

## **“Remember Who You Are,” Encourages Retiring Pastor**

By Maureen Buscher-Dang Contributing writer

It's tough being a teenager. Just ask retiring 66-year-old Roger Poppen, lead pastor of Laurelglenn Bible Church. Raised in farm fields of South Dakota, Roger's folks grew oats, corn, alfalfa, cows, pigs and chickens until one day when he was 14. Roger had just graduated 8<sup>th</sup> grade with seven other pupils, half being cousins. His dad saw no future for his four sons, so the family packed up their belongings and moved to California. His father became a television repairman and his mother a bank teller. Culture shock set in when he started high school in Menlo Park as one of 700 freshmen, none of them relatives. Roger credits his teenage salvation to an encouraging youth pastor and involvement in the church. It was his rock that provided refuge during dark and difficult days when South Dakota seemed far away, in more ways than one.

In his junior year of high school, Poppen attended church camp where he had an epiphany. “I sensed this call to serve the Lord and his church. Feeling totally inadequate, I resisted that call for years, but at the encouragement of a pastor I went to seminary where the call was confirmed.” Indeed, Western Seminary in Portland is where he met Naomi, his wife and ministry partner of 42 years.

Roger received his first pastorate 40 years ago when he was 26-years-old. The last 20 of those years have been spent at Laurelglenn Bible Church on Ashe Road. When he and Naomi first came to Bakersfield in 1989, the church had about 600 attendees and took up 30,000 square feet. Twenty years and 850 baptisms later, approximately 2,000 now call Laurelglenn home. Facilities have expanded to 55,000 square feet.

When asked what he enjoys most, there is no hesitation. “What brings me the greatest joy in ministry is teaching the Bible....making it relevant and applicable to today's world. I'm not a rah-rah leader. I use expository preaching...the Bible still has answers to life's important issues.”

His preaching abilities, humble spirit and dry wit make Poppen unique from other pastors according to Holly Culhane, parishioner and long time friend. “Roger's focus is always on the “message,” never on himself. His last sermon was a great reminder from the New Testament book of Jude to remember who you are, where you're going and what you stand for...”

Poppen is particularly proud of the establishment of a “deaf” church within the church at Laurelglenn Bible. “We have Pastor Jeff Jackson who is deaf. He has about 50-60 parishioners. This is one of our nation's most unreached groups.”

Laurelglenn Bible Church is planning a special retirement celebration for Roger and Naomi this Sunday, September 20th, 10am in the gym at Centennial High School. Asked about this being his last Sunday, Roger confessed, “God has been good to me over the years. I've been blessed by Laurelglenn Bible Church. It's been extremely rewarding...I have no regrets.”

For more information on retirement festivities for Roger and Naomi Poppen, go to <http://laurelglennbible.org>

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What: Laurelglen Bible Church celebration for Roger & Naomi Poppen

When: Sunday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 am

Where: Centennial High School Gymnasium  
8601 Hageman Road

Info: <http://laurelglenbible.org>

***This article written by Maureen Buscher-Dang Contributing writer first appeared in The Bakersfield Californian on September 19, 2009. Holly Culhane is president of P.A.S. Associates, a Bakersfield human resources consulting firm. She can be contacted through her webpage at [www.PASassociates.com](http://www.PASassociates.com) or by phone at 631-2165.***

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