

THAT HIS GLORY MAY BE KNOWN

by Karen L. Willoughby

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HAMILTON, Va. (BP) — “When I came here, we had a lot of money in the bank, and we needed to fix that,” said Steven Carne, pastor of **Hamilton Baptist Church** for five years.

Congregation Challenged

Pastor Steven challenged the congregation regarding financial stewardship.

“God entrusts us with His resources; not to save them for a rainy day, nor to bury them in the ground, but to utilize them to make disciples,” Carne told Hamilton Baptist. “I don't want Jesus to return and say to us, ‘What have you done with what I have entrusted to you?’ “We don't want to live in paneled houses while His name is unknown among the nations,” he said.

The church responded to the new pastor's challenge by unanimously voting to invest more than ever before in God's Kingdom work. The church began giving 35 percent of its resources to missions causes—an increase over its previous 20 percent—including 12 percent to missions through the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention.

A Desire to Serve

Adding to a 10-year or longer commitment to missions among Native Americans in the Dakotas, the church began an outreach to southern Ghana. The church's desire to serve is bearing fruit through a community-wide program to serve orphans, foster children, and the families who parent them.

“We believe in missions, and the Cooperative Program is part of our missions strategy,” Carne said, referring to the way Southern Baptists work together financially to spread the Gospel worldwide. “We feel God would have us send missionaries throughout the world as the International Mission Board does, to send church planters to underserved populations as the North American Mission Board does, and to train future pastors as our seminaries do. We give to the Cooperative Program because we yearn to be part of this Kingdom-building work.”

Hamilton Baptist Church, organized in 1889, is the only Southern Baptist congregation in the community of 2,000 people about an hour northwest of Washington, DC. About 300 people gather for Sunday morning worship, and many also participate in home groups throughout the week.

“We seek to create a culture of discipleship,” Carne said. “Our mission as a church is to make disciples for the glory of God. We do that by seeking God through His Word and encouraging one another towards godliness as we share our lives together.”

The church faithfully witnesses nationally and internationally but needs to improve its witness to neighbors and coworkers, Carne said. Outreaches among Native American women and children in the Dakotas include a weekend ladies' retreat, a ministry to children, and a Thanksgiving program.

Gospel Partnering

Eight years ago, Hamilton couple Ilhami and Ann Konur founded Windswept Academy in Eagle Butte, SD, a Christian



Hamilton Baptist Church pastor Steven Carne, at left, baptizes a new believer during a mission trip to the Republic of Ghana in Africa.

school that has grown to include 81 students.

Through Hamilton's pastoral training conferences in southern Ghana, the congregation planted Hope Community Baptist Church in Nsawam, a town of about 20,000.

“Through our church plant, many have come to faith in Christ,” Carne said. “Last time I was there, I baptized 10, including a repentant witch doctor and his family.”

“We consider our partners more than people we send money to,” the pastor noted. “As we see in Paul's letter to the Philippians, we understand our Gospel partnerships as reciprocal relationships. We seek to be engaged in their work—giving, praying, going—and we also long for them to be praying for us, aware of our ministries, and come and visit us.”

Hamilton Baptist every other year hosts a three-day missions conference that involves each of the church's partners, allowing communication, worship and thanksgiving for the Lord's work through partnerships.

“We want to grow as faithful citizens living in an alternative kingdom, God's Kingdom,” Carne said. “As we do, we demonstrate to our neighbors and the nations who God is and what He has done. My hope is, to the degree in which we experience the Gospel, we find freedom and joy in sacrificing for King Jesus.”

Resources for His Glory

For the past five years, all church income exceeding expenses has been allocated for missions. Surpluses are divided proportionally between local, national, and international missions, Carne said.

“We don't want to simply write a check,” he said. “We want to use these resources to facilitate our members engaging in missions.”

Orphan care in the Hamilton community and various outreaches in Guatemala are on the church's radar.

“God is teaching me—and I hope this faith family—that life is not about maximizing ease and comfort,” Carne said. “Instead, we're called to joyfully sacrifice that His glory may be known among the nations and His marvelous work among all peoples.”

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