



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: John Leckenby | 559-733-9070, ext. 106
johnl@visaliafirst.com | www.visaliafirst.com

February 1, 2022

VISALIA FIRST ELECTS NEW LEAD PASTOR

Visalia, California – On the evening of January 30, a special meeting for voting members was held at Visalia First for the purpose of voting on a new Lead Pastor candidate, Dr. Mark Merrill. After opening with worship, votes were submitted via paper ballot. As a result, it was confirmed that Dr. Mark Merrill had been officially elected as the new Lead Pastor of Visalia First.

This recently held election was the result of a multi-year transition plan initiated by Pastor Mike D. Robertson and Visalia First's Board of Directors, with the assistance of Dr. Sam Chand and the Expand Group.

New Lead Pastor Mark Merrill, along with his wife Gretchen and other family members, will be relocating from Georgia where he will be completing his term as the Superintendent for the Georgia Assemblies of God. He will take on the full capacity of Lead Pastor in the months ahead, while Pastor Mike D. Robertson will continue in the Lead Pastor role until that time.

This is a historic season in the church's history, not only because of the transition of leadership, but also because of the method of transition. While Lead Pastors commonly depart their role immediately, Robertson and Merrill will be partnering together to transition the leadership of the church into the new season ahead. For the foreseeable future, Robertson will take on the role of Global Pastor, fulfilling a variety of roles as Pastor Mark Merrill assumes his new position.

Over the course of over fourteen years as Lead Pastors, Mike and Karen Robertson grew the church's weekly audience to over 7,000 on campus and through media audiences. Under the Robertson's leadership, Visalia First has become the number one church for missions giving in the Southern California Network of the Assemblies of God. 41% of the church's missions budget has been dedicated to local outreach, impacting the Central Valley of California on numerous levels.

In 2018, the Robertsons led the charge to dedicate a new Worship Center that seats over 2,500. Assets and attendance have doubled in the last decade. Relying fully on the guidance of God, the church has maintained its commitment to be a Spirit-filled church that is home to the Holy Spirit's work through signs and wonders.

To find out more about Visalia First, visit the church's website at www.visaliafirst.com and follow Visalia First on Facebook and Instagram. You can reach the church offices by calling 559-733-9070. For questions about the transition process, email leadpastor@visaliafirst.com.