

Alastair & Elise Donaldson

January 2026



With grandad at Christmas

'Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."' (James 4:13-15)

Pioneer ministry can be strange. It has great moments of joy, encouragement and satisfaction, coupled with times of abject frustration, disappointment and head-scratching. You might be greatly surprised with me (Alastair) writing this, or identify with the sentiment closely. Several of Elise's family members – including her paternal grandparents (who are still alive) – were among the first 'pioneers' to the west of Canada in the early 20th century. It was a tough existence to leave everything they knew for a land unknown, and many who started the same journey didn't make it. Shades of Abraham resonate. The Scriptures teach us that he didn't know where he was going but trusted the one taking him and Sarah there. Likewise with pioneer ministry. Some days it's hard to do anything, but the Holy Spirit within us convicts us to do something. To keep pressing on. To keep seeking his will, holding loosely to our own plans and understanding in the process.



Christmas cousins

This is our first prayer letter since autumn, and the Lord has indeed shown us much since then. Josiah and Edith turned nine and six, respectively. Our Bible study group continues to expand slowly. An average night now consists of 9-10 people. We have fed richly in the Gospel of John with plans to study John 14 next. Between now and June, we will occasionally study a little workbook whose subject is how we serve and love one another in Christian community. It has been a real blessing to us also. At Christmas, we had a little evening at our house where people shared some food, stories of their lives and faith, and we were all encouraged and unified. As a family, we also had a lovely few days with my parents and family in County Armagh. Josiah loves a car journey, and Edith loves her 'girl' cousins, and both of them their grandad and granny. The Lord is good. We pray those reading felt encouraged this Christmas also.

At the start of last summer, I applied for the retained fire brigade service in Gort. Elise and I prayed and believed it could work well alongside ministry. There would be challenges, of course. Anyway, after seven long months, I got news that I wasn't successful. It was disappointing, but the decision filled us with hope that the Lord has more suitable plans going forward. A friend encouraged me with the

words, 'you would have made a good fireman, but you're a better minister'. A kind word reminding me of our real purpose for being in Gort. Elise has a busy few months till the summer. She is splitting herself between motherhood, working in afterschool, studying at college and partnering with me in ministry. She is not a superwoman, but she feels like that to me sometimes. Please pray she would have the energy she needs and that her eyes would be fixed on Jesus despite many possible good distractions. One way I'm getting over the fire brigade is to run a half-marathon at the end of January with friends from my new running club. Excitingly, Josiah has started running the local park run monthly, while Edith loves gymnastics and dancing.



Elise at St George's Dagenham



Mid-term outreach with the St Giles' team

We're continuing to seek the Lord for what the next few months might look like. A couple of partner churches have enquired about some people coming over and what that might look like on the ground. We were very encouraged with our mid-term family outreach last October, at which a small team from St Giles' Derby joined us. Elise and I had a weekend break in London in November, which allowed us to worship with God's church at St George's Dagenham. It was a flying visit but we were so warmly received. Back to Gort, we want to do some door-to-door leaflet dropping, and boots on

the ground are good for this. Maybe over this period the Lord might add to the Bible study contingent? Wouldn't that be nice, as the Beach Boys once sang. Whatever he will do, he is faithful.

We thank the Lord for every single person reading this letter. You are such an immense source of encouragement to our family and have supported us in a multitude of ways. Please keep in touch and let us know how we can pray for you also. It's important to share our lives as those 'adopted' into God's family. Ever since we came to Galway in August 2024, Elise and I have hosted a monthly prayer meeting by Zoom. This meeting is usually on the last Thursday of each month at 8.30pm. That means you're hopefully reading this letter before our next one on Thursday 29 January. Please join if you can. It lasts no longer than an hour. The details are as follows:

<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/75245932165?pwd=6fVAMPkoc9wZ000xa42Ejb96a6um1S.1>

Meeting ID: 752 4593 2165

Passcode: GUdG9J

Secondly, we have been invited to address the Crosslinks Ireland Zoom prayer meeting on Monday 11 May at 7.30pm. I (Alastair) will share a short devotion, and we will share a little about the work in Galway. There will also be time for Q&A, as well as hearing from the Crosslinks Ireland leadership about other missional news. Please check out the Crosslinks Ireland Facebook page for details, and we'll also share the necessary details as soon as possible.

***'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'* (Isaiah 41:10) Amen!**

Alastair and Elise Donaldson Gort, County Galway, Ireland