

With Stately Towers and Bulwarks Strong

Harriet Auber (1773–1862)

With stately towers and bulwarks strong,
Unrivalled and alone—
Loved theme oft for the sacred song—
God's holy city shone.

Thus fair was Zion's chosen seat,
The glory of all lands;
Yet fairer, and in strength complete,
The Christian temple stands.

The faithful of each clime and age
This glorious church compose;
Built on the Rock—with idle rage
The threat'ning tempest blows.

Fear not: though hostile bands alarm,
Thy God is thy defense:
And weak and powerless every arm
Against Omnipotence.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Almost Nine Months

Kevin T. Bauder

Late last year I was asked to fill the pulpit of a small church that had lost its pastor. After one visit, the church's pulpit committee asked me to cover the month of January. During my second week, the pulpit committee asked whether I would become the church's interim pastor. I have now been ministering in the congregation for nearly nine months.

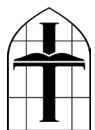
This was a small church to begin with, and COVID cut its attendance drastically. On a very good Sunday the congregation will number in the twenties. The members understand that their church cannot pay a full-time pastor under the present circumstances.

Some might suggest that the church could be closed, since there are a couple of other good churches within a fifteen-mile radius. The members don't see it that way. They believe that their church has a unique identity and can fulfill a unique calling. Furthermore, the church's building is located on a major highway that represents one of the growth corridors for the MSP metroplex. That alone is good reason to try to preserve a witness in this location.

As for me, I am happy to do all that I can to help keep the church's doors open. I've been teaching Sunday School and preaching in the Sunday morning service. We have reinstated the midweek prayer meeting, at which I present another weekly Bible study. The church's leadership has recently begun conversations about reopening an afternoon service on Sundays.

In addition to the preaching ministry, I've tried to become active in the lives of the church's members. The biggest problem here is distance. The church building is nearly an hour from my home, and most of the members live even further away than that. Still, my wife and I have sought interaction with these folks wherever and whenever that has been possible.

While the membership is small, the church presents the usual challenges that any pastor might expect. Sometimes people pull in different directions. Some have fears for which they need assurance. Some carry hurts for which they need healing and counsel. All need feeding. So far, however, the mem-



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bers of this congregation have shown exceptional deference to each other and to me. No overt conflicts appear to be brooding beneath the surface.

This church prefers to use the King James Bible for its services. While it was not originally planted as a King James Only church, a previous pastor led it in that direction. When I began ministering in January, its confession of faith included a rather strongly-worded assertion of King-James-Onlyism. The church has subsequently amended its confession to remove that statement, which most of the members did not even understand. In the meanwhile, no one (including me) plans to abandon the use of the KJV.

As might be expected, the pulpit committee has asked whether I would be willing to candidate for the pastorate. For the moment, I have taken a rain check on that question. I am leading the church through a series of lessons to try to cultivate a particular philosophy of ministry. This series will acquaint the church with the kind of ministry that I want to have. I am hoping that it will also solidify the congregation's thinking in terms of the kind of pastor they want to find.

Since this church cannot pay a pastor a full salary, their options are limited. They could find a pastor who is willing to support himself by working an outside job (or whose wife is willing to). Alternatively, they could find a pastor who has some other source of outside income. A retired pastor would certainly be an option. I wish that I knew of such individuals whom I could recommend to the church.

In the meanwhile, I would like to steer the church away from looking for a pastor who will take them back into King-James-Onlyism. My reason is that I have learned to care about these people. I want to see them led in good and biblical directions by a gentle under-shepherd. I want to see them taught well. I want to see them growing in the faith and in their walk with God. I want to see the church prosper under the leadership of someone who can devote more attention to it than I am able.

Because of the distances involved, I cannot really give the church all the ministry that it needs. The situation is further complicated by responsibilities that I must not shirk as a seminary professor. Still, even a partial ministry may be better than no ministry—or, worse yet, a destructive ministry. If no other options present themselves soon, I may well allow the pulpit committee to present me to the church as a candidate, if they are still so minded.

Even if I do, and even if the church calls me, I have told the pulpit committee that I come with an expiration date. I'm not sure exactly when it will be, but I am already at the age when most people retire. Even if called as the pastor, I will in effect continue to be an interim whose main duty will be to find a more permanent solution for this congregation.

As the Lord brings my situation to mind—which is also the church's situation—I would appeal for your prayers. This is one of those times when both the church and I need wisdom and guidance from the Lord. A bit of providential intervention would not go amiss, either. It's a small congregation, but it is a church of Jesus Christ, and one that He loves. By His grace I want to see it prosper.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
