

FIRSTwords

TO REACH PEOPLE FOR JESUS CHRIST & TOGETHER BECOME MORE LIKE HIM

A Message to First Baptist Church, Abilene

From the Pastor Search Committee

September 29, 2021

On behalf of the Pastor Search Committee, thank you for supporting us through your encouragement, prayer, and the commissioning of our committee in worship on September 12. We are privileged to be part of such a compassionate church family.

Along with everyone else in the congregation, we feel deep joy as we celebrate 26 years of Dr. Christopher's ministry at First Baptist. Phil, Mary, Jeremy, and Natalie are a great gift from God to all of us. At the same time, we feel the weight of changing relationships, as Phil retires and his leadership role as our Senior Pastor comes to a conclusion. We celebrate all that God has done in our midst through Phil's dynamic leadership, and we look forward with faith to the next chapter in the life of our church.

Rich Resources Available to Us

The Pastor Search Committee has been quite busy since you elected us to lead in this time of pastoral transition. We are learning a lot about the pastor search process, and we feel both a sense of humility in the face of the huge task and deep confidence that God, who has led FBC from our beginning in 1881, will certainly be faithful in guiding our church through this interim time and on to new horizons of service.

One thing that has been particularly helpful to us is the discovery of organizations that assist churches in the search for a new pastor. After careful investigation, the Pastor Search Committee has engaged the Center for Healthy Churches (CHC) to consult with us, coaching our committee as we move ahead. CHC is a well-established organization created by Baptists and specializing in helping churches like ours. Their assistant director, Dr. Matt Cook, who lives in Dallas, will be our consultant. For over 20 years, he served as the senior pastor of several Baptist churches, and now he ministers through church consultation and interim pastorates. For more information, explore the website for CHC at chchurches.org (look under the About and Resources tabs).

Dr. Cook has already been a huge asset to our committee, especially in helping us to conceptualize the journey ahead. We do not think of our work as simply helping the church to hire a new employee, but we view the search for a new senior pastor as an act of spiritual discernment for our committee and our congregation. Our purpose is to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, discerning the Lord's guidance to the individual whose gifts and pastoral skills best fit the needs of our church. The process is not a matter of any one of us asking, "What do I want in the next pastor?", but rather the question is: "What sort of pastor does our church need to help us live out God's calling for our congregation?"



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As a committee we are deeply grateful for our church's remarkable Leadership and Ministry Staffs, knowing they are fully capable of guiding us in the days ahead to continue our mission of being the presence of Christ in our world. We also look forward to the pulpit ministry and pastoral encouragement of our future interim pastor, when that person is called to our church. All of the basic elements are coming together to help us thrive as a church in this time of transition.

Next Steps for Our Church

Your Pastor Search Committee has a very clear sense of how our church can begin well in this transition period. We want you to know about two important opportunities just ahead for FBC.

1. Prayer@First: A Season of Prayer for the Month of October

The first thing we ask of the congregation is to engage in a focused season of prayer in the month of October as we enter this time of transition. We are calling it Prayer@First to emphasize that First Baptist is a praying church and that prayer is our first responsibility as we seek to discern the Spirit's leadership.

In particular, we are inviting the whole church to focus our October season of prayer on the following:

- Prayer for Phil and Mary Christopher as they transition into the next chapter of life
- Prayer for our church in this interim period as we prepare for a new Senior Pastor
- Prayer for the Pastor Search Committee as they guide our church in the transition and search for a new leader.

During each of the Sunday Worship services in October, we will engage in this time of prayer as a congregation and we will be encouraging many other opportunities for prayer:

- In Sunday school classes
- On Wednesday evenings at 6:00 p.m.
- In weekday prayer groups and all other meetings of our fellowship
- At home and with our families.

Jim Jones will also be preparing a Prayer Guide for our church. The guide and other resources and opportunities will be appearing on the main page of the church website through a link called "Senior Pastor Transition." We will also provide Prayer@First bracelets for all worshipers on Sunday morning, October 3, as a tool to remind us to pray.

2. First Congregational Conversation on Sunday, November 7

An early task that we have as the Pastor Search Committee, according to our Church's Constitution and Bylaws, is to develop a profile of our church. The profile will explore who we have been as a church, who we are now, and where we imagine God will be leading us in the future. Based on this Church Profile, we will also develop a Senior Pastor Profile which will summarize the gifts and strengths we will be looking for in the leader who can help us fulfill God's calling for our church.

As a committee, we understand that this Church Profile is something the congregation needs to help develop. We want to know who you think FBC is and what you imagine our mission will be in the future. The most effective way to collect the whole church's thinking about our identity and purpose is to engage in a series of church-wide conversations, wherein we can think and dream together.

The First Congregational Conversation will be on November 7, 2021. It is imperative that everyone in the church be present for this important discussion as we begin to form a deep sense of where we are as a church. We need to hear everyone's voice, so we strongly encourage all youth and adults in the church to join in the dialogue.

Here are the details for our First Congregational Conversation:

WHAT: First Congregational Conversation for Our Pastoral Transition

Designed for all FBC Youth and Adults

Hosted by the Pastor Search Committee

WHERE: Family Life Center Gym

WHEN: November 7, 2021

4:45-5:30 p.m. - Hamburger Meal (complimentary)

5:30-7:00 p.m. - Conversation around the Tables

CHILDCARE:

- Infants through Pre-K will be in the main church nursery starting at 4:45 p.m., and these children must have eaten before they arrive.
- Children who are K-5th grade are invited to enjoy the hamburger meal in the FLC at 4:45 p.m. with their families and then move to their activities in the FLC at 5:15 p.m., while youth and adults meet around tables in the gym.

The Big Picture

To summarize, the Pastor Search Committee is inviting the entire congregation to join in **Prayer@First, a season of prayer in the month of October** for the Christophers, for our Church, and for the Pastor Search Committee as we enter this time of transition.

We also encourage the whole church to participate in our **First Congregational Conversation on Sunday, November 7**, starting with a meal at 4:45 p.m. and then table talk at 5:30 p.m. Your input about our church's identity and mission will directly influence the sort of Senior Pastor we will be looking for in the future.

In addition to the Congregational Conversations, **the Pastor Search Committee wants to be available to you** at other times. Feel free to talk with anyone of us on the committee about your ideas, questions, and comments, or you may email us at pastorsearch@fbcabilene.org.

As we enter this transition period, we do so with **deep gratitude** for Dr. Christopher's leadership and a **sense of expectancy** about what God will be doing in our church in the future. We look forward to seeing how the Spirit of God will fulfill in us the promise that "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered the heart of anyone the things that God has prepared for those who love the Lord." (1Cor 2:9) Amen!

With gratitude and hope,

The FBC Pastor Search Committee

Debby Brown

Paul Irby, Vice-chair

Bob Ellis, Chair

Jim Jones

Libby Gibson

Marcus Spencer

Tiffany Hammer

Jecilly Varghese

Evan Harris



(Left) Members from First Baptist Church of Abilene, Texas, joined Hunter and Mary in Thailand to minister alongside them and Thailand Baptist Convention partners. (Right) Hunter Huff was known for his zeal for life and belief that sharing the love of Christ meant meeting people where they are.



After decades of kingdom building work, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship field personnel Hunter Huff made his way home to God following an extended battle with cancer. A life of service, faith, humor, devotion, and good, holy work drew to a close on July 29, 2021. Surviving him and continuing his legacy are his wife, Mary, and his children, Caleb and Hannah.

His days on this earth ended much as they began—surrounded by loving family in the U.S. American South, bookends to an adventurous, illustrious life of service centered primarily in Thailand. Born in 1960 in Monroe, Louisiana, but spending most of his upbringing in Mississippi, Hunter seemed destined, even from an early age, not only to engage in ministry, but to do it in sauna-like climates.

As a student at Mississippi State University (MSU), he traveled to Israel as a summer and semester minister utilizing his God-given gift to “go.” After graduation from MSU, Hunter earned a degree

from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and met Mary Byrd who would become his wife and partner in ministry. They began their CBF journey together in 1996 after four years of church service in Hampton, Virginia.

In keeping with his philosophy of ministry—“It’s not just what we do but how we do it”—Hunter brought immense passion, humor, humility and intelligence to each of the diverse tables at which he sat.

“Hunter wasn’t only my colleague but a dear friend. Hunter’s love for life, his sense of humor, and his desire to follow God’s calling was contagious, and I enjoyed spending time with him,” said Becky Hall, Associate Coordinator of Operations for CBF. “Over the 25 years we worked together, I looked forward to our visits, whether it be a team meeting in Asia, or when Hunter and Mary were passing through Georgia on the way to visit family. He will be missed.”

This desire to follow God’s calling led the Huff family to Thailand. So integral is Hunter’s story to the CBF story that the two even share a common beginning in which work was focused on connection with ethnic minorities providing a variety of theological and social services.

According to Hunter and Mary’s CBF bio, “In a country where less than one percent of the population is Christian and Christian resources are written from a different perspective, much of the

Hunter Huff lived, breathed and embodied ministry—fulfilling his calling with excellence and leaving a lasting legacy after 25 years of work.

ministry is outreach and creating and providing resources with the appropriate terminology.” By translating the Bible into terminology more conducive to these ethnic groups for use in print and virtually, Hunter and Mary were opening the door to the kingdom of God for the people with whom they served.

Sharing the love of Christ inevitably involves meeting people at their various points of need. For Hunter and Mary this has included provision of secondary educational scholarships, supporting outreach to homeless undocumented child immigrants, assisting in the process of securing land rights, securing grant money for community development projects, and more.

It bears repeating, though, that it’s not just that Hunter and Mary have provided services; it’s how they have gone about it. It is in this way that Hunter was truly uncommon.

“From evangelism to Bible translation, Hunter employed a big heart, self-deprecating humor, and a keen mind to build bridges across cultures and conflicts,” said CBF GM Coordinator Steven Porter. “He was, in a word, a peacemaker.”



“FROM EVANGELISM TO BIBLE TRANSLATION, HUNTER EMPLOYED A BIG HEART, SELF-DEPRECATING HUMOR, AND A KEEN MIND TO BUILD BRIDGES ACROSS CULTURES AND CONFLICTS.”

Hunter, as a peacemaker, was certainly a son of God. He was held in high earthly esteem, too, cultivating trust and rapport with every organization, people group and church with which he did work.

“Hunter’s easy-going nature, humility, and genuine love for Jesus and others established him as a natural leader within CBF Global work and the Thailand Baptist Fellowship,” Porter said.

In addition to the Thailand Baptist Fellowship, Hunter partnered alongside the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), the United Bible Society, the Thailand Bible Society, the Social Development and Service Unit of the CCT, and the governing board of the Peace Community Foundation. Hunter believed, “Our witness is a natural overflow of our relationship with Christ and thus is simply a part of who we are.” Others saw the way he lived out this belief and desired partnership with him.

Ministry in this context was as much a part of Hunter’s DNA as blood, as integral to his being as spirit. It wasn’t something he did; it’s something he lived, breathed and embodied. It was this heart that enabled Hunter to fulfill his calling with such excellence.

“It’s a rare honor for a field person to be so trusted by national colleagues that he’s repeatedly asked to be the ‘go-to’ in

communication between ministry and national agencies,” said CBF Associate Coordinator Sam Harrell. “That honor comes only through long, trusted association and friendship and was accorded to Hunter in his relationship with the Thailand Baptist Fellowship so much so that they wouldn’t let him rotate off! He held the position for years past his initial term!”

It is no small feat to end a career of 25 years, to finish a life of 61 years, and leave behind a legacy as luminous as it is loving, as full of humor as it is devotion, as teeming with devotion as it is excellence.

But that’s Hunter—no small feats in a larger-than-life life.

“Hunter was a connector. His skill, wit, sensitivity and disarming style will be sorely missed,” Harrell shared.


CBF field personnel colleagues Cindy and Eddy Ruble remembered Hunter for his humor and wisdom.

“Hunter’s life was the consummate articulation of the Gospel lived out,” Eddy said. “He was loved by many across the world and will be missed dearly.”

“We remember Hunter as the kind, funny, caring and disarming man he was,” Cindy added. “He left his mark on all of our hearts and will be greatly missed.”

Hunter’s life lives on in heaven as surely as his legacy will endure on earth. From Monroe, La., to Mississippi, to Israel, to Kentucky, to Thailand, and back to Georgia, everywhere Hunter walked, the footprints of Christ were imprinted in his wake.

“Believers need to work out of the gifts and talents that the Lord has given them. I believe one of the most important elements of ministry is that Christians should love one another, and our ministry should reflect that love and grace,” Hunter once observed.

“He did,” Porter said. “In life and death, Hunter Huff bore witness to Jesus Christ.” 

FBC MISSIONS: **ACTING IN** *love*



You're Invited

COME AND WELCOME TREVOR AND GINA ALLEN
TO THE FRIENDSHIP HOUSE
1518 ORANGE STREET

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 10
12:15 p.m. TO 2:15 p.m.

Serving Dessert
(some eat dessert first!)

Come help us support the Allen's in this new ministry for First Baptist Church by bringing one or more things from the following list!

- **Diapers** (Size 6)
- **Pullups** (Size 2-3)
- **Fragrance Free Wipes**
- **Wheat Flour**
- **Walnuts**
- **Pecans**
- **Rolled Oats**
- **Cinnamon**
- **Honey**
- **Paper goods** (Cups, plates, disposable utensils)

Here's how you can help City Light for October!

At City Light, we have been serving meals as both dine-in and takeout. We serve about 120 takeout meals each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. We also have fresh fruits and vegetables available to take home. So, if you have plastic sacks to donate, we need a lot of **plastic sacks!**

City Light still offers showers. We have depleted some of the items like **small shampoos and body wash;** hotel or travel size work best.

We also have given out all the drinks the food bank donated and are now giving out water bottles with the takeout meals. We are purchasing bottles at Sam's and some of the other places that are limiting customers to 3 cases each, so we could use some **water bottles in the 16 to 20 oz size.**

If you can donate any of these items, you may leave them in the vestibule at the church or at City Light.

Feel free to call the church office at 325-675-8112 for more information.

Thank you so much for always being willing to support this ministry!

HELPING OTHERS

With your generous gifts to First Baptist Church, we were able to help in the disaster relief of Hurricane Ida and other recent disasters by sending \$2,500 to Texas Baptist Men and \$2,500 to CBF Disaster Relief Fund.

We were also able to send \$2,500 to CBF to help our field personnel, Jeff and Alicia Lee, in their efforts to address the needs of Afghan refugees in Macedonia. They are working with local partners in Macedonia to help provide hygiene items, clothing, fresh fruits and vegetables, tea and coffee. Thank you for your support of this ministry!

UNIFIED MISSION OFFERING 2021

We can change the world one community at a time!

SEVEN MISSION OFFERINGS COMBINED INTO ONE

WE HAVE MET \$26,160 OF OUR 2021 GOAL OF \$75,000

**CBF • BGCT WORLD HUNGER • COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION • BAPTIST WORLD AID
MARY HILL DAVIS OFFERING FOR TEXAS MISSIONS • BGCT DISASTER RELIEF
LAWRENCE TROTT OFFERING FOR ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONS**

THE FIRST OF THE SEVEN MISSION OFFERINGS IS THE COOPERATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP GLOBAL MISSIONS:

50% of the Unified Mission fund goes to the Offering for Global Missions of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a Christian network of people and churches (FBC Abilene) who put faith to action through missions and ministries. Through the Global Missions efforts, CBF is transforming the world – engaging God’s mission and touching and serving the most neglected and least evangelized with Christ-like love. Today, CBF field personnel, including Alicia and Jeff Lee, Lauren and David Bass, and Lesley-Ann Hix Tommey bring love and hope to the poorest of the poor in the United States and in more than 25 countries. We share Christ, and we love people because God loves us. When FBC Abilene gives to the Unified Missions Offering, the world changes and Christ’s love is demonstrated.

Our gifts and prayers make it possible for us to help spread the Gospel and meet physical needs in the world, even in places we may never go. As we pray, give, and serve, we can become part of God’s mission to heal, redeem, and transform the world! Our FBC Unified Missions offering really does make a difference in our world.



THE SECOND OF THE SEVEN MISSION OFFERINGS IS BGCT WORLD HUNGER:

This ministry supports projects across the world which feed the hungry and help the hungry help themselves in the context of holistic Christian ministry. They disperse funds through partners to over 100 hunger relief and development ministries across Texas and around the world.

We will be highlighting all seven missions that our Unified Missions Offering is helping so watch for more information or contact John Moore or the church office at 325-675-8112 for more information.



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October

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

October 1, 7 years

Maria Veracruz

GLO Teacher

October 1, 3 years

Allie Workman

GLO Director

October 1, 2 years

Raul Garcia

Custodian

September 15, 2 years

Austen Winfrey

Pastor for Students

October 23, 3 years

Melinda Norris

Ministry Assistant to Pastor for Missions

- 3 Sunday School Workers
Training Session
Pastor Search Committee
Personnel Committee
Recreation Board
- 10 Friendship House Welcome Pounding
Foundation Board
- 12 CLCM Board Meeting
Women's Night (Bunco)
- 13 Buildings & Grounds Committee
- 17 Pastor Search Committee
Mission Committee
- 19 Finance Committee
Deacons' Meeting
- 24 Lord's Supper
Pastor Search Committee
- 27 Hospital Visitation Team
- 29-31 College Fall Retreat/Camp Butman
- 29 GLO Fall Festival
- 31 Pastor Search Committee
Trunk or Treat

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE

September 2021

Budget	September	Year-to-Date
Required	\$264,060	\$2,481,040
Given	\$202,610	\$2,119,394

God continues to bless our faithfulness through the tithes and offerings given to His Kingdom work.



FIRST BAPTIST
CHURCH • ABILENE

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