



## Discerning God's calling...

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)*

You will know by now that we are keen hikers and get out walking in the countryside whenever we can! Two recent hikes form a good contrast for where we are at right now. The photo on the left is from a family walk at Christmas when the mist came down and made it very hard to see the way forward. In fact we got a bit lost that day and had to retrace our steps! The photo on the right was taken on a rare weekend away for just the two of us back in November. The view is noticeably different and we walked that day for ten incredible miles.

While we are sure you love to hear our hiking tales you are probably wondering what the point is here! The point is that life is also a bit like this! At times the way forward seems very clear, you know where you are headed and it is clear how to get there. However there are also times when the fog obscures the view and the direction forward is less obvious. Just now it feels more like we are experiencing a foggy view: we are trusting God, seeking His will about the future and asking Him which path to take. Both of us have been involved with students now for the best part of 20 years. We have led the student ministry in Southampton for nearly 15 years and have had a whale of a time. We know that we still have plenty to offer the student community but you will be aware from our last letter that we are now in a period of transitioning into what God has for us next. We are exploring a number of options for continuing ministry after students alongside our likely continuing involvement in the Navigators International Missions Team and in Europe. Two of the most likely avenues of ministry are working with 20s and 30s and/or taking more of an organisation role in developing a lifelong disciple-making focus in the Southampton area.

While we are not yet in a position to have clarity on what such a role will look like we are sure that our new focus will continue to have disciple-making at its heart. This is now part of our DNA and the thing that we have found most helpful in our walk with Jesus. This disciple-making would continue to be personal (suited to the individual), relational (born out in doing life together), intentional (worked out with purpose), generational (designed to help equip others to do the same) and reproducible (using tools that people are able to reuse themselves in the lives of others). Please do be praying for us as we seek God's leading and direction. Pray that the right doors would open and that God would provide people to continue to work with the student ministry.

The second big change is in relation to how we are funded. For the past 10 years we have been Sent Mission Partners (SMPs) at Above Bar Church (Southampton) who have provided around a third of our income. This financial support has been incredible but following a sharpening of their World Mission policy we expect to lose this support at the end of next year. Below is a paragraph from Ian Castro which gives some context to this:

*“Steve and Debs have been Sent Mission Partners (SMPs) at Above Bar Church (ABC) since 2008, working with the Navigators, and it has been a privilege to follow their ministry, seeing and hearing what God has done and is doing in so many young lives, and trying as best we can to support and encourage them. Over the last three to four years in ABC’s mission groups and leadership team we have been considering which most strategic areas we should be particularly encouraging. This has led to development of three newly-focused priorities\* for present and future SMPs which do not include the kind of focus that Steve & Debbie have had during these past 10 years. Over the course of their recently renewed assignment, running until the end of 2020, they will be exploring what God is calling them to do in the next phase of their life and ministry. There is mutual recognition that this may fall outside the scope of the church’s new stated mission priorities and there will be a need for them to raise additional finances to cover the shortfall of about a third of their income post-2020. Meanwhile, we will continue to support and encourage Steve & Debs in their current ministry. Please join us in praying for them, asking that God will continue to provide for them and continue to direct their thinking: His plans are perfect!”*

**Ian P Castro, Mission Personnel Support Group, ABC**

*\*For more information see ABC’s new World Mission Policy at <https://abovebarchurch.org.uk/outreach/world-mission>*

Given that this is a significant change we are beginning now to work on a fund-raising plan ahead of the changes next year which will run in parallel with the changes to the focus of our ministry. At this stage we just wanted to give you some forewarning but if you would like to talk more on this or feel you might be in a position to help us then please do get in touch. We would really value your prayers along the lines of Proverbs 3:5-6 that we would trust God, seek His will and discern where He is leading us.

## Prayer Points

Clearly the content of this letter will be a stimulus to prayer! We would also however like to ask you to pray for a few other things:

### *Upcoming Events:*

- **NAVS Big Weekend (Fri 8 to Sun 10 March):** A group from Southampton and Bournemouth will attend this excellent conference in Blackpool on the subject of creativity.
- **NAVS Emerging Leaders Day (Sat 30<sup>th</sup> March, New Forest):** Steve is putting together a team to run a practical day designed to help students develop skills for life and leadership (For 18-30s).

### *Key People:*

- **Southampton student Team:** That we would continue to raise-up and resource leaders and labourers with a heart to work in God’s harvest-field both here and further afield.
- **Graduates:** For those graduating from both the student ministry and also from Formation school this year: that God would lead them on into fruitful service.

*To God be the Glory,*

*Steve, Debs, Ben, Naomi, Sam, Jacob & Aaron*



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