



Dear Friends,

As we work on completing this newsletter, we are thankful for the opportunity to attend the *annual Hilltop Conference at the Arlington Baptist University*, where we both attended college. The preaching has been powerful and challenging. Sometimes we as “ministry people” need to be ministered to, and God is doing just that. As we travel from church to church, part of our ministry is to try to be a blessing and encouragement to pastors and their families and other ministry leaders. Church members often forget that pastors and their wives and children are going through the same personal and family struggles that they go through. Those who serve in a full-time or part-time ministry are not automatically guaranteed problem-free living! Satan often fights most fiercely to try to distract and destroy the most faithful servants of God. Some of you reading this newsletter follow our schedule and pray for us as we move from place to place. As you do, *please whisper a prayer for the pastors and their families in the churches in which we minister. And don't forget to diligently pray for your own pastor and church leaders and their families!*

One of the conference speakers mentioned the *urgent need for older pastors to be handing over the baton of the Gospel to a younger generation of pastors who will be able to carry it into the future*. In January of this year *Christianity Today* reported some sobering information regarding the same issue. Surveys and interviews with 14,000 Protestant pastors revealed that the average age of Protestant senior pastors has risen to 54. That's a decade older than 25 years ago, when the average age was 44. Now, just 1 in 7 pastors leading congregations is under 40, according to Barna Group's 2017 State of Pastors project. Most are over 60. Barna says the age shift stems from evolving career expectations and *difficulty passing leadership on to millennial-aged pastors*. Millennials in this study were defined as those born between 1984 and 2002, or people who are roughly 15-33 years old. More than two-thirds of today's pastors surveyed said *it has become harder to identify suitable pastor candidates among millennials*. Why is this? In terms of numbers, Millennials are the largest adult generation, and they typically seek jobs that are meaningful and can make a positive impact on their world. So *why is there a shortage when it comes to "full-time ministry" candidates?* More than half of the pastors surveyed sensed their calling as young adults, between ages 14 and 21. A vast majority attended church as a kid (85%) and participated in youth ministry (80%). Why aren't there more “suitable candidates” among this same age group today?

(Above statistics from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2017/january/only-1-in-7-senior-pastors-is-under-40-barna.html>)

There are a variety of valid reasons for the above dilemma, but in our 35 years of traveling to hundreds of churches, two striking distinctions stand out. *The majority of churches seem to have forgotten the importance of presenting full-time ministry as a viable and attractive option for a lifetime career*. In our eager efforts to attract teens to our churches and then when they get there, to make them feel comfortable and accepted, we have sequestered them to the point that the teen room is the *only* place where they *do* feel comfortable. It is the exception rather than the rule that the teens are brought into an “adult” service when there is a guest speaker or missionary. How are they going to consider ministry career goals if the only full-time ministry careers they are consistently exposed to are the current Christian super stars? I am thankful that my home pastor regularly recruited groups of all ages to attend revival meetings and conferences throughout the region. He sincerely held up missionaries as our heroes of the faith. I grew up believing that there was no higher goal in life than that of serving God full-time, whether vocationally or as a faithful lay person.

Hand in hand with ministry exposure goes opportunities of service. Millennials *want* to make a difference in the world, and we are neglecting infinite potential by not giving them opportunities to serve alongside adults. I was presented with a myriad of ministry opportunities even before I was a teen, helping Sunday school teachers, teaching pre-school students, working with adults on work days at church or in the kitchen, assisting my mom as she worked as a camp counselor, learning to deal with a variety of people and issues as I made visits with my parents and other adults in homes, hospitals and nursing homes. We must let them serve now! We must develop leaders now! They will make mistakes, but that's how they learn to lead and grow!

Often young people would be willing and eager to serve if their lives were not dominated by sports. Too many parents think they are somehow neglecting their children if they don't involve them in as many sports as they can fit in the family schedule. Which will make a difference in 100 years, or even 30 or 40 years, our children knowing the fundamentals of soccer and lacrosse or our churches and communities being filled with committed disciples of Jesus? As our children and grandchildren someday pack away the trophies they so diligently sought after as children and teens, will they also dust off their Bibles and suddenly realize their only true fulfillment is in a life of love and service to God? Probably not. With their lives bound up in making house payments and buying groceries, will they suddenly make a decision to become a pastor or missionary? Not likely. As we pray for God to call laborers into the white harvest fields, we must allow these Millennials, as well as the younger Gen X and Gen Z demographics to serve NOW and interact with all of the community of believers, first in the teen room, then throughout the church, into the community, and ultimately unto the uttermost parts of the earth.



In the center is Pastor Andrew Hayward with his wife Marilee and sons Parker and Cooper. L-R is Deacon Rance McCloskey and wife Edna, Student Pastor Parker Kleinert and his fiancé Mattie Smith.

Reflecting on the pastors we have worked with this month, we are excited to realize that 100% of them were young pastors under the age of 60 with most being under 40. We have ministered mainly in the Dallas/Fort Worth area this past month, partnering with churches in Mansfield, Waxahachie, Cleburne, Fort Worth, and Arlington. We also enjoyed presenting a concert at Dove Creek Café in Roanoke, where Bob Wills hosts a



Rev. Earl Sides and Pastor Tyler Gillit Worth Baptist Church

weekly Gospel night, providing live music at the restaurant. Above to the left is **Andrew Hayward** with his wife and children. (Andrew is the one proudly displaying his Michigan jersey!) He recently became the pastor of the **Central Baptist Church in Mansfield, TX**. He has been handed the baton by a faithful pastor who served at Central Baptist for over 60 years! In the photo to the right are two young pastors, **Tyler Gillit and Earl Sides**. Bro. Gillit is the senior pastor of **Worth Baptist church in Fort Worth, TX**, and Bro. Earl is the Discipleship Coordinator. Tyler was called to be the pastor in January of 2016, after the retirement of **Dr. Willie Weaver**, who now serves the church as Pastoral Evangelist. Dr. Weaver, pictured to the right was our pastor in Connersville, IN for 19 years. Below to the right is Miles with his friends, John and Sheila who brought him to church last Wednesday night. As he heard Alan preach, the Holy Spirit worked in Miles' heart and he stepped forward to accept the Gospel invitation! With encouragement, prayers, and discipleship from the family of God, perhaps Miles will be among the next generation of laborers in the field that is ripe unto harvest.



Dr. Willie and Mrs. Carolyn Weaver

Sincerely and thankfully yours,

Alan and Angie Harris

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John, Sheila, Miles, Alan, and Angie

PLAN NOW TO ATTEND
THE
HARRIS FAMILY
HOME COMING
CONNERSVILLE,
INDIANA
AUG 19, 2017!!!

MAY - JUNE 2017

- May 7: First Baptist Church, Canton, MI
- May 14: Calvary Baptist Church, Altavista, VA
- May 21-26: Bethany Baptist Church, McDermott, OH
- June 4-AM: First Southern Baptist Church, Falmouth, IN
- June 11-AM: Kennett Sq Miss. Bapt Ch, Kennett Sq, PA
- June 18-AM: Southside Baptist Church, Dover, DE
- June 18-PM: New Life Baptist Church, White Marsh, MD
- June 21-25: Freedom Baptist Church, Dundalk, MD