

“The Great Commission and Our Ministry”

By General Pastor Peter F. Paine

Sunday, February 25th, 2018

Please be seated. It is a privilege to be here with you today. I am very, very, very thankful. For those of you who are here for your first time, I pray that you will be truly blessed today, and I hope that none of the ceremonial aspects, or appreciation aspects, of the service take away anything from your personal blessing of being here today. And, that you will understand that we are a family that simply loves God, and is loved by God, and we seek to do our best to let that show in a way that is contagious.

And, I'll share a little of my testimony today. I was nineteen years old—nope, I'll back up: I was eighteen years old and I went in the United States Navy. I had been seeking God and I didn't grow up in church. I grew up believing there was a God, but I didn't have any idea, really, of how to connect. I had never read the Bible. I believed that the Bible was God's Word, but I had never studied it, never read it, and I was stationed in San Diego, California. And, I can remember very clearly the night that I cried out and said, “God, if you're real, please show me.” it was that simple prayer from a simple person that was just speaking to the question, “God are you real? And, if You are real, please show me.” A few months later, I get orders to Great Lakes, right here. And, I met a guy—my story, in that part, is very similar to yours, Pastor Ulysse—I met a guy, and he was selling drugs. And, he and I were working in the galley together, I was a cook, that was my job description. And, I kept saying to him, “Ray, you shouldn't be doing that. You're going to end up going to the brig, getting dishonorably discharged, and really, it's going to cause you trouble the rest of your life. You're going to regret this; stop it.” I was doing everything I could, as just a shipmate, a friend, to try to help him to choose a better path, but, he wasn't having it. And, one day he walked into work, and, those of you in the military know that the galley opens up, the place where we—by the way Pastor Ulysse used the term, and if you've never been in the Navy, you may not know the term, ‘mess crank,’ but it just means you're working in the galley, or the kitchen. And, that's where I was, and I was working in the kitchen—that's not a qualification to be part of this ministry, by the way. You in this church know that Pastor Ulysse and I were both working the galley. But, and, he came in, and it was zero-three-forty-five, 3:45 a.m., and he shouted across the mess deck, to the staff lounge, “Pete, I threw away all my drugs!” and, I'm looking around to see how many chiefs might be around to have heard that declaration, and he said, “I'm a Christian! My life is changed.” And, I wanted to hear his story. And, of course, he said, “Come with me. I want to take you to the place where I'm learning about Jesus.” That place was a pizza restaurant in North Chicago. It's no longer there, but it was there then, and that night we had greasy pizza and a Bible study, and I learned about Jesus, and I accepted Him as my Lord and Savior. And, August eleventh, 1973, I was baptized in the precious name of Jesus, and I'm still here today, and I was excited when I get started. I was very excited when I get started. And, one of my concerns was what I stay excited? And, I can tell you that I'm more excited, today, than I was when I began.

Pastor Ulysse, Parrish Lee, Andy Giebler, and I, have spent the last two days together, talking about ministry, and how we can work together most effectively in ministry. And, I want to share with you today from my heart that I am so thankful for what each and every one of you do to make this ministry great. And, as I prayed for wisdom, “God, what can I share today? What can I share that would be meaningful? What can I share that would help a person that might be here today, and you're just really looking and asking the question that I was asking back in 1973, God, if you're real, please show me.” or, what can I say to the person who's been living for Christ for many, many years, and, you feel like, “How do I fit in?” What can I share to the person who's been here, today, and you know exactly how to fit in, but, you feel like, “I need people to come alongside

me. The fields are white to harvest, the laborers are few, I can't keep doing this alone. We need more people to be part of it." and, I was praying for wisdom, "What can I share to people who are in different stages of your walk of life? So that God can speak to you, today, through His Word, through His Holy Spirit, and speak to you, and say, "I have a message for you. I have an answer for you. I have direction for you. I have hope for you. I have a place for you." and I hope that, today, God will do this for each and every one of you. My prayer is that each of us will leave today, myself included, and say, "I have clearer direction, today, than I had yesterday." My prayer is that each of us will leave with the awareness that God is clearly leading us, as a family, and, us as individuals. Amen?

How many times have you, those of you that really have a walk with the Lord, and you know that God is giving you direction, and the direction that He gave you wasn't what you, personally, wanted to do? And, yet, when you carried it out, you look back, and you say, "I'm so thankful that I did. I'm so thankful that I did." Some hands go up. And, you know, sometimes, when I'm teaching on that, I try to add a little humor to truth, and I make the point, that there have been many, many times in our forty-two years of marriage, Debby and I, that I have apologized to her, knowing that I was right, and she was wrong, only to find out later, that I was wrong and she was right. Can you imagine how glad I was that I apologized? Right? Well, a little humor in that truth, but, how many times do we need to apologize to God, and say, "God, I haven't acted the way I should have. I haven't followed your Word the way I should have. I haven't yielded the way I should have. I haven't been tender-hearted the way I should have. I haven't stood fast the way I should have." Whatever it is. Amen? And, I'm not here, today, to put anyone down. But, I am here to say, "Can we draw closer to Christ? Can we draw closer to our Lord and Savior? Can we say, 'Lord, I want a closer walk with you.'?" And, then, do whatever it takes to get that closer walk. But, let go of whatever it is that we're holding on to that might separate us from the God that loves us, and that we love. Amen? You know, we can get into our routines and our rituals, and they can get in the way of us serving God. And, sometimes we make mistakes, and then we repeat them, and pretty soon it becomes a habit. And, that's true for all of us. You know, you read through the Old and the New Testament, and you read about people who loved God, and served God, and had a zeal for God, and they were doing great things for God, and then they slipped, and they fell. And they had to get back up. It's hard to get back up and face forward after you've made a mistake. It's hard to admit that you have a haughty Spirit when you're doing so much for the glory of God. It's hard to admit that you become stubborn or stiff-necked when you know that you're a Christian and you live for God, but I have had to do all those things. I've had to recognize that I've let my heart get hardened to certain situations or even certain people, and said, "God, help me have a soft heart. Help me to see it through Your eyes. Help me see it Your way.". And, so, not just the last two days, but I've been praying for wisdom. How can we work together more effectively as a ministry? And, many of you know, Christian Fellowship Ministries International and who we are, and what we feel our unique calling is, and, sometimes when I'm explaining it to people, I use this example: you know, every Christian ministry has, really, the same Great Commission. If you choose Matthew 28:19, you don't have to pull it up. It's Christ speaking—you can if you want—Christ was speaking, and just to set the scene a little bit, in Matthew 28:19, to set the chronology of it, so Christ came, and He did His ministry on Earth, and He was crucified, resurrected, and now He returns, and He speaks to those who walked closest with Him. He speaks to those that He had been with, that He had broke bread with, He instructed them, He showed them how to do the work, right? Then, He gives them what we call, the Great Commission. He gives them this final instruction, "Okay, this is what you're going to spend the rest of your life doing. This is what you're going to spend the rest of your life doing." And this was the instruction they wanted, they needed. What do we do now? The One that we walked with, the One that we went about, and we saw Him do miracles, we saw Him open blinded eyes, we saw Him heal the lame, we saw Him crucified, and now He's back, and He's saying, "Okay, this is what you're going to do for the rest of your lives." and He said, "**Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing**

them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always..." Isn't that powerful? "I'm with you always! You might not see Me, but I'm there." Amen? "You might not see me, but I'm there. I'm with you always." And that's the Great Commission. He said, "Go ye therefore, teach..." that's the first word of the Great Commission. Teach. Teach where? Your neighborhood, your school, your community, He told them all nations. Well, how do you teach all nations? You don't do it alone. You don't do it alone. No one of us, no group of us could teach all nations. Amen? It takes a whole body of believers. Now, I want to spend some time with you today, talking about this Great Commission and how it relates to this ministry that God's called us to, and how our ministry relates to the bigger family, the body of Christ. Amen? And, then, come back down, and talk about how we, in Great Lakes, how we, here in Waukegan, in this congregation, and in the military fellowship that's within this congregation, how do we work together with our brothers and sisters around the world, how we do all that? And, I hope that today, each and every one of us will leave with a little bit more clear of vision of how we do that together. Because, one of the things that you're preaching this month is on the topic of unity, amen? And, so, one of the things that the devil tries to do is to divide us. Right? When I went into basic training in the Navy, the person who was going to train us— back then, we used the term company commander. Now, I think, what is it, division commander? What do you call the person that trains you in basic training? RDC. Recruit division commander. That's why I'm not the Navy today, I don't have enough of that vocabulary. I used to. Recruit division commander; did I do better? Thank you. Okay, RDC. Recruit division commander. But, back then, we didn't speak like that, we just said, "Chief." But, the point is, the first night that we went in, he talked to us. We still had our long hair, our civilian clothes, we hadn't gone through anything yet, you know, any of our training yet, we had just arrived from the airport, or the bus station, or wherever it was, and we all gathered together. There were eighty-three of us in a room. And we're all looking around at each other. We had all come from different places around the country, you know? Some of us came from cities, some of us came from farms, some of us—you know, all different people, all different places, and, for most of us, it was really quite a new experience, to be there with people we'd never met before. And different lifestyles, and so on. You know, southern accents, and northern accents, and people told me I had a funny accent, and I said, "No, you're the one with the funny accent." you know, like that. So, all that stuff. And, he says, "Hey, here's the deal, guys. You're eighty-three individuals tonight. Not everybody will graduate. Some of you won't make it. Some of you will decide to quit, and you'll find a way out. And, some of you, you'll want to stay, but you won't make it. But, however many of you graduate, and, I would guess it's going to be somewhere between seventy-five and eighty, when we leave, you're not going to be eighty-three individuals, you're going to be one unit." Does that mean that I was no longer Pete Paine? No, of course not. Did that mean that I was no longer an individual human being? Of course not. But, what it meant was, we thought like a unit, we thought like a company, and company, by the way, for civilians, that's just what they call the group of people that go through basic training together. Has that changed? We called it a company in basic training. That's the eighty of us that went through training together. I was in company 352. That's a lot of years ago. Okay? So, here we go. He says, "You're going to think like one unit." and, I think, and some ways, it's a lot like that in Christianity. Yes, we're individuals. Yes, we have our own likes and dislikes. You might like this style of music, I might like that style of music, you might like—there's lots of things that we can disagree on. But, salvation, the Gospel message, we have to agree on. And, to be effective in ministry—watch this—to be effective in ministry, we have to be able to work together. So, if we believe that, and we agree with that, then, what is one of Satan's great goals? Division. Which is the opposite of unity. To get us divided, right? Parrish doesn't like me. I don't like Parrish. Division. Unity. Right? I walk by him and he sneezes, and what I thought he did was snicker. You know, (snort) I don't like him. So, I don't say, "God bless you," I say, "God, get him." Are you with me? And, if we don't stop the devil, if we don't stop the devil from separating us and dividing us, we won't be able to accomplish what God wants us to

accomplish. Amen? That's just simple, basic truth. That's not deep theological teaching. I'm not here to impress anybody today with deep theological teaching, I'm here to preach a simple gospel message and, hopefully, each and every one of us will look and see ways that may be we've shifted a little bit, where we're not working in the unity and the harmony that we need to in order to effectively do what God has called us to do. Amen? It's happened to me. It's happened in my family, it's happened in ministry, it's happened in life. Amen? So, here we go: The first three words—put the whole mission statement up, if you would, Pete, it's just a simple ten-word mission statement for our International Ministry, and for those of you who aren't familiar, let me explain: like most churches, we have a headquarters church. Our headquarters church is currently in Norfolk, Virginia. Okay? And, we have a congregation there, you have a congregation here. Within that congregation, we have what we call, an Outreach, or a fellowship to the military. Because, that's a large military area there in Norfolk. That's a group of people especially work with the military. But, in the congregation, we work with everybody that we can work with; young, old, civilian, military, it doesn't matter. Amen? One of the great things about Christian Fellowship that I like, is our diversity. Not every church has that. I'm thankful that we do. I'm thankful that we do. I think it's a great blessing that we have in Christian Fellowship that not every church has, and I love it. I love that when I first met our founding pastor, Pastor Davis, who passed away in 1999, that was one of the things that he had a strong heart for. I appreciated it then, and I appreciate it now. And, so, our headquarters congregation is in Norfolk, Virginia. This congregation also has a military fellowship in it. Phil and Alex lead the charge of working on the base, they're not the only ones, but they lead the charge for the military work on the base. Why? Because, we feel that within the Christian calling that I referenced in the Great Commission, "Go you therefore and teach All Nations..." that God gives many ministries a specialty area; some for homeless, some for food shelters, some, you know, for a place for—it just could be a variety of things. When you hear Campus Crusade for Christ, you know that that's an outreach ministry to college campuses, right? That's their area that they feel a unique calling to. Some ministries feel unique calling to developing nations, or third world countries. And, they feel like their work is to do mission work in other places. We feel that the area that God has called us to do, in addition to the obvious calling of Christianity for all of us, is to have a connection with military. One of the reasons that that's a really important thing to do it's because of the transient nature of military. You might be stationed in a place for three months, for example, for a school. Well, how do you connect with a church in three months? I mean, Don was looking for a church, he found one. My twin brother was in the Navy for a career. When we got out of high school I went in the Navy as a career as an enlisted person, and Paul, my twin brother, went to college. Four years later, I was getting out of the Navy and Paul was coming in the Navy. So, he came in as an officer, as an ensign, and, then, he retired, many years later, as a captain. And, so, the reason I mention that is Paul accepted the Lord, he and his wife, I had the privilege to baptize them, and he said, "One of the greatest challenges that he, and most military families face, is, every time they go to a new duty station, is finding a church." That was before we have the network that we have in ministry. And, our prayer, and our goal is, that we could say to people who were going from here to Norfolk, or from Norfolk to Jacksonville, or Jacksonville to San Diego, or San Diego to Honolulu Hawaii, or Yokosuka Japan, or Everett Washington, and so on, and, the places that I just mentioned, we have fellowships in all those places. And, our prayer, and our goal is getting a stronger, more seamless connection for that, so that as people travel—you say, "Well, what does that have to do with me?" that's one of the things I hope to share today that will be helpful for all of us to see, that you are a part of that, and a big part, in a big way. And it doesn't take from you, it blesses you, and, it doesn't take from the military to be part of your fellowship, or congregation, depending on the nature of where you're at, but it blesses. it's a win-win scenario, and I hope to talk about that in a way that's meaningful today.

So, let's take the word, 'educate.' We all know that—go back to Matthew 28:19, "Go ye therefore and..." what? Teach. That's to educate; that's to teach, right? Go ye therefore and teach All Nations, right? Okay, so...

So, let's take the word, 'evangelize,' that's the first word in our ten-word mission statement. So the first word is evangelize, that's letting your light shine. That's to go out and tell people about Jesus, amen? It's to go out and tell people about Jesus. Sometimes that starts with a simple, "God bless you," sometimes it's a family member, sometimes it's a stranger, but— show of hands: how many of you believe that Christians have a calling, a responsibility to evangelize? One way or another, you have an opportunity to tell others about your Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen? I don't mean that you have to stand on the street corner and preach, but, what I do mean is, that you have to prayerfully look for ways to be a testimony of Christ. Amen? Don't try to hide it under a bushel, Scripture says (Matthew 5:15), but, be like a candle that is set on a candlestick that gives light to the whole house. Amen? Amen? So, this idea of evangelizing, can we accept that that's a universal call to Christianity? Evangelize? Okay, but, it's also a call within Christian Fellowship, isn't it? And, that doesn't matter what part of Christian Fellowship you're in. You could be a part of this congregation, a part of the military fellowship here, it doesn't matter. But, the better people get at evangelizing, in Jacksonville Florida, which is one of our fellowships, does that help the whole ministry? The better you get at evangelizing, here in our congregation in Waukegan, or Great Lakes, we call it, does that help the whole ministry? So, we're working together. Sometimes, we don't see each other; we don't know what's happening in other places. And we're trying to get better and better and better at communicating that, so that we feel more connected with the whole body of Christian Fellowship, which is a part of the body of Christ. But, can you see how evangelism anywhere helps everywhere? Amen? And then, to educate, and I spoke on that.

And then to equip, to give people the tools. One of the things that we've been working on, very diligently, in our headquarters, is to have the tools to equip people. So that people who travel can stay connected with ministry. And, that might not seem so important to you, to those who are in a congregation, to those who are in a congregation. Because, you say, "I come every Sunday, I get fed, and I get nourished," but, what about what happens to the person who's out at sea for six months? That's on deployment, and they don't have a church that they can go to, they don't have a place they can go? And, we have those tools, those resources to equip people, so that they can continue to study the Word of God and grow in the Word of God and receive Fellowship. Someone said to me this morning—I don't remember who it was— "I enjoy seeing you online," something to that effect. "I enjoy watching you on the internet," because we have broadcasts. We have different tools. We have people that go out to sea, and write us letters, and say, "it's such a blessing that I was able to download all the information, so that even when I don't have an internet connection, I have a constant support system of ministry." Now, if somebody's out to sea, and, let's say, their ship is stationed in Yokosuka, Japan, where we have a fellowship, and they continue to grow in God, does that bless the whole ministry? Of course it does. Who knows, but, that person might, their next set of orders might be to come to Great Lakes as an instructor, and then, they would not only be part of the military fellowship here, at Great Lakes, but part of this congregation? Amen? Pete, you still teach on base, but you were a military instructor here at Great Lakes, before you got out of the Navy, right? So, here we go, we all work together. And, I think that sometimes we forget how connected we are. We forget how intertwined we are. We forget how much it matters. Does that make sense?

Short story: some of you've heard this one, because some of you have heard some of my childhood stories; I was eleven years old, maybe twelve years old, when my oldest brother went to Vietnam, and, so, you know, he was out of sight and out of mind; one more bedroom for the rest of us to share; there were six kids in a five-bedroom house. Mom and dad got one of those, so that means that, you know, some of us were sharing a room. And, so, when my brother Steve left for Vietnam, I thought, "Great!" Jim gets that room; Gary gets out of our room. Paul and I are sharing a room now. So, one less person in our room. So, I was real happy he went to Vietnam.

And, every morning, my dad would put an eight and a half by eleven notepad on the kitchen table, and he'd say, "Don't leave the house until you write something to Steve." Every morning, he put an eight and a half by eleven notepad on the kitchen table and say don't leave 'til you... Every night, he would add to that letter and put it in an envelope and send it. Sometimes Steve would get those ten at a time, because that's just the way the mail ran. But, you know, he passed those around to all of his shipmates. And, he said they all liked them. Because we'd write stupid stuff, like, "We had hamburgers last night; I got two. Stay there." Silly stuff. Does that make sense? But, you know what? my dad was reminding us with that eight and a half by eleven, we're still family. He may be halfway around the world, but he's still your brother. And it matters. And you can't just forget him because you don't see him. Amen? And we have brothers and sisters around the world. We can't forget them, because we don't see them. And they can't forget you because they don't see you. Because everyone blesses everyone. A rising tide—you might want to write this down; I don't know—a rising tide lifts all ships. Everyone that is a blessing, blesses everyone that will be blessed. We are a family. We are a ministry.

So, the next part of our mission statement is: "Providing Christian fellowship and spiritual support worldwide." I sometimes think that we forget that when we—Pastor Ulysse, you shared today that you were taught Bible studies. One of the people that taught you Bible studies was Joe Ramirez. Right, Joe? So, then Pastor Ulysse leaves here, he goes to Norfolk. He was stationed there, and he was a blessing in the congregation there. Pastor Thomas continue to mentor and teach Pastor Ulysse. Right? Pastor Ulysse leaves Norfolk, he goes to Florida, he starts at church there, he leaves Florida, to go to Haiti, to start a work there. Now, I don't think Joe Ramirez can take credit for the work in Haiti, any more than I can take credit for the work in Haiti, because I baptized Pastor Ulysse, but, if Joe hadn't taught, if I hadn't baptized, if Pastor Ulysse hadn't heard, our school today in Haiti, that you're a part of, has over six hundred students. Is that right? Because I heard a different number the other day; it was seven hundred. It's close to seven hundred. I'm anxious to say seven hundred. But, we're building a new kindergarten. That work started—do you know how that work started? Yes, give the Lord of praise. That's a powerful work. You're touching over seven hundred lives in that school in Haiti with the work that you do here, you say, "In this rented building, on this metal folding chair?" Absolutely, in this rented building, on this metal folding chair. Amen! We're in it together, amen? We're in it together, amen? How many of you have had the privilege to go to Haiti and see the work there? Kirk, Joe, Parish, I'd love for many more of you to go. Pastor Ulysse takes a trip with a group of people, every year, he goes several times. In fact, four days after we get back from this trip, Pastor Ulysse will leave for Haiti. He'll be there, with the leaders and the teachers there. And, that's out in the village churches, too. We have several churches throughout the island nation of Haiti, and, we also now have a thriving and growing ministry in the Dominican Republic. And you're part of that ministry in the Dominican Republic. And, some of you might be sitting here, sort of feeling like, "Why do I need to hear this? Why does this matter to me?" Because, it all starts with each of us realizing that we're part of the body of Christ and we impact each other. Amen?

When Paul was in prison, he wrote letters. And he thanked people for their support. Long after they couldn't see him. Long after they couldn't visit with him. Long after he couldn't visit with them. But, he thanked them for their support. And, the ministry continued. And, how did he close his letters? Thanking God for their faithfulness, for their continuing in the Word. And I pray that what happens today is, the we get reminded afresh that we're part of the body of Christ, amen? And, many of you help support the international ministry. And, that support helps to do things in San Diego, California. And Yokosuka, Japan, and Honolulu, Hawaii. It helps support trips. This weekend, right now, as we speak today, Todd Morgan, who many of you know, and also, Bill Griffiths are in South Carolina at the marine base. I just drew a blank. I'm a little embarrassed that I just drew a blank, but it's brand new to us, it's a new fellowship that has just started, and Pastor Ulysse and I spoke to them last night, and had a prayer with them, and, I was in Charlotte, two weeks ago visiting our fellowship there. And, so when you support International, you're

supporting all that work. Beaufort, that's it, thank you. Beaufort, South Carolina. And, so, Byram and Seth who are Marines, were stationed there, benefited from the visit, and the fellowship, and they were able to invite their fellow Marines out to the study they had last night on the base, there in Beaufort South Carolina, and you're a part of that. You're a part of that. So, I came to tell you today don't look around and count how many people are here today, and think that that's the part of the ministry that you're a part of. You're part of a much bigger ministry than you see. And, we can't forget you, and I'm asking you not to forget us. We're in this together; we minister to each other. And, we're getting better and better at the resources on the website. We're going to talk a lot about that at the church conference coming up.

But, when we provide Christian fellowship, let me explain something: I'm going to come back, I'm going to circle back, and try to nail down this point a little bit harder. When you provide Christian fellowship for someone here, you're strengthening the whole ministry. And, when we say provide Christian fellowship, sometimes that's visiting in a prison. Sometimes it's visiting another base, like Todd and Bill are doing today, in Beaufort South Carolina. Sometimes it's visiting a fellowship—like Debby and I had the chance to do two weeks ago—Charlotte. And you're a part of that. You said, “Well, just my money goes there,” no, your heart goes there. It matters. We're family. You might not see all your brothers and sisters this side of Heaven, but we're a large family. We're a big family, and we're in this together. Can the church say amen? Well, what does that matter to me? Well, you know what? It's possible, that in some cases, you might not see the benefits of our bigger family this side of Heaven. But, does it matter to you that you might be a part of seeing someone saved? Does it matter to you that you might be a part of seeing someone saved that's going to go out to do a work—did you catch how powerful that is that Pastor Ulysse was just a sailor stationed here? And when I say just a sailor, I'm saying, you know, no status in ministry. When I say just a sailor, I don't mean that as a negative thing. You know, no one looked at Pastor Ulysse when he was in “A” school, and said, “Wow! He's a bishop!” right? Right? But, somebody shared a Bible study with him, somebody baptized him, somebody encouraged him. What he got stationed in Norfolk, which was the continuation of being part of this body, right? The body of Christian Fellowship, which is part of the body of Christ. He continued to get mentored and taught. And, now, over six hundred children, today—that's just one work in Haiti. The school. Does it excite you to know that you're a part of that? And, was it just two weeks ago that Charlene Turner was just up here sharing about the work, and One Hope for Haiti? How many people did that encourage? To see that work that's there, to know that you're a part of it? Amen? And, whether you sponsor a child there or not, you're still part of it, if you're part of Christian Fellowship, because that work matters. And, by the way, if you don't know how big that work is—what I mean by big is how important that work is, do you know that in Haiti, if you don't go to private school, you don't go to school? They don't have public schools. “Well, you know, if they don't go to our school they'll go somewhere.” They won't. They don't have public schools. How many school teachers do we have here? Abby's here, who else? Mrs. Razumov, Linda, you know? Our children are blessed; they always have places to go. And, the fortunate ones get great public schools. Some people choose private schools. But, everybody has a school. That's not true in Haiti. Some children grow up in Haiti without school. They don't learn how to write. They don't learn—and, do you know what that means for the rest of their life? And, you're making a difference in them. You say, “Pastor, what's this message about today?” That we get to be a part of a family that makes a difference. We get to be a part of a family that makes a difference. And, we don't always see the fruit of that labor this side of Heaven. We don't always see the through that labor this side of Heaven. Does anybody remember that song? It's an old song, it's a stretch, it's a Ray Boltz song, it's a ballad, and the name of it is, “Thank you.” And, it's, thank you for what you did for the Lord. And, the song is about people speaking from Heaven, and one of the people speaking from Heaven, in the song, is someone who says, “Thank you, you were the bus driver that drove the church bus that took me to the church where I gave my heart to the Lord. Because of you, I'm here today.” And, it goes on, with different examples like that. So, if you're a church bus driver,

for example, do you know how big your work is? Do you know how big your work is? Pastor Davis used to say, "Ushers are the most important people in church, because they're the first smile anybody sees. amen? And, by the way, I want to talk about this building for a minute. We're going to outgrow it, and we're going to have our own building, and, we're talking about that this week. But, so what if we— isn't this a great place to see people saved? Isn't this great place? When we were worshipping in the early days of ministry, here, and some of you remember a building that was on Washington Street that we rented for a while. It was 1614 Washington Street. Our chapel, our chapel, I'm going to say it again, our chapel was smaller than the entranceway of this building. Smaller than the greeting area with the little couches out here, I mean, the chapel was smaller than that. So, one night— I share this with Parrish and Andy just yesterday or the day before— so, it was a New Year's Eve service, and I had invited somebody to service, and they came and they were a pretty wealthy person, a business owner in the community, and, so, when they walked in, I started to say, "I apologize for our small building, that we're renting," it's not a church building, it's like an office converted to a church, and the Holy Spirit spoke to me, and said, "Are you going to apologize for what I've given you?" and, I said, "Welcome to our building. We're so thankful for what God has provided us with." Can we give the Lord a praise? Don't ever apologize for what God's given you. Don't ever apologize for what God has given you. Don't ever apologize that you don't know as much as somebody else or that you can't speak.

I'll tell you a story: some of you will like this because it'll give you a chance to laugh at me. And, I mean that in a positive way. So, as I was saying, when I was senior pastor up here, before we went to Norfolk, I visited Norfolk, and I taught a Bible study one night. And, so, I had a horrible, bad sinus headache, I mean, I shouldn't have taught. I should have stayed home. But, I thought, "I'm going to press through, and teach." It was a mistake, the people deserved better. So, I didn't do good. And, you might be thinking, "Do you have a sinus headache today?" I didn't do good. But, I did what I could, and, so, afterwards, there was a young guy who happened to be visiting from the Navy base, sharp man. And, he said to me, he said, "You gave me a lot of hope tonight. A lot of encouragement." And I said, "I'm glad to hear that." And he said, "Let me tell you how." He said, "You're a terrible Bible study teacher, and, I figure, if you could do it, I can do it," and, I remember exactly what I said to him, "I'm glad I could encourage you. God bless you. Step away before I hurt you." You know. And, it's just one of those things where, you know, you just do your best, and if you don't know, you don't know, sometimes, the seeds you plant, you don't know, sometimes. He was sincere, he thought, "Wow," because, the way they introduced me, "He must be somebody. I can do this," you know? So, I tell you that to say, don't ever underestimate the impact that you have. When I became a Christian, I knew one verse, and I went back to my barracks, and I went to a guy that was willing to listen, and I said, "Hey, I know a Bible verse," and I shared it with him, and then I said, "You want to give your heart to the Lord?" and he said, "Yeah." and I thought, "Man, I'm an evangelist! I'm awesome. I rock!" and you rock. And, I hope what's happening today, in this simple, straightforward, sort of country-bumpkin message, if that's what it is, I don't know, is that you feel like, "You know what? That's right, I am part of a big family. I do matter. It's not just the people I see in the room that I worship in." Our family is a big, beautiful, wonderful family. The weekend of June 22nd to 24th, we're going to have, what we call, our International Conference. And it's going to be in our headquarters congregation in Norfolk, Virginia, and the International Ministry will host it. But, that's your conference. That's your conference. And I hope you can come, and I hope you can be a part of it. Some of you will be able to come early and stay late. I hope you do.

And, Pete Shepherd, by the way, is helping grow the church in Norfolk grow. He just had another grandchild. So, there you go, there's Pete's efforts, right there. Who knew? He's helping the church in Norfolk grow. Thank you. I love you all more than I know how to tell you.

So, the last part of our mission statement is spiritual support worldwide. I touched on that before, but I want to, I want to spend a little more time on that. What you do goes around the world, what do you do really matters, what you do makes a difference to brothers and sisters that

need that difference. Amen? And my prayer is to get better and better at feeling that, around the world, so that our fellowship in Yokosuka, Japan, knows that you're praying for them. And, the people, here, know that you're being lifted up, and prayed for, and loved by those around the world, wherever they are. Whether they're on a ship out at sea, or in another congregation, or another fellowship. We're in this thing together. We're working on ways to get better and better. I'm going to share a lot at the International Conference about the tools that we've been putting in place, advancing education, and our website, and different interactive tools so people can be mentored long distance. Those are things that most ministries don't do, because they don't feel the heart to connect with people that are traveling. But, we feel that that's what God's laid on our hearts. We are working at ways to meet that challenge. And, do better at it every day. And, so, I want to spend the moment on a verse that is truly my whole heart verse, a verse that I believe is—you know, sometimes people will say, "What's your favorite verse?" I believe this is the one that I feel most called to represent, and that's Matthew, chapter five, verse sixteen. In Matthew 5:16, Jesus Christ is speaking, and He says these simple words: He said, "Let your light..." let your light, you as an individual, you have a light, it could be a kind word to somebody, it could be a kind word to somebody, and you don't know, you don't know, how much a kind word means, how much a kind word matters. My fourth grade teacher—I'm going to tell a story that's so embarrassing. Some of you know that when I was ten, my mother had a cerebral hemorrhage that left her blind, paralyzed, and she spent the rest of her life in a nursing home. That was third grade. So, my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Kern, knew I had a problem. She didn't know what it was. But she reached out to me, and she cared. She took me to my father and talked to him. She said "Something's wrong with Peter," and she worked with me until they figured it out. You know what? If Mrs. Kern hadn't helped me, as an eleven-year-old boy, I might not be here today. I might have taken a very different path. I never—once, once I knocked on Mrs. Kern's door, after I got out of high school, I was at home on leave from the Navy, and I thanked her. Once. After all the years, I went back, and I said, "Mrs. Kern, I was in your fourth grade." "Oh, I remember you, Peter." she didn't remember my face, but as soon as I said, "Pete Paine," "Oh, I remember you, Peter." I said, "I remember you too, Mrs. Kern. Thank you." How many of you are Mrs. Kern, or Mr. Kern to somebody? You're helping them on their journey, and you may never see them again this side of Heaven, but you matter to their life. You make a difference. I left out the embarrassing part, where the principal said, "I have three sons. I have spanked you more, this year, than I spanked all my sons in their entire lives. What is wrong with you, son?" I said, "I don't know, Mr. Ruby, I really don't know. if I knew, I would change it. Clearly, something is wrong, though." That's all I'll tell about that.

I love you. God is performing miracles here. I'm so excited about how God's blessing. I'm so excited about how God's ministering. And, you're encouraged, in spite of the fact that you don't see a lot of growth. Don't let the devil tell you that we don't have what we need to succeed. Don't let the devil tell you that we don't have what we need to grow. Don't let the devil tell you that we're shrinking. My God's not shrinking. My God's growing. My God's growing. My God is exciting in my life, is your God exciting in your life? If He isn't, then ask why, and say, "God how can You connect—How can I connect with You? How can You connect with me? What do I need to change?" This relationship, this walk that we have with Christ, should be exciting. If you're here today, and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, I invite you to right now. I invite you to say, "God I want you in my life, I want you to lead my life, and guide my life. Jesus, I accept you as my Lord and Savior. I want to follow you." I remember the day I prayed that prayer, and I followed Him by getting baptized. After Jesus gave the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19, Peter and the others went out, and they did it. You can read it in Acts 2:38, it says, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." That day I was buried with Him, and, as it says in Romans, I was raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). I began a journey, which I'm still on today. And, I came here, today, to acknowledge that we haven't done everything great, and we haven't communicated as effectively as we could have in

some ways, we've dropped the balls in some ways, but, I can tell you that that ball is currently picked up, and we're growing. We're growing as a ministry. We're getting stronger. I'll tell you, that we've worked hard these last ten years on laying a foundation that we can build on.

I remember—this will be my final story: I remember when Lake Forest Hospital was putting on a new addition. And, back then, I had an occasion to be in Lake Forest Hospital three or four times a week, and, I saw—and they had a two story building where they decided to build the addition, and, so, they tore that building down, and then they began to dig. I didn't know how big the addition was going to be. But, it took them almost a year to get back to ground level. They went three or four stories down, and then, they drove the concrete pillars into the ground. And, then, they started building the walls that would become the basement walls. A year later, they were at ground level. And, it looked like it was worse than before they started, because, before they started, they had a two-story wing on the hospital; a year later, they were only at ground level. And, then, the next year, there was a seven-story building there. And, I believe we spent a long time getting this foundation in place, properly, over these last ten years. But, I believe what we're going to see in the next year, and the year after, is going to be explosive growth. We need to do it together. I came here today to say I love you, and I thank you. For those of you who were looking for a fiery evangelistic message, I know I didn't deliver that today. But, I hope what I've delivered today was a message of saying, "Let's work together. We're in this together. Let's do all we can. Let me know what I can do to serve you better. I'll do my best to let you know what you can do to serve God better. And, together we'll get it done." Amen? I appreciate you more than I know how to tell you. I'm thankful to be in this ministry together. I'm thankful for the truth that makes us free. I love you very much.

I should have started by saying the words I'm about to say: I bring you greetings on behalf of my wife, Debby, and, also, her mother, the mother of our ministry—and, what I mean by that, if that's foreign to you, is, Mrs. Davis, who I called the mother of our ministry, she and her husband founded this ministry. I had the privilege to be there in 1974 when they did that. And, I'm humbled to be part of it still today. And, I love you. And, I thank you for your love. May God bless you.