

# **Pastoral residency offers mentoring for young ministers**

August 17, 2007

Posted: 8/17/07



Young ministers who have been through the pastoral residency program at Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas include (left to right) Jay Hogewood, Sean Allen, Amy Grizzle, Brad Jernberg, Ann Bell Worley, David King, Jake Hall and Andrew Daugherty. Not pictured is second-year resident Anne Jernberg.

# Pastoral residency offers mentoring for young ministers

By **Mark Wingfield**

*Special to the Baptist Standard*

ALLAS—When a Baptist minister graduates from seminary or divinity school, what factors predict whether that person will succeed or fail in local church ministry?

Educational training plays a part, as does the personality of the congregation the minister serves. But according to data gathered by the Lilly Endowment, other intangibles play perhaps an even greater role in predicting whether that minister will remain in ministry five, 10 or 15 years down the road.

A good theological education is essential, but it may not be enough to help a young minister survive a first pastorate or a challenging pastorate, noted George Mason, pastor of [Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas](#) for 18 years. Establishing a healthy pastoral identity, gaining confidence in ministry skills, finding a sense of community—all these play a key role in preparation for the pastorate that spans beyond traditional theological education.

In short, the intangible factor might be called mentoring.

As someone who now seeks to pass this baton to younger ministers, Mason himself draws upon a type of mentoring unusual in Baptist churches. When he became pastor at Wilshire in 1989, he followed in the footsteps of Bruce McIver, who had served the church 30 years.



**See related articles:**

- [PASSING THE TORCH: Does pastoral transition have to be hard?](#)
- [Collaboration essential part of effective mentoring](#)
- [The church has a new pastor. When will it start to feel normal?](#)
- Pastoral residency offers mentoring for young ministers
- [Students want to serve God's kingdom' not necessarily in the church](#)

What could have been a death sentence for a young pastor—living in the shadow of a beloved long-term pastor who remained in the church—instead became a blessing that sparked a larger movement. McIver became a mentor to Mason, blessed him as pastor and made it his mission to help him succeed.

And so when McIver neared the end of his life, as he and Mason visited in a room at Baylor University Medical Center, they could model for others what they had learned working together. Their idea was to create a two-year program of mentoring for young ministers, allowing them to gain experience in a healthy large-church setting before setting out on their own.

That idea serendipitously collided with a new initiative of the Lilly Endowment, based in Indianapolis. Lilly leadership had taken note of the coming shortage of pastors in American churches and the high burnout rate of pastors already serving.

Wilshire became one of the first congregations in America—and one of the few Baptist congregations—to receive a grant from Lilly’s Transition-into-Ministry program. With this first \$800,000 grant, Wilshire established a pastoral residency program.

The idea was drawn from the medical field, where newly educated doctors serve as residents in teaching hospitals to gain practical experience.

Wilshire employs four pastoral residents in two-year cycles. They serve as members of the ministerial staff, preach regularly, teach Bible studies and special classes, participate in worship planning, make hospital visits and have contact with prospective members. They also participate in weekly seminars on preaching and pastoral ministry.

“Learning in a residency paradigm, there’s nothing that compares to it,” said Amy Grizzle, a Duke Divinity School graduate who left Wilshire this summer to become minister to adults at South Main Baptist Church in Houston. “It does enable you to learn as you do. You are being a minister, you are preaching, you are teaching. But there’s also this critical evaluation component ... that makes your preaching and teaching that much more valuable.”

The mentoring process at Wilshire takes many forms, some planned and others unplanned. Residents report that some of their most helpful insights come from sitting around a table dissecting events they have watched unfold in the natural life of the congregation—reflecting on committee meetings, staff meetings, deacons’ meetings, interpersonal relationships.

“We had this all-access pass to see a live congregation,” said Jake Hall, former pastoral resident at Wilshire and now pastor of Heritage Baptist Fellowship in Canton, Ga. “Doctors in medical school get to take apart a cadaver—not that Wilshire is in any way dead, but we got to take a look at this living, vibrant body and then go out from that experience and to see the points of life in a congregation. That was a great gift.”

A large part of mentoring is learning by doing, said Andrew Daugherty, a Wake Forest Divinity School graduate who left Wilshire’s residency last year to start a Baptist church in Rockwall.

“One of the skill sets I learned—putting other tools in the pastoral toolbox besides preaching—was how to lean on people who may be more gifted in some areas of ministry than I am, how to rely on people who are part of your leadership team,” he explained.

Through the residency, this hands-on learning occurs in a safer and less-threatening environment than a young minister might find in a first pastorate.

“Those two years of shaping were almost womb-like,” said Jay Hogewood, Wilshire’s first pastoral resident and now pastor of University Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, La.

“There is a sense of maturation; you have that time and nobody’s pressing you. You’re not really so much in the thick of it that you feel like you can’t extract yourself. If I had not had that time at Wilshire, it would have taken me three or four years to ramp up to a situation like this at University

Baptist.”

The end result is a strengthened calling to ministry and a quiver full of resources to sustain that calling, said Sean Allen, a Truett Seminary graduate who has just left Wilshire to become pastor of First Baptist Church of DeLand, Fla.

“The opportunity to come in and integrate what I had learned in seminary with what little experience I had had in ministry, to come into an environment this nurturing and loving and supporting, it’s essential,” Allen said.

“I have a lot of friends in ministry who chose a different path, and they are now spinning their wheels in the mud, questioning their calling. I, on the other hand, have had my calling affirmed.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.