

## COLUMNS

### **A Sport Many Don't Survive**

By Tim Patterson

FENTON - I have noticed that in our nation and in our state in particular, that competitive sports play an intricate part in our lives and loves. This year's season of football will soon be ending but not the ongoing talk, reruns, debates and controversies. With 24 hour a day sports broadcasting, it never ends. One can be entertained by and involved in football 365 days a year.

There is another sport among us that takes on those same characteristics. It's not basketball, baseball, hockey, volleyball or any other sport that requires some sort of ball or object to be bounced, kicked, passed, hit, or caught. This sport requires an unbelievable amount of stamina, agility, finesse, concentration, skill, focus, determination and a pile of thick skin and intestinal fortitude. This sport can be brutal at times and in other instances, extremely fulfilling. I've seen the players and spectators alike, cry like babies and then in a matter of moments jump, shout, cheer and make a complete fool of themselves in expressing their joy and admiration for those in the field of play.

One of the unusual quirks about this particular sport is that the players don't normally wear uniforms, but the spectators and pep squads do. It is not unusual to see fans wearing their team's colors, caps and T-shirts at any time or any place. Some carry placards and will stand in public places proclaiming the superiority of their preferred combatant. I have seen many decorate their homes and vehicles to express one's allegiance.

As game day approaches, the cheers and chants for the key players can be heard in all places, formats and by almost anyone. Obsession would be a good word to describe those involved. Possession, as in demonic, is possibly applicable to some, and everyone gets involved. Toddlers to Grandmothers all have a part. New born babies adorned with team colors and players names can be found on social media quite readily. Almost no one is uninvolved or untouched by this sport in some way.

But the biggest concern I have about this particular sporting event is the high rate of injury that occurs among the players and especially among the spectators. That's right the spectators. Of course, we have all heard how that some rugby and soccer games in Europe have resulted in the severe bodily injury to fans. Well, this sport does far more damage than has been caused by those riotous fans of foreign fields. Those kinds of injuries usually heal within a matter of weeks or a few months, but the injuries and the damage caused by this sport can last for a lifetime.

These injuries can cause love to be lost, families to be destroyed and entire communities ripped apart. Marriages have failed and lifetime friends have ceased to speak to one another. Respect has been trashed and characters have been assassinated just so someone could win. The broken souls and crushed hearts that are the result of previous games still litter the streets, roads and woodlands of our towns, cities and states. Some people are forced to move to a

different geographic location in order to try to heal the deep gaping wounds they have received. Others carry the competition of the game back to their homes and neighborhoods, only to create division, animosity and anger.

It amazes me that some individuals and groups can't seem to keep it in perspective. This is a game. It won't last forever. Seasons come and go but people and relationships last. The key players will come and go, and most will not even recall their names a few years later.

Politics! The bloodiest sport of all.

Some will win and others loose. One crowd will cheer while the other will cry. Is the outcome of the game important? Yes! Absolutely. But people, relationships, character, reputations and treating others with dignity and respect is far more important.

One day we will stand before the Father and He will not be the least bit concerned with how you voted, but I can guarantee that how you treated your fellow man on this earth will be of keen interest to Him. I have said on many occasions that politics should not and cannot direct or determine our Biblical and Doctrinal convictions, but that our Biblical and Doctrinal convictions should direct and determine our politics. There cannot be some dialectic and duplicitous life concerning Christianity and politics. Worldly governments will come and go, but the Government of God will not!

When we get to heaven all the games will be over. Time will have run out, and there will be no overtimes, no chances to run again, no instant replays or recounts. Winning will be of no consequence, but how you played will be judged and will affect your eternity. Politics! What a game.

Play by the rules. (HIS RULES!)

## **Growing Pains**

By Mike Durbin

The 1967 Chevelle had been sitting at the end of the driveway for a long time. Today, it's considered a classic, but back then, it was just an old car. Nobody drove it. I was in high school, had my license, and wanted a car of my own. Mom said I could drive the Chevelle if I could get it running.

As a result, it was the car I drove to take Shar on our first date. I walked her to the car, opened the door for her to get in, and closed it when she was seated. Then I popped open the hood, unscrewed the lid to the air filter, put a screwdriver into the throat of the carburetor, got in the car, and turned the key. It's the only way the car would start! Then I reversed the process and off we went. Those were the days. I had some good times in that car. It gave me freedom I had never known. I could go further, faster.

It was a hot afternoon in Michigan, the kind of hot when sweat drips off your face even when you're just sitting. Our house didn't have air conditioning, and there was no place to escape the

heat. It was hot everywhere - the perfect day for a swim. My two brothers, ages 12 and 2, jumped in the Chevelle and we took off to the lake for a swim.

Perhaps you can identify with me. I've never been one to walk steadily into cold water. I like to go slow and get accustomed to the water, especially as it gets to the mid-section. There was no doing that at this lake. There was a sharp drop off to deep water just a few feet from shore. My 12-year-old brother and I were challenging each other to be the first to jump into the deep water as we splashed each other. I turned to check on my two-year old brother. He was supposed to be playing on the land behind us, but

he was nowhere to be seen. Instinctively, I looked into the water and my worst fear was confirmed. His head was under the water and he was sinking in the deep part where the lake dropped off. In that moment, I forgot about everything else and lunged into the deep to pull my brother to safety.

He wasn't breathing and I had no idea how to revive a drowning victim. This was long before cell phones and there was no way to call for help. We were too far away to get in the car and drive to get help quickly. I remember carrying him in my arms out of the water and quickly laid on the ground and started pushing on his chest and stomach. My heart was sinking as the seconds passed. There was no response. Then I lifted him up, bent him over my arm and hit him on the back with my hand. Every second felt like an eternity, even though it was all happening so fast. I've never been so scared.

My brother's life was hanging in the balance. Would he live? Was he going to die? My mind was racing; What do I do next? Why didn't he just stay on the bank like I told him? One minute we were laughing and having a good time. The next - he was hanging unresponsively over my arm. I was afraid, confused, angry, and in disbelief all at the same time. I definitely went further, faster that hot Michigan afternoon. I was learning just how quickly life can turn, how fragile it is, and how powerless I am when life literally hangs in the balance.

I think back to that moment on the lake from time to time, especially when I see people hurting each other. Relationships are complicated and breakable. They bring great joy and meaning to our lives. They're also messy and can be difficult. Whatever is happening, it sure feels different when someone you love is hanging breathless over your arm.

I know how this story ended. How about you? Do you know what will come of your life once its over? Do you worry about not having a relationship with the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ? Do you know?

**Who do You Imitate?**

By Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI - Greetings from Bambi Lake! We are well into our new year of retreats and camps and thus far it has been amazing! We are looking forward to a spectacular year. For the February article I was asked to write about "love". This is a somewhat daunting task because I don't want to just write something cliché or mawkish, so here goes.

It is no secret that "self-love" is the sin problem of our culture. It is and always has been since Adam and Eve were relieved of their garden duties. The unfortunate news is I believe "self-love" is the number one sin problem in the church. Now, when I say church I am pinpointing those of us who claim to "love" Jesus, and have a personal relationship with Him. We of all people should understand and do our best to avoid the destructiveness of "self-love".

When the divorce rate inside the church is as high or higher than outside the church, there is a fundamental, core problem. The sin of "self-love" is poisoning our soul and making us spiritually weak and relationally detached from the "lover of our soul" - Jesus. Not only does "self-love" disable our ability to love God but it also handicaps our capacity to love others. The "others" being spouses, friends, enemies, neighbors. We love ourselves more than the heart of God.

"Love" is supposed to be the one quality that sets us apart from the lost world. It should be the singular attribute describing our lives. It should refine us and define us. Love is the aroma others should smell when they are around us. This lifestyle of "love" is possible. In 1 John 4:8 we are told "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love". Since God is Love then what the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus makes perfect sense. Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

A lifestyle of "love" is possible when we - like children - choose to imitate our Heavenly Father and Savior Jesus. The more we look to our Savior and discover Him in scripture the more we will be like Him. As our personal relationship with Him deepens so will our imitation of His character. As Christians, we are to imitate God's character, actions and behavior towards us as a standard of how we treat others and live out the Christian life. When we imitate Christ, we become the truest, most real and authentic "us" because we become the person God intended us to be. The culture is continuously demanding our attention by deceiving us with promises of prosperity, power, self-confidence, success, promotion and recognition - "self-love".

Christ calls us to be like Him - "Love" - to all those we encounter, even to those we would rather avoid. We the church, must look like Christ. We must look like "Love".

## Ultimatums or Love

By Tony Lynn

FENTON - As the church enters a growth-phase, ultimatums may start. Growth-changes bring friction, conflict, and sometimes result in ultimatums. Menacing statements are heard: "Pastor, if you do that then you will have to find a new church." Or "Brother, I guess you no longer need my tithe if you are going to do that." Or "Preacher, you seem to be more interested in the newer people than those who called you to be pastor here."

A friend of mine, who came to know the Lord under one of my previous ministries, was surprised to discover his newly purchased home was near a new church where I had become pastor. Let's say his name is Tom. He visited the new church with his family, and informed everyone that he was thankful for my previous ministry. Being a businessman and running his own company, Tom thought he was doing the right thing endorsing me as a good pastor, and openly expressed our longtime friendship.

There was another man, long embedded in the new church even before I came as Pastor, who we will call Rick. Rick saw Tom's endorsement and friendship of me as a threat. Tom's visits with his family at the new church fell-off. He came to play a pick-up basketball game at the church building. As the game progressed, I saw that Tom and Rick were guarding one another and interacting in-between plays. I thought it was a good sign.

I was wrong. After the game was over and before we shut-down the gym, Tom slid-up to me and whispered, "Hey, I hate to do this, but I think my family and I are going to look for another church closer to home. This one's too far. We love you and we are grateful for all that you've done for us." I took his statement at face-value, we guy-hugged and I wished him well.

Six-months later during a random visit to Tom's business, he asked how the church was doing. He went on to say, "I didn't want to tell you this, but something happened at the basketball game that convinced me joining the church would be a mistake. Tom continued, "As I grabbed my gear that night after the game, Rick came up to me and said, "If you think you're going to come into our church and take-over with Pastor Tony, you're wrong! It's not going to happen." Tom saw the shock on my face.

When euphoria from a growth-phase is peppered with ultimatums from others, oftentimes all someone tastes is the "pepper." The euphoria is smothered. Worse yet, the person leading the growth-change becomes jumpy looking for the next ultimatum lurking in the heart of someone who is not happy.

When a growth phase is blocked by ultimatum-driven opposition, three radically different conclusions are reached.

1. Those who threaten ultimatums erect a statue of victory and repeat to themselves the phrase, "Ultimatums work well. I am in control."

2. Those who initiated the growth phase, only to surrender to the ultimatums, put up red-flags of defeat and whisper warnings, “No longer take risks toward growth unless the ultimatum-user agrees.”
3. The largest group, the unknowing group of people who were led toward growth-change and then abandoned only to return to the past, plant a forest of question marks. They ask one another with puzzled and hopeless expressions, “Why is our church (or class, or group) not growing or developing when others grow?”

So how do leaders overcome the 1-2% ultimatum-driven threats and lovingly lead people toward growth? They do it through transparency in four-steps.

1. When someone threatens the primary leader’s direction with ultimatums, the leader should share those ultimatums with the leadership surrounding him or her in one corporate meeting. Too many leaders keep menacing ultimatums to themselves causing them to freeze progress.
2. The primary leader should persuade his or her circle of leadership to extend a joint invitation to the ultimatum-maker to meet with them for an open dialogue.
3. The primary leader would be wise to allow a trusted person, other than himself, to moderate the meeting. The opposition should explain why he or she believes the direction is unwise. The primary leader should explain why he or she believes the direction is wise. Questions toward the two should be allowed.
4. After the two parties have expressed themselves, each individual in the circle of leadership should state their support or opposition to the changes. The balance of support and of opposition will be clearly seen. The future direction can be solidified, canceled, or changed together rather than capitulate to a menace.

With transparency the power of an ultimatum subsides and love prevails. Ephesians 4:2-3 reminds us, “Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults

because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace,” (NLT).

## STARTING

### 3 Reasons We Need Rural Church Plants

By David Pinckney

CONCORD, NH - Planting churches in rural places around the globe is essential. For if the knowledge of the glory of God is to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14), then every hamlet and village must contain a gospel gathering of worshiping witnesses.

Consider, for example, one picturesque town of 4,800 residents near where I live. Like a third of over two hundred towns in New Hampshire, it has no evangelical church. Though small, this town matters to the mission of God. That's why in the fall of 2018, a small missional community from my church started meeting there every Sunday night. They gather in a public building to eat together, to worship Jesus, and to love their community by serving its unique needs.

Cities matter too, and their strategic importance has been proven and promoted over the last several decades. But planting rural churches is no less important. Rural life is a reality for billions of people—people who are of immense value to Jesus and his plans. Consider these three reasons gospel work in the less populated places is worth our time.

#### 1. Small Beginnings, Big Impact

The birthplace of Jesus is an example of how God can spark great works out of small places. “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (Mic. 5:2 ESV). Countless big works of God find their roots in geographically small beginnings.

“Rural life is a reality for billions of people.”

There is no doubt that the global population is urbanizing. But rural life will never go away completely. Besides, the trend toward where people are moving overlooks where they are coming from. What would it look like if many of these future urban dwellers found the joy of Jesus in country churches and went into their new cities prepared by rural congregations for gospel mission? Significant urban evangelism could happen because cities are populated by passionate “country Christians.”

#### 2. Small Numbers, Big Celebration

Leaving the ninety-nine to find the one fits with the pattern of rural ministry. For while the theme of the three parables of Luke 15 is the value of the “lost” to God, two of the stories focus on the small number of one. To be sure, it would be a stretch to apply this directly to rural ministry and church planting. However, there is no doubt that one lost person in a village who is safely brought into the Father's house is worth celebrating in heaven.

Furthermore, the amount of time that Jesus spent in the lesser-populated places of Israel should cause us to take notice. The woman at the well, the demoniac among the tombs, and the recruitment of

fishermen to be his first disciples all took place in the context of rural ministry. And then there is Matthew 9:35, which explicitly mentions Jesus's desire to take the gospel everywhere that people are. "Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness" (ESV). Kingdom work can't only be a numbers game, therefore. It's good to strategize how we can reach more with the gospel. But there always ought to be a genuine celebration of reaching small numbers in small places.

### 3. Small Size, Great Praise

The church of the West today often seems mesmerized by bigness. Yet God is neither impressed with nor opposed to big platforms and large seating capacities. As the creator of all things, big and small, he delights in all that is good. When it comes to great big churches or tiny village gatherings, "He will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the great" (Ps. 115:13 ESV). So it pleases him to bless burgeoning suburban churches as well as the gathering of two or three in his name. We must, therefore, never overlook the small by focusing on the big or the great.

I think heaven will surprise us all. Small deeds will be celebrated much more than they were on earth, where they often receive little recognition. Indeed, the small will join the great to shout praises with an equal voice. As John wrote, "Praise our God, all his servants, and the ones who fear him, both small and great!" (Rev. 19:5 CSB)

### Coming Full Circle

About thirty-five years ago, a rural New Hampshire pastor helped a soon-to-be-married couple understand the gospel. They professed faith, were baptized, and began a journey of following Jesus. They lived in that town I mentioned above, where the wife became an elementary teacher. She has remained in that school all this time, and as a couple, they have loved their neighbors faithfully for over three decades. Today, they are part of that small group seeking to plant a church in the community, and all of this is thanks to the faithfulness of Christians in rural places.

"Rural church planting matters because people live in these places, and people matter to God." At the end of the day, rural church planting matters because people live in these places, and people matter to God. So for those who get the Spirit's nod to reach people in small places, please know that this is a big deal with heaven's attention and affection. The good news is for both the city and the country, the urban and the rural, the great and the small.

About the author: David Pinckney is a second generation New Hampshire pastor who has been at it for over thirty years. He's the founding pastor of River of Grace Church in Concord, and he also serves as co-director of the Acts 29 Network's Rural Collective. He is passionate about seeing pastors in small settings thrive in God's big grace. David and his wife, Sharon, have four sons and one daughter who all are walking with Jesus.

**2019 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering**

By Staff

ALPHARETTA, GA - Today the spiritual needs of North America are as great as ever. Approximately 363 million people live here with a projected 75% who do not have a personal relationship with Christ.

Many communities, especially outside the South, have a serious lack of Bible-teaching, Evangelical churches. One look at the headlines tells the story of how secularism has overtaken our region. Poverty, violence, sky-rocketing divorce rates, human trafficking and an overflowing foster care system sadly demonstrate how greatly North America needs the hope of Christ.

At the same time, the nations continue to come here in search of a new life. Many immigrants and refugees arrive from unreached people groups and can now hear the gospel for the first time. The opportunities are endless. That's why the North American Mission Board, in partnership with Southern Baptist pastors and churches, is committed to sending hope.

Every gift to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering—100 percent—goes to train, resource and deploy more than 5,000 missionaries involved in church planting and compassion ministries. Together we make a difference by meeting needs, planting churches and discipling new believers. Transformation is taking place one life at a time.

Things you want to know about this year's offering:

- National Goal - \$70 million
- Week of Prayer for North American Missions – Sunday, March 3 through Sunday, March 10
- Offering Theme – Sending Hope
- Verse – “...He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” – 1 Peter 1:3, CSB
- Offering Resources Available: [www.AnnieArmstrong.com](http://www.AnnieArmstrong.com)

Southern Baptists have generously supported the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® for North American missions since 1933. These sacrificial gifts have made it possible for millions to experience the hope of the gospel through the work of missionaries across the United States, Canada and the territories of Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam.

## STENGTHENING

### **100 Little Sacrifices**

by Clark Cothern

Love is hard to define. And yet we know when we've been loved.

YPSILANTI, MI - If you said, "Show me a solved mathematical equation that proves with certainty that you love your wife," I wouldn't be able to do that. And yet I know, with certainty, that I love my wife. It didn't take long for me to fall head over heels for that girl. After only one date I got home and wrote in my calendar, "This is the one!" (I'm not making this up. I really did.)

Joy, unfortunately, hadn't yet received that memo from God. A couple of months after that first date I blurted out my love for her. Her response? "You don't love me. You don't even know me!"

Oops.

Did her reaction cause me to think I had gotten it wrong? Did I say, "I misread that one," and move on? No way! Joy was worth waiting for. I carefully refrained from using "the L word" and began to persistently demonstrate my love for her. After a hundred little sacrificial gestures she finally came around. One evening after a long talk, she said, "I've been thinking about my future, and I realize that I don't want a future without you in it."

Yes! That's why I persistently sacrificed in a hundred tiny ways. That girl became the Joy of my life for the rest of my life. We've remained married over forty years now. I think that God exhibits the same kind of tenacious love, offering persistent sacrificial gestures to people who crave a future filled with love and purpose.

The Old Testament reveals well over a hundred sacrificial ways that God persistently demonstrated His love for His "Chosen Ones," the Nation of Israel. And if that wasn't enough He sent His only son as the ultimate demonstration of sacrificial love to people who had not yet "gotten it." But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8, CSB) And then because God was so loving and so persistent He empowered a bunch of people as His agency of reconciliation. Those of us who call ourselves "The Church" – those of us who have gotten it – are tasked with revealing God and His persistent love to a world in need.

Often it takes a hundred little sacrifices before someone sees that God is really serious about this eternal love. Like the guy who drove 45 minutes each way one day a week for six months to meet a friend for lunch so they could talk about God's crazy sacrificial love. That lunch buddy finally showed up in a home Bible study group and months later accepted the grace his friend had been talking about and demonstrating to him.

Or like the lady who hosted a weekly Bible discussion in her home for three years before one of the women in her study says, "I get it now!" When a lot of people who are distant from God first hear someone blurt out how God loves them they might think, "Love me, God doesn't even know me!" But after a hundred little sacrifices from God's grace agents, some might eventually say, "I've been thinking about my future and I realize that I don't want a future without God in it."

About the author: Clark Cothorn is grateful to serve as Pastor at Living Water Community Church, Ypsilanti, MI. Living Water is a congregation continuing to learn how to R.E.A.C.H. (Recognize Everyone And Communicate Hope). Clark and his wife Joy live in Milan, MI. They have three grown children and two grandchildren.

### **Breaking down walls, Detroit Baptists honor MLK**

by Diana Chandler

DETROIT (BP) -- Not far from Eight Mile Road, a historic racial dividing line in Detroit, more than 100 diverse Southern Baptist pastors, state leaders and laypersons worshipped together on Martin Luther King Jr. day.

The 7 p.m. service marked a milestone for 78-year-old African American pastor Robert Coverson, the event's preacher, who marched in Detroit with King during the civil rights movement. Many suburban residents are afraid to cross Eight Mile Road and venture into the deep inner city during the day, Coverson said, let alone after dark. "I saw last night God touching the hearts of people and I saw walls falling," Coverson told Baptist Press the next morning. "I saw hearts being tenderized for the idea of we are our brother's keeper. I saw a new love relationship starting. It was awesome."

Pastor Roland Caldwell, vice moderator of the Detroit Baptist Association, hosted the event at Burnette Baptist Church. Mathew Vroman, a white pastor who leads the predominantly black Eastside Community Church (SBC) in Eastpointe, organized the event with Caldwell to help unify the community. "Everything in Detroit breeds race," Vroman told BP, referencing Eight Mile Road, racial riots of the 1960s, and racism that continues. "It was important to remember things that happened and proclaim Christ."

The event emphasized unity in Christ, spotlighted the church's efforts to plant diverse churches, and proclaimed Christ while remembering King. "I think it was one of the most significant things I have seen in Southern Baptist life," Vroman said. "Not just talking about it with resolutions, but doing something that matters to the community, as far as making a statement to the African American community."

Tim Patterson, executive director and treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM), attended the service. "It was extremely important for our denomination to see all of our pastors come together in a common cause for someone who did so much for so many," Patterson said. "It was a great time of celebration and a great time of remembering the legacy of Dr. King, and it's a great time for us to look forward to in our future and see what we can do together." In 2020, the BSCM plans to host a King celebration at a larger venue allowing statewide participation, he told BP. The BSCM had hoped to host an event this year. "God's

called us to be one big family and I believe as we work together," Patterson said, "we can do more together."

Such events are vital in displaying Southern Baptist unity and repentance from a slave-holding past, Coverson said, despite Southern Baptist Convention resolutions promoting racial reconciliation and repenting of racial sins. The SBC "has plateaued in the South and if it's going to grow, it has to go to the north," Coverson told BP. "And if it doesn't deal with this issue of confirming through their fruit that they're no longer the organization that historically discriminated against people of color, then people of color will not trust them or want to be a part of what they're doing. "And it hinders the spread of the Word of God in the north." Coverson, pastor of Meditation Missionary Baptist Church in Detroit, served as president of BSCM in 2003. Rev. Rochelle Davis Jr. served as the first African American president of the BSCM in 1985-86."

During Coverson's presidency, he encouraged the BSCM and state Baptist associations to adopt Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a paid holiday for employees, which would allow greater denominational participation in such events. "For the first time in the history of our convention, we came together to celebrate a hero, Dr. King, in a way that broke down some walls," Coverson said of the Jan. 22 worship. "We didn't know each other on a personal level. We didn't know each other's story. And last night gave us an opportunity to tell the story. And God's Spirit permeated the place and we'll not be the same anymore." More than 100 people attended the event, Caldwell said.

"My dream and vision is that the pastors and churches in the suburbs, and the pastors and the churches here in the inner city will come together and begin to work towards the goal of love," Caldwell said. "The church and Christ are under attack (by the world). They're coming after the church, and that's because we're separated." Caldwell recalled King's statement that 11 a.m. on Sunday marks the most segregated hour in the nation. "Whites stay in their church and the blacks stay in their church," Caldwell said. "Jesus said that by this all men shall know you are my disciples, that you love one another. Love is action.

"The reason I joined Southern Baptists," he said, "is because I believe that we have to become one in order to win this battle."

About the author: Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

### **Open Doors: Christian persecution up 14% worldwide**

by Diana Chandler

WASHINGTON (BP) -- The number of Christians suffering high to extremely high persecution is 14 percent more in 2019, Open Doors reported, counting 245 million individuals globally. Persecution driven by Islamic extremism and Communist authoritarianism in the world's two most populous countries, India and China, marked the increase, Open Doors said today (Jan. 16) in releasing its 2019 World Watch List of the 50 countries with the most extreme Christian persecution.

"Islamic radicalism continues to dominate and influence all spheres of life for Christians, and we are watching China and India very closely," Open Doors USA President and CEO David Curry said in releasing the latest findings. "The distressing impact of billions of people living in an environment in which the government oppresses freedom of religion is unraveling day by day as millions of Christians are being attacked, imprisoned or killed."

Life without religious freedom is no freedom at all, Curry said at a Washington press conference announcing the findings. "Religious freedom is the first freedom," he said. "If you don't have the right to make up your own mind, are you really free at all?"

China climbed to 27th on the list from 43rd in 2018. India ranked as the 10th most persecuted country this year, its first time in the top 10 in the rankings' 27-year history. India outpaces China in persecution, despite the rampant closure of house churches and the widespread arrest of Christians.

"India has a large population of Christians," Curry said, "and the radical agenda of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata) Party has created an environment -- and I can't repeat this enough because it needs to be understood -- that India's not a safe place for Christians. Because the government has looked the other way when mobs have attacked churches, and then they have tacitly approved the arrest of pastors. Christians of all kinds are under pressure in India."

North Korea, an authoritarian regime mandating worship of President Kim Jong-un, maintains its first place for the 18th consecutive year. Others in the top 10, in descending order are Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen and Iran. Russia, which had not placed in the top 50 countries of persecution since 2011, entered the 2019 list at No. 41.

Globally, persecution against women and the spread of radical Islam across sub-Saharan Africa join authoritarianism as notable trends driving persecution. Africa is a major epicenter of violence against Christians, with groups loyal to the Islamic State growing in sub-Saharan Africa. Open Doors noted a splinter group of Boko Haram, the Islamic State West Africa Province, or ISWAP.

Numerically, the 245 million persecuted Christians counted this year are more than the 215 million counted in 2018. Globally, one in nine Christians is highly persecuted -- an increase from one in 12 last year. Each day of 2018, 11 Christians were killed, totaling 4,136 by year's end. Most of the killings -- 3,731 -- were in Nigeria, which ranks 12th on the list, Open Doors said. Pakistan and the Central African Republic round out the three countries where Christians experience the most physical violence. "Open Doors continues to see ominous persecution trends against Christians," Curry said. "Open Doors will continue to walk alongside these Christians and advocate on their behalf for human rights we take for granted in America."

Among few improvements for Christians in 2019, Iraq ranked number 13 this year after an eighth-place spot in 2018, evidence of the territorial defeat of ISIS. Malaysia improved from 23rd to 42nd, where the electoral victory of the Pakatan Harapan political coalition has reportedly given hope to persecuted minorities. North Korea, despite its first-place rank, freed three imprisoned Korean American Christians in 2018, including a pastor convicted erroneously as a

spy. Open Doors markets its list as the "only comprehensive, annual survey of the state of religious liberty for Christians around the world."

Interviews and research conducted November 2017 through October 2018 measures Christians' ability to practice faith in five spheres of life, namely private, family, community, national and church. Each category is measured with numerical points, with the total score determining a country's ranking. For instance, North Korea garnered 94 out of 100 points, with India accumulating 83.

Ranking 11-50 on the list are, in descending order, Syria, Nigeria, Iraq, Maldives, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Central African Republic, Algeria, Turkmenistan, Mali, Mauritania, Turkey, China, Ethiopia, Tajikistan, Indonesia, Jordan, Nepal, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Brunei, Tunisia, Qatar, Mexico, Kenya, Russian Federation, Malaysia, Kuwait, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Bangladesh, the Palestinian Territories and Azerbaijan.

The full list and accompanying resources are available at [opendoorsusa.org](http://opendoorsusa.org). Open Doors has worked for more than 60 years to help Christians living in countries the organization deems the world's most oppressive and restrictive for believers.

About the author: Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

## **Get Ready: 5 Tech Trends That Will Impact Mission**

By Jon Hirst

In 1949, Father Roberto Busa approached Thomas J. Watson, the founder of IBM, with a simple proposal: let's bring words to your computer! Busa recognized God's ultimate creativity and dominion over all creation. And he challenged Watson to take the computer beyond pure computational power and make it work with text.

Busa was motivated by a desire to digitize the works of Thomas Aquinas so they could be accessible to anyone with a computer, but the result was that digital text revolutionized communication. Busa once said, "Since man is a child of God and technology is a child of man, I think that God regards technology the way a grandfather regards his grandchild." I wonder what God thinks of his technological grandchildren today? Is he pleased with the way we have used our God-enabled creativity to create the tech that is impacting this world?

Here are 5 Tech Trends for 2019 and the Implications for Mission

### **1. Uberization**

Definition: To subject (an industry) to a business model in which services are offered on demand through direct contact between a customer and a supplier, usually via mobile technology. (Collins Dictionary)

Key fact: At least 40 percent of Americans will participate in the Gig Economy by 2020.

Why Uberization is trending: Workers seek more control and better quality of life while employers look to reduce costs and risk. When an industry “uberizes,” it allows individuals to take resources they already have that are being underutilized and monetize them through a larger ecosystem that attracts and coordinates the service. In turn, companies have a seemingly limitless pool of people that can respond with rooms to rent (AirBnB) or rides to give (Uber).

Mission implication: From the moment Jesus ascended after leaving his disciples with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), the missionary workforce has been flexible, scalable, and responsive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Uberization can help missions sending agencies in considering how to redesign organizational structures. Mission agencies might adopt models that allow people to commit latent talent and resources directly to the cause in a way that keeps overhead low and empowers people to generously serve as God leads. The challenge is to harness the innovation of uberization while also retaining high value on training and member care that sends people out prepared and supports them while they serve.

“As God’s servants, our challenge is to use every tool at our disposal to advance the kingdom with the understanding that none of these technology-enabled trends should govern our ministry.”

## 2. Blockchain

Definition: Blockchain allows digital information to be distributed, but not copied. That means each individual piece of data can only have one owner. (Medium)

Key fact: 39 percent of companies surveyed across seven countries plan to invest five million plus in 2019.

Why Blockchain is trending: There is significant distrust (the Trust Gap) between individuals and the institutions that make society work (banks, governments, corporations, and even nonprofits). The middlemen that have traditionally guaranteed trust (FDIC, United Nations, World Trade Organization, ECFA, etc.) are currently in a trust deficit. So, people are decentralizing trust by choosing to manage financial transactions directly by harnessing solutions like Blockchain. The technology enables individuals to convert money into a cryptocurrency so that funds can be sent and received without bank involvement. Home buyers, news readers, suppliers, and people using digital devices appreciate the transparency of a process that cuts out a middleman.

Mission implication: The same lack of trust in institutions extends to nonprofits. According to the Global Trust Index there was a 9 percent drop in the trust of NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) by Americans in the last year. What could that mean for believers? There may be a deterioration in trust between mission agencies and individuals who seek to have more control over how they give and serve globally. Sending churches might increasingly look for a direct connection with the mission field and a high level of transparency about the path their money and service will take. Given this trend, mission agencies must step up efforts to increase trust and empower people by engaging them with greater transparency.

### 3. Surveillance

Definition: Surveillance involves the monitoring of a person, place, or object to obtain certain information or to alter or control the behavior of the subject of the surveillance. (Australian Government)

Key fact: Video surveillance market will be close to 40 billion dollars by 2023.

Why surveillance is trending: In times of uncertainty, individuals, organizations, and governments attempt to reduce insecurity by tightening control. Surveillance on a grand scale has been made possible by significant innovations in facial recognition, video capture, and big data analysis. Countless hours of video footage are now being captured and analyzed by governments and businesses all across the globe.

Mission implication: Governments want to know about people within their borders, but increasingly people will not want to be known by them. Believers will be watched closely and sanctioned if those in power do not want Christianity to prosper. Increasingly, surveillance will extend beyond national borders as countries profit from exporting their technology to other countries in order to gather more data to train the artificial intelligence in their systems and keep tabs on diaspora communities. Agencies will need to train missionaries to recognize surveillance while calling God's people to step into ministry knowing that persecution and opposition should be expected.

### 4. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Definition: Artificial Intelligence is the science and engineering of making intelligent machines. (John McCarthy)

Key fact: 77 percent of consumers are utilizing a product or service that is enabled by artificial intelligence

Why AI is trending: The natural result of wanting to reduce risk, gain control, enhance security, and rebuild trust is artificial intelligence. Since we struggle to find a common moral framework in a post-Christian world order, we look to machines to provide objectivity. Our hope is that machines will crunch through the data, learn how to solve problems, and maybe even make up for the relational struggles that have plagued us since the Fall. One example is a new messaging app called Ixy that promises "conflict-free" conversations with the help of an AI mediator.

Mission implication: There is huge potential for AI to help mission sending agencies with cross-cultural communication, streamlining operational tasks, and creating better donor experiences. However, at its core, AI may be the latest Tower of Babel—a manifestation of the desire to control our destiny and be our own god. We must utilize AI-based tools with caution to make sure that we're not buying into assumptions and expectations that remove God from his place in our lives.

AI tools could push mission agencies to conform to the biases and assumptions of their creators and the corpus of human knowledge they learn from. AI systems cannot be designed to recognize spiritual priorities or have spiritual discernment.

## 5. Internet of Things (IoT)

Definition: Simply, the Internet of Things is made up of devices—from simple sensors to smartphones and wearables—connected together. (Matthew Evans)

Key fact: There will be over 14.2 billion connected devices in circulation by 2019.

Why the Internet of Things is trending: The Internet promises connectivity that creates efficiency, convenience, and new opportunity. With the growing number of devices that are connected via the Internet, users are finally seeing some of those promises realized in their daily routines. Whether they are starting their car, heating the living room, syncing grocery lists, or a million other daily tasks, the information and devices that manage them are now connected online. Users hope that this connectivity will improve their quality of life.

Mission implication: As the world's citizens live in an increasingly connected world, mission agencies and missionaries have to design programs, products, and services that interoperate with their lives. This means that in order to get a hearing from many people around the globe, we'll have to connect into their connected lives. Our messages will have to be on the platforms and devices that they already depend on.

Because the number of devices is so massive and diverse, we have to be intentional about where to integrate and how that will impact other ministry efforts. We'll also be challenged to consider how interoperability is creating distracted people who can hide behind the gadgets that order their lives. The very tools we hope will give us access to people may also actively block us from sharing the good news with them.

### Into the Future

What are we to make of the world that is taking shape around us? As God's servants, our challenge is to use every tool at our disposal to advance the kingdom with the understanding that none of these technology-enabled trends should govern our ministry. We walk boldly into the future open to innovations that could further mission while recognizing our hearts desire is for God's ways and our value and identity are from God's hand

About the author: Jon Hirst has served the global mission community as an innovator for over twenty years. He currently serves as director of program innovation for SIL International. He is the co-editor of *Innovation in Mission (IVP)* and has written or co-written three other books and countless articles. Jon and his wife, Mindy, live in Colorado and have three children, a dog, and three birds. You can find Jon at [www.generousmind.com](http://www.generousmind.com) or on Twitter.

Jon would like to thank several thought leaders for their invaluable insights as he was writing: Jeff Holder, Chad Williams, Greg Outlaw, and D. Ray Davis.

**Ministry Bridezilla**

By Tito Diaz

DETROIT, MI - I remember watching Godzilla movies on Saturday mornings. Yeah, I know. I'm a nerd. A giant, mutant dinosaur emerges from the depths of the earth to wreak havoc. Unbeknownst to everyone, Godzilla is actually on a mission to do good. Usually something like ridding the earth of impending doom from another large mutant like Mothra. But no one seems to care about the good he's trying to accomplish, because of all the damage he's causing during his plight.

Have you ever noticed, some brides act more like Godzilla than beautiful wives-to-be during their wedding season. However, instead of physical destruction, these "bridezillas" leave behind a path of relational destruction. Their tempers are short, frustrations high, and no one is competent in their eyes. Overly critical, they want everything done to perfection. And maybe the worst part all of these emotions are directed at the people closest to them. The people in their corner. While their mission of planning a day filled with beautiful vows, fun dancing and delicious food was accomplished, no one seems to care because of all the damage they caused.

Pastors and leaders have ministry seasons that seem a lot like wedding planning. Seasons that lead to milestone events. Maybe it's the launch of a ministry, construction of a building, a large outreach or the opening Sunday of a church plant. During these times, leaders can appear a lot like bridezillas. The most thoughtful leaders can turn into monsters leading up to and during the event. Then when everything is over, the monster disappears and the person you once knew is back. I'm sure it's happened to someone you know or even yourself some time in ministry. I know I've been a terror during certain ministry seasons in my past. I've had my share of hurting family, staff and volunteers in the name of the mission. Over the years, I've learned a lot about how to love those around me leading up to large events, mostly from the mistakes I've made along the way.

Here are some guidelines on how to love those around you leading up to a ministry milestone:

**PEOPLE ARE NOT PAWNS**

People are not tools used to make the ministry succeed. People are the ministry. If I'm not honoring people, then I'm not honoring Jesus. That includes my staff, leaders and volunteers. I had to stop looking at people as pawns in my attempt to win the game of ministry. (Phil 2:3)

**MY FAMILY IS NOT THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS**

The ends do not justify the means. Our families are not supposed to be sacrificed on the altar of ministry. Jesus was enough sacrifice to cover our every need. Our families are our first ministry. They are to be stewarded, not discarded in the name of Jesus. I've found in ministry seasons leading to milestone events in my life, they were the first thing I sacrificed. Ministry milestones are good, but not if they come at the cost of our families. (1 Tim 3:4-5)

**LOVE JESUS MORE THAN JESUS' WORK**

I've found that the times I've spent the most as a ministry bridezilla, are the times I've spent the least with Jesus. Our amount of love and grace are directly associated with intimacy with Him.

Don't allow the amount of time spent planning and executing an event trump the time you spend with your Savior. Rest is not an option, it's a necessity. So is resting in the Lord. Our worth is not found in the work of Jesus, but in the person of Jesus. (Matt 22:37)

It feels amazing to charge towards the vision God has placed on our hearts. Sometimes we may approach it like bridezilla but we don't have to. There are always going to be seasons in ministry where we are working a little more, sleeping a little less and spinning a few more plates. But in our passion to do the work of God, let's not forget to love the people of God. (1 Pet 4:8)

About the author: Tito Diaz is the multiplication pastor for Mile City Church in Detroit. He serves as a NAMB Church Planting Catalyst.

### **Missional Parenting: Teaching Love for Diverse Peoples**

By Cyndi Logsdon

RICHMOND - I have often wondered what one small family can do to combat social injustice. Racism, for example, is an issue so massive and personal that I wonder how we can even begin to build bridges between cultures where the chasm is deep. I have noticed, however, some really encouraging diversity in the lives of families who seek to parent missionally and base their parenting decisions on a conviction to "spend and be spent" for the cause of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 12:15).

It has been interesting to follow the kids like ours who were raised overseas. Our girls grew up on multiple continents, as did many of their friends. I've seen both the blessings and the scars that accompany life as an expat. One thing I have noticed is that missionary kids (MKs—also known as TCKs or "third-culture kids") tend to deeply love people who are different from them. Even after MKs return to America, many are drawn to international students and tend to have deep friendships with individuals of many different cultures and races. In fact, if you were to look at the wedding pictures of many MKs I know, you would see extremely diverse wedding parties. And if you ask them what made the difference in how they formed these friendships, they often can't even tell you. All they can communicate is that lifestyle patterns became relational norms that helped to instill in them a love for all people.

"One of the easiest ways to teach kids to love others is to simply give them many opportunities to connect deeply with lots of different people. Invite diverse people into your home and let them see you as you really are."

Let me suggest three lifestyle patterns in missional parenting that build love for others:

1. Missional families make hospitality that includes diverse peoples the norm

One of the easiest ways to teach kids to love others is to simply give them many opportunities to connect deeply with lots of different people. Fill your home with people. As fun as it is to meet a friend at a public place for coffee, relationships reach a different level inside homes.

Invite diverse people into your home for meals or coffee and let them see you as you really are. Let them see your marriage, your laundry, and your muddy shoes. Instead of meeting a friend for coffee at a coffee shop, make them coffee and serve it to them at your kitchen table.

Our children tend to love and trust those whom we love and trust. So, if you can't remember the last time you shared life with someone who doesn't look like you, work to form new habits. Invite people into your home, truly love and welcome them, and make hospitality the norm for your family.

2. Missional families have experienced being a minority, and they are better for it. Intentionally going places where you are the minority can be hard. Placing your kids in situations where they are the minority can be much harder. Yet, there is something beautiful about helping children develop a soft heart for others, and there is a different level of compassion that is developed when we walk in someone else's shoes.

My children were the only American kids in their elementary school most of the years they attended. They looked different, had to learn a different language, and had to learn a culture that was new to them. It wasn't easy, and I'm certainly not recommending that all kids move around the world.

Yet, finding situations where they can take part in a group or activity where they aren't the majority culture can help to fight entitlement, pride, and selfishness. It's healthy for our children to learn early that the world is a big place and not everyone is like them.

3. Missional families teach a biblical worldview that helps children love those whom their Father in heaven loves.

Sometimes American children learn so much about American history in school that they almost think the world began in 1492. We need our children to understand their place in the history of a much bigger story. They need to understand the grand narrative of Scripture and how they personally fit into it.

When you read through the Bible with your kids, point out geography and show locations on maps. Buy a globe. Start in Genesis and show them what part of the world the Garden of Eden was in. Don't let them skip over names like the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Our children need to know that biblical stories are real stories that took place in real cities by real mountains and real rivers. Talk about where Abraham lived and where Moses talked to Pharaoh. Tell them about the kingdom of Israel and how and where it was divided. Look through maps of Paul's missionary journeys and talk as a family about the early church and where it began.

Our kids should know from early ages that the Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek and Aramaic, and that English was a later translation. We have to teach our kids that we are part of a story that is much bigger than our little worlds. We are part of a story full of people and languages and cultures that our Father created and loves.

## Loving Our God and Loving Our Neighbors

Missional parenting should lead us to raise and train our children in light of both the Great Commission ([Matt. 28:18–20](#)) and the Great Commandment ([Mark 12:30](#)). Out of a desire to love the Lord with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, and out of a desire to love our neighbor as ourselves, we intentionally work to make the gospel known to the nations.

So, let's build family rhythms that welcome all kinds of people into our homes and lives. Let's place ourselves in situations that allow us to grow in understanding and compassion for others. And let's be intentional to teach the entire story of God and his plan for his people.

Can we eradicate all racism in the world? Probably not. Can we build habits of love for others in our homes? We absolutely can, and we absolutely should.

About the author: Cyndi Logsdon spent twelve years living in a predominantly Muslim nation where she raised two daughters, shared the gospel, disciplined women, and drank lots and lots of tea. Today she serves alongside her husband at the International Mission Board as well as leading missions efforts at her church, Movement Church in Richmond, VA.

## Sharing and Caring

By Donna Campbell

South Lyon - It is the Lord's design that His people work together to accomplish His purpose. This is one of the strengths at First Baptist Church. (Matthew 19:26 "With men this is impossible, But with God all things are possible.")

Each year, we participate in the Samaritan Purse Shoebox Ministry, packing 110 boxes this year, with toys, school supplies, and personal items. Our WMU reached out to a class of fifth graders in a small town in northern lower Michigan. Boxes were placed in our church. Within a few weeks, they were overflowing, not with 'gently used' but new shoes, socks, pants, hats and gloves. The most popular with the students were the snacks. One student wrote, "Thanks for the snacks, people with no snacks are happy to get a snack if they don't have any. Your snacks are the best snacks."

A group of our members packed and mailed boxes to our men and women serving in the military. Another group of ladies met at the church and filled 27 gift bags with treats, lotion, chapstick, all items we take for granted. We believe children, and adults, begin to see God's love through the generosity and love of His people.

We may never know the joy that the children feel when they open an unexpected gift, and learn that someone they may never meet or know, cared enough to share God's love. We pray for each child that they might know God's love through the gift of His son, Jesus. We also wanted to give each of the students a warm fleece blanket. Through the generosity of several members, we purchased twenty-five of these warm blankets, which even had pockets for their feet! They were delivered just before Christmas break, and as one teacher related a personal message, "The blankets are something these students will not forget."

Giving has a way of blessing others, even beyond our imagination. A great blessing is giving through the Lottie Moon offering. (Matthew 28:19 "Go ye into all the world...") Our offering reaches into some of the most atheistic countries in Europe such as the Czech Republic. Our goal was \$4,500 and so far \$6,000 has been given because of our strong belief and worth of missions.

We are truly blessed and know that God has a purpose. We once had a pastor who loved to say, "We can never out give God." Reaching souls for Christ, the living Son of God, is the purpose of the church. We thank Him daily, giving Him all the glory and praise.

About the author: Donna Campbell and her husband Fred have been members of First Baptist Church of South Lyon since 1966 serving in various areas of the church most notably the bus ministry. Donna is presently the WMU Director and the mission work of the church.

### **Spanish Church Holds Health and Job Fair**

By Benjamin Moy

(Preface from Pastor Eli of the First Spanish Church in Detroit)

This morning, as a follow up to the Saturday Health and Job Fair at the First Spanish Church Detroit, I received the letter below from Benjamin Moy, member of Lakes Bible Church, and the student from the University of Michigan, who helped us organize the Health and Job Fair. I thanked our members for practicing *filoxenia*, the love of the stranger, hospitality, and for preparing the soil for evangelism for both our neighborhood guests and the students and doctors. I encouraged our church members by stating they are valuable and needed for our church's ministry. Thank you for praying. Pastor Eli

Dear Pastor Eli and the entire PIBH family:

On behalf of the Kidney Disease Screening and Awareness Program, I would like to thank you for your hospitality and kindness in hosting the health and job fair. You all went above and beyond to help plan and publicize the event, which made the fair a true success. We were able to screen about 50 people despite the cold weather, which likely kept some at home. I know that we are excited to partner with you all again.

Perhaps more important was your testimony of faith to members of the club. The students commented on how your servants' hearts and generosity was something they had never experienced before with any community organization. Truly, your commitment to the truths of the Gospel as well as your active, mission-minded zeal was very evident. From young to old, for a few minutes or all six hours, whether you helped set up tables, prepare the food, or engage with the students, you demonstrated how Christ's church should operate. Your involvement today reminded me of Matthew 5:16, where Jesus said: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Personally, I am grateful that you opened your hearts and building to us. You did not have to, but you did so willingly and cheerfully. Your church is filled with special people and I always

have fond memories of time spent in Southwest Detroit. God bless you all and I hope to see many of you soon.

Sincerely,  
Benjamin Moy

About the author: Benjamin Moy is a member of Lakes Bible Church, and a student at the University of Michigan. He was instrumental in making the Health and Job Fair a success.

### **The Importance of Evangelism and Apologetics**

By Roberto Perez / ShareFaith.com

On the battlefield of evangelism, people soon realize that it's not always as easy as it should be. The Gospel message is simple, and quite frankly attractive. Mankind is fallen, God loves His children, and they can be forgiven of sins if they believe in Jesus...easy.

Unfortunately, Christianity is not always viewed in such simplified terms. As a matter of fact, God is often seen as a big meanie in the sky who tallies up wrongdoings so He has an excuse to throw people into hell. To top it all off, God requires mankind to follow a strict rule book, which is unreasonable and not very fun at all. So why the misconception? Those who don't believe in Jesus often do not have college degrees in theology. Those who are uninterested in a subject rarely take the time to study up on such things. Judgment is made solely on what information is available with the least amount of effort required. This is where many fall into error. It is the job of the apologist and evangelist to attempt a correction of this error.

Christians are interested in the subject of God but don't take the time to study up on apologetics, doctrine and theology. This is to fall into the same error as the non-religious. Apologetics takes time and effort. Believers are commissioned by Christ to make disciples of the nations and to bring the truth of the Gospel to unbelievers. Apologetics is not simply a specified subject that only apologists are required to know; apologetics is crucial to evangelism which is required of all Christians everywhere. God paints a sobering picture of the error of willful ignorance. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me." Hosea 4:6

The Bible is clear about the subject of knowledge. Knowledge of God and His ways are tools that Christians need to become effective evangelists and preachers. Apologetics are used to correct faulty thought processes and beliefs, they are used to present evidence of the truthfulness of the Gospel message and are also used to solidify personal faith. Christians present Christ in an intellectual satisfying discourse, simple yet beautiful.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

"For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'"

"Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God. It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

"For the Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are being called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

About the author: Enthusiastic and charismatic are words often used to describe Roberto (Joey) Perez. When asked about his silly personality he said, "Being raised in Santa Cruz, California, you have to have a sense of humor...or at least your parents do!" Roberto has served at his church faithfully since he received Christ in 2002. In 2004 he joined a college internship called the Armor Bearers. He graduated from the program in 2006 and in 2007 received a Bachelor of Theology Degree.

Before receiving Christ, Roberto played in a Ska-Punk rock band. He attributes his rude boy years as a time of formation. "I just remember how badly we wanted to change the world. We were on a mission!" While Joey's life since Christ has changed dramatically, his motivations haven't. His mission remains the same -- to change the world. He uses wit, humor, knowledge and love for his fellow neighbor to present the Gospel of Christ and to help lead the lost to repentance.

## SENDING

### **The Great Confusion about Missions**

Matthew Ellison and Denny Spitters

There is great confusion in the church today about the Great Commission.

Albuquerque, NM - Our combined experiences in working with hundreds of churches suggest the confusion is massive, and not just among churchgoers but among pastors and church leaders. A March 2018 Barna survey revealed disturbing evidence: 51 percent of Christians in North America don't recognize or know of the Great Commission. More alarming, of the 49 percent who say they do (when given five Scripture verses, one of which is the actual passage of Matthew 28) only 37 percent could actually identify it! We believe that if you were to do a quick survey of church leaders and mission-minded people in your church, asking them just a couple of basic questions about the Great Commission, you'd get many different and often conflicting answers.

Jesus told us in Matthew 28:18–20, which we know as the Great Commission, to make disciples of all the nations. Now don't think nation states, like Germany or Brazil. Think people groups with distinct languages and cultures. The Great Commission, according to Jesus, isn't just about doing good works in his name—it's not even about making disciples—but about making disciples of all the nations.

"Today, our ever-broadening definition of missions has led to the idea that every follower of Christ is a missionary." The priority, then, of our Great Commission task isn't to just win as many people to Jesus as possible. It's not simply to do acts of kindness and mercy in his name. It's to plant the gospel in every nation, tribe, and tongue. Historically, this priority shaped the church's missions practice and understanding, but today any good deed or altruistic, evangelistic work is often considered missions.

Sharing the gospel with your neighbor who has never heard a clear presentation of the gospel (but could if you'd just cross the street), feeding empty bellies, caring for the homeless and for widows and orphans in places where churches already exist are all important ministries and shouldn't be neglected, but are they really missions? Today, our ever-broadening definition of missions has led to the idea that every follower of Christ is a missionary.

### Unpacking Terms

Does the Bible provide a clear definition for missions given the word isn't even in the Bible? Can we expect the Bible to tell us what it means?

Eckhard Schnabel is considered one of the world's leading experts on missions in the New Testament and author of two 1,000-page volumes on early Christian mission, as well as the 500-page work *Paul the Missionary* (IVP Academic, 2008). He decisively writes, "The argument that the word mission does not occur in the New Testament is incorrect. The Latin verb *mittere* corresponds to the Greek verb *apostellein*, which occurs 136 times in the New Testament (97 times in the Gospels, used both for Jesus having been 'sent' by God and for the Twelve being 'sent' by Jesus)."

Keeping Schnabel's observations in mind, let's take a closer look.

1. *Missio Dei* translates as "mission of God" and is used to signify all that God does in the world and all that he is doing to accomplish his objective, the complete exaltation of the fame of his name: "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Ps. 46:10 ESV).
2. Mission has a secular meaning; it often refers to either an underlying purpose (as in the term "mission statement") or a specific campaign or objective (as in a military or diplomatic mission). But it is also used to define the scope of all that God has given his church to accomplish within the *missio Dei*. It may include all that God has called the church to do in the world.
3. Missional—the most modern of the four terms—is an adjective used primarily to distinguish the ministry of the church that happens beyond its four walls, as opposed to caring for its own. Some churches now use the term missional where they may have previously used mission or missions. This term has also been co-opted to describe a

specific, progressive style of church that is intentionally outreach-oriented (a missional church or a missional community).

4. Missions may be used as a synonym, perhaps a clunky or outdated one, for any of the terms above, and our British brothers and sisters are among those who prefer the more graceful term “mission” without necessarily a switch in meaning between the two. But missions also has a narrower meaning. It’s used to refer to the work of the church in reaching across cultural, religious, ethnic and geographic barriers to advance the work of making disciples of all nations.

Missiologist Gary Corwin, in an article “MissionS: Why the ‘S’ Is Still Important,” compares these four terms along with another one: “In addition, establishing churches among those people groups and communities where Christ is least known has been distinguished over the last several decades as what frontier missions is all about.” Despite the overlapping meanings, explains Corwin, each has an important, particular emphasis, and when they’re properly understood, each serves a useful purpose.

The problem arises when the terms are used interchangeably and these unique emphases are lost.

As Corwin writes, “To say, for example, that either the *missio Dei* and the mission of the church is synonymous, or that the mission of the church is all that one needs to focus on or be concerned about, runs the very real risk of simply defining everything as mission.”

#### Great Commission Focus

We’re unapologetic and ardent activists for a narrow, Great Commission-focused definition of missions that will keep the church on the path of making disciples of all nations. Maintaining a narrow definition of missions will be a more useful tool for the church in fulfilling her mission, and the overall thrust of Scripture readily supports this emphasis.

“Maintaining a narrow definition of missions will be a more useful tool for the church in fulfilling her mission, and the overall thrust of Scripture readily supports this emphasis.” To cross the barriers that missions requires, we must bring significant focus and special emphasis in the church to making disciples resulting in churches. Without this regular and specific emphasis on “making disciples of the nations,” the needs and outreach of the local church will always, quite naturally, receive the greatest attention of our efforts, while the voices of those with no access become a distant memory until next year’s “Missions Sunday.”

A sound, biblical missions definition is crucial to the future of the evangelical church. Defining missions in our relativistic, pluralistic era requires that we be committed to walk the path of God’s redemptive mission, culminating in the collective worship of the Lamb by all nations, peoples, tribes, and tongues. That is the bedrock path of missions to which we, his bride, are called. No matter what process we use to define and carry out missions activity, this is the path our boots must travel if we hope to clear the fog of great confusion about missions and obey Jesus’s Great Commission imperative.

About the authors: Matthew Ellison is president of Sixteen:Fifteen and Denny Spitters is vice president of church partnership at Pioneers. They co-authored the book *When Everything Is Missions*.

## **Chitwood to be Installed as IMB President Feb. 6**

By Julie McGowan

RICHMOND —The International Mission Board will install Dr. Paul Chitwood formally as its 13th president on Feb. 6, 2019, at 6:30 p.m. at Grove Avenue Baptist Church in Richmond. The public is invited to attend the installation service, which will include a Sending Celebration honoring the appointment of 19 new Southern Baptist international missionaries.

The IMB's board of trustees unanimously elected Chitwood, 48, as president of the organization on Nov. 15 in Richmond. Chitwood, who previously served as executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, took office immediately as president of the 173-year-old entity, the largest denominational

missionary-sending body among American evangelicals. More than 3,600 Southern Baptist international missionaries serve worldwide.

The special service will include a charge to the new president and the new missionaries by Dr. Tom Elliff, former IMB president, who served in the role from 2011-2014. Other notable guests who will participate in the service include IMB President Emeritus Dr. Jerry Rankin, who served as IMB president from 1993-2010; Dr. J.D. Greear, president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, N.C.; Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director/treasurer of the Woman's Missionary Union in Birmingham, Ala.; Dr. Chuck Pourciau, chairman of the trustee presidential search committee and senior pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La.; and Dr. Clyde Meador, IMB's interim executive vice president.

Dozens of Southern Baptist leaders endorsed Chitwood as the IMB's next president. "I have had the privilege of witnessing first-hand the quiet grace, genuine humility and incredible effectiveness with which Dr. Chitwood has carried out his many roles as husband and father, teacher, pastor, IMB board chairman, and executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention," Elliff said. "As many ... will testify, Paul Chitwood is eminently qualified to serve in this new role. It will be a privilege to pray for him faithfully as he assumes leadership in this new era of advance in global missions."

"Dr. Chitwood is uniquely qualified to lead us into the next era of Southern Baptists reaching the nations," Pourciau said. "His missions heart and leadership acumen will serve us well in the years to come. I am eager to watch God work through him as he leads our international missions efforts."

### **Experienced servant-leader**

A former chairman of IMB's board of trustees, Chitwood most recently served as executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, the state's largest religious organization with

750,000 members in 2,400 churches and 70 associations, from 2011-2018. For 18 years, Chitwood served as the pastor of local churches of varying sizes: First Baptist Church, Mt. Washington (2003-11), where he is a member; First Baptist Church of Somerset (1999-2003); First Baptist Church of Owenton (1995-99); and South Fork Baptist Church in Owenton (1993-95). As a pastor, his churches averaged giving 18.5 percent through the Cooperative Program.

During his pastorates, he served as chairman of the IMB trustees from 2008-10, part of his tenure as an IMB trustee from 2002-10. His overseas short-term mission involvement includes work in the Americas, South Asia, East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. As executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, Chitwood led the organization to a greater focus on strengthening local churches, planting new congregations, evangelizing the unchurched, and shifting more funding to international missions.

In consideration of leading the largest denominational missionary-sending body among American evangelicals, Chitwood has stated that he is committed to the organization's next executive vice president being someone with significant mission-field experience. Chitwood has traveled extensively overseas in support of the IMB and worked alongside IMB missionaries, which gives him a view into the missionary life and task but also makes him realize how much he will depend on men and women who have long-term overseas experience.

Chitwood was Kentucky Baptist Convention president in 2005-06; first vice president in 2003-04; and president of the state pastors' conference in 2002. He was chairman of the SBC Committee on Nominations in 2015-16, and he also has served on several other state mission committees and in associational leadership committees. He has served as a trustee of Crossings Ministries, Sunrise Children's Services, Kentucky Baptist Foundation, Oneida Baptist Institute, Baptist Haiti Mission, and Bridges to Nigeria.

He is an adjunct professor of leadership at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously has been an assistant professor of missions and evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, University of the Cumberland, and Boyce College.

A native of Jellico, Tenn., Chitwood is a 1992 graduate of Cumberland College (now University of the Cumberland), where he has served as a trustee. He earned a master of divinity degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1995 and a Ph.D. from the seminary in 2001. He currently is pursuing a master's degree in nonprofit administration from the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame.

Chitwood and his wife, Michelle, have been married for 25 years. Their family includes a son Daniel, 22, and daughter-in-law Derrika; and three daughters: Anna, 20; Cai, 12; and Lilly, 6.

The service will be [broadcast via Livestream](#).

About the author: Julie McGowan is public relations manager for the IMB.

## **A Christmas Story**

By Joy Gleason

LANSING - Faith Fellowship Baptist Church was not closed on Christmas Day 2018. Our doors were open to share a Christmas lunch with the community. The menu included turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, ham, string beans and rolls. The desserts were a generous selection of cakes and pies. There was a warm atmosphere set by Christmas decorations, music in the background, and the singing of Christmas carols. Although everyone showed up looking for a natural feeding, they received a spiritual feeding as well.

One gentleman in particular, Glen, is a living example of that. He had lost faith in God several years ago. Growing up he was abused by family members, and felt that God could not be a God of love to allow what happen to him. Glen was enjoying his meal when he asked the question, why the church opened its doors on Christmas to feed the community. Pastor Stan replied, "Because of the love of God." We wanted to make sure no one is left out of the celebration of God's greatest love gift to mankind. Glen responded by saying, "How do you know God loves people?" At that moment, Pastor Stan sat down and struck up a conversation with Glen. He began to talk about the reality of the miracle birth of Jesus, and explained how much God loves mankind. God was not satisfied with how sin had brought separation between God and one of his greatest creations.

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At the end of the meal, Pastor Stan gave Glen a bible and additional food to take home. Glen left feeling loved and cared for. Today He is being disciplined by Pastor Stan and has a renewed hope in our great God.

Everyone enjoyed the warm, festive atmosphere set by the background music and the singing of Christmas carols. Our community had gathered for a meal, and it was truly the feeling of a home style Christmas. The love and light of Christ shone into the lives of the people there that afternoon.

About the author – Joy Gleason is an Office Assistant with Faith Fellowship Baptist Church, Lansing, Michigan.

## The Impossible Dream: The African Migrant's Journey to Europe

By Karen Pearce

PRAGUE - Africans call their home “the Motherland.” Its wild, unfettered nature is rich with wildlife and music and colors, its cities with tradition and history. But despite the strength of African pride, natural disasters, economic hardship, and wars have oppressed the people. So Mama Africa nurses her babies on tales of the Western Utopia where money is free and life is easy.

From the lap, little boys grow up hearing that to be a good son and “make something of yourself,” they must set out from home, get to the shores of Europe, become successful, make money to send home, and change the future of the family. Proof that it's possible comes from social media posts of others who brag of their success. It seems easy. I joined a group of photographers, documentarians, and videographers to follow the African's journey from the Mediterranean to Malta, to the shores of Sicily, through Rome, and to the French border. What we found were men and women who had believed the hype and risked it all to find out that Europe wasn't what they thought—men and women living in the shadows of beauty, but with all beauty stripped from their lives.

These sojourners lived in cramped shelters or tents, unable to find work. They are resented by the locals, malnourished, lonely, and terribly disillusioned. For them, the Mediterranean isn't a sparkly place to play, but a dark, churning grave that has claimed many thousands of their brothers. The amazing food and gelato on every street corner doesn't offer a smorgasbord of calories and decadence but a meal they can't afford to enjoy. The ruins aren't a beautiful historical site but a marketplace to sell kitschy knick knacks to tourists. Each sale is one more Euro to put toward a meal or a place to sleep.

In the Baobab refugee camp, an unofficial haven for migrants and refugees in Rome run by volunteers, migrants gather from all over Africa. Though their skins are different shades of brown and black and their accents reveal various backgrounds, their stories are the same. They left home thinking that

Europe would welcome them and that they would be heroes and legends in their hometowns. They had no idea what lay ahead.

### The Impossible Journey

The Sahara Desert, or the Great Desert as it's known in Africa, stretches all over North Africa—from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Sub-Saharan Africans dreaming of a better life in Europe must first accomplish the daunting task of crossing this dry, arid expanse the size of the continental US.

The journey means thousands of miles of desert where exhaustion, hunger, thirst, and death are daily threats. Sojourners travel with the ever-constant fear of traffickers who roam the desert like pirates on the high seas, looking to imprison, rob, kill, or extort.

Those who make it to Libya are greeted with violence, prison time, and medieval conditions. One woman we met described being in an underground prison for a year—no light, no privacy, no choice.

When these men and women finally make it to the Mediterranean, they are faced with another vast expanse that wants to eat them alive. Crammed onto inflatable dinghies, or rickety wooden boats, they set out on a temperamental sea with no guide and no supplies. These boats are packed past capacity, the dinghies deflated to fit the larger number. This leg of the journey claimed more and 1,500 lives in 2018 alone. When migrants reach the shores of Europe, they find closed borders. Africans who have already traveled hundreds of miles have no food, no money, no place to live, no visas or passports. The only thing given is ugly sneers from locals who don't want them.

These migrants said if they had it to do over again, they'd never come. This isn't their dream come true; it is a nightmare.

#### The Migrants' Message

Mumuni\*, a Ghanaian, lives at the Baobab refugee camp. He has small rations of food provided by volunteers and a place to pitch a tent, but nothing else. He has accomplished little in his two years away from home. He can't work legally and is forced to beg and steal until he can manage to get documents. "I think if I come to Europe, I will go to school, get a job. I'm coming here to have good situation. But instead, I'm in the streets suffering. The situation here is crazy. I didn't think I would have this kind of life," he said.

Mumuni's journey was from Ghana to Libya, where he and a thousand others paid more than \$700 USD for passage across the sea. As his overcrowded boat made it to deep waters, it sank. He swam back to shore and was immediately put in prison. He had to start over, paying again for another attempt to cross the sea. Today his message to people back home is that the journey is not worth it. "They should not go the Libya way. It's the desert and the sea. You can achieve nothing. Ghana is better than Italy," he said.

A Nigerian man at Baobab also went through Libya to make it to the dreamland of Europe. He left home with a group of twenty-eight people, and only eight survived the trip. The other twenty died in the desert, in prison in Libya, or in the Mediterranean. He also warned other countrymen of believing the social media distortions. "Don't come; it's not easy. If you come to Europe, you are going to suffer. There is no job in Europe. You get what you don't expect," he said.

#### Missing Mama

Their stories reminded me of our own American heroes who risked it all to "settle" the West. They weren't satisfied with the life they'd known and were willing to take a chance. But our heroes didn't have to qualify or get permission to pursue their dreams. If they had the courage to try and the luck to survive, the world was their oyster. For many Africans, their brave, new world is already occupied, so there isn't freedom to settle just anywhere. Passports and papers are needed to open up the oyster. Migrants often find that fact surprising—thinking if they just make the journey, the dream will come true.

Even for those who have refugee status, life isn't much better. There are a few provisions given, but without documentation, refugees aren't allowed to work, or profit, or emigrate. They are left living in a camp—in a world of limbo and broken dreams. They miss their home, their family, their Mama.

\*Name changed

About the author: Karen Pearce is a writer for IMB living in Prague. She has dedicated much of the past three years to researching and writing about the global refugee situation.

Editor's Note: The Baobab refugee camp in Rome was shut down by Italian government officials in November 2018, three months after the author of this article and her media team visited the camp. Continue to pray for the refugees affected by the shutdown.

### **Stories from the Mission Field**

By Karen Villalpando

#### **The Invisible Child (a story from Chad)**

The girl attached herself to us at our arrival at the market. We wandered through the dirt pathways between the varied stalls of the African version of a mall/flea market. She was always there. I met her gaze, noticed her lack of shoes, her torn skirt, hungry eyes. I smiled. She smiled back.

Our host told her that we had nothing for her, and told us to not give any money since beggar children are sent out by the Imam to beg for him. He gives them training in the Koran and a scrap dinner. The host said if we give money we will be surrounded and unable to move on. So I obeyed. Other children approached us in groups of 3 or 4, but quickly went away.

The girl, however, stayed as if she was part of our group. She brought up the rear, almost as if she were shepherding the white ladies so no one would be left behind. She talked to me. I talked back, but we didn't share a language. She was mostly curious, and I think she felt safe. I was praying for her as we moved through the market. Others just looked through her, around her, past her, but we had a connection.

The only time she wasn't invisible to others was when 3 other beggar children began to hit her with their begging bowls. They had shoes and better clothing. They had each other. She covered her face and took the abuse. I stepped between and scolded. They scattered for a few minutes, only to come back with more abuse in the next aisle. My friend saw the action and intervened as well. Then the girl stood up for herself. She had found some courage after our defense of her.

We lost our little shadow only when we boarded the 3-wheeled taxi to leave. I didn't lose her in my heart. I still pray for her. I can't fix her life. But I can recognize her as a child made in the image of God and worthy of my attention, however brief. I can keep a promise I made to really see people, to treat no person as invisible or unworthy of my kindness and my prayers. I will not forget her.

**Wearing the Lafai\***

As we walked the myriad dirt pathways through the market our host heard the repeated comment: "Ladies are here and they are wearing Lafais." How unusual is it that western women will dress in African traditional dress while visiting that it would prompt this refrain so many times? Do others not do the same?

Why do we dress in local attire when visiting Africa?

To respect local modesty standards.

To place value on their culture.

To not draw attention to ourselves and our independence.

To gain credibility as humble helpers.

To represent Jesus as our Lord more than we display our own culture.

Are we willing to lay aside our rights and our cultural preferences, to reach others with the good news? Jesus Christ put on human flesh to live among those he created. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." No matter the place, another country, culture or community, we as representatives of Christ should be the example of love and respect. "They" take notice and that may be the reason we are given the opportunity to speak into their lives with the Gospel message.

Philippians 2:3-11

Colossians 4:5-6

1 Peter 2:11-12, 15-17

\*a traditional scarf/veil dress worn by draping one long piece of fabric from head to ankle.

**Engineers, Doctors, Dentists, Artists**

The great missionary question: Why do professional people with multiple degrees, young children, Christian community, loving family and a fast track to the American dream plant their lives in the middle of the Sahara Desert?

Picture this: Continual dust that invades sinuses, lungs, eyes, ears, homes, food, linens, cars, and toes. Oh my. The foot dirt! Longing for family at holidays and on birthdays, knowing that the togetherness with them may not come until years have passed. Small wages, small houses, intermittent water and electricity, questionable food quality, exposure to diseases virtually unknown in-home circles, desert treks for supplies that would be as near as the Dollar General at home.

Why? Why go? Why bother? Because we are to be imitators of Jesus Christ. When we take up residence among those we are longing to know the glory of God and the grace and truth of Jesus Christ we must be there.

Romans 10:1-4

Colossians 1:24-29

Colossians 3:1-4

Philippians 3:7-17

John 1:9-14

About the author: Karen Villalpando is a Michigan Baptist, an IMB Trustee and the director of Child Care at Memorial Baptist church in Sterling Heights, MI.

## MI NEWS

### **Breaking down walls, Detroit Baptists honor MLK**

by Diana Chandler

DETROIT (BP) -- Not far from Eight Mile Road, a historic racial dividing line in Detroit, more than 100 diverse Southern Baptist pastors, state leaders and laypersons worshipped together on Martin Luther King Jr. day.

The 7 p.m. service marked a milestone for 78-year-old African American pastor Robert Coverson, the event's preacher, who marched in Detroit with King during the civil rights movement. Many suburban residents are afraid to cross Eight Mile Road and venture into the deep inner city during the day, Coverson said, let alone after dark. "I saw last night God touching the hearts of people and I saw walls falling," Coverson told Baptist Press the next morning. "I saw hearts being tenderized for the idea of we are our brother's keeper. I saw a new love relationship starting. It was awesome."

Pastor Roland Caldwell, vice moderator of the Detroit Baptist Association, hosted the event at Burnette Baptist Church. Mathew Vroman, a white pastor who leads the predominantly black Eastside Community Church (SBC) in Eastpointe, organized the event with Caldwell to help unify the community. "Everything in Detroit breeds race," Vroman told BP, referencing Eight Mile Road, racial riots of the 1960s, and racism that continues. "It was important to remember things that happened and proclaim Christ."

The event emphasized unity in Christ, spotlighted the church's efforts to plant diverse churches, and proclaimed Christ while remembering King. "I think it was one of the most significant things I have seen in Southern Baptist life," Vroman said. "Not just talking about it with resolutions, but doing something that matters to the community, as far as making a statement to the African American community."

Tim Patterson, executive director and treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM), attended the service. "It was extremely important for our denomination to see all of our pastors come together in a common cause for someone who did so much for so many," Patterson said. "It was a great time of celebration and a great time of remembering the legacy of Dr. King, and it's a great time for us to look forward to in our future and see what we can do together." In 2020, the BSCM plans to host a King celebration at a larger venue allowing statewide participation, he told BP. The BSCM had hoped to host an event this year. "God's called us to be one big family and I believe as we work together," Patterson said, "we can do more together."

Such events are vital in displaying Southern Baptist unity and repentance from a slave-holding past, Coverson said, despite Southern Baptist Convention resolutions promoting racial reconciliation and repenting of racial sins. The SBC "has plateaued in the South and if it's going to grow, it has to go to the north," Coverson told BP. "And if it doesn't deal with this issue of confirming through their fruit that they're no longer the organization that historically discriminated against people of color, then people of color will not trust them or want to be a part of what they're doing. "And it hinders the spread of the Word of God in the north." Coverson, pastor of Meditation Missionary Baptist Church in Detroit, served as president of BSCM in 2003. Rev. Rochelle Davis Jr. served as the first African American president of the BSCM in 1985-86."

During Coverson's presidency, he encouraged the BSCM and state Baptist associations to adopt Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a paid holiday for employees, which would allow greater denominational participation in such events. "For the first time in the history of our convention, we came together to celebrate a hero, Dr. King, in a way that broke down some walls," Coverson said of the Jan. 22 worship. "We didn't know each other on a personal level. We didn't know each other's story. And last night gave us an opportunity to tell the story. And God's Spirit permeated the place and we'll not be the same anymore." More than 100 people attended the event, Caldwell said.

"My dream and vision is that the pastors and churches in the suburbs, and the pastors and the churches here in the inner city will come together and begin to work towards the goal of love," Caldwell said. "The church and Christ are under attack (by the world). They're coming after the church, and that's because we're separated." Caldwell recalled King's statement that 11 a.m. on Sunday marks the most segregated hour in the nation. "Whites stay in their church and the blacks stay in their church," Caldwell said. "Jesus said that by this all men shall know you are my disciples, that you love one another. Love is action.

"The reason I joined Southern Baptists," he said, "is because I believe that we have to become one in order to win this battle."

About the author: Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

## **A Christmas Story**

By Joy Gleason

LANSING - Faith Fellowship Baptist Church was not closed on Christmas Day 2018. Our doors were open to share a Christmas lunch with the community. The menu included turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, ham, string beans and rolls. The desserts were a generous selection of cakes and pies. There was a warm atmosphere set by Christmas decorations, music in the background, and the singing of Christmas carols. Although everyone showed up looking for a natural feeding, they received a spiritual feeding as well.

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why the church opened its doors on Christmas to feed the community. Pastor Stan replied, "Because of the love of God." We wanted to make sure no one is left out of the celebration of God's greatest love gift to mankind. Glen responded by saying, "How do you know God loves people?" At that moment, Pastor Stan sat down and struck up a conversation with Glen. He began to talk about the reality of the miracle birth of Jesus, and explained how much God loves mankind. God was not satisfied with how sin had brought separation between God and one of his greatest creations.

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About the author – Joy Gleason is an Office Assistant with Faith Fellowship Baptist Church, Lansing, Michigan.

## **Churches Increasingly Use Background Checks to Ensure Safety**

By Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- As churches become aware of potential safety issues, more are signing up for background check services through LifeWay's OneSource program. "The numbers have increased dramatically since we began our relationship with backgroundchecks.com," said LifeWay's Jennie Morris. "On average, we add 160 customers a month."

Since January 2009, more than 16,000 customers have conducted more than 320,000 screenings with backgroundchecks.com through the LifeWay OneSource program. In 2018, more than 1,800 new churches signed up for the program. Morris said part of the growth comes from offering a \$10 price point for a search that includes nationwide sex offender registry, various terrorist watch lists, over 600 million felony, misdemeanor and traffic records searches, as well as Social Security number validation.

According to Morris, around half of the searches return some type of offense. Most are only for minor incidents, but historically, close to 2 in 10 discover a misdemeanor or more serious crime. Churches have begun to recognize how pervasive abuse in churches can be. A 2018 LifeWay

Research survey found 12 percent of Protestant pastors say someone on church staff has sexually harassed a congregation member at some point in the church's life, while 16 percent say a staff member has experienced sexual harassment in a church setting.

Having some peace of mind is part of the reason Rachel Steele, a ministry assistant at Mountain Creek Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, said their church uses the service. The background checks are the "first level of due diligence," Steele said. "We want to have a basic idea of who we are working with," she said. "For volunteers with kids, we need to make sure there are no offenses of note that would make it unwise to allow individuals to serve in those circumstances."

Les Seal served as a pastor at Harper Creek Baptist Church in Battle Creek, Michigan, and started using backgroundchecks.com for individuals working with kids and students. He said it was part of "taking steps to provide a safe and friendly environment for the children." Protection for children at church is one of the primary reasons Oak Grove Baptist Church in Covington, Tennessee, decided to use backgroundchecks.com through LifeWay, according to Jim Martin, a retired deacon and Sunday School teacher.

The church added a background check requirement for all teachers of students to their child protection policy. Martin said no one has been disqualified from serving because of a background check, but church members are at peace knowing someone is checking the history of those working with youth and children. He feels having the background check requirement in place may also have caused some potentially problematic volunteers from ever applying.

A lawyer recommended Oak Grove use background checks for their volunteers to not only provide protection for the children, but also legal protection for the church itself. Martin said Oak Grove uses it for Sunday School teachers, AWANA leaders, Upwards coaches, children's church volunteers, mission trip leaders, and church staff. "If you love kids, you have to protect them from folks with evil intentions," he said. "You cannot just leave it up to a volunteer selection committee and hope for the best."

For more information on background checks, visit [LifeWay.com/backgroundchecks](http://LifeWay.com/backgroundchecks) or call (800) 464-2799. For additional resources to help churches prevent sexual abuse or other moral failures by staff members or volunteers, visit [LifeWay.com/OneSource](http://LifeWay.com/OneSource), [SBCLife.net/pdf/ProtectingOurChildren.pdf](http://SBCLife.net/pdf/ProtectingOurChildren.pdf) or [SBC.net/churchresources/sexabuseprevention.asp](http://SBC.net/churchresources/sexabuseprevention.asp).

About the author: Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

**Ministry Bridezilla**

By Tito Diaz

DETROIT, MI - I remember watching Godzilla movies on Saturday mornings. Yeah, I know. I'm a nerd. A giant, mutant dinosaur emerges from the depths of the earth to wreak havoc. Unbeknownst to everyone, Godzilla is actually on a mission to do good. Usually something like ridding the earth of impending doom from another large mutant like Mothra. But no one seems to care about the good he's trying to accomplish, because of all the damage he's causing during his plight.

Have you ever noticed, some brides act more like Godzilla than beautiful wives-to-be during their wedding season. However, instead of physical destruction, these "bridezillas" leave behind a path of relational destruction. Their tempers are short, frustrations high, and no one is competent in their eyes. Overly critical, they want everything done to perfection. And maybe the worst part all of these emotions are directed at the people closest to them. The people in their corner. While their mission of planning a day filled with beautiful vows, fun dancing and delicious food was accomplished, no one seems to care because of all the damage they caused.

Pastors and leaders have ministry seasons that seem a lot like wedding planning. Seasons that lead to milestone events. Maybe it's the launch of a ministry, construction of a building, a large outreach or the opening Sunday of a church plant. During these times, leaders can appear a lot like bridezillas. The most thoughtful leaders can turn into monsters leading up to and during the event. Then when everything is over, the monster disappears and the person you once knew is back. I'm sure it's happened to someone you know or even yourself some time in ministry. I know I've been a terror during certain ministry seasons in my past. I've had my share of hurting family, staff and volunteers in the name of the mission. Over the years, I've learned a lot about how to love those around me leading up to large events, mostly from the mistakes I've made along the way.

Here are some guidelines on how to love those around you leading up to a ministry milestone:

**PEOPLE ARE NOT PAWNS**

People are not tools used to make the ministry succeed. People are the ministry. If I'm not honoring people, then I'm not honoring Jesus. That includes my staff, leaders and volunteers. I had to stop looking at people as pawns in my attempt to win the game of ministry. (Phil 2:3)

**MY FAMILY IS NOT THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS**

The ends do not justify the means. Our families are not supposed to be sacrificed on the altar of ministry. Jesus was enough sacrifice to cover our every need. Our families are our first ministry. They are to be stewarded, not discarded in the name of Jesus. I've found in ministry seasons leading to milestone events in my life, they were the first thing I sacrificed. Ministry milestones are good, but not if they come at the cost of our families. (1 Tim 3:4-5)

**LOVE JESUS MORE THAN JESUS' WORK**

I've found that the times I've spent the most as a ministry bridezilla, are the times I've spent the least with Jesus. Our amount of love and grace are directly associated with intimacy with Him.

Don't allow the amount of time spent planning and executing an event trump the time you spend with your Savior. Rest is not an option, it's a necessity. So is resting in the Lord. Our worth is not found in the work of Jesus, but in the person of Jesus. (Matt 22:37)

It feels amazing to charge towards the vision God has placed on our hearts. Sometimes we may approach it like bridezilla but we don't have to. There are always going to be seasons in ministry where we are working a little more, sleeping a little less and spinning a few more plates. But in our passion to do the work of God, let's not forget to love the people of God. (1 Pet 4:8)

About the author: Tito Diaz is the multiplication pastor for Mile City Church in Detroit. He serves as a NAMB Church Planting Catalyst.

### **The Invisible Child and other stories from the field**

By Karen Villalpando

#### **The Invisible Child (a story from Chad)**

The girl attached herself to us at our arrival at the market. We wandered through the dirt pathways between the varied stalls of the African version of a mall/flea market. She was always there. I met her gaze, noticed her lack of shoes, her torn skirt, hungry eyes. I smiled. She smiled back.

Our host told her that we had nothing for her, and told us to not give any money since beggar children are sent out by the Imam to beg for him. He gives them training in the Koran and a scrap dinner. The

host said if we give money we will be surrounded and unable to move on. So I obeyed. Other children approached us in groups of 3 or 4, but quickly went away.

The girl, however, stayed as if she was part of our group. She brought up the rear, almost as if she were shepherding the white ladies so no one would be left behind. She talked to me. I talked back, but we didn't share a language. She was mostly curious, and I think she felt safe. I was praying for her as we moved through the market. Others just looked through her, around her, past her, but we had a connection.

The only time she wasn't invisible to others was when 3 other beggar children began to hit her with their begging bowls. They had shoes and better clothing. They had each other. She covered her face and took the abuse. I stepped between and scolded. They scattered for a few minutes, only to come back with more abuse in the next aisle. My friend saw the action and intervened as well. Then the girl stood up for herself. She had found some courage after our defense of her.

We lost our little shadow only when we boarded the 3-wheeled taxi to leave. I didn't lose her in my heart. I still pray for her. I can't fix her life. But I can recognize her as a child made in the image of God and worthy of my attention, however brief. I can keep a promise I made to really

see people, to treat no person as invisible or unworthy of my kindness and my prayers. I will not forget her.

### **Wearing the Lafai\***

As we walked the myriad dirt pathways through the market our host heard the repeated comment: "Ladies are here and they are wearing Lafais." How unusual is it that western women will dress in African traditional dress while visiting that it would prompt this refrain so many times? Do others not do the same?

Why do we dress in local attire when visiting Africa?

To respect local modesty standards.

To place value on their culture.

To not draw attention to ourselves and our independence.

To gain credibility as humble helpers.

To represent Jesus as our Lord more than we display our own culture.

Are we willing to lay aside our rights and our cultural preferences, to reach others with the good news? Jesus Christ put on human flesh to live among those he created. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." No matter the place, another country, culture or community, we as representatives of Christ should be the example of love and respect. "They" take notice and that may be the reason we are given the opportunity to speak into their lives with the Gospel message.

Philippians 2:3-11

Colossians 4:5-6

1 Peter 2:11-12, 15-17

\*a traditional scarf/veil dress worn by draping one long piece of fabric from head to ankle.

### **Engineers, Doctors, Dentists, Artists**

The great missionary question: Why do professional people with multiple degrees, young children, Christian community, loving family and a fast track to the American dream plant their lives in the middle of the Sahara Desert?

Picture this: Continual dust that invades sinuses, lungs, eyes, ears, noses, food, linens, cars, and toes. Oh my. The foot dirt! Longing for family at holidays and on birthdays, knowing that the togetherness with them may not come until years have passed. Small wages, small houses, intermittent water and electricity, questionable food quality, exposure to diseases virtually unknown in-home circles, desert treks for supplies that would be as near as the Dollar General at home.

Why? Why go? Why bother? Because we are to be imitators of Jesus Christ. When we take up residence among those we are longing to know the glory of God and the grace and truth of Jesus Christ we must be there.

Romans 10:1-4

Colossians 1:24-29  
Colossians 3:1-4  
Philippians 3:7-17  
John 1:9-14

About the author: Karen Villalpando is a Michigan Baptist, an IMB Trustee and the director of Child Care at Memorial Baptist church in Sterling Heights, MI.

## SBC NEWS

### 2019 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

By Staff

ALPHARETTA, GA - Today the spiritual needs of North America are as great as ever. Approximately 363 million people live here with a projected 75% who do not have a personal relationship with Christ.

Many communities, especially outside the South, have a serious lack of Bible-teaching, Evangelical churches. One look at the headlines tells the story of how secularism has overtaken our region. Poverty, violence, sky-rocketing divorce rates, human trafficking and an overflowing foster care system sadly demonstrate how greatly North America needs the hope of Christ.

At the same time, the nations continue to come here in search of a new life. Many immigrants and refugees arrive from unreached people groups and can now hear the gospel for the first time. The opportunities are endless. That's why the North American Mission Board, in partnership with Southern Baptist pastors and churches, is committed to sending hope.

Every gift to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering—100 percent—goes to train, resource and deploy more than 5,000 missionaries involved in church planting and compassion ministries. Together we make a difference by meeting needs, planting churches and discipling new believers. Transformation is taking place one life at a time.

Things you want to know about this year's offering:

- National Goal - \$70 million
- Week of Prayer for North American Missions – Sunday, March 3 through Sunday, March 10
- Offering Theme – Sending Hope
- Verse – “...He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” – 1 Peter 1:3, CSB
- Offering Resources Available: [www.AnnieArmstrong.com](http://www.AnnieArmstrong.com)

Southern Baptists have generously supported the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® for North American missions since 1933. These sacrificial gifts have made it possible for millions to experience the hope of the gospel through the work of missionaries across the United States, Canada and the territories of Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam.

### **Chitwood to be Installed as IMB President Feb. 6**

By Julie McGowan

RICHMOND —The International Mission Board will install Dr. Paul Chitwood formally as its 13th president on Feb. 6, 2019, at 6:30 p.m. at Grove Avenue Baptist Church in Richmond. The public is invited to attend the installation service, which will include a Sending Celebration honoring the appointment of 19 new Southern Baptist international missionaries.

The IMB's board of trustees unanimously elected Chitwood, 48, as president of the organization on Nov. 15 in Richmond. Chitwood, who previously served as executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, took office immediately as president of the 173-year-old entity, the largest denominational missionary-sending body among American evangelicals. More than 3,600 Southern Baptist international missionaries serve worldwide.

The special service will include a charge to the new president and the new missionaries by Dr. Tom Elliff, former IMB president, who served in the role from 2011-2014. Other notable guests who will participate in the service include IMB President Emeritus Dr. Jerry Rankin, who served as IMB president from 1993-2010; Dr. J.D. Greear, president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, N.C.; Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director/treasurer of the Woman's Missionary Union in Birmingham, Ala.; Dr. Chuck Pourciau, chairman of the trustee presidential search committee and senior pastor of Broadmoor Baptist Church in Shreveport, La.; and Dr. Clyde Meador, IMB's interim executive vice president.

Dozens of Southern Baptist leaders endorsed Chitwood as the IMB's next president. "I have had the privilege of witnessing first-hand the quiet grace, genuine humility and incredible effectiveness with which Dr. Chitwood has carried out his many roles as husband and father, teacher, pastor, IMB board chairman, and executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention," Elliff said. "As many ... will testify, Paul Chitwood is eminently qualified to serve in this new role. It will be a privilege to pray for him faithfully as he assumes leadership in this new era of advance in global missions."

"Dr. Chitwood is uniquely qualified to lead us into the next era of Southern Baptists reaching the nations," Pourciau said. "His missions heart and leadership acumen will serve us well in the years to come. I am eager to watch God work through him as he leads our international missions efforts."

#### **Experienced servant-leader**

A former chairman of IMB's board of trustees, Chitwood most recently served as executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, the state's largest religious organization with

750,000 members in 2,400 churches and 70 associations, from 2011-2018. For 18 years, Chitwood served as the pastor of local churches of varying sizes: First Baptist Church, Mt. Washington (2003-11), where he is a member; First Baptist Church of Somerset (1999-2003); First Baptist Church of Owenton (1995-99); and South Fork Baptist Church in Owenton (1993-95). As a pastor, his churches averaged giving 18.5 percent through the Cooperative Program.

During his pastorates, he served as chairman of the IMB trustees from 2008-10, part of his tenure as an IMB trustee from 2002-10. His overseas short-term mission involvement includes work in the Americas, South Asia, East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. As executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, Chitwood led the organization to a greater focus on strengthening local churches, planting new congregations, evangelizing the unchurched, and shifting more funding to international missions.

In consideration of leading the largest denominational missionary-sending body among American evangelicals, Chitwood has stated that he is committed to the organization's next executive vice president being someone with significant mission-field experience. Chitwood has traveled extensively overseas in support of the IMB and worked alongside IMB missionaries, which gives him a view into the missionary life and task but also makes him realize how much he will depend on men and women who have long-term overseas experience.

Chitwood was Kentucky Baptist Convention president in 2005-06; first vice president in 2003-04; and president of the state pastors' conference in 2002. He was chairman of the SBC Committee on Nominations in 2015-16, and he also has served on several other state mission committees and in associational leadership committees. He has served as a trustee of Crossings Ministries, Sunrise Children's Services, Kentucky Baptist Foundation, Oneida Baptist Institute, Baptist Haiti Mission, and Bridges to Nigeria.

He is an adjunct professor of leadership at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously has been an assistant professor of missions and evangelism at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, University of the Cumberland, and Boyce College.

A native of Jellico, Tenn., Chitwood is a 1992 graduate of Cumberland College (now University of the Cumberland), where he has served as a trustee. He earned a master of divinity degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1995 and a Ph.D. from the seminary in 2001. He currently is pursuing a master's degree in nonprofit administration from the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame.

Chitwood and his wife, Michelle, have been married for 25 years. Their family includes a son Daniel, 22, and daughter-in-law Derrika; and three daughters: Anna, 20; Cai, 12; and Lilly, 6.

The service will be [broadcast via Livestream](#).

About the author: Julie McGowan is public relations manager for the IMB.

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