

INTRODUCTORY LETTER FROM PROSPECTIVE PASTOR ALEX L. MARTIN

February 7, 2011

Dear Calvary Baptist Family,

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ! I believe that I feel a little like the apostle Paul must have felt when he wrote to the church in Rome so many years ago. Although he had never met that particular family of faith, he was already grateful for them and was already praying that a way would be opened for him to come to them (Romans 1:8-10). And this captures so well the way that I feel about you. I'm already thankful to God for everything that I've learned about Calvary Baptist through the members of your Pastor Search Team; and I'm grateful, too, for all the work that you as a congregation have done (with the help of your Interim Pastor and your Transition Team) to reach the place that you're ready to call a new pastor. And so—in light of everything that the Lord has brought us through so that our paths could cross at last—I am eagerly praying that the Father will open a way for us to begin serving together.

As we continue praying and discerning God's will in all of this (and as we look forward to meeting one another), I wanted to send this letter so that you could begin to learn a little about me. Of course, there are many things I could say and many questions you'd probably like to ask. So there's no way I can do much more than scratch the surface. But in these few paragraphs, please allow me to share with you a little bit about my spiritual journey, my family journey, and my ministry journey.

My spiritual journey began in a Christian home. (I must confess; it was a Methodist Christian home. But I think that Bob McPherson and Ron Stephenson have forgiven me for this; so I hope you can, too. J) As a result, I cannot remember a time in my life when I didn't believe that God loved me and that He sent His Son Jesus to die for my sins so that I could live in relationship with Him. However, it wasn't until I was in high school that this belief started to have a profound impact on my life through participation in the youth group of a nearby Baptist church. Through that congregation, I was introduced to a passion for God's Word, a depth of Christian love, and a commitment to full-life discipleship that were unlike anything I had previously experienced. As a result, I made a faith commitment that was truly my own, and I was baptized into full membership in the church. As I took advantage of various growth opportunities, I sensed a call to ministry; and so I headed off to college with a belief that the Lord wanted to use me in some way.

I enrolled at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. From the very first day I set foot on campus, I was active in the Baptist Student Union. (For those unfamiliar with the BSU, it's a collegiate ministry program similar to Campus Crusade for Christ and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.) Although I don't want to overstate this point, I found that participating in a collegiate ministry gives one a unique perspective on faith. While these groups are not churches per se, they do bring people together for worship, fellowship, discipleship and mission—and they do so at a pivotal time in a young adult's life. University students are making big decisions about relationships and careers, and they're building an understanding of God and life's purpose—all in an environment that's full of intellectual and relational challenges. So for me, this "crucible of faith development" proved to be the place where many of my foundational ministry convictions were established. I discovered an even deeper respect for Scripture, becoming aware of both its life-changing simplicity and its question-inducing complexity. I learned how relationships (both within and beyond our Christian communities) are the essential context in which our faith grows and gets expressed. And I came to believe that a Christian life without servanthood and sacrifice—key elements in the life of the Savior who served and sacrificed for us—can barely be called a Christian life at all.

Of course, all of these convictions developed gradually through Bible studies, worship gatherings, mission trips and countless late-night conversations. And looking back, I've come to realize that there was another core conviction taking root—one that I was hardly aware of at the time, but which has become the most important of all: the conviction that it's all a gift. None of our biblical knowledge or faithful worship or sacrificial service makes us worthy of God's love. But He gives it anyway. And so, the most vital "spiritual thing" that we can do isn't really something that we "do" at all. It's more like an act of surrender: we accept and abide in the grace of God, revealed in Jesus Christ...and then we join Him in the grand adventure of sharing that love with the world.

With thoughts like these running through my head, I graduated from college and went to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. At this point, it's appropriate for me to mention my family journey, because it was at seminary that I met my wife Teresa. Teresa (who was raised in Durham, NC) was a student in the seminary's music school. We found each other at the dish window of the school cafeteria, where I was working to cover the costs of my education. Over time, we became friends and started dating... and naturally we fell in love. (After all, how could she resist a man who washes dishes! J) We got engaged just before I graduated from seminary in 1991, after which I moved to Virginia to begin serving as a collegiate minister with the Virginia Baptist Mission Board. For the next year, we nurtured our relationship long-distance while she finished her degree, and we were married in the summer of 1992. Teresa joined me in Virginia, and for the next 13 years (living first in Fairfax and then in Richmond) we ministered individually and as a couple. As I've already indicated, I served among college students—trying to give them the same kind of life-changing experience through Baptist Student Union that I had received—and Teresa ministered first as a church secretary and then as an administrator with the Baptist World Alliance. In addition to those roles, the two of us "moonlighted" as a music ministry team at a small Baptist church, and in the year 2000, our duet became a trio as we welcomed our daughter Windham into the family. As an intelligent and artistic ten year-old, she is looking forward to making new friends and discovering new opportunities in Mount Airy.

And it is on that note that I conclude with a few notes on my ministry journey. Over the years, my work with college students began to change as pressures on denominational budgets forced a reworking of job descriptions. In a very short period of time, I went from being a "campus minister"—responsible for shepherding a fellowship of students at one university—to being a "campus strategist"—responsible for overseeing work at multiple universities and communicating with churches across multiple associations to help them identify and equip young leaders. In many ways, it was an exciting and useful change. But in other ways, it drew me away from the essentially pastoral work that represented the heart of my ministry calling. I started looking for a new ministry opportunity, and in 2004 I was called to serve as the pastor of First Baptist Church in Marshville, North Carolina. During the past 6 and 1/2 years, that church family and I shared all the ups and downs that are part of life in most congregations. We discovered bonds of love and points of disagreement. We worshiped God and served our community. We even undertook a building program, relocating from our historic sanctuary to a new facility uniquely suited to take advantage of new ministry opportunities. As that process concluded, however, I began to sense that my "door for effective work" in Marshville was closing. So I started anticipating that God would open a new door once again...which leads me to this letter...and to you.

Is it God's desire for us to share our journey? I hope so. From everything that I've been able to learn about Calvary Baptist from the Pastor Search Team and from my own prayerful search for the Father's will, I believe that we can have a fruitful partnership. I cannot tell you exactly what that partnership will look like or exactly where it will lead, because those are things that we'll have to discover together as we seek God's face, study His Word, and listen to the voice of His Spirit. But I do know that if you call me to be your pastor, I will bring to the task the same passion for God's Word, the same depth of Christian love, and the same commitment to full-life discipleship that I discovered in the Baptist church of my youth. Even more, I will bring a passion to share the grace and love of God...and to join with you in the mission of our Father's kingdom.

I look forward to meeting you soon. Please pray for me and my family, just as my family and I will be praying for you. And this will be our prayer: that God will fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way (Colossians 1:9-10). May God's grace be with you all.

Sincerely,
Alex L. Martin