

Alumni Spotlight: Tom Lindberg (MTS '76)



Current title: Lead Pastor of First Assembly Memphis

Family: Wife: Sandi, 3 grown children: 2 sons and 1 daughter

Favorite professor: Doug Stuart, Gordon Fee, R.C. Sproul, and Harold Ockenga

Favorite class: Exegesis in Ezekiel and New Testament Theology

Favorite memory: Francis Schaeffer's surprise visit as a guest speaker during Chapel, as well as E.V. Hill's week of preaching during Chapel

Would you tell us about the church you are currently serving?

The church where I serve as Lead Pastor is an historic Assemblies of God church. Assemblies of God was formed in 1914, but First Assembly Memphis was started in 1907. The membership stands at 2,900. We also operate a K-12 school with 550 students. First Assembly is the church Elvis Presley attended from age 10 through age 15. Several of the long-time members remember Elvis well. My first administrative assistant dated him for three years and was with him in studio when he recorded "Heartbreak Hotel." During Elvis week in Memphis (third week of August), guests attend the church and we have greater opportunities to proclaim the gospel. It's also the home church of the famous Blackwood Brothers Quartet. There have been years when tourists from Japan took a chartered bus to visit the church, which were more golden opportunities to share the gospel of Jesus. My time at Gordon-Conwell also instilled a passion for missions deep within me. Each year we contribute more than \$1 million to missions worldwide.

What do you love about the ministry work you are doing now?

My greatest love in ministry is preaching and teaching. When a pastor looks for ways to be creative in presenting the gospel within the church and outside its walls, opportunities abound. It has been such a joy to watch God transform lives and families. When I was in high school my dream was to be a physician. During the spring semester of my senior year, God forcefully called me into ministry. From that day forward, I never looked back. I have no regrets. Both my wife and I count it a privilege to have served as a pastor and pastor's wife of this church. First Assembly Memphis has many students and younger families. Shaping and guiding the next generation for Christ is extremely rewarding. The drug rehab center we started and the sex trafficking ministry we operate has made a significant impact on the city as well.



What are the particular challenges of serving in a large church in general, and in your specific context?



Challenges of serving at a large, historic church include staying fresh and incorporating new ideas. Large ships turn slowly and new directions are always needed. I desire to be scriptural, not cultural. The opportunities of a larger church far outweigh the challenges. One challenge every larger church faces is to stay current with the times. It's easy for a congregation to become content with the status quo. After all, attendance is good, ministries are well-oiled, and the budget is strong. Youth For Christ operated with the slogan: "Geared to the Times, but Anchored to the Rock." It's essential for every church, larger or smaller, to be scriptural, not cultural. No one can (or should)

attempt to create a wave of the Spirit using gimmicks or marketing. Like surfers, we cannot create the spiritual wave, but we must spot the wave and catch it at the ideal time when it crests. That's always a challenge when leading a larger church, for voices will try to pull you in multiple directions.

How has your Gordon-Conwell education served you in ministry?

Gordon-Conwell changed my life and taught me much about ministry. I remember a poster in the library which said, "Give me a fish and I can eat for a day. Teach me to fish and I can eat for a lifetime." Gordon-Conwell taught me to fish!!

What piece of advice would you give to young alumni who are beginning in ministry?

Some advice for a seminary student in being ordained in the Assemblies of God since 1976: Keep your family first, give your mornings to God for prayer and study, give your afternoons to your people to relate and guide, be yourself, and have fun!