

Is 29 Too Young to Be a Megachurch Pastor? Nepotism Charges Arise at Victory Christian

Since it was reported that 28-year-old Paul Daugherty—son of Victory Christian Center founders Sharon and the late Billy Joe Daugherty—would be taking over as senior pastor, some have raised questions of nepotism.

Bill Sherman of the *Tulsa World* wrote that his article about the change “drew a response from one person who said Daugherty’s bachelor’s degree in theology from Oral Roberts University was insufficient education for a person in such an elevated position.”

Another reader countered that his lifetime of working closely with his parents was more valuable “than any piece of paper from a college; that he has been preaching at Victory for years, as well as ministering around the world on missions trips; and that most Victory people value his heart and his compassion over academic credentials.”

Paul Daugherty’s parents were about his age when they founded the ministry 33 years ago. He grew up going to the church and attended Victory Christian School from kindergarten through 12th grade. He graduated from Oral Roberts University in 2008 with a major in theology and a minor in business.

Sherman pointed out that several successful churches have been taken over by sons whose fathers built the ministry, such as Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Houston.

“There’s something about the heart of a father that wants to pass along his life work to his son,” he wrote.

The other issue some have with Daugherty's leadership is his age. As the youngest child of Sharon and Billy Joe Daugherty, Paul will turn 29 just days before he is to become senior pastor. According to Sherman, Warren Bird, research director for Leadership Network, said Daugherty will be the youngest megachurch pastor in the nation.

A megachurch, by definition, draws 2,000 or more weekly worshipers. Victory Christian hosts 7,600 worshipers each week, runs an international Bible school network of 1,542 schools in nearly 100 nations, and operates a major Christian school as well as the Tulsa Dream Center.

"I would point out two things," Sherman notes. "First, that Daugherty's father was about the same age when he started Victory, and it quickly grew into a megachurch. And second, and I'll probably catch it for saying this, but I believe Jesus was about the same age when he started his ministry."

Paul said in an interview with the *Tulsa World* last week that the first time the thought occurred to him that he might one day pastor Victory was at his father's bedside at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

"The night my dad passed away, I was holding his hand ... and just, crying, 'God, please let my dad live.' And I just had this moment, where God was like: 'He's with me now, and he's happy. Serve your mom and serve the church, and get ready because you're going to step into this role one day.' That scared me, because I had never thought about being the pastor of Victory.

"I was the youngest sibling. ... I didn't say anything. But I took it to heart and started serving my mom wholeheartedly."

His mother confirmed this a year-and-a-half later when she told him: "I think you should know that your dad had spoken that you would one day step into the role as pastor but that you needed time to develop."

Around that time is when Paul Daugherty began preaching regularly at Saturday night services and taking on more responsibilities at Victory, where he was the youth and young adult pastor.