

A Letter from Pastor Pope

Dear Christchurch,

As I write this and after a very short night and an early morning, my wife and I are in flight to Philadelphia. From there we'll be getting our rental car and heading to Lancaster, PA. Thank you for praying for us as we make this journey reminiscing how God brought us together as a couple fifty years ago. We were married between our fall and spring semesters of college on the 21st day of December. It was a cold and snowy night in northwest Indiana, just outside Chicago on the winter's solstice. But the warmth of God's *agape* love could not have been stronger in our hearts. We were young, but very aware that in two words, "I do," everything in life was going to change. And what change it was! And after all these years, we can say it was definitely a change for our good and for the glory of God. "Marriage is honourable in all..." (Hebrews 13:4a). "...Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31b). Thank you, Christchurch, for making it easy for us to be a happily married couple and family, by respecting our time together; which like all families, is necessary to a wholesome nurturing environment. Thank you for last Sunday evening as we shared the slide show and then celebrated with us in a most perfect Texas way, i.e., nachos with all the fixings! The handshakes, the hugs and congratulations meant everything to Mrs. Pope and me. I really mean it when I say, "There's no place like this place, anywhere near this place, this MUST be the place!"

Pray for us on this trip because since my great friend, Dr. Clarence Sexton has passed, we had to make a few changes in our plans. My wife and I will be leaving Lancaster on Wednesday morning to drive to Knoxville, TN to be at the celebration of Dr. Sexton's life. He has been a great friend for nearly fifty years. Dr. Clarence and his wife, Evelyn met Barbara and me in our first year of marriage. At that time, Dr. Sexton was the up and coming young Southern Baptist, soon to be in the legacy of the likes of W. A. Criswell, Charles Stanley and Adrian Rogers. Dr. Sexton, unlike the other three pastors, believed the Convention was heading down the road that, for him, would be better from which to depart. Rather than fighting for the fundamentals within the ranks, he believed the best thing for him was to "...come out from among them, and be ye separate..." (II Corinthians 6:17a). On Thursday morning, Lord willing, we'll drive back to Lancaster. And because we will be missing a day of our Anniversary holiday, we have added an extra day to our stay in Lancaster. We shall now be flying home on Saturday evening. We look forward to seeing you all on this coming Christmas Eve at Christchurch.

We are praying for you all while we're gone. We welcome Dr. Bob Gray II and his wife Kelly to Christchurch Baptist Fellowship today! Pastor Gray and Kelly have been married since 1987. They have three children, Deanna, RG and Jordan. Dr. and Mrs. Gray have been rewarded with five grandchildren, Blake, Grayson, Natalie, Grant and Chip. I know you're going to enjoy and be blessed by the preaching of Dr. Bob Gray II. I have known Dr. Gray most, if not all of his life. His father and I attended the same to college in Indiana. I preached for Dr. Bob Gray, Sr. when he pastored in Bourbonnais, IL before he pastored the same church his son now pastors in Longview, TX. It was a joy to observe Bob Gray II grow up into honorable manhood, then surrender to preach and now has become one of the most sought-after preachers for Bible conferences, revivals and

youth camps. In Mrs. Joy Corn's teen years, Dr. Gray made a lasting impression that has stayed with her to this day.

I love you all.

-Pastor Pope-