

From the Pastor..

Dr. Sheron C. Patterson Excited to Go to Hamilton Park UMC as Senior Pastor

By Jackie Blalock Robinson



Just like when she eagerly accepted the call from God to serve Him and lead others to Christ, Dr. Sheron C. Patterson, also called Rev. Patterson or Pastor Patterson, or Dr. Sheron enthusiastically accepted the call from Bishop Michael McKee to lead the flock at Hamilton Park UMC. I recently sat down to chat with Dr. Patterson to see what's on her agenda for HPUMC when she gets here.

Jackie Blalock Robinson: It's been seven years since you've pastored a church. What made you want to return to the pulpit?

Dr. Sheron C. Patterson: Everyone is asking me that question. I am an ordained, itinerate elder of the North Texas Conference. The term "itinerate elder" means you agree upon ordination that you will move when the bishop says move. I was sitting in my office, minding my own business, when the bishop and the district superintendent, Cammy Gaston, came into my office and said, "It's time for you to move". The bishop saw that Hamilton Park would be available and thought that I would be the best person for the job.

So, I am excited about going there and taking not only my communication skills, but also my pastoral skills, my preaching skills, and my visionary skills. I have been out of the pastoring realm for seven years, but I've been very active preaching across the country. For the last seven years, I served on the extended cabinet. That has given me access to the best and brightest strategies on church growth and revitalization. I've learned what a vital church looks like and how to get there. Spending time with the bishop and the district superintendent these seven years has ingrained that into me, and I plan to pour it out into Hamilton Park A-S-A-P

JBR: What was your job at the Annual Conference Office?

Dr. Patterson: I was Director of Communications, which also means I was a member of the Extended Cabinet. The Communications Team was running at a high rate of speed. It's very effective. It's very motivating. It's connecting the 300,000 members of the North Texas annual conference. We have many platforms on which we communicate. We are equipping; we are teaching. In other words, I've brought it a 'mighty long way'. When I came here, it was running at a speed of the TV show, Leave It to Beaver from the '50s. Now, it's 2020 and beyond! The bishop knew my communications team was flourishing, so he thought me going to Hamilton Park was the best use of my talents.

JBR: What are your initial thoughts about Hamilton Park?

Dr. Patterson: When I look out at the sanctuary, I know it holds 1,500 people, correct? We have got to get back there. Hamilton Park is a jewel of Methodism. This is a landmark church. Hamilton Park is known all across Methodism. When I go to BMCR conferences, all of them know of Hamilton Park because of the grandeur of it. We have to get back to that in terms of membership. One of the first things I'm going to be doing, in addition to updating the communications, is getting to know the people. I want to get to know them, and I want them to know me. I'm a people person. I want them to have me over for a cup of tea, some lemonade, or some barbeque! I like people. That will be a lot of fun. I love seniors. Both of my grandparents were gone when I was born. So, I am always looking to find the 'love of a grandmother to take me in'. Both of my parents are now deceased, so I really value the power.

JBR: I see that you've been very active in the community—Operation Uplift summer program for at risk youth, health and wellness programs, Habitat for Humanity houses for breast cancer survivors, raising funding to provide low income women with free mammograms—what kinds of ideas do you have for the HP community?

Dr. Patterson: I'm really community-oriented and community based. So we're going to have to embrace those around us even more. Recently, The Dallas Morning News featured an article about a young, former NBA player who is trying to get an indoor basketball court down at the Willie B. Johnson Center. So, I reached out to him and told him I was coming on as pastor, and I want to get involved with the project. Of course, I've been over to the Pacesetter School and met with the outgoing and incoming community liaisons and the principal. I have already made contact with TI as well. I have a meeting set up with them already. I want to walk the streets of HP and find out who's there, talk to them, and find out what needs to happen. I want to meet the city council rep and the police division chief in this area as well.

I believe the church **must** serve the community. Someone once asked the question, "Would your community even notice if you weren't there anymore? And, so I want it to be if Hamilton Park vanished, the community would come running asking, "Where are they? We need them! We love them!"

JBR: We have a more mature congregation. Given the fact that social media is reality—not craze. How do you envision bringing them into the social fold?

Dr. Patterson: The first thing about bringing them into the social media fold is to have some mini classes or teaching sessions. In the classes the teacher will say, "Take out your phone, let's learn what Facebook is; let's learn what Instagram is." Or, we can assign teenagers to buddy up with them because it's just a matter of teaching and showing. Once you get on it (technology), you'll love it. Here is what everyone needs to understand, technology changes so fast that all of us could use a class to keep up.

JBR: I mentioned that we are a mostly mature congregation. How do you see getting young adults to come back to HP?

Dr. Patterson: Young adults will come where they are welcome. So, we're going to take an honest look at our programming, outreach, worship and the culture of our church to see if we are welcoming. We'll have to get some things in place quick, fast, and in a hurry. But, I do realize that this is going to take some time. I don't expect the church to be filled with young adults tomorrow.

JBR: You're right, and programming is going to be key.

Dr. Patterson: Yes, and young adults also means young parents. The Children's Ministry must be stellar. I'm talking about 'A+'. That will make or break a young parent's decision to come. They're going to walk in and make a decision to come. It cannot be second or third rate. Period.

JBR: We've evolved into a regional church. Maybe twenty percent of the congregation still lives in Hamilton Park and the surrounding community. The rest of us are passing four or five churches to get there. Are there things that we can do to make these members get more involved with the church?

Dr. Patterson: Yes, small groups are a proven, effective method for churches to retain members and to grow. One good example is Concord Church. They have groups all over the city. People get to come together to learn and talk and meet each other and build cohesiveness in their area. Small Groups is one of the keys to growing a church and to energizing the membership.

To bring about growth, we've got to have some love and cohesion among our members. New members are not going to flock in to an existing membership where there is chaos, anger, and rage. So we're going to have to love on each other, and begin to emit some love and attract some people. The saying is true in relationships between human beings and people in churches: "We are what we attract."

JBR: Now, you've said a 'word!'

Dr. Patterson: Oh, yes. In the dating arena, I tell singles all the time—you are who you attract, and they go "What!" I'll say that same thing with us. We have to make sure we are loving and kind and merciful and spirit-filled, and that will attract people of that same ilk. That may mean having greeters in the parking lot welcoming people in saying, "Hey, come on in, you are welcome. We're so glad you're here. Have a seat. What's your name?" You have to cover them with kindness from the beginning.

JBR: Would you like to add anything else?

Dr. Patterson: It's an honor and a privilege to be appointed to this church. I'm excited and looking forward to being here.