

THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

by Andrew Gilmour

As I walk through our local allotments here in Oxford and see the vegetable beds being prepared for the onset of winter, my mind moves to Greensboro and the farm at Church of the Redeemer. I wonder how the autumn harvest has gone and what's still in the beds. I wonder what visions the team have for the land after the relative quiet of winter. Many months ago when my family and I lined up our trip to y'all (have I earned the right to say that?!), our hopes and expectations simply had to do with seeing the farm ministry in action. Upon arrival, it quickly became obvious that our time with you as a community was going to touch our hearts in ways that we hadn't foreseen. Being able to write this piece for *The Table* is a welcomed chance for me to express the gratitude that we as a family feel for the way you received us, and also for your encouragement to reflect back to you how we witnessed love being manifested in your church family.

After waiting an eternity for our luggage at the airport, we arrived at the Hawkins home late at night and weary from travel. Angela Kaye beckoned us in to a delicious dinner and a warm welcome. The same kindness and hospitality poured forth from the Van Wagenens, who hosted us for the remainder of our stay. Elisabeth and I hadn't anticipated being so challenged by the hospitable love being shown to us, though we knew that the experience of being taken in by these families was going to linger with us as a testimony of what it means to open your home in a spirit of generosity. Day after day during our time in Greensboro, we encountered the love of Christ in the face of the church community. From the rich conversations I had with the farm staff while we flipped garden beds to the numerous invitations we received to join in on family activities or dinners. Two tangible reminders of this love and generosity made it back with me to this side of the pond. One is a bottle of Fishers Whiskey from the Wall family after a rich

evening of tri-tip steak and Evening Prayer! The other is a pair of Duluth work trousers (sorry--"pants") that Tony Nguyen bought for me at the end of my time on the farm. When I wear them in the future to work my allotment or tend my yard, I'll be reminded that love helps knit us together into the body of Christ, even beyond individual congregations and countries.

In and of themselves, these expressions of love--whether it be an invite to dinner or a bottle of Greensboro whiskey--may not seem all that out of the ordinary. But the cumulative effect on us as a family meant that by the end of our stay, we were blown away by the intentionality and kindness with which we were received. As I said above, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude for the welcome you gave us and how you've helped to shape our lives as

we think about future ministry. It also seems like an opportunity for us as outsiders to share our experience with you in order to remind you of the love that permeates your community. I'm reminded of Paul exhorting the Corinthians to "follow the way of love" (1 Cor 14:1): what he refers to in the previous chapter as "the most excellent way." As someone who has experienced first-hand the kindness, hospitality, and generosity of your community, I simply want to shout encouragement from the sideline that you go on pursuing, with greater depth and revelation, the most excellent way. As you come to the table of Lord together, as you open God's word and as you pray with and for one another, might you be fanning into flame this Christ-like love. May this love continue to move richly through you as a church family, and also spill out so that the lives of folks in Greensboro are touched.



A NATIVE OF NORTHERN IRELAND, Andrew now lives in Oxford, England with his wife Elisabeth and two young boys, Jesse and Gabriel. He is in his third year of training at Wycliffe Hall for ordination in the Church of England. In July 2022, the Gilmours will be moving one town over to Abingdon where Andrew will be starting as a curate at Christ Church Abingdon. Elisabeth is a lecturer in Spanish literature and cultural studies at the University of Bristol.

