

An Open Letter to Christchurch ...The Family Church

Throughout the country, I get reports of preachers and laymen alike who read the article we put in our church paper and website every week entitled *The Pastor's Word*. Being aware of this, I often keep in mind that I should say something to which everyone in the nation can relate. Although those of you in the service of the Lord can still relate to what I am about to say, this week's article is going to be extremely personal. It is an open letter to our Church.

This past Sunday, Mrs. Pope and I were emotionally "knocked off our feet." The planning, the preparation, and the performance of our 25th Anniversary celebration as a Church was stupendous! The cards that you wrote to Barbara and me were very touching. We took turns reading them to each other and we had a hard time reading them without getting choked up. The outpouring of love exceeded our grandest expectations. What a blessing!

The morning service took on the theme *This is Your Life*, based on the old television program with the same title. I was amazed at the video clips of great friends from the past. I thought it was really clever to all of a sudden have Billy Graham on the screen bigger than day to say, "Johnny, I am so glad to be part of this special day...." Of course this was a tribute he gave to his old friend, Johnny Cash, but it was a good joke. Maybe that was one of the great ingredients of our special day together, i.e. the tears, but also the laughter as we reminisced over the twenty-five years. I was moved that Dr. Lee Roberson would take the time, at his age and write a tribute. I was also moved by the words of my old friend, Ben Jordan as he explained that he had cut out my picture and placed it beside the dictionary definition of friend, because he wanted his sons to know what a friend looked like when they looked up the word. Believe me, as my dear wife and I looked out into the faces of the oversized crowd, we saw clearly what friends looked like. Friends of a lifetime. I was amazed at the testimony of Gary Matthews; I never knew our ministry impacted him so positively. Then I was blessed by the kindest word from my old Greek professor, Dr. White, followed by a letter from Richard White with adulations I could hardly believe coming from a man a couple of years my senior who was considered the "big man on campus" when I was a freshman in college. How appropriate that Dr. Hancock, my old mentor should send his greetings with his dear wife.

The letters from President Bush, both Texas Senators, John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison, and finally the Proclamation of Mayor Bill White were overwhelming, especially when I looked closely and saw they were really signed by their own hand! Thank you for this extra touch!

What can I say about the food? For those of us that attended the banquet in our fellowship hall, was it not the most exquisite and delicious feast you have ever attended? Joe & Beverly Ann Adams went without sleep preparing for this event. How about that sculptured ice?

I agree with the words of the Hintzels who said of Barbara, "You heal our souls with your music." What a great reminder that it is not just a preaching ministry, but for these twenty-five years to have her by my side as the church pianist has been a real boon! Then to hear our church members say kind words about our four kids and grandkids was very special. I love what Dr. Keen said, "In our opinion your greatest legacy isn't your preaching and pastoring ministry but your family." Tears came to my eyes on that comment. I need to share with you a little of what I said in Deacon's Meeting last Thursday night. The day meant so much to Barbara and me, but what you did for my kids was a highlight.

We knew Josh, Juliana, and Sean would be here for the special day, but we were totally kept in the dark on the other kids and grandkids! As the morning progressed, Juliana approached the piano to play a song that our kids have sung since they were little, entitled, *The Mind of Christ*. I was enjoying it, but there was a little sadness because the other kids were not here singing with her. Then on the second

stanza, in comes Heather, and then on the third stanza in comes Jonathan with his guitar and Sean. By the time they were ending in acappella, extolling the Savior their mother and I have prayed they would believe in and worship, well...we "lost it." Then come the grandkids! Hallelujah! Now my mom and Barbara's mom and dad were here, as well as two of Barbara's aunts, a cousin and her sister-in-law. Thank you for getting my sister Judy and brother David and his daughter here, too! We had already had a good cry over them being here. By the time it was over we were washed out. You see, just as our ministry was approaching the acme, we experienced for reasons beyond my definition, a crisis of insurmountable proportions. God has been good and we have recovered and will in the long run with God's help, do better than if the crisis had never come. Our kids were old enough to know what was happening and young enough that the hurt could cause an indelible impression. Well, when we saw the accommodations that you as a church put them in, along with ample remuneration in plane fares, we could hardly believe it. It did a lot to bolster our kids' belief in the work of the Lord. They saw how much the faithful member of our church really loved us and them! What you did for my kids was priceless. They knew I didn't orchestrate it; it was a pure show of unconditional love.

Thank you for bringing in two of my greatest friends for the big day. David Gibbs in the morning and Tim Lee in the evening service. Their preaching was superb! What a day! I later found out you have been giving for some time in order to fulfill a dream of ours in sending my sweet wife and me on a river trip on the famous Delta Queen. It is the Civil War excursion with stops along the way at battlefields. Seven days! You have blessed your pastor and his wife beyond their fondest desires. Time would fail to thank Mrs. Lord, the Deacon Board, and all the members of Christchurch who went above and beyond. As a matter of fact, I could not even begin to thank everyone. Every day I find out something else someone did to make the day special. Thank you, Christchurch!

I love you!

- Pastor Pope -

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