

After Life of Luxury, Former Scientist Becomes Gilroy Pastor

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By Chuck Flagg (religion@gilroydispatch.com)

Many people see a great division between science - the realm of observable facts - and faith - the realm of belief not based on solely physical evidence. But Manuel Pereira, the new pastor of Gilroy's Trinity Bible Church, has successfully bridged this gap.

Pereira was born in a small town in California's San Joaquin Valley - so small, he jokes, that when he left the town, the population sign was changed from "206" to "205."

He comes from a family of devout Roman Catholics, and he served as an altar boy for 11 years. But at the age of 17, while attending a Protestant church service, he received a new, stronger understanding and relationship with Jesus Christ. It was at this time, during his junior year of high school, that Pereira made a public profession of faith and began studying the Bible.

Later he studied applied physics at California State University, Fresno. At the time of his graduation in 1997, Pereira found himself much in demand as a scientist - both Hughes Aircraft and IBM offered him positions.

He chose IBM, moved to Silicon Valley and in two years was assigned to work at the prestigious Almaden Research Center. Well-regarded for his work in the scientific community, Pereira was all set to begin doctoral studies at Stanford University when his life took a dramatic change of course.

After moving to Gilroy with his wife and children, Pereira visited Trinity Bible Church one evening in 2003 as they looked for a new church home. He remembers being somewhat unimpressed at the "industrial" appearance of the building and the small congregation.

But the powerful teaching of Pastor Vaughn Park and the love evident in the people who greeted him after the service convinced Pereira that this church had a lot to offer. Soon he became involved in the teaching programs, including preparing a 23-week Sunday School course on evangelism. He was elected to serve as a deacon for a year, followed by election as a church elder.

For the past two years, Pereira says he has been feeling an increasingly strong call to full-time ministry. When discussing this with his mentor, Pastor Park, he was warned: "Don't pursue this ministry unless it's the only thing you can do."

But it became evident that it was the only thing he could do; that he was willing to set aside all - scientific career, handsome salary, ideal working conditions, expensive home - to follow God's call to teach and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Plans to sell his house and move his family to Southern California to begin studying at The Master's Seminary last year were deferred after Pastor Park announced his resignation to accept a call from a church in his hometown.

Earlier this year, Pereira was accepted and enrolled to begin his course studies at Master's this fall. After much prayer and discussion, the leadership of Trinity asked Pereira to become their new pastor. Although he was tremendously grateful, he felt inadequate to serve in this position without seminary training.

Much discussion and many prayers ensued. Finally, with the congregation's overwhelming confirmation, an agreement was reached: Manuel Pereira was installed as the church's new pastor on Aug. 6; this year he will begin studies for his graduate degree in ministry through Master's distance-learning program, taking courses in Old Testament, New Testament, Greek and Hebrew.

In the fall of 2007, Pereira will begin commuting to Sun Valley to take classes on campus but will spend most of each week in Gilroy ministering to his congregation. Already fully licensed as a minister, he will seek ordination from the seminary after completing some course work.

Pereira esteems the charge to "teach the word" with reverence, diligence and dependence on God.

"I know what I am not, but it's not about me - it's all about Him," Pereira said. "I am just a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. My lack of training and experience cause me to cling ever more tightly to the Lord, through His perfect Word, the Bible. I have a passion for the truth and a gentle, affectionate desire to see people repent and flee from the wrath to come. I resolve to pursue the faithful preaching of the word, in sound doctrine and genuine practice. I aspire to follow in the footsteps of Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, and pray that the Lord would use me to bring honor and glory to His name."

In closing, Pereira asked: "Please don't judge me or the church. Come and visit us, hear the Word of God preached with conviction."



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