

2017-State of the Church

Proverbs 17:24 | Galatians 6:3-5 | Proverbs 29:18 | Ecclesiastes 11:4

Can you believe I have been your Pastor for a year already?

It doesn't seem possible that it has been a year since God directed Kandi and I to assume this Pastoral Ministry. So many wonderful and scary things have happened to us and to this church during this time that we are left with nothing but anticipation for what God has yet to come.

As we follow the Lord's plan for Family Life in 2017, we have two options; we **must** remember where God has brought us from, but we **must** also keep focused on the New that is just ahead of us.

As we remember the past, we will be drawn back in memory to relive some of those times, and some of those times will not be the best. You see, life is like a book. Yesterday is the chapter we just finished, and tomorrow is the chapter we are about to begin.

Have you spent time actually talking to God in prayer, or reading His Word in anticipation of 2017?

One thing that is important, that many of us fail to do, is to ponder God's Word. After reading it, we should be spending time each day thinking about how His Word impacts our lives. Think about what He wants you to do and whom He wants you to interact with.

If we really love the Lord, we should spend our life in His Word; learning as much as possible about Him; understand how He loves us; and trying to show others His love.

Most of us like to think we are close to God, but don't spend much time doing the things we are directed to in God's Word. What does that actually reveal about how we really feel towards God?

I imagine it makes Him feel the same way you feel if someone you love very much never had much time for you.

God gave us today but no promise of tomorrow. This year could be the greatest time in our lives; if we dedicate ourselves to make it be. Whatever we're going to do for the Lord, we better get moving, because time is passing us by. They say time waits for no man, time is not going to wait on us while we decide what we want to do.

No matter what else we do, we had better use our time to get closer to God than ever before.

2016 was a tough year for some of us. We had heartaches and had to make hard choices we really didn't want to make.

Even this church found 2016 a little difficult.

You saw the change of leadership to a new pastor who sees the necessity of changing some things for the good of the church. Change is always a difficult thing to endure.

Every conversation I had with every board member between the time my father announced his retirement to the day I was voted in to take the position, was centered around two dictates.

1. I was going to preach God's Word, and to lead this church out of the box we were in.
2. I have put my trust in the Lord that He would lead me in His wisdom as I began to fulfill His calling.

However, the success or failure of this Church rests on the fact that each person has a choice whether they grow in Christ or not.

I believe this church has too much going for it to just lie down and wait until it dies out. I am going to do everything in my power to do those things that I believe God wants done in this church so it will have more impact upon our community and upon the mission fields.

And that leaves us with some good news and some bad news.

The bad news is there is nothing we can do to change the lost opportunities of yesterday.

The good news is we can learn from them and look for ways to grow this church's influence in our community.

This will necessitate making even more changes so this church will be able to reach out into the demographic of our community, making a difference for the Lord.

Now, here is where You as Members come into the picture.

I hold no illusion as to the measure of Pastor that I am. I am not the best preacher by any means, but I am able to preach God's Word unaltered to those who have a heart to listen. And as far as leading this church, I see it as boiling down to a matter of trust.

Do you trust me enough to let me lead you?
Do you trust that God called me to lead you?

You see, nobody can lead you if you are not willing to be led.

I know that nobody likes change, but Bel-Air Assembly certainly has made some big changes over the past 30 years...Did you forget you changed your entire identity and location? You built a wonderful sanctuary after you bought this property, and then later, you even built this big auditorium. That was quite a change, wasn't it? Going from meeting in houses to school cafeterias to store fronts to your own buildings?

Because God directed those changes, there are new faces and families that have joined with us over the years and that really magnify the glory of God in our Church and community.

We all know that God offers us a fresh new start, with no history of condemnation after we receive Jesus as our Savior. He also gives us another chance to start fresh at the beginning of every day. However, He fully expects us to use that time He gives us for His glory and purpose, not our comfort.

Proverbs 17:24 (NKJV)

Wisdom is in the sight of him who has understanding, But the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.

Proverbs 17:24 (The Message)

The perceptive find wisdom in their own front yard; fools look for it everywhere but right here.

Proverbs 17:24 (GNT)

An intelligent person aims at wise action, but a fool starts off in many directions.

That means they have a goal or an objective in focus not just generic ideas.

Which part of that verse do you think describes our church?

Are we going to enter this year with a clear set of goals that we would like to see accomplished, or have we done like many other churches and just step through the doorway without having any distinct goals except eternity?

There is an old business adage; *"People who fail to plan, plan to fail"*

I will tell you one thing for sure; if we really and truly want this church to make an impact for the kingdom of God, we had better get a plan, and we had better start working that plan – every day.

This church can only be taken as far as the members in this church are determined to take it.

I think we all want more for this church than it has now, but how do we actually achieve it? We get the most for this church by getting the most for each individual within the church.

Here is how we can help improve ourselves so that we can help improve our church.

1. TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR DECISIONS

Accepting personal responsibility for your actions is not very popular in our society today because we live in a culture that embraces a concept called "social justice / political correctness".

This basically says, "None of your problems are your fault. Everything bad in your life is somebody else's fault. Blame the environment. Blame the educator. Blame your parents. Blame the government. Blame another race. Blame anybody else, but it's certainly not your fault."

We will never be a success in life if we have the attitude that it's always somebody else's fault.

We must accept responsibility for our own lives.

Galatians 6:3-5 (NKJV)

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.

The hard truth to life is that you are responsible for almost everything in your life, good; bad; or indifferent.

Now of course there are some exceptions. Certainly victims of crimes were not responsible for what happened, and while we may not be in control of all the circumstances we might face, I am saying that we do have control over how we will respond to them.

I want to talk to you about three types of people. While I describe each type of person, try to figure out which one describes you best.

1. The **ACCUSER** will always blame all their problems on somebody else. No matter what happens, they see it as a direct result of somebody else's actions. These people always seem polite, but are always looking at others with a darkened heart.
2. The **EXCUSERS** always have a quick excuse for everything they do not want to do, or for anything they do that turns out wrong. These people should keep in mind that the Bible says it's a lazy man that is full of excuses.
3. Then, we have the **CHOOSERS**. They fully accept responsibility for the things they do or say, and these are the ones who make the most of their lives, including their walk with the Lord.

All of us are somewhere in these examples.

Once we are honest enough to analyze ourselves, we can then start moving ahead with Christ. Once we begin to take responsibility for our own lives, we can go the next step.

2. SET GODLY PRIORITIES

God has given us all an incredible gift called 'choice' or free will. With this choice, each one of us can decide what we want from our lives. We can choose how we are going to live and we can even choose whether or not we want God involved in our lives.

Most people in America go from day to day without ever putting any real thought behind the priorities they have in their lives.

Yet, the only way we can succeed at anything, including our lives, is to have a clear cut set of priorities, and then stick to them.

Proverbs 29:18 (NKJV)

Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law.

Proverbs 29:18 (The Message)

If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.

I want to challenge each of you to make a list of things that are important to you in your life.

Ask yourself; What 3 things do I want to do?

Ask yourself; What 3 things do I want this church to accomplish?

After you write these down, I want you to realize who they most affect.

If these things were to come about, would they make the most for you, or would they make the most for God?

If these things deal mostly with you, let me urge you to throw them away quickly, as any time we put the focus on ourselves, we are taking it away from the Lord, and that is sinning.

If you had the Lord in mind when you wrote those answers, the next step will be to see just how the Lord will fit into these plans. I congratulate you, because you are formulating your goals for tomorrow, and you are doing so with God at the center of them.

I know most of you didn't write anything down, so here are the 3 things that need to be at the top of your personal list:

a. YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS #1.

- What are you going to do to strengthen and improve your relationship with God in 2017?
- You need to make your relationship with God top priority.

b. YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY IS #2.

- What are you going to do to build a stronger and better relationship with your family in 2017?
- What are you going to change about yourself that will help you to accomplish this?

c. YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHURCH IS #3.

- What are you willing to do to improve the quality of your church in 2017?
- How involved are you willing to get to help your church accomplish God's goals for this church?
- How willing are you to try new things that might be outside your comfort zone but will help our church grow?

3. DON'T WAIT ANY LONGER BEFORE STARTING

When your children were small, do you remember telling them to do something and expecting them to do it right then instead of later? As parents, we expect certain things to be done immediately instead of being put off, don't we?

As our heavenly Father, God also expects us to stop putting things off until they end up never being done.

We can have the best plans in the world, but if we never get around to acting on them, we might as well not have any plans at all.

Here are 3 words that can radically change your life - ***"DO IT NOW!"***

Let me explain what I try to do.

In everything I do during the day, I try to keep focused on God and ask Him what he wants me to do. Sometimes, I am not sure if He answers me, so I will put these things on the back burner until I think He calls them up again.

Sometimes, I am quickly made aware of what he wants me to do in a given situation, and in these areas, I will talk to others, explain what I feel, and listen to them give me their feelings.

If after this, I still feel the same way, I will act upon what I think God wants me to do, and I will not waste God's time so that I can feel comfortable doing so. After all, the focus is on God's desires, not my comfort.

So, if you see me starting to implement some action, please feel free to talk to me about it if you have concerns. But be prepared that after we talk, I might tell you that I think God still wants me to proceed, and in those cases, I will without delay or apology.

Ecclesiastes 11:4 (NKJV)

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

Ecclesiastes 11:4 (GNT)

If you wait until the wind and the weather are just right, you will never sow anything and never harvest anything.

"If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done."

Some of you have told me that we should do this or that to help the church grow. Some of the ideas we have done, others we haven't.

I have done some things people don't agree with.

I firmly believe that God called Kandi and I to this specific time for Family Life Assembly. I think it was to transition and grow this church and lead in developing a healthy and vibrant Church. It doesn't need many big changes, only a few fine tunings.

God has already supplied this church with an exceptional congregation.

All we have to do is work together. Focus, work, grow.

An old man once said that when he was young, he prayed that he could change the world. When he got to be middle-aged, he saw how wrong that prayer was. He then started praying that the Lord would let him change those people who mattered to him most; his family and friends. He said when he got to be older, he realized how foolish he had been to pray such prayers. He said it wasn't until he was an old man did he realize that he should have been praying all along, "Lord, please change me."

I want to close by asking you a couple of questions.

Are you willing to see that we can do much more for God through this Church than we are now?

Are you willing to trust me and let me lead us where I think God wants this church?

Are you willing to honestly go before God and ask Him to show you what you need to do to help this church grow?

God is calling us to revival in our personal lives, our families and in our Church in 2017. He's calling us to new areas, "terra incognita" as Christopher Columbus wrote..." Lands yet Unknown".