

20th January 2020

Dear all,

I am typing this letter sitting at my old desk in my new study (a box room) in our new home. We have certainly downsized, but are very grateful for a beautiful home with a sea view, across Belfast Lough, from the kitchen. My garden shed has been installed and my bicycle is ready to follow the coast to wherever it leads.

It is difficult to put into words the gratitude we have to you all for the generosity you showed to us as we said farewell. Your kindness was overwhelming and we are very grateful. Throughout the years I have sought to serve you as bishop, your constant prayers and support were always something I knew I could depend on and I can assure you I did need them. I have tried to reply to the many letters and cards we received, but if I have missed someone, please forgive me.

In saying thank you, we are particularly grateful for the incredible wave of prayer and support we received during last year when I was undergoing intensive treatment for prostate cancer. We were very conscious of the prayers of many as we experienced peace that was tangible and incredibly helpful. It was a wonderful reminder of how important it is to pray and, in particular, to pray for one another.

I will continue to pray for you all, and especially in the coming months as you await the appointment of a new bishop, but also in the years to come. Connor diocese is a special place and it was an enormous privilege to serve you as your bishop. There are so many wonderful memories of being with you at different times in your parish history and of the fellowship we shared.

The farewell evening in St Patrick's, Ballymena, was a delightful occasion and it will long live in my memory, as it helped me say farewell and begin the process of leaving behind the responsibility of being bishop.

The Christmas celebrations in the two Cathedrals were wonderful ways for us as a family to worship together and to share the end of a chapter in ministry. Ministry will continue and I look forward to being able to serve in any way that I can.

On a sad note, I want to ask for your prayers for one of our staff team, Audra Irvine. She took very ill on the evening of my farewell and received surgery in the RVH that evening for a clot on the brain. For the first few weeks, she was in ICU in the RVH, but has since been moved to Antrim Hospital, awaiting a bed in the brain injury unit in MPH. She is showing small signs of recovery, so please pray for her in the weeks and months ahead.

She has served in Church House for over 30 years and we were delighted when she joined Team Connor. Please pray for her; her husband, James; daughter, Louise; her mother; and her family circle. Prayer is something that really does bring blessing, healing and peace.

I return to the main purpose of this letter and words that I used in my farewell address were “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”

I will be forever grateful for all we have shared together and be assured of my love and prayers for you as you journey into the future with Jesus.

Grace and peace to you all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a plus sign followed by the name 'Alan' in a cursive script.

+Alan Abernethy