



I Am Second

by Sue Wright

LARRY D. JONES

Catch the local TV news, and you'll occasionally see a face from Second Baptist—Eric Zahnd's,

the Prosecuting Attorney of Platte County and feature of this column March 13th, and Larry Jones', Health Director of the City of Independence, and the focus of this week's I AM SECOND. Both men prove daily they are anything but cardboard cut-outs of the jobs they do. They are multi-dimensional and deeply committed to their work—to their families, their personal passions, and to their church.

When Larry Jones was elected to the Board of the National Association of County and City Health Care Officials, the City Manager of Independence, Robert Heacock, said this about him: "I am not surprised by Larry's selection. He has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life through public health in this state, in the region, and in our city. The City of Independence is fortunate to have a person of his caliber. He is an extraordinary advocate for public health." An extraordinary advocate for Second Baptist too!

Larry has been recognized by many organizations for distinguished service to his community. For instance, in the fall of 2007, he received the most prestigious award presented to an individual in the field of Public Health by the Missouri Association of Local Public Health Agencies and the Missouri Public Health Association—the W. Scott Johnson Award. It commemorates "the same skills, integrity, and devotion to duty and constructive leadership that characterized the life of W. Scott Johnson, an environmental public health specialist working in Missouri from the 1940's to the 1960's."

Larry has been the Health Director for Independence since December 2001. In that position he has founded among other taskforces, the Independence Coalition for Child Safety to prevent the spread of child abuse and the Healthy Independence Coalition dedicated to



Larry tending the coffee bar on Sunday morning.

reducing chronic disease through increased physical activity, improved nutrition, and a reduction in tobacco use. Currently, he is also working with interested agencies in addressing the needs of the hungry and homeless in Independence. He is active in groups committed to senior services, nursing standards, homeland security, and free health clinics. He is a respected mentor to others in his profession.

Larry holds a Masters Degree in Public Health from St. Louis University as well as a Masters in Secondary School Administration from Truman State University where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Education.

And what would Larry add to these and other accolades that describe him? Well, to begin with, he wants you to know, "I'm the guy you see in the Welcome Center most Sunday mornings, much of that time behind the coffee bar." He guesses that's why he can say, "I am Second," along with serving as a Deacon and chairing the Stewardship Committee. He admits with a calculated grin, "I'm the one who sends out those letters reminding us we're supposed to give to the church."

Larry will tell you he's not a predestination-type of believer, but he does think the Lord sometimes shuts one door and opens another to get our attention. In fact, as Larry looks back on his life for us, that will be the theme of his story. "I was called to serve children and youth when I was a teenager," he explains, "and being a good Baptist I thought that meant accepting a role in the ministry. I went

Want to share your story?

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to college fully intent on becoming a minister of music. But boy, did God shut the door on that! Instead, I ended up with a degree in business education. That's okay, I thought at the time. My ministry to children and youth will be as a teacher.

"In the summer of 1970," Larry goes on, "I was in graduate school (hadn't found a job in teaching yet) and engaged to Linda with plans to marry in August. A glitch soon developed in those plans however because Linda got the idea she wasn't going to marry me unless I had a job. In desperation, I headed for Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine hoping I might find night work there as a ward clerk. I knew I could type and by working nights, I would be able to go to school in the day time. I walked into the building to apply and found it was full of young people taking tests.

"I asked for an application form, filled it out, and since I had never applied for a job before, requested the secretary check it over for me to be sure I had completed everything correctly. She did and then asked me to be seated. Meanwhile, she showed the director of personnel my application and he immediately invited me into his office. He wondered if I had noticed all the people taking tests (How could I miss them?). I said yes and he informed me they were testing to be administrators in the college system. He asked would I be interested in testing with them. Turned out, he would stay with me until 8 that evening while I took the test.

"Two weeks later I began working with the college on a Federal Children's and Youth Project which concerned the establishment of something similar to an HMO, though at the time, we didn't know to use that terminology for what we were doing. I would hold this position for about 4 years or until 1974 when I got a call from the Missouri Department of Health that all the funds for federal projects were being transferred to the state capitol and they needed me to transfer too. Linda and I had liked living in Kirksville but were quick to move to Jefferson City with our eighteen month old.

"For the next 20 years or so, I worked at the State Health Department in the field of Maternal and Child Health, and in that position, had the opportunity to impact numerous policies and legislation that affected the lives of children and youth. My last seven years there, I created a new Center for Local Public Health.

"During this time, Linda and I built our dream house in Jefferson City—planned on being buried in the back yard we felt so planted (Just kidding!). I was a deacon at First Baptist in a variety of leadership positions and early on became involved with CBF. Especially active in Missouri CBF, I served on the board and as treasurer for several years. When the State Convention was taken over, I helped to create an organization know as Mainstream Missouri Baptists and served as their treasurer.

"For some reason—for a change—I wasn't holding any leadership role in particular at First Baptist in 2001. Rather, I was busy at my job with the Center for Local Public Health, among other responsibilities, helping the City of Independence find a new health director. The next thing I knew, I had been offered that position and the rest

is history. Remembering back, I have to believe the Lord had cleared my calendar in Jefferson City so I could be available for the challenges of Independence. And there have been many. For example, within the first four months of our arrival, four infants living in Independence were murdered by their caregivers. This naturally created considerable uproar, and in response, I started a Coalition for Child Safety with the help of several other organizations in the community. The Coalition is still active today."

According to Larry, what you've read, pretty much sums up his professional life. He hopes it has shown how a person like him—or like you—can answer the call to God's service without working full time in the church. "My career has always had something to do with children and youth," he reiterates, "but again, not as I expected."

Indeed, this creative, caring administrator with the ever-present twinkle in his eye—he's a doting grandfather too—exemplifies for all of us, just one more route to be traveled as a follower of Christ. He's a man of faith who has found his way no matter where that mysterious map called life may lead. Even to the taps of Percolator-in-Chief at Second Baptist! Leded ready, Larry?

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Larry and Linda Jones