

STARTING

Gallup: Non-denominational Protestants on the rise

by David Roach

NASHVILLE (BP) -- Data pointing to a dwindling percentage of Americans who identify with a specific Protestant denomination has spurred calls for churches marked by God's "presence and power" and for re-emphasis of biblical doctrine. Southern Baptist Convention President Steve Gaines said a strong denominational identity doesn't seem to hinder the church he pastors or the SBC. Still, the manifest work of God in a church is far more important than its denominational identity, he told Baptist Press.

"We are 'Bellevue Baptist Church,'" Gaines said of the Memphis-area congregation he leads. "I don't believe the word 'Baptist' hinders our ministry. I don't believe being part of the SBC hurts us. I believe if what is happening in and through a specific local church is Christ-honoring and Spirit-anointed, people will come and get involved regardless of what the name of the church is or what denomination it is part of." According to the Gallup polling organization, just 30 percent of American adults identified with a specific Protestant denomination in 2016, down from 50 percent in 2000. Over the same timeframe, the percentage of Americans who regard themselves as Christians without claiming a specific denomination rose from 9 percent to 17 percent, a July 18 news release stated.

"I'm convinced that we should seek to have churches that are marked by the supernatural presence and power of God," Gaines said in written comments. "If people sense the presence of Jesus at a church, they will come and be part of what God is doing. And they won't care whether that church is part of a denomination or not." Gallup claimed the shrinking percentage of Americans who identify with a specific Protestant denomination stems from two realities:

-- "There are fewer Protestants of any kind in the American population today." Thus, "the pool of those who identify with a specific Protestant denomination is smaller."

Protestants shrank from 57 percent of the population in 2000 to 47 percent in 2016, Gallup stated. At the same time, the percentage of Americans who do not claim a religious identity of any kind rose from 10 percent to 20 percent.

-- Those who self-identify as Christians increasingly put themselves in the "non-denominational category."

Of Americans who do claim a specific Protestant denominational identity, Baptists are the largest group with 10 percent of the population. Some 3 percent identified specifically as Southern Baptists in 2016, down from 8 percent in 2000.

Gaines said the lack of denominational loyalty seems to parallel a lack of loyalty to corporations and brands among Americans, with workers frequently transferring "from

company to company" unlike they did in previous generations. "Whether the lack of organizational loyalty is good or bad, I don't know," Gaines said. "But it is reality. That's why many churches have chosen to remove the name of their denomination from the name of their church. Many churches in the SBC have removed the word 'Baptist' from their identity. Again, I can't say whether that is right or wrong. That is between them and the Lord."

Kevin Smith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland-Delaware, told BP he is "not surprised" by Gallup's findings. "As we have a greater number of therapeutic pulpits and fewer pulpits preaching clear biblical doctrine, theological (thus denominational) identity gets muddy, cloudy and irrelevant," Smith said in written comments. "I've always felt a responsibility to make sure ... members of churches I pastored have understood why we are Baptist." Smith added, "Sadly, for many 'Baptist' is a sociological indicator, rather than an exegetical/ecclesiological one.... Historic Protestant identity and confessions will be more important heading forward because 'evangelical' is becoming more and more useless" as a theological descriptor amid a vast number of people who claim that identity without holding key theological beliefs traditionally associated with evangelicalism.

J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., told BP the rejection of denominations may be a rejection of stereotypes associated with those groups rather than a rejection of their doctrine. "While many say they prefer a non-denominational church, I think their bigger concern is not wanting to be a part of a church that fits their stereotypes of certain denominations," Greear said in written comments. "If a church is big on the Gospel, the mission and loving each other, then denominational affiliation is less of an issue. "In other words, I don't think the answer is downplaying our denominational affiliations, but on 'playing up' Gospel love. The greatest challenge is to clearly proclaim the Gospel message to a society that has increasing numbers of people who have faith in nothing," Greear said.

Smith urged Southern Baptists to emphasize Baptist distinctives, like believer's baptism and regenerate church membership, in their discipleship processes. "We have the Baptist Faith and Message," Smith said. "The question is, do we care? Discipleship includes learning biblical truth. We need to do better in many cases." Churches "that have a membership process," Smith said, generally have membership classes with "a doctrinal component" and teach theology well. He expressed concern about the health of churches that emphasize "lowest-common-denominator" Christianity and eschew points of doctrine that distinguish denominations from one another. Such churches tend to "lack biblical and theological clarity and explicit identity," Smith said.

Yet amid the increasingly non-denominational milieu, Smith said, "I feel pretty good about the SBC's identity, as it is so driven by Great Commission passions" -- especially surrounding the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board.

Gallup's 2016 data was drawn from telephone interviews of 2,053 adults May 4-8 and Dec. 7-11. The margin of error in the survey was plus or minus 3 percent at the 95 percent confidence rate, according to the release.

About the author: David Roach is chief national correspondent for Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention's news service. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

STRENGTHENING

Metamorphosis Camp 2017 "A Boy and His Hat"

By Randy Weeks

SOUTH LYON, MI - For years, I have had a picture that comes up on my digital picture frame in my office. It's a picture of a little boy, about 12 years old at the time. He is smiling and wearing a leather type "Indiana Jones" style hat. I remember taking the picture during "water recreation" day at Metamorphosis Camp a few years ago. Since that time, it has been good to see Jared and his friends at camp every year, along with that same hat.

This year was Jared's last year at camp as a student since this was his senior year. I found myself watching him and the other seniors from his era who had been at Metamorphosis year after year, as they went about their last week at camp. I noticed the strong bond that had been formed. The relationships that had been built over time. It was very evident in the games that were being played during rec time. Musical chairs ended up morphing into a large dance party. "Egg, chicken, ape, man, superman," a different version of "Rock, paper, scissors," was typical of this particular bunch of kids. All played with the same goofiness that makes camp...camp.

Every year, part of our team time is spent putting together team videos. This year's theme of "Bambi Life," seemed pretty fitting with all of the memories that we had made through the years. Every year we watch the videos, laugh together, and applaud the efforts of each team. For some reason, little to no explanation of the film is necessary, all of us seem to know what is being expressed.

It's funny how you meet students on that first day of camp and before the week is done, there is an attachment. As the week goes on, there is a trust and a bond that binds you together. As you study God's Word together every day and hear the hearts of the students, you long for God to work in the hearts and lives of these folks.

Every now and then, God reminds me He is still at work in people's lives. This was never more evident as I stood at the front again this year to pray with different students coming forward during the decision time. Standing there I watched students hugging and crying and praying for each other, God was at work in so many lives. Even after getting back home and seeing and hearing words of encouragement from those at camp, this was still very evident. Not only had there been relationships built over the week between the

students, there were relationships built with God as well. This is the part of camp that is most important. This is why we have youth camps like Metamorphosis.

On the last night, I was sitting in the game room with a few students when Jared came up and handed one of his friends a charcoaled piece of something. "Here," he said, "this is part of my hat. I burned it because this was the end of an era for me. I want you to have part of it." Can I just say, my heart sank at that moment? Who would have thought a silly hat would mean so much? My mind raced back to that summer day just a few short years ago when I met this young man and his friends. I don't think that it was so much the hat but rather, the many memories of team times, ping-pong games, camp dodge ball, praying together, sharing our hearts with him and others that made that moment a special one.

"Lord, please watch over these students in the days ahead," I prayed silently. "Thank you for such a great opportunity for kids to come together for a week to make memories and bonds that will last a lifetime. Thank you for continuing to stir our hearts and make a difference in their lives."

On Friday morning, we were getting ready to pack up to leave camp when a boy came up to me. As I recall, he was about 12. "I can't wait until next year for Metamorphosis Camp." I couldn't help but smile and think, "this little fellow was at the beginning of a new era of his own."

About the author: Randy Weaks is the youth pastor at First Baptist Church, South Lyon, MI and regularly serves at Bambi Lake during Metamorphosis Camp each summer.

Bambi Lake Reflections

By Nancy Spears

FENTON, MI - You have to go to Bambi Lake to appreciate the great beauty and potential that is there. Recently, as I heard people planning for an event, I made a suggestion that they consider holding their event at Bambi Lake. They admitted they have never been there. What I have noticed is that when people actually drive onto our beautiful campus, they begin to see things they can contribute, think of what they could do to help, as well as, what kind of events they would be able to hold here.

This camp's potential is realized as people experience the camp. I deal with a lot of the financial side of Bambi, having the responsibility of registration, and working with our new director, Mick Schatz, to write contracts for events and submitting bills for payment. Most people do not realize the price tag of owning a camp, or cost of operations and maintenance. Sadly, many of our events have been poorly attended in the past, even though prices have not been raised in several years. This has led to a decrease in funds available to maintain the camp, and for improvements to be made. Although people understand the need to raise prices, there is a resistance to paying more to attend events. Consideration is not given to what the event price includes: meals, accommodations, speaker(s), the worship team and so many other incidentals.

I was delighted when I heard that Bambi will be the sole recipient of the Francis Brown Mission Offering. I know there are many needs as we try to bring the camp up to expectations. Many things are being accomplished-- Re-grading the entrance drive to solve water issues, redefining the drives, new picnic tables, repainting the old picnic tables, repainting the lodge, etc. There is so much more to do. All of the buildings need a fresh coat of paint, there are carpets to be replaced, JB's needs a complete remodel, at the least the floor and counter need to be replaced. Cottages 1-3, if renovated, could be a self-contained retreat center for small events with less than 25 people. This would give them the ability to cook their own meals. It would also expand the possibilities for family reunions, church leadership retreats and other gatherings. Of course, these are just some of the ideas floating around before priorities have been set. I pray Michigan churches will give generously of their finances and their abilities. Work teams, giving of their time and talents, can greatly extend the value of dollars received.

I have been attending retreats at Bambi Lake since I first came in the seventies to a married couple's retreat. How did my path bring me to work at Bambi? Well, that is a long story, and an unbelievable course of life experiences have prepared me for this job/ministry. Since I began working full-time at Bambi, May 2017, I have had many opportunities to share the vision that we have for our camp and retreat center. People who walk with me and hear of the plans are excited about what we hope to accomplish with the facilities. First-timers are drawn into our vision, seeing the tremendous potential and possibilities. Serving Bambi Lake has been one of my greatest joys.

I remember the first month or so, waking up and looking at the beauty that surrounds me, thinking "I get to be at Bambi!" It is work, lots more hours than I have worked before, but the benefits certainly outweigh the long hours that I keep. Rewards? Lives rededicated, salvation experiences, and wonderful people to work with who love the Lord and seek to live lives that are pleasing to Him. Work teams from across Michigan join with us to accomplish what they can contribute, each bringing a personal flare and excellence that make Bambi a special place.

If you ever have need or opportunity, I am available to place reservations for a camp or retreat, or to reserve a cabin or lodge room as you pass through the area, or as you plan for a personal or family get-away. I admit you may not always get through on the first try, but I return missed calls and respond to email and voicemail messages, not wanting anyone to miss the chance to spend time at Bambi Lake.

If you haven't been to Bambi Lake Retreat and Conference Center, stop in, have a cup of coffee and look around. God's creation is beautiful - potential is everywhere. In any season, you will not be sorry that you took the time to come.

About the Author: Nancy Spears serves as the administrative assistant for Bambi Lake Baptist Retreat and Conference Center for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan.

Black church conference: nurture, fellowship & praise

by Diana Chandler

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP) -- Southern Baptist African American pastor Ryan Rice, founder and leader of Life Church in New Orleans, is experiencing the first Black Church Leadership and Family Conference of his 30-some years. "To see other pastors who look like me ... and have flourished in their families and their ministries -- that's been a huge blessing and an encouragement," Rice told Baptist Press July 18 on the second day of the conference scheduled through July 21 at the Ridgecrest Conference Center near Asheville, N.C.

Rice connected with the Southern Baptist Convention when looking for a partner to help him plant Life Church in the Algiers community of New Orleans three years ago and said he is becoming increasingly involved in Southern Baptist life. At Ridgecrest, he has already established connections he considers valuable to the life of his ministry. "It's been the relationships that I've been able to develop, even in a short 24 hours' span of time, and just the real nuggets of wisdom that I've gleaned from other pastors who've been doing ministry longer than me, and who've given their heart, their soul," Rice said in reflecting on the most valuable aspects of the conference.

"It's been a huge blessing to be a part of the SBC," he said. "It's been a great thing to see how God is moving among the SBC, seeing the generations now, kind of touch every generation from my generation, millennials, all the way on, and then the multi-cultural aspect as well. I've been definitely blessed." Ken Weathersby, SBC Executive Committee vice president for convention advancement, likened the worth of the SBC to an African Proverb that suggests if you want to simply run fast, run alone, but if you want to run farther, run with others.

On the heels of the SBC's passage of a resolution denouncing Alt-Right white supremacy at the group's 2017 annual meeting, Weathersby encouraged conference attendees during the event's opening evening worship in Spilman Auditorium. "There will be no racism in the Southern Baptist Convention. We will not tolerate racism," Weathersby said, though not referencing the resolution. "As Dr. (Frank S.) Page said when he greeted you here last year, there will be no partiality in the SBC." Page is president of the SBC Executive Committee and has made intentional strides in including the voices of Southern Baptists of all ethnicities in policy initiatives and priorities.

Byron Day, president of the SBC's National African American Fellowship (NAAF) of 4,000 churches, described the conference sponsored by LifeWay Christian Resources of the SBC as "one of the most exciting, encouraging and empowering events for black Southern Baptists." Among the 200 or so pastors, ministers and others who attended the welcoming reception NAAF hosted on the conference's opening night, about 25 were first-time attendees of the event held annually for nearly 25 years. Preliminary LifeWay figures show a total conference attendance of about 950. "The annual conference is important because it offers African American Southern Baptists the opportunity to worship and fellowship with brothers and sisters from all over the country in a familiar cultural context not available to them at similar conferences," said Day, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Laurel, Md. "The numerous training classes and activities

for the entire family provide a time of rest and renewal for our pastors, church leaders and their families." Day, like others, pointed to the networking and information-sharing as beneficial. "I am very grateful to LifeWay and its partners for their commitment to this event that equips, encourages and edifies the saints," he said.

Conference convener Mark Croston, LifeWay's national director for black church partnerships, voiced excitement at the opportunity to offer the event. "Having all the SBC entities and other partners represented allows us to offer classes and experiences for all aspects of church life and something for all age groups," Croston told BP. "What really makes this event unique is that we really do have something for the entire family." With its origins in ministry to African American Southern Baptists, the conference has multicultural value, Croston said. "We are (titled) black church but not just for black church," he said. "We have many who are not black but want to share with or learn how to share with African Americans in their communities. One white family from Vermont is here. They adopted a black child and want to give him time and experiences with other black children, but it turns out they have been having as great an experience as their child."

Trillia Newbell, who addressed racial unity in her 2014 book "United: Captured By God's Vision for Diversity," told BP the conference is an opportunity for churches to gather, support, encourage and equip each other for the glory of God. She believes the SBC has made strides in racial reconciliation and has hope that Southern Baptists will continue to see progress. "I don't know of anyone who doesn't need to grow," Newbell said, moments before teaching a conference class today (July 19) encouraging women to love the unborn, unloved and neglected. "The truth is that we will not see complete restoration until Jesus comes."

The previous day at 6:45 p.m., conference attendees gathered in Spilman Auditorium for worship. Eric Geiger, vice president of LifeWay's resources division, preached on sanctification from Galatians 3:1-13. The grace of Jesus saves, sustains and sanctifies His followers, Geiger preached. Praise leader and vocalist Niya Cotton, wife of conference worship leader Roy Cotton II, sang a closing hymn, "How He Loves Us," before the benediction. For most churches, the benediction signals the end of worship, but Cotton kept singing, "He is jealous for me. Love's like a hurricane. I am the tree bending beneath the weight of His wind and mercy." The "Who-So-Ever-Will Choir," a volunteer impromptu group drawn each year from conference attendees, remained on stage, praising God, singing background at times.

More than 100 of the 700 or so adults gathered for worship remained in the auditorium, singing along, raising hands, swaying, undaunted by the close of service. After 20 minutes of soulful love ballads to and about God, Cotton's father-in-law Roy Cotton Sr. joined in singing "Oh How I love Jesus." Someone shouted "hallelujah," even as the crowd dispersed and fellowshiped with conference attendees in Ridgecrest coffee shops, courtyards and other venues. The next day would begin with 6:15a.m. early morning worship.

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.

BSCM Thanks Long-Time Servants

By Staff

FENTON, MI - The Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) took a day to celebrate the retirement of two staff members whose work has become synonymous with the mission of the ministry in Michigan. Anne Glissman and Yolanda Chapa are retiring after many years of faithful service. The BSCM hosted an Open House and Retirement Appreciation BBQ on July 8th.

Glissman has served for 23 years as the BSCM Bookkeeper and Executive Assistant. Chapa has tirelessly worked as a Ministry Assistant for 16 years. More than 150 people attended the event including friends, pastors and wives, as well as past coworkers. Crystal award plaques were given to each of the women in addition to gifts and cards of appreciation. The members from Tecumseh Missionary Baptist Church helped with the preparation and set up for the BBQ.

BSCM Executive-Director, Dr. Tim Patterson says, "Anne and Yolanda have given strength and stability to this convention for decades. They were my angels at the East of Eden. I love them so!"

Francis Brown State Missions Offering Announced

By Staff

FENTON, MI - The Baptist State Convention of Michigan has announced the emphasis for the 2017 State Missions Offering. This year the collected giving will go toward much needed repairs and upgrades at Bambi Lake Baptist Retreat and Conference Center.

Bambi, as it is most often referred, has been part of the BSCM for more than fifty years and has been ground zero for transforming lives of young and old alike.

Bambi Lake is a place of spiritual renewal and refreshment. No matter the time of year, the natural setting has a way of inviting you to celebrate God's creation while reminding you of His grace and love. Many a pastor and church staff member have found the tranquility of Bambi to be the perfect setting for reconnecting with God and "refilling the gas tank" to keep going. Youth of all ages have encountered a living Savior while experiencing camp life as well as men and women of all ages learning and growing in their love for missions.

This year's offering has a very specific goal to meet a very specific need. Plan to join us in prayer during the week of prayer, September 10-17. To learn more go to midifferencemaker.org and #MIidifferencemaker. "We believe in the power of one" and ask that you be that one to make a difference this year. Give generously as the Lord leads.

LABOR DAY: Your work matters

By Michael Kelley

NASHVILLE (BP) -- You might or might not be paid for the work you do. You might or might not work outside the home. You might work in a manufacturing industry or you might own your own business. You might wear a uniform or you might wear yoga pants and a sweatshirt. Nevertheless, when work slips into tedium and routine, I think all of us are prone to ask the question whether what we are doing really matters.

The question, even if it's not directly spoken, is revealed in other ways. We might find it hard to get out of bed on another Monday. Or we might constantly find ourselves clicking on job postings online to find something we deem to be more significant. Or we might apply this short but very relatively word to our occupation -- "just":

-- I'm just a teacher.

-- I'm just a mom.

-- I'm just a cook.

-- I'm just a salesman.

Does our work really matter? And if the answer is "yes," then are there reasons for that answer that go beyond the scope of a particular vocation? In other words, does our work matter regardless of what our position is? To that end, I can see at least four reasons why your work matters, whether you're a plumber or a preacher, a stay-at-home mom or a go-to-the-office dad:

1. Because God is sovereign.

We tend to think of God as sovereign over big, earth-quaking events like an election or some other world event, but if we believe that God is sovereign, then He is sovereign over both big and small. It is not by chance that you are working in a particular field, at the company where you are, and even in the location where you are. You are there by His design. God has not made an error in judgment or had a lapse in His divine attention.

2. Because we are made in God's image.

Work matters not only because of God's intentionality; it matters because our desire and capacity to do good work is part of what it means to be made in God's image. If you look back to the account of creation, you see God speaking innumerable creatures into existence, but He made only one in His own image. And the first thing He did after uniquely creating man was to give Him a job: "The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it" (Genesis 2:15). Being made in God's image goes well beyond this, but it also includes our work. God did not create us to lounge around; it is His intent for us to engage in work. Indeed, without work we are

not living fully in the image of God. So our work matters simply because working is God's design for us as humans.

3. Because work is for your good.

God is using all things, both big and small, for our good, which is to mold us into the image of Jesus. This is His will for us in Christ -- that we are transformed into the likeness of His Son (Romans 8:28-30). When we become adults, we spend the majority of our waking hours doing some kind of work. So, then, if God is using all our circumstances for our good and godliness, and we spend the bulk of our time doing work, then our work must also be for our good and godliness. It's through this avenue that we learn the lessons of sanctification like contentment, perseverance, faithfulness, patience and a host of other things. And even if your job is not one you would have chosen for yourself at this point in life, you can be sure that God is using it to make you more like Jesus.

4. Because work is for the good of others.

Work is one of the primary means by which God is exercising His common grace for humanity. Though He might have chosen other means, He has opted to use us to keep the world in order and provide for human flourishing. Consider, for example, what the Lord said to His people when they were exiled into a foreign land: "Seek the welfare of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for when it has prosperity, you will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7). One of the most practical ways we can seek the good of the community around us is by doing good, hard work that others benefit from. Whether you are teaching a class, collecting garbage or plumbing a toilet, you are one of the means of God for the public welfare. That means your work matters.

So you might find yourself living your dream job today. Or you might find yourself in a role you would quite frankly rather be assigned to someone else. But God is sovereign. You are created in His image. He is making you more like Jesus. And He is providing for the good of others through your job. Be faithful, Christian, and work hard in faith.

Celebrate the fruit of your labors and give God the glory.

About the author: Michael Kelley is director of groups ministry for LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention and author of "Wednesdays Were Pretty Normal: A Boy, Cancer, and God" and "Boring: Finding an Extraordinary God in an Ordinary Life." He is on Twitter at [@_michaelkelley](#) and online at [michaelkelley.co](#), where this article first appeared.

LOVE LOUD: Who Will Go For Me?

By Sue Hodnett

FENTON - As a young girl, my favorite Sunday services were the times when a visiting missionary would share about their work overseas. Most of the time the stories were about the work they were doing in orphanages in a poverty-stricken community. As I would sit and listen in our small Catholic church in the City of Detroit, the Lord would over and over again put this question on my heart, "Who will go for me?". After the missionary finished sharing we would sing, "Here Am I, Send Me." The service would conclude with an offering basket being passed and I would offer a whole dollar of my paper route earnings. Oh, I would feel so proud of myself. It would then take me a few sleepless nights to try to forget the pictures of the faces of those small, suffering children.

Special missionary visits would happen once a year at our church and each year my heart would hear the question, "Who will go for me?" I would sing "Here Am I, Send Me" louder and with more passion as each year went by. I would continue to give some of my hard-earned paper route money. I would feel I had done my part and wear my, "I gave to missions" ribbon with such pride.

In my high school years, the call from the Lord and question "Who will go for me?" became stronger and stronger. At the time, I did not know what to do with this passion to service in ministry. All the information I had known up to this time required a vow of celibacy. Yeah, okay that wasn't happening for me. My yearning to be a mommy was just as strong of a passion, as was the call to serving in ministry. My heart's desire to be a mom was granted with four children to raise and love with their father, my very supportive husband. But God did not stop asking the question, "Who will go for me?".

As a young mom and wife, with the perfect family and home, I still felt as though there was something missing. I prayed for understanding as to why I felt incomplete. At the age of 31 I understood what was missing was the surrendering of my life to God and needing to enter into a personal relationship with Him. After surrendering my life, I prayed for a woman of God to mentor me, and help me to develop the passion for missions God had given me.

It was a WMU leader, who first acknowledged my desires to serve God. As a young believer, I was seeking guidance. This WMU leader inspired and motivated me to recognize my spiritual gifts, and how they could be used for God's Kingdom. I am thankful for many leaders who have and continue to invest in and encourage me in a mission's lifestyle. These leaders committed themselves to "Love Loud" into my life. Presently, I have been called to lead others and to "Love Loud", as a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, a friend, a leader in my church, and as a women's ministry and mission's leader in my state convention. How I minister may look different in each of these settings, but the ultimate goal is that they would understand and experience the love of Christ more than they did yesterday.

Is it important for a Leader to “Love Loud?”

“Who will go for me?” I can now respond, “Here Am I, Send Me” with a clearer understanding that God was calling me and I could be used for His Kingdom. Ministry leaders took the time to invest in, influence, and mentor me as a young adult. I am so grateful for these leaders, but can’t help thinking how supportive it would have been if a leader would have “Loved Loud” into my life as a youth. What would it look like if leaders began to “Love Loud” into the lives of our youth? If they were to help them realize that God can use them? What if helping others to develop spiritually, providing missions discipleship, and educating young believers on the many pathways for mission and ministry careers was a priority? “Words spoken into the heart of a young believer can motivate and inspire her (him) to great things on behalf of the Kingdom of God.” Sandy Wisdom Martin, Executive Director, National WMU.

Will you LOVE LOUD?

What if we worked together to strengthen mission’s discipleship? What would it look like if we focused on mentorship opportunities for women in ministry? What if we looked for ways to encourage others and challenged them to be better leaders? The value of a life “Loved Loud” will have a great impact on those whom you have the opportunity to lead with regularity. Don’t miss the chances to “Love Loud”, carefully consider who God has placed in your hand. Every relationship and opportunity you are given, is potentially a new leader to be used to further God’s Kingdom.

JOIN US...

Help us celebrate our commitment to “Love Loud” at the 59th Annual Meeting of the Michigan Woman’s Missionary Union. Our keynote speaker, Linda Cooper, National WMU President will challenge us to be radically involved in missions. The South Carolina WMU team will be joining us to lead mission’s education, and discipleship training sessions for each specific age level. We will have the newest mission’s education resources available for viewing and ordering. Information to pathways for mission’s involvement, social issues, and support ministries will be featured. The Michigan WMU team will be available to help and encourage you to take your passion for missions to the next level.

“Love Loud” will be held at Sunrise Baptist Church, 2138 N. Jefferson Rd, Midland, MI., on Saturday, September 30, 2017. The doors will open at 8:30 with coffee and donuts. The cost is \$15 per person and includes a catered meal. Pastor’s wives are invited to be our guests at no cost. Free childcare will be provided for children 5 and under. For more information contact: wmu@bscm.org.

Registration link: bscm.org/register

6 Ways to Make Your Guests Feel Welcome at Church

By Pastor Chris Weatherly

Winter Haven, FL - We all love our churches but rarely do we think about how they operate from a church guest perspective. Then someone brings a first time visitor. As soon as we bring a church guest or someone tells us they brought a guest our brain goes into hyper drive. What will they think about us? Do they think we are weird? Is the music too loud? Did somebody greet them when they came in? Will the sermon minister to them? All of these are normal questions to ask, but what if instead of waiting until the guest showed up to think about these questions, we think about them ahead of time.

Here are 6 suggestions to help you get the process of thinking through the first impression of your church.

1. Clean the church building

When people drive up to your church for the very first time what do they see? Is the grass cut? Are there light bulbs out? Is the bathroom clean? All of these are incredibly important, and I know you understand this. When you go on a long road trip, someone always needs to use the bathroom. You determine which bathroom to stop at based on the cleaner gas station. I'm not sure if it's right, wrong, or indifferent, but church guests are the same way about your church.

2. Have great signage

You know where everything is at church and so do most people who attend your church. The only reason you know where everything is at is because you aren't a church guest. They come to your church with a completely different perspective. With a church guest in mind you should ask does a first time guest know where to take their children? Do they know where the youth ministry meets? Is there clear signage for handicapped parking? From the moment a church guest drives onto your parking lot, they are often timid and scared. Great signage removes that fear and gives them clear direction about where to go. Having great signage leads us to the very next point.

3. Have an information area

Have a table, booth, or whatever else. They type of area is as important as having an area where a first time guest can visit and ask questions is unbelievably vital. At this information area can be a smiling person who welcomes any church guest with questions. You can also give away a gift to your first time visitors. It doesn't need to be flashy or expensive. Our church gives away a mug and info about the various programs we do. Not all first time church guests will go to the information table, but your visitors will be glad to know they have a place to go to if there is a question. Once again it communicates that you have thought about and planned for them.

4. Greet everyone who comes to your church

It seems obvious that your church needs greeters, but it is not so much about having greeters as it is how they greet people. For instance if your greeter hugs every person who comes through the doors, it might be off-putting. Some church guests don't want to be hugged the first time they come to your church. Could you imagine going to a new Walmart and the greeter giving you a hug when you came inside? It would weird you

out. Greeters make people feel warm and welcome. At our church we have glass doors people use to come in the building. As we see people walk up, we open the doors for them and “say welcome to our church.” Opening the door shows that we care about them and we want everybody to feel welcomed. Your church might not be able to do exactly the same thing, but you can make sure your greeters are trained to make everyone feel warm and welcomed, especially your church guests.

5. Think through your service with the church guests in mind

My wife and I attended a church years ago for the first. During announcements the man on stage said, “If everyone who is a church guest today, will you please stand. Everybody else remain seated. We want to greet our guests.” Needless to say this made my introverted wife incredibly uncomfortable, and even my extroverted self was uncomfortable. We felt like all church guests were being paraded in front of all the “regulars.” It felt like this church didn’t think through how a guest would feel the first time at a church. Does your service acknowledge and welcome church guests without making them uncomfortable? You don’t have to change the sermons or switch your style of music because of guests, but if you want to retain visitors at your church then you must think through a service from their perspective.

6. Preach with the church guest in mind

Do you preach in a way that is filled with inside jokes and insider language? Does your preaching come across as “just for the regulars?” When a preacher acknowledges that there are church guests and even people with different levels of faith, it puts the first time visitors at complete ease. A regular attender never thinks about the sermon until the day they bring a guest, and it is the job of the preacher to think through how a church guest would perceive your message. Don’t change the gospel or the message, but there are usually great ways to say very difficult truths that will challenge the believer yet encourage the church guests.

Hopefully visitors come each and every week to your church. I hope your front door stays wide open for people to come and experience the love of Christ and the community of the church, but instead of just having a front door that is open let’s make sure we have a back door that is closed. Church guests will be much more apt to not leave your church if they know they have found a place to belong.

About the author: Pastor Chris Weatherly is an author, speaker, and current associate Pastor at Christ Community Church in central Florida. He currently has one book Built to Last Youth Ministry, and is writing his second book called “What’s Next? Becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus.” You can find him on [Facebook](#) or his [website](#) where he writes a weekly blog helping people take their next steps in the faith.

5 Tips for Secure and Hassle-Free Nursery Check-In

By: Lights Up North

CHIPPEWA, MI - When parents of young children attend church, they want to know first and foremost that their children will be safe and secure in the church nursery. They also don't want to miss a lot or even much of the sermon while checking their kids into the nursery. The following tips should serve as guidelines to designing a secure and hassle-free nursery check-in for your church:

1) Design a Secure Nursery Layout

Ideally, the church nursery should be fairly close to the sanctuary, providing a short amount of travel time for the parent to go there and back. A lock/buzzer system should be in place in regards to the doorways with someone monitoring the traffic flow. Once all the children are checked in, these doorways should be locked and secured until someone needs to use them. Security cameras in the hallway and room are always a good idea, as one can never be "too safe." An attached bathroom only available to nursery use is another idea for those who are in the middle of toilet-training.

2) Create Smooth Transitioning (Drop Off/Pick Up)

A check-in and check-out system needs to be in place so that each child is accounted for. In an effective system, each parent would fill out a sticker to be then placed on the child's back. The sticker should include the following information: name, allergy information, parent's name, parent's cell, assigned i.d. number, and any other information the parent feels necessary to note. To be efficient, these stickers could be handed to the "regulars" to fill out prior to church.

As the children come in, the information that the parents have put on their child's sticker should also be somehow logged so that each child can remain easily accounted for. The parent or person dropping off the child will get an i.d. number matching what is on their child's sticker. This number should not be a very easily replicated. It could be on a designed tag only available from the church nursery. That person must then present the number to get the child back. If there is any kind of worry that tags might be replicated or lost, there is always the option too of using a unique stamp on the parent's hand.

3) Strive For Accountability

A criminal background check should be mandatory for all nursery workers to fill out annually-provided through the church. This ensures that those who are volunteering are indeed trustworthy to be around the children. It should not be assumed that a person is safe based on how long they have gone to the church or their reputation. This mandatory rule should be in place to keep everyone accountable.

A second rule in regards to accountability should be that there should always be at least two workers present in church nursery. More eyes means less risk of accidents.

All volunteers should be easily identifiable with some sort of nursery name tag. This name tag or lanyard should be one that is not easily replicated and only available in the nursery. The volunteers should also line up with a nursery schedule or list of approved people to serve. The last thing that is wanted is for unsafe people showing up saying they are the volunteers for the day.

4) Emergency Plan/Communication With Parents

There needs to be a way for the nursery workers to communicate with the parents in case there is an emergency, question, or if the child is crying inconsolable. Here are a couple of options for communicating: a pager system could be instilled using a numbered pager in relation to the number assigned to each child. There could be the option of texting the parent if there is a problem (ideally, then, there should be a church cell phone to text from in the nursery). Another method for communicating is providing a way to put the child's I.D. number up on a screen where the sermon notes are viewed if the parent is needed.

5) Deterring Unwanted Situations

When I think of a church nursery, I think of a lot of young children who may be crying and attached to their parents. If there is not another place in the church designated for those babies and toddlers who are too anxious to leave their parents, there will be parents trying to stay in the nursery with the child. This can be a real problem if they are not volunteers who have cleared backgrounds. It leaves room for pedophiles to easily take advantage of such a situation.

How can this type of situation be deterred? Create a "cry-room" or "family-room" near the back of the sanctuary where the child and parent can sit and still hear (and hopefully see) the sermon but yet feel comfortable if the child needs to play or make a bit of noise. A part of this room could even have a space sectioned off for the nursing mom to have a bit of privacy and yet not miss the sermon. The parent is then there to monitor any situation regarding their child without putting the nursery children in any kind of possible harm.

Conclusion

It does not matter if your church is located in a small town or a large city – or if it is a small or a mega church, there is always the possibility of predators. When a lot of people think of church, they assume that church people and volunteers are trustworthy. This can create an easy area of attack on the people who attend, especially the children. While it is important to pray for and believe in God's protection over the church, it is also important to take adequate measures to keep areas in the church, like the nursery, safe and secure.

About the author: Lights UP North writes from deep inside the great Northern Woods in hopes of bringing inspiration, encouragement, and hope to others. Ministering to those who are suffering from eczema and allergies is another strong passion for Lights UP North. Lights UP North's [official webpage](#).

SENDING

2017 Annual Praise in the Park

By Angela Spencer

LANSING, MI - Lives were changed in Lansing as a local church and partners reached out to their community. Faith Fellowship Baptist Church (FFBC) hosted its annual Praise in the Park Block Party in Walsh Park in Lansing on July 8.

FFBC partnered with community businesses, local churches and the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) to make this “Fun in the Sun” outreach event a success! This partnership included contributions ranging from monetary donations and equipment rental support to event setup and breakdown activities.

In addition to the Gospel message presentation by Pastor Stan Spencer, this event engaged participants through gospel music entertainment, which consisted of Gospel groups, such as Spoken Praise (Lansing), Men 4 Christ (Detroit), Life Challenge (Flint), and Christ Kingdom Builder (Lansing). Individual performers included Minister LaSandra (Lansing) and Jessica Robins (Detroit). Each group/performer ministered a soulful praise to God that created a spiritual atmosphere and relayed a positive message to the members of the community.

The Praise in the Park Block Party also provided a Community Family Resource Fair. Vendors were selected that would focus on health screenings, health-care sign-up, and children’s summer activity sign-up opportunities. And of course, no block party would be complete without prizes and games. Adults were blessed with a variety of gift cards. Three of the children in attendance won new bikes. Children also participated in various games and activities, including bowling, bean bag toss, fishing, basketball, face-painting, hula-hooping, tic-tac-toe, and the always fun - bouncy castle excitement.

FFBC Pastor Spencer believes the church glorified God by engaging the community and demonstrating the love of Christ. This engagement and display of love resulted in the adding of souls to the Kingdom. More than 260 adults and children attended, 22 children made professions of faith, and 4 adults rededicated their lives to Christ. Also, many of the children who attended the Block Party attended Vacation Bible School (VBS) the following week at FFBC, with the potential of also attending Sunday School in the future to continue their growth in Jesus Christ. Pastor Spencer says, “We would like to give a very special “thank you” to the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) for partnering with us to make this event possible. Your unwavering support continues to overwhelms us”

For more information about FFBC events please contact the church at (517) 853-9897 or faithfellowshiplansing@hotmail.com.

About the author: Angela Spencer currently resides in Lansing, MI and works as a Senior Business Analyst for Accenture. She is also a minister's wife, and faithfully serves in ministry at Faith Fellowship Baptist Church.

CHAPLAIN'S SACRED MOMENTS

"Being in the Right Place at the Right Time"

By Chaplain Bob Dennis

FENTON, MI - To be a Chaplain is to be in the right place at the right time. How you get there can be a matter of being sensitive to your calling as an "Under Shepherd." Your calling is not just a call to duty, but feeling the Holy Spirit tug at your heart to be just where God wants you to be. Being in touch with the Holy Spirit's guidance is important, especially for where and when you should be ministering.

I had a chapel member missing last Sunday from our morning chapel service who is always in his place. Just like any regular church service, he parks his big electric wheelchair in the same place every Sunday. This particular Sunday I noticed immediately that he was not there in his usual place for worship. I finished my Sunday morning "endurance" routine by 1 pm, and felt the Holy Spirit calling me to go find my missing "sheep" that had been absent from worship that morning. At my age, I often feel like my recliner at home is calling, but not this time. God had a Divine appointment for me to attend and be his representative.

As I entered the room of my chapel family member, I was surprised to find him actively dying. I spent the next 30 minutes with him sharing his favorite scripture and praying with him as he stepped out into eternity to meet his Lord and Savior. He died a peaceful death with dignity with God's chaplain pastor at his side at the right time. I was grateful to God that He had impressed on my heart to go check on him, and to be with him during that sacred moment. For me it was confirmation that I need to be sensitive to the Lord's leading, and to continue receiving my "Sacred Moments." Psalm 116:15 - Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones. (NASV)

If you believe you may be called by God to be a chaplain or to be of support to our chaplains in prayer please contact me at (bdennis@bscm.org). You can also see more information on our BSCM website at bscm.org and look under "SEND" to find the Chaplaincy page. We also offer chaplaincy training. See below for more information.

2017 BSCM EVENTS FOR CHAPLAINS: The first annual BSCM Chaplain Training will be at the Church Equipping Conference on September 16, 2017 (*see the event flyer this issue*). We have an experienced chaplain key note speaker and important topics selected.

Five Graduate Michigan Baptist School of Theology

By Roberto Santos

DETROIT, MI - The Michigan Baptist School of Theology ADVANCE Program (formerly called Greater Detroit Baptist Association Contextualized Leadership Development) is an ADVANCE Center affiliated with Gateway Seminary in Ontario, California. On June 25, 2017, we held our commencement exercise at Temple of Faith Baptist Church, West Chicago, in Detroit, MI. Five students graduated with a Diploma in Christian Ministry. Dr. Warren Haynes, Gateway Seminary ADVANCE National Director, awarded the Diplomas and Rev. Rochelle Davis, Jr, pastor of Temple of Faith gave the Commencement message. The event was a celebration of hard work and achievement for the five students.

Gateway Seminary ADVANCE centers began with the mission to provide accessible ministry training at a post-high school level. Since 1980, ADVANCE Centers have offered affordable, quality education to ministry leaders across the United States and around the globe. ADVANCE centers are established under a cooperative agreement between Gateway Seminary and a local Southern Baptist Church, Association, or State Convention.

If you would like to know more and/or register contact:

Greater Detroit Baptist Association

313-533-2663

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Registrar: Rose Santos, 313-443-7634.

ADVANCE Site Director: Rev. Roberto Santos, 313-445-6286

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Michigan Baptist School of Theology

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24250 Joy Road. Redford, MI. 48239

Submitted by Roberto Santos

About the author: Roberto Santos is the ADVANCE Site Director for the Michigan Baptist School of Theology. It is a ministry of the Greater Detroit Baptist Association. He is also Pastor of Philippine International Baptist Church located at 25528 Wick Road, Taylor, MI. 48180.

Send Relief: aiding churches in compassion ministry

by David Melber

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) -- For many pastors and churches, Send Relief is still a developing thought. Just a year ago, Send Relief became a key part of the North American Mission Board's strategy to equip our churches to engage their communities through compassionately serving those around them for the sake of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since the launch of Send Relief at the 2016 SBC annual meeting in St. Louis, we have seen and heard of churches across North America -- established churches and church plants -- utilizing resources provided by Send Relief to meet the needs of their neighbors. Here are some practical examples:

In April, Lakota Hills Baptist Church in West Chester, Ohio, used our Home Fire Campaign program to install free smoke alarms in their community. Send Relief distributed the alarms, provided free by the American Red Cross, which allowed the church to mobilize nearly 80 volunteers into their community that day. They're building relationships throughout their community and plan to do the outreach event again in October.

In May, Strong Tower church at Washington Park in Montgomery, Ala., held a community festival with 150-plus people in attendance. During the festival, they utilized our Send Relief mobile medical clinic to provide care to more than 20 uninsured residents. While volunteer doctors and nurses administered care, others from the church were meeting additional physical and spiritual needs. At least two people placed their faith in Jesus during that event.

At the end of August, St. Louis-area Southern Baptist churches and business leaders will lead thousands of volunteers to produce a million meals to be distributed to those in need throughout St. Louis and beyond. We'll be taking 250,000 of those meals via our Send Relief tractor-trailer to our new ministry hub in Appalachia, where we'll be distributing them to those in need throughout the region. Think of the Gospel-sharing opportunities when you share a million meals!

Speaking of Appalachia, state conventions and churches have committed to providing at least 65,000 backpacks to be distributed to needy children throughout the region this year. Through local churches, these backpacks will be given to children, along with the Gospel. You could do something like this in your hometown! Through the Appalachian hub, we'll be able to serve one of the most disadvantaged regions of North America. The ministry hub there will be a distribution center for food and other necessities to reach the thousands of people who live in poverty. This hub also will serve as another staging facility to respond with disaster relief resources.

In addition to the Appalachian hub, God has graciously allowed us to acquire another property in Clarkston, Ga. Each hub allows Southern Baptists to serve and experience ministry in unique contexts. In Clarkston, we're positioned in one of the most diverse communities in North America. In the "Ellis Island of the South," you will find more than 50 unique ethnic backgrounds. Clarkston is a mission field, but it is not unreached. The new Send Relief ministry hub will not only allow us to serve the community in relevant ways, but churches from throughout North America will be able to experience ministry in this unique context and learn how to serve people of diverse backgrounds in their own communities. You can expect more in early 2018 as the property is prepared to serve and equip our churches.

We're incredibly excited to partner with state Baptist children's homes to launch a campaign emphasizing the need for churches across North America to step up and meet

the needs of orphaned children in our state foster care systems. We're called to serve orphans and widows, and we hope to see thousands of Southern Baptists respond to that need.

Of course, our alliance with state convention partners in the area of disaster relief is the core of our ability to serve communities in response to weather-related crises. The 45 disaster-related entities are key to serving those areas when they're impacted by hurricane, flood, tornado or fire. And we're prepared to support them to ensure that the response is optimally coordinated. While other organizations might be the first in, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief is often the last out. With 70,000 volunteers and 50 years of experience, the third-largest disaster relief organization in North America stands ready.

Why do we do Send Relief? To equip the church for its next missional opportunity. What does that look like? It depends on where you live and the needs of your community. When we drop our agendas and consider others above ourselves, when we show compassion and meet the needs of others rather than being concerned for our convenience, that's when ministry takes place and relationships are formed. Send Relief exists to equip you and your church to share Jesus and to see others place their faith in Him. That's why we say: Send Help. Send Hope. Send Relief.

To learn more or to find resources your church can use in ministry, visit [Send relief](#).

David Melber is vice president of Send Relief at the North American Mission Board.

COLUMNS

Empty Holes

By Tim Patterson

FENTON, MI - In the early years of our marriage and ministry, Sabrina and I lived in the hamlet of Marathon, Texas at the edge of the Big Bend National Park. At the time I was working in a small church as the associate pastor, which really meant that I was the personal slave of the pastor. One of the perks of that ministry assignment, however, was that I had the opportunity to travel that region quiet extensively.

While driving those roads, the beauty and expanse of the vistas that were afforded me were almost incomprehensible. Jagged peaks and desert valleys filled my view from one horizon to the other. Pronghorn antelope dotted the vast grasslands, and mule deer could be seen grazing in the same pastures along side thousands of sheep and cattle. There awaited me around every turn visual delights and windows of wonder into God's great creation. In my first year or so, I was taken in by the enormity of it all, but as I spent more time in the area I began to take notice of the small and more intricate beauties of the landscape. The small reptiles and the tiny rodents that dotted the desert floors were

amazing, as well as the various cacti and flowering plants. The rocks, sand and variations in strata seemed to have been painted by some imaginative artist. This high desert region commands one's attention and captivates our vision like so many of the landscapes of our great nation.

Something else I began to notice were mounds of rock and dirt at the base of mountains, knolls and outcroppings. Their shapes and colors betrayed their manmade beginnings, and were somewhat out of place with their surroundings. I later discovered that these mounds of rocks and dirt were the results of men digging for gold ore among the desert hills. As I began to take notice of them, it was obvious that literally hundreds of them could be seen across the landscape. Some were located high in the crevasses of lofty peaks while others were more easily accessible at the base of foothills. Their locations seemed to have little to do with logic, and did not seem to follow any pattern.

At one time the area boasted some very profitable silver and quicksilver mines, and I have been told very few true gold producing mines ever existed. Pioneers, adventurers and travelers from across the globe came to this barren region of West Texas to find their fortunes and build the empires of their minds. With all their worldly possessions in a few bags and bundles, they left the comforts of cities, towns and villages to live the solitary life of a prospector. The future would hold unbelievable loneliness and isolation, and conditions that would make even the residents of Hades happy to live in the abyss. It was a hard life, yet untold numbers of men gambled with their livelihoods and their very lives for the almost nonexistent chance at riches.

Today I see person after person doing the same thing as did these wishful prospectors of years past. They leave all that is good and right to stake a claim on nothing more than a fantasy that has about as much substance as the dreams that produced them. Instead of building their lives on that which is real and lasting, they scurry about punching holes in barren soils that offer nothing but misery. And just like the abandoned mines and shafts of the Big Bend of Texas, this present life is pocked with the desperate diggings of disappointed men. All they have to show for their efforts are empty holes.

Fulfillment, happiness and peace are found much closer to home, and it is unnecessary to traipse across the barrens of this world to possess them. In fact, those wonderful states of being can only be found in one's heart. Oh, not the muscular pump that delivers life-giving blood to our bodies, but the inner Soul and Spirit of the human being. And here is the good part, all of this peace and fulfillment is a free gift. Peace, fulfillment and complete satisfaction are ours for the asking. All He asks for in return is our hopeless and hapless lives. It sounds like a good trade to me. Besides, it is my understanding that when we get to heaven they use gold instead of asphalt to pave the streets. What a deal! Stop digging and start believing. Empty holes or full-filled hearts? It's your choice.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Proverbs 8:19 My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold, And my revenue than choice.

Eccl. 4:8 There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother.
Yet there is no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches.
But he never asks, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?"
This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.

Mr. Poindexter's Apology

By Tony Lynn

Knock, knock, knock! The worn, lightweight aluminum screen door opened up toward our 12 year old faces. We were nervous. Tom stood behind me trembling in his tattered Converse sneakers, stained t-shirt, and gym shorts. Despite the summer heat, both of us froze in fear while our brains were screaming for us to run away when we saw Mr. Poindexter open the door with an impatient sigh.

You see our neighbor Mr. P, as we called him, scared all of the kids on my street. He and his wife didn't have any children so we didn't really know him. All we knew is that when we crossed the corner of his yard to get to the little store or the ball field that he wasn't happy with us. Mr. P wasn't a screamer. He was quiet. Dead serious quiet! His glares made our hearts stop so on normal days we didn't bother Mr. P.

This particular summer day, back in the 70s was different though. Tom and I were building a fort out in the woods behind our houses. For 3-4 weeks we noticed that Mr. P was collecting wood from what we thought was a basement remodel. His scrap wood was collected on the ground at the side of his garage. On this particular hot hazy summer day, Tom and I decided that one of us was going to ask Mr. P for that scrap timber. Since I lived closest to Mr. P I would be the one to do the talking. "Mr. Poindexter," I stuttered as each syllable stuck in my throat. "Tom and I couldn't help but notice the scrap lumber laying beside your garage." As I finished that opening line I think Mr. P glared at us even harder as if to say, "What business is it of yours!" I continued with a nervous tremor in my voice, "Sir, if you don't have any plans for that lumber may Tom and I use it for our fort in the woods?"

Mr. P replied, "No. I don't have plans right now, but I might later." With the thump of the word "later" came another long stare, silence that seemed to go on forever. I still believe part of my life ebbed out of my soul that day from his frightening look. Somehow I was able to form the words, "Okay sir. Sorry we bothered you." as we turned and walked away much quicker than we had arrived.

Some forty years later, I happened to run into Mr. Poindexter again. This time it was in my parents' yard while visiting with my wife and children. He said, "Tony, do you remember when you and your little friend asked for that wood beside my garage years ago?" I said, "Sure do Mr. Poindexter. I'm sorry we bothered you that day." Mr. P held up his hand as if to gently silence me then continued, "No, I'm the one who should apologize. I don't know what got into me back then. I have always regretted not giving you that lumber. It all rotted after being exposed to the autumn rains and winter snows. It rotted and ever since I have regretted not letting you have that stack of wood. You were

good kids and I should have given it to you.” I accepted his heart-felt apology all the while thinking to myself, “Wow, an apology forty years later.”

Isn't that the way we are with a lot of things in our lives, in our families, and in our churches? We buy, we hoard, and we don't share. We justify our collections by convincing ourselves that one day, when we have enough then we will share. In Luke 16:9 (NLT), Jesus explains the emptiness of selfishness and the eternal results of generosity, “Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.”

Please, pay close attention here or you're going to miss it. Summer is coming to a close. A new church year is about to start. Many of you will review the annual church budgets this fall. It's time for you to let go of the “lumber laying beside the garage” and let your funds extend God's Kingdom. Here are two meaningful options that come to mind during this time of the year:

1. The State Missions Offering & the Bambi Lake Retreat & Conference Center Restoration Project – In September, we are kicking-off a campaign with the theme “Because we believe in the power of one.” One more person, one more church, and one more contribution can make a difference! The state retreat center is where our churches and God fellowship together and inspire one another to strive for greater aims. Please, lead your congregation to give generously each week or each month to this incredible undertaking.
2. Cooperative Program (CP) – For the first time in history, every church treasurer can make the church's contribution to the Cooperative Program securely online at bscm.org. In fact, a recurring donation can be set-up where funds are automatically transferred from the church to the state convention. Those funds help us help churches in Michigan. Those CP funds help 20,000 students study for ministry and missions. Those CP funds help supply the needs of 8,500 missionaries and their children all over the world.

Please, don't let forty years pass before you realize the “lumber has rotted.” Mr. Poindexter and I agree, sharing is better than hoarding. Join the movement of God in Michigan. Great things are happening. People's lives are changing. Believe in the power of one!

Bambi Lake is Full of God Moments

By Mike Durbin

FENTON, MI - Shar and I recently had the privilege of participating in a God moment. We were sitting around the table with the Patterson's, the Lynn's, the Taylor's, and the Schatz's. Pastor Tim asked Mick and Jackie if they had ever considered serving in retreat ministries. Mick and Jackie looked at each other, and then told us it was something they had always wanted to do.

That moment started the beginning of a new future for Bambi. Interviews were conducted, references checked, votes taken, and the call was extended and accepted. Somewhere in the midst of all that was Mick's first trip to Bambi. Mick saw it initially without Jackie. I wondered what he would feel when he looked at Bambi Lake for the first time. There was a lot to see - the grounds, the buildings, the area, the schools, and so much more. And there was a long way to go to see it. He had no prior experience at Bambi to draw upon, no emotional connection, and no life changing moment at camp to color his experience. There was just the camp.

He would look with fresh eyes, with eyes fixed on the Father, with eyes focused on the future. Was this the place, the ministry, God was calling him to invest his life? Would his family sense that same calling?

That first look was overwhelming for him. I know because I was there. I could see it in his eyes, and hear it in his voice. I felt for him as we went to the manager's house for the first time - the place his family would live. We were in the process of remodeling the house, but all he saw was a house that had been dismantled. It wasn't pretty. There wasn't a single room that was ready or even close to being ready. I watched and listened as he showed Jackie the house with FaceTime on his phone. I walked with him, painting a picture with words of what the house could look like, but at that moment it was floors without coverings, bathrooms without fixtures, walls in need of paint, dust and demolition debris.

He took it all in. A lot of questions were asked. A lot was said. But one sentence that I'll paraphrase stood out: "As I walked the grounds," Mick said, "I realized that this place has a wonderful heritage to build upon."

Since becoming our State Director of Spiritual Refreshment and Retreats, Mick has been building on that heritage. There's a whiteboard in his office that takes up most of the wall. It is filled with retreats, updates, and projects for the future. Improvements to the buildings and grounds are noticeably visible. It starts at the entrance of the camp where the signs have a fresh coat of paint and fallen trees and limbs have been removed. Mick oversaw the completion of the remodel of the manager's house, and it's beautiful. There's a new stage in the worship center that makes a great statement. Repairs on the exterior of the lodge are taking place and the lodge is being repainted. The foyer has a new look that invites you to a fresh new experience at Bambi. One of the most noticeable additions is the waterslide. It rises 20 feet off the ground and descends 120 feet to the water!

The first time Shar and I went to Bambi together was for a pastors and wives retreat. It was a Godsend in our lives. We had recently returned to Michigan after eight years of college and seminary. We were starting a new ministry after serving as a pastor in a rural church for five years. It was the first time in our seven year marriage that we lived in the center of a major city. The parsonage was on a noisy, five lane highway. Our first child was born just a few weeks after we made this major move. He was so little that we laid him in an open dresser drawer at Bambi to sleep.

To say the least, it was a time of incredible transition in our lives. We arrived at Bambi exhausted, overwhelmed, and all the while trying to figure out the whole parenting thing. Shar was experiencing the beginnings of postpartum depression, but we didn't know what that was at the time. There were all kinds of stressors in our lives. We needed encouragement, community, and a fresh encounter with God, and that's exactly what we experienced at Bambi. The details vary, but believers all over Michigan have experienced fresh encounter and renewal with God at Bambi.

I had the privilege of experiencing Bambi retreats as a student, adult, parent and now as a grandpa. Our children have been to Bambi on numerous occasions, and so have their wives. Shar and I have taken our grandchildren to Bambi camping. The camp has been a blessing to three generations of Durbins, and hopefully that will continue as the family grows and new generations are born. We have come to know the blessing of Bambi and hope you will come experience it as well.

“What A Ride!”

By: Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON- MI - What a ride! I have now been at Bambi Lake for 6 months and what a ride it has been! Each day brings new challenges and opportunities so no one day is ever the same as the last. Meeting new faces from a diverse variety of places is a true joy! However, there are three things about Bambi Lake that I am passionate about— it's past, it's present, and it's future.

Past – At every Camp or Retreat we host, I encounter stories of how Bambi Lake has impacted a life for eternity. I hear testimonies of individuals who were saved here as a child, and now serve in a church or full-time ministry. Most often, those individuals are now bringing their family or student group or church to Bambi Lake. I watch as friends reunite and share memories of first meeting each other at a camp or retreat fifteen or twenty years ago. I listen to students tell of the first time they heard the voice of God speak to them in the quietness and calm sitting by the lake. Numerous are the tales of cramming a few hundred into Hubbs chapel, but it did not matter because worship was the priority of the day. Being uncomfortable was not an issue because God was in the house and His presence was imminent! That will preach! Many, many lives have been transformed by the power of the gospel here at Bambi Lake. What a heritage, what a legacy.

Present – It has been said, the best gift we can give ourselves and those around us is to be present. With such an amazing heritage to learn from and stand on, by the grace of God, Bambi Lake now has the responsibility to be present. We cannot be satisfied and rest on the accomplishments of our past – however great – we must be present. We must be engaged in raising up new leaders, and fiercely empowering young and old alike to share the Good News of salvation, the Good News of Jesus. I am excited to say that this is a reality at Bambi Lake. At every Camp and every Retreat new stories are emerging. New chapters are being written in the lives of those who are discovering freedom, healing, joy, and forgiveness in Christ. Bambi Lake is discovering new ways to encounter the culture with the love of Christ. We are implementing new programs and

opportunities for the Body of Christ to be encouraged and empowered for the Kingdom. Bambi Lake is striving to be a lighthouse in our community, state, nation and world! Bambi Lake is Present!

Future – With a legacy of life change and a mandate to be present, I am ecstatic about the future of Bambi Lake. We should all be! As great as the past has been, I believe the future is going to be even more amazing. Not just because of new camps, retreats, or new activities, but because of people like you. Yes, people just like you reading this article, God's people, Christian Michiganders who love God and worship together with other believers at churches filled with worship because the presence of God is evident. How you ask? By praying for Bambi Lake and taking advantage of opportunities to participate. Many of you already have stories written at Bambi Lake. Others have yet to experience a weekend or week of enjoying fellowship with God and making new friends and memories. I believe, like many of you, God has great plans and designs for Bambi Lake. His presence is being felt and experienced here in new and refreshing ways. The cool part? He is inviting you and me to come. So, come join the ride. Come be refreshed. Come find rest. Come be present and see God move!

AROUND THE STATE

Back to School Bash

September 9 – Free school supplies and backpacks, clothes and giveaways. Faith Fellowship Baptist Church. For more information contact Faith Fellowship Baptist Church, 1001 Dakin Street, Lansing, MI 48912, (517)853-9897, or faithfellowshiplansing@hotmail.com.

READ IT!

READ IT! Is a ministry of Eastside Community Church. It is a kids reading program and the children in our community love it. The program is designed to help with reading skills, especially for families with little help, no money and no time. READ IT! Focuses on getting children to read the Bible and grow in confidence both in the Word and in their reading skills. Last week 20 students attended. Eastside Community Church is providing this tool free to churches seeking ways to be part of the community. Contact Pastor Mathew Vroman for more information and to get started. Call (313) 657-1100 or email pastor@eastsidecommunitychurch.com.

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified Ad Submission Guidelines

1. Baptist Beacon classifieds are posted free of charge.
2. All classified posts will run for 2 consecutive months. Longer or shorter times may be requested. Publication of classifieds correspond with the monthly publication of the Baptist Beacon.
3. Classifieds must be from a BSCM church.
4. Be sure to include thorough details of request, name of church, contact information as well as a point of contact.
5. Submissions must be made no later than the 10th of the month prior to publication.
6. Submit all classified ads to beacon@bscm.org

Senior Pastor Needed

Harper Creek Baptist Church in Battle Creek, Michigan (Southern Baptist Convention) is looking for an experienced Pastor to lead a congregation of 30 to 50 people. This dynamic group of worshipers is grounded in the Word of God and enjoys a blended type corporate worship. HCBC offers salary commensurate with years of experience. If you are interested in helping us share Jesus and grow in our faith, please visit our web site at www.harpercreekbaptist.org to learn more. You may also send inquiries or resumes to: PastorSearch@harpercreekbaptist.org or mail to: Pastor Search Committee, PO Box 2467, Battle Creek, MI 49016.

Church Strengtheners/Mobilizer position

The Greater Detroit Baptist Association is seeking an individual for a Church Strengtheners/Mobilizer position. This position will replace the position of Associational Missionary (Director of Missions). [CLICK HERE](#) for more information about specific responsibilities, financial support, desired skills, education requirements, education requirements, ministry experience, and theological views. Interested applicants should send a cover letter and resume by July 31, 2017 to:

Mr. Nonnie Lesada,
Administrative Assistant
24250 Joy Road
Redford, MI 48239
detbaptasn@sbcglobal.net
313-533-2663

Family Ministry Leader

Warren Woods Baptist Church in Warren seeks a Family Ministry Leader to assist the church in developing a ministry to children, youth, and their families with the goal of inspiring faith, love and growing discipleship. Children's and youth ministry will reflect a balance of Bible study, fellowship, worship, service, and outreach.

Qualifications:

- A person with an undergraduate degree equivalent or with experience in children's and/or youth ministry
- Strong organizational, leadership, and communication skills
- Experience and ability in teaching and training
- The ability to build and lead volunteer teams
- A love for children, youth and families
- In alignment and agreement with the Baptist Faith & Message 2000
- A Christian who feels a call by God into ministry and demonstrates a personal relationship with Jesus Christ evidenced by Christian character and behavior

This is a 20 hour per week position. Pay commensurate with qualifications. Please submit a resume to pcarnline@warrenwoods.org prior to May 31, 2017.

Singer or Speaker for Women's Group

Mary Hester is the pastor's Wife of The Shore Church in St. Joseph, Michigan where she serves with her husband, Church Planter and Pastor Kevin Hester. Mary has been involved in ministry for twenty plus years. She is a homeschooling mother of eight children with a passion for changed lives through the life changing power of God's word. Mary studied music at Bethel College in Mishawaka, Indiana and at Grace Bible College in Wyoming, Michigan. Mary is available to give full or partial concerts or for speaking engagements to women's groups. To schedule a concert or a speaking engagement contact Mary at mry_hester@yahoo.com.

Senior Pastor Needed

On January 1, Steve Oswalt resigned from Crossroads Community Baptist Church in Ann Arbor and started as senior pastor of Broadman Baptist Church, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. In the interim, Worship Pastor Douglas Keasal is serving as senior pastor. The search process for a new senior pastor is underway. Inquiries can be made directly to the church: Crossroads Community Baptist Church in Ann Arbor (2580 Packard Rd, Ann Arbor, MI 48104) (734) 971-0773.

Part-time Worship Leader

CrossPointe Church is seeking a part-time worship leader to work with the lead pastor in planning and implementing all areas of our Christ-centered worship ministry. Our music style is considered "contemporary" as we are led by a team of musicians (piano, guitar(s), drums, bass, vocals). Within our "contemporary" style of music, we value both old and new songs that are theologically rich and seek to glorify God (examples: Citizens & Saints, Getty Music, Sovereign Grace Music, Indelible Grace Music). We are a medium-sized church affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) located in Monroe, Michigan. We offer two identical gathered worship services on Sunday mornings which include; biblical preaching, scripture reading, prayer, theologically rich music, and regular observance of the biblical ordinances (Lord's Supper and Baptism).

Please visit www.crosspointemonroe.com for more information regarding CrossPointe's doctrinal statement, leadership, history, and various ministries. To apply for this position or request more information, please email resume along with links to samples of your worship leading to crosspointeworshipleadersearch@gmail.com.

Bi-vocational Pastor Needed

Liberty Missionary Baptist Church, in Monroe MI is searching for a bi-vocational Pastor. Please send resumes to retiredchief1980@att.net or curtpat33801@yahoo.com. If you have any questions you may call Ron Doolittle at 734-752-0238.

Senior Pastor Needed

Roscommon Baptist Church is currently searching for a pastor. Please submit resume to roscommonbaptistchurch@gmail.com or mail to P.O.Box 178, Roscommon, MI 48653. For more information contact the church roscommonbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

Church Information Packets

The information previously mailed out in the Church Information Packets will now be available online at bscm.org/flyers for all churches to download, print, and use!

ABOUT US

The Baptist Beacon is the official newsjournal of the [Baptist State Convention of Michigan \(BSCM\)](http://bscm.org), in association with the Southern Baptist Convention. The mission of the Baptist Beacon is to communicate with Michigan Baptists in our shared mission of punching holes in the darkness through starting, strengthening, and sending churches.

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