



Bethlehem Baptist Church

Dear Friends at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Bethlehem College & Seminary, and Training Leaders International,

Having turned 65 in November and being in the midst of my 40th year as a pastor at Bethlehem, this has been a season of increased reflection and prayer. My entire adult life I have been serving on the staff of Bethlehem, living in the same house, and raising my family among the dear people of Bethlehem. I am indelibly marked by her DNA and vision. With this burning in my heart as brightly as ever, I have sought to discern what fruitful endeavors the Lord has for me in whatever days, months, years, or decades God may be pleased to give me. My love for Bethlehem Baptist Church and Bethlehem College & Seminary and our mission only continues to grow. My excitement for the future fruitful ministry of the church and school is relentless, and I am eager to continue to play whatever role God gifts me to play.

As I have reflected and prayed and talked with my wife, Julie, we have sensed that God is leading me to increase my focus for the foreseeable future on the international dimension of Bethlehem's discipleship efforts, especially the Bethlehem College & Seminary Extension Site in Yaoundé. The country of Cameroon has been on my heart since 1984, just one year after my conversion to World Christianity. My heart for Cameroon increased significantly in 1990–91, when Julie and I and our three older children lived there for seven months while I taught at the Cameroon Baptist Theological Seminary. Many, many teaching trips have followed since then, and my ties there deepened through involvement with numerous Cameroonian leaders. In recent years, my passion for Africa has been strengthened—perhaps irresistibly—through my partnership with Dieudonné & Dominique Tamfu, now the executive director of the Bethlehem College & Seminary Extension Site – Yaoundé. God has given us a shared passion for a Treasuring Christ Together church-planting movement to be birthed in Yaoundé (and beyond) with its DNA shaped by church-based theological education and outreach to unreached/unengaged peoples. I see the Yaoundé extension site as an effort that uniquely encapsulates the “Fill These Cities: 25 x '25” vision the Lord has given to Bethlehem.

Therefore, with the blessing of Bethlehem leaders, I have decided to move from being a Bethlehem pastor to being a Bethlehem Global Partner. I will be sent from Bethlehem through [Training Leaders International](#) (TLI) and will be raising prayer and [financial support](#) as a Bethlehem Global Partner. If God prompts you to want to know more about this work, I would love to talk to you. I have been connected to TLI since its inception and have served on its board for the 11 years of its existence. This partnership will allow me to serve Bethlehem and the Bethlehem College & Seminary Extension Site in Yaoundé by caring for the Tamfus; teaching at the school; and recruiting, coaching, and caring for future long-term global partners (and short-termers!) who will serve the cause of theological famine relief in Cameroon and beyond.

I have talked and prayed with many people about this transition: our wonderful Human Resources staff (Ken Currie, Joby Morgan, Jon Grano, and Jason Abell); my longest current ministry partner of 32 years, Connie Kopischke; my supervisor, Pastor Kenny Stokes; my

colleague of 40 years, Pastor John Piper; my leader and partner at Bethlehem College & Seminary from the beginning, Tim Tomlinson, and the President's Cabinet; Bethlehem's Lead Pastors; Julie's and my small group; the leaders of TLI; and, of course, Dieudonné. So needless to say, the decision to shift over from employment at Bethlehem Baptist Church to becoming a Bethlehem Global Partner through TLI has not been made rashly. In closing, here are several highlights regarding this transition:

- The targeted transition from Bethlehem's pastoral staff to Training Leaders International and my role as *Director of Theological Education – Cameroon* will begin August 1, 2020, if the Lord is so pleased to bring in my full-time support by then.
- Julie and I will remain whole-hearted members of Bethlehem, and we will continue to live in our Elliot Park home.
- I will continue to serve as an elder at Bethlehem, but now as a "non-staff elder."
- Brian Tabb, our Academic Dean, has invited me to continue teaching regularly at Bethlehem College & Seminary, both in Yaoundé, Cameroon, and at our Downtown Campus in Minneapolis.
- Though I won't be regularly involved with the President's Cabinet of the school or the Lead Pastors of the church, I am eager to consult with these cherished colleagues, if/when needed.

I love you all and cherish the camaraderie, friendship, and history (and future!) we share. My comfort in making such a transition is that God is sovereign and he is good and he loves us all! Together with you in the Greatest Cause,
Pastor Tom

From Pastor Jason:

Dear Bethlehem,

Tom Steller is one of my heroes. When I grow up, I want to be more like him. He was a treasured mentor for me as a seminary student, and I have never stopped learning from him and the example of his faith. I look at Tom's 40 years on staff and I pray, "Lord, produce in me that kind of unshakable, joy-filled perseverance." Now I look at this redeployment after 40 years on staff and pray, "Lord, give me this kind of risk-taking faith that is willing to venture all on the grace of God and say, like Caleb, 'Give me this mountain' (Joshua 14:12)." This redeployment excites me because the very next chapter tells us that Caleb drove out the descendants of Anak (Joshua 15:14). I am praying that the next chapter of Tom's ministry will read much like Joshua 15.

Still watching and learning and cheering,

Pastor Jason Meyer
Pastor for Preaching & Vision
Bethlehem Baptist Church

From Pastor John:

I have never known a Bethlehem Baptist Church without Tom Steller. Of course, there was one. This great church was 109 years old before Tom or I were part of it. But within the first year of my pastoral ministry in 1980, Tom was not only part of my dream team, but also was living in the other half of our duplex where he and Julie still live, 40 years later. He remained part of the team for my entire ministry.

Having memorized the entire book of James, Tom picked up numerous beautiful traits from this letter. The one that tends to conceal the others was his obedience to the imperative, "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (James 1:19). I think one of the most important roles I played for 33 years at Bethlehem was knowing when and how, in a staff meeting, to turn to silent Tom and make him talk. Countless times, the logjam would break as Tom gave a perspective that opened a whole new way forward.

Behind his slowness to speak and slowness to anger (has anyone ever seen Tom show anger?) lay an incarnation of James 3:17, "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." Tom's gentleness concealed a stunning heavenly wisdom. Many have seen it in personal relations. Few saw it like the staff did in institutional design. Repeatedly, in the 33 years we served together, Tom quietly redesigned the ministry structures of Bethlehem, building trellises that kept the vine fruitful in the sunlight of God's word.

Tom was a guinea pig for at least five pastoral positions, accepting new roles to see if we really needed them. He was the first full-time pastor for college students, the first full-time pastor for world missions, the first full-time executive pastor, the first full-time pastor for leadership development, and the first ever overseer, and then dean, of what became Bethlehem College & Seminary. There would be no College and Seminary without him. Perhaps the most seminal and important obedience to James that Tom manifested beneath all the others was, "Receive with meekness the implanted word" (James 1:21). Tom received the word of God so deeply, and thought about it so profoundly, and applied it so steadily, that he became a great teacher for students, and a great counselor for me. Tom saw things in the word others didn't see. This made him a well-spring of life and joy in my ministry.

Behind the scenes there was always the indispensable Julie. Like Tom, she was a student of mine at Bethel. I performed their marriage 43 years ago, preaching from John 16:33, "In the world you will have trouble. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Julie has been steadfast in her devotion to her husband, freeing him for his astonishing accomplishments at Bethlehem. Six children and forty years later, she is as strong and creative as ever. The ministry of Tom Steller is inconceivable without Julie.

Tom and I have talked about his transition to missions for a long time. I knew it was coming. I am thrilled that the post-65 chapter of Tom's life will be the African chapter. Serving theological education in Africa is a beautiful combination of Tom's gifts and passions: a superior exegete,

an empowering teacher, a structural genius, a lover of missions. How good God is that we at Bethlehem get to be Tom's senders.

Perhaps you have forgotten that Tom wrote the "Afterword" for my book, *Let the Nations Be Glad*. The title of the Afterword is "The Supremacy of God in Going and Sending." It is an application of 3 John 1:6–7, "Send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name."

Now it all comes full circle. The one who taught us how to send, and designed structures for sending, is now to be sent. What a privilege we have! Thank you, dear Lord Jesus, for blessing me, and this church for 40 years with the life and wisdom and love of Tom Steller. Make this the most fruitful chapter of his life.

John Piper
Pastor Emeritus
Chancellor, Bethlehem College & Seminary

From Tim Tomlinson:

This proposed change in Tom's deployment at Bethlehem seems to be the perfect way to take full advantage of Tom's robust heart for missions, his deep passion for God's glory, his devotion to the word of God, and his many years of experience in training and equipping future pastors. In many ways, this feels like an ideal role for Tom as it brings together his skills, his experience, his passion, and his commitment to the gospel for the nations, in a way that could only have been brought about by the Lord.

Tim Tomlinson
President
Bethlehem College & Seminary

From Darren Carlson:

Training Leaders International was birthed out of Tom's office in 2008, and now we get the honor of serving with him on staff. Pastor David Livingston once told me that he could not think of one person who dislikes Tom. He is loved. And what does it say about a man, that he would leave a stable ministry position where he is loved and has served for 40 years in order to join a position in global missions that requires him to raise personal support? It shows a man who has been reassigned and is willing to take a risk for the supremacy of God amongst the nations. His decision should challenge you. We are excited to receive him from you!

Darren Carlson
President
Training Leaders International

From Dieudonné Tamfu:

Pastor Tom is a mentor, friend, and ministry partner like no other. After years of praying together, dreaming about ministry in Cameroon, little did I know God would lead Tom & Julie in this direction. I can't put into words how excited and hopeful I now feel for the church in Cameroon and all of Africa. That God would move Pastor Tom in this direction for me is an evidence among many that revival is near. God is about to do something God-sized in Cameroon. May he use Pastor Tom to accomplish more than we can think or imagine.

Dieudonné Tamfu

Executive Director

Bethlehem College & Seminary

Extension Site – Yaoundé, Cameroon