

North Carolina Pastor Dies in Apparent Hanging Suicide

Robert McKeehan, senior pastor of Community Bible Church in High Point, N.C., was found hanging in his home last week in an apparent suicide.

McKeehan's wife, Elizabeth, asked for prayers on Saturday on the late pastor's Facebook page.

"With saddened hearts for our earthly loss, but joyful for heaven's gain, we inform you that Robert McKeehan finished his race for God and entered into His presence Friday night," she wrote. She added that she and their two children, John and Scarlett, "covet ... prayers for comfort and peace in the days, weeks, and months ahead."

The 42-year-old pastor has led Community Bible Church since the fall of 2010.

"As you can imagine, there's been a lot of grief and a lot of numbness," said Richard Curtis, chairman of the church's elder board, reports. "We're sad, of course—we're going to be poorer for the loss—but we're also trying to help people understand that even though this is not the path we would've chosen, God is sovereign, and we're still going to praise and worship our God."

Church leaders tried to make sense of the tragedy during an emotional service Saturday morning.

"The reality is we can never understand exactly how and why that happened," Curtis said. "Just like those they lead, pastors are human and subject to all the same trials, emotions and struggles."

The church's pastor of adult ministries, Rob Black, pointed

the congregation to Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Curtis added, "Why Robert took his own life is always going to be one of the secret things. What God has revealed to us, however, is the promise we hold onto in Romans 8:28—'We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.' God has proven that to our church in the past when we've had difficult times, so we know that certainty will again prove true as we move beyond the question of why."

He said McKeehan quickly felt at home with his new congregation upon moving with his family from Peoria, Ill., in November 2010.

"He was an incredibly gifted teacher of God's Word," Curtis noted. "The vision of our church is broken people becoming whole in Christ, and Robert was the type of pastor who related that well to our congregation. They knew he lived out that statement. They knew he needed Christ to make him whole, and they knew they could look to him as someone who could understand and help them."

Out of respect for his family, the church declined to publicly discuss the specifics of McKeehan's death. The High Point Police Department reportedly found the pastor hanging and unresponsive in his home and pronounced him dead "from an apparent self-manipulated hanging" less than an hour later.

A memorial service for the pastor was held Wednesday afternoon at First Wesleyan Church in High Point.

Curtis said Community Bible will not begin seeking a new senior pastor for a few weeks. The seven other pastors on staff will lead the church in the interim, and all of its various ministries will continue.