

Editorial: Another Pastor Matt C. steps down; why matters

September 14, 2022

On Aug. 28, Matt Chandler, senior pastor of The Village Church, announced to his congregation he was taking a [leave of absence](#) immediately.

On Sept. 11, Matt Carter, lead pastor of Sagemont Church in Houston and a founding pastor of Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, announced to his congregation he is [retiring](#).

Two Matt Cs, pastors of two Texas megachurches, two weeks apart, two different reasons for stepping away from the pulpit. Same age and same denominational body—Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. All of that is interesting, but the bigger story is why Matt Carter is retiring and what we need to take from it.

Chandler's leave of absence has received considerable attention, including some here in the [Baptist Standard](#). Indeed, his situation is worth learning from. Carter's situation is no less important a lesson for us.

Why Matt Carter is retiring

Carter spent about 3 minutes of his more than 5-minute announcement talking about "recent health issues."

He began by saying: "I'm going to take just a few minutes to share with you what's going on with my health. As you guys know, I missed last week. Went to the hospital a week or so ago."

A couple of months prior, Carter received a stent "for a blockage." During his stay in the hospital last week, he learned two things: (1) the 90-percent

blockage was in the “widow-maker part” of his heart, and (2) he has a 50-percent blockage in another section of the same artery.

It gets worse.

Carter also learned the type of plaque in his cardiovascular system is a “rapidly growing kind of plaque.” He described scans of his heart over a three-year period that show the significant growth of plaque.

In light of this, his doctor told him he needs to “make some radical changes in your life.”

“Bottom line guys: I’m 48 years old. I’m about to turn 49 here in a couple of weeks. I’ve had cancer twice, and I’ve got rapidly advancing heart disease, and it’s time for me to make a change,” Carter said.

The change: Carter decided to retire from Sagemont Church effective Sept. 30.

What we need to take from it

I connected with Carter’s announcement on a personal level. I’m 47. Also, my college roommate, whose birthday is days away from mine, died at age 33 from sudden cardiac death, leaving a wife and two very young children.

He was on the pastoral staff of Fellowship Church at the time. The night he died, he came home late from a church function. Ministry didn’t cause his death. Rather, an inherited congenital heart defect did. However, the hours and pressures of ministry didn’t help.

Pastors like Matt Carter are [followed by many young pastors and ministers](#). They see his announcement and take it to heart. It encourages them to take care of their physical health as much as they try to care for a church’s spiritual health. Churches will need to take heed.

Younger generations of pastors and ministry leaders aren't allowing or going to allow ministry to consume them the way it did many of their predecessors. They seem to be more aware of their physical and family health and the need to impose boundaries on their time. Churches will need to take heed.

One reason seminaries are seeing lower enrollment and churches are finding it [difficult to fill open ministry positions](#) is because people see the wear and tear on ministers, paired with often low rates of compensation. They opt to minister outside the church in a field where they can earn potentially more money with potentially less stress. Churches will need to take heed.

In Carter's case, he is taking what is expected to be [a lower-stress ministry position](#) outside, but alongside, the church—vice president of mobilization for the North American Mission Board's Send Network.

Not every pastor or minister will be given a vice president position at a denominational entity upon resignation or early retirement, however. Likewise, many pastors and ministers can't afford to resign or retire from their ministry positions due to health reasons. Churches shouldn't wait to take heed of this ticking timebomb; they should take heed now.

A pastor for the long haul

What would you do if your pastor stood in front of you on a Sunday morning and said: "Look, y'all, I love you, but being your pastor stands a good chance of killing me. So, I'm out of here."

That's essentially what Carter told his congregation, and one of the reasons other pastors have cheered it is because they'd like to stand before their congregations and say the same thing.

During these times of so much instability—culturally, financially, politically and otherwise—having the stability of a long-tenured pastor can be a needed blessing to a church. What, then, can a church do to support such longevity?

A place to start includes: updating time away provisions to require pastors and ministers to take regular breathers, providing a sabbatical, providing full health insurance and covering mental health counseling. This is a place to start, but it's not the end. Additionally, it may not change health conditions that require a career change.

Yes, all of this costs money, and your church may not have much of that. In that case, you will need to talk through what you can reasonably expect of a pastor serving you. You may also need to help a pastor find additional sources of income, understanding those other sources may eat into your pastor's time.

Churches need to decide if they want pastors and ministers who can serve them a long time or star athletes they can burn up and replace. Whatever they decide, they need to know their staff and staff prospects are watching and have their own decisions to make.

Eric Black is the executive director, publisher and editor of the Baptist Standard. He can be reached at eric.black@baptiststandard.com. The views expressed are those solely of the author.