM Script

### Difficult year.

If you have known me for any length of time, I have most likely disappointed you in some way. If I haven't yet, it's only because you haven't known me long enough. Just give me time.

Lost Michael and Debbie - years of pastoral passion and gifting. Michael was strong where I was weak and vice versa. Now that isn't to belittle Russ and Denise in any way. They are better than you yet realise. But here is the reality: Russ and Denise were not brought in to replace Michael and Debbie. They were brought in to oversee and develop our youth program. So to lose Michael and Debbie was very difficult for us as a church. Particularly for Marek and I as Elders. Add to that Marek's job situation over the past year - 4 nights a week is not easy. It has taken a toll. Please be praying that Marek could find a new job!

I want to speak today about 4 things. We'll hit some sub-points within each, but I want to hit these 4 things pretty hard; particularly the final 2. I think they are possibly the most important things for us to consider as a church going forward. They will determine our future. We won't discuss everything today. We will, quite frankly, have to have some subsequent meetings. But I at least want to get us thinking today.

### 1. Worship service etiquette

I know I say this with some regularity, but all of us easily get lax as time goes on. So I want to say it again and ask you to think about it from a different perspective. Most of us, over time, begin to view things as insiders. Everything is familiar to us, so we get comfortable with it. But I want you to think about our service from the perspective of an outsider. Now, Marek and I don't craft our services for outsiders, but that doesn't mean we don't want to reflect on the way outsiders are experiencing them. Let's start with time. We say we start at 11am. We publicise that. So you're a first time visitor. You're nervous about going to a new place. Here's what you think: "They start at 11am. I'll get there at 11:05, sneak in the back, and no one will notice I'm there." Now see, you're laughing; but if you're a first-time visitor looking to remain anonymous and you show up here at 11:05, 1) you're one of only a few in the room, 2) we haven't started, 3) once we do start, people are continually walking in. It's disappointing and distracting. Are you coming back? Probably not.

I think we can do better. I think, just for the sake of being true to our word, we need to do better. I don't know how we do it better except just doing it better. I need to lead it better. So, I am asking that we all make a better effort of being on time and starting at 11. Insert a shameless plug here for coming even earlier to the 10to10 study.

Here's the other component. Every time any of us goes in or out of this room, what happens. I'm up front, I see it. Whenever anyone comes in or goes out, all eyes turn to that person. Now, who do we want all eyes to be on while we're here? We want our eyes drawn up - to God, not to be drawn to us. In everything you do while you're here, you need to think, "Will this be distracting." If you think it would be, then wait or don't do it. We need to work to minimise distraction. We want people to meet God. We want non-believers to be confronted with the Gospel.

So, come on time. If you have to be late, stand outside the door until we're all standing and singing. Please don't come in while someone is reading or talking or praying. It's just too distracting for everyone else. Finally, during the sermon, please don't get up and leave unless it is absolutely necessary. Go to the toilet during the greeting time. If you're bursting and just can't hold it any longer, then think about the timing. If someone is in the middle of a Gospel appeal, urging someone to turn from the edge of Hell to new life in Jesus; can I suggest you wait just a few minutes?

We love kids. And, of course, we know that young kids don't understand when they are being a distraction. I'm not trying to guilt anyone. I've got 4 kids. I know how guilty parents can feel. That's not what this is. As a parent of really small kids, you should always feel the freedom to slip out and sit with your child in Room 4 if you need to. If you're kids are school-aged, well parents, that's on us to teach our kids about not being distractions.

We've been doing really well on keeping the balls and food in the sports hall or outside. Keep it up. Again, anyone, if you see kids out in the corridors with balls or food, please gently remind them to go back into the hall or outside. Ok? Enough said on that? We need to do better together. I'm not going to belabour this but are there **any questions?**

## **2. Outreach**

There is a reason we are in this community. 2000 Tim and Joan prayerfully base in Knocknacarra - developing area - and they saw the potential. We joined them in 2003 right as things in Knocknacarra really began to explode. No one else (no other churches).

Where we find ourselves today: Map Newcastle (1900), Dangan (4000), Ragoon (3000), Barna (3700), West Shill (1500), Knocknacarra (15000) = 29100 with 2 churches. 1 church for 15000 people. We've got to reach into this community. That's one of the reasons we're really interested in a compassion ministry. We want to have such an impact in this community that, if we were to leave, the community would feel a void and be sad about it. Who else is going to reach this community with the Gospel? So please be praying for this community and the impact that God wants us to have in it. Of course we're concerned about other communities. It's not exclusive. But God has made this area an epicentre from which our ministry extends.

One thing we're doing in June is an outreach concert. We have a Gospel choir and small jazz band coming to do a concert. If you've ever heard the name John Piper, they are from his church in Minnesota, USA. It is going to be a celebration of Jesus, so there will be Gospel songs, we'll read some words of Jesus, and there will be some testimonies interspersed throughout the event. The Gospel will be proclaimed but in a winsome way. But we have to turn up and invite our friends. We're actually going to hold the concert at the catholic church over on ballymoneen road. The Gospel is going to be shared and sung about in the catholic church on Sunday evening June 10 at 7pm. It may be a first. Tadgh the priest is excited about it, and myself and a fellow from the choir will be facilitating the evening.

Please. All of us have friends that need to hear the Gospel. Please plan to support this and to invite your friends. It's on most of their home turf. **Any questions?**

*(Ok, now let's get down to the nitty gritty)*

### ***3. Flip the Switch***

Every church, company, and organisation has a life cycle. It usually looks something like this (bell curve). Growth, peak, followed by decline and death. This is the probable future because if nothing is done, this is where all organisations eventually end up. This is the path we're on right now. The longer I'm here and the bigger I become, the quicker we move along this path to our probable future.

The good news is there is an alternate future available to us...if we are willing to embrace it. We began as a mission church. That is, we were a church started by missionaries. Missionaries made most of the decisions and took most of the responsibility for the church. Our alternate future doesn't lie in that identity. It lies in this identity. The problem is the transition. This is what I call the murky middle where we're not really sure which we are. Are we still a missionary church or have we transitioned to a fully functioning local church? Well, we've made some great strides, but - if we are going to be a 200-year church and not a 20-year church, we've got to flip the switch now and fully embrace our identity as a fully functioning local church. Now I'll come back to this in a minute, but that means, fundamentally, that I have to become small. Every church planter faces the dilemma of trying to know when it's time to go.

So what am I saying to you? We have to flip a switch. We have to leave the murky middle and take full responsibility for ourselves as a church. Now, that is going to involve a few things.

- Going to have to change the way our church (GCBC) relates to WorldVenture (WV). WV is the organisation that Mandy and I work for, as well as the Cumings, Poths, Susan Newell, Bannons, Kerstetters. It is the mission organisation that planted this church. Whereas before, we as missionaries decided who would come in to minister; from now on we as a church become the catalyst for new missionaries coming in. So I've told our organisation, no more missionaries to Galway unless the church requests them. That's from today. Because, at present, we have three families who have raising support for the past 2-4 years in order to come to Galway. I'm going to remind you of who they are. One family, the Mirones have applied for their pre-clearance visa and could possibly be here by the end of the summer. Because of new immigration laws, we as a church must "sponsor" these families coming in. So, at least for the time being, the church will enter into an agreement with WV who will provide funding each month to these families through the church. This is the way the government is requiring it to be done. So the church will get a restricted gift each month which will then get passed through to the families, starting with the Mirones. The Morters could be here by the end of the year. The Morters and Mirones will be here in the church for a 6-9 months while going through orientation, at which point they will be sent out to church plant somewhere in the county. Part of what I would like for us to do - besides getting to know and love them so that we might get behind them - is to gather a small team together to decide where they will be planting. The Copelands have been in this church before, about 4 years ago, and have been raising support ever since. They will be coming, not as an Elder, but just to serve in helping to build leaders, do outreach, help with worship, women's ministry, anything else they can help with. So, I am cashing in some leadership chips today because I'm telling you from this moment, we can no longer be a

missionary church and, at the same time telling you that the horse has already left the barn for these 3 families. So, we need to step up and get behind them.

- Taking ownership means that we need to take covenant membership more seriously. We need to see people visibly take responsibility for the church and to be seen doing it so we know who is in the boat together. Everyone here needs to ask the question, is this my church or is it not? Covenant membership is the visible way that we have of answering that in the affirmative. Now, you may not be a member today because you disagree with membership. That's fine. But you also may not be a member because you're on the fence and don't want to commit. We want to give you time, but we want to challenge you not to use time as an excuse for not getting in the boat. Flipping the switch means that each of us decides to take responsibility for what is our church or to not.
- Flipping the switch and taking responsibility involves giving. You can see from our 2018 report we brought in €30000. There is no magic pipeline through which money flows from the US to us here, and, if there were, if we're going to embrace our identity as our own church, we are compelled to turn it off. If that is going to happen, we have to all get to the place where we become regular, sacrificial, percentage givers. Many of you come from cultures - including Ireland - in which giving is spontaneous from whatever you have in your pocket. Now spontaneous giving isn't bad, God may lead you on a Sunday to give when you weren't planning on it. But in the NT, giving is intentional. It is planned. We think about it and pray about what God would have us give. And there is no minimum requirement in the NT. There is giving as XC gave. So how did XC give? Did He give 10%? He gave it all. That's our model. So, flipping the switch means that we give to our church as worship: sacrificially, regularly, as a percentage of what we have). So Mandy have prayerfully reflected and settled on a percentage which give at the beginning of every month to the church.
- Finally, flipping the switch means we need more people to take the risk of leadership and service. Marek and I have approached 2 men about training as Elders in the coming year. We will be talking to people and then to the church about people serving as deacons/deaconesses, taking responsibility over some areas of the church: youth, hospitality, set-up. We all have to step up and serve, and we need some deacons/deaconesses to take some weight.

So, if we are going to move from our probable future to an alternate future, we have to flip a switch in our mindset and ethos. I have to become less, and we need to become bigger. All of us are going to have to put aside some things to embrace an imperfect church if it's going to grow and thrive. And listen, let me just bare my heart a little here. Mandy and I have always said that we want to be here until our presence becomes more of a hinderance to the church than a help. I would love to see us decrease to the point that we could hire a pastor and become a place where church-planters get trained to go out and plant other churches in Ireland. That's my dream. But to do that, we have to get smaller. So, while we would love to be here a long time, my goal, in the next 5-years is to position the church so that Mandy and I could leave. I want to be really clear here. We're not planning on leaving in 5-years, but I want the church to outlive me. So we want the church to be in a position that we could leave in the next 5 years. We've got to flip the switch.

#### ***4. Paying Pastor***

And there is one thing (and this is the final thing) that, more than anything else, MUST happen at the end of 5-years if this church is going to survive longterm. Maybe you've seen it...I know some of you have. It's not a building. Look around this room. We can get 200+ chairs in this room which is a little over 7000ft. We use, sometimes, 6 classrooms

that are around 750ft. If we maxed out 4 of them, that's an additional 3000ft. That's 10000ft in total that we have almost total access to on a given weekend. That amount of space doesn't exist anywhere on this side of town where we feel God has placed us. Do you know how much we pay for that? €7200 a year. If we were able to construct something similar it would cost us at least €1 million, and, the odds of us getting a loan are virtually nil. That kind of structure is simply not an easily transferable asset. I would love a building, but a building is not what is keeping us from becoming a fully functioning, mature body.

We have to put ourselves in a position to be able to pay a Pastor a salary. Listen, we can say until we're blue in the face that we want to be a fully functioning church, but if we can't pay for pastoral care and teaching, it isn't going to happen. Listen, and I am saying this out of love for this church and with a clear conscience before God that I have never once begrudged the fact that the church has never, in 16 years, paid me a salary - I'm not grubbing for money; but listen, the fact is that this church has gotten 16+ years of free pastoral care and teaching...and from people a lot better than me. This isn't about me. We have to take steps over the next 5-years to pay a pastor.

Every year the baptist association puts out a suggested salary scale for churches to use as a guide. Do you know what the suggested salary for a pastor or a church of our age and size is? €38000 a year. Now look back at our giving record from last year. We've got work to do, don't we? Now I'm not saying we have to get there all at once, but we have to take baby steps toward that end.

And in Galway at the moment, what is the biggest stressor on a would-be Pastor's ability to come into this area? Housing. If a Pastor had to rent and had a family, and needed an office and a place to practice hospitality; he's looking at near enough €2000 per month. So one thing we've been discussing at various levels and with a variety of people is, would it be possible for the church to purchase a manse which could be offered to a Pastor in lieu of some salary. Think about it. What if the church owned a house and said to a potential Pastor, we can give you €12000 a year and a free house! We would be in a very strong position at that point.

Thankfully, while I am not in a position to need a full-time salary from the church, I am in a position - because of my housing situation - to need something like a stipend to supplement my rent. We have to move house, and we feel it is important to stay as local as we can afford, but we are at the limits of our resources. Now, God has always provided for us. But one of the questions the church needs to ask is, is it time for the church to begin to be one of the ways God provides for the Posts. Now this isn't a discussion for today because I don't need to be a part of it. We'll have it another time. But we have to get on the track, somehow, of stretching to pay a salary. So, what if the church bought a manse and the Posts rented it from the church and paid down the mortgage until such time that the church is ready to hire a full-time Pastor? These are the kinds of things we need to be thinking about.

Well again, I want to be clear that we don't have any plans to go anywhere, but we are running out of resources to do what we've done. Not just financial resource, but we don't know where God will lead us in the future. We're taking on more responsibility in our mission organisation. We don't know what 10-years from now looks like. So, for the next 5-years, we want to pursue our alternate future; the future that sees us growing and going into our community and our

world for impact. As I pray for you regularly, I pray that God would make us a 200-year church. That in 100 years people might look back and say, “we’re here today because those people 100 years ago said yes, we’re all in.”