

Worship

FAITH & VALUES

From the cockpit to the pulpit

After career in air, Cox is grounded by his faith in God

BY GREG THOMPSON
THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

As a young boy on the family farm in Webster in Breckinridge County, Don Cox often stood looking up.

Pointing up at the sky as a plane flew over, and his head tilted back as far as it would go, he'd tell his parents, "I'm going to do that someday."

Cox never knew why, but he'd always had a "bug" for aviation. Perhaps it was because of the stories told by nearby neighbors, Ray and Mildred Claycomb, who both served in World War II.

"I was enamored by his stories, and her stories, also," Cox said.

Cox joined the Air Force where he flew the T-37 and then the T-38 for more than eight years of active duty. He also flew in the Air Force Reserves.

Upon retirement in 1995, he was hired by Southwest Airlines, where he would spend the next 25 years, including 20 years as a captain.

The aviator turned pastor said the best education he received was in vocational school. He took machine shop as a high school junior and senior at Breckinridge County Area Vocational School. Upon graduation, he worked second shift as a machinist at Henry Vogt Machine Company while attending the University of Louisville J.B. Speed School of Engineering during the day.

Cox said, as a youth, he never desired to be a pastor.

His wife, Pam, played a pivotal role in Don's faith formation.

"She was always more grounded in her faith than I was," Don said.

Married for 41 years, Don remembers when their children arrived, it was Pam who made it clear that she wanted them to attend church. "I couldn't just sit at home and let the family go," Don said. "I went with them."



GREG THOMPSON/The News-Enterprise

Work is being done in the original chapel of College Heights Methodist Church. Pastor Don Cox said the space is going to be made into a youth ministry area. Barn wood will be installed as the background for the cross.

Very little did Cox and his family attend church while growing up. The only times his two brothers and he would go to church were when their uncle, Ranny Stith, picked them up.

What really sealed the deal between Don and God was Emmaus Walk 90 that he attended around 2003.

"Basically, a three-day, 72-hour vigil with Christ" is how he described the spiritual weekend. "That's when I feel like I got serious about my faith."

Don began teaching a Bible class not long after the Emmaus weekend concluded. On occasion, he would fill in for a Sunday evening service. In his heart, Don was simply helping out. The desire to be a full-time pastor still wasn't there.

In 2008, he took his first seminary course. A dozen years later, Cox received his degree.

Around 2010, he filled in at Cecilia United Methodist Church.

"They didn't have a pastor and they couldn't afford one," Cox said.

A moment he will never forget: Cox recalls an overwhelming calm and peace that came over him, that he had never experienced before in his life.

It would be another 10 years to finish his seminary education

and before he would walk away from the high-in-the-sky vocation of flying that so soared through his veins.

"I felt like God was calling me to the ministry full-time," Cox said. "I was praying for a way to leave flying, because I loved it."

It was then that COVID hit. Southwest Airlines offered the best package to pilots to leave during that time. It was five years of reduced pay and benefits.

Cox still struggled with deciding to walk away. He really didn't want to leave, but he believed God had other plans.

Cox eventually came to the idea that if he didn't take the severance package, there might be consequences.

"Now, that's totally Don-driven - that's not God-driven, there's nothing theological about that. That was my take on it."

The only thing that puts a sparkle in Cox's eyes, other than soaring above the clouds, is the work God is doing at College Heights Methodist Church in Elizabethtown, where he has served as pastor for nearly five years.

Had Cox not listened, he and Pam would not have been able to experience the fruits of their labors at College Heights.

"She does all kinds of stuff around here. She is the best

pastor's wife that you could ever imagine," Cox said. "She's smart, she's loving, she leads classes, she's just, hmmm."

A children's ministry and youth ministry are being established and some members who had left over the past few years have returned. Sunday worship, at both the 9 and 11 a.m. services, have grown exponentially.

The parking lot has been doubled in size, new windows have been put in place, new heating and air system installed. So many upgrades have taken place and a lot of the labor has been done by Cox and the church members.

Cox was able to bring Neil Janes on as a co-pastor. The two worked together for several years at Memorial Methodist Church in Elizabethtown.

For Don, Pam, Neil and members of College Heights, they feel it has been such a blessing to see their church grow in remarkable ways.

While God has Cox's faith grounded in service and leadership, he still enjoys flying and serves on the Elizabethtown Airport Board.

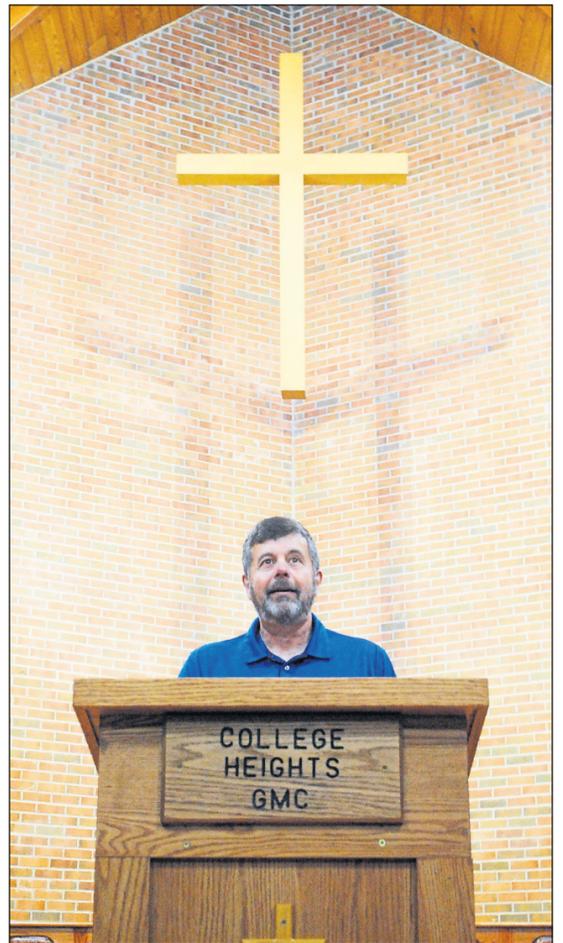
The old saying on stickers and car plates that reads "God is my co-pilot" is totally worded wrong, according to Cox.

"That phrase is wrong, by the way," Cox said. "God is my pilot - I'm his co-pilot. God should be your Captain."



GREG THOMPSON/The News-Enterprise

Don Cox, a retired pilot, is pastor of College Heights Methodist Church in Elizabethtown. His head and heart may sometimes be in the clouds, but his faith is grounded.



GREG THOMPSON/The News-Enterprise

Pastor Don Cox of College Heights Methodist Church in Elizabethtown spoke during Sunday's service about the two thieves on either side of Jesus. Cox set the lighting in the sanctuary so that members saw three crosses behind him.

REACH designed to help 'renew passion for gospel'

BY CHIP HUTCHESON
KENTUCKY TODAY

Kentucky Baptists will gather next week at Westport Road Baptist Church in Louisville for the annual REACH Evangelism and Missions Conference.

Jason Hay, evangelism strategist for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, pointed out that the event "offers encouragement, biblical clarity and practical tools that help churches renew their own passion for sharing the gospel and leading with intentionality toward the Great Commission."

The event begins with registration at noon Monday. The first session starts at 1 p.m. and the evening session is at 6:30 p.m. It continues Tuesday and concludes with an optional lunch and learn at 12:15 p.m.

"I hope every member from every church will attend

because the Reach Conference strengthens our shared mission as Kentucky Baptist churches," Hay said. "It's a place to hear what God is doing across the state and around the world, to learn from trusted leaders and to be reminded that we are better together in the work of evangelism and missions. When we gather with a common vision, it fuels cooperation, prayer and action that can ripple back into local churches and communities, helping Kentucky Baptists reach more people with the hope of Christ."

The schedule for Monday is:

Noon: Registration and exhibit hall opens.

1 p.m.: Session One featuring Todd Robertson, associational mission strategist for the Louisville Regional Baptist Association, and Ryan Coffey, pastor of First Baptist Church Somerset.

3:30 p.m.: Breakout Session No. 1.

4:30-6:30 p.m.: Dinner Break. Women's Track Dinner with speaker JoAnn Mann (free).

5:30-6:15 p.m.: Exhibitors open.

6:30 p.m.: Session Two featuring Herb Reavis, pastor of North Jacksonville (Fla.) Baptist Church and Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board; Sending Celebration.

8:45 p.m.: IMB After Party: Dessert and networking, sponsored by International Mission Board.

The schedule for Tuesday is:

8 a.m.: Registration and exhibit hall opens.

9 a.m.: Breakout Session No. 2.

10:15 a.m.: Session Three featuring Chris Johnson, senior pastor of New Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Radcliff, and Tim Beougher,

recently retired pastor of West Broadway Baptist Church in Louisville and now interim pastor of First Baptist Church Mt. Washington.

Noon: Dismiss
12:15 p.m.: Optional lunch and learn.

Music for the conference will be led by Westport Road

Baptist Church.

Breakout sessions include Don Barger, digital evangelism; Jeff Clark, growing a church in rural Kentucky; Ryan Coffey, church fostering; Brent Foley, reaching the Now generation; George Martin, what and who of missions; Dithson Noel, community engagement;

Bryan Proctor, how to live out James 1:27; Jesse Thomas, building a vibrant missions strategy.

Women's breakouts will be led by Anna Daub, reasons we can go boldly, part 1; JoAnn Mann, first encounters with people in need.

WORSHIP CALENDAR

SUNDAY

Meeting featuring church planter and leader Dr. Hendrik Vorster, 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., translated in Spanish, Abundant Life Church, 1511 S. Dixie Blvd., Radcliff. POC: 270-351-9990.

MONDAY

Meeting featuring church planter and leader Dr. Hen-

drik Vorster, 6:30-9 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, event hall, Abundant Life Church, 1511 S. Dixie Blvd., Radcliff. POC: 270-351-9990.

UPCOMING

ROAR Workshop, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. March 14, youth room, Abundant Life Church, 1511 S. Dixie Blvd., Radcliff. Know who you are

in Christ, walk confidently in faith, use your God-given voice with boldness, connect with other strong, faith-filled women through teaching, interaction and meaningful connection. Register by March 13. POC: alcky.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3462359.

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