

Grace and peace to you all, in Christ Jesus our Lord

I've been given permission by Alan Saunders and Eric White to read a statement regarding the changes in the leadership positions at The Sports Village Church.

Eight days ago on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September four new members were added to the SVC leadership team. The leaders consisted of Senior Pastor Eric White, Jackie White, Phil Isherwood, Barbara Isherwood, Andy Bolton and myself. The four new leaders are Anthony Murden, Jude Platt, Simon Edwards and Simone Bennett. Please pray for them as they all adjust to their new role.

Eight days from now on 16 September, Senior Pastor Eric White will lead his last service as Senior Pastor at SVC. It's a day we all knew was coming but like all days like this we all will approach it with mixed emotions.

It's appropriate now to pay tribute to Jackie and Eric and to thank them for their bravery, dedication, hard work and Christian love. This month marks a decade since SVC was founded and in that decade lives have been transformed, ministries have been founded, many have discovered giftings and people have come to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I would like to thank Eric for his commitment to the Christian Faith as found in the principles of The Reformation – that Scripture alone is the infallible rule for a Christian and the church – that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone. These have been the phrases we've heard, sang and prayed at SVC for a decade. He has also never lost any of his zeal or commitment in reaching out to the marginalised of society, which was the reason SVC was set up. This led to setting up a Christians Against Poverty centre being established at SVC, which has become the main vehicle for mission.

And where would we all be without Jackie? Her loving heart and her gifts of service are a modal to all of us. She always makes sure people feel included, that everyone has somebody to talk to and that those who need it get a lift. She is indeed, the mum of SVC. Whether it's her clipboard for socials or her welcome bags for new people she's always looking after us all.

In a very real sense the church plant vision which found expression in SVC was ahead of its time. Over the past year The Church of England has expressed support for planting new churches to reach minority and marginalised communities with the Gospel. Our own Diocese of Manchester has expressed a desire to plant several dozen church plants across Greater Manchester over the next few years. SVC was doing this a decade ago! The founders of SVC and the CCP leadership deserve immense credit for stepping out in faith. The results speak for themselves.

On Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> February Eric rang me to tell me he had had a meeting with Alan Saunders about the future. He told me they agreed that I should succeed Eric when the time comes. I

will become Lead Pastor on 23<sup>rd</sup> September this year – the day after my birthday! My thanks to Eric and Alan for their confidence in me and special thanks to my wife Simone for her love, optimism, support and encouragement. My first act will be to formally give Eric the title “Founding Pastor of the Sports Village Church” in recognition for all he has done. On a personal note I would like to thank Jackie and Eric for their kindness to me since I joined the church family in 2008. Eric and I became friends almost immediately. It was in the foyer at CCP and he saw that I was carrying the ESV Bible, the standard translation for those of us who support and subscribe to The New Calvinism. I think it’s safe to say we got on from the start. Of course, who can forget the day Simone and I got married? From nominal Christians to ardent atheists everyone on my side couldn’t speak highly enough of his ministry on that day. One friend, a fiercely anti-religion atheist said to me that day “I still don’t believe but something was different here today...something was *real*”

Many still talk about it for that reason. Quite right too.

I shall give the final word to a retired Vicar – you may remember him – his name is Tony Butterworth. I met him over the summer to tell him what was happening. His advice was, as always, insightful and valuable. Two pieces stayed with me particularly and I shall blend them for the sake of this statement

“Be your own man” he said “even when it turns out you’re wrong. You can only learn from your mistakes if you own them...and whatever you do, don’t try and follow Eric because nobody will *ever* be able to follow Eric.”

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I agree.

Thank you, Eric.

Thank you, Jackie.

And thank you for listening.

John A Bennett