

Exclusive to Anna Dembowski, intern for RealClearReligion.org

***Unedited version of “[Mr. Walker Goes to Washington](#)” (Published July 28, 2015)**

Rep. Mark Walker, a freshman congressman from North Carolina, is no foreigner to the church.

At age four, Walker became a preacher’s kid.

“I never wanted to be in ministry,” Walker told RealClearReligion from his Washington, D.C., office. “In fact, I always said I wouldn’t be that because I saw how emotionally taxing it was on my mom and my dad.”

So Walker pursued business.

The catch? Walker exchanged the business world for ministry in his late 20s. He’s since spent 15 years in ministry, most recently serving as the music and worship pastor of Lawndale Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina.

But in December 2013 Walker once again exchanged worlds. He resigned from church leadership to run for Congress.

“[I] committed the whole year of 2014 to run for office,” Walker said. “I just felt like, ethically, there needed to be some separation.”

As a preacher’s kid – his wife a PK as well – Walker said his desire to compassionately share the “message of hope and opportunity” with people of all cultures and communities drove his campaign.

“I felt like there were some in our circles that were taking that message and using it more from a condemnation standpoint rather than one that was driven by compassion,” Walker said, “and that was what really motivated me to say, ‘Maybe there’s room in this arena for me.’”

A friend of Walker and Lawndale Baptist Church’s senior pastor, Joe Giaritelli, said he never doubted Walker would make it to Congress.

“I didn’t care what the polls were saying,” Giaritelli told RealClearReligion. “I just knew in my heart that he was going to win that, that God was going to open up doors.”

Though Giaritelli lamented losing his worship pastor, his support for Walker has never wavered.

“I believe he’s been prepared for such a time as this,” Giaritelli said. “It takes someone with a very strong character, which Mark has, and incredibly perceptive leadership skills, which he has, and also an understanding of people to go through the in-and-out roads of Washington.”

And so for Walker, the move from pastor to politician was not so difficult.

“I think it’s a very easy translation in the sense that the parallel or the common thread is that both are kind of in the people business, so to speak,” Walker said. “Sometimes [as a pastor] you’re standing next to someone passing at a deathbed, or there may be counseling of a marital breakdown, financial situation, people who are having issues and problems, much like this country at a larger scale of the different issues and concerns that we’re facing.”

Just seven of the 535 seats in Congress are held by ordained ministers – four of which, Walker included, [identify](#) as Baptist – but Walker said there’s a precedent of pastor-politicians.

“Historically, there’s a precedent for it if you go back to even some of our original governors of William Bradford and Roger Williams,” Walker said. “These guys were governors throughout the week, but they were ministers. They are people very involved in ministry or ordained ministers who also spoke about political things.”

While Walker did not speak in agreement with politically-charged pulpits – doing so can disqualify a church for its 501(c)(3) status – he said the church’s lack of engagement in the political realm may be cause for the country’s moral shift.

An initiative to realign the moral compass – the [American Renewal Project](#) – is recruiting evangelical pastors to run for elected office at the local, state and federal levels. David Lane, founder of the project, has set his goal at 1,000 pastors in the 2016 election.

“Somebody’s values are going to reign supreme: our values or their values,” Lane [said](#). “If our people are not voting, and are not being salt and light, and not engaging at the public square, the other side’s values are going to reign supreme.”

Walker said recent decisions by the government have spawned an “awakening” for churches to find their voice.

“I think the church needs to have a voice in this – not one that’s harsh or critical, necessarily, but one that kind of leads by example and talking about the issues of our day,” he said.

But while Walker is an ordained minister, he is also a congressman. There, his focus lies.

“My faith is a big part of what drives me,” Walker said. “I do not wear it on the sleeve in the sense that I’m here as a minister. I’m here as someone to uphold the Constitution, to represent our constituents.”