

COLUMNS

The 12 Days of Christmas

By Tim Patterson

FENTON - Our Christmas traditions are as varied and unique as the communities of people who practice them. Many originate from the "Old Country" while others we share here in the good old USA are homegrown. A great deal of these traditions have come to us like common colds. We have them, but we don't really know how or why. We just do.

Some of the songs we sing during the season would be at best nonsensical if their history were not known. Most of us don't have a clue what "Figgy Pudding" might be (from the song We Wish You A Merry Christmas), and don't really care.

Do you know the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" has a very profound Christian purpose? On the surface it doesn't appear to have anything at all to do with God but according to Dr. William Hunter, there's a great symbolism. "From 1558 to 1829 Roman Catholics in England were not able to practice their faith openly, so they had to find other ways to pass on their beliefs. The song The Twelve Days of Christmas is said to be one example of how they did it.

Each of the items in the song, so we are told, represents something of religious significance. The hidden meaning of each gift was designed to help young Christians learn their faith. There is some doubt to the veracity of this interpretation, but it is still very intriguing.

"The song goes; 'On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me ...

The true love represents God and the one who receives these presents is the follower of Christ.

The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ who died on a tree as a gift from God.

The two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments - another gift from God.

The three French hens were faith, hope and love - three gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13.

The four calling birds were the four Gospels that sing the song of salvation through Jesus Christ.

The five golden rings were the first five books of the Bible also called the Books of Moses, or the Pentateuch.

The six geese a-laying were the six days of creation.

The seven swans a swimming were the seven spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit found in the New Testament.

The eight maids a milking were the eight beatitudes.

The nine ladies dancing were nine fruits of the Holy Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23.

The ten lords a-leaping were the Ten Commandments.

The eleven pipers piping were the eleven faithful disciples.

The twelve drummers drumming were the twelve points of the Apostles Creed."

I encourage you to look more closely at the traditions of Christmas, to find in them the deeper meanings, and hopefully greater inspiration to make Him Lord of this Season and every season of your life. There are some traditions that have nothing to do with our Lord and His birth, but are still great family and social traditions to carry on. Now as far as Figgy Pudding is concerned I still don't know what it is, and to be quite honest, even if I did I don't think I would "want some."

Merry Christmas!

A Light Has Dawned

By Mike Durbin

FENTON - "Let's go spelunking," Tony said to Shar and me during one of our visits with the Lynn's during our seminary days. We didn't have any idea what spelunking was, but we said, "sure, let's go."

We discovered that spelunking means exploring caves. The cave they took us to was absolutely fascinating! There was a stream of crystal-clear water flowing from the entrance of the cave that formed a beautiful creek on the outside. The only way to explore the cave was to walk through the ice-cold water. Though shockingly cold at first, the water was a welcome relief from Kentucky's humid summer heat. It was fascinating to watch geckos run for cover, bats hanging from the ceiling, and other creatures that made their home in the cave. The rock formations were mesmerizing. It was our first time exploring a cave with no tour guides, no signs, and no restrictions on how long we could stay or how far we could go.

The deeper we entered the cave, the shorter and narrower it became. Water that was only ankle deep near the entrance was rising higher on our bodies as the passageway narrowed. Our goal was to make it to the end of the cave, but we got to a point so narrow that the only way forward was to wade in water waist deep and rising. We were all taking turns carrying Tony and Jamie's two-year-old daughter Naomi. We didn't want her to get wet in the frigid water, and Jamie was nearing the end of her second pregnancy.

Our wives agreed to stay behind while Tony and I went deeper into the cave. We wanted to make it to the deepest part. Leaving one of the two flashlights we had with our wives, we headed deeper into the cave. After a few minutes, the cave narrowed and shortened dramatically. The passage was so short that we crawled on our hands and knees for a few feet. That wasn't so bad. The bad part was the water. We had entered an area where the water was so deep that only the upper parts of our bodies were above water as we crawled forward.

This cave exploring adventure happened when we were in our 20's. We were young and adventurous, but smart enough to know that we had reached a point where it wasn't safe to go any further. Actually, we went a few feet past that point. We were married men with family and ministry responsibilities. We decided to turn around and let the end of the cave remain a

mystery to us, but before returning, we turned off the flashlight to experience the total darkness of the cave.

It was a darkness like no other I have experienced. There was a total absence of light. I put my hand in front of my face, but I could not see it - not even a faint outline! We yelled, but we had gone too far for our wives to hear us. If the flashlight were to fail, fall in the water or run out of power, we would have needed to feel our way out. It's difficult to describe the eerie, unsettling thoughts that entered my mind as I was enveloped in total darkness with not much more than my head above water.

I am often reminded of that moment of total darkness during the Christmas season. Of the many beautiful descriptions of our Savior during Advent, one of my favorites is that Jesus is the Light. Matthew tells us, "The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned" (4:16).

Because that Light has dawned, it truly is MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Brotherhood Overcomes Divisions

By Tony Lynn

Brotherhood! What does it mean? Is it important to those of us in ministry?

FENTON - This fall at a meeting at the North American Mission Board, one of my brothers in the ministry by the name of Noah Oldham shared a story about his early years. I was so shaken by his reflection on life that I asked for permission to adapt his story for this column. I hope his story will tug at your soul in the same way it jerked me upright, calling me to create a culture of brotherhood wherever I live and serve. Noah Oldham is a Christian, husband, father, church planter, pastor, send city missionary, and personal trainer.

Noah Oldham said: "I grew up in a family of 3 brothers. My father did something ingenious and special for us while we were growing up. He gave us a family motto: "Honest, brave, strong, and tough, we are Oldham boys!" As boys we were proud of our shared identity. Now as adults raising our own families, we continue to be very proud of our shared identity. My brothers and I, still very close, have put the family motto on signs that hang in each of our sons' rooms.

When my brothers and I were younger we played sports together. As we entered high school, each one of us started specializing in our favorite sport. My sport was football. My older brother played basketball. My younger brother ran track. Each of us had a team, but we remained brothers. I did not play basketball in high school, but I went to every game my brother played. He always did the jump ball for his team. Just a split-second before the tip-off the people in the gym would fall silent and at that moment I would scream, "Get-up Nate Dogg!" My brother would

make eye contact with me and nod acknowledgment. I did that ritual every time, every single time.

When I became a sophomore at university, my younger brother ran track during his senior year in high school. I ran track during my high school years only to stay in shape for football. I did not like running track but during my sophomore year in college I rearranged my work schedule and class schedule so I could attend every track meet in which my younger brother ran. I would carry his starting blocks. After the pop of the starting gun went off, I would yell at the top of my lungs, "Go Nick go," until he completed every single 100-meter race.

Why did I go to the basketball games and the track meets? It was not because I loved basketball. It was not because I loved track. It was because Nate, Nick, and I remained brothers even though we were on different teams. Looking back on my childhood I realize that my father intentionally created ways for my brothers and I to stay connected. Being in the middle, I could play up with my older brother Nate or play down with younger brother Nick, but most of the time all three of us played together.

When we moved from Chicago to my parents' hometown of Eldorado, Illinois I was six years old. My father did a few strategic things. First, he built a clubhouse for us. Second, he built a basketball court with adjustable goals. Third, he made certain that we always had a video game with multiple controllers. Looking back now, I realize what my father did was on purpose. He was helping his sons to create brotherhood. We found our space in the clubhouse. We faced off with one another on the basketball court or played united against others. Shoulder to shoulder we played video games or defended our fort against the neighborhood kids. Everything created a brotherhood."

As I relive hearing Noah's story one more time, here are the lessons for us in ministry:

We share a calling to spread the Gospel which overshadows our differences
Diversity is our strength, not our weakness: old guys, young guys, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, immigrants, language groups, reformed, and non-reformed
We are called to different contexts: rural settings, small towns, suburban sites, metropolitan mosaics, urban center cores, and different people groups
We must share life with one another: lunches, coffees, family times, serve one another, and attend one another's celebrations

Brotherhood! What does it mean? Is it important to those of us in ministry? It means everything. It is vitally important to all of us even if we do not recognize it or admit it. Go hug your brothers!

Welcome to Bambi Lake Life!

By Mick Schatz

Thank-you to every church that has supported Bambi Lake through participation at one of our camps or retreats. Thank-you to every church that supported Bambi Lake through giving to the Cooperative Program or the Francis Brown State Mission Offering. God is using you and your generosity to further His Kingdom through Bambi Lake.

But what is Bambi Lake? I ask this question because I never want to assume everyone knows about Bambi Lake. I ask this question because after researching our records from the last 3-4 years I have discovered that of the 305 churches in our convention only 10% of the SBC Churches in Michigan have participated in an event at Bambi Lake. Fortunately, this means Bambi Lake has tremendous potential for growth and expansion. So, what is Bambi Lake? Let me explain it this way...

Bambi Lake is more than 240 acres of beautiful woods and walking trails.
Bambi Lake is more than freshly painted cabins, chalets and a lodge.
Bambi Lake is more than newly renovated reception area and snack shop.
Bambi Lake is more than newly built cabins for camping and a renovated bath house.
Bambi Lake is more than stage and lights.
Bambi Lake is more than great smoke barbecue and freshly prepared meals.
Bambi Lake is more than a pristine spring fed lake with great fishing.
Bambi Lake is more than kayaking, canoeing and swimming.
Bambi Lake is more than paddle boats and flying down the Bambi Booyah!
Bambi Lake is more than volleyball, basketball, putt-putt golf, Gaga Ball and Human Foosball.
Bambi Lake is more than milkshakes, popcorn and smoothies.
Bambi Lake is more than programs and products....

BAMBI LAKE IS SOOOO MUCH MORE!

Bambi Lake is a place where friendships are made for a lifetime.
Bambi Lake is a place where couples meet and discover their soulmate for life.
Bambi Lake is a place where no matter if you are black, white, purple, blue or green, you are welcomed with open arms, a warm smile, a cookie, and coffee.
Bambi Lake is a place where the light shatters the darkness.
Bambi Lake is a place where this year 40 souls were saved for eternity.
Bambi Lake is a place where the lost become found.
Bambi Lake is a place where men and women boys and girls first hear the Savior calling their name.
Bambi Lake is a place where the call to missions or full-time ministry is heard and realized.
Bambi Lake is a place where Heaven touches Earth.
Bambi Lake is a place where if you listen, you can hear God speaking through His creation.

Bambi Lake is a place where God's glory and majesty are on constant display be it winter, spring or summer.

Bambi Lake is a place where God's love is tangible, and His grace and mercy experienced.

Bambi Lake is a place God's Word is the Boss.

Bambi lake is a place where we serve for His glory and at His pleasure.

Bambi Lake is a place where the name of Jesus is exalted in worship and proclamation.

Bambi Lake is a place where Jesus is honored as the King of Kings and Lord of Lord's with no apology!

Southern Baptists of Michigan, Bambi lake is a gift given to you by God to be a place of spiritual equipping, empowerment and encouragement. Southern Baptist of Michigan, Bambi lake is a gift given to you by God to be a place of retreating and refreshing in the manifest presence of God. Southern Baptists of Michigan, Bambi is your camp, Bambi is your legacy, let's build it for the Glory of God and His Kingdom.

STARTING

Mission Offering Goal In Sight
By Staff

Fenton – The Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) staff has announced that Michigan Baptists are closing in on this year's goal for the Frances Brown State Mission Offering. This year's goal is a faith-stretching \$90,000, and as of December 1st, churches and individuals have given \$83,756.74. With less than a month to go that places the remaining amount to reach the goal at just more than \$6000.

The State Mission Offering is one of the primary methods that Michigan Baptists use to fund starting churches, strengthening churches and sending churches across the state. This year's offering will be shared between those three areas as well as the Bambi Lake Conference Center.

BSCM designates one week in September to highlight the ministries supported by the Frances Brown Offering, as well as to pray for them. But Michigan Baptists are free to support the offering at any time throughout the year. That gives churches and individuals a few more weeks to help BSCM to reach this year's goal whether they have not given to the offering yet, or they would choose to give more to help the state top the offering mark.

BSCM Executive Director, Tim Patterson, calls on Michigan Baptists to continue to pray for the state's many ministries. He says, "The fuel that fires the engines of the ministries of BSCM is prayer. Without prayer to power the work of God, our efforts would be useless."

This year's theme for the state offering is "The Power of One; Multiplied." BSCM Women Ministries Director, Sue Hodnett says, "We face a massive task in reaching every person in the State of Michigan with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Think of the astonishing achievements that would be possible when every member of every church is involved in praying, serving and giving, a multiplication of involvement by every single believer of Jesus Christ."

To give just go to <https://www.bscm.org/giving>

STENGTHENING

Am I enough?

By Dave Abberger

ZEELAND, MI - It's here! That magical moment we affectionately refer to as "Christmas time." Whether you have been listening to Christmas music before Thanksgiving or deem it to begin the night of Thanksgiving, it's officially here! Wikipedia defines Christmas as "The annual Christian festival celebrating Christ's birth, held on December 25 in the Western Church."

Personally, it has always been my favorite season. As a kid, Christmas meant no school, late nights, parties at church and with friends, and hopefully, a snow storm. While in college, it was the season that my wife and I began dating. I will never forget our first date in downtown Chicago on the Magnificent Mile. Now, I am a father and it means more time with my kids.

Since I am also a pastor, I have leadership celebrations to attend, community outreach events, and many other opportunities that pull my attention from my Savior. At times, the more we strive to maximize the season, the more we tend to minimize the value and virtue of the One we are celebrating. We often find ourselves ready for the season to be over so we can get back into our normal rhythm of life. We leave the longed-for season emotionally and physically empty, and promise to make changes the following year.

Three years ago, our world was forever changed. Truthfully, we entered the most difficult Christmas season ever. Danisse nearly passed away giving birth to Hudson as the doctors encountered severe complications during the cesarean procedure for Hudson. Her blood pressure dropped to 33/18 and she lost her entire body's blood volume. She received multiple transfusions, and God spared her life. This left her to recover with 48 staples in her abdomen, and a long uphill recovery process. She was immobile for 3 weeks and needed constant monitoring. Two weeks into the process, our son Evan went in for an emergency appendectomy. I would stay at the hospital until Evan would fall asleep, go home to check on Danisse and Hudson, and make sure our other two children were getting their homework finished.

Two weeks following Evan's surgery, he was back at the hospital being checked for Leukemia, and a week later for heart complications. Little did we know that just two months later, my daughter Mia would be (thankfully) misdiagnosed with a tragic illness that we would live with for the next 6 months before the doctor corrected the misdiagnosis. I remember hosting a Christmas party for our church leaders and staff, and watching them laugh and enjoy themselves. I smiled and laughed all while hurting so badly inside, and I could hardly even eat. I was confused at even my own emotions toward Jesus. I was broken inside and needed emotional and spiritual healing. It was during this season that my world forever changed.

John 10:10 reminds us "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

While I am convinced Jesus allowed those trials to be catalysts to increase our faith and exalt His Name, the devil used it to dampen my fire, kill my resolve, and discourage my hope. Satan used my humanity to remind me of my own failure and nearly miss the greatest blessing of the Christmas season. It was in this season of losing that Jesus confronted me with the question, "Am I enough?" I have to admit, at that time, He wasn't.

While we find blessings in the people, the presents, and the performances, Jesus is not just our anecdotal reason for the season, He is the center of our joy! As we learn to find satisfaction in Jesus, we find the season of Christmas much more satisfying, whether or not we are living a Hallmark Christmas special or the nightmare of hospitals, life and death situations and all the uncertainty. No matter the struggles you and I face, may we celebrate God's goodness and the salvation that comes through His son, Jesus, born in Bethlehem.

About the author: Dave Abberger is the lead pastor of Hope Church, a new church plant in Zeeland, MI. He and Danisse have been married for 15 years and have 4 children. Before returning to Michigan to plant Hope, he was a senior pastor in both North Carolina and Tennessee."

FIRST-PERSON: An ever-escalating identity crisis

By Charles Patrick

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) -- Man has been plagued with the desire to "play God" since Genesis 3. This includes promoting "imago" self rather than "imago Dei." That is, culture is obsessed with representing self, according to one's own design.

Although the created has always sinfully desired to be the Creator, contemporary culture is fraught with heightened forms of creating one's identity.

Online avatars permit us to create a virtual self where visual appearance, attributes and behavior may be represented in any manner in the perceived risk-free environment of online

spaces. This permits individuals to act out their personal fantasies without apparent consequences. Online screen names and profiles permit us to self-represent ourselves in a particular manner that is often far from reality. Social media permits us to define facets of self with mere images and a few characters.

Gender fluidity, meanwhile, is being promoted as a cultural norm. Individuals may now self-identify as someone or something else. Bookstores and blogs are rampant with self-help, self-awareness and self-actualization topics. Tattoos have moved from expressing identity to defining identity. Advances in artificial intelligence are rapidly colliding with concepts of identity and personhood. TED talks provide unending lectures on personality, self-motivation and humanity, all with the goal to assist us in defining our identity.

The 1978 rock classic "Who Are You" by The Who is the siren lament of contemporary culture. Culture has more adjectival labels for people now than one's favorite cup of coffee at the boutique coffee shop. People are in an identity crisis, desperately trying to define themselves in a world that strangles uniqueness as it makes everything normative.

We, believers, have the answer. Our identity is not defined by a denomination or a church. It is not defined by what coffee we drink, clothes we wear, what political party we align with, whether we use an iOS or Android phone, sports team we root for, blogs we read, or whether or not we have a beard.

Rather, the apostle Paul clearly and succinctly defines our identity with the two-word prepositional phrase "in Christ." He repeatedly uses this expression in his epistles (along with "in Him" and "in the Lord"), and it is critical to Paul's and our theology. Our identity is a Gospel identity fully defined in Christ.

To be in Christ means we share in Jesus' death and resurrection. The old us is dead and we are a new creature placed under the headship of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1-2). Hence, our identity has been changed, and we think and act differently. We are adopted into the family of God (1 Corinthians 12:13). Having been justified, we are able to come boldly before the throne of God (Ephesians 2:13; Hebrews 4:16) as a people set apart (1 Peter 2:9). Our identity comes with citizenship in heaven as we are changed to be in the world and not of the world (John 17:14-16; Romans 12:2).

Our identity does not depend on us or material things of this world, but solely on Christ. We are united with Christ and are His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20).

So, the next time someone asks who you are, answer them with "in Christ." When they look at you strangely, begin a Gospel proclamation.

About the author: Charles Patrick is vice president for strategic initiatives and communications at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. This column first appeared in the seminary's Theological Matters blog, theologicalmatters.com.

Is Boxing Day and Christmas the same?

By Staff

Boxing Day takes place on December 26th and is only celebrated in a few countries; mainly ones historically connected to the United Kingdom (UK) (such as Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand) and in some European countries. In Germany it is known as "Zweite Feiertag" (which means 'second celebration') second to the traditional Christmas Day.

It was started in the UK about 800 years ago, during the Middle Ages. It was the day when the alms box, collection boxes for the poor often kept in churches, were traditionally opened so that the contents could be distributed to the destitute. Some churches still open these boxes on Boxing Day. In The Netherlands, some collection boxes were made out of a rough pottery and were shaped like pigs. To this day, many believe it was the beginning of the piggy bank children save their coins. It was also tradition that servants got the day off to celebrate Christmas with their families. Boxing Day has since become a public holiday when it is also the traditional day that Pantomimes debut.

Pantomimes today are little more than interactive theatrical events that allow the audience to participate in the story. More traditional pantomimes were based on the story of Christ's birth and intended to educate those who didn't know what Christmas was all about. The interaction was the opportunity to come forward and accept Christ as savior of their lives. Sadly, in later centuries more and more actors became involved and persuaded the theaters to change the storyline for entertainment value.

Boxing Day, December 26, is also St. Stephen's Day. St. Stephen is believed to have been a very early follower of Jesus, one of His disciples, and was the first Christian martyr. Stephen was stoned to death outside the gates of Jerusalem by some who didn't believe in Jesus. St. Stephen's Day (or 'the feast of Stephen') is when the Carol 'Good King Wenceslas' is set. It's about helping the poor - so it has a strong connection to Boxing Day. The king braved the winter storms to share food and blankets with less fortunate of his kingdom.

The conclusion can be drawn that Boxing Day is indeed very similar in tradition to Christmas. Boxing Day and Christmas are all about giving to others, intentionally sharing love, and caring for the needs of those less fortunate. Both find their roots steeped in Scripture, and modeling the Christian faith. So celebrate the days focusing on the true reason for the celebration, Jesus, Savior of the world.

The Basics of the Nonreligious Worldview

By Caleb Crider

RICHMOND - Cultures around the world have unique relationships to world religions. In most cases, the culture of a particular place can be categorized as Muslim, Hindu, Catholic, Buddhist, animist, or some combination of these. A growing number of people around the world, however, do not consider themselves as belonging to any religion.

Being nonreligious means you do not practice any form of organized religion. In some cases, entire peoples have a long history devoid of any religion. In other cases, the nonreligious started out relating to a religious framework of some kind but abandoned religion in reaction to abuse, hypocrisy, and perceived irrelevance within the tradition. The nonreligious sometimes seek to limit the influence of religion on society and often consider religion to be the source of conflict and trouble. They may point to the persecution of people by religious leaders as evidence of the negative impact religion can have. Nonreligious people, therefore, reject the notion that religion can be a positive force in culture. Instead, they turn to other philosophies to help them make sense of the world around them.

Three Main Groups of the Nonreligious

Many (not all) nonreligious people consider themselves to be atheists, meaning they do not believe there is a God. They also may deny religious concepts such as life after death, supernatural miracles, spiritual realities, angels, demons, heaven, etc. For the atheist, what we see here on earth is all that exists. Because they don't believe there will be any judgment by a higher power or even an eternal existence, atheists are usually more focused on the here and now. The promise of an encounter with God after death does not motivate them; they're concerned with the present.

"Nonreligious people reject the notion that religion can be a positive force in culture."

Other nonreligious people consider themselves to be agnostic, which means "without knowledge." The agnostic remains morally neutral on the question of God's existence. Usually, agnostics find themselves somewhere between a desire to believe in something beyond the material world and a need for more evidence for God. They tend to be slow to draw conclusions about spiritual things, and therefore can be put off by strong assertions and truth claims. Agnosticism is centered around what should be done based on what can be knowable.

Humanists are another group of nonreligious people. Often overlapping with atheism or agnosticism, humanism is the philosophy that people should think for themselves rather than be led by any set of doctrines. Instead of consulting a religious framework for how to think about the world or make life decisions, the humanist considers viable options and does what he or she thinks is best. Information, logic, and instinct make a lot more sense to the humanist than faith, grace, or God.

The Problem of Evil

A nonreligious person will likely say that humans are morally neutral. Typically, they believe people are born innocent and then learn or are shaped to do bad things by their family, school, neighborhood, or religion. The nonreligious would say that despite our propensity to learn and exhibit bad behavior, we have the basic capacity for good.

Many nonreligious people do not believe they or the world have a sin problem. While they understand there is bad in this world—wars, suffering, natural disasters, and other atrocities—they don't necessarily equate it to an inherent depravity. Instead, they would say the suffering that exists in the world is caused by other humans and comes about when "human rights" are not granted to all people as individuals. If injustice, poverty, and inequality could be eradicated, the nonreligious believe the world would be great.

The solution most nonreligious suggest to end suffering, then, is to ensure and respect every person's human rights. Typically, they propose solutions to be accomplished by large organizations—governments or collections of governments like the EU or the UN. These institutions can help facilitate education, primarily science-based education, to correct the simple or willful ignorance that causes humans to infringe on others' rights.

Individuality for the Nonreligious

Religion or spiritual thinking is often a private matter for the nonreligious. Since a person's beliefs are to remain their own, to impose a universal standard of right or wrong would be a violation of a person's rights and the sovereignty of their individuality. Appeals to religious systems of right and wrong, good and evil, or moral codes aren't convincing for the nonreligious. If someone does not believe in any religious law, an appeal to that law in the name of religion will not make sense to him, no matter how universal that law may seem to us.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery" may prick the conscience of the nonreligious, but because their moral framework has no "rules" about going against one's conscience, they're not likely to respond with contrition or belief. The nonreligious often have great difficulty seeing the need for salvation because they don't have a law that pronounces them guilty.

The Nonreligious Worldview

The nonreligious often focus on science, living life for the moment, and pursuing personal happiness. Many focus on current circumstances and have no concern for what happens to them after they die. They still tour historic church buildings, practice yoga, and allow temples and mosques to be built, but they generally do not think about spirituality or religion in their day-to-day lives.

Christopher Hitchens described this kind of worldview in his book, *God Is Not Great*. He wrote, "Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We do not rely solely upon science and reason, because these are necessary rather than sufficient factors, but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason. . . . Literature, not scripture, sustains the mind. . . . We

do not believe in heaven or hell. . . . We believe with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion.”

The problem many nonreligious recognize is how to collectively lead ethical lives while agreeing on what is ethical, especially when crossing cultures. Andrew Copson argues secularism is the best way to deal with diverse societies and achieve a cooperative society. He uses a modern definition of secularism based on sociologist Jean Bauberot’s work to explain how to accomplish such a task.

Separation of religious institutions from the institutions of the state and no domination of the political sphere by religious institutions

Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion for all, with everyone free to change their beliefs and manifest their beliefs within the limits of public order and the rights of others

No state discrimination against anyone on grounds of their religion or nonreligious worldview, with everyone receiving equal treatment on these grounds

A lack of religious belief is not new to humanity. As Pew Research reports, the abandonment of faith is on the rise, at least in the Western world. Religion, for those who have none, has become passé, relegated to stories told on museum walls as humanity outgrows its need for religious constructs and faith. Musician Reggie Watts summarized the nonreligious community’s view well, tweeting, “Religions are the training wheels of the self-enlightenment. They can be helpful in the beginning, but at some point they need to be let go.”

About the author: Caleb Crider is an instructional design leader at IMB. He is a coauthor of *Tradecraft: For the Church on Mission*. You can find him on Twitter @CalebCrider.

What’s a Jesse Tree?

By Staff

Jesse Trees are a very old Christmas Tradition and began in medieval times. They were used to help tell the story of the Bible from creation to the Christmas Story. The Jesse tree represents Jesus’ family tree. The name is taken from Isaiah 11:1, in which Jesus is referred to as a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, the father of David.

1. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
2. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--
3. And he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;
4. But with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. Isaiah 11:1-4 (NIV)

A branch is a sign of new life and new beginnings. Jesus was a descendent of King David making Jesus' birth a new branch. The ornaments on the Jesse tree tell of Jesus' ancestors, and of the events leading to Jesus' birth.

The first Jesse trees were large carvings, tapestries or even stained glass windows put in Churches that helped illiterate people to learn about the Bible from creation to the Christmas Story. Now, Jesse Trees are used as a kind of Advent Calendar. You can use a normal Christmas tree or a banner in the shape of a tree. Each day through advent (or sometimes just on the four Sundays of advent) a special decoration or ornament (similar to a Chrismon), that tells a story from the Bible, is hung on the tree.

There are very many different stories and symbols you can use.

Some of the symbols and stories include:

Bible Story	Scripture Reference	Symbol/Ornament
Creation	Genesis 1	Earth
Adam and Eve	Genesis 2:4-3:24	Apple tree
Noah and the Flood	Genesis 6:9-9:17	Rainbow
God's Promise to Abraham	Genesis 12:1-7 & 15:1-6	Tent
Isaac	Genesis 22:1-18	Ram
Jacob's Ladder	Genesis 37 & 50	Multicolored robe
Moses	Exodus 2:1-4:20	Burning bush
Israelites and Passover	Exodus 12:1-42	Lamb
10 Commandments	Exodus 19:1-20:20	Stone tablets
Joshua and Jericho	Joshua 6:1-20	Ram's horn trumpet
Ruth	Book of Ruth	Sheaf of corn
King David	1 Samuel 16:1-3	Star of David
Solomon's Temple	1 Kings 6	Temple
Elijah and Baal	1 Kings 18:16-39	Bonfire
Isaiah's Jesse Prophecy	Isaiah 11:1-11	Tree stump-single branch
Jonah and the Whale	Book of Jonah	Whale
John the Baptist	Matthew 3:13-17	Scallop shell
Mary	Luke 1:26-38	White lily
Elizabeth	Luke 1:39-56	Mother and child
Zechariah	Luke 1:57-80	Tablet and pencil
Joseph	Matthew 1:19-25	Carpenter's hammer
Shepherds	Luke 2:8-20	Sheep
Wisemen	Matthew 2:1-12	3 Gifts / 3 crowns
Jesus	Luke 2:1-8	Baby in manger

Who is Mary, Mother of Jesus, and Why Does It Matter?

Leonardo De Chirico

ROME - The simple sound of the name “Mary” opens up very different views in people’s hearts and minds.

For some, she was what the New Testament says she was: a young Jewish woman who was chosen by God to supernaturally conceive and give birth to Jesus, thus becoming part of the way in which the Son of God became a man. This group, not without their own doubts and setbacks, believes her biblical portrayal indicates that she was also a member of the first community of men and women who followed Jesus. She is soberly respected, yet she does not occupy center stage in their overall Christian experience.

For others, Mary deeply shapes their whole spirituality and entire life. She is prayed to and venerated, surrounded by a vast array of “Marian” devotions, such as rosaries, processions, pilgrimages. The titles with which she is referred to (Heavenly Queen, Mediatrix, Advocate) resemble those ascribed to her son, Jesus Christ. She looks like an altogether different person than the one the previous group perceives she was.

There’s Something about Mary

The process through which Mary became so venerated was long and not linear. It accumulated different viewpoints, devotions, and doctrinal formulations that eventually led to a body of beliefs and practices centered on Mary but beyond biblical boundaries. The real, biblical Mary became an idealized Mary.

Some apocryphal (literally “obscure”) gospels (e.g., The Protoevangelium of James) elaborated on traditions that tried to embellish the gospel story at the expense of its authenticity. Whereas the canonical gospels are realistic, the apocryphal ones are excessive in their attention to Mary’s life.

Besides the influence of these writings, the spiritual framework that gave us Mariology was generated by popular piety. Liturgies centered on Mary, prayers addressed to her, devotions to honor her—this is the religious milieu of the Mariological crescendo. It was through the practice of devotional prayer that Mary was transformed from being a model of faith to becoming an object-subject of faith addressed in prayer and praised in the context of Christian worship. Against this background, the Council of Ephesus (AD 431) gave Mary the title “mother of God.” The “motherhood” of Mary that first related to Jesus Christ was extended to her motherhood of other areas—mother of the church and mother of the human race.

Marian Dogmas and Devotions

In nations and cultures where Roman Catholicism is prevalent, Marianism largely defines the religious experience of Roman Catholics who pray to her and are devoutly committed to her.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church goes as far as to say, “The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship” (section 971).

To call devotion to Mary “intrinsic” means there can be no proper worship without devotion to her. It also implies that when dealing with Marian devotion, one touches a central nerve of the whole of Catholic spirituality. It’s not something that can be dealt with independently.

Marian Prayers and Rosaries

Prayer to Mary quintessentially defines Marian spirituality. She is perhaps the most invoked figure in many religious quarters. Acclaimed as mother, she is sought to give help and strength. She is approached with reverence and awe. Mary can be approached confidently because she can obtain for us from her divine Son anything she asks for.

Against the background of such deep theological and devotional vision, the list of prayers mirrors a Marian-centered spirituality: “Hail Holy Queen,” “Regina Coeli” (Queen of Heaven), Ave Maris Stella (Hail Star of the Ocean) are only a few of the most common Marian prayers. Another significant form of Marian prayer is the Rosary, which means “crown of roses.” The conviction behind this expression is that each time people say a “Hail Mary” prayer in the Rosary, they give her a rose. And each complete Rosary makes her a crown of roses. The Holy Rosary is considered by those adherents to be a perfect prayer because within it lies the story of salvation retold in a way that highlights Mary’s central role in redemption.

Instead of inculcating salvation history as the Bible tells it, the Rosary is a powerful tool to shape one’s own imagination in terms of the pervasive presence and agency of Mary in whatever the Triune God is and does. The whole orientation of Roman Catholic “biblical theology” is inherently Marian, in that Mary is thought of as sharing the prerogatives and roles of the Son. This is totally contrary to the gospel whereby all that is said in the Scriptures needs to be seen in the light of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27) and that there is no mediator apart from Christ for our salvation and prayers (1 Tim. 2:5).

Marian Shrines and Apparitions

Apart from shaping the life of prayer and the overall spiritual understanding of salvation history for Catholics, Mariology is also a determining factor for the arrangement of worship in its spatial dimension. Thousands of church buildings around the world are dedicated to Mary, thus forging the minds and hearts of millions of people. Aside from huge church buildings and sanctuaries, Marian devotion marks its territory in the form of small shrines disseminated in crossroads, hospitals, schools, apartment blocks, and offices to signify the nearness of Mary in everyday life and in every place.

The strong Marian emphasis of Roman Catholicism has also been enriched by alleged apparitions of Mary throughout the centuries, with an increase of these episodes since the nineteenth century when Marian piety pushed the Church to promote the dogma of Mary’s immaculate conception. Each apparition generated the rise of more devotional practices, such

as pilgrimages and shrines to the memory of the apparition and to further its message. The most famous Marian apparitions are those associated with Guadalupe in Mexico, in Lourdes, France, and in Portugal.

Rather than promoting a Bible-based, Christ-centered faith, all these messages have reinforced Marian practices and veneration. Although Marian apparitions may at times seem like fanciful tales to non-Catholic observers, their impact has been significant. They've led to the conversion of millions to Roman Catholicism, the building of some of the largest Marian shrines around the world, the formation of Marian movements dedicated to the spreading of Marian devotions, encouragement for the development of Mariological doctrines, and the drawing of hundreds of millions of pilgrims to Marian sites.

What is at Stake?

In all its theological force and devotional ramifications, Mariology is an inescapable, all-embracing, and fundamental tenet of Roman Catholic theology and practice. For all Bible-believing Christians, Mariology is a big source of puzzlement. They love Mary, but they cannot come to terms with what happened to the memory of the young lady called by God the Father to be the bearer of the person of the Lord Jesus. They don't see how the biblical Mary can be reconciled with the hypertrophic Mary of subsequent Mariology. Its development seems to respond to rules and criteria that go way beyond what is written in the Bible.

Mariology, as it stands, needs to go through a process of radically biblical deconstruction if it wants to become a biblically defined and viable Christian option. All the stratified accumulation of Marian suggestions, expansions, and developments should go through the healthy refinement of clear biblical teaching in order to be given Scriptural shape. Pointing our attention to the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—this was Mary's way.

About the author: Leonardo De Chirico is the pastor of Breccia di Roma and director of the Reformanda Initiative. His most recent book is *A Christian Pocket Guide to Mary*.

Why the Christ in CHRISTmas?

By Staff

Frankenmuth- Anyone who has traveled I-75 North of Flint and beyond has seen the roadside signs. The Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland and its 27 acre site right off the highway. The "store" itself is the size of two football fields. The Wonderland draws more than two million visitors every year, and has become one of the top ten man-made attractions in the entire state of Michigan.

It's hard to believe that this giant extravaganza got its start as a little sign shop more than 70 years ago. Wally Bronner and his wife, Irene, built their own building in 1954, and even then half

the sign shop was dedicated to Christmas decorations. Now, there are 350 decorated Christmas trees, 6,000 types of ornaments, more than 500 different nativities, and 50,000 trims and gifts.

The outer focus of Wally Bronner's life was the store, but the inner focus was his relationship with Jesus Christ. Bronner was clearly a successful businessman, but he said that it was Jesus who had given his life meaning and purpose. So, Wally built his business around the Person he honored with the capitalized letters of "CHRIST" in Christmas. The gift of salvation he had received from God had so dramatically changed Bronner's life that he loved to share it with others. In fact, visitors to the company website will find a clear presentation of the Gospel here. <https://www.bronners.com/topic/the-story-of-wally-bronner.do?from=fn&sortBy=ourPicks>.

Wally loved working at his store, and even late in life he would spend 10 hours a day welcoming his visitors. He would joke that he only worked on days that end in "y". Bronner passed away on April 1st, 2008. He joked that he was going to heaven "to make sure the decorative touches are in place."

On his last Good Friday on earth Bronner wrote these words, "Today's Good Friday was an especially GOOD FRIDAY when our dear family in prayer agreed to the reality that our loving Lord and Savior – the CHRIST of CHRISTmas – is ready to receive me into his heavenly kingdom where all believers in the Creator God will be with him FOREVER AND EVER...NOTHING COULD BE GREATER!"

Wally Bronner understood what it meant to be a Christ follower and exhibited such in all his affairs. His example stands the test of time as people from all over come to his CHRISTmas store not just to spend money, but to experience the Spirit of Christmas.

SENDING

DR efforts continue in Carolinas, across U.S.

by Laura Sikes

Date: November 27, 2018 - Tuesday

LONGS, S.C. (BP) -- Pastor Lebron Crisp of Living Water Baptist Church challenged his congregation to look for opportunities to reach hurting people after Hurricane Florence struck the church's community just a few miles northwest of North Myrtle Beach. The storm's flood waters damaged hundreds of homes including several homes of church members. "It just breaks our hearts. I want to be out here helping every waking second," said Crisp, founding pastor and pastor of the church in Longs, South Carolina, for 29 years.

Crisp, church members and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) volunteers reached out to deacon Russ Frye and his wife Gerry, who lost most everything in their home of 19 years in the

Aberdeen community. In early October, Crisp met the Fries, both in their 80s, when they first returned to their flood-damaged home and found mold nearly four feet high in every room. The couple, married for 61 years, had been away during the hurricane and the home was closed up for almost three weeks.

Crisp helped them take water-soaked belongings out to the yard and committed to help them. The home went through a complete tear-out and now all the new sheetrock is hung, along with new doors and trim, Crisp said. "We're hoping to start the painting this week. It's getting close for them," he said. Frye said he was so thankful for the support of his church family. A member gave them use of their beach home while the work has been done on their home.

In addition to all the work, the couple has received clothes, furniture and meals, he said. All four of the church's pastors, including Crisp, were at the house working. "I don't think any church family can top ours," Frye said. For more than two months, church members have served alongside SBDR volunteers who set up a command post in the church's parking lot.

SBDR closed down the post just before Thanksgiving. The work will transition from recovery to rebuild in December, said Randy Creamer, SBDR director for the South Carolina Baptist Convention. The church and volunteers are taking a much-needed break, and collegiate volunteer teams will come to help with the rebuild during their break in December, Creamer said. They will work with SBDR crew chiefs and team leaders.

Creamer credited Living Water Baptist Church's work to a good partnership with Horry County and the Waccamaw Baptist Association during the response in the state. He estimated that volunteers served more than 300 residents from the SBDR site stationed at the church. "Church members were assisting their community while the flood waters were rising and well before our formal disaster relief resources began arriving," Creamer said. He also noted that it has been hard on the areas which were hit two years ago by Hurricane Matthew. "That's been especially disheartening," Creamer said. He asked for continued prayers and support as the work moves into long-term rebuild.

Crisp gave thanks for the seven professions of faith that have been made. "God's been good through all of this," he said. Georgia SBDR volunteer Ronnie Register, who led the incident command post at Longs for about two weeks, said he was concerned for retirees who had so much damage. Many don't have flood insurance, he said. He and his wife Linda, both members of Brushy Creek Baptist in Sparks, Ga., have served for about 10 years. "With flooding, it takes a long time to recover," he noted. "A lot of people still need help, and you have to be thankful for all the volunteers. Even when some leave, there will be others coming to help."

Also serving in Longs, were Georgia SBDR team leader Tom Young, and his wife Denise, who worked mud-outs for about two weeks. Young said he was impressed with how neighbors came together to help each other with their homes. Denise asked for continued prayers for people as they work to put their lives back together. As of Nov. 25, SBDR has provided flood clean-up

services to more than 680 homeowners and performed more than 1,200 chainsaw and yard clean-up jobs in North and South Carolina.

In response to major disasters across the United States, including Hurricane Michael -- which struck the Florida Gulf Coast, Georgia and Alabama -- flooding in the Midwest and fires in the West, SBDR has served nearly 2.3 million meals. SBDR volunteers have helped more than 6,800 homeowners clean up their homes and yards following flooding and wind damage. Following nearly 4,000 gospel presentations, 534 people made professions of faith.

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief is among the three largest providers of disaster relief assistance in the United States. Southern Baptist churches, associations and state conventions all partner to mobilize volunteers, resources and equipment to provide services. The North American Mission Board provides national coordination and assistance in larger, multi-state responses.

About the author: Laura Sikes is a freelance writer for the North American Mission Board.

Christians around the World

By Rachel Cohen

“My wife lost her life to cancer and left me with a young daughter and a life in shambles.”
“A Christian had always tried to encourage me to read the Bible, but I was never interested.”
“My parents were Christians, so I thought I was too.”

The beauty of the gospel is that God meets people—in the US, in Africa, in Asia, everywhere—in the midst of their sorrow, their obstinance, and their misunderstanding of him. He unifies us in his kingdom, then he sends us out with a unified mission: go and make disciples of all nations. Christians in the United States are not alone in this task, nor are we always leading it. As people worldwide come to faith, we, as a global family, work toward God’s vision laid out in Revelation 7.

Our Christians around the World series gives us a glimpse of how God is redeeming people then inspiring them to be on mission—every church, every nation. Let’s celebrate what God is doing through his followers and pray for each other as we do our part in his global mission.

East Asia

After eight years of marriage, my wife lost her life to cancer and left me with a young daughter and a life in shambles. I had a broken heart, felt hopeless and lost, and couldn’t sleep at night. One day, my neighbor, who came to faith one month before, quietly left the Jesus film in front of my door. After dinner and putting my daughter to bed, I watched the Jesus film alone. I couldn’t stop crying as I reached out to Jesus for his help and forgiveness of my sins. Two months later, I got baptized and started attending a Bible class. I wanted to know God more and how to

become Jesus's disciple. I felt the calling for full-time work as I began to share my testimony with friends and coworkers. Our small group of Jesus followers soon turned into a church.

Our church is small and still growing in the Word, and therefore, overseas mission is quite overwhelming for us. However, we want to heed Jesus's Great Commission in Matthew 28 and Acts 1:8. I believe Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria are where we can start. Our Judea and Samaria are the people in remote villages and ethnic minorities within our own province who won't hear the good news unless someone takes it to them. Every year, we take volunteers to remote villages to help with farm work and share about Jesus to those with open hearts. As people respond and come to faith, we see how God strengthens and grows our church through those outreaches.

—Y., East Asia

Earlier this year, I started a small food cart and sold fried potatoes and rice noodle on the street of my hometown. Friends were shocked and asked if my dad's business had gone under. My dad is a wealthy businessman, so seeing me on the street with a food cart was a total surprise. I assured them my dad still had his business. I simply wanted to raise my own support for volunteer work overseas and not rely on my dad's help. Since believing in Jesus five years ago—because someone came to my country to share the good news—my life has changed, and I share my faith frequently with friends and family because I want them to have the same joy as I do.

I decided to serve overseas as a volunteer for two years sharing my faith with people outside of my language and culture. All my nonbelieving family members, including my parents who thought I would soon give up the idea when faced with challenges, saw how determined I was and started to encourage and support me even though they still didn't understand why I was going overseas. Some of my friends want me to stay, get married, and enjoy a comfortable life. But I want to seek God and his kingdom first, and now I'm seeing how God is opening new doors and answering my prayers as I follow his lead.

Although my church is small, they're supporting me financially and spiritually and are very proud of my decision to go and share overseas. A few have said with a tone of envy, "How I wish I could go too!"

—E., East Asia

Indonesia

My name is Jerry, and my family has been living in Jakarta for about a month now. I come from a broken family, which required me to stay with different family members as I finished school. It also gave me opportunities to attend church and receive Christ as my Savior during high school. I went to seminary, where I met my wife, and we began our ministry together serving a local church for seven years. I had opportunities to serve in other places in Southeast Asia on short-term mission trips. While traveling through Jakarta on these trips, God gave us vision and open

doors to serve in Jakarta. Through prayers, fellow believers, and blessings of our church, God gave us confirmation to make a bold move to one of the biggest cities in the world.

The move has not been easy. There are cultural and lifestyle adjustments we need to get used to. However, we are confident in God's providence and his calling. We are here because we love the people of Jakarta, and we want them to have opportunities to hear the good news.

—Jerry, Jakarta

Colombia

We can't go back to Venezuela. It is not livable there. Here in Colombia, we see Venezuelans sleeping in the street or asking for enough money to feed their babies. This is so sad. I don't even have words to express it. We don't have a salary anymore. We don't have anything. We don't have any way to get food either, but the amazing thing is that God provides—and not just barely. He is in every detail. When we don't know what we will eat that day, we just worship the Lord, and one way or another we eat that day. We have a vision to plant a good solid church in this place so many will look to God. We see so much need and so much receptivity.

—Cesar and Neida, Venezuelan refugees in Colombia

After six weeks of looking for work and finding nothing, I went to a park by myself. I was always alone, so why wouldn't I be alone? But I found out later that God was with me the whole time. A text message came up from a friend Carly back home in Venezuela. She is a Christian and had always tried to encourage me to read the Bible, but I was never interested. She asked how I was, and I said, "Not well at all. I am depressed. I cry every day. I'm not doing well." She said, "William, you need to take refuge in the Lord. You are not alone. If you are in Colombia, that's not circumstantial, God has a plan."

She put me in contact with a church in Bogota. When I attended, everybody there wrapped their arms around me and gave me a big, warm hugs. It was the first time in Colombia I felt like I wasn't alone. The pastor's wife gave me a Bible, and I started reading it. That was the best day of my life. I got to know the Lord. I have to say there was a William Duran before and a William Duran after—not the same person. Nobody wants what has happened to Venezuela. But as horrible as it is, if that is what had to happen to get me to a place where I came to the Lord, then it was worth it.

—William, Venezuelan refugee in Colombia

Burkina Faso

I was always active in my church—singing in the choir, leading worship and Bible studies. Then I had a recurring dream that I was in a boat surrounded by people who were underwater, drowning. I started preaching from the boat and many of them came up to the surface to hear. Some climbed up into the boat and were saved. That's when I decided to go to seminary and become a full-time minister of the gospel. For the past ten years, I've been pastoring the church in which I was saved, and I supervise others in our district. I go out regularly to surrounding villages to preach where there is no church.

—Pastor Lazare, Burkina Faso

I'm a pastor's wife, and I was just always at his side. Then I received orality training in chronological Bible storying. I learned how to craft stories from the Bible in my mother tongue and share them with others. I brought that back to the women in my church, and it changed everything. When I share Bible stories that way, the women really open up. Before the women never spoke up in church. Now they ask questions and interact with the Bible because they really understand it.

—Burkina Faso

My parents were Christians so I thought I was too. I ended up in prison and God sent a missionary there who shared the gospel with me. He baptized me in the prison laundry sink and disciplined me. God was merciful, and my twenty-year sentence was commuted after ten years. Now I'm a pastor of a church in the city and doing prison ministry of my own. Prisoners connect with me when I witness because they know I've walked in their shoes.

—Burkina Faso

About the author: Rachel Cohen is a content editor for imb.org and a media specialist for IMB.

LMCO - This Year, More than ever

By Staff

The goal? Raise \$160 million dollars by the end of the year

The purpose? To send more light into the darkness, to touch more lives with the Gospel, and to raise up more nations in His name.

How does it happen? One way is giving and lots of it. Another way is prayer - 2018 Week of Prayer for International Missions – during December, and everyone can be part of both.

Generous giving to the 2018 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® makes a massive difference in the world. Men, women, children, and entire communities are transformed as a result of this offering. Your gifts enable thousands of missionaries to live among, serve, and share the gospel with people who have never heard it until now.

Where does all that money go? Through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, you and your church are:

Supporting over 3,600 missionaries

Enabling disciples to be made and churches to be multiplied around the world

Continuing the SBC's 173-year commitment to missions, worldwide

In addition to the week of dedicated prayer for world missions there are stories to share:

Larry Pepper traded a space mission for a medical mission among the sick and hurting in Africa. God is using a small church in Tennessee to make a big difference in the work of IMB missionaries in Asia.

Hispanic churches are crossing cultures and engaging the world with the gospel. A partnership between a Kentucky church and a Brazil-based team is reaching Sao Paulo with the gospel.

Ukrainian believers are planting churches, trained by IMB missionaries and supported by a North Carolina congregation.

The impact is mutual when American students travel to East Asia to serve college students alongside IMB workers.

It takes the support of many churches to keep a small hospital running in Tanzania. Refugee ministry is both local and global for a church in Atlanta.

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering is just one way of making the Christmas Holiday all about the Baby Jesus coming to save the world. Won't you be part of continuing the efforts that all may hear?!

MI NEWS

Mich. Baptists authorize building sale, affirm women

by David Roach

Date: November 19, 2018 - Monday

JACKSON, Mich. (BP) -- The Baptist State Convention of Michigan authorized its Executive Board to sell the convention's office building in Fenton, Mich., and adopted an increased 2019 budget. Messengers to the BSCM annual meeting also launched a church planting and revitalization partnership with the Baptist General Convention of Texas and adopted resolutions affirming "the dignity and worth of women" and denouncing domestic abuse. The Michigan convention convened Nov. 9 at Grace Church in Jackson, Mich., with 132 messengers representing 50 of the convention's 305 cooperating churches. The meeting's theme was "The Power of ONE -- Multiplied."

A building sale was authorized because the BSCM's current office building contains 25 offices along with space for support staff though only five BSCM employees work in the building. A move would cut costs, but no offers to purchase the building have been made to date. The 2019 budget of \$2,843,701 -- a 5.6 percent increase from the current year -- anticipates \$1,300,000 in

Cooperative Program giving from churches, \$710,576 from the North American Mission Board and \$55,000 from LifeWay Christian Resources. The convention will forward 27.5 percent of CP receipts to Southern Baptist Convention national and international causes, the same percentage forwarded in 2018. There are no budget provisions for shared ministry expenses.

The convention launched two new partnerships. The partnership with Texas Baptists will focus on revitalization and church planting in inner-city Detroit. The Southern Baptist Foundation of Michigan began a partnership with WatersEdge Advisors, a tradename of The Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma, in which the Oklahoma foundation will manage the Michigan foundation's accounts.

Eight of the nine resolutions adopted by BSCM messengers largely mirrored resolutions adopted by the SBC at its annual meeting this summer in Dallas. A resolution "on the dignity and worth of women as co-heirs and co-laborers in the mission of God's church" "honor the immeasurable contribution of women to our cooperative mission of Great Commission work."

A separate resolution "on domestic violence and abuse" "acknowledge that abuse dishonors the marriage covenant, and fundamentally blasphemes the relationship between Christ and the church."

Other resolutions addressed the integrity of ministry leadership, "the full dignity of every human being," "Christlike communication," immigration and domestic terrorism.

The newly elected slate of officers included: president, Scott Blanchard, pastor of Lakepointe Church in Macomb, Mich.; first vice president, Roy Henry, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Battle Creek, Mich.; second vice president, Ed Emmerling, pastor of Westside Church in Flushing, Mich.; recording secretary, Eli Garza, pastor of First Spanish Baptist Church in Detroit; and assistant recording secretary, Roland Caldwell, pastor of Burnette Baptist Church in Detroit.

Next year's annual meeting will be Nov. 8 at a location to be determined.

About the author: Based on reporting by the Baptist State Convention of Michigan staff. 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.

Am I enough?

By Dave Abberger

ZEELAND, MI - It's here! That magical moment we affectionately refer to as "Christmas time." Whether you have been listening to Christmas music before Thanksgiving or deem it to begin the night of Thanksgiving, it's officially here! Wikipedia defines Christmas as "The annual Christian festival celebrating Christ's birth, held on December 25 in the Western Church."

Personally, it has always been my favorite season. As a kid, Christmas meant no school, late nights, parties at church and with friends, and hopefully, a snow storm. While in college, it was the season that my wife and I began dating. I will never forget our first date in downtown Chicago on the Magnificent Mile. Now, I am a father and it means more time with my kids.

Since I am also a pastor, I have leadership celebrations to attend, community outreach events, and many other opportunities that pull my attention from my Savior. At times, the more we strive to maximize the season, the more we tend to minimize the value and virtue of the One we are celebrating. We often find ourselves ready for the season to be over so we can get back into our normal rhythm of life. We leave the longed-for season emotionally and physically empty, and promise to make changes the following year.

Three years ago, our world was forever changed. Truthfully, we entered the most difficult Christmas season ever. Danisse nearly passed away giving birth to Hudson as the doctors encountered severe complications during the cesarean procedure for Hudson. Her blood pressure dropped to 33/18 and she lost her entire body's blood volume. She received multiple transfusions, and God spared her life. This left her to recover with 48 staples in her abdomen, and a long uphill recovery process. She was immobile for 3 weeks and needed constant monitoring. Two weeks into the process, our son Evan went in for an emergency appendectomy. I would stay at the hospital until Evan would fall asleep, go home to check on Danisse and Hudson, and make sure our other two children were getting their homework finished.

Two weeks following Evan's surgery, he was back at the hospital being checked for Leukemia, and a week later for heart complications. Little did we know that just two months later, my daughter Mia would be (thankfully) misdiagnosed with a tragic illness that we would live with for the next 6 months before the doctor corrected the misdiagnosis. I remember hosting a Christmas party for our church leaders and staff, and watching them laugh and enjoy themselves. I smiled and laughed all while hurting so badly inside, and I could hardly even eat. I was confused at even my own emotions toward Jesus. I was broken inside and needed emotional and spiritual healing. It was during this season that my world forever changed.

John 10:10 reminds us "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

While I am convinced Jesus allowed those trials to be catalysts to increase our faith and exalt His Name, the devil used it to dampen my fire, kill my resolve, and discourage my hope. Satan used my humanity to remind me of my own failure and nearly miss the greatest blessing of the Christmas season. It was in this season of losing that Jesus confronted me with the question, “Am I enough?” I have to admit, at that time, He wasn’t.

While we find blessings in the people, the presents, and the performances, Jesus is not just our anecdotal reason for the season, He is the center of our joy! As we learn to find satisfaction in Jesus, we find the season of Christmas much more satisfying, whether or not we are living a Hallmark Christmas special or the nightmare of hospitals, life and death situations and all the uncertainty. No matter the struggles you and I face, may we celebrate God’s goodness and the salvation that comes through His son, Jesus, born in Bethlehem.

About the author: Dave Abberger is the lead pastor of Hope Church, a new church plant in Zeeland, MI. He and Danisse have been married for 15 years and have 4 children. Before returning to Michigan to plant Hope, he was a senior pastor in both North Carolina and Tennessee.”

Mission Offering Goal In Sight

By Staff

Fenton – The Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) staff has announced that Michigan Baptists are closing in on this year’s goal for the Frances Brown State Mission Offering. This year’s goal is a faith-stretching \$90,000, and as of December 1st, churches and individuals have given \$83,756.74. With less than a month to go that places the remaining amount to reach the goal at just more than \$6000.

The State Mission Offering is one of the primary methods that Michigan Baptists use to fund starting churches, strengthening churches and sending churches across the state. This year’s offering will be shared between those three areas as well as the Bambi Lake Conference Center.

BSCM designates one week in September to highlight the ministries supported by the Frances Brown Offering, as well as to pray for them. But Michigan Baptists are free to support the offering at any time throughout the year. That gives churches and individuals a few more weeks to help BSCM to reach this year’s goal whether they have not given to the offering yet, or they would choose to give more to help the state top the offering mark.

BSCM Executive Director, Tim Patterson, calls on Michigan Baptists to continue to pray for the state’s many ministries. He says, “The fuel that fires the engines of the ministries of BSCM is prayer. Without prayer to power the work of God, our efforts would be useless.”

This year's theme for the state offering is "The Power of One; Multiplied." BSCM Women Ministries Director, Sue Hodnett says, "We face a massive task in reaching every person in the State of Michigan with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Think of the astonishing achievements that would be possible when every member of every church is involved in praying, serving and giving, a multiplication of involvement by every single believer of Jesus Christ."

To give just go to <https://www.bscm.org/giving>

Why the Christ in CHRISTmas?

By Staff

Frankenmuth - Anyone who has traveled I-75 North of Flint and beyond has seen the roadside signs. The Bronner's CHRISTmas Wonderland and it's 27 acre site right off the highway. The "store" itself is the size of two football fields. The Wonderland draws more than two million visitors every year, and has become one of the top ten man-made attractions in the entire state of Michigan.

It's hard to believe that this giant extravaganza got its start as a little sign shop more than 70 years ago. Wally Bronner and his wife, Irene, built their own building in 1954, and even then half the sign shop was dedicated to Christmas decorations. Now, there are 350 decorated Christmas trees, 6,000 types of ornaments, more than 500 different nativities, and 50,000 trims and gifts.

The outer focus of Wally Bronner's life was the store, but the inner focus was his relationship with Jesus Christ. Bronner was clearly a successful businessman, but he said that it was Jesus who had given his life meaning and purpose. So, Wally built his business around the Person he honored with the capitalized letters of "CHRIST" in Christmas. The gift of salvation he had received from God had so dramatically changed Bronner's life that he loved to share it with others. In fact, visitors to the company website will find a clear presentation of the Gospel here. <https://www.bronners.com/topic/the-story-of-wally-bronner.do?from=fn&sortBy=ourPicks>.

Wally loved working at his store, and even late in life he would spend 10 hours a day welcoming his visitors. He would joke that he only worked on days that end in "y". Bronner passed away on April 1st, 2008. He joked that he was going to heaven "to make sure the decorative touches are in place."

On his last Good Friday on earth Bronner wrote these words, "Today's Good Friday was an especially GOOD FRIDAY when our dear family in prayer agreed to the reality that our loving Lord and Savior – the CHRIST of CHRISTmas – is ready to receive me into his heavenly kingdom where all believers in the Creator God will be with him FOREVER AND EVER...NOTHING COULD BE GREATER!"

Wally Bronner understood what it meant to be a Christ follower and exhibited such in all his affairs. His example stands the test of time as people from all over come to his CHRISTmas store not just to spend money, but to experience the Spirit of Christmas.

SBC NEWS

Bush 41 remembered as 'at home' with So. Baptists

by David Roach

Date: December 03, 2018 - Monday

HOUSTON (BP) -- President George H.W. Bush, who died Nov. 30 at age 94, is being remembered by Southern Baptists who knew him as a "warm," "cordial" man who "felt right at home with people who loved God and His Word."

Bush held the U.S. presidency from 1989-93 following eight years as vice president. He is the last president to address the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in person. An Episcopalian, Bush professed faith in Christ and met with SBC leaders both during his 1988 presidential campaign and during his time in the Oval Office.

"At my invitation in 1991," then-SBC President Morris Chapman told Baptist Press today (Dec. 3), "President Bush spoke to an overflow crowd of convention messengers at the annual meeting in Atlanta. It was very apparent that he felt right at home with people who loved God and His Word, and he was welcomed with numerous standing ovations."

Bush's commitments to "school choice," "defense of the unborn" and "attendance at public worship" during his presidency, Chapman said in written comments, "were not a matter of political expediency." They were "consistent hallmarks of a man of principle, faith and dignity."

Chapman, who served as SBC Executive Committee president from 1992-2010, added, "I had several occasions over the years, whether as president of the Southern Baptist Convention or its Executive Committee, to observe him in public and private settings. He was truly a man of great character."

'How it might have seemed to God'

Bush's 17-minute address to the SBC in 1991 touched on religious liberty, the sanctity of life and the need to strengthen families among other topics. But Bush became visibly emotional, fighting back tears, only when he began to speak of prayer, describing how he sought God during the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91.

"For me, prayer has always been important, but quite personal," Bush said. "You know us Episcopalians. And like a lot of people, I worried a little bit about shedding tears in public for the emotion of it. But as my wife Barbara and I prayed at Camp David before the air war began, we were thinking about those young men and women overseas. And I had the tears start down the cheeks, and our minister smiled at me. And I no longer worried how it looked to others ... We realized that in prayer what mattered is how it might have seemed to God."

Bush also spoke to Southern Baptists about the collapse of the Soviet Union, which culminated six months later when the U.S.S.R. officially dissolved. In the Soviet Union, Bush said, "places of worship long stood silent and subdued, forced underground by the iron fist of the state. But now, churches and synagogues and the mosques buzz with life, reclaimed by the people, joyfully emerging to proclaim their faith anew."

Jerry Rankin, International Mission Board president from 1993-2010, told BP he feels an "awesome sense of the providence of God" when considering Bush's role in the Soviet Union's collapse and the Gospel's subsequent advance in the region.

The former Soviet bloc was part of an "emerging world that valued freedom and democracy, in which the suppressed people and the injustices and the oppressions had just reached a point that something would happen to bring about ... change," Rankin said. The U.S.S.R. "was ready to boil over and open up. God just used 'Presidents'; Reagan and Bush and American diplomacy as pressures to bring that about."

When the Soviet Union fell amid Bush's presidency, Rankin said, "an open door to missionary presence" emerged in Eastern Europe, and the region's churches "unleashed their potential," carrying out "a massive harvest and proclamation of the Gospel."

During Bush's presidency, the SBC adopted a 1991 resolution praising the way he led the Persian Gulf War. Individual Southern Baptists also commended his defense of unborn life.

According to the National Right to Life Committee, Bush "urged the Supreme Court to overturn Roe v. Wade," vetoed 10 bills "that contained pro-abortion provisions" and prohibited abortions on U.S. military bases "except to save the mother's life."

At times, Southern Baptists also disagreed with Bush. In 1990, BP reported some Southern Baptists objected to Bush's invitation of homosexual activists to a White House ceremony. In 1991, the SBC adopted a resolution expressing opposition to a \$25,000 grant by the Centers for Disease Control to fund the National Lesbian and Gay Health Conference. Another 1991 resolution criticized Bush for not opposing government funding of "pornographic" and "sacrilegious 'art'" through the National Endowment for the Arts.

Overall, however, Bush appeared to enjoy a good relationship with Southern Baptists.

During his 1988 presidential campaign, Bush met with about three dozen evangelical leaders, including Chapman, then-immediate past SBC President Adrian Rogers and then-SBC President Jerry Vines, BP reported. During his time as president, he met with Vines in the Oval Office.

"I was honored to meet with President Bush in the Oval Office," Vines told BP via email. "He was welcoming, warm and cordial. The privilege to pray with and for him was very special to me."

Richard Land, who became executive director of the SBC's Christian Life Commission in 1988, said he considered the possibility of becoming a member of Bush's administration. During that year's presidential campaign, George W. Bush went to visit Land at Criswell College, where Land was vice president.

George W. Bush told Land "if his father won, he hoped I would consider coming to Washington and helping them" in an administration job, Land told BP. Land responded he was interviewing in two weeks to lead the CLC.

"Frankly," Land recalled saying, "I don't think they're going to pick me. It's very unlikely they're going to pick me. And if they did, I would have to take it as providential" and accept the position.

Land was indeed called to the CLC, but he went on to meet with George H.W. Bush on several occasions while Bush was president.

"I always found him to be very courtly, very well-mannered, an almost patrician presence," Land said. "When you think of a president, you kind of like to think of a guy like George Bush."

'We're going to heaven'

Evangelist Billy Graham may have been the Southern Baptist with whom Bush was most comfortable discussing faith. Bush and Graham vacationed together and attended church together on occasion, and Bush sought Graham's spiritual counsel for his children, according to the 2008 book by Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, "The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House."

Bush advisor Craig Fuller said there were seasons of Bush's life in which it seemed "Billy Graham was the one person he was communicating with, and talking to, about his faith," according to "The Preacher and the Presidents."

Bush assessed his own faith in his 1988 book "Man of Integrity," addressing whether he had been born again.

"If by 'born again' one is asking, 'Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?'" Bush wrote, "then I could answer a clear-cut 'Yes.' No hesitancy, no awkwardness. But if one is asking, 'Has there been one single moment, above any others, in which your life has been instantly changed?' then I can't say that this has happened, since there have been many moments."

On Bush's final day of life on this earth, he asked his friend James Baker, Bush's former secretary of state, "Where are we going today?" USA Today reported. When Baker replied, "We're going to heaven," Bush said, "Good. That's where I want to go."

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.

DR efforts continue in Carolinas, across U.S.

by Laura Sikes

Date: November 27, 2018 - Tuesday

LONGS, S.C. (BP) -- Pastor Lebron Crisp of Living Water Baptist Church challenged his congregation to look for opportunities to reach hurting people after Hurricane Florence struck the church's community just a few miles northwest of North Myrtle Beach. The storm's flood waters damaged hundreds of homes including several homes of church members. "It just breaks our hearts. I want to be out here helping every waking second," said Crisp, founding pastor and pastor of the church in Longs, South Carolina, for 29 years.

Crisp, church members and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) volunteers reached out to deacon Russ Frye and his wife Gerry, who lost most everything in their home of 19 years in the Aberdeen community. In early October, Crisp met the Fryes, both in their 80s, when they first returned to their flood-damaged home and found mold nearly four feet high in every room. The couple, married for 61 years, had been away during the hurricane and the home was closed up for almost three weeks.

Crisp helped them take water-soaked belongings out to the yard and committed to help them. The home went through a complete tear-out and now all the new sheetrock is hung, along with new doors and trim, Crisp said. "We're hoping to start the painting this week. It's getting close for them," he said. Frye said he was so thankful for the support of his church family. A member gave them use of their beach home while the work has been done on their home.

In addition to all the work, the couple has received clothes, furniture and meals, he said. All four of the church's pastors, including Crisp, were at the house working. "I don't think any church

family can top ours," Frye said. For more than two months, church members have served alongside SBDR volunteers who set up a command post in the church's parking lot.

SBDR closed down the post just before Thanksgiving. The work will transition from recovery to rebuild in December, said Randy Creamer, SBDR director for the South Carolina Baptist Convention. The church and volunteers are taking a much-needed break, and collegiate volunteer teams will come to help with the rebuild during their break in December, Creamer said. They will work with SBDR crew chiefs and team leaders.

Creamer credited Living Water Baptist Church's work to a good partnership with Horry County and the Waccamaw Baptist Association during the response in the state. He estimated that volunteers served more than 300 residents from the SBDR site stationed at the church. "Church members were assisting their community while the flood waters were rising and well before our formal disaster relief resources began arriving," Creamer said. He also noted that it has been hard on the areas which were hit two years ago by Hurricane Matthew. "That's been especially disheartening," Creamer said. He asked for continued prayers and support as the work moves into long-term rebuild.

Crisp gave thanks for the seven professions of faith that have been made. "God's been good through all of this," he said. Georgia SBDR volunteer Ronnie Register, who led the incident command post at Longs for about two weeks, said he was concerned for retirees who had so much damage. Many don't have flood insurance, he said. He and his wife Linda, both members of Brushy Creek Baptist in Sparks, Ga., have served for about 10 years. "With flooding, it takes a long time to recover," he noted. "A lot of people still need help, and you have to be thankful for all the volunteers. Even when some leave, there will be others coming to help."

Also serving in Longs, were Georgia SBDR team leader Tom Young, and his wife Denise, who worked mud-outs for about two weeks. Young said he was impressed with how neighbors came together to help each other with their homes. Denise asked for continued prayers for people as they work to put their lives back together. As of Nov. 25, SBDR has provided flood clean-up services to more than 680 homeowners and performed more than 1,200 chainsaw and yard clean-up jobs in North and South Carolina.

In response to major disasters across the United States, including Hurricane Michael -- which struck the Florida Gulf Coast, Georgia and Alabama -- flooding in the Midwest and fires in the West, SBDR has served nearly 2.3 million meals. SBDR volunteers have helped more than 6,800 homeowners clean up their homes and yards following flooding and wind damage. Following nearly 4,000 gospel presentations, 534 people made professions of faith.

Southern Baptist Disaster Relief is among the three largest providers of disaster relief assistance in the United States. Southern Baptist churches, associations and state conventions all partner to mobilize volunteers, resources and equipment to provide services. The North

American Mission Board provides national coordination and assistance in larger, multi-state responses.

About the author: Laura Sikes is a freelance writer for the North American Mission Board.

LMCO - This Year, More than ever

By Staff

The goal? Raise \$160 million dollars by the end of the year

The purpose? To send more light into the darkness, to touch more lives with the Gospel, and to raise up more nations in His name.

How does it happen? One way is giving and lots of it. Another way is prayer - 2018 Week of Prayer for International Missions – during December, and everyone can be part of both.

Generous giving to the 2018 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® makes a massive difference in the world. Men, women, children, and entire communities are transformed as a result of this offering. Your gifts enable thousands of missionaries to live among, serve, and share the gospel with people who have never heard it until now.

Where does all that money go? Through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, you and your church are:

Supporting over 3,600 missionaries

Enabling disciples to be made and churches to be multiplied around the world

Continuing the SBC's 173-year commitment to missions, worldwide

In addition to the week of dedicated prayer for world missions there are stories to share:

Larry Pepper traded a space mission for a medical mission among the sick and hurting in Africa. God is using a small church in Tennessee to make a big difference in the work of IMB missionaries in Asia.

Hispanic churches are crossing cultures and engaging the world with the gospel.

A partnership between a Kentucky church and a Brazil-based team is reaching Sao Paulo with the gospel.

Ukrainian believers are planting churches, trained by IMB missionaries and supported by a North Carolina congregation.

The impact is mutual when American students travel to East Asia to serve college students alongside IMB workers.

It takes the support of many churches to keep a small hospital running in Tanzania.

Refugee ministry is both local and global for a church in Atlanta.

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering is just one way of making the Christmas Holiday all about the Baby Jesus coming to save the world. Won't you be part of continuing the efforts that all may hear?!

CLASSIFIEDS

Bi-Vocational Pastor

Church Name: Faith Baptist Church

Location: Monroe Michigan

We are a small Southern Baptist Church and member of the Southeastern Baptist Association, seeking a Pastor who is compelled to serve the Lord by tending the flock. The members of Faith Baptist Church are dedicated to supporting and serving the Lord through various ministries and missions.

Additional information about Faith Baptist Church can be found on our website:
www.monroefaithbaptist.org

Spirit led candidates should have the following characteristics:

A born again follower of Jesus Christ living a life of exemplary behavior

Should demonstrate leadership abilities and a passion for worship

A student of and endorses the Baptist Faith and Message

Spirited willingness to administer to the church's pastoral duties, support counseling and church sponsored events.

Requirements:

Bachelors degree majoring in Christian Ministries or equivalent

o Ministry experience of at least 5 years preferred

Cover letter of introduction

Application letter of interest in the position

Resume with a minimum of 3 references (1 from former Pastor, 1 from employer)

Submit the above requirements:

BY EMAIL: faithbaptistmonroe2266@gmail.com

OR

Faith Baptist Church

C/O Pastor Search Committee

2266 Sandy Creek

Monroe, MI 48162

Add:

OAK PARK MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH 1560 Wordsworth, Ferndale, Michigan 48220

248.548.8960

FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT FOR PASTOR Opening Date: December 5, 2018
Closing Date: February 5, 2019 The Oak Park Missionary Baptist Church is seeking a bi-vocational Pastor as shepherd of our great church. We are a small church with tremendous growth potential located in Ferndale, Michigan. Oak Park is the “Lighthouse on the Corner” a place to grow, connect, and serve. We are an established Missionary Baptist Church anchored in solid Baptist teaching with a strong love for high praise and worship. The church has historically been involved in the spiritual growth and education of the local communities we serve which has been the hallmark of the church over her history. The Oak Park Missionary Baptist Church is seeking a visionary pastor with strong leadership skills, who will preach the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ, teach sound Baptist doctrine, engage in pastoral care ministries, and also provide spiritual leadership. A successful candidate must meet the following qualifications:

- Be a Born-again, baptized believer in Jesus Christ with qualities and characteristics reflected in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, Galatians 5:22-23, and Malachi 3:10. Be a licensed/ordained, Baptist minister, skilled in preaching and teaching sound doctrine to individuals of all ages and demographics.

Leads by consensus – is not dictatorial.

- Provide documented experience as a minister significantly involved in church administration and ministry.

A strong proclaimer of the Word whose sermons are bible based, dynamic, and is led by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual counselor who demonstrates a high level of maintaining confidentiality. College educated and/or degree from an accredited theological seminary or school of divinity is preferred or can provide evidence of comparable experience. Be approachable, display love for the church and passionate for reaching out and attracting newcomers to our church. Be a visionary thinker, strong minded, and planner with sound judgment and discernment in keeping with the tradition, vision, and mission of Oak Park Missionary Baptist Church.

- Loyal to Southern Baptist Convention beliefs as expressed in the Baptist Faith and Message. Be an advocate of Christian Education and capable of teaching Sunday School, Bible Study, etc. Demonstrate ability to apply principles of financial management and work with leadership to cooperatively manage the church's resources effectively and efficiently.

- Must be ethical, possess strong faith, integrity, dedication, and live a lifestyle that is reflective of God. Interested candidates should submit the following:

- Letter of Interest and Resume
- Copy of License/Certificate of Ordination
- Verification of college degrees, seminary or theological training course work, if any.
- Three (3) letters of recommendation (clergy, layperson, personal reference). Optional:
- Submit a recording of a recent sermon.

All material should be forwarded to:

Pastoral Search Committee Oak Park Missionary Baptist Church

P.O. Box 312

Southfield, MI 48034 The committee will acknowledge receipt of all resumes and letters of interest. All information presented will be kept confidential. All final candidates must submit to a history background check.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTAL OF PACKET IS FEBRUARY 5, 2019

ABOUT US