

Part-time Pastor, Full-time Rancher

Hereford cattleman Gordon Jamison answered a “calling” from his church to be a minister.

by Sara Gugelmeyer



“We feel like God gave us this ranch and gave us the things we do for a purpose and we need to share it. There’s still a deep desire across all America to see the cowboy life.

— Gordon Jamison

Unlike a typical pastor, Gordon Jamison didn’t necessarily aspire to be a minister. In his religion, the Dunkard Brethren, it works a little differently. But, both his employment as a rancher and his calling as a pastor are roles he comes by naturally. In his hometown of Quinter, Kan., he is the third generation in his family to do both.

In 1890 Owen Thomas Jamison stepped off the train in Quinter after a long ride from Virginia. The land he claimed as a homestead is

still the headquarters of the Jamison Ranch. He farmed, raised horses and served the church as minister.

Owen’s son Dale bought the family’s first Hereford in about 1940. He, too, served as a minister of the church. By 1970 Gordon had joined the family operation. The next year the Jamisons purchased a group of half-blood Line 1 Hereford cows, and by 1975 the entire Jamison herd was of L1 genetics.

Together, Gordon and Dale grew the Jamison herd’s reputation. Although Dale passed away in 2007, the Jamison Ranch

has continued the tradition of raising and selling top-quality Hereford bulls and females.

And, Gordon has continued the tradition of being a pastor at the Dunkard Brethren Church in Quinter.

Now, the Dunkard Brethren denomination may not be as well-known as say the Baptist denomination, but Gordon says its theology is similar. The Dunkard Brethren is an Anabaptist religion, which includes Amish, Hutterites and Mennonites. The “dunkard” term comes from the way that believers are baptized, which is by immersion.

Pastors in Gordon’s faith are not full-time employees. Rather, the congregation chooses a member or members of the church whenever there’s a need to take on the duties of minister, Gordon explains. In his church there are three “lay pastors,” as they’re called.

“In our church, it’s not something that you volunteer to, it’s an appointed position and something like an election is held and the church elects individuals whenever they feel there is a need,” Gordon says. “It’s by popular vote, so to speak. After a great deal of prayer and soul searching



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 In addition to raising cattle, the ranch markets Quarter Horses as well.

everybody submits a name. You do have the option of saying no, if you don't feel that it fits. We call it a calling from the church."

In just this way, Gordon was called to be a lay minister when he was 29 years old. "Honestly, I was very intimidated by the task," he says. "I still am. But, I grew up with that. My father and my grandfather shared that same position ahead of me."

Gordon's responsibilities include everything a traditional pastor would do, including giving sermons at church, conducting weddings and funerals, counseling congregation members, and the like.

Gordon admits, "There are three of us, so it spreads it out a little bit. But in addition to the work we have in our local congregation, I do quite a bit of traveling. I spend about three weeks a year traveling to speaking engagements at other churches. That does cut into the ranch life."

Luckily for Gordon, his sons Daron, Wade and Cody have taken an interest in the ranch.

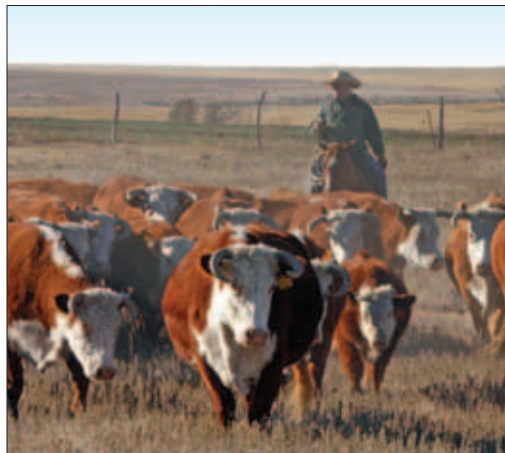
Daron lives in nearby Hays, Kan., and is involved more

on the financial side, according to Gordon. Wade, who also lives in Hays, helps out when he can, and Cody lives on the ranch and works there full-time.

Also, one way Gordon and his wife, Marsha, help out the church is by providing opportunities for young people from the congregation to come work on the ranch.

"We feel like God gave us this ranch and gave us the things we do for a purpose and we need to share it," he says. "There's still a deep desire across all America to see the cowboy life. Sometimes we are probably a bit overstaffed, but we're creating more of a job opportunity for young men, usually, to get away and come interact, and have some new experiences. Some do it for a few weeks, others a year or more."

Most of the congregation is not directly involved in agriculture, and Gordon also sees hiring outside help as an opportunity to educate the public about what happens on a farm or ranch. "Probably the majority will not spend their lifetime in agriculture, but there are so many lessons to be learned that you just can't learn in other jobs," he says.



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 Gordon says he likes to be viewed as just another guy working on the ranch but he finds meaning in his relationship with God.

And the extra help can't hurt as Gordon works double-duty. It is considered a special honor to be a lay pastor in the church, but it's not without its challenges.

"I would be completely dishonest if I said it was never a burden," Gordon admits. "But I don't view it that way. It's something that I can do to justify my existence. I know that at one time or another every rancher thinks to himself, 'What in the world do I accomplish?' Because all it is sometimes is just trying to meet the next bill, make the next payment and keep our banker out of our hair. This puts a whole different element into life and so I find it very fulfilling and rewarding.

"It's taken a lot of my focus off my own individual wants and needs and helped me to see the needs of others. A Christian's first responsibility is to see beyond himself, because we all tend to be so self-centered. I feel like we've been blessed with a lot of things that I maybe wouldn't have given proper credence to if I wouldn't have been able to see the other side of the picture."

One of Gordon's concerns is to avoid the sort of "in-your-face religiosity" that some can find intimidating. "I don't like to come across to people in a way that they think because I am a pastor I am a step up from the rest. I am just one of the guys working out here on the ranch day by day by day, but where I find meaning is my relationship with God. When I go deliver a bull to someone, I want it to be more than just a financial reward for me. I really want to be involved in their life. But that's my challenge — to be very real and able to influence people's lives in a subtle way." **HW**