

Getting a job in Dallas by looking in St. Louis

By D. A. Sharpe

Having a call to be Executive Director of the Covenant Fellowship of Presbyterians, headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri, lasted as a very positive experience for about 10 years. At a certain point in 1981, my sense of God's hand on my life was telling me that my assignment at CFP was completed, and that I would be moving on voluntarily to other things.

A friend of mine who was President of a manufacturing business in the area recruited me to participate in a new function to add onto their operations. However, the business economy in Mid-America was not functioning well, and after about a year, it became necessary to discontinue the new activities in which I was a part. Here I was, age 43, unemployed, and the unemployment rate in the metropolitan area was close to 15%! There were a number of people I knew who were looking for work in their mid-careers, so finding a new job was not an encouraging prospect.

However, my personal inclination was that our family was growing up in the St. Louis area, and it had become "home" for us. Therefore, my searching for a new position focused only on the St. Louis area.

Some background inserted at this point was the beginning of the assurance we began to feel about being in God's Providence, even though we did not yet realize how that would develop.

Our three children were in the middle and high school range of grades. Our disappointment in the public schools where we were grew into our decision to place them in private education. Saint Louis, school-wise, is really a significant Roman Catholic School resource there. For example, there were about two-dozen RC high schools in the area. Also relevant was that RC school tuition was about half the rate of the small number of private schools. Our prayer for guidance and soul-searching led us to register our children in the Catholic schools, which we did the previous year.



Having made that school choice, we were prepared to pay the up front advance tuition payments. What was realized now was that suddenly being without family income, we might actually need that money to buy food in the foreseeable future! This understanding took place about a week before school was to begin and tuition would be payable. The two schools in which our children had experienced so well good results the year before all were schools with waiting lists of students for whom they did not have room, but wanted in, if vacancies appeared.

We went to the two school administrators to explain our unemployment situation and financial dimensions affecting our decisions. We told them that we would remove our children, place them in public school for now, and the Catholic schools could allow three other students on their waiting list to enter. Unexpectedly, they turned down our offer! They said, you all are part of our family, and you need us in this time of changes. Leave your children enrolled here, and you can take care of tuition sometime in the future. Don't worry about it now!

WOW! If that's not an example of institution Christian outreach, I don't know what could be better! It was such a blessing to experience their care and concern for us, knowing all along we were not a Roman Catholic family in our worship. We just knew that things were beginning to work favor for us, and it was such a blessing!



About that time, my attention was directed to a Labor Day Weekend Conference that was to take place at the Presbyterian Conference Center in the mountainous Montreat, North Carolina area. I knew a number of my pastor friends would be there, and they could be solicited to pray for my St. Louis job search.

I took off by myself, so I could drive the 600+ miles there while a lot of thinking and praying could take place on the way. A year or two before that, I had taken my mid-life step by purchasing a 1980 two-seater English Triumph sports car convertible! There I was, rolling down the highways with the top down. WOW! I imagined that I appeared so cool!



Arriving at the Assembly Inn (hotel for the conference) in the evening, it was not until the next morning when I began to meet friends. At breakfast, one of the pastors said that he and 8 or 10 others were going into a planning meeting about the conference in a few minutes. Most of them would be pastors known to me, so he invited me to join them, briefly, to tell them of my employment need, and to ask them to pray for me about finding work in St. Louis.

Immediately after these pastors prayed for me, I looked up to begin my exit. Right at that moment, a pastor friend of mine, Dr. B. Clayton Bell, then pastor of the Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas, at that time the largest membership Presbyterian Church in the United States, motioned across the table to get my attention.



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“See me at the break,” his lips quietly mouthed. This was one of those unique times when I sensed something supernatural taking place. In that quiet, but quick moment, it was like an emotional arrow shot through my being. I knew that I was going to work for him!

Obviously, I waited around for an hour or so until those pastors took a break at their meeting. To make a long story short, I was brought onto Clayton’s staff to become the Business Manager a month later. Clayton was the head-of-staff, another pastor friend of mine supervised all ministry activities, and I would be responsible for everything not ministry! (Everything not spiritual, as someone laughingly said).

So this again is a continuum of seeking to live our family’s lives, based on what God’s plans were for us, and not what we initially thought our plans should be. Working in that position took the last 22 years of my church management career, and retirement in 2004 brought us out to our country home in Wise County, Texas for another series of God’s graces. We’ve resided here over a decade, and it keeps getting better and better!