

Q & A With Pastor Mike – June 2008

One year ago there were many questions. What would the loss of Pastor Greg to a different church and a new ministry role mean? Could Pastor Mike, in an interim position, set challenging goals and mobilize a willing lay staff while splitting his time between Pearce and Young Life? Could stop-gap measures lead to an effective long-range program within the framework of the goals of a new senior pastor?

Only 6 months was needed to demonstrate that the program was moving forward with steady guidance and planning and effective execution (See *Messenger* January 2008). In recognition of Pastor Mike's leadership, the Official Board recently accepted Pastor Wally's recommendation to appoint Mike Kuhkin as full-time Youth Pastor, effective January 2009. During the next six months, Pastor Mike will continue on a half-time basis at Pearce as he severs his ties with Young Life in an orderly fashion.

With Pastor Mike on a one-month sabbatical and this reporter vacationing in Florida, Pastor Mike responded to a variety of questions by email.

Reporter (R): What is your evaluation of the youth program for the 2007-2008 year?

Pastor Mike (PM): This year has been a success based on the markers we laid out in the beginning.

We have managed to continue the program as Greg had established it and we have seen good numbers in attendance and even more important we have continued to build relationships with the students. It has been difficult to help the actual program move forward because we have not really been able to build a long-term vision due to not knowing what the future was going to be. Much of this summer will be dedicated to meeting with the lay leaders and dreaming. Where do we want to go, how are we going to get there and how do we model and build community into the student ministries department? This is not to say we have not seen growth. The biggest catalyst for spiritual growth was our trip to Romania. The team was greatly impacted by what we saw and did. We were amazed at how God was working in Romania. We were even more astonished by how easy it was to build relationships with people who live in a different culture and speak a different language. Serving was an incredible way to share our faith and we are looking for ways to continue that here in the States. Other areas of spiritual growth are not as obvious, but are there. The relationships we have been building have allowed us to speak into the lives of our students and to walk through difficult circumstances and to point to Christ in the midst of troubles.

There have been few difficulties other than the usual; transportation, logistics, finances etc. The first year in any position is one of learning and figuring out what is going on and where improvements can be made. As we go forward I anticipate new difficulties. Pain typically accompanies growth.

R: To what degree have your goals been met?

PM: The goal of maintaining the current level of ministry was met. We were able to continue and build on the relationships already established and I don't believe there was much of a drop if any in the quality of ministry offered. We did establish a parent support group, but it has not been active in recent months. I look to resurrect that team in the coming months. We have also begun the process of evaluating our team and ministry. This will be on-going.

R: Discuss briefly what it will mean for you to leave Young Life next January. Will you continue to encourage Pearce youth to be involved with YL? Why do you feel that YL is important?

PM: I have been involved with Young Life for 19 years. I met Christ ultimately through Young Life, I volunteered in college and have been on staff for over 13 years. Leaving is going to be very difficult. I am beginning the grieving process already. I believe in the focus of the ministry (reaching kids, that no one else is), and I value the relationships and support I have received in this ministry. I will continue to encourage our students and church to be involved.

I think YL is a crucial arm of the church. They have an ability to go into places and reach kids that a “pastor” can’t or at least not as easily. My hope is that our students will use Young Life as a tool for introducing their friends to Christ. Pearce Student Ministries would be a next logical step for those students. Young Life really can be a feeder for our ministry. I hope to also maintain contact with YL by being on their adult committee.

R: What will you do differently during the next year? What will it mean to you and the program to be at Pearce full-time starting in January?

PM: We are just starting to dream in this direction. The main thing for me will be to really go after students. I desire to build stronger relationships with students that will allow me the right to speak into their lives. I will also make it a priority to recruit, train and deploy more lay leaders. I desire to really build a team of volunteers who will be active in the lives of these students. It used to be said that we need a youth director or volunteer for every 10 kids. I think the reverse is true. We need 10 Christian adults in every student’s life.

Going full time in January will provide clarity and focus for me. It will also free me up from the administration of Young Life (fundraising, etc.) to chase after kids and leaders – things I believe to be my strengths.

R: What are some activities planned for the youth during the summer and into the fall.

PM: This summer we will continue with the TNT (Tuesday Night Thing). We will meet every Tuesday for times of fellowship and relationship building. Some of the things we plan to do; Seabreeze, bonfires, Charlotte – Abbotts, and swimming parties. We will also be taking our annual trek to Algonquin August 3rd -9th.

R: Give us an update on your interaction with Greg (Harp) during the year and share with us your feeling of how he and his family have adjusted to a new community and a new role.

PM Greg and I have tried to meet regularly and to stay in contact via e-mail and phone. I get a sense that he feels like he is where he is supposed to be. He has connected well with Pastor Bill (Lowery Jr.) and is enjoying ministry. I think the adjustment has been harder on Tracy and the kids but they are making gains as well. I have spoken with Greg about taking the Youth Pastor position on full time. He has given me his blessing. It was difficult to see how things came about over the last two years, but God was still in the midst of it all.

R: What can the congregation (parents and others) do to support the youth program?

PM: Pray, get involved in events, and get involved in the lives of students. Some great examples of this are; Paul Stewart taking Caleb Adams deer hunting, Joe Steinwachs taking Sid Stewart turkey hunting, and Bob Antes hiring students to work with him. You may not be able to give time to the weekly ministry but if you can make room for a student to join you in something you are already doing, the dividends are huge. They need multiple role models and need to see the Christian life lived out in the mundane.

R: Share with the congregation some activities/programs you would like to initiate. Brainstorm on this question assuming money and personnel not to be issues.

PM: My biggest dream would be to begin a Student Ministries Intern program. I think we have an incredible ministry and have the tools to train others to be effective ministers of the gospel. If money were no issue I would like to hire a Roberts grad for two years at a minimum salary and really invest and train him/her in ministry. It would benefit our students to have a second staff person but it would also build the kingdom because after 2 years the intern would be ready to really go into full-time ministry at another church.

I would also like to make sure we are taking regular missions trips. My dream would be that the student ministries would adopt Romania and make trips every other year or so. I think this is a crucial piece to our ministry.

R: How will this change in your ministry direction affect your wife and family?

PM: For starters it will mean I am not out 4 nights a week or traveling nearly as much. Typically now I'm gone 2 weekends a month and at meetings 4 nights a week. My family especially Jackie is looking forward to me being home to help put the kids to bed. My kids are intrigued by what it means to be a pastor – a title I'm not yet comfortable with. My biggest fear is that my kids become the stereotypical PKs that drive Sunday School teachers crazy.

R: Here's your chance to express your thoughts on any subjects/issues that have been missed.

PM: Please know that last June when I accepted this interim position I had no intention of taking it on full time. I was stepping in for a season. I fear that the congregation will question my motives. Be assured that this was never my intent but I do believe it is now God's timing and his direction.