

**Hope Baptist Poised to Reach Growing Community**

Tim Murr is excited to see God at work in his congregation. He began as pastor of Hope Baptist Church on September 1st. Located in an area of tremendous community growth and development, the church sees its neighbors as its mission field. Hope Baptist was birthed from the joining of two former congregations – Eastwood and Parkway Baptist Churches – but as Murr looks across its membership he only sees the united future that God has in store for them.

"It really isn't relevant to me which church anyone has come from as far as the past merger is concerned. I was called to pastor Hope Baptist Church, which is what I think God wants me to do,” says Murr.

Under his leadership Hope Baptist is focused on looking to its future with expectation for what missions and evangelism opportunities God has planned. He describes Hope Baptist as a community of people who want to do life together as a faith family. Murr says the 2020 vision is to “look inward and be honest with ourselves about who we are, outward to be soul winners, upward as we grow closer to God and always looking forward.”

“We are struggling, like most churches that have an older congregation, with how to continue reaching people and accomplish God’s will for us without leaving behind the traditions we love. We are having younger families visit us and we are making changes that would attract these families. We want to share the gospel and the message hasn’t changed, yet we are making adjustments in order to be relevant in the culture that the Lord has placed us,” Murr explains.

That “culture” includes a bustling section of Clemson Road that is experiencing growth in every direction. There are new houses being built, new families moving into the area, a new hospital is being constructed and three elementary schools are located within three miles of the church. Hope Baptist members are currently being trained ahead of launching a Good News Club at one of the elementary schools. Murr says members were quick to volunteer when they heard about the new ministry opportunity.

“Any time you’re reaching elementary students with the gospel of Jesus Christ you’ll receive a blessing from the Lord. He has blessed us with the community that surrounds us, and the Good News Club is a wonderful way to reach young families living here,” he says.

Murr says he’s excited to see the people of Hope Baptist intentionally looking for ways to serve. Not long after moving to Columbia, Murr and his wife Denise planned a workday at the church to help clean and spruce the buildings. With only two days’ notice more than a dozen volunteers showed up on a Tuesday morning to lend a hand and, in fact, he says it’s unusual for a day to go by without a member showing up to offer to help in some way.

“It’s exciting to see people step up to ask what they can do. Some churches struggle with finding people to be involved but that’s not the case here. We’re a smaller congregation but have a group of people that really want to see that change and are looking for things they can do to glorify God,” he says.

Murr credits strong former leadership, including transitional pastor Ben Newman, with laying the groundwork for welcoming him as a new pastor and for the ministries Hope Baptist embraces today. Women from the church gather weekly to prepare backpacks filled with food to distribute at a local elementary school. Hope Baptist hosts active women’s and men’s ministry groups along with Bible studies offered on Sundays, Mondays and Wednesdays. Hope Baptist members regularly give to and volunteer with its Giving Hope Food Pantry, assisting folks from the community who are in need.

“Our church members are interested in finding out how and where God is specifically calling them to serve,” Murr says.

As pastor, Murr is most excited that Hope Baptist has everything in place to experience what God intends to do through them next, whatever that may be. With its current facilities, full gymnasium and kitchen, along with a daycare program with more than 100 children enrolled, Hope Baptist is prepared to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the surrounding community.

“We have the facilities and the people in place to be poised to experience fantastic things for the glory of God. I am also excited to work side-by-side with Denise, who has invested time and energy into planning for the appearance of our facility and children’s ministry. As my life partner in ministry, she’s made my ministry easier and it’s great to serve alongside of her,” Murr adds.

While acknowledging the ancestry of Hope Baptist having infused two separate churches for a new common goal, Murr stresses that churches in similar situations should focus on the biblical truth of unity among believers who are all children of the same family under God.

“I also want for people in our community to understand that we are here to love them like Jesus loves them. God puts each individual church in a place for a particular reason, and we want to be here as a light in the community that’s around us. There are many different churches in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association to choose from, and we want to reach the people that God intends for us to reach,” Murr says.