

Should Pastors Preach From Political Pulpits?

Rick Scarborough says pastors have a higher calling: not only as shepherd of their flocks, but also as political beacons of hope. Their spheres of influence are crucial to understanding how Christianity can and should play a role in our politics, even if it's the last place that some may propose spiritual beliefs should be.

Join Rick Scarborough on this episode of *Mixing Church and State God's Way* on the Charisma Podcast Network to see the political and religious parallels that can be drawn from the time of Senator Lyndon B Johnson in 1954 and the imprisonment of Paul and Silas in the Bible.

Scarborough says it's a pastor's duty, as much as they can, "to obey the laws of our land—until those laws are in direct conflict with the Word of God."

That may seem easier said than done, but Scarborough has a few suggestions. He says, "if we are faithful to proclaim the cross, men and women will be set free. Their lives will be reclaimed, their souls will be redeemed and that culture can be renewed.

"Oh, beloved Christian, if we would just stand and speak the truth to this culture, without fear of reprisal; if we would lovingly offer the repentance that God offers through the blood of Jesus Christ, who knows what God would do?" Though God can do anything, Scarborough says we must realize that we also have a part to play. "Could that not happen in America today if we recognize we are dual citizens?" Scarborough asks. "Our first allegiance is to Almighty God. Our first commitment is to Jesus Christ; we are citizens of heaven. But that should empower us to also stand up and say, 'I'm an American

Christian.'”

Will you stand up in the face of adversity and proclaim your beliefs, unpopular though they may be? For encouragement to do so, listen to the full podcast here. {eoa}

Apostolic Prophet: ‘We Are Not at a Time That the Church Is Going to Perish’

There is a lot of speculation in faith communities regarding racial tension, COVID-19 and what the future of the church will look like with economic unrest further hindering the reopening of physical church buildings. Apostle Ryan LeStrange joins host Joshua Giles on a recent episode of *The Global Prophetic Forecast* on the Charisma Podcast Network to share what he believes lies ahead for the next season in the church.

Though most prophets and apostles seem to be on the extreme ends of the spectrum in terms of what they believe God is saying about the future of the U.S., host Joshua Giles says he has learned some tools to be able to discern how his prophetic voice should be used and more importantly, if and when he should share it. He says, “There are tons of things that the Holy Spirit has spoken to me that I’ve just written down, and I’ll pray over them personally. Sometimes the Lord may have me bring it to my team of intercessors and will intercede, but it will never come across, you know, a public platform because God just maybe didn’t release me to say it.”

LeStrange says he gets frustrated with “some of the limited prophetic lenses I see being displayed on social media and media,” which say that, because of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, “Therefore, the church is done.” He points out that if we look from a more global perspective, “There are some places where the only way you can gather a group of the people is outside, because there are not buildings that are comfortable enough or big enough to hold a crowd of people. ... I think that we are not at a time that the church is going to perish, is going to die. “

LeStrange says discerning prophetic voices plays an important part in determining the future of our nation, as many increasingly look to prophets to assess where we are headed. He says “I think that politically, there is the struggle for the soul of the nation. You know, will we be a nation that really values everybody—Black, white and in between? Will we be a nation that comes to peace with a troubled past, or will we be a nation that kicks the can down [the road] for 10 or 20 years?”

“I think it would be very helpful if you would stop and really listen and ask the Lord, ‘Is there another piece of this puzzle [I’m] not seeing?’”

For more on discerning the validity of prophetic voices, the projection of the church in a rapidly increasing digital age and how racial tension correlates with the coronavirus, listen to the rest of the interview here.

Jack Hayford: How Holy Spirit Rescued Me From 'Hook' of Pornography

Rob Saunders sits down with longtime charismatic Pastor Jack Hayford of Jack Hayford Ministries in this episode of *Escaping the Hamster Wheel* on the Charisma Podcast Network to talk about a very real struggle that many face, but few might admit to: pornography.

Hayford reflects on his introduction to pornography from a young age and how it was something he wrestled with in the most unlikely of ways. He says, "I thought it was just struggling with myself."

What he would later come to realize was that there were evil spirits at work in his life, using the mild pornography he unwittingly viewed at the tender age of 8 to keep luring him into temptation. "It's as though a hook had been put in my very being toward pornography ... I later came to recognize that's because that was attended by a demon spirit," Hayford says.

After working through the problem as an adult, Hayford came to understand that his struggle was not purely his fault as a young, innocent and impressionable child. He says, "I didn't know what was happening to me. I was defenseless."

He touches on the reality that he thought if he just worked harder against this spirit that he would be able to overcome it. The Lord revealed to him that, "oftentimes we labor to try and overcome something of our human capacity for sin, which is very real" but we fail to recognize that there is more at work in this scenario than we may first recognize.

To hear more about Hayford's story of redemption and how God

is using him to bring to light how the devil is at work in this space, listen to the full podcast [here](#).

Country Music Star Charlie Daniels Dies

Grammy Award-winning Country music star Charlie Daniels died July 6, 2020, at age 83. The Country Music Hall of Fame and Grand Ole Opry member passed away at Summit Medical Center in Hermitage, Tennessee, as a result of a hemorrhagic stroke.

From his Gospel Music Association Dove Award-winning gospel albums to his genre-defining Southern rock anthems and his CMA Award-winning country hits, few artists have left a more indelible mark on America's musical landscape than Daniels. The Charlie Daniels Band (CDB) is known for memorable hits and Daniels' signature song, "The Devil Went Down to Georgia." Early in his career, he also played in Bob Dylan sessions.

Daniels parlayed his passion for music into a multi-platinum career and a platform to support the military, underprivileged children and others in need. He gave his time and talent to numerous charities, including The Journey Home Project, which he founded in 2014 with his manager, David Corlew, to help U.S. military veterans.

Daniels leaves behind his wife of nearly 56 years, Hazel Alexander Daniels; only son, Charles William Daniels; four grandchildren; as well as the CDB family. He was preceded in death by his parents, Carlton and LaRue Daniels.

Friends in the music world reflected on Daniels' life and talent.

Well, the devil went down to Georgia, but Charlie went straight to heaven. My heart, like many millions of others, is broken today to find out that we've lost our dear friend Charlie Daniels.

– Dolly Parton (@DollyParton) July 6, 2020

Daniels inspired singer Jason Crabb.

“This one hits me hard,” he writes. “Charlie Daniels was an inspiration to me as long as I can remember. As a kid, I listened to Charlie Daniels when I was learning guitar. Growing up as a young boy in Beaver Dam Kentucky, I could've never dreamed that I would ever share the stage with this man, let alone get to know him. He was an amazing entertainer, but more than that, he was a gentle man with a kind spirit, and if you spent any time around him at all, you knew he loved Jesus, his country and his family. We're gonna miss you, Charlie Daniels.”

Famed singer Brenda Lee said of Daniels: “He loved his God, he loved his family and he loved his country. And we all loved him!!! He lived it and breathed it every day. What a great American!”

In 2017, Daniels released his memoir, *Never Look at the Empty Seats*, with W Publishing, an imprint of Thomas Nelson. In the book, Daniels presented a lesson for everyone, no matter their profession: “Walk on stage with a positive attitude. Your troubles are your own and are not included in the ticket price. Some nights you have more to give than others, but put it all out there every show. You're concerned with the people who showed up, not the ones who didn't. So, give them a show and ... Never look at the empty seats!”

In 2018, Thomas Nelson also released the gift book *Let's All Make the Day Count: The Everyday Wisdom of Charlie Daniels*, which highlighted Daniels' wit and life lessons he shared through his "Let's All Make the Day Count" posts on Twitter.

The funeral service will be held at 11 a.m., Friday, July 10, at World Outreach Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. An open visitation for the community will be held from 10 p.m. on Thursday, July 9, at Sellars Funeral Home in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee. {eoa}

Editor's Note: This article has been updated since its original publication.

'Investment Preacher' Helps Believers Align Finances With Faith

Pastor Anthony Wright had quite a shock when he realized his financial walk wasn't matching his spiritual talk.

"About two years ago, I had a life-changing event," Wright tells podcast host Chris Johnson on *Charisma Connection*. "And up until that point, I had been just like every other financial adviser across America. I went to an event where they were talking about faith-based investing, and so they asked me to give them my portfolio and allow them to run my own personal portfolio. And when I did, I was an ordained

minister and I was preaching pro-life, I was preaching marriage between man and woman, and here all of a sudden, they screen my stocks, and I end up being 83% funding abortions, pornography and same-sex marriage. So the very thing that I was preaching from the pulpit, I was not doing with my money.”

This realization brought Wright to tears.

“I felt like such a hypocrite because my walk wasn’t matching my talk,” says Wright, president and CEO of Retirement Specialty Group, a company based in Cookeville, Tennessee, with multiple satellite offices.

Now known as the “Investment Preacher,” Wright has built several highly successful businesses and was senior/lead pastor at Faith in the Word Church in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

Today, faith is “the everything of our business,” Wright says. “We do every Monday morning prayer and Bible study. There are several times throughout the week. We will have prayer with our clients on the phone with them. I have a nationwide radio program on Sirius XM channel 131, and I get a lot of calls from around the nation. A lot of times, yes, I’m able to help them with getting their stocks lined up with their beliefs and making their walk match their talk, but there are a lot of times they just need somebody to pray with. There are a lot of times they just need spiritual counseling, and so that is just as big a part of our company as faith-based investing and helping them get their funds in the right places.”

Click [here](#) to learn more about Wright’s Retirement Specialty Group and his philosophy of investing based on Christian principles.

Fully Obedient in the Spirit

Kim Maas believes wholeheartedly in the Scripture that says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). She knows she has heard the voice of God, loud and soft, at pivotal points in her life such as when she chose to stay in her difficult marriage and when she heard the call to full-time ministry.

A nurse who had worked in pediatrics and in labor and delivery, Maas and the firefighter her friends set her up with on a blind date were immediately attracted to each other.

"He was between girlfriends, and I was between boyfriends," Maas says. "We went out, and we were married within 10 months."

Sadly, what she didn't know was how serious her husband's addictions were.

"I met my husband during a time when I had been very, very wounded, and I was not walking with the Lord at all," says Maas, who was saved in early teens. "I had completely walked away, and he was not a Christian. What I didn't realize was he was an alcoholic and a drug addict, actually, and so we started dating and we said that we fell in love like in a week. We started sleeping together, of course, so I became pregnant, and we got married. And as soon as we got married, I started really seeing that I didn't really know this person very well, and his alcohol and drugs were much more of a problem than I had understood."

Dealing With Dysfunction

Maas, who describes herself as "very far from the Lord" when she got married, knew right from wrong but did as she pleased. After the wedding in 1980, there was none of the hoped-for wedded bliss.

“Things were really rough from the very beginning,” she says. “I was able to deal with it in my own heart for about three years. We had two children, and somewhere in the third year, I just couldn’t take it anymore. It was a very dark time. Mike was never physically abusive, ever, and he was really good with the girls, but he was a terrible husband.”

Maas also didn’t know if or when her husband would come home after work.

“We were both working so hard, and there was just never any money, and the money went to drugs and alcohol,” she says. “And then there were crazy friends who were really no one like anyone I had grown up with or was used to. It was just a very lonely, very difficult time. We fought all the time, and I just came to a place at the end of that time when I just knew. You become numb. You can’t cry anymore. You can’t beg anymore. You can’t yell and scream anymore. It was bad. My family thought I was crazy. They just didn’t know what was going on, and so I left and filed for divorce. We were separated for six months, and we were dating other people and, of course, sleeping around.”

Maas was “dead set” on divorce, but says, “We got back together actually three weeks before our divorce was final.”

She had had a change of heart when a few weeks before, she met a kindhearted Christian when she was interviewing for a job.

“Mike wasn’t paying any child support because he had lost his job. I was applying for a job, and the girl who was leaving her position and her husband were going to plant a Vineyard church.”

Growing up, Maas and her family had gone to an evangelical church, but she didn’t know anything about the charismatic movement.

God’s love came through the woman who interviewed her. When

Maas admitted some of what was going on in her life, the woman invited her into her home.

“She wanted to pray for me, and I went,” Maas says. “It was the catalyst for this major change in my life because she was so kind and I never felt judged. I didn’t feel condemned. She wasn’t shocked by the sin that was going on in my life, by all the trouble it had caused me, by all the damage it was doing in my marriage. I really just unloaded on her, and she prayed with me. And then she invited me to be a part of their church plant.”

Maas was shocked by that invitation because of her sinful condition.

“I felt so dirty and I felt so sinful,” she says. “When I filed for divorce, I really felt like I was committing the kind of sin that I could never be forgiven for—and that wasn’t something I had learned.”

The woman’s kindness made its way to the deepest part of Maas’ heart.

“That was such a catalyst for me, feeling like maybe God could love me again,” she says. “Maybe I could be accepted in God’s heart. The kindness of the Lord really, really does lead us to repentance.”

Maas got the job and also took the woman up on her invitation to be a part of the new church, but she only attended a couple of weeks.

Hearing God’s Voice

Three weeks from the divorce becoming final, Maas put her two toddler daughters down for a nap and opened the new Bible she had purchased to go back to church. That’s when she heard from God.

“It just fell open to a passage of Scripture I was reading

about husbands and wives,” she says. “I heard the audible voice of God, and I was so shocked and afraid. And He just said one thing to me. He just said, ‘Go home and I’ll take care of everything.’ That’s all I heard. It was so loud on the outside and the inside, and it filled up the room. I can’t even describe to you what the sound was like, but in my mind, I knew the words. I knew what He said. It was clear and strong and so loud, and it was so shocking and frightening and yet commanding.”

But then she had another visceral reaction.

“As soon as I got over my shock, I was angry, and I stood up and I was yelling at Him, saying, ‘Do you even understand what you are asking of me? Do you even understand how bad I was hurt and how he hasn’t changed? Do you know what you are asking me to do?’ And He didn’t say another word.”

She knew she had a life-altering choice to make.

“I called my husband and asked him for a date,” she says. “And he was as shocked as I was, like, Who is this? He never did want the divorce. He really wanted me to stay and wanted to be a family, but he was an alcoholic and a drug addict, and he wasn’t giving that up.”

They met for dinner the following weekend, and she told him she had heard the voice of the Lord. That was it. The marriage was on again.

“I packed up and went home, and we reconciled,” she says. “We called our lawyers, and we called off the divorce.”

Within a month, she was pregnant with their son. Maas thought when she went back, that all would be well soon, but as it turns out, she was wrong.

“I thought it would be like magic, like bang, he would have this change,” she says. “I would go back, and because I came

back, he'd be willing to do everything, but nothing changed. Nothing changed for four whole years."

Her powerful encounter with God helped her endure not only her husband's addictive behavior, but also the shame and humiliation she felt before her family. She spent many nights "completely alone" in pain and turmoil.

Saving the Marriage

Maas had started back to church, this time to a Foursquare congregation. Every now and then, she would hear of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but she really didn't know what it was. She had a prayer life and attended church regularly, but after four years of a difficult marriage, she was weary.

"One morning after he'd been gone all night long—the night before Thanksgiving—he was out all night drinking and doing drugs with his friends and there was something about that night," she says. "I was up all night. I prayed the whole night through. My kids were asleep in the room, and I was weeping and sobbing and crying out to the Lord all night long. When I got up in the morning, I was in that numb place again and I was done."

But she got a surprise when her husband walked in early the next morning..

"He was just white and pale," she says. "He said, 'I know you're about to leave me, and I'm asking you not to go because something has happened.'"

She was "completely cold" to his suggestion. But even though she'd been down this path before many times, for some reason, she stayed.

"I think that I started to see that something was different," she says. "A few weeks after that exchange that we had, we sat down and talked about it, and he told me that on his way home

that morning in those early hours, a presence had filled the car while he was driving. And he just had a knowing on the inside, in his heart, that it was Jesus. He heard Jesus say, 'You're about to lose everything you've ever loved, and this time, I won't bring it home unless you give your life into my hands,' and he said in that moment, he knew. He gave his life to Jesus. He got saved in that moment, and he was instantly delivered from all of his drugs and alcohol."

Against all odds, God had saved Maas' husband and, in the process, rescued the marriage and family. Mike had changed for good, and they started the healing process.

"It's not magic," she says. "It seems like magic when God instantly delivered him because some people have an instant deliverance from Jesus, for some people it takes a process, so we had this instant thing happened, but we also had to go through the process of rebuilding our lives and becoming really Christians in the way that we lived, in the way that we related to each other, in the way that we loved each other and loved our family."

Receiving the Baptism

Their church leaders heard about this marriage miracle and asked Maas to give a short testimony. That opened the door for her to give an in-depth testimony at a women's retreat.

Although she didn't feel women's ministry served her needs, she went and testified. Afterward, a young woman said the Lord had told her to lay hands on and pray for Maas.

"She said that she'd heard the Lord say, 'I want you to lay hands on her for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.' And so I said, 'Well, you can try.' I didn't know if I believed it, but yet I'd had this encounter, but I'd never had any other kind of encounter, nothing."

God met her in that moment.

"I had a radical infilling, a radical encounter with the Lord, and I was sobbing and snotting and shaking and trembling and falling out under the power, which I didn't understand what that meant, but they put a chair under me because I had started to black out," she says. "I didn't know what was going on and then they were talking to me about speaking in tongues, and I didn't know if I believed in that ether, but I was open. I didn't speak in tongues right away. It wasn't till the next morning that I woke up and I took a shower and I started hearing the syllables in my brain. And so I said, 'Lord, if this is You, I want it,' and I began to speak in tongues."

When doubt tried to enter her mind, she had another experience that confirmed she was hearing from God. The next day at the retreat, she walked by a garden and God spoke to her about it. Returning to the meeting room, she heard beautiful worship, then singing in tongues.

"I didn't know at that time that I was feeling the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit in a room," she says. "I didn't know that her singing in tongues was a word of the Lord, but it was so beautiful and mesmerizing at this moment in time, and then she stopped and she started saying what the song was, the word of the Lord, and it was nearly word for word the thoughts I'd had about the garden."

Then Maas felt the fear of the Lord, the same fear that came over when she heard God's audible voice.

The group then took the communion elements individually.

"We were to ask the Lord if there was anything He wanted to say to us personally," she says. "I'd never done that before, so I'm sitting with my elements, and I asked Jesus, 'Jesus, is there anything you want to say to me?' And I heard that voice, and this time, it was on the inside. It wasn't audible. It was a still small voice, but it was the voice that I had heard those years ago that told me to go home. And I recognized it."

He called me to full-time ministry, and I started sobbing, you know, the ugly cry, when you're snorting and you're choking, and I mean, in my mind, I'm saying, How can this possibly be? I have done so many bad things that I am ashamed of, and I'm a woman. I'm so small. I'm nobody."

That's when the voice of God sent her to another woman in the room for help with doubts about her call.

"I said, 'God told me to come over here and to tell you that He just called me to full-time ministry, and I told him all the reasons why I can't,' and I started sobbing again," she says. "I said, 'because I'm no good and I've done these bad things and that I'm too small and I'm a woman.' She looked at me and she looked right through me, and I never had anyone do that before and then she looked on my shoulder like she was looking at something."

The woman pointed at something on Maas' shoulder and called it out. Maas had never seen or experienced deliverance, but now she was jerking and shaking and sobbing.

"She said, 'You get off of her right now,'" she says. "My body started convulsing. I couldn't control it, and I'm still standing, but I started sobbing so hard. And she put her hand on me. She blessed me and I ran back to my room. I didn't have any context for any of this, but I knew I'd gotten free from something."

In her room, God told her to get her Bible, a notebook and a pen.

"'I'm about to tell you things I want you to write down that are going to be things I want you to do for the next five years every single day,'" He said.

God told her things that would happen to her over her lifetime and gave her her life scripture.

After this, she says, "I came home completely changed."

Accepting the Call

When Maas got home, her husband didn't know what happened to the wife he knew. And God had told her she was going to preach and prophesy all over the world, but how?

"I was a mom from Moorpark with three kids in puberty, and my husband was a fireman," she says. "I was in a tiny church in a tiny town."

But she knew God could do it. A few months later, a prophet preached at her church. He read Jeremiah 1:5-10 over her, which is about being called from the womb as a prophet to the nations. In that moment, she says she shook, cried and dropped to her knees "under the weight that I was feeling of the Holy Spirit."

That's when the prophet said God had one question for her: Was she willing to pay the price?

Later, after saying yes, she questioned God, so He stayed silent. But one day, while she was walking in her neighborhood, God asked her to get down on her knees. She knew she had to obey fully. Although she was embarrassed, she realized what God was doing.

"I understood, Oh, it's part of the cost," she thought.

"I got down on my knees, and as soon as I did, I felt the wash of the warmth and the love of the Holy Spirit. I felt so loved and I felt so affirmed and confirmed, and that was another very important part of the process of saying yes."

God moved her into an executive pastor role for 11 years in a Foursquare Church, where she learned to truly love people.

God also broadened her ministry. He showed her what He was about to do through a vision of a dragonfly, which became her

ministry logo. When she came out of the vision, she heard the Lord say, "It's time for cross-pollination." In that moment, she understood.

"You cannot stick within the walls of your denomination if you are going to participate in this move of God that is coming," she says. "I want you to cross-pollinate, I want you to be open to other streams. I want you, of course, to test everything. I want you to be theologically and biblically sound, but I want you to be open to how I move and the move of the Holy Spirit across the different streams."

In her 40s, Maas earned her master's of divinity from The King's College and Seminary, which was then in Los Angeles. In her 50s, God led her to United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, to earn her doctorate through a program initiated by Randy Clark and Global Awakening. God confirmed this direction to go to seminary through a prophetic dream.

"I became very close friends with Randy Clark, and he started inviting me to the nations," she says. "It's been a very prophetic journey, a very miraculous journey."

Her book, *Prophetic Community: God's Call for All to Minister in His Gifts* (Chosen/Baker Publishing Group), was birthed out of the research she did for her doctoral program.

"Because the voice of God changed my life, I wanted to research and write a dissertation on this most important topic, the voice of God and the gift of prophecy."

Supporting her Ministry

Today, her husband, a fire battalion chief who is now retired, is her "greatest cheerleader," she says.

Mike had his own spiritual encounter one night when Maas was ministering at a friend's church. She says he "got completely wrecked by the Holy Spirit" and received the baptism of the

Spirit.

“When he tells testimony of the change and the miracle that God did in our marriage, I’m telling you, there’s never a dry eye in the place,” she says. “He tells about his alcohol and drug addiction and his side of the story, and it’s just so beautiful the humility that this man has when he tells his story.”

The two are about to celebrate 40 years of marriage in November, a true testimony to the work of God in their lives.

Christine D. Johnson is an editor at Charisma Media and podcast host of Charisma Connection.

Church Remodeled

Bishop Dr. R.C. Hugh Nelson and Pastor Diana Nelson saw great potential for what God could do through the people of their new congregation when they arrived in New York City. Leaving Canada’s capital in 2003, the Nelsons were called to ministry at the Church of God of East Flatbush in Brooklyn.

“I felt, in my own spirit, that the opportunity of doing ministry in a city such as New York was a great opportunity,” Bishop Nelson says. “That means that there’s access to people of a wide range of ethnicity and race, and therefore, the chance to explore varied types of ministry models.”

Bishop Nelson was a good fit to lead the Church of God of East Flatbush, which Jamaican immigrants founded 50 years ago this fall. He and Pastor Diana were both born in Jamaica, and she was raised in London, England.

In 1982, Bishop Nelson joined his family in London and later that year accepted a scholarship to study at the European Theological Seminary in Rudersberg, Germany. He also studied biblical archaeological studies in Jerusalem, Israel. Bishop Nelson returned to London, where he completed his ministerial internship with the Wood Green Church of God. He married his former classmate Diana Griffiths before accepting a scholarship to pursue his master of divinity degree at the Church of God Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee. After completing his master's degree, he completed advanced clinical pastoral education. The couple pastored briefly in Cleveland, Tennessee, before moving to Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, where they served for eight and a half years as senior pastor of the Ottawa Church of God. Seventeen years ago, they accepted the call to be pastors of the Church of God of East Flatbush in Brooklyn, New York.

Pastor Diana was a microbiologist after earning her bachelor's at the University of East London. Later, she added to her education with a master of divinity at New York Theological Seminary.

"We're partners in life and ministry," says Bishop Nelson, who also noted that the congregation of about 1,700 has three other associate pastors, Pauline Gayle, Gloria Edwards and Edward Nyarko, who provide oversight to missions, children's outreach, membership discipleship and the many other aspects of the church's ministry.

Remodeling the Church

At the time of the Nelsons' arrival in New York, the Church of God of East Flatbush functioned as a first-generation congregation and had about 700 members.

"There was only one non-first-generation Jamaican in leadership," Bishop Nelson says. "I discovered very quickly that the entire leadership was almost 100% first-generation

Jamaican, which meant that although there were several other nationalities present, they were not engaged in leadership, and the first-generation American-born members were also relegated to the margins of ministry leadership.”

In light of his international travels, Bishop Nelson felt there had to be a change to include more representation in leadership that reflected the diversity of the church.

“For a church to grow in a healthy way, there has to be an intentional integration,” he says. “That means, if the community demographics changes around the church and we failed to embrace and integrate those on the margins, we would forfeit the full potential of what the ministry could become. We had to make a concerted effort to address the issue. Although the congregation is made up of minorities representing Black Americans, Caribbean and Africa immigrants, we still had to ensure that there was a platform which affirmed and respected the diversity of the varied nationalities.”

Recognizing that the church functioned in a more “insular” way, Bishop Nelson and the leadership team began to envision a ministry model that was more inclusive. They took on the challenge to transform the ministry system to function as an urban ministry center. They established five ministry goals to ensure that all ministry activities would move the organization in a concerted fashion.

“The first is to equip and to empower the congregation, making discipleship training as the pivotal activity. The second goal is mobilizing the members to do ministry beyond the walls of the sanctuary. The third one is to develop strong leadership. The fourth goal is to forge community partnerships with the police, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Children Services. The fifth goal is to acquire additional properties for the expansion of the ministry.”

These five goals became the focus of the entire leadership team in the newly restructured church model.

“The idea, therefore, was to shift the focus of ministry from the concept of gathering on a weekly basis, toward an external community engagement, which focused on the needs of the city. The urban ministry model falls into three categories: Benevolence, Education and Urban Ministry Training.”

Pastor Diana is principally in charge of benevolence in her role as the executive director of the Hope Center Development Corporation, a nonprofit organization that serves about 2,500 people on a weekly basis.

“They have now established partnerships with the Brooklyn District Attorney’s office, United Way, the Food Bank of New York and Feed the Children. On a weekly basis, we provide hot meals, groceries, clothes distribution, family crisis intervention, parental support and a seniors’ drop-in center,” Bishop Nelson says. “We also provide a yearly health fair, financial seminars and foster care support.”

The ministry also provides a sidewalk children ministry with the use of a ministry truck that goes out into the community. The side of the truck can be lowered to make a stage, and then used to proclaim the gospel through poems, puppetry and songs.

Under the education focus, volunteers staff an Adult Learning Center. The church also runs a GED (General Education Diploma) class, an English as a Second Language course, Project Family Restoration for formerly incarcerated individuals, job training, scholarship programs, after-school tutoring and a computer lab.

“It is exciting to see seniors learn how to maneuver the computer, set up a Facebook page and navigate their smartphone,” he says.

Under the urban ministry focus, church members learn to

connect with local residents and communicate the gospel through meaningful relationships.

“This is where we train the congregation to engage the urban landscape as missionaries,” he says. “Even though many of our members migrated from different countries, we were not necessarily exposed to urban living. We discovered that effective ministry in America’s largest city would challenge our previous mindset and drive us to function with a greater awareness of our ministry context.

To help members better understand urban ministry, the church did a monthly series of events called “Urban Realities.” These events focused on urban issues such as prostitution, alcohol/drug abuse, HIV, transgender issues and human trafficking. Bishop Nelson cited one special Urban Realities event when a male ex-prostitute shared his testimony of life on the streets and how he came to Christ. At the end of the presentation, the congregation was allowed to ask questions for greater clarity.

“The final question was an open dialogue as to how the congregation could have ministered to this gentleman if he had walked through our doors,” Bishop Nelson says. “These dialogues move the congregation beyond merely hearing an inspirational story to an experiential one which reshapes the mindset and culture of the congregation.”

Chaplaincy training also falls under the urban ministry focus.

“We have over 100 certified community chaplains who provide weekly ministry to local hospitals, nursing homes, homeless shelters, police precincts, disaster response and even grief support,” Bishop Nelson noted. “Even during the season of COVID-19, it was refreshing to see our chaplains visible, deployed and doing practical ministry while the city was under siege by the coronavirus.”

Leading by Example

Bishop Nelson wanted to show the congregation how important community service is, so he took a big step.

“It’s one thing to talk about what we could be doing in the community, and it’s another thing to model it,” he says. “So for a couple of years, after completing the police academy training, he served as a volunteer police officer, or what is known as an auxiliary police officer. On Monday nights, I would put on the uniform and patrol my neighborhood for four hours. I wanted to set an example to our members so that they could discern ministry opportunities right around them. I’ve always worked closely with the police. I served at one point as president of the Brooklyn Clergy Council Task Force and continue to serve as an assistant president of the 67th Clergy Precinct Council.”

When Eric Garner died in 2014 in police custody, the police commissioner and his top brass met with Bishop Nelson and other local clergy at his church to discuss the police and community relationship. Bishop Nelson has also been involved in recent protests against police brutality and racism after George Floyd’s death in Minneapolis.

“On a recent Saturday night after having been out most of the day feeding the poor and ministering to those at risk, he got home and settled in, but was later called to provide clergy support at the day’s protest demonstrations in Brooklyn,” he says. “So I showed up in my jacket with ‘God Squad’ emblazoned on the back to identify who we were. We stayed at the protest till after 10:30 p.m. as a pastoral presence and to discourage looting.”

In his role as a district pastor for his denomination, he connected with fellow ministers and got involved in the protests.

“I reached out to some of our pastors because we needed to have a response whereby the church is seen as being there to

support the voice of those who were protesting police brutality, and to be a voice of peace and reconciliation,” he says. “As we gathered on the steps of the church building, we wanted the protestors to know here was a place where they could be accepted and heard. For one hour, we prayed, acknowledged the pain of racism and the reality of police brutality. At the same time, we wanted to encourage peaceful protests and discourage destruction of property. After that prayer vigil, the media interviewed us, and other pastors requested that continue the following Sunday evening. This time we met at one of our major intersections, Church Avenue and Utica Avenue, and led thousands of people in a march to the church steps. The cops blocked off the streets and with a large gathering standing around, we prayed against police abuse, systemic racism and the plight of our young black men.”

Bishop Nelson has also long been involved with public health. He is a member of the board of trustees of the One Brooklyn Hospital System, which joins Brookdale University hospital, Interfaith Medical Center and Kingsbrook Healthcare System.

“I’ve been on weekly briefings with the hospital as we had to go through the pandemic,” he says. “With New York having lost over 22,000 people in a short time, I also consulted with some of the funeral directors as they struggled with the overload of funeral homes. We are grateful that our chaplains were able to respond even during this deadly pandemic by performing last rites and providing grief counsel.”

Bishop Nelson works “very comfortably” with both police and health professionals. Ultimately, in many ways, he is an example to his church of the call to serve the community in the name of Christ.

“The congregation knows I’m out there in the community, so it is easy for them to find creative ways to also engage the needs of the community.”

Expanding Their Reach

The Church of God of East Flatbush took an unusual step for a church in seeking to meet the housing needs of the city. Instead of going it alone to meet this need, the church partnered with three developers to build affordable housing as well as its own new worship center.

“Our church has been strapped for space for years,” Bishop Nelson says. “This has long preceded my coming, and so we recognize that if we were going to function as an urban ministry center, providing ministry space for youth and seniors, etc., we needed to step out of the box and explore innovative options. In 2011, we took a leap of faith and purchased two city blocks, which at the time cost us \$8.1 million. That was a major leap for a local congregation. All the doors we had explored in terms of warehouses were beyond our financial capacity. At first, we were thinking just in terms of church space, but then we discovered that even after purchasing, building could be a major financial expedition.”

But then, there was a breakthrough around that time.

“We had a new mayor who promised to create, to sponsor, to support more affordable housing,” Bishop Nelson says. “And so we purchased for \$8.1 million, and began the arduous process of rezoning this property. It was zoned for commercial use only, and God gave us favor.”

With the rezoning approved, “we are able to now build out a 40,000-square-foot ministry space and 530 apartments above,” he says. “Now this is possible because God gave us favor. The need for housing in New York City is huge, and we are excited that we are able to address not only the spiritual needs but also the housing demand.”

The schedule has changed somewhat due to circumstances beyond its control, but the church looks forward to the project’s completion.

“They should have been able to turn our space over to us in September and then we could begin fit-out,” he says. “Because of COVID-19, it has pushed it to January 2021. No doubt, we’re in the process of building a state-of-the-art urban ministry space through which we’ll be able to provide life-saving ministry to our residents right here and at the same time have 530 affordable apartments built above our ministry space.”

The church is pleased to be able to meet this housing need.

“To live in New York City is becoming increasingly impossible,” he says. “Folks cannot afford to live in New York. The salaries are excellent, but the housing cost is becoming impossible. Some people have to move outside of the state and commute a long distance to work. By providing affordable housing, the cost of the apartments will now be, to a great extent, determined by percentage of income. This affords moderate- to even lower-income residents to find an opportunity to live in the same place that they work.”

The congregation calls the campaign “Building for Greater.”

“The project is called Ebenezer Plaza, as referenced in 1 Samuel 7:12, ‘Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen. And he called its name Ebenezer saying, ‘Thus far the Lord has helped us.’”

Bishop Nelson hopes that as other ministries hear of the miracle in New York City, they will be able to come alongside as partners and assist in the costly fit-out expense of Ebenezer Plaza as the church continues to provide ministry in one of the world’s most expensive cities.

Just as the church made developers its partners, now it is looking for mission-focused partners. These partners could be churches or ministries “especially in the South or other less populated areas that may even consider exposing their young people to a summer program in New York City,” Bishop Nelson says. “So we established Urban Reach, a program where we can

facilitate short-term urban missions, mission trips from ministries around this country that would like to have their young people come to New York City, work with us and get exposed to ministering in an urban setting.”

The Church of God of East Flatbush congregation truly lives out its core values, which encompass the usual ministry emphases of a church—evangelism, Scripture and prayer—as well as relationship, empathy, cultural diversity and trust. With the vision of “Making Disciples to Impact our World,” this Spirit-led congregation aims to fulfill Christ’s Great Commission by serving its own Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the earth.

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Stephen Mansfield: How to Live Out Noble Manhood Under God’s Power

Author Stephen Mansfield believes men have purpose and significance, contrary to what society often tells them. But many men are disillusioned and confused.

“The bottom line is that we are in decline regarding manhood,” Mansfield tells Dr. Steve Greene on a recent episode of the *Greenelines* podcast. “Almost every measurable statistic regarding men today, from longevity to health to earning to

academic degrees, all of it is declining and not just relative to women, but relative to men of a generation ago, so we're in decline, but I think it can be turned around."

The way men feel about themselves also impacts their families.

"They just don't think they can be significant, even in the lives of those they love, but we try to convince them otherwise," says Mansfield of his work with men. "And, of course, when they get connected to the power of God in their lives, to live out noble manhood under His power, then we really begin to see them making the difference they're called to make."

Mansfield recently added to his slate of bestsellers with his new book, *Men on Fire: Restoring the Forces That Forge Noble Manhood*, where he reflects on what it means to be a man and a godly man.

He believes there are two main things men can do to make a difference in their family life. First, the man's focus must be right.

"When a family turns its hope in God and has a focus on what God can do—God's protection, God's deliverance, God's unfolding destiny for each person in the family—the statistics are it just absolutely transforms each life there," Mansfield says. "It's something they all look back to, and during these dark and difficult times, that's when people most need to be reminded of their foundation."

Beyond focus, men can change things for the better for their families if they preserve their family culture, he believes—and this is important particularly during the COVID-19 crisis.

"Man, I think, has got to be the culture keeper in his home," Mansfield says. "It's easy during these times for despair to get in, for bad habits to get in, for negative talk to get in,

for there to be a culture in the home that's destructive and counterproductive and produces despair, disillusionment, depression. I think the man's got to not only keep faith alive, but he's also got to keep fun alive. He's got to keep hopeful statements alive. He's got to encourage. He's got to pull in with each person in the family and pick them up wherever they are in their faith and in their growth and in their maturity and help them to see the possibilities for what this might mean."

Mansfield also points to the ways families coped during the Great Depression as instructive to families enduring the pandemic today.

"You'd be surprised at how many people reach old age decades after the Depression, but said, 'Our family life during the Great Depression was the highlight of my life,'" he says. "So they are 99, 100 years old, obviously decades later, but they said, 'What our parents did with music, with dance, with fun, with games, with prayer, with faith, that's the high time of my entire life, during the Great Depression.' So I think it can be that way again."

To hear more of Stephen Mansfield's thoughts on manhood, listen to this episode of *Greenelines*.

Church of the Highlands Loses 2 Campuses Over Social

'Likes'

Birmingham schools have severed a contractual relationship with Pastor Chris Hodges' megachurch because of what they deemed controversial social media activity, according to Family Research Council and .

The Birmingham Board of Education voted Tuesday night to stop leasing its facilities to the Church of the Highlands after learning that Hodges liked posts by Charlie Kirk, president of the conservative nonprofit organization Turning Point USA.

Pastor Hodges apologized, but his apology didn't seem to have any impact on his opposition.

"I would love for you to not just look at a microscopic zoom-in but look at the totality of 37 years of ministry and 19 years as a church," he said. "If you look at that, it will be abundantly clear that we value every person."

This is a money-losing proposition for Birmingham City Schools. The church paid an average of \$12,000 a month each to rent Parker High School and Woodlawn High School for Sunday services, according to .

In "Tony Perkins's Washington Update," the Family Research Council president stood by his longtime friend Hodges.

"At least a third of the Highlands' congregations are black and Hispanic," Perkins wrote. "If anything, Hodges was respected for fighting for the disenfranchised, for preaching about healing and reconciliation. As recently as last Sunday, he called the city to mutual understanding, peace and prayer. But in this 'cancel culture,' those 20 years of bridge-building don't matter to liberals bent on burning down any platform but their own."

In a recent prayer service at his church, Hodges was sharing

Scripture that could apply to the situation in Minneapolis after George Floyd's brutal murder at the hands of police. The pastor had a hard time continuing when the passage spoke to helping those "being crushed." He tearfully read these verses: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice" (Prov. 31:8-9, NLT).

"Racism, bigotry, prejudice exist," he said. "It's real, and it's of the devil. White supremacy or any supremacy other than the supremacy of Christ is of the devil."

He points to the true source of evil and said his church had been "consistent in our value for all people."

"The devil is a murderer," the pastor said. "We've got to love people and hate the devil."

Hodges called for the heart change that comes from God and for the "presence of God over our nation." Before Pentecost weekend, he said, "We need an outpouring of the Spirit."

Hodges also called up to the platform—"intentionally," he said—several African American leaders in the church who spoke and prayed with authority for those in the church and for any who are hurting during this troubled time. {eoa}

Christian Self-Help Author Rachel Hollis, Husband to Divorce

Author, podcaster and lifestyle expert Rachel Hollis has announced she and her author-husband, Dave Hollis, are divorcing. Rachel made the difficult announcement on social media.

Rachel has made many guest appearances on shows such as *The Rachael Ray Show*, *The Talk* and *Extra*. Her first book, *Girl, Wash Your Face*, is a No. 1 *New York Times*' bestseller and sold 1 million copies in only seven months, according to her publisher, Thomas Nelson. She followed its release with another bestseller, *Girl, Stop Apologizing: A Shame-Free Plan for Embracing and Achieving Your Goals*.

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