

Henderson helps churches fulfill the Great Commission

May 31, 2024

Kyle Henderson felt a clear calling from God to resign the pastorate of a church he loves to step out by faith and raise his own financial support to help churches to fulfill Christ's Great Commission by 2033.

Earlier this year, Henderson stepped down as pastor of First Baptist Church in Athens, where he served 27 years, to become director of strategic planning for the 2033 initiatives at the [Baptist World Alliance](#).

"I am raising my own support. The BWA doesn't have this in its budget," Henderson said.

He devotes about half of his time to working directly on his BWA responsibilities and the other half on a closely related task—serving in a volunteer capacity with Rick Warren's Healthy Church Teaching Network and its [Finishing the Task](#) initiative.

Both Warren's ministry and the BWA have set their sights on challenging and equipping churches to achieve measurable goals for evangelism and discipleship by 2033—arguably the 2,000th anniversary of the church's birth at Pentecost.

Regarding his new role, Henderson said, "It's overwhelming, exciting, scary and fun."

'Step into the dream'

On March 2 last year, Henderson woke early, [recalling a vivid dream](#) in which he was talking with Warren—whom he never had met—about

“finishing the task” of making disciples of all nations. Henderson began trying every avenue he could imagine to contact someone at the Finishing the Task movement.



Rick Warren, founding pastor of Saddleback Church and best-selling author of “The Purpose Driven Life.”

Eventually, he was invited to attend a meeting at Saddleback Church in Southern California, where he met Warren, who invited him to serve as a volunteer pastoral adviser to the movement. His task was to represent pastors of congregations that are not megachurches, to discover ways they can become involved.

“The idea is to localize the Great Commission,” Henderson explained. “We have outsourced the Great Commission to agencies and institutions for a long time.”

Before he succeeded in contacting Finishing the Task, Henderson texted Elijah Brown, general secretary and CEO of the Baptist World Alliance, to tell him he felt God calling him to help churches fulfill the Great Commission by 2033. If BWA was interested, he offered to serve.

Brown responded quickly to the text, saying he had spent the previous week talking about developing strategic goals for 2033.

“It was a God-inspired connection,” Henderson said.

At the BWA annual meeting in Stavanger, Norway, last summer, Henderson spoke about Finishing the Task. He challenged Baptists globally to “step into the dream” of discipling every people group on the planet.

At Brown’s invitation, he also agreed to represent BWA on the volunteer planning team for Finishing the Task.

‘I was being torn apart’

For several months, Henderson tried to juggle volunteer responsibilities with Warren’s ministry and BWA, along with his pastoral duties at First Baptist Church in Athens.

In October, Warren asked Henderson to lead a training conference in Africa, but Henderson declined because he felt his responsibilities in Athens wouldn’t allow him to take time away from the church.

“It was like God said to me: ‘I called you to this. I need you to say, ‘yes,’ the next time you receive an invitation,’” Henderson said.

In January, Warren was leaving to take a church group on a tour of biblical sites in Turkey when Warren called again, asking him to lead a conference in Hawaii for Pacific Rim church leaders.

“This time, I said, ‘yes,’” Henderson recalled.

At the same time, he told his wife Cindy in order to be obedient to God’s call and not do a disservice to First Baptist in Athens, he felt like he needed to resign from the pastorate.

After the couple prayed about it, he initially made tentative plans to resign after Easter. However, he had no peace about waiting.

“I was being torn apart. I was trying to be a good pastor and do this other thing God had called me to as a side gig,” Henderson said. “God made it clear, I had to take the faith leap.”

Henderson was so troubled, he was hospitalized with extremely elevated blood pressure at one point.

“The day I told the first person I was going to resign, my blood pressure dropped 25 points immediately,” he said.

‘Never felt more biblical’

Since joining the BWA staff as a volunteer—and accepting greater responsibilities with the Healthy Church Teaching Network—Henderson has hit the ground running.

He is working with other BWA leaders to craft the 2033 vision and goals, including meeting with pastors to get their feedback. BWA will present the 2033 goals to participants at its annual meeting in Nigeria in July.

For example, one goal will focus on Baptists globally engaging in intentional acts of service that can open doors to evangelism.

“Acts of service are at the heart of who we think we are as Christians, but it’s not necessarily who the world thinks we are,” Henderson said.

At the Healthy Church Teaching Network, Henderson will be involved over the next few weeks in leading one-day conferences for church leaders in Kenya and Peru.

Moving forward, the Hendersons plan to continue to live in Athens.

“Our house is paid for. Our vehicles are paid for. And right now, we’re looking at ways to cut expenses, not take on new ones,” Henderson said.

Cindy Henderson, who has been on staff at the church more than two decades, will continue to serve as pastor of administration until after the church calls its next senior pastor.

First Baptist Church of Athens has a search committee in place. Todd Still, dean of Baylor University’s Truett Theological Seminary, and Larry Parsley, former pastor of Valley Ranch Baptist Church in Coppell and now a professor and director of mentoring at Truett Seminary, will serve as interim co-pastors.

“God has been faithful. God has led us,” Henderson said. “Our church has been supportive. A lot of the people at our church feel like they are on the journey of faith with us.

“It’s hard to explain. I’ve never felt more biblical.”