

It is a privilege and a deeply humbling honor to be here in this position today. I am very grateful to be a part of the next chapter of the story God is writing for **the living body of Alliance Christian Center**. Ultimately, the Kingdom of God expands and grows as each part does its work. **Slide 2**

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No one's part is unimportant; no one's part is more important.

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All of us who bear the name of Christ have a vital function within Jesus church so that the name of Jesus and his saving work may be known throughout the earth, and that the full number of people that Jesus wants to add to his family will be complete upon His return to the earth. As I step more fully into my role here as pastor, I am simply doing my small part in the much larger story that God is writing. One that will go on for all of eternity.

But let's take a brief look back at what God has done in this little corner of his kingdom.

### ***Brief history of Alliance Christian Center*** **Slide 3**

**In 1978**, Alliance Christian Center was established, led by a then 23-year-old Kirk Martin along with a team consisting of 14 adults and 7 kids. Several of these founding members are STILL active parts of ACC or our sister church in Louisville.

- Kirk and Ruth and their 3 girls
- Reijo and Cindy Saari (who were single at the time but got married in Alliance)
- Dave (who is now with Jesus) and Karen Walker, and baby Thaddeus
- Gordon Mcquire
- Gail, who later married Bill Barzda in Alliance

### **1988 - The church began meeting at this present location**

**Janet and I started attending ACC in 1990**, at the invitation of my work colleague at the time, Joel Parkinson. Dave and Karen Walker were among the first people to invite us over for lunch after church. I distinctly remember Karen serving roast beef and spaetzle with gravy. It was the first time I ever heard the word spaetzle, and it was very good!

**In 1995, Kirk** resigned as the pastor of ACC after acknowledging an unhealthy emotional attachment outside of his marriage. He was not in a position to lead the church spiritually or emotionally and needed time away to address the issue and to pursue counseling and healing. What followed was a sixteen-year journey of counseling and healing in the beginning...then spiritual growth as the Lord deepened Kirk's walk with Him, reshaping his character, and gradually confirming that God's call on his life was still in place.

**Reijo Saari** served faithfully as pastor from 1995 until 1998, and left a significant imprint on my life. Reijo's love of the Word of God and his respect for its authority, and his diligence to wrestle with tough questions firmly rooted in a belief that God's word was true, deeply affected my walk with Jesus and my life.

After an interim period led by Joel Parkinson, **Paul Dykshoorn** became the lead pastor in 2000. Paul cared deeply about the flock of God and sought to care for the people of God with love and sincerity of heart. In 2004, I was ordained as an elder, and worked closely with Paul for several years.

**Kirk Martin** had begun to lead a home church that met together for a number of years. In 2011, we asked Kirk to help out here at ACC as an advisory elder. Then something extraordinary happened. Kirk's calling to minister and be involved with the expansion of the Kingdom of God was bursting in his heart. At the same time, the Lord had birthed in Paul the idea of starting a ministry to help men in Alliance learn basic skills to be more employable.

In an amazing display of God's work in reconciliation and restoration, after a time of fasting and seeking God's direction, Paul declared in a meeting with Kirk, Bill Powell, and me that he thought it was time for him to step aside and let Kirk take the lead. In February of 2012, that is what happened. Paul and some other men started the Men's Challenge ministry (now known as Challenge Ministries), which also continues to serve people in Alliance to this day.

I don't bring this up to dwell on the past, but to give glory to God for what he has done! The humility and grace displayed by both Paul Dykshoorn and Kirk Martin that allowed the healing and reconciliation that took place is only something Jesus could bring about. **It truly is an extraordinary occurrence.** And ACC as a congregation has grown more strong and mature as each part has done its work.

Over the past 14 years, Kirk has helped build up ACC's leadership base and led in a way that was never about him. He has done the hard work of making the Great Commission a focus (with people like me sometimes dragging my feet) while also empowering and equipping men and women in this church **to do the work of the ministry.** **Slide 4**

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*Ministry is the variety of ways given to us by God's grace – in order to meet the needs of others – and requiring some response from us.*

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ACC is a healthy church, with many different parts working well together to serve Jesus and build up the body of Christ while striving to make disciples from all peoples in Alliance and the surrounding areas.

***Give honor where honor is due.***

I want to make it clear once again that my coming on staff at ACC at this **time is not so much to replace Kirk as it is to release him**. As Kirk himself has said many times, he has no plans to move to Florida or take up golf. He will continue to lead the effort to ensure that there is No Place Left in Alliance and the surrounding areas where the gospel of Jesus has not been fully proclaimed. **Slide 5**

*Rom 13:7 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*

**Kirk Martin is an extraordinary man.** Though he is not widely known nationwide or internationally (at least not yet!), he works tirelessly to make the name of Jesus known in this city. In recent years, Kirk has shared the gospel of Jesus with thousands of people. One at a time or maybe to 2 or 3.

- During a recent tragic event in our city, Kirk found an opportunity to care for the people involved. Kirk was then asked to do the funeral service, and our congregation had the opportunity to serve dinner to the family afterwards. Maybe 75 people?
- Last month, we did the bike giveaway downtown, and Kirk was running the show. The crowd was enormous, and a one point, a bit restless. Kirk told the crowd that if there was any fighting or arguing we'd have to shut it down. He then gave a brief summary of the Great Commandment, noting that we must love God with our whole hearts and love our neighbor as ourselves. Part of that was treating each other kindly and with respect. The crowd was calm and paid attention.

**Kirk Martin, pastor of the City of Alliance.**

So again, I am not going to try to replace Kirk, even if that were possible. I'm here to relieve some of the burden, and release him to do even more disciple-making. **Slide 6**

*2 Tim 4:5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

Kirk has been a wonderful friend and mentor to me over the past year. I asked him the other day if, after seeing me acting like a goofball at Brianna's wedding, he had any regrets about

his choice of successor. He just laughed and said it's probably good to inject a little craziness into the mix!

### **What's Next?**

ACC is very blessed to have such a wonderful group of people gathered together. So many gifts in operation. So many dedicated and faithful servants of God, working together with one heart. I think we generally do a great job heeding the words of the apostle Peter, who said: **Slide 7**

*1 Pet 3:8 Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.*

At the same time, we also must be forceful for the Kingdom of God!

*Mat 11:12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.*

We should not be passively living our lives waiting for Jesus to come back. We have two clear overarching marching orders: **Slide 8**

**The Great Commandment** – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

**The Great Commission** – Make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything Christ has commanded.

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We can summarize it succinctly that we are called to:

- Love God,
- Love each other,
- And make disciples

Here are some specifics that ACC leadership has broken down using the building blocks A - E: **Slide 9**

**Abide** – continually drawing close to Jesus as our center

**Bible** – always basing everything upon scriptural truth

**Community** – having authentic relationships where we can care for one another

**Discipleship** – learning to daily walk in our next step of obedience

**Evangelism** – working to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission

Some things we will be doing this fall: **Slide 10**

**Abide** – A monthly community worship and focused prayer time being led by Randy Jellison

**Bible** – We are relaunching our “school of foundations for ministry” on Monday nights in the fall. Teacher Reijo Saari will be doing a class on basic foundations, and we will be doing a series on apologetics.

**Community/Discipleship** – As Kirk announced last week, we are doing small group leader training next month as we then launch new small groups in the fall. These will have a specific start and end date so anyone can join a group and it is not a lifetime commitment. They will be simple scripture-based groups that anyone can lead. And they will focus on authentic relationships and each person taking their next step of obedience in following Christ.

**Evangelism** – With Kirk now released to fully pursue disciple-making, we will continue to do continual gospel outreaches as well as partner with and train other churches to go into the harvest.

### ***Building for the Future***

One of the key areas I will be focusing on is the development of more leaders. **Slide 11**

*2 Tim 2:2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.*

This is essential to what it means to make disciples of all nations. It is a continuous process of teaching others to follow Jesus, including teaching them to teach others to follow Jesus. **I am asking God to continue to bring us men and women who are willing to be disciples of Jesus. But especially men who can be leaders and teachers of others.** The church was never meant to be a show. It is a collection of people working together to make Christ known in the world.

### **Slide 12**

The Apostle Paul gives us a key blueprint to follow

*Eph 4:11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, **as each part does its work.***

I know Kirk talked about this last week, but it's worth emphasizing again. When the body is functioning well, every part is working. **Slide 13** The 5-fold ministry, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are the equippers of the people of the church, the body of Christ, to do good works. These works "build up God's people in love, as each part does its work." Caring for one another. Delivering truth and healing to one another.

As I step more fully into an equipping role, I will do all I can to build you up and release you, the ministers, to do the work that God is calling us to do here in Alliance, Ohio, in 2026 and beyond. Because every one of you, whether you were saved 30 years ago or last week has work to do that will help advance the kingdom of God. **Slide 14**

A scripture that I have shared with many youth over the years is

*Eph 2:10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

This is an amazing truth to grasp. That each one of us, each one of you! is a masterpiece of God's workmanship. You were made new in Jesus with a purpose to do good things! And good things that God planned for you to do long before you were even born! Following Jesus isn't just your ticket to heaven so you can go do what you want. **It is about finding your purpose, laying hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of me.** And that part is not just about us as individuals, but each of our small stories is part of the bigger story of his church here. And we are a part of what Jesus is doing in the world! Isn't that awesome?

**Care for the Flock** **Slide 15**

To my fellow elders, I remind you of our calling:

*1 Pet 5:1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

Let's not lose our focus or be distracted by the joys and cares of this very temporary world. This world is quickly passing away.

Young men – we need you guys to continue to step up. We need more elders who care for the flock and watch over them.

***What does the future hold?***

We tend to always think the times we live in are “unprecedented”. But the reality is that the history of the Church of Jesus has been difficult for 2000 years. It has grown in times of persecution, yet floundered in times of prosperity. Sadly, most of the original Christian lands were forcibly converted to Islam. But the church continues to expand into the whole world. We help support some massive disciple-making movements in various places around the world. Hopefully, we will become a massive disciple-making movement right here!

**Slide 16**

We live in truly exciting times! Why? Because Jesus is building his church, and the Gates of Hell will not prevail against it! So let us press in to take hold of that for which Jesus took hold of you! We have work to do!

**Let's draw near to Jesus,**

**walk in obedience,**

**love God,**

**love each other,**

**and make disciples.**

Father – transform us into your image! Jesus I pray that you speak to every person here today, that they will aggressively pursue your calling on their life for the kingdom of God. That each of us would recognize the high calling of following Jesus and doing our part within your church, that all the world would know you, Jesus, and the incredible love you have poured out. Jesus – what you have done is so amazing. Humbling yourself to be a servant, even to the point of death on the cross. May we follow your example, empowered by your Holy Spirit, becoming like you in your death so that we might experience also your resurrection.