

At this service of ordination and induction here in Port Erin today, what are you hoping to see or to experience or to receive? What are you hoping will be the product or the outcome or the fruit of this service?

I am sure that Enoch will be longing that his ministry will be successful in the genuine sense of that word – that he will be faithful and that his service of the church will bear good fruit in God’s kindness. Perhaps Rosie and the girls are hoping that they will settle well, that they will be received and welcomed, that their family life will be happy and secure. What about the members of the church here? Surely, you are looking for days of blessing upon the church, where there is growth spiritually and numerically; days where a settled ministry produces stability and contentment and joy. And what about all the visitors both from the island and from across the sea? Are we not hoping and praying that all these desires of Enoch and his family and all the members of the church here will be met? That there will be blessing and faithfulness and contentment and spiritual growth and numerical growth and joy in the church, all for the glory of the head of the church, even Jesus Christ.

But how is that going to be accomplished? Surely, we must understand that none of the outcomes we desire are by any means certain. Good desires and biblical objectives do not guarantee anything. The experience of this very church, as with that of many others, is proof that these things are not readily attained. To enjoy these blessings, it must be a 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15 church; it must be a biblical church; or to coin a phrase, it must become *AN EDIFICATION CHURCH*.

What is that? The word “edify” (v11) means to be built up and strengthened. Without such a church, how shall we persevere in the faith? The way is so hard; the enemy is so strong; the spirit may indeed be willing, but the flesh is weak. We face so many discouragements and setbacks in our Christian lives – when we gather as a church, we desperately need to be comforted, built up and strengthened – to receive from the Lord of the church, the blessing that he has designed the church to channel into the lives of his people – that the church might be the means of grace to Christ’s own.

One of the greatest sorrows of my life and ministry has been to see so many lose their way, either because they never found an edification church, or because they chose to leave one for personal and unbiblical reasons, which is even more grievous. Is **THIS** an edification church? To be a member here, is it to be comforted, encouraged and strengthened on the way to sanctification and glory?

It takes both minister and congregation to make the church a place of edification and beauty, blessing and encouragement. The role of the minister is absolutely vital, but so is the response of the members, and the part played by each and every one in the congregation. Are you, minister and members of this church, totally committed to making this congregation a place where every category of person, every kind of attendee, every man and woman and child, is edified and blessed under the means of grace week by week? Paul directs us in these verses to five essential marks of such a church.

1. A Responsible Leadership (v12)

Paul here describes church leaders not by title, status or talent, but by what they do. Leaders are those who labour among you, who are over you in the Lord, and who admonish you. This describes the work of a pastor, overseer, and elder – three New Testament titles for the same office.

- A pastor's work is to labour hard, 1 Timothy 5:17 – in study, preaching, visitation, evangelism and discipleship – to be like a Victorian miner with pick axe in hand, seating and labouring at the coal face – just as Christ laboured tirelessly, night and day, never tiring anyone away, never ceasing in his commitment to do others good, never failing to seize an opportunity to be a blessing to others,
- An overseer's work is to take care – not simply over-looking the people like a manager, but looking out for their good, seeking their blessing, being alert to their needs and promoting their wellbeing – remembering that this is all done “in the Lord”, meaning that the overseer is conscious of his accountability to the Chief Shepherd, and to be like him in all his work, 1 Peter 5:2-4.
- An elder's work is to admonish, Titus 1:9 – to teach, direct and, when needed, to warn lovingly and faithfully – as Jesus warned his own disciples when they were in danger on the night of his betrayal – as Paul warned the Ephesians, night and day with tears, Acts 20:31.

Every pastor must labour hard, take care, and admonish faithfully.

2. A Respectful Membership (v12–13)

With such leadership, members are to respond with respect. Paul urges believers to:

- *Recognise* their leaders, honouring them for their unique calling and authority, even as Paul encourages respect for masters in the workplace, Colossians 3:22-24.
- *Esteem* them, humbly receiving their admonition and committing to support them materially, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Corinthians 9:14.
- *Love* them with commitment, kindness, and generous warmth. All members are to love their pastor because he is Christ's love-gift to the church, which he purchased through his victory over sin and death, Ephesians 4:7-12.

Remember, it is a very serious matter to bring an accusation against an elder in the church, 1 Timothy 5:17-21. Your encouragement can sustain them; your criticism can undo them. An edification church respects, esteems, and loves its elders.

3. A Peaceful Fellowship (v13b)

Unity between leaders and members is essential. A lack of peace results in division and strife, often hidden but always harmful. Peace must exist on every level – and where it doesn't, peace-making is our calling. Even when conflict is disguised as spiritual concern, division is still division, and we really need to examine our own hearts. Remember the stern warning Christ gave to those who cause his little ones to stumble, Mark 9:42.

Deacons play a vital role here, as seen in Acts 6 – they were appointed when the church was divided, and they brought unity and rich blessing as a direct result. A peaceful fellowship is a precondition for an edifying one.

4. A Nursing Family (v14)

Paul repeatedly affirms that the church is a family by referring to the believers as “brethren” (v12; 14; 25; 26; 27). Every edification church is a family – not merely like a family, or similar to a family, but the real, live, functioning family of God! And in a family, there is genuine care shown to the weak and the needy. In a business, or a sports team, or a secular organisation, failure leads to dismissal – but in a family it's different! There is love and commitment shown to all.

- The idle (undisciplined or lazy) are admonished.
- The fainthearted (despairing or grieving) are encouraged.
- The weak (especially morally weak) are helped.
- And patience is shown to ALL – especially those who try our patience!

Don't retreat to comfort zones or cliques. True family love reaches out to the neglected, the outcasts, the defeated. The church is to be like her Lord, who reached out to the lepers, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, even sinners like us, shedding his blood to make us clean. Consider those in the church you have despised or neglected – it's time to repent.

5. A Kind Community (v15)

An edification church is a kind community where evil is not repaid with evil, and where what is good is pursued with zeal. If good is returned for evil every time that evil arises in the church, then good will triumph over evil first time, every time, Romans 12:21. This kindness is rooted in God's own goodness – not what is easy or convenient, but what is pure, moral, and holy – there is no blessing or joy in what is sinful. We are to be like Jesus, who always returned good for evil, even to those who crucified him, Luke 23:34.

This is the beginning of an edification church: responsible leadership, respectful membership, peaceful fellowship, nursing family and kind community.

So, how is it at Grace Baptist Church Port Erin? What will change under the ministry of your new pastor? Will you, minister and members together, commit to being a church where all are blessed, comforted, encouraged, and edified? You can't afford to be any other kind of church. May the Lord of the church bless you to this end.