



Charles and Tranay Wilson

A Beautiful Tapestry

THE HILL CHURCH: Multi-cultural & Multi-ethnic

In the fall of 2016, Pastor Charles Wilson and his wife, Tranay, drove from their home in Dallas, TX to Lynchburg, VA to drop off their son at Liberty University. On the way home, Tranay wanted some ice cream, which prompted a stopover in Roanoke. They drove to the top of Mill Mountain and ate their ice cream as they looked out over the city. Little did they know, God was planting something new in both of their hearts. “When we went to the mountaintop, to the star, it is when I believe we both felt God doing something in our hearts for this city,” Tranay shared.

They did not speak of it until about a month later when she suggested they plant a church in Roanoke. For them, they hadn’t thought that planting a church was in their future, mainly because they had been part of one previously and knew how hard it was. Even so, they couldn’t run from God’s calling. In 2017, they packed up and moved their family to Virginia.

Their first few weeks in Roanoke were pretty scary, but God was working, and they knew He was about to do something special. They trusted Him to be their provision. They heard Roanoke had a history. They noticed the churches in Roanoke were still very segregated and both believed God wanted to use them to do

something different. They committed to jumping in, learning the city, and serving the city before even beginning to plant.

Their inspiration came from Psalm 121:1-2, “I lift up my eyes to the hills,’ shared Tranay, ‘From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.’ It’s not in the hill or the mountaintop, but it’s in the Lord. We wanted The Hill Church to be a place of refuge where the Lord is elevated above all else!”

They felt led to plant in the northwest city quadrant but also knew it was a more challenging place with difficulties like high poverty and crime.

“After a while of us fighting through what we were trained to do, we realized we needed to surrender to what the Lord was calling us to do,” said Pastor Charles. “So, we surrendered and said, ‘Alright, Lord, what are You trying to do?’”

After that, God began opening doors. The Lord provided the old, boarded-up Villa Heights Baptist Church building off Melrose Avenue on Lafayette Blvd. Charles noted, “It is perfectly located in the center of the community with the most challenging stats imaginable, not only in the region but nationally. From divorced families to childhood diabetes, to poverty. You name it, we

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have all of those challenges, including crime and a food desert. One of the big questions to answer is, ‘What do you do with a 45,000-square-foot building in the middle of a community like this?’”

Dreaming big, **The Hill Church** desires to see the space used to assist the community with economic development, counseling, helping students, etc.—while presenting the Gospel and keeping that front and center in everything they do. They dream that half the building will be used for worship and ministries to the community and the other half will be used to assist the community with economic development.

As a coffee shop, a counseling center, a place for a community grocery market, a robust youth and children’s ministry, the once boarded-up blight will one day be a beacon of hope and light for the community. A city on The Hill!

Children ride their bikes up and down the street and constantly ask Pastor Charles, “What’s going on there?”

“I don’t tell them we’re going to have video games and all kinds of cool stuff,” said Pastor Charles with a smile. “I just tell them there’s going to be a church here, and they get excited and can’t wait to come!”

Denita Wray, who serves on the church’s support staff, was excited when she initially heard of a new church starting in Northwest Roanoke. One reason she joined The Hill Church was to go back to the community where her father once lived and help the community that’s there now.

One of the reasons the Wilsons believed God brought them to Roanoke was to help address the segregated side of the



valley—to plant a church that is diverse, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic. Their mission is to be a beautiful mosaic, loving God and loving one another.

According to Pastor Charles, one of the most unique things that has marked The Hill Church is its diversity. “We have people from all walks of life and from all over the city. We are actually living out what we are trying to do as we are moving into this part of the city. We are actually doing it at a slow pace—one person at a time, very authentic—but we are very vocal and serious about the Gospel.” ■

