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A new era

By [Melanie Tucker](#)
 of The Daily Times Staff



Associate Pastor Jordan Davis (left) and Pastor Keith Ross stand in front of Marble Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Friendsville. The two, who are both 27, took over the leadership of the church three months ago.

Keith Ross and Jordan Davis are first cousins, but more importantly brothers in Christ as this new generation of leaders takes Marble Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Friendsville into a new era.

Ross was ordained as pastor of Marble Hill a little over three months ago, while Davis became associate pastor. Both have been members of the church for several years, both are only 27 and are graduates of Greenback High School. The two possess the motivation to move Marble Hill in the right spiritual direction.

Ross previously led the music at Marble Hill and takes over pastoral duties from his father, Bill Ross, who decided to resign after almost 10 years in the pulpit. Keith said it was about two years ago that he let his church family know that God was giving him a new mission.

"God works in strange ways," he said, looking back at those months of questioning his destiny. He said God began talking to him about entering the ministry, but not necessarily as a pastor. "Then I got to the point where I couldn't imagine not being a pastor," this minister said.

Davis had likewise announced his desire to become a vessel of the church at the same time. So when Bill Ross made the decision to step down, these two were asked to step in.

"God had already spoken to both of us before anybody else did, to prepare our hearts," Keith said.

Styles that mesh

As associate pastor, Davis will provide support for his Christian brother and deliver the sermons each Sunday evening, while Ross will be in charge during the Sunday morning and Wednesday evening services. The two said they use different styles of preaching that mesh well together.

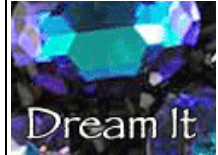
Ross described himself as more structured and a note maker. He uses PowerPoint for all of his sermons and lets his outgoing personality come through.

Davis, on the other hand, is more reserved and says he is comfortable in the role of a supporter. His sermons reflect his quieter demeanor.

"Everything Jordan does is heartfelt," Ross said of his associate pastor. "People say pastors need to be preached to. I enjoy the opportunity on Sundays for him to feed me the scripture."

Davis said in addition to sermons, his job is to be there and support Ross during any tough times he may have. In churches with only one pastor, it is sometimes difficult to find that shoulder to learn on.

The two leaders have been spending the last three months getting into their new roles and will be developing a strategic plan for Marble Hill's future. In addition to his pastoral duties, Ross is employed as the airline operations manager for Aircraft Technicians Inc. Ross' wife Starr is a dance instructor and has her own studio. Davis is a radiological control technician at Oak Ridge National Lab. His wife Jana is church administrator.



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Seeing past the present

The church purchased 10 acres a couple of years ago across the street from the church and behind the cemetery. Ross and Davis said plans include building a larger church with life events center. Davis said the potential for growth is ride outside the front door.

"There has been a lot of development in this immediate area," Davis said. "Within just one mile there are been lots of newcomers to this community."

Marble Hill recently held a visitation blitz and sent out 10 teams who visited 100 homes in the area. Ross said Marble Hill wants the community to feel its presence in a positive way.

"We are not trying to get anyone's money. We are here because we care for people. We want to have a church environment that says that," Ross said.

This pastor said the biggest challenge facing Marble Hill are misconceptions about this country church that may not look like a palace from the outside. "You can imagine people in here throwing snakes around," he joked. In reality, the church has a modern update inside with newly renovated sanctuary, and no snakes.

They embrace Southern Gospel, traditional hymns as well as contemporary and praise music. Sometimes video clips get the message across, but the focus never changes.

"Our message is 100 percent the gospel message," Ross said.

Marble Hill celebrated its 60th anniversary last weekend, and in its history there have been about a dozen pastors. Ross said he wanted his congregation to understand he was not coming in to imitate his father or be compared to him. It has been a smooth transition.

The church holds 110 and was overflowing recently. Davis and Ross said they hope to get started on building plans as soon as possible.

These two are full of hope for Marble Hill's future. As friends, cousins, and brothers in Christ, they are taking on this leadership challenge full speed ahead.

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