

Bread

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – The urge hit me again today. You know, one of those cravings that seem to take control of all your senses, and make them focus on that one “desire”. I am told that pregnant women have these cravings and some of them are most unusual. Well, I’m not pregnant and that for which I crave is not very unusual, that is, if you were born and reared in Texas.

I have in recent months been on a diet to get rid of some of the blessings of the “lard.” To do so I have limited my intake of anything Mexican. Now I have a hankerin’ for some good ol’ TEX-MEX food. Like an addict aching for his fix, I’m in desperate need of a tamale and tortilla injection via my mouth. A little bowl of salsa and fried corn tortilla chips wouldn’t hurt either. There is nothing quite like fresh tamales and tortillas. If all you have ever had are the “store bought” kinds of these Mexican delicacies, then you are greatly lacking in one of the great experiences of life. Suffice it to say, there is nothing like the original.

One of the reasons I believe that tamales and tortillas are such wonderful delights is that the art of their preparation has been perfected. My friend, no one can make a tortilla like a little Mexican lady from the border of Texas and Mexico. These things that we buy packaged in plastic in the grocery store are mere facsimiles of the originals. Their taste and texture more resemble that of bleached cardboard than that of this heavenly bread.

Of course, I am not slighting the bread that our ladies make here in the Northern regions of our nation. In fact, since moving up here where popsicles feel at home, I have partaken in some of the finest breads, pastries and cinnamon rolls this side of heaven. Although they should spell cinnamon with an “s” instead of a “c”. I have noticed that no matter where I go there is one universal food that appears at almost every meal, and that is bread. Tortillas, rolls, loaves, biscuits, toast, buns and all of these come in assorted shapes, sizes and colors. Their textures and tastes are as varied as the people who make them but nonetheless, all over the world, bread is universal. How it is prepared and presented takes on hundreds of thousands of styles and forms.

The Word of God tells us that Jesus is the Bread of Life. Everyone needs bread and everyone needs Jesus. Our heavenly Father wants us to be about the business of making sure that the Bread of Life is offered to all who need it and I have found that the methods, means and style of delivery are as varied as the people and the breads of the world.

It could be that some in the South might say that, “the bread of life can only be in biscuit form”. Or those in South Texas must serve the Bread of Life like a tortilla. Even those in France could proclaim that only a hard-crusty loaf will do in the proper presentation of Jesus. I have even heard of bread stores (churches) in the same town, on the same street argue that if you do not use a certain amount of flour, and if it is not cooked at 350 degrees for exactly one hour and

dipped in a certain kind of butter, then it is not bread. In other words, if it is not done our way then it is not true bread!

No matter where I go in this world I have found that people have bread. How they prepare, serve, and present it will differ. But the fact remains, it is bread and we all need it. Bread is bread and Jesus is Jesus. That will never change. The world is hungry and we don't have time to debate about style and texture. The world is hungry and starving for the Bread of Life. Let's get busy baking. Anyone for a tortilla?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Patterson is Executive Director/Treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Elected unanimously in May of 2015, Patterson formerly served for 9 years as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla. He also served as trustee chair and national mobilizer for the North American Mission Board.

Racism has to stop

by Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – The officer patted down the black church planter while the white church planter was locked in the back of a squad car. Separate officers relentlessly interrogated each church planter accusing them of running drugs. Multiple squad cars surrounded the men while police-dogs sniff-out the black minister's car. The Michigan church planters upon being stopped had quickly explained to the officer, during the first seconds of the stop, that they were on their way to a church conference in Pennsylvania.

No one believed the two young men. Consequently, the two church planters were on roadside display, police lights flashing, dogs posturing, and their personal possessions were scattered over the car and onto the ground, including their Bibles. After the interrogations and search was over the two church planters were told, without apology or explanation, that they could go on their way. Within a few minutes the dogs were rewarded and kenneled, the officers turned-off their flashing lights and the squad cars sped away from the scene leaving the two young church planters to repack their belongings, and sort through their feelings in front of passing motorists.

That real life scene played out with my friends less than two years ago. I know these men, their wives and their children. I have served with them these past two years as they have worked to become the best church planters they can become. My heart aches and my soul is torn-in-two by sorrow and anger thinking that my two friends, two years ago, could have come to a violent

or fatal end. When you think that this crisis of ongoing racism does not affect your life, is not your business, or that another priority is more important than this injustice, would you remember our two Michigan church planters? No matter how uncomfortable you get with this subject, realize that racism is a pervasive problem that it must be addressed by all of us.

I am learning from this current crisis as all of us should be learning. For example, I must confess that I am uncomfortable with sorrow and tears. So, when I heard my friends recounting this true personal story my angry-inner-voice screamed phrases like, "Someone should have reported that abuse!" "We need to establish citizen review boards who look over complaints about specific police officers on an annual basis." I voiced my angry thoughts to the men around me and offered practical solutions.

After I was finished with my short list of proposed solutions a third church planter in Michigan said in a slow, soft tone to all involved in the conversation, "It's not time to do something. It's not time to offer solutions. It's time to lament. It's time to show sorrow with brothers who are treated unjustly. It's time to grieve." Shamefully, it occurred to me that I was angry over one incident that happened to two friends while my African American brothers in Christ have a tragically large archive of racist interactions that have shaped them differently than I have been shaped.

During a Sunday afternoon prayer vigil in pursuit of justice and the end of racism, a fourth African American church planter prayed aloud about how he constantly instructs his son to be docile if he is ever stopped by the police or anyone in authority. Do you know the definition of docile? The word docile means "to readily give into the command or authority of another." That sounds agreeable at first hearing, but what does someone do when they are treated unjustly, illegally, or relentlessly pushed to provoke an angry response that could lead to an escalation of violence or worse, a fatality? To whose authority do you find refuge and rescue?

A fifth church planter in Michigan expressed on his Facebook post that he was weary and needed rest from the disappointing and hurtful remarks on social media from brothers and sisters in the Lord. Having known this man for many years, I knew it took a great deal to suppress his enthusiasm for the Lord and ministry life. Days later, I was so pleased that his family and my family shared an afternoon together on our patio with a cookout and conversation. He talked. We listened. We learned. We lamented. We are still learning.

I haven't got all of the answers but I am determined to listen, to lament, to learn and to leverage what I can do to stop racism. Born in Flint, Michigan during 1959, I have some vivid memories of the Civil Rights Era. I've listened to my parents and family members who were raised in the south recall the segregation that took place before my birth. All of it sickens me. It grieves me. It makes me angry. It may do the same to you. Yet, mere feelings aren't going to change anything; so, my wife and I have found some personal and corporate ways to help create a better world. A world more in-tune with God's desires. I hope you are spending time with the Lord, and learning from others who are not the same color as you to discover what God wants you to do.

Racism has to stop! I love the words of Paul who reminds us in Acts 17:26-27 (ESV) that we are one human race created by Almighty God. Paul said to the Athenians, “He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth . . . that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.” I am convinced that if we will pursue deeper relationships with people who are different from us in color that our impact will be greater upon this world so that more people will feel their way toward God and find him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Lynn is the State Director of Missions for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as lead pastor for more than six years at Crosspoint Church in Monroe, Michigan. He and his wife, Jamie, also served with the International Mission Board in Africa and in Europe.

“Yes, We Will Always Say ‘Yes.’”

by Mike Durbin

KINGSLEY, MI – Graduation is a special time for high school seniors. All kinds of events surround this rite of passage - senior pictures, prom, special academic and sporting recognitions and that long awaited moment when the students walk across the stage to receive their diplomas. COVID-19 threatened to take all these special moments away from graduating students this year.

One Michigan church worked with the local school and community to make a “graduation” ceremony possible. Pastor Nathan Norman of the Orchard Church in Kingsley tells how he got a call out of the blue one day from the local school superintendent. Many schools in the area were planning drive through graduations or satellite graduations, but the Kingsley school superintendent wanted a physical graduation, and he had a creative idea of how they could do it.

The school had a long history of optional Baccalaureate Services for graduating Seniors. The idea he presented was simple - “If the Orchard Church could sponsor the service, they could also use it to pass out diplomas.” It would be a joint “baccalaureate graduation” event recognizing this significant milestone in the lives of the students.

Pastor Nathan immediately responded, “Yes, the answer is yes. We will sponsor it,” and the planning began. “It actually turned into weeks and weeks and weeks of work. I would go to all the Board meetings.” There were lots of discussions about how they could safely conduct the

event. With a smile across his face, Pastor Nathan says, “It finally paid off. We were able to get the Board’s approval, the community’s tacit approval, and the church was fully on board.”

There were lots of logistics to work out. The service had to be limited to parents and step-parents of the students. Everyone had to stay 6 feet apart from each other and wear a mask. People would be asked medical questions to make sure no one was infected, and the service had to be conducted outside.

One member of the church, Sharon Greer, told Pastor Nathan, “You know it is traditional to give Bibles away for Baccalaureate.” He had no idea how they were going to make that work with all the safety precautions that had to be in place. Working with the principal, they decided to put the Bible’s in a gift bag. Pastor Nathan, the Superintendent, and the Principal all thought that they were going to be the small Gideon Bibles, but Sharon had other plans. She contacted LifeWay and was able to purchase the Brown Leather Touch Christian Standard Bible at an incredible price to give to all the graduates.

At the graduation, the Superintendent approached Pastor Nathan and said, “Those were incredibly generous Bibles.” The Principal said, “I can’t believe how nice those Bibles are.” The next day at church, one of the members who works for the head of the Board of Education quoted her boss as saying, “Those Bibles are nicer than any Bible that any person has ever given to me.” Pastor Nathan is making sure that he gets one of those Bibles.

The phone call Pastor Nathan received from the Superintendent wasn’t really, “out of the blue.” It happened because the Orchard Church had spent years serving the community and the Kingsley schools. They had relationships with teachers, with board members, and with leaders in the community. It was decades in the making as they served the mission field around them. They built relationships slowly. There have been a number of times the school has called the church with a need and our answer has always been, “Yes. We will always say yes.” Those “yesses” to needs built trust.

Pastor Nathan says, “It was incredible to see the students lining up, socially distant in masks, and excited to be able to physically graduate. That moment made all the hours and hours of labor worth it.”

During the Baccalaureate/Graduation service, Pastor Nathan was able to read scripture and share with them the hope of the Gospel.

Congratulations to Kingsley graduates of 2020, and to the families, the school board, principal, superintendent, community, and church that worked together to honor these students and their achievements.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Durbin is the State Evangelism Director for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before joining the state convention staff, Mike served as Church Planting Catalyst and Director

of Missions in Metro Detroit since 2007. He also has served as a pastor and bi-vocational pastor in Michigan, as well as International Missionary to Brazil.

Rooms for Rent

by Eric Ball

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This guest column was republished with permission from Eric Ball, the author of the article. He directs and facilitates E3 Ministries. He is also a great friend and mentor to Mick Schatz and a friend of Bambi Lake.*

What a crazy year! Jokingly someone commented, "The most useless purchase this year is a 2020 planner." At least it sure feels that way since most of what was life's routine has disappeared.

One thing that hasn't changed however, is our need to choose which voices will occupy our attention. Our life is akin to a house made up of many rooms. In the home of our life we have our thinking room, our feeling room, our work room, our relationship room...you get the picture. One of the most sobering issues surfacing during this crazy year is just how much fear is actively seeking to take up residence in the rooms of our lives. The message "be afraid" scream at us from every channel and on every page of social media. Fear is relentlessly looking to rent the rooms of our lives. If we allow it access, like a deadbeat tenant, it soon begins to destroy everything in the house. But the truth is we can say NO!

While we were not designed to operate in fear, to be honest, most of us have rented rooms to fear much too long. We must stop giving fear access. Here are a couple of things I am finding helpful in dealing with fear:

Jude 20, 21 - But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

- Keep yourself in the love of God. Visit and revisit the love of God for you.
- Write them down & meditate upon the loving promises of God and the sacrifice of Christ that was just for you.
- Personalize each promise by putting your name in the promise. Promises like Psalms 1, Romans 8:32, Romans 8:14-17, John 17:23 and so many others.

Romans 15:13 - Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Peace comes in believing: Believing what? Believing what you see on the news? No! Peace and hope come from believing what is true.
- Power comes with believing: When we choose to not rent to fear but instead believe God's truth that choice is accompanied with the power of Holy Spirit that enables us to abound in hope.
- Remember, hopelessness is always tied to a lie while truth always leads to hope.

If you've rented rooms to fear, evict it. Tell it there's no room in your house and actively choose to fill up each room by focusing on God's truth until one of two things happen. Either you believe His truth to the core of your being or you die moving in that direction! Regardless, fear has no place in you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Ball is the founder of E-3 ministries, a ministry to students. Eric travels the country and the world to share a dynamic message of Truth that students of today desperately need to understand. Eric and his wife, Linda have four beautiful daughters. Eric has authored several books: *The Heart 2 Heart Journal* – a devotional for students seeking to develop an intimate walk with the Father. *A Personal Survival Guide* – a follow up manual designed to be used by students, parents, and leaders to disciple new believers by addressing their “felt needs”. *Mission Trip Training Manual* – a step-by-step manual for Youth leaders preparing their group for short-term missions.

BSCM officers stand against racism

The officers and the Executive Director/Treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, on Monday, June 29, 2020 from Plymouth, Michigan released a statement against racism and injustice. Approximately thirty people were in attendance, including a local news station, pastors and staff members. Attenders stood alongside leaders, as the statement was read publicly, while others participated through Zoom. Participants broke into applause at the conclusion of the gathering. This event was a result of an important conversation and collaboration between the leadership of the state convention and the officers of the Greater Detroit Baptist Association. The complete, six-paragraph written statement can be read below and the video of the press release can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/433739761>.

To join with the BSCM officers in taking this stand, please sign the petition at <http://chnq.it/hcPxqsgvNb>

Press Release Statement by BSCM Officers and Executive Director

The Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast what is good...Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Romans 16:9, 15, English Standard Version). The officers and employees of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan abhor the injustice that many of our African-American brothers and sisters have endured as the result of the lingering vestiges of systemic racism in our society. We stand side-by-side with our brothers and sisters with hearts filled with love for them, but also with hearts that are broken because of the pain and fear they have endured and are continuing to endure. We openly weep with them.

We condemn, in the strongest terms possible, all expressions of racism as being not only contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but as an anti-gospel of hate rather than love. We believe that all human beings are made in the image of God, and as such deserve dignity and respect. Any words or actions that attack and denigrate any humans on the basis of their ethnic background are attacks on the God in whose image they are created. Because we are ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20), we must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and speak up and speak out for those who suffer injustice (Isaiah 1:17). We believe that all black lives are therefore sacred, without denying that any other lives matter and without supporting the principles of the Black Lives Matter organization. To assert that black lives matter, when black lives are in danger, is not contrary to the Gospel, but rather is the product of loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40). Therefore, we recommit ourselves to pray that “justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24) and to act in love for our neighbors. Our words must be and will be supported by our actions.

To that end, we call on our elected representatives at all levels of government to fulfill their duty to end racial injustice wherever it exists. We recognize this means both reexamining existing laws to ensure their equity and fairness as well as considering new legislation that offers protection for those most susceptible to the abuses of those lingering vestiges of systemic racism, including federal legislation outlawing the heinous crime of lynching. Therefore, we recommit ourselves to pray for our government leaders’ well-being, wisdom, discernment, and their just exercise of the authority given to them by God.

We further recognize the need for reform, but not disbandment, in our law enforcement agencies. We are rightly repulsed when those who serve as public protectors violate the justice they have been sworn to uphold. While we are supportive of those men and women who faithfully and bravely serve their communities as law enforcement officers, we are also sadly aware that there are some who misuse their God-sanctioned authority to mistreat and abuse minority ethnic groups. Therefore, we recommit ourselves to pray for those in law enforcement who are striving to be peacemakers, that God will bless their efforts with success as they seek to build relationships and bridges with the people they serve. We also recommit to pray and

speak out against those members of the law enforcement community who would abuse their authority.

The Baptist Faith and Message 2000, our confessional statement as Southern Baptists, unequivocally calls on every Christian to oppose racism. Furthermore, in Article XV – The Christian and the Social Order, it states, “Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.” These principles find their basis in both the Scriptures and the God who inspired them, and we affirm without any reservation or qualification these principles. Therefore, we recommit ourselves to acting on behalf of those whose voices are not heard, advocating and promoting the sanctity of life from the womb to the tomb and laboring endlessly to bring about healing in the area of racial and social injustices.

Ultimately, however, we understand that there can be no lasting resolution or peace in this matter apart from hearts that have been transformed by the Good News of Jesus Christ, because at its foundation the problem is not sociological, but theological. We believe that the sin nature we have all inherited lies at the root of racism, along with all of its poisonous fruits, and that the only permanent solution is the Gospel and its application. As we strive to address the physical, mental, and emotional pain and darkness, we also seek to point people to faith in Jesus Christ so that we might punch holes in that darkness with the light of God’s love.

“Ethnic Conciliation” Punching Holes in the Darkness Podcast

by Baptist Beacon staff

PLYMOUTH, MI – Detroit Pastor Eli Garza joined the podcast “Punching Holes in the Darkness” recently to discuss the recent racial struggles in a broader context than black and white tensions. Pastor Garza says that is why he prefers to describe the issue as “ethnic conciliation.”

Garza, a trained engineer before being trained as a pastor, has an intense interest in history and especially the history of Detroit and its racial divides. He told podcast host, Tim Patterson, that in his lifetime he has seen divisions between African-Americans and Anglos, but also between those groups and Latinos, and even division inside of each other racial group.

The longtime pastor says those struggles point to our sinful natures of “wanting to be around people exactly like we are.” He says Jesus pointed this out when he said that if we only prayed

for those who loved us then we are no different than the pagans. Garza says “it is God’s intention that the Church be mixed together across class and ethnic lines.”

The Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) has launched this new podcast called “Punching Holes in the Darkness.” for conversations like these. The online audio program is hosted by BSCM Executive Director and Treasurer, Tim Patterson. The podcast is a collection of interviews and stories about the ministry of pastors and churches in Michigan.

“Punching Holes in the Darkness” can be found on Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts, or at bscm.org/podcast.

Neighbors helping neighbors

by Dave Roberts

MIDLAND, MI – On May 19, 2020, two dams failed and two others were compromised along the Tittabawassee River system from Secord Lake down to Sanford Lake due to overwhelming rain received in the area. The dam break resulted in 5,000 flooded homes and caused 11,000 people to be displaced in Gladwin County, Edenville, Sanford, Midland, Freeland, and Saginaw. Miraculously, there was no loss of life during this disaster, however, many lost homes and belongings, and continue to wait for answers from the government and insurance companies.

In the midst of this great tragedy, and because of COVID-19 restrictions, more people were available to respond when the waters receded. A lot of the major cleanup work was done in less than three weeks – neighbor helping neighbor, arm in arm, hand in hand – and Christian disaster relief organizations responded including your Michigan Southern Baptist Disaster Relief team (DR).

Disaster Relief volunteers staged at Sunrise Church of Midland. A steady stream of volunteers from a variety of Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) churches worked for two weeks in the Midland, Gladwin, and Saginaw areas to serve families affected by the flood. 94 volunteers served between 15 to 20 homes. Each homeowner was prayed with and presented a Bible signed by the volunteers who helped them. Pray that God’s Word will do God’s work in their hearts and bring them to faith in Christ. Pray for effective follow-up work as those helped are revisited to see how they are doing.

I am grateful for the ministry of DR across Michigan and beyond. It is a ministry worthy of your support as you give through the Cooperative Program or directly to MI DR through the BSCM website. “Thanks” to all who came and helped from Grayling, Grand Rapids, Plymouth/South

Lyon, Detroit, Grand Blanc, and other places – you have made a difference here in the Bay Area Baptist Association.

There is still a lot of work to be done for those who are rebuilding. Please keep them in your prayers. And remember, “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8) NKJV.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Roberts is the Associational Mission Strategist (AMS) for the Bay Area Baptist Association. He is also an Adjunct Professor for Liberty University School of Divinity and Spring Arbor University. He is married to Melissa and they live in Midland.

Husband's incarceration leads to passion for 'forgotten families'

by Trennis Henderson

GALATIA, IL (BP) – “Why did you become involved in corrections ministry?” It was a fair question that Karen Vinyard always had a good answer for: “My husband is incarcerated.”

Vinyard, a longtime Illinois Woman's Missionary Union leader, began volunteering in corrections ministry while her husband was serving 13 years in prison for drug-related charges. Their daughter, who was 10 years old when her father was arrested, grew up, graduated from college and got married while her dad was in prison.

“I tell people, 'It's not something that I planned for my life. It's not something that I wanted to happen in my life,'" Vinyard said. "I would tell that to our daughter. I said, 'But you know what? It happened. Now what are we going to do with it? We have a choice to make in this. ... We can hide it, be ashamed of it or we can use it to somehow allow God to bring glory to Him and to use us in this.'”

Vinyard chose the latter. Today, she and her husband, who was released from prison last year, are active members of First Baptist Church of Eldorado, Ill. While she is grateful for their current season of life, Vinyard remains deeply committed to helping other families still struggling like she was.

“I think truthfully, there were so many years that I felt like I probably lived in a tunnel -- just trying to survive at times," she said. "You don't maybe sometimes have a lot of support from people, friends. It's not something that you talk about many times over casual conversation.

"It was, I think, after my daughter had actually graduated from high school and college, I just finally felt a freedom like, OK, God, we made it, we made it. Thank you.' Through this time, we were able to raise a daughter in the church and still, even with an incarcerated father, to kind of still maintain that contact of the family, but yet not have a turning away from God in the midst of it, not asking God, OK, why did this happen to me?"

Instead, she asked, "Why not me? Why would this not happen to me instead of someone else?"

Vinyard takes that perspective to the conferences she leads on "Bringing Hope to the Forgotten Families."

"Sometimes I felt like the families of the incarcerated were the ones that truly were forgotten," she said. "We as a church need to be aware of that and to know how to minister to those families."

Along with reaching out to families, Vinyard has a burden for helping churches assist former inmates with their re-entry into society.

During a recent speaking engagement, she said, "People released from prison have three needs: They need a safe environment, they need employment, but they also need community. That community can be the church walking alongside, sharing the love, hope and forgiveness that is possible through Christ.

"Are we as churches ready to minister to the needs that may come with someone who has been in prison and is re-entering the 'real world'? There is a great need for churches to be bridge churches to people who are formerly incarcerated, to be mentors to them in their spiritual journey."

Vinyard's ministry passion can be traced to her early involvement in Girls in Action and Acteens. She and National WMU Executive Director Sandy Wisdom-Martin are longtime friends who served together in their teens as counselors at Illinois Baptists' Lake Sallateeska Baptist Camp.

"The bubbly personality of the teenage Karen drew me in like a magnet," Wisdom-Martin recalled. "She was such a positive influence on my life, always upbeat and encouraging. She served with incredible passion and joy.

"Nearly four decades later, her name still brings a smile to my heart. And all those things I said about teenage Karen are still true. She has allowed God to take the circumstances of her life and use them for His glory. I am astonished by her faith and grateful our lives intersected."

Vinyard now serves as director of the Saline Baptist Association's WMU.

"WMU ... is a foundation for me," Vinyard said. "I want it to persevere. I want it to transcend all generations. I want it to be there for my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren because it is the vehicle, the instrument that we can use to share the Gospel with others."

Vinyard said issues for those with incarcerated family members range from financial stress to loneliness to a sense of shame. Helpful responses can include such practical steps as inviting the family over for a meal, sitting with a parent who is alone at a child's sporting event, volunteering to take a child shopping for school clothes or just taking the time to send the child a birthday card.

"There may be someone sitting right next to you in our churches that either they have been or a family member has been incarcerated, but many times we won't share that," Vinyard said.

"It definitely is a ministry of presence and encouragement," she added. "Our church always paid a lot of attention to my daughter. Those things mean so much to you to have that community behind her."

Amid all the emotional and spiritual ups and downs, Vinyard said her life verse has become 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, which describes God as "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

"The comfort that the Holy Spirit gives you is not just to bring you comfort," Vinyard said. "It truly is then to share with others."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trennis Henderson is a freelance national correspondent for the Woman's Missionary Union.

'It's on me,' SBC leaders and pastors say of baptism decline

by Brandon Elrod

ALPHARETTA, GA (BP) – Several Southern Baptist leaders, missionaries and pastors are voicing a unified response to the continuing decline of baptisms across the Southern Baptist Convention: "It's on me."

In the face of a steady, 20-year decline, a new video released by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) emphasizes the need for Southern Baptists to take both responsibility and action for sharing the Gospel in North America.

The video begins with Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB): "In the past 20 years, North America's population has risen by 48.2 million people," Ezell says. After others on the video note the ongoing drop in baptism, Ezell states: "I'm Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, and when it comes to baptism decline in the SBC, it's on me."

Johnny Hunt, NAMB's senior vice president for evangelism and leadership, and Ezell lead off a chorus of Southern Baptist pastors and leaders who rally around the message that pastors and congregants need to be focused on evangelism personally in their lives and corporately through their churches.

"We can have all of the good ideas. We can develop all the programs," Hunt said, "but until we are daily following our Great Commission calling, it doesn't matter. It's on me, and it's on all of us."

During his tenure as SBC president, J.D. Greear, lead pastor of The Summit Church in Durham, N.C., has sought to make evangelism a top priority in Southern Baptist life in part by partnering with Hunt and NAMB to launch the Who's Your One evangelism initiative in 2019.

"We have got to own this problem and say, 'Lord, what needs to change in me? What posture do I need to take to ask You why we're not bearing abundant fruit?'" Greear said in submitted comments. "I'm asking that question, and I would challenge every pastor, every Christian, every follower of Jesus in the Southern Baptist Convention to ask the same thing."

In light of the challenges, Southern Baptist leaders shared their vision for how to move forward to equip and encourage pastors and Christians to develop a culture of embracing and sharing the Gospel.

Larry Anderson, the director of healthy churches for the Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey, highlights three "I's" to pastors in the BRN: institution, internet and intimacy.

"I encourage pastors to make institutional, corporate evangelism a priority through their churches, utilize the internet and social media as a creative platform for sharing their faith and to embrace their intimate relationships with friends, family and coworkers where they have been given the privilege and responsibility to be alive and saved, to be witnesses of the Gospel," Anderson said in written comments.

Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, also appear in the video. Akin shared more about the role SBC seminaries, SEBTS in particular, have in reaching people with the Gospel.

"The churches of the Southern Baptist Convention have charged us to educate their pastors, missionaries, women's ministers, and all other leaders," Akin said. "Our goal is that every pastor educated at SEBTS would leave here with a commitment to serve the church and fulfill the Great Commission.

"Our goal isn't to have our students leave Southeastern with a passion for high baptism numbers. It's to have them leave with a passion for the lost, for God's Word and a passion to fulfill the Great Commission. If we are successful at impressing on students the urgency of eternity and the mission before us, we believe God will use them to reach countless men and women for Christ."

Thomas Hammond, executive director of the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, pointed out the need for a renewed, evangelistic spirit across all levels of the denomination.

"There's no reason for us to point fingers or play the blame game because it's on me," Hammond said. "It's on us all. So, what we need to do is to really focus on the Great Commission. It's to remember what Christ reminded us and that's to keep our eyes on the harvest field because it's abundant and it's ready for harvest. It's important for us like never before to equip the saints for the work of the ministry and to go out into the fields ourselves"

Kenji Adachi, pastor of All Peoples Community Church in the Washington, D.C., metro area, underscored the need for local pastors to involve themselves in evangelism and discipleship.

"It's on me as a local pastor of a local church to make disciples and to see them baptized in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit," Adachi said. "So, it's on me because Jesus has given me the Great Commission as the local pastor in my community to reach these people who are lost and far from Jesus."

The challenge for Southern Baptists, said Hunt, is to engage unbelievers with intentionality and that starts with praying for and reaching out to one person.

"When it comes to the decline in baptisms, which represents a decline in people having a life-changing encounter with a merciful Savior," Hunt said, "it's on us to share the Gospel of the eternal, living hope found in Jesus Christ."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

Riots, race, and revival

by Stan Parker

LANSING, MI – Over the past few weeks, we have observed many of our cities experiencing riots due to the recent outpouring for social justice and reform in how policing is conducted in our nation. These are difficult days we are living in.

There is so much unrest, heartbreak, sin, and hardship. Thankfully, we serve a God who is a loving Heavenly Father and we can have hope knowing that He is working all things for good for those who love Him. One day God will wipe away every tear, and make all things new. Until this occurs, we must live the Gospel in word and deeds.

As Christians we may be upset watching innocent individuals being killed due to injustice, however, we have a responsibility to ensure the Gospel is lived out.

The Bible challenges us in the book of Micah 6:8 states, *"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"*

Part of walking humbly is to recognize injustice and be willing to act.

Recently, in the Potter Walsh Neighborhood which is a multi-ethnic community, a white man named Roc was very sad at the news of Rodney Boyd being killed in Atlanta. He thought about his indoctrination as a child where he was taught to hate African Americans.

Roc called one of his high school teachers to find out what he could do to address his anger and sadness. His teacher and friend suggested that Roc go to visit a predominately African American Church and build relationships.

Roc accepted the suggestion and made his way to Faith Fellowship Baptist Church, which is located in the Potter Walsh Neighborhood. Roc arrived at the church and attended Sunday School and morning worship.

During Sunday School, Roc shared his testimony and began crying because he felt he was part of the problem of hatred in the world. The Sunday class embraced Roc, and comforted him with the love of Christ. He asked what he could do to be part of the answer. The Sunday teacher shared the Gospel, and Roc felt relieved.

He now attends a predominately African American Church. He is growing the Lord, and has become an Ambassador for justice, love, and mercy. Roc is sharing the Gospel with his friends and neighbors.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Stan Parker is the Pastor of Faith Fellowship Baptist Church in Lansing Michigan. He is the current President of the Michigan African American Fellowship. He is married to First Lady Char Parker.

Southern Baptists report growth among ethnic minorities despite declines in broader SBC

by Diana Chandler

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – The Southern Baptist Convention is growing in three key metrics among ethnic minority fellowships despite a continuing decline among the broader SBC, according to a report the Convention Advancement Advisory Council (CAAC) released June 24.

Southern Baptists comprising six ethnic minority fellowships increased their churches, members, and worship attendance, but suffered declines in missions, baptisms and congregations (a category combining churches and missions), the CAAC said in its 2020 report to its membership and ethnic fellowship leaders.

At the same time, the broader SBC and white Southern Baptists decreased in all categories included in the report, according to the CAAC Dashboard 2020 from the CAAC Subcommittee on Research.

Minority ethnic fellowships comprised 22.3 percent of the 51,538 Southern Baptist congregations included in the report regarding 2018, the most recent year studied, using data from LifeWay Research and the North American Mission Board (NAMB).

The only rises in baptisms in 2018 were reported among Hispanic, Native American and "Other Ethnic" Southern Baptists, with the largest increase among Hispanic Southern Baptists, the CAAC reported.

Peter Yanes, who leads and coordinates SBC Executive Committee work among ethnic minority fellowships, said the data is important in building partnerships to fulfill the Great Commission.

"This will provide a better picture and understanding on how diversity and ethnicity should influence our ministry strategy, and hopefully will foster intentional partnership among our churches for the Gospel," said Yanes, SBC EC executive director of Asian American relations and mobilization. "There is much more we need to do in order to get relevant data to the local churches and pastors so that frontline decision making is based on relevant data and accurate facts."

Dennis Mitchell and Minh Ha Nguyen compiled the data as co-chairs of the CAAC Subcommittee on Research. The report, combining Annual Church Profile (ACP) data from LifeWay Research and Racial and Ethnic Reports from NAMB's Center for Missional Research, is the latest and most thorough study of Southern Baptist ethnic diversity available from the SBC EC.

NAMB's Center for Missional Research provides more accurate information on racial, ethnic and language categories and names, Mitchell and Nguyen said.

"For example, ACP has only nine ethnic identifications while the [NAMB] reports provide over 30 ethnic and language groups," the two said in written comments. "In addition, CAAC is doing further research to identify ethnic and language groups among the 'Other Asian' category which includes some of the newest ethnic members of the SBC family (e.g. Chin, Nepalese, Burmese, Persian, South Asian, etc.). Often, these overlooked groups are some of the most dynamic ones showing much vitality and growth."

Following are CAAC findings in various ethnic categories:

All ethnic fellowships combined

- Growth: 8,696 churches, up 1.02 percent from 8,608; 1,481,351 members, up 1.46 percent from 1,459,972; 618,602 in worship attendance, up 6.31 percent from 581,868.
- Decline: 11,504 congregations, down 0.15 percent from 11,522; 2,809 missions, down 3.5 percent from 2,914; 27,160 baptisms, down 3.74 percent from 28,215.

White Southern Baptists

- Decline: 40,033 congregations, down 0.91 percent from 40,400; 38,762 churches, down 0.46 percent from 38,940; 1,271 missions, down 12.96 percent from 1,460; 13,331,855 members, down 1.58 percent from 13,545,666; 4,679,193 worship attendance, down 1.25 percent from 4,738,620; 219,301 baptisms, down 2.92 percent from 225,907.

African Americans

- Growth: 3,382 churches, up 1.23 percent from 3,341; 907,420 members, up 0.05 percent from 907,011; 258,970 worship attendance, up 3.69 percent from 249,744.
- Decline: 3,920 congregations, down 0.23 percent from 3,929; 538 missions, down 8.5 percent from 588; 9,428 baptisms, down 15.35 percent from 11,137.

Hispanics

- Growth: 3,509 congregations, up 0.09 percent from 3,506; 2,275 churches, up 2.39 percent up 7.34 percent from 2,222; 234,658 members, up from 218,614; 142,454

worship attendance, up 4.83 percent from 135,894; 8,053 baptisms, up 20.32 percent from 6,693.

- Decline: 1,234 missions, down 3.89 percent from 1,284.

Asian Americans

- Growth: 2,095 congregations, up 1.06 percent from 2,073; 1,615 churches, up 2.09 percent from 1,582; 93,784 worship attendance, up 0.43 percent from 93,382.
- Decline: 170,093 members, down 0.89 percent from 171,631; 480 missions, down 2.24 percent from 491, and 4,358 baptisms, down 24.80 percent from 5,795.

Southern Baptist Asian Americans include people of Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Laotian and Vietnamese descent.

Native Americans

- Growth: 913 baptisms, up 1 percent from 904.
- Decline: 431 congregations, down 0.92 percent from 435; 390 churches, down 0.25 percent from 391; 41 missions, down 6.82 percent from 44; 35,829 members, down 12.40 percent from 40,900; 15,301 worship attendance, down 4.05 percent from 15,947.

Other Ethnic and Language Groups

- Growth: 516 missions, up 1.78 percent from 507; 133,351 members, up 9.47 percent from 121,816; 108,093 worship attendance, up 24.39 percent from 86,901; 4,408 baptisms, up 19.59 percent from 3,686.
- Decline: 1,550 congregations, down 1.84 percent from 1,579; 1,034 churches, down 3.54 percent from 1,072.

The Other Ethnic and Language Groups category is composed of multiple groups including Haitians, Nigerians, Kenyans, Middle Easterners, Brazilians, Slavic people, Jewish people and other language groups. The findings are in concert with 2019 ACP data released in June, which shows SBC declines in baptisms, members, missions, and worship and Sunday School attendance, alongside a 0.16 percent increase in the number of churches. The CAAC report, in its third year, was conceptualized and designed by Ken Weathersby, who retired in late 2019 as SBC EC vice president for convention advancement. The CAAC said it plans to continue the dashboard for the next five years to establish sufficient information to analyze trends.

For the latest SBC-wide numbers, please see Baptist Press' June 2 story.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor.

First-Person: Is 2020 America's Babel?

by Ryan Smith

STILLWATER, OK (BP) – 2020 was the year.

Because 2020 was a natural aim for renewed vision (20/20 ... get it?), many organizations and leaders placed great expectations on the dawn of the decade.

As the time drew near, goals from personal success to organizational overhaul looked to the broadening 2020 horizon as the arrival of achievement, satisfaction and a charge toward new beginnings in a modern future.

A prospect of promise, a forecast of hope and a celebratory finish line awaited us all as the year 2020 slowly crept into view. In 2020, we would arrive.

And then 2020 came.

In Genesis 11, a design is laid for a grand pinnacle of human achievement. Brick by brick, in a valley of settling, mankind raised their summit into view. As the tower rose high above the expectant city, few realized the depth of shadow such an obelisk would make.

One cannot fault individuals and organizations for setting goals and forecasting progress. That's what good leaders do. However, if this year has taught us anything, it is that our plans are fragile and our efforts certainly are still those of mere men.

The year we thought would show our strength instead has exposed our weakness. God has decimated many of our impenetrable strongholds in a matter of months.

COVID-19 has stripped our sense of physical invincibility.

Social distancing took away sports -- the packed coliseums that were paragons of unity, identification and recreation.

Our peace and security have been rattled by shouting voices in streets filled with cries of unrest.

Our churches have sat empty. Our families are seen, but not felt. Battle lines are drawn. History is torn down.

Never have we been more connected as a nation. Never have we been more divided.

Despite our advancements and opportunities, this year has shown us that we are still plagued by the same elementary sins of delusion, pride, power, brokenness and rebellion that bared their teeth in Eden.

What many bemoan is the fact that though we speak a common language, we have lost the ability to communicate. Great fissures, both new and ages-old, create isolated islands of identity where it seems we have lost the capacity for empathy. A multi-dimensional world of perspectives has been flattened to two: us versus them.

The reason 2020 held such promise for us is that it was supposed to be a year of renewal and progress. In the first half of the year, however, what has been exposed is that despite all our efforts, we have not built a stronger tower of unity, but erected barbed walls of division.

We daily expose the depths of our depravity and once again reaffirm the fact that we can never be the masters we once thought we were and so long to be.

The original Babel resulted in confusion -- twisted communication, scattered families, a loss of control and a remaining monument to futility.

The results of 2020 remain to be seen, but confusion is likely appropriate. In time, our temples will be rebuilt, our distractions will resume and an apparition of what once was will masquerade as a "new normal."

But there is no way we can go back. In many ways, this will provide opportunity for good. In some ways it will provide new weapons for evil. Either way, the new normal is likely to look more new than normal.

Amid the tumult, a resounding reminder echoes from the pages of Genesis 11. We are not God. God is. No matter how high we elevate ourselves, our ideologies and our achievements, God still must descend to be at our level.

Though they thought themselves to be the pinnacle of prominence, the people of Babel are a mere two paragraphs in the hundreds of pages of Biblical narrative. The overarching story carried by that narrative, however, is that God is God and His purposes will prevail.

God's plan for 2020 is unfolding exactly according to His schedule, and it appears His goal for us is a sense of humility, not triumph. A part of that plan is the reminder that Proverbs 16:9 still holds true:

"A person's heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps."

Like our early ancestors, may we emerge from our confusion with greater faith in God and a renewed emphasis of mission. Though we carry the scars of experience, may we not disdain the discipline of our Heavenly Father.

May a posture of humility emerge from the rubble of our Babel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ryan Smith is associate pastor at Eagle Heights Baptist Church in Stillwater, Okla. He is the author of "Not That God."

Michigan Campers On Mission Rally

by Rick and Cindy Truesdale

ROSCOMMON, MI – We are so excited to be able to move forward with our mission to get Michigan Campers on Mission (MI COM) officially organized! Campers on Mission is a national fellowship of evangelical Christian campers who look for opportunities to share their faith and love of Jesus Christ through their participation in mission activities while camping. Two characteristics of Campers on Mission are a love of the great outdoors and a love of sharing Jesus. While enjoying the camping experience, they participate in mission projects including church planting, construction, disaster relief recovery, Backyard Bible Clubs, fairs and festivals, campgrounds, auto racing, parades, and truck stops. All engaging in opportunities to tell others about Jesus. COMers are active members of local churches and “*on mission*” Christians, “*sharing Christ*” through word and deed “*as we go*”.

We have scheduled a few days at Bambi Lake Baptist Camp for us to come together to camp, hold meetings to accomplish the organizational needs, and to relax in the most beautiful camp in Michigan. Since this is not a “work opportunity”, we will be paying for our stay this time. 2020 Bambi rates per night are as follows:

- **Campsite \$25, Electric & Water (dump station available)**
- **Lodge \$49, 2 beds, bathroom**

- **MI COM Organizational Rally at Bambi Lake Baptist Conference Center Wednesday, July 29 - Saturday, August 1, 2020**

We will be providing meals; and if you would like, you may donate towards that expense. Coffee and punch will be available at mealtimes. We do request you bring your own water bottles and pop if you'd prefer.

You do not have to be a Camper On Mission member to attend. Come! Invite your Christian family and friends who might be interested in being a volunteer missionary with COM. This will

be a wonderful time for everyone to meet us and learn about who we are and what we do through COM ministry. We need your reservation as soon as possible so we can organize the food and lodging needs for everyone.

You may go to our Facebook: Michigan Campers on Mission or our website: www.michigancampersonmission.org to learn more about us. Or call us at 810-869-4716.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick and Cindy Truesdail have been married for 27 years. Together they have 5 children and 14 grandchildren. During their early years together, they worked as leaders of a Single Adult Ministry. Rick is a Licensed Professional Counselor and a licensed SBC minister. He served as Associate Pastor with a Spanish-speaking church in Flint for 10 years and Cindy served as the Pastoral Assistant. They are currently active members at Heritage Baptist Church, Grand Blanc, and are eager to work with Campers on Mission in their retirement.

Michigan Disaster Relief: A homeowner's perspective

by Bill LaFollette

Just a month ago central Michigan experienced a 500-year flood and the subsequent failure of two dams on the Tittabawassee river. The heavy rains and ensuing flood waters damaged a number of homes in Gladwin, Midland and Saginaw counties. In Midland county alone, 2,500 homes, businesses and nonprofits were affected. Some 150 homes were completely destroyed, with another 790 suffering major damage. As one of the impacted homeowners, it was welcome news to hear Michigan Disaster Relief was being mobilized to help.

Shortly after Memorial Day, twenty-five trained volunteers came from across the state over a two-week period. There were another 67 spontaneous volunteers from Michigan churches. A number were from the Bay Area Baptist Association, some of whom were impacted themselves. The volunteers were housed at Sunrise Baptist Church in Midland where Disaster relief established a command post, along with feeding and shower/laundry units.

Several of the homes had damage to more than one floor. Those homes typically took more than one day to complete due to the amount of work required. Drywall and flooring were removed and the disposing of debris. Thorough cleaning and sanitizing were involved; all while trying to protect household items that could be saved. Because of the layout of many homes, the number of people at some locations had to be limited to keep from getting in each other's way.

When initially contacted during the assessment phase, some home owners were overwhelmed. After a few days passed and volunteers showed up to help, it was heartwarming to see hope returning to their eyes when they realized others cared and their problems were not insurmountable.

All of the homeowners were grateful, many finding it hard to believe Disaster Relief was providing this help without cost. This often led to discussions about Christ's redeeming love also being free.

The COVID-19 virus restrictions continue, and impacted homeowners are performing the many time-consuming tasks of restoring their homes and getting their lives back to normal. Homeowners are appreciative of Disaster Relief, and churches that showed us the true meaning of loving your neighbor.

For more information about the Michigan flooding visit: <https://bit.ly/31HuLB8>

New EC chair Rolland Slade viewed as pastor of all El Cajon

by Diana Chandler

EL CAJON, CA (BP) – Rolland Slade's longtime friend John Hughes describes him as the pastor of all of El Cajon, a San Diego suburb of more than 100,000 people.

So much so, said Hughes, that when an ecumenical group of pastors sought to comfort the community after El Cajon police shot and killed an unarmed African immigrant in 2016, pastors called on Slade.

"San Diego comes unglued. There's marches. Everybody's focused on El Cajon," Hughes said. "Those pastors got Rolland Slade and put him in front of the camera and said please be our spokesperson. They didn't go to the big guys, and they didn't go to him because he was Black. They went to him because he was Rolland. He's just the best. He's just absolutely the best."

Slade, elected June 16 as chair of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, pastors Meridian Baptist Church, whose pre-COVID-19 Sunday worship attendance was about 70. Slade's footprint extends far beyond the walls of the church, said Hughes, who has collaborated with Slade on several faith-based projects during their 25-year friendship.

"He was the pastor of that community, so much that the mayor would send the chief of police over, the head of the parks and [recreation] over and say, 'Go talk to Rolland. We're trying to do

something in the community and we're not sure how it's going to work," said Hughes, a minister and co-founder of Simon Cross Consulting.

A news clip of about 35 pastors' response to the community upheaval captures Slade's prayer:

"We Lord -- the region, the community, the neighborhood and the family of [African immigrant] Alfred Olango -- have been dramatically changed, but Lord we've been called for such a time as this. Our nation has seen division and separation long enough. Let us identify as a church, the children of God, and use this moment in time to drive us forward to do and to be better. We seek truth, Lord. We seek transparency. We seek transformation not only for the city, but for the region."

The most important thing in his ministry, Slade told Baptist Press days after his election to chair the EC, is loving others as Christ loves him.

It is a love that surprised Slade as a teenager, a love that motivated him to share Christ in the marketplace, a love that allowed him to pastor his father and lead him in the sinner's prayer, a love that led him to missions, and a love that placed him in 2004 as senior pastor of Meridian Baptist Church, where at least 91 percent of the members were of a different hue.

Slade has worked extensively in community ministry since his ordination to Gospel ministry at Bayview Baptist Church in San Diego in 1991, serving at Highland Park Baptist Church, planting Meadowbrook Fellowship in a housing complex, and working as a California missionary with the Home Mission Board, now the North American Mission Board (NAMB). He has collaborated with Hughes in faith-based ministry, is active in the greater El Cajon community and has been awarded for his work.

As a child growing up in San Diego, Slade thought his family was Catholic. He was an altar boy, attending mass most days of the week. He attended Catholic parochial grade schools and a Catholic university. But when his family moved close to public Helix High School, Slade negotiated with his father to attend Helix. It saved Slade a commute; it saved his family a tuition bill, and it put Slade in contact with a Young Life ministry that taught him about the love of Jesus.

Slade wondered why the Young Life ministry embraced him and his friends when it was likely obvious they were only attending the meetings because "that's where all the pretty girls went." Slade asked the leader, Dalton, why the group was so kind.

"I'll never forget. Dalton said to me, 'Jesus loves us, and so we love you guys,'" Slade recalled. "Nah, nah, nah," Slade said he responded. "Jesus is the punishing God, and He's the Son of God Who punishes [me for] all the stuff I do wrong. And I'd been riding my bike to school, doing confessions every week, ... my last confession was a week ago. ... It just blew me away. We were there for all the wrong reasons, and they just loved us."

Slade was astonished to learn he could go directly to God. A few years later at the University of San Diego, Slade took to the religion courses "like a duck takes to water, just reading and asking questions." Unlike in parochial school, the priests responded to his questions with information and suggested reading rather than disdain.

"I was about to graduate, and I think the Spirit just spoke to me, that I would forever going forward have this diploma from this school, great school, one of the best schools in the United States," Slade said. "But I would always have that school, and the theology of that school would always be part of who I was."

He approached his father, James Dementrus Slade, about transferring to another university for his senior year. His father agreed.

"I need to also tell you son," Slade recalled his father saying, "we're not Catholic. ... He said, 'Have you ever seen me go to church with you?' ... A lot of people didn't even know I had a dad, because they'd never seen him."

Slade decided to let the world know he was a Christian. After college, he joined Bayview Baptist Church in San Diego, a National Baptist Convention congregation, where he was baptized. He married Adrienne C. Jewell, and the two are parents of Rolland "Jay," Ryan and Alexandra.

NAMB appointed Slade and his wife as missionaries to the California Southern Baptist Convention, with Slade directing community ministries for the San Diego Baptist Association. It was in 1995, when Slade served as NAMB's national missionary for Welfare to Work Evangelism Ministries, that he and Hughes became friends. Slade was tasked with training and empowering churches, associations and state conventions to mentor men who had struggled in life.

From 2002–2005, Hughes and Slade led the Faith-based Leadership Training Institute of San Diego State University with two other professors, training over 100 pastors from 18 different denominations to work in the community.

Mike Carlisle, director of missions for the San Diego Baptist Association, speaks highly of Slade as an active member of the association for more than 16 years. Slade has served the association as finance committee chairman and as moderator, Carlisle said, and has prominently served in various community leadership roles.

"He has been a steady hand and a wise leader in every respect," Carlisle said. "He has been a gentle man who appreciates diversity, and just, I couldn't say enough good things about him in terms of his leadership role both here in our association, in our state convention and now nationally.

"His attitude, his spirit, is nothing but positive and helpful," Carlisle said. "Everyone here loves Rolland."

Jeff Lettow, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lemon Grove, has known Slade more than 30 years. His earliest memories are of Slade as a San Diego Baptist Association community liaison.

"Everyone would say that Rolland is like their best friend," Lettow said. "He has that kind of a personality who listens well; he's very encouraging. I've never heard him say bad things about anyone. He's a man of integrity. He's very judicious when he speaks or listens. He's a man under control in a lot of ways."

Lettow describes Slade as a "man above reproach" who is well respected at Meridian Baptist, in the political realm, in the business realm and in law enforcement. He and other California Baptists have prayed for Slade during his service to the SBC Executive Committee over the past six years.

"As we prayed for him," Lettow said, "we really believe he's the man for this hour, a man for this season. ... He's a man I would want on my side, going into battle, and he's been there for that. He's a gentle spirit. Jesus talks about how He handles us in a gentle manner, and I think that's an apt expression of Rolland."

Slade has a business degree, and his ministry career was first centered around his work in the marketplace. He surrendered to the call to preach only after two bouts of pneumonia and accompanying hospital stays.

When he owned a Second Sole athletic shoe store franchise, an employee found Slade lying on the floor of the store. Slade was delusional, running a high fever.

"One day I had a cold and didn't think anything of it. I was lying on the floor, talking about how I had hurt my shoulder," Slade recalled. "My wife came in and took me to the hospital. ... It just was excruciating pain, and I thought I had separated my shoulder."

Slade's lungs were filling with fluid, pressing on a nerve, causing the pain.

It was his first hospital stay in more than 10 years. Slade told the Lord that if He allowed him to live, he would do whatever the Lord desired.

"You have me," he said to God. "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do."

But upon recovery, he explained to God that he had been in a desperate situation, thinking he would die, and "if You would just continue to allow me to own my business and expand my business, and maybe get four or five stores, build a small chain of my own"

If the Lord allowed him to be a millionaire in business, he posed, he could then enter the ministry without expecting a salary from the church, perhaps like the apostle Paul as a tent builder.

That proposition didn't work. He got pneumonia again within a month, landing in the hospital a second time.

"There I was again. 'God, I'm sorry. I don't mean to negotiate with You. I will be a man of my word.'

"We talk about our reasonable sacrifice is our lives. God gave me my life back twice, and from that point forward, He's had me."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor.

African American leaders call for Southern Baptists to stand together in unity

by Tess Schoonhoven

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Calling the racial unrest roiling the nation "spiritual warfare," and saying "unless hearts change, nothing will change in America," Philadelphia pastor K. Marshall Williams urged Southern Baptists to stand together in unity against injustice.

"The world is waiting for us to come together," said Williams, senior pastor of Nazarene Baptist Church of Philadelphia. "Because Beloved, truth be told, this is just a dress rehearsal for when we get around the throne. I think maybe God is stripping us. I don't know about you, but this has been a stripping time for me, a pruning time for me, a time in the refiner's fire, that God would see what He really has as far as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Williams' comments came during "A 60 Minute Conversation on Race in America," a panel discussion hosted online Wednesday (June 17) by Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, who brought together five African American Southern Baptist pastors and leaders. Along with Williams, panelists included Rolland Slade, senior pastor of Meridian Baptist Church of El Cajon, Calif., and newly elected chairman of the SBC Executive Committee; Charlie Dates, pastor of Progressive Baptist Church in Chicago; Kevin Smith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware; and Willie McLaurin, vice president of Great Commission relations and mobilization of the SBC EC.

While thanking Floyd for convening the call, Dates said "this is a very tiring conversation, not simply because of the events of recent weeks ... [but] because this has been a 401-year struggle

for African Americans." Dates added that real change would come from pastors joining together to combat racism.

"If the persons who proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ are not in the front lines of strategy and demonstration then the world will simply be blowing hot air in trying to bring change," Dates said. "We can demonstrate the Gospel in power and in witness in leading them in peaceful protesting."

Smith encouraged believers to view the topic through a biblical lens and to use biblical rhetoric rather than "the combat rhetoric that's going on all around us," adding: "If we start with the Lordship of Christ and the Scripture, we can engage with some of these tough subjects."

McLaurin expressed a need for SBC ministry pipelines available to develop vocational leaders from an ethnically diverse perspective. While agreeing, Smith said it should extend to include discipleship for laypersons "to live as salt and light out in their communities."

"The pipeline that is hurting us as regards race in America, as regards a lot of things in America - materialism, greed, consumerism -- is discipling [church] members in such a way that when they go out in the community, they are just different than other people," Smith said.

Asked whether the SBC is progressing on racial issues, McLaurin noted his experience as an interim pastor of 16 "predominantly Anglo churches" in Tennessee. Saying he was the first black man to preach in some of the churches, he recounted a moment when a 10-year-old boy responded to an invitation. The boy's father came down the aisle, hugged McLaurin and asked to speak to the congregation.

"He said, 'I wasn't for this black man coming to be our interim pastor,'" McLaurin said, "'but my 10-year-old son has gotten saved today and today this black pastor is my brother in the Lord. And any of you who have a racist bone in your heart, you need to come to the altar today and get it right with Jesus.'

"I don't know what happened after that, because I was filled with tears," McLaurin continued. "But we are making progress."

Smith acknowledged significant positive change since the SBC's founding 175 years ago in a split with northern Baptists over the issue of slavery, as well as since the Civil Rights movement of the 20th Century. But he said he has been discouraged in recent years by "indifference and insensitivity" from many white Christians.

"I'm certainly encouraged. Things have certainly moved and changed since 1845 and I'm comfortable saying they've changed since 1945," Smith said. "But I don't think the last decade or so ... has been the best window in that long story of Christians in the United States dealing with the issue of race. And I really have a burden about it, because I think it matters evangelistically and missiologically."

Affirming Southern Baptists' strong, passionate stands against abortion and sexual immorality, Williams said he wanted "us to be as passionate about racism and injustice, because it's part of the biblical mandate, Micah 6:8, to do justice."

"I don't think we need to write any more resolutions," he said. "We need to put some shoe leather in it and effect some change. ... Our younger generation wants to see practical application of the biblical principle. And for us right now, our hypocrisy because we haven't acted on it and dealt with America's original sin, it has hindered the heathen from hearing when we holler about the holy. They can't hear us.

"And so we have a great opportunity. That's why I'm here. That we might be a bridge-builder, a unifier, that we might stand as a collective, incarnational presence."

Slade, who was elected Tuesday (June 16) to chair the SBC Executive Committee, challenged Floyd, whom he described as "a man of action," to press forward into the issues of racial injustice discussed Wednesday.

"We knew that when you called, we're gonna do something," Slade said. "We're gonna have a call, but I know ... it's gonna be more than just talk. This is the launching pad. We're going on from here."

Floyd noted that their conversation was taking place five years after the murders in Charleston, S.C., of nine African American church members by a white supremacist. The night before the killings, messengers to the 2015 SBC Annual Meeting in Columbus, Ohio, had cried out together in prayer over "matters of injustice and ungodliness," Floyd recalled, adding: "We were on our face before God about this issue."

Floyd said when he learned of the shooting, he said it felt as though Satan had won the battle -- "But we got back up and we moved forward, we did what we could do at the time."

Floyd urged viewers to engage in conversations like Wednesday's, saying Psalm 133 has been "on my heart for churches and for our Southern Baptist Convention," and quoting: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"

He added: "I appeal to all of you, regardless of the color of your skin, we must fulfill what Jesus said in John 17:21," and then quoted the verse: "May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I am in You. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me."

A recording of the "A 60-Minute Conversation: On Race in America," can be viewed [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tess Schoonhoven is a Baptist Press staff writer.