



SENIOR PASTOR

Opportunity  
Profile

TRINITY FELLOWSHIP CHURCH  
Big Rapids and Newaygo, Michigan



# Overview

After 41 years of faithful ministry at Trinity Fellowship Church, Senior Pastor Gary deBock has determined the time is right to pass the baton of leadership to his successor. Under Gary's long tenure and strong teaching, Trinity has weathered the ups and downs of church growth and development from a group of 70 people when he arrived, to a multi-site church with two locations and 600-700 attendees each weekend. His departure creates an exceptional and rare opportunity for a talented successor to enter into a church where many things are going well, and to build on a strong foundation with a staff and congregation that look forward to continued faithfulness to the Word and Gospel impact in West Central Michigan and beyond.

Trinity Fellowship Church is affiliated with the [Evangelical Free Church of America](#). Trinity Fellowship's mission is *to be an integrated ministry that wins and grows disciples who show allegiance to Jesus Christ*. The church embraces core values that set them apart. They are *under the Word*, recognizing the Bible as their final authority. They seek to *reach both head and heart* (intellect and emotions), valuing the spiritual growth of individuals. They *grow healthy together* by doing ministry primarily in small groups, fostering a healthy and connected community. And they work *from the Church out*, intentionally pursuing an outward-focus, seeking to share the good news of Jesus beyond the church walls.

## Quick Stats

- Trinity Fellowship Church is one church in two locations: Big Rapids and Newaygo, Michigan. The Big Rapids campus welcomes approximately 500-530 attendees to two Sunday morning services at 9 and 10:45 a.m. The Newaygo campus welcomes approximately 140-160 attendees to a single Sunday service at 10:30 a.m.
- Worship is a blend of contemporary praise songs and refreshed hymns led by a bi-vocational, PT Worship Pastor who develops and organizes a rotating team of talented musicians, vocalists, and tech specialists, and helps develop the same across campuses.
- Trinity is served by a staff of 5 FT and 16 PT employees.
- The annual budget is just under \$1.3 MM, and the church has zero debt.
- Trinity Fellowship Church has a congregational form of governance which means the members of the congregation will vote on the call of the Senior Pastor, all Elder appointments, the annual budget, any changes to the Constitution or Bylaws, and the support of any missionary candidates. Not limited by number, there are currently 10 elders, including the Senior Pastor who is a voting elder. All elders serve three year terms which may be consecutive following a screening and re-affirmation process. A sub-set of the elders serve as "Oversight Elders" This group of five hold additional responsibility to work with the Senior Pastor to provide strategic direction for the church, supervise the Senior Pastor, and provide oversight in the establishment and implementation of the policies and procedures of the church.

## The Location

Big Rapids is the county seat and a community of 8,000 residents that is a regional hub for numerous smaller communities around it. Known for its friendly atmosphere and natural beauty, Big Rapids offers a mix of well-known restaurant chains, franchise hotels, and big box stores alongside a charming downtown. Home to Ferris State University, the city swells during the academic year when more than 10,000 students come to town. Ferris State is one of many strong employers in this community of schools, sporting activities, parks, arts, a hospital with services in a regional healthcare network and much more.

Newaygo is its county seat and is a rural community of about 2,500 residents about 40 minutes southwest of Big Rapids. Nestled in the heart of Michigan's stunning natural landscape, Newaygo offers a perfect blend of small-town charm and outdoor adventure. The Muskegon River runs through town, making it an ideal spot for kayaking, fishing and hiking. With a vibrant community spirit, local events, and friendly neighbors, life here feels connected and welcoming.

People love living in this part of the state! Just east of beautiful Lake Michigan and north of vibrant Grand Rapids, this area offers the convenience of numerous golf courses, parks, lakes, streams and rivers. There are endless trails for hiking, biking, snowmobiling and more. Big Rapids truly offers something for everyone!

# The Opportunity

Trinity Fellowship Church is a healthy, thriving congregation that takes discipleship seriously. A congregational health assessment conducted in fall 2023 revealed Trinity Fellowship is in a posture the assessment calls, “transformation,” which means that congregants reflect high levels of energy (engagement) and satisfaction (fulfillment). With so much that is working well within the church community, the incoming Senior Pastor will be motivated by the opportunity to build on a solid foundation and maximize what is present, while thoughtfully discovering ways to help this vibrant congregation stretch and reach for more.

This is true not only at the Big Rapids location, but also at Newaygo. Trinity Fellowship became one church in two locations in 2017 when a struggling EFCA congregation in Newaygo approached them about an adoption. Originally launched as a video venue, within two years the church recognized the benefit of live preaching and shifted to that model. Campus Pastor Patrick Shea has been given the freedom to contextualize the vision and values of Trinity to this local community, and the results have been tremendous. There is an opportunity to further define and clarify the relationship between the two locations in order to foster a greater sense of unity and connection.

Trinity Fellowship draws attenders from a variety of smaller communities throughout the region. Roughly half of attendees drive more than 10 miles to attend. Given the success of the Newaygo Campus, people are curious about the ways the church might intentionally reach and serve people in these other communities with the Gospel. The possibility of additional locations could balance the congregations’ desire to reach new people and grow, without becoming too large. Creating a strategy to achieve the church’s missional impulse to win and grow disciples who show allegiance to Jesus Christ, while sustaining the relational value is an opportunity that should not be missed.

Given its close proximity to Ferris State University, Trinity has valued a connection with various college ministries over the years. Currently, the church has a strong and connected relationship with Real Life Ministries, a campus ministry to college students that sees about 60 students attending Sunday worship services at Trinity’s Big Rapids campus. Director Nick Loveberry has been mentored by Pastor Gary, has participated with both staff and elders at various times, and participates in staff meetings. To most congregants, Real Life is the college ministry of Trinity Fellowship. However, this relationship has not yet been defined and remains unclear, since Real Life Campus Ministry is its own organization. While the lens is clearly positive, this mutually valuable relationship should be clarified and articulated so it can be strengthened and well-supported by all.

One strong feature of Trinity Fellowship at both campuses is the expository teaching of God’s Word, which is consistently delivered with passion and humility on Sunday mornings. Throughout the week, discipleship primarily takes place in home-based small groups, but attenders also enjoy various topical or theological classes offered by the Senior Pastor. The expository teaching plan dovetails with the church’s three-year vision, currently titled “Unshakeable Faith, Hope and Love,” which will carry the church through 2025. Starting in 2007, Pastor Gary began setting out three-year visions for the church. Beginning six years ago, advanced sermon planning conducted in alignment with a three-year vision has allowed the preparation of coordinating Bible study workbooks that encourage the people to study through the passage themselves using the Pathways Bible Study Method. Then, after discussing their personal study within their small groups, they receive the teaching in the Sunday morning sermon. This approach is used throughout the school year, with shorter topical-textual studies being included at other times. The incoming Senior Pastor will have the opportunity to build on this pattern of hunger for learning and applying God’s Word.

The strong focus on biblical teaching has created a bit of an imbalance in the missional and relational impulse of the people. Some people expressed that small groups at Trinity tend to function as Bible studies. Although this has deepened the spiritual walk and biblical knowledge of participants, in some groups people sense it has also created gap areas such as openly sharing vulnerabilities or difficult life experiences. They appreciate the advanced study of the text in preparation for Sunday morning, but some expressed a sense that true, authentic “life on life” relationships are under-developed. There is a potential opportunity to work with the newly hired Community Life Pastor to rebalance and strengthen small groups, so people find intentional fellowship, depth of authentic community and personal care in times of need as well as the valued biblical study. There is an added opportunity to ensure those who are spiritually vulnerable, or those who are not engaged in a small group have clear avenues for pastoral care when needed. These are potential ways to strengthen and enhance a ministry that is achieving its purpose in so many ways.

In addition, the Senior Pastor and church leadership have applied a very thorough “Gain and Sustain” approach to aligning ministries and activities toward the realization of their vision. While the advanced visioning has been helpful in orienting ministries in the same direction, staff still feel somewhat compartmentalized and campus focused. There is an opportunity for the incoming Senior Pastor to develop some fresh rhythms of meeting and collaborating that will help strengthen and connect staff with one another.



Staff are eager to welcome a Senior Pastor who enjoys working with a team; one who will foster and champion a positive, team-oriented culture at Trinity Fellowship. Plans have been made and will soon be underway to refresh the physical office space at the Big Rapids campus. It is hoped these changes will not only help to improve communication and increase the rhythms of collaboration, but will serve as the genesis of a stronger and more cohesive staff team.

The Trinity congregation knows what it does really well: offering an excellent Sunday morning worship experience where Scripture is taught with depth, encouraging attenders to come “under the Word,” and remaining focused on small groups serving as the delivery system for discipleship. People would love to explore ways for Trinity to make a stronger impact in the region with regard to outreach and mission. The incoming pastor will have an opportunity to view Trinity Fellowship with fresh eyes, and to work together with leaders to clarify and articulate Trinity’s identity and potential as a missional agent in the region, in their communities and beyond. When working with staff, elders and leaders across campuses, the Senior Pastor will have the opportunity to develop a refreshed vision and strategic plan for the next three years in order to ensure the church is activated on mission and connecting new people with Christ, one another, and building them up into healthy maturity as well as discipling them in their faith, biblical knowledge, discipleship, interconnection within and across campuses, gospel outreach and service.

## The Candidate

Trinity Fellowship Church will resonate with a Senior Pastor who is a devoted follower of Jesus; one who leads and teaches others out of the overflow of an authentic, intimate relationship with God. This faithful man will possess personal integrity that is evidenced in everyday life through courage, competence and character. A devoted family man, he will live a life that is above reproach, ensuring his leadership of his family and the church flow from allegiance to God’s Word, a deep personal conviction, prayerful guidance of the Holy Spirit and orienting biblical values. He will prioritize time in God’s Word and prayer not just to prepare to teach others, but because he values devotional time with his Lord.

In addition to a dynamic Bible teacher, Trinity Fellowship will welcome a relational shepherd who enjoys spending time with people, practicing hospitality and taking an active interest in them personally and spiritually. They look forward to a Senior Pastor who takes initiative with people; one who is friendly, visible, approachable and accessible to congregants. This kind of open posture, particularly as they enter into the role, will help develop connectivity and trust within the congregation. People in this community want to know their pastor, so prioritizing relationships with congregants as well as with elders and staff, will help the pastor quickly integrate into the community of the church.

People are Trinity Fellowship’s greatest asset, so it is important the incoming pastor see the tremendous potential in the people, valuing opportunities to get to know their God-given gifts and talents, and to help deploy them to serve on mission with purpose. Working with and developing the staff team, elders and ministry leaders across campuses, the Senior Pastor will build into the people around him through personal development, discipleship, mentoring and coaching. As the church grows, he will encourage the development of organizational systems that help reproduce these kinds of developmental opportunities more broadly, empowering Trinity Fellowship to remain connected and growing across generations and locations.

It is important this Senior Pastor collaborate well with others and believe in a team approach. As a leader, the pastor will help the team to set and clarify vision and priorities, and then to work well with the team to establish a plan to bring the vision to life. This individual will anticipate issues or hurdles early and involve others when appropriate and wise in discussions and discernment in order to make good decisions. He will facilitate healthy two-way communication with others so staff, leadership and congregants understand the vision, plan and rationale behind it. He will bear responsibilities well, follow through and assess results.

As a skilled and effective communicator, this Senior Pastor will cast vision and keep it in front of the people in a compelling way. The ideal candidate will inspire and motivate others by filtering vision, ideas, initiatives and ministry objectives through the lens of Scripture, providing biblical rationale that helps people to see God’s fingerprints in them. He will seek to unify the future of Trinity Fellowship with its historic and current strengths as he encourages people to grow up in their faith and apply their spiritual maturity, faith and biblical knowledge in acts of love, mission and ministry service.

Following a long-tenured Senior Pastor will require both patience and energy from the new pastor as this adjustment will take some time. Undoubtedly there will be some comparisons. It is important the incoming Senior Pastor have thick skin, and an unwavering commitment and humble confidence in God’s call on their life to love and lead the local church.

# Candidate Qualifications

## These descriptions represent preferred experience or background:

- A committed relationship to Jesus Christ and passion to see the local church mobilized on mission. Spiritually mature and emotionally intelligent.
- Demonstrate a humble, servant-hearted relationship on Jesus Christ.
- Agree with [Trinity Fellowship Church's doctrine](#) and the [EFCA's statement of faith](#).
- Meet the biblical qualifications of Elders found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-4.
- Master's degree is required; a Master of Divinity is preferred.
- Ordination within the EFCA, or a willingness to seek ordination within the EFCA strongly preferred.
- 10 years of pastoral ministry experience, ideally with 5 years as a Senior Pastor/Campus Pastor including teaching, planning, collaborating, delegating, equipping, overseeing and development of paid staff and unpaid volunteers. Multi-site experience is preferred.
- Exceptional expository Bible teacher.
- Inspiring servant-leader who empowers others and leads with a shepherd heart.
- Demonstration of a mature faith and wisdom that has been tested and proven through faithful discipleship and personal intimacy with Jesus.

# Inquiry Process

If after reading this description you have interest in the Senior Pastor position at Trinity Fellowship Church, and you feel you meet the qualifications for the role, you are invited to submit the following information for consideration:

1. Your **resume** or CV (in **Word format only**).
1. The **results of any personal assessments** you have completed (StrengthsFinder; DiSC; Meyers- Briggs, etc.) in the last three years.
2. **Five references** (one supervisor, two peer, one subordinate, and one of your choice). These references will be contacted later in the process with your prior approval.
3. **Written responses to the following five questions** (prepared and attached in a Word document).
  1. Describe your faith in Jesus Christ. Tell us how you came to personal faith as well as your journey into full time ministry.
  2. What is it about the opportunity at Trinity Fellowship Church that attracts you to this position. What, in your experience, has best prepared you for this job?
  3. What are two or three of your core strengths? Please share two or three examples of situations where you utilized your core strengths to develop or mobilize the church you were leading.
  4. It has often been said that the best leaders “lead with a limp.” How have you been shaped by failure?
  5. What are the key factors that you believe should be present in your next church and ministry in order for you to be optimized?



## Please submit your information to:

**Greta Barthelemy, Search Associate**

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