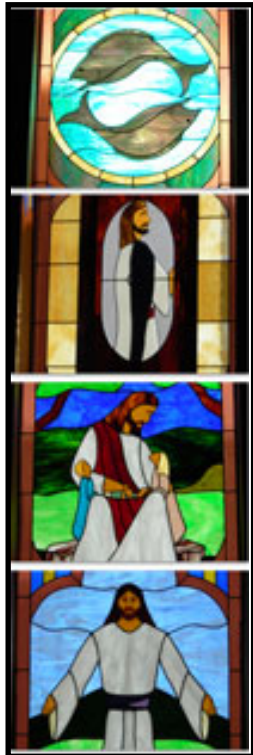


Looking Up at Alta Vista

by staff writer Dian Kidd



Alta Vista Baptist Church is putting her best face forward. When Pastor Chuck Lightfoot learned that 250,000 people passed by the facilities daily on Spencer Highway, he led the church to use stained glass art to create a gospel witness. Eight beautiful custom designed windows line the worship center. Designed by Lightfoot himself and crafted by Lightfoot and Senior Deacon Carroll Full, the four windows on the Spencer Highway side depict the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

On a walk through the worship center, Lightfoot shares the story behind each window. One of the windows is especially moving. Jesus is tenderly watching and embracing two small children and a baby, memorializing two children of Alta Vista whose tragic deaths particularly touched the congregation in recent years.

Lightfoot is clearly a man of action. He has a firm handshake, a welcoming smile, and a no-nonsense, straightforward way of speaking. The red pickup truck parked outside has 2x4s loaded in the back. Lightfoot's Thursday attire of blue jeans and t-shirt clearly indicate he's come ready for the work that's involved in maintaining all old facilities. Roofs need repair. Windows get broken. Paint starts to peel. Hurricanes flood the hallways. In smaller congregations, the pastor is often called upon to handle a lot of that personally. Alta Vista is no exception. Complexly, Lightfoot is also a designer and an artist. He is a man of prayer who loves and creates beauty. "God has been leading me toward some meditation," he says, opening the door from his office to reveal the Prayer Garden outside that he is creating in the courtyard nestled between the two buildings.

Although the water has been turned off for winter servicing, the tranquil and inviting design of the Prayer Garden is clear. One fountain of tall, slim pillars is joined by a rock-lined stream to a second fountain comprised of a tower of rocks. Pathways meander along the rows of knock-out roses and crepe myrtles. A stone bench provides a place to sit and reflect. The stained glass windows lining this side of the sanctuary building invite one to look upward and reflect on Jesus' love for us. Lightfoot explains where the gazebo and the coy pond will be. He describes the jasmine that will flower on the archways and along the currently bare metal guardrail in the parking lot.

It is well known that pastoring a 70-year-old church in a building in disrepair in a transitioning community is not for the faint of heart. Chuck Lightfoot is anything but faint of heart. The church was comprised of 39 individuals when he came. They had abandoned the now beautiful worship center because it had fallen into such severe disrepair. They were meeting in an adjacent building. Lightfoot told them, "Oh no, now, we've got to worship in the sanctuary." With reluctance the small congregation agreed. The first Sunday it rained. Buckets had to be placed all through the sanctuary. "The drops falling in the buckets were so loud that they almost drowned out the preaching," Lightfoot remembers with a smile.

You wouldn't recognize it now. The roof has been repaired. The eight striking stained glass windows grace the walls. Each pew has been carefully sanded, painted white, and covered with a deep blue upholstery. A beautiful stained, waxed, hardwood worship platform covers the front of the sanctuary. A walk through the children's area reveals freshly painted walls with children at play painted on them. All this has been done because Lightfoot believes that God placed this church in this community to minister to the people who live here. While some congregations have found God leading them to sell and move to younger neighborhoods, Alta Vista believes that God has called them to stay.

Lightfoot's heart for this congregation and for the community is reflected as he shares his pride in the youth in the church. It is reflected as he respectfully greets the disheveled man in dirty clothes who walks in and "needs to talk" to him, assuring him he'll talk to him later. It's reflected as he talks with passion about the need to preserve the balance of justice and mercy, fairness and compassion, in the laws that govern the lives of immigrants in his neighborhood and our nation.

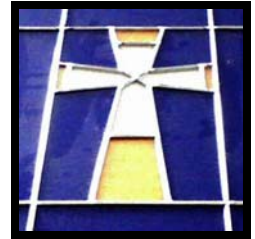
Reflecting the diversity of the community, a small chapel has been created for a Korean congregation who meets weekly and shares the facilities. "They are family to us," says Lightfoot. A Spanish-speaking minister has been called to develop a ministry to the Spanish-speaking adults while their children are enveloped in the youth ministry of the church.

In 1993, Alta Vista Baptist Church, called Chuck Lightfoot to be their pastor. It was the church in which he had been saved at age 12. It was the church where he had received his call to preach and where he had been mentored and discipled by the pastor there, Rev. Hendrix Maxwell. Lightfoot had connections there and a heart for the community. Sixteen years later, the church presents an astonishingly beautiful and artful face to the community, signifying hope and its commitment to this place.

Children are being discipled; diverse language groups are being ministered to; trials are being weathered; and people are being won to Christ. Things are looking up at Alta Vista.

For more information about the missions and ministries of Alta Vista Baptist Church, contact Pastor Chuck Lightfoot at 713.943.9800.

Alta Vista Church has a room dedicated to the ministry of making stained glass. For information about obtaining custom-designed stained glass windows for your facility, contact Pastor Lightfoot.



**Senior Deacon
Carroll Full**

Lightfoot shares that during the crafting of the eight stained glass windows, Deacon Full was diagnosed with cancer in his right eye. He continued working on the windows while receiving targeted radiation treatment in his eye.

"Even after he lost the vision in his eye, he never lost the vision in his heart of completing the windows," says Lightfoot.

Deacon Full now continues this ministry of making stained glass windows for churches and is currently working on windows for small African-American congregation.