

# IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

By Dr. Ron Lyles

December 29, 2020

Greetings South Main:

Do you remember that we called 2012 the Year of the Makeover? It was the year that we marked the 20th anniversary of being in our new campus here on the Beltway. When all of that renovation work was done, my oldest son Tim and his family visited us, and I walked them through the building, showing them the new look.

As we stood in front of these two pastoral portraits, my grandson Carter, six years old at the time, read the plaques under these portraits. They say Dr. B. J. Martin, 1955-1980 and Dr. Ron Lyles, 1981-. Carter exclaimed, "Hey Hairy, how come the other guy has two numbers, and you only have one? I explained to him why I only had one number. I have determined that my second number will be 2021.

After Brenda and I have spent a lot of time prayerfully reflecting upon it, **I am announcing to you that I will be retiring from my position as the Senior Pastor of the South Main Baptist Church of Pasadena on September 1, 2021.** That date is two weeks after I complete 40 years of service in this wonderful ministry assignment. I commit to you that during the next eight months I will continue to devote my energies fully to you in teaching, preaching, and providing pastoral care. I promise that I will finish my tenure here strong.

This announcement of course has an impact on you and on me.

First, with regard to me. Brenda and I have no plans to move away from this area. Three of our four children with seven of our ten grandchildren are in the Houston area. We will remain here.

I plan to continue doing, beyond my retirement, what God has called me to do. That will include teaching Seminary students, preaching when opportunities are made available either for Pastors who are away for a Sunday or for churches who are in pastoral transitions. I also plan on doing some writing and some volunteer work in ministry organizations.

Brenda and I would love to maintain our membership in this church family that we love immensely. Dr. Martin, my predecessor was so good to me when I came, and, as a result we became very close friends. I want to be the kind of positive help for my successor as Dr. Martin was for me. That is my desire. When you call a new Senior Pastor, I will pledge my full support of you and your new Pastor.

Then, with regard to you as a congregation. 2020 has been one of the most challenging years of my entire ministry here. Having said that, this announcement is not a reaction to this difficult year. Brenda and I have been in conversation about my retirement off

and on for several years. I knew **that** the time would come when I would step away from full time ministry. Over a year ago, I determined the **when** of that event. When that decision was made, I began to think about **how** I could help in the pastoral leadership transition. The pastoral transition that is necessary after the retirement of a long serving Pastor who desires to remain in the church can be a difficult thing to work through successfully.

Let me tell you of my commitment to help in this process. A little over a year ago, November 2019, I confided in some trusted leaders of SMBC about my retirement decision and invited each of them to begin thinking with me about the pastoral transition from me to my successor. I designated them the Transition Advisory Group or the TAG team. I asked Dr. Johnny Walbrick, one of our deacons and the Chair of the Finance Team, to chair this group of ten lay leaders plus Jeff Fuqua as the Ministry Leadership Team liaison.

I gave them the assignment to study the landscape of the variety in how churches strategically approach these transitions today. I then asked them to think about which one of all the options they discovered, would, in their opinion, align best with the culture and personality of South Main. They read some books and learned the experiences of other churches. They have done some really good foundational work to launch the pastoral transition process.

I believe that the more you become acquainted with the work of the TAG Team, the more confident you will be in receiving the fruit of their work which will be in the form of a recommendation of the best path forward.

At this moment, let me clarify what this group is not and what they will not do.

1. **They will not do the work of a Pastor Search Team.** You will elect that team later, following the guidelines as described in our By Laws.
2. **They will not do the work of the congregation,** work that only you can do. They will lead you and facilitate the process that will seek to involve comprehensively every member of the congregation.
3. **They will not do what I tell them to do.** I will not control the process moving forward. I took the initiative to create this group as a starting point for the transition and will now excuse myself so they can provide the leadership I enlisted them to do.

One of the books that I am currently reading is entitled *Sailing True North. Ten Admirals and the Voyage of Character*. It was written by a decorated retired Admiral from the United States Navy, James Stavridis. In this book he introduces the reader to a variety of naval leaders over the centuries. He then describes some leadership characteristics that can be learned from these people of courage. Each chapter is devoted to a different leader, like Themistocles (ancient Greek navy), Lord Horatio Nelson of the British Royal Navy, and Chester Nimitz and Hyman Rickover of the US Navy. Each chapter is self-contained; as a result, I read the book a chapter at a time.

The history of South Main Baptist Church is a Kingdom “book” consisting of two chapters. The first chapter, Dr. Martin’s leadership chapter, was a great foundational one. The second chapter, the one with me as your Senior Pastor, will be completed eight months from now. Whoever God will send to lead you through the third chapter, I pray that the next chapter will be a really good one, the greatest one yet.

As I have said often over the years, the key is flexibility. So much has changed since the formation of the TAG Team in November 2019. No one could have anticipated the appearance of COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic. The current protocols will complicate the pastoral transition process in terms of in person gatherings, but I know that God will guide you through it well.

Many persons love the affirmation of Jeremiah 29:11 where God declares to his people the Jews in exile, “For I know the plans I have for you.... plans to give you hope and a future.” We can claim that promise of God as well. Barbara Gillies and Joan Neal serve the TAG Team as Chaplains. They have mobilized the group to pray daily for the Holy Spirit to provide holy discernment to the group throughout this entire process. Now that you know what they know, I ask you to join with them in praying daily for the direction of God to be known and followed in this important transitional process.

Be assured that is what I am praying for as well.

Dr. Ron Lyles