



## Stop trashing our environment

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – It was about 6:00am when I stepped out of the back door, quietly closing the screen so as not to disturb my wife and our gracious hosts. I took a long deep breath of the crisp mountain air filling my lungs with pure invigorating energy. The thermometer read 54 degrees and the sun was just beginning to flood the treetops with a soft yellow glow. I slipped into my hip waders, strapped on a tackle belt and basket for my krill and headed for the river. Just a few steps down a very steep but navigable slope waited a pristine ribbon of crystal clear water and an untold number of leviathans of the deep.

As I entered the water I made sure not to disturb the bottom sediment and rocks unnecessarily. I wanted my approach to be as stealthy as possible knowing that my green rubber covered size elevens would already appear to be quite out of the ordinary to the inhabitants of these waters and they needed nothing else to spook them.

Step by careful step I waded up the stream to a large clearing where the waters calmed and the tell tale swirls around a certain eddy disclosed a possible well of trout treasures. The faint rays of sunlight were beginning to turn the water's surface into a shimmering sheet of gold. It seemed as though the morning light had awakened this lazy liquid and it had begun a daybreak dance that would last throughout the day.

I lifted my fly rod and inspected the ties and my reel. All was in order. With my left hand I pulled enough line out to begin my cast. In a smooth steady forward and back motion I advanced my line and fly. Ten o'clock – Two o'clock, Ten o'clock – Two o'clock. Back and forth I moved my right arm as the line followed my directions, as would the first violin follow an orchestra leader's baton.

Cast after cast I worked this field of fish hoping that my lure would be enticing enough for one of these rainbow colored beauties to bite. This was a beautiful place and a soul filling experience. Everywhere I looked I could see God's artistry displayed on the canvass of this rippling river. Every limb, rock, leaf, tree and bird had a place. Nothing appeared obtrusive or inordinate, that is until I looked down into the water just to the right of my feet.

There, lying on the bottom among the water worn river rocks were the remains of an extension cord. It was bright orange in color with a black plug at one end. It didn't belong. It was out of place. It just didn't fit. In the midst of all of God's beautiful creation this orange discard seemed totally out of place. It was ugly.

I began to get angry at the insensitive lug that would have so little respect for all of this beauty, and with one thoughtless act mess it up. Didn't he or she care about God's creation? It was at that moment that I could see the inconsistencies and the spiritual debris that was cluttering and marring God's greatest creation, man. Just as that discarded cord was out of place in the midst of God's beauty so is the devil's discards in the life of a Believer and His church as a whole. We

are God's creation; His workmanship and we have no right to muck up His masterpiece. We are a work of art that our Father loves to admire, but sadly we have trashed His treasure.

The junk of this world is ugly and out of place in the life of His children and His church. It is as ugly and as out of place as an extension cord in a pristine river. It's time for the Christian community to clean up and clear out the garbage that is smudging our souls and trashing our testimonies. This present world order and modern culture can never be the standard by which we judge that which is right or wrong, nor can it be the guiding factor in our decision making. We must live Biblically and be led Biblically. Living based on expediency in business, relationships, pleasure or politics will not only end in failure, but will trash our spiritual environment and leave a trail of filth in our Christian faith that will decay for decades. It will leave us wanting and our witness waning.

Now is the time to clean up our Christian environment. Now is the time to stop trashing it with the world's garbage.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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## **"Thank you for joining me. This is Tony."**

**PLYMOUTH, VA** – I hope that phrase will become familiar to you.

Creating a blog, podcast episodes, and newsletters are very new and frightening experiences for me. However, rest assured these efforts are not about me. This trio-platter is a means, by which I can brag on what I see God doing in the world. People tell me that I light-up when I tell stories about God's actions in people's lives. I hope that you can feel that "light" while you listen to or read the stories that I am going to share with you.

Like everything I do, there will be variety. Some stories will inform you about the past. Others will be interviews with those who impact the world for Christ. And yet others, will be opinion pieces on current trends that I feel compelled to address.

Whatever the subject of the podcasts, my goal is to bring honor to God. The words of Christ, in Matthew 5:16, will be the guardrails on the pathway for these podcasts. Jesus said, "Let your

light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

Everything that I am describing, in this column, can be found at [DrTonyLLynn.com](http://DrTonyLLynn.com).

## **Blog**

The blog features a diary-type or log-type collection of written articles or “posts.” I will archive the posts online so that you can read them and share them with others. You can offer feedback after you have read the post. I want to create a conversation where we build one another up and help each other become more effective at what we do. Frequently, I will ask questions when I write. I really, really want you to answer the questions so that I can learn from you. The posts will be filled with summaries of past events, moments from interviews with influential people, opinion pieces on trending topics, and manuscripts from my sermons. Everything is sharable. You can start reading at [DrTonyLLynn.com/blog](http://DrTonyLLynn.com/blog).

## **Podcast**

This month, I nicknamed my family room the “Recording Studio.” I am a rookie at creating podcasts. You will hear how “raw” my production is when you listen to my first audio recording. I reported on what I saw God do during November 2019. Though I tried to sound casual, the episode came across too rigid as I read the manuscript. I won’t do that again. I have smart friends helping me as I try to improve. You can listen right now at [DrTonyLLynn.com/podcast](http://DrTonyLLynn.com/podcast). The podcasts are also available on Apple Podcasts and Google Play under the title "Great Lakes Conversations".

Want to give me another chance? You can listen to the interview I had with Tito and Mollie Diaz who describe the new church plant launching on March 1. Or listen to my thoughts and application for leading a church by using a model that comes right out of Ephesians 4. It’s a topic that has regained new interest.

One of the sweet things I like about a podcast is that you can listen while doing something else. One Friday, my wife was going to visit her mother while I drove to another part of the state to visit my mother. I sent my wife a podcast link through a text message. She started listening just as I did. Intermittently, I would pause that same podcast in my truck, 60 miles away, and call her up to discuss what we were hearing. You see, I love to learn in an interactive way. A podcast is something you can listen to, on a device, while driving, waiting, or doing something else. You can also sit with friends, listening as a group, then discuss what you heard together. I will look forward to the questions, answers and feedback you offer after you listen to a podcast.

## **Newsletter**

Back in my earliest days of faith during 1970-something, if something was really important, a poster would hang on the wall over the drinking fountain at church or in the center of the

bulletin board in the church's foyer. To those of us who still enjoy holding a piece of paper in our hands or want a poster on the wall, I am going to write a newsletter and publish it each month. I know it's best to keep it brief, meaning 2-3 pages. I will cover the very top highlights and refer to either a post on my blog or an audio file on my podcast; but, I think it's worth it because some of us still like to see ink and feel the paper between our fingers. Again, everything is yours to share with others. Run-off copies for your friends. Post the news on the wall. Pass the newsletter onto others through email. Are you ready to see the newsletter? If so go to [DrTonyLLynn.com/newsletter](http://DrTonyLLynn.com/newsletter).

### **Why Do All of This?**

I want to make sure you hear about what the Lord is doing. I need your prayers as I take on producing these pathways of information. My days are already filled with administration, meetings, planning, traveling, preaching, teaching, supervising, my family and spending private time with God; but, I feel compelled now more than ever that you need to hear, read, experience and share in the joy and anticipation I feel every single day of my life. I want to make sure I cast a light on our Heavenly Father so that you can see Him, and I mean really see and hear the evidence of our Father at work around us.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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## **Information and misinformation**

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – Information is coming at us faster and from more sources than at any other time in human history. It's hard to believe that there was a time in my life when I had to go to the local library to get or verify information. Research got so much easier when I could type a few words into a web browser and get information in my home. Now, I don't even have to type. Depending on whether I'm in my home, office, or on the road, I say, "Hey Google, Hey Alexa, or Hey Siri," and I can get or verify just about all the information I need.

The rise of the internet has expanded information exponentially. Some have estimated that the internet is growing at a rate of 65% a year! There's a plethora of information available 24 hours a day about everything and it's growing. Don't get me wrong. I love the feel of a book in my

hand and I still go to our local library occasionally, but the internet makes parts of my life so much easier!

Unfortunately, there is a downside to internet resources: Not all of the information on the internet is accurate. There's no reliability or truth test a person has to pass to post something. There are no monitors making sure the information is accurate. Content on the internet could be false, misleading, inconclusive, or even fake. I read some contradictory information online recently for a project and it left me confused and in doubt about what to do.

To be fair, my struggle for clear and accurate information is not limited to the internet. Daily, I hear or read news reports on television, radio and in print that contradict each other. Somewhere behind all of the noise of commentators, politicians, and pundits is accurate information. It's just really hard sometimes to sort through it all and find it.

Information is only as good as the source that it comes from. It's unfortunate that the dramatic increase and accessibility of information doesn't always bring clarity. It comes at us faster and from more places and perspectives than ever before, but not all of it is true or beneficial to our lives or the lives of others. It's one thing to get bad information for a project. It's another thing to get bad information for life.

This Scripture caught my attention during my devotional time a day or so after my frustrating internet search: "Jesus went up the mountain and summoned those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, to send them out to preach" (Mark 3:13-14).

There's a lot in these two verses to reflect upon, but two things stand out to me.

Jesus calls his followers first to be with him. Before he would ask them to do anything, he asked them to be with him. Being with him was their first and foremost assignment. It was their training ground for who they would become long before what they would do. As they did life with Jesus, they would discover the truth about God, themselves, and their purpose. In him, they would experience God's love, forgiveness and grace and it would change their lives. Jesus was building their character as they spent time with him. Being precedes doing because character trumps activity.

Second, from his presence, Jesus would send them out to preach. Notice the pattern: Being with Christ preceded being sent from Christ. The truth of who they were in him was reflected in how they lived for him. Character led to conduct that honored God and advanced his Kingdom.

The information and misinformation around us is not going to change, and it's not going to get any easier to sort through it all to get to the truth. There's really not much we can do about it. What we can do is follow the example of the first followers of Christ. They spent time with Jesus and it changed not only who they were, but how they lived. They impacted the world because their character and conduct reflected the Christ they followed.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mike Durbin is the State Evangelism Director for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before joining the state convention staff, Mike served as Church Planting Catalyst and Director of Missions in Metro Detroit since 2007. He also has served as a pastor and bi-vocational pastor in Michigan, as well as International Missionary to Brazil.

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## **Don't take the bait**

**ROSCOMMON, MI** – Having spent the first 30 years of my life living in the state of Florida on the east coast, I have a deep appreciation for the outdoors. Along with spending many summers at the beach riding the waves, one of my favorite activities was fishing. My brother and I spent many afternoons drowning bait in the Indian River Lagoon. I'm proud to say along with drowning lots of bait we also caught lots of fish - all shapes and sizes. We were fairly savvy in our pursuit of fish. We knew where to fish, when to fish and what kind of bait to use to catch specific fish. Fresh, "live" finger mullet was the bait of choice for catching Red fish - a prize catch! It was always interesting to watch other fishermen float by us in their \$25,000 plus boats, trying to find the fish and often getting as close to our spot as possible because they saw we were actually catching fish. We did not have fancy equipment (couldn't afford it), and always fished from shore and usually caught our limit. Our freezer stayed stocked with Red fish filets! We just knew when to fish, where to fish, and what bait (or gear) to use.

Spending time on the river in my younger years has served-up copious amounts of memories and numerous object (illustration) lessons in my life. One lesson in particular being - "Don't take the Bait!". Just like we knew what bait to use to catch specific fish, Satan knows exactly what bait to use to catch us. Make no mistake, he is out to catch us and destroy us - "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8. His mission is to hook us, reel us in and leave us flopping around on the shore gasping for life. Unfortunately, he is very savvy at his mission and knows just what bait to use to hook us and pull our affections, our focus, and our mind away from God. In this worldly, materialistic/self-culture we live in, He knows exactly what bait is going to captivate our heart and distract us from enjoying intimate fellowship with God. Every Sunday my hometown pastor would always have us make the statement - "the main thing is the main thing". He would then ask the question - "what is the main thing?" The congregation would then answer - "to love God and enjoy Him forever!" This is life-changing truth and it's the very truth Satan continuously schemes to nullify in our lives. If he can get us hooked using the bait of material greed, ego, anger, un-forgiveness, bitterness, gossip, self-righteousness, comparing,

lust, covetousness, doubt, just to name a few, then he can keep us from living in victory, worshipping God and spending time in His presence.

“Don’t take the Bait!” - “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”. - Ephesians 6:10-12. Just as my brother and I were savvy with fishing, as Christians we need to be savvy and know who we wrestle, why we wrestle, and what gear (armor of God) to use. We have been given victory over temptation (bait), we just need to exercise our faith and live in it. “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.” - 2 Corinthians 10:3-6. We have been freed through the blood of Jesus from our obligation to sin, we no longer have to “take the bait!”

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mick Schatz serves on the staff of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. He is the State Director of Spiritual Enrichment and Retreats and lives at Bambi Lake.

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## **Michigan church replant launches fruit basket ministry to build ‘bridge to the community’**

**PETOSKEY, MI** – Children’s Missions Day, an annual missions emphasis promoted by Woman’s Missionary Union, has the potential to generate missions projects that reach far beyond a single day.

Such projects can be as practical as assembling and distributing fruit baskets to show appreciation to military veterans, firefighters, law enforcement officers and others in a local community. At least that’s the case for True North Community Church in Petoskey, Michigan.

This year’s Children’s Missions Day, held on Saturday, Feb. 15, is designed to prepare the next generation to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ – both today and in the future.

For Rick Bristol, a North American Mission Board church planter at True North Community Church, participating in a partner church’s Children’s Missions Day project led him to launch an ongoing community outreach program through his own congregation. A WMU leader at

Orchard Church invited Rick to speak at Orchard's CMD because he is a military veteran and their project focused on honoring vets for their military service.

In addition to speaking at the event where the children assembled fruit baskets for veterans, he was asked to find an appropriate location to distribute the baskets. Contacting his county's Veterans Affairs office, he offered to deliver the gift baskets. Rick noted that the VA official's immediate response was something like: "Absolutely, the vets need all the Jesus they can get!"

Based on the success of that experience, Rick approached his True North congregation about continuing the fruit basket ministry on a weekly basis. "I said, 'Hey listen, church, this is something we did for the Orchard. We used the WMU there, they had a Children's Missions Day and then I was able to give the baskets out.

"I think we could do it here. I think it's something we could do fairly often. I want to try it once a week. Can we make seven baskets a week?" he recalled asking. "They said, 'Yeah, let's go ahead and do that.' So that's what we did. We came together and it's been a growing process and a learning process."

According to Jeff Urban, a service officer for Emmett County Veterans Affairs, "We definitely respect and honor our veterans but to actually have something given to our veterans like a fruit basket, it's not very common so they're delighted and surprised all at the same time. It definitely gives them a little warm fuzzy there when they get it."

### **A strong Christian witness**

Sharing fruit baskets is one of several ministry projects that Rick and his wife, Katie, have launched over the past couple of years. Their primary ministry efforts are aimed at replanting True North Church after the previous congregation gradually had declined to only six active members.

As a former Navy chaplain who also worked with the Marines, Coast Guard and Army National Guard, Rick has a heart for fellow veterans. Katie, who grew up in northern Michigan, realized from phone conversations with family and friends back home that there was an urgent need for a strong Christian witness in the region.

Spiritual surveys in northern Michigan that Rick reviewed showed about 50 percent of residents in 2000 had no religious affiliation. That number had jumped to 75 percent by 2010. Another decade later, "the trend lines are not going in the right direction," he acknowledged.

"Pretty much when you keep hearing, 'I wish God would send somebody to them,' there's that point where you have to realize that's God telling you to go there," he said.

In response, he concluded his military career and they partnered with NAMB as church replanters. Changing the tiny congregation's name from Agape Baptist Church to True North

Community Church, they gradually are engaging the community and nurturing new growth, including a thriving children's program coordinated by Katie.

"I am definitely called to work with children. It is a natural thing for me," she said. "Probably my God-given talent is to work with kids so that's how I can share the gospel."

"I have a passion for what we've done but it's not an easy work," Rick pointed out. "The replant nature is to be able to take the people that were willing to say, 'Hey, we want to try something new' and to honor what had happened before but at the same time refocus and rebirth."

As a result, the Bristols and their growing congregation continually are looking for new avenues of ministry and spiritual impact. Rick said one of his first goals as a replanter was "looking at turning our building inside out" to help meet community needs.

### **Ministry effort quickly expands**

That's where the church's fruit basket ministry comes in. Besides taking baskets to the VA office to "recognize the sacrifices of the former military members," Rick said the church quickly expanded the community appreciation initiative to include law enforcement officers and firefighters.

Contacting Fire Chief Al Welsheimer, Rick explained that True North "just wanted to show our appreciation for your men and women that are willing to run into a burning building to save a life. Can we give you these baskets to show how much we love them and how much we're praying for them?"

Expressing appreciation for the church's initiative, Welsheimer said, "I think one of the important things is it really shows the kids at a young age the importance of sharing and giving back. It's not all about getting things; it's about giving back to your community. As we know, that's what Jesus did. He gave back, He gave everything."

Along with the firefighters enjoying the fruit baskets and the affirmation, Welsheimer said they often pay the church's gift forward by sharing any extra baskets with "people that aren't so fortunate or elderly people that don't get out to get fresh fruit on a regular basis."

Describing the ministry of affirmation and appreciation to community servants as "kind of this neat bridge to the community," Rick said children in the congregation color pictures and write thank you cards each week to include in the fruit baskets.

### **Hands-on missions experience**

Involving children of all ages in the project provides them a memorable hands-on missions experience, Katie said. "They learn that when they're helping others like that, they're spreading

the gospel of Jesus Christ,” she explained. “They have a certain happiness and joy when they do these cards.

“It’s not only helping the person you’re serving,” she added, “but it really is fulfilling your love that God instills in you.”

Of course, there have been a few glitches along the way. Rick admitted that part of the learning process included eliminating glitter and glue from the card-making process after the first attempt “took four hours for the glue to dry.”

“We said, “Okay, that can’t work,” Rick chuckled. “What we got was some really good glitter unicorns but not necessarily something that conveyed Jesus’ love specifically.”

Finding a practical solution, he opted to design stock cards tailored for each community service group that the children can personalize with handwritten notes and artwork. The cards’ pre-printed messages range from “Jesus loves you” to “Thank you for your service” along with contact information for True North and an invitation to visit the church.

Besides honoring veterans and first responders, a church member asked Rick about making baskets for young women at the local crisis pregnancy center. “I was like, ‘Absolutely, we have no problem showing Jesus’ love to whoever you want to.’”

Noting that the women frequently receive donations of diapers, bottles and pacifiers for their babies, the center staff told Rick that “a little basket of fruit for them is kind of a nice thing because it’s showing an appreciation specifically for them.”

Affirming the ministry’s personal touch, Rick concluded, “We’re Jesus’ church and He wants us to be known for His love.” At True North Community Church, sometimes that’s as simple as sharing a basket of fruit in Jesus’ name.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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## **2020 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering**

**ALPHARETTA, GA** – Since 1933, Southern Baptists have supported missionaries and their work through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® for North American missions. Millions have

heard the gospel throughout the United States, Canada and the territories of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam because Southern Baptists sacrificially gave.

The spiritual needs in North America, though, remain as great as ever. The demographics continue to change. More people are moving to the continent. The culture is rapidly secularizing. Entire regions that were once bastions of Christian thought, such as New England, are now deemed post-Christian.

Approximately 363 million people live in North America, and a projected 75% of those people do not have a personal relationship with Christ. The presence of Bible-teaching, Evangelical churches has been waning, especially outside the South.

Along with the intense spiritual need, there are immense physical needs as well. Missionaries with the North American Mission Board strive to reach out to refugees and internationals, assist those in poverty, reach out to those caught in human trafficking and serve children through foster care and adoption—all while remaining focused on sharing the hope of the gospel.

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

- National Goal - \$70 million
- Week of Prayer for North American Missions – Sunday, March 1 through Sunday, March 8
- Offering Theme – It’s All About the Gospel
- Verse – “For I passed on to you as most important what I first received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...” 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (CSB)
- Offering Resources Available: [www.AnnieArmstrong.com](http://www.AnnieArmstrong.com)

#### **Week of Prayer Featured Missionaries:**

- Sunday, March 1 – Dave and Mary Elliff, Seattle, Washington
  - Monday, March 2 – J.D. and Andreina Fasolino, Toronto, Ontario
  - Tuesday, March 3 – Kirk and Karen Kirkland, Cincinnati, Ohio
  - Wednesday, March 4 – Jonathan and Yesenia Santiago, Guaynabo, Puerto Rico
  - Thursday, March 5 – Rob and Annabeth Wilton, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
  - Friday, March 6 – GenSend, San Diego, California
  - Saturday, March 7 – Mojic and Munkho Baldandorj, Denver, Colorado
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## Don't disappoint Annie

**WARREN WOODS, MI** – Two years ago, Beth Hill, my daughter in law, and I took on the task of distributing promotional material to the Michigan churches for promoting the Lottie Moon, Annie Armstrong and Frances Brown offerings. Our job is to compile materials, pack it, and do a mailing to any churches participating in these three offerings throughout the year. It's our way of being a part of the promoting of these missions, as we both have gone out on missions in our state, our country and to foreign fields. We both truly know the importance of getting the gospel to the lost.

Our homes become a temporary distribution center to fill these orders for about two weeks, and it leaves us in a bit of out of our normal routine. So, when working on this past Annie Armstrong distribution, we had the "help" of Ezekiel, Lauren and Michael's little man, our grandson, and Selah, Nathan and Beth's little one, our sweet little granddaughter. They are always busy and into things, so when they saw the mounds of materials, Ezekiel asked "Mimi? What is all of this stuff?" Hmm... is 3 years old too young to tell about how the gospel needs to get out, and how do I explain it so he understands? I thought quickly about it, and when he picked up a prayer guide, I began to explain to him about Annie Armstrong.

Annie was born in Baltimore, Maryland, at a time when women weren't able to do a lot in public. She wanted to do great things for Christ, so she began helping women pray together. She wanted churches to be built so more preachers could come and teach about Jesus. Then, she went on to be the first Executive for the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU). "Zeke, that's who Mimi and Auntie Beth work with too. We want others to hear about Jesus!"

So, as we glanced through the prayer guide, we noticed how there are church planters working to start churches in North America. I told him Mimi and Papa, Uncle Nathan and Auntie Beth went to Waterford to work with Seth and Taylor Springs, and now they have a church started.

Isn't that great? "Yes!" So, look, see how [Kirk and Karen Kirkland](#) are going to Arkansas, and [Dave and Mary Eliff](#) are going to Ohio. And look, here are families that are trying to start churches for people who have moved to our country! [Mojic and Munko Baldanorj](#) are starting a church for people from Mongolia and [The Santiago's](#) are working in Puerto Rico, where the hurricanes were so bad. Zeke looked up and said, "Those people need to hear that Jesus loves them." I looked at Selah who was giving her "chomp" of approval on an envelope, grinning at her big cousin.

"MIMI! You still didn't answer my question! Oh, I thought, what didn't I explain? "What is your question?" "So, why are we putting these things in these boxes and envelopes?" Oh goodness, after talking to this poor little guy about missions, he still wanted to know why we had such a "mess" going and what we were doing. "Well, Zeke, these boxes are being filled with all the things we need to let people know of the offering we're receiving for the Annie Armstrong special offering for the missions in North America." These prayer guides, envelopes, posters and

DVD's go to the churches and they tell the church about the "Annie Armstrong" offering. Then, the church puts money in the offering for missions. "What do you think about that?"

He sat there a minute, looked at all the boxes and mailers we were about to send out. "Well, Mimi, I think we better get busy, so Annie's not disappointed in us." I had to laugh a little. "Zeke, Annie is with Jesus now, but I think Jesus would be very happy with what you're doing to help share about Him!", and with that we got busy, and Ezekiel and Selah became missionaries by filling boxes. Beth and I looked at both of them, and our hearts grew a bit bigger that day. And you know? That's what it's all about!

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Elaine Hill works as Administrative Assistant to both Motor Cities Metro Baptist Association and Warren Woods Baptist Church, where she and her family are active members. She has gone on mission trips throughout the United States, Russia and Jordan. She serves on the Executive Board of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan on the church strengthening team. Women's ministry is an important facet, as she serves as Vice President with the WMU. She also leads women's ministry through her church and the community. Elaine has been married to Dan for 44 years and they have a grown son and daughter, and spend lots of time with their two precious grandchildren.

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## **Church planting and princess cups**

***But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)***

**WATERFORD, MI** – Being born and raised in the south, I don't know much about this snow stuff. However, I do know that when it snows, I am expected to shovel that snow. Several weeks ago, we got a few inches and I was heading out to shovel. Before I could get out the door, I heard our 4-year old daughter Layla calling, "Daddy, can I go too? I want to help!" I gave her a thumbs up and her mom started getting her dressed. When Layla joined me outside a few minutes later, she exclaimed, "Okay Daddy, I have my shovel and I'm ready to help!" I turned and noticed that my shovel was a little bit different from hers. There she stood with an 8oz princess cup, intending to join forces with her daddy and to change the world.

The longer I participate in the work of church planting, the more I realize that God doesn't need my help. He has every tool and resource in the universe at His disposal. When it comes to pushing back the darkness, advancing the Gospel, and building His Kingdom, God has a God-

sized shovel...and I have a princess cup. Like a 4-year old helping dad, I lack the strength, experience, and attention-span to complete the job by myself. But, here's the good news: God, my Heavenly Dad, graciously invites me to join Him in His work anyway. He doesn't extend this invitation because He needs me. God invites me to join Him, to participate in His Great Commission, because He wants to be with me, displaying His power and patience to me in the process.

I need to be reminded of this gracious invitation often. I love this journey we're on. I can't imagine being anywhere else doing anything else. With that said, the Church Planting process is not always polite. Excuse the expression, but when I get "too big for my britches" Church Planting has no problem showing me how small I am. Church Planting has a unique way of exposing inadequacy and revealing immaturity. In those times, I need to be reminded that God doesn't need my help. My abilities are not enough to propel God's mission, and my inabilities are not enough to halt God's mission. This is okay because God's shovel is plenty big. God's invitation, His calling on my life, is more about the powerful display of His grace than my ability to run the race. My weaknesses are glaring, but His grace is sufficient!

This powerful grace is what motivates our involvement in His mission. God, who does not need us, rescues us, invites us, and empowers us to participate in His rescue of others. While we have our inadequacies and immaturities, God calls for us to join Him as He transforms lives, transferring people from death to life and from darkness to light. We may only have a princess cup, but Daddy's shovel is big enough. What a gracious invitation!

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Seth Springs serves in Waterford, MI with his wife Taylor and their 2 little girls Layla and Lily. Seth is a church planter and one of the pastors of Transformation Church Waterford.

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## **Meager beginnings**

**MILAN, MI** – Four years ago my wife Debbie and I moved to this beautiful state of Michigan. We knew nothing about Michigan before we moved here. I had a wonderful pastorate in downstate Illinois, but through a mission trip in Wisconsin with a friend who God was using to plant a SBC church there, God spoke to me and called me to leave the pastorate and follow His call to become a Church Planting Catalyst with the North American Mission Board. Within two weeks of that call, I was being invited by Tim Patterson to serve in central Michigan as a NAMB CPC.

We sensed a confirmation from the Lord on this call, so I resigned my pastorate and we made preparations to move to Michigan. As I said, initially my region to work in was central Michigan. So we started looking for a house near Lansing. My direct supervisor, Dr. Tony Lynn suggested that we look for something closer to Ann Arbor. Boy, that proved to be providential! We couldn't afford to live in Ann Arbor (like most of the rest of Michigan, ha!) so God led us to a house in Milan, south of Ann Arbor. I asked the Lord to provide us a place near major highways that intersected major highways. He honored that request and off to Milan we headed.

I knew what Church Planting Catalysts did, or thought I did, but in all honesty, I didn't know how they did it. Most of the CPC's in Michigan were green at that time, so for us rookies it was a journey of faith and discovery. Church planting in Michigan had just begun to really pick up during that time, but it was still slow compared to what it is now. God graciously taught me how to wait on Him for planters, pray for planters, and methods to discover planters. It was all new, but God was faithful. Over time, my region was expanded to include metro Detroit and Windsor, Ontario in addition to regions including and east of Lansing. God began to answer prayers and church planting in Michigan has grown exponentially.

From what felt like meager beginnings four years ago, My fellow church planting catalysts and I have seen God do an amazing work right here in Michigan! We have planters who have moved thousands of miles to Michigan to plant churches because God called them to reach lost people with the gospel and make disciples. We have planters who have dedicated their lives to planting churches on college campuses so that after those new believing college students have been discipled, they will graduate, move all over the world, and make disciples of Jesus there.

We have planters who have left their foreign homelands and moved to Michigan because the people of their homeland have moved here. Those people are far from God, so planters moved here to reach them with the gospel. We have planters who left their long-standing affiliations to join us here in Michigan to plant churches to reach the lost. Those decisions cost them life-long friendships because they didn't understand. Every year we are seeing more and more raised up, called, and sent to plant churches to, as Tim Patterson states, "punch holes in the darkness" right here in Michigan. It is happening, more and more, because God is doing something great here. I am so happy I get to be a part of it.

Shameless plug: We are taking a tour to Israel in February of 2021. Contact me if you are interested.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tim Shrader is a church planting catalyst with Send Network of the North American Mission Board. He serves in Send Detroit and southeast Michigan. He has been happily married to Debbie Shrader for almost 40 years. They will celebrate their anniversary in August. He is originally from St. Louis, MO. Tim and Debbie have three married children and one outstanding grandson. You can reach him at [tshrader@namb.net](mailto:tshrader@namb.net).

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## Our Reasonable Faith conference

***"All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel."***

(Judges 2:10 NASB)

**PORTAGE, MI** – It's a cautionary tale. Joshua was a godly man who led the people to serve the Lord. The elders who survived him, who had seen all the great work the Lord had done, were also faithful. Then, another generation arose in Israel that did not know the Lord or His work. The Passover, passing through the sea, the Covenant, the crossing of the Jordan, Jericho's fall, the Glorious God who wrought it all: unknown, just a generation removed.

In February, my oldest son turned eighteen. The scope & scale of change we've experienced through his lifetime is mind boggling. Some of what his generation accepts as normative had not even occurred to us just twenty-five years ago. What could the next quarter century hold?

With the world & all its voices constantly available at their fingertips, this generation has been exposed to ideas & ideologies that contradict the truth we hold dear. There are those purposefully acting to see that the Lord & His work is unknown to the youngest among us.

How will our churches rise to the occasion? Will we intentionally convey the gospel to our children & their generation? Will we lovingly listen & answer the questions that arise from the influence of an increasingly hostile society? Will we prepare ourselves to give the reason for the hope we've found?

Our Reasonable Faith is a conference designed to equip people from the pew & the pastorate as we strive to see rising generations know the Lord & His work. Join us as Tim McGrew equips us to engage in conversations without casualties while offering clear answers to the most common questions & objections to Christianity. Andy Giessman will offer his insights into ministry to those in the rising generation gleaned from experience on the university campus. Tom McCuddy will encourage us to reconnect apologetics with discipleship to help believers be better prepared to engage those around us.

The South Central Baptist Association is blessed to once again partner with the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) to offer this conference. Join us at Faith Baptist Church in Battle Creek from 9am to 3pm on Saturday, March 28th. A catered lunch will be provided that is worth the price of admission, which is only \$15 if you [pre-register](#). Come as a group, expecting to be encouraged & equipped for such a time as this. Share the promotional video below:

Anticipating that his ministry would soon come to a violent end, Paul writes to Timothy imploring him to faithfully pass on the truth by instructing reliable men who would also be able to do the same. We must also prayerfully & intentionally pass on the truth once and for all delivered to the saints that coming generations would know the Lord & His work.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Chad Wells is in his fifteenth year as the pastor of First Baptist Church of Portage. He also serves as the Associational Mission Strategist for the South Central Baptist Association. He & his wife Angela are blessed with five children.

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## **Defining your leadership**

**DETROIT, MI** – John Maxwell says “Everything Rises and Falls on Leadership.”

Have you ever tried to come up with your own definition of leadership? I’ve always looked at leadership simply as “Service before Self”. However, recently in my studies I came across a definition for the word meek that I had never heard before. The picture of meekness that I had was of someone who was submissive, passive and gentle. To the culture during Jesus’ time, the people would have understood it to mean something completely different. It has totally brought clarity to my role as a woman leader.

In the old Grecian military, meeking a horse was not stripping the power from the horse into submission; it was to harness the horse’s power from a state of wild independence to one of loyalty so that the horse could be used as the master intended. Paul uses this same word “praus” when he speaks of the meekness and gentleness of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:1). Christ was meek in that he was submissive to the will of his heavenly father at all times. It’s harnessing your God given power while being under the Authority of that same Master, God.

There is a lot of emphasis in the church today placed on a women’s role as it relates to leading. What can a woman do? What can’t a woman do? The best and most comprehensive question I can ask as a woman is “Am I meek?” Then leadership will fall into place.

A meek woman is one who understands that they are to still go and fight in the battle. We are allowed! Women are called to be part of the fight in contending for the faith that was once and all delivered for the saints (Jude 1:3). Women are not to be sidelined in the fight. They are not mere spectators. They are called to join with the other believers in Christ and fight. Consider the life of Christ and the significant role the women had in the gospel ministry. Paul when writing to the church at Rome commended to them the deacon Phoebe. In the Old Testament we read about judge Deborah who stands firm and leads the people into battle! Jael defeated an enemy of the people of God by driving a stake through the temple of Sisera. Women are called to fight!

A meek woman is one who also understands that they are to fight under authority. The war horse was under the authority of the rider and the rider was under the authority of his commanding officer. A meek woman is one who is submitted to the authority of God and His Word. The Word then clearly outlines the other areas of authority that they are to fight under. A wife is to be under the authority of her husband, and she must submit to him (Eph. 5:22-24). This is for the good of the man, the woman, the family, and for the good of the Kingdom of God. Women are to be under the authority of the pastors/elders of their church. They are not to be out of the bounds of this, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet" (1 Tim. 2:12). There is only one place to determine the structure of authority, and that is found in the Bible.

"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." – Matthew 5:5-9

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Lori Stewart is the wife of ONElife Church planter/pastor Eric Stewart, she serves on the board of the pro-life ministry ONElife for Life and works as a staff member at the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Lori has finished several half marathons, is a former Big 10 Varsity Athlete, and is an avid read. Lori and Eric have three young children and reside in Grand Blanc, MI.

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## **Pittsburgh missionary wants to make gospel part of city's renewal**

**PITTSBURGH, PA** – Pittsburgh has, in decades past, been synonymous with steel. In the years following an economic hit to the blue-collar town, the city has been experiencing a renaissance as technological and medical companies are beginning to thrive.

While the economic renewal has been a boon for the city, missionary Rob Wilton is praying and working to see a spiritual revival as well. Only 15 percent of the population is evangelical, with less than one percent of that being Southern Baptist.

As Wilton, the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) Send City Missionary in Pittsburgh, has dug in and established roots, though, he has seen a responsiveness to the gospel.

"It's very clear Pittsburgh doesn't have a harvest problem. There is a worker problem," Wilton said. "Lord, would you begin to start sending workers into this harvest?"

Wilton serves as one part of the answer to that prayer. He caught the vision for serving Pittsburgh just a few years ago in 2017.

“The first time I was told about planting in Pittsburgh, it didn’t sound that great to me,” Wilton recalled. “I had never been here. I’d never experienced the city.”

Prayer, conversations with his wife, Annabeth, and several vision trips opened his heart and lit a fire in his heart for Pittsburgh. Yet, the transition required a step outside their family’s comfort zone. For Rob, it meant leaving the city he had grown up and planted his first church in—New Orleans.

In 2008, the Wiltons planted Vintage Church in Uptown, launching the same year as the birth of the first of their four children. So, when God started to lay on their hearts that their time in New Orleans was coming to a close, there were nerves alongside the sense of clarity.

“The Lord spoke very clearly to me and told me that I was finished—that I had completed my assignment,” Wilton said of what he experienced after completing nearly his tenth year planting and leading the church.

“Vintage in New Orleans felt a like kind of a first child for us,” Annabeth said. “It was a hard move to make and a hard decision to make, but we both had complete peace about it.”

As NAMB’s Send City Missionary, Wilton helps to recruit church planting missionaries to Pittsburgh and supports them after they arrive. He is in the process of planting a church himself, Vintage Church Pittsburgh, to help foster a gospel movement across the city.

“It’ll begin to break your heart as you travel around the city,” Wilton said. “You see a lot of empty church buildings that basically have become more like museums than they have mission centers.”

Many urban centers across North America face similar spiritual challenges, and through the [Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®](#) (AAEO), NAMB’s Send Network has come alongside churches to help plant new churches in these areas of great need.

“I planted a church 10 years ago before the Send Network was formed, and to be honest, I planted alone,” Wilton recalled. “We truly believe that through the North American Mission Board, this offering is equipping pastors who are all over North America to plant churches, and when you reach these cities we’re trying to reach, you will change the world.”

As the Wilton family planned their transition to Pittsburgh, they met families from around North America who then moved with them to be a part of the launch team as founding members, including a retired couple from North Carolina, Ted and Wanda Hough. The Houghs felt called to give their retirement years to be a part of planting a church in an area where one was needed after hearing Wilton preach and cast vision to their congregation.

Together, Wilton, his family and his launch team have come alongside church leaders and missionaries who have been tilling the soil and planting seeds in Pittsburgh for years. Their aim is to bring more workers into the harvest.

“People who have the ability to give, who are giving towards something that they may never see,” said Annabeth, “we are the recipients of that, and we are able to do what we’re doing because of what you are giving.”

The [Annie Armstrong Easter Offering](#) provides half of NAMB’s annual budget. Money given to the offering is used on the field for training, support and care for missionaries and for evangelism resources.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

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## **Missionary steps into unknown—one hour from home**

**CINCINNATI, OH** – Kirk Kirkland felt a stirring in his soul to start a church in the inner city. For seven years, he served as an associate pastor at the Baptist church where he grew up in Dayton, Ohio.

“We got the sense that maybe God was calling us out from this place of comfort,” Kirkland recalled, “where we lived just a couple of blocks from our church and we got paid every Friday—kind of living the American dream.”

Every year during a missions conference, he would hear testimonies from overseas missionaries about conversion stories and cross-cultural ministry. He could not help but get excited and think about what it would look like for him and his family to be missionaries themselves.

“What would it look like to leave everything we’ve ever known, to leave everybody we know and love to go into a new city, to meet new people and to make disciples as missionaries in the United States,” Kirkland asked at the time.

Some of the cities on the table seemed like compelling options—Seattle or maybe New York City. Yet, a smaller city, just an hour south of Dayton, kept growing in its appeal as they prayed over where God was sending them.

Cincinnati has a population of two million people. Only 13.7 percent of residents in the metro area are affiliated with an evangelical church, and more than half do not identify with any church at all.

For the most part, the city had only been a destination for the Kirklands to attend a baseball game, go to the zoo or visit the amusement park. Then, they took a drive down with a different set of eyes.

“We drove south on I-75, and I remember getting off the Western and Liberty exit and seeing people who were, as I would describe, sheep without shepherds,” Kirkland said.

While Kirkland saw the beauty in the city, he knew there was brokenness there too.

“It has a history of segregation,” he said. “It has a history of poverty—the second largest child poverty population in the nation. It is a city with an epidemic of people who are losing their lives because of the opioid crisis.”

All of that physical and emotional poverty stems from humanity’s sinful condition, Kirkland said.

“Cincinnati also has a history of God moving and working,” Kirkland continued. “There are great churches that have been a part of this city, but compared to a million people who don’t know Jesus, there is a great need.”

After moving into the city, renting a townhome and beginning their outreach with just enough to make ends meet, Kirkland and his wife Karen planted Revive City Church on Easter Sunday 2013. They did so, however, from an independent Baptist background. They did not have the support of any denomination or network. Looking back, the Kirklands say it was the hardest thing they ever did.

Even so, God moved, and the new church plant gained momentum.

It was clear that the need in their city would require their congregation to plant another church if they were going to further their impact on lostness. At that point, Kirkland connected with another pastor and learned more about Southern Baptists.

He discovered the North American Mission Board’s (NAMB) Send Network, NAMB’s church planting ministry, and the efforts of Southern Baptists to reach cities with the gospel. After learning more about the mission and the vision, his church voted to become a part of the Southern Baptist Convention and plant a second church.

“One of the number one benefits of the Send Network is that you do not feel alone,” Kirkland said. “When we planted the first time, we were planting in isolation. We were very much on an island.”

The efforts of the Send Network, its support of missionaries across North America by providing training, coaching and care, are made possible by Southern Baptists and their sacrificial giving to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® (AAEO) for North American missions.

“My hope and prayer is that a mighty awakening of God would happen as people sacrifice,” said Kirkland, a 2020 Week of Prayer missionary for the AAEO, “normal, everyday people giving, believing that God will take their little and do much with it.”

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

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## **Missionary bringing faith, hope to Puerto Rico’s rebuild**

**GUAYNABO, PUERTO RICO** – Puerto Rico garnered headline after headline when Hurricane Maria struck in 2017. The major storm devastated the island, and as happens after such a catastrophe, news media scrambled to cover the story.

A little over two years later, though, thousands of families remain in need. Yet, few outsiders consider their plight now.

“No one talks about Puerto Rico in the news anymore,” said Jonathan Santiago, a 2020 [Annie Armstrong Easter Offering](#)® Week of Prayer missionary. “September 2017 is ancient history, but I wish people could see what I see. Sometimes, it’s like Hurricane Maria happened yesterday.”

For Santiago, the passion that fueled his multiple trips to Puerto Rico in the immediate aftermath of Maria persists. In fact, his heart stirred, and God led him and his family to move from New York to serve full-time through the North American Mission Board’s (NAMB) compassion ministry arm, Send Relief.

“The North American Mission Board asked us to consider coming back to Puerto Rico to serve in my current role as director of Send Relief for Puerto Rico,” Santiago said.

The job is a big one. He coordinates crisis response ministry across the island where an estimated 30,000 homes still have only blue tarps serving as their roof.

“Hurricane Maria was the worst disaster in Puerto Rican history, but what really gets to me is not what Maria did to our property but what it’s done to our people,” Santiago said. “When you look at different communities, you see the hopelessness. You see so many families still struggling.”

The physical toll the storm took is only surpassed by the emotional and spiritual hit the people have endured. While Send Relief helps with the physical rebuild, the aim is to connect those served to God so that their spiritual needs can be met through the power of the gospel.

“They say it’ll take 8 to 10 years to get things back to where they were before Maria,” Santiago said. “But Puerto Rico’s mental, emotional and spiritual brokenness is no match for the hope that we find in Jesus Christ.”

As it stands, there is only one Southern Baptist church for every 44,522 people in Puerto Rico. The vast majority of Puerto Ricans identify with Roman Catholicism, 85 percent.

Send Relief’s ministry, however, has played a key role in evangelism and church planting as missionaries have been able to build relationships through the disaster relief efforts. Through Santiago’s coordination, Southern Baptist volunteers from the mainland have been connecting people in need with new and established churches in Puerto Rico.

“People here in Puerto Rico are so grateful and excited every time they see a team come to their community,” Santiago said. “Our churches are grateful because they choose to be here in Puerto Rico to serve these families that are still struggling.”

Local pastors in Puerto Rico identify needs in their own communities, and Santiago works with those pastors to partner their church with a mission team from the mainland.

“Ultimately, we want every person that we help to be connected to a local church family where we know that they are going to be followed up with,” Santiago said.

One story in particular stood out to Santiago.

A team helped repair the roof of a man in Humacao, and when the church leaders heard the homeowner mention that God sent the team there to help, they were caught off guard. They knew that he had claimed to be an atheist.

“Everybody was kind of surprised because they knew his background,” Santiago recalled. “But now he’s having God-centered conversations. It’s one of the instances where we have seen families served and people transformed as they hear the gospel for the first time.”

Hearing these stories of heart change fill Santiago with hope as he pours his life into the island where he was born. He grew up in the city of Ponce, Puerto Rico in a Christian family, and his father served as a church planter in Massachusetts where Santiago spent his teen years.

Eventually, Santiago entered the ministry himself, serving in Houston, New York and now he has returned to Puerto Rico to serve as a Send Relief missionary.

“People giving to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering is what put me and my family here so we can help rebuild our island into something greater than it was before,” Santiago said. “I am so thankful because as we continue to pray and give, the gospel is spreading and healing our land here in Puerto Rico.”

The [Annie Armstrong Easter Offering](#) provides half of NAMB’s annual budget. Money given to the offering is used on the field for evangelism resources and support, training and care for missionaries.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

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## **A Night to Shine from a Pastor’s Eyes**

**FLUSHING, MI** – “My eyes welled up with tears as I watched almost 100 honored guests with special needs show up at the Night to Shine Prom” said Ed Emmerling, Pastor of Westside Church in Flushing. Emmerling says Westside partners along with the Tim Tebow Foundation and many others put on a night that their guests will never forget. The guests danced the night away at a prom designed for them which culminates in each of them being crowned Kings and Queens of the prom. For the church, the members, and their friends, it is a night to pour the love of Jesus into the lives of guests and their families. There were more than 200 guests and family members attending, and they all were served by 200 volunteers.

From the moment they arrived, they were treated like royalty. The red carpet with the “paparazzi welcome” is a huge hit as people all around cheered and clapped for them as they arrived. They were given a “buddy” for the night who made sure they experienced all the fun that made up the evening. They went to the “primp and pamper” room where they touched up their makeup, shined their shoes, and topped it all off with a corsage or boutonniere paired perfectly with their dress or outfit. The rest of their dream night details they pick for themselves through the activities available for them. They explored the dance floor, karaoke

room, dinner buffet, photo booth and limo rides too. Guests who were wheelchair-bound did not miss out. They were lifted in and out of the limo. Regardless of environmental sensitivities or special diet needs, they were all met with a smile. Emmerling says, "The answer for the night is yes, yes, yes!"

One guest, Kendall, said it like this, "This is AWESOME!!!"

Karen who attended said, "What an absolute, glorious night I had." The people who came together with open arms for our special needs community was exhilarating!" She thanked Tim Tebow and all the Churches around the world for touching her heart in a way that she said would last forever.

One volunteer named Pam was a buddy to a lady named Jamie. She was able to attend with her boyfriend, Don. "They informed me in our Limo ride that they were never able to attend prom when they were in school, but tonight that dream came true." Pam says, "This was hands down the most heartwarming event I have ever attended. To witness so much compassion and love in one building was the most refreshing thing to witness." At the end of the night every guest is crowned King or Queen of the Prom by their buddy.

Pastor Emmerling says the best part of the night is the "Crowning Moment." To see each buddy, place the crown or tiara on their honored guest and proclaim them King and Queen of the prom is something that I can only describe as heavenly. He adds that it's a great chance to share with the guests and their parents how much God loves them and desires to make them a part of His forever family is such a privilege and is one of those moments as a pastor that you cherish forever.

He says, "Once again, my eyes are filled with tears as I reminisce this night and multitude of people God used to bless our guests and families. I am filled with gratitude to get to be a small part of such an incredible night of sharing the love of God and the hope that can be found in Him. Through my tears I feel the sparkle I saw in the eyes of our guests shining through my eyes as I gaze upon our God and His wonderful works. To Him be glory forever in His church."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ed Emmerling and his wife Reneé together have 4 children and 4 grandchildren. Ed pastors Westside Church in Flushing, Michigan.

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## **Baptist leaders call for unified care for displaced**

**LOUISVILLE, KY (BP)** – The world is on the move. Millions of people live far from their homes but are able to stay connected with their family through the use of technology. Because of this, leaders from a number of Southern Baptist entities, state conventions, local associations and churches believe the time is right for a strategic plan to reach these people on the move.

"There's a growing desire among Southern Baptist Convention entities to communicate more and collaborate better when it comes to serving displaced people," said Trent DeLoach, Send Relief coordinator and pastor at Clarkston International Bible Church in Clarkston, Ga.

Conversations between leaders at the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board (IMB) and North American Mission Board (NAMB) along with leaders from the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), state conventions, local associations and churches led to a gathering Oct. 31, 2019, in Louisville, Ky., for a listening session on initiatives to reach displaced people.

Then, at the SBC Executive Committee meeting Feb. 18, NAMB and IMB announced that Send Relief, launched by NAMB in 2016, will come under the leadership of both entities to give Southern Baptists a "one-stop shop" for giving to and participating in compassion ministries domestically and globally.

Another formal conversation among denominational leaders about reaching displaced people is planned for April 23 in Atlanta.

"There's no shortage of great work that's happening on all of these levels," said Jeremy Simmons, National Ministry Center director with NAMB. "I think we're really working toward communicating the need between each other."

Terry Sharp, IMB conventions and network relations leader, believes this is an opportunity for a truly global strategy in reaching displaced people.

"An exciting thing to me would be to see churches engage with people groups overseas through missionaries, but then also engage those same people who have been displaced and relocated in North America," Sharp said.

John Barnett, missions strategist for the Kentucky Baptist Convention, saw the opportunities when he first returned to the U.S. after serving with IMB.

"One of the biggest impressions on me when we came back from overseas in 2015 was the internationals who were here," Barnett said. "There were refugees in Louisville, Owensboro, Lexington and Bowling Green. We have an opportunity to build pathways here that will connect all the way back to the refugees' home country."

United Nations statistics show more than 270 million people worldwide are displaced in some way. Barnett has developed four broad categories of displaced people -- forcibly displaced, vulnerably displaced, purposefully displaced and naturally displaced.

Barnett said forcibly displaced people may or may not cross a border, but they cannot go home. They may be asylum seekers due to political reasons or they may be refugees because of war or terrorism. Statistics show about 70.8 million people forcibly displaced in the world.

Vulnerably displaced people have been taken against their will to be trafficked into some sort of slavery. People who are homeless or children who have been orphaned also fit into this category. Officials report around 40.3 million people are displaced because of some sort of enslavement including human trafficking.

The purposefully displaced are students who've left their home country to gain education or vocation. They may also be immigrants who are looking for a better life in another country or the migrant worker looking to send a portion of their wages to family in their home country.

Finally, Barnett said there are people who are naturally displaced. These people have suffered great loss through natural disaster, famine or widespread disease. These people can't go home because they've lost their homes.

"This is such an important issue," Barnett said. "What we really need is a discussion on how we work together to start engaging this issue on a global scale as God is moving the nations all over the world."

Sharp said while the government has a significant role to play in immigration policy, Christians interested in being obedient to the Great Commission have a great opportunity to be good neighbors.

"Who's our neighbor and what's our responsibility?" Sharp asked. "We're calling Southern Baptists to be the hands and feet of Christ, to show and share the love of Jesus."

Building the pathway is the challenge, though. While the churches and entities are at work individually, the autonomous structure of Southern Baptist life can prove to be a challenge for collaboration.

"We're grateful for the Cooperative Program," Sharp said. "We want to keep sending missionaries, but we hope Southern Baptists will realize that while we're going to the nations, God is bringing them to us in the United States."

Barnett recalled previous strategies to reach those in the 10/40 window.

"Ten years ago the International Mission Board was talking about engaging people in some of the most difficult places in the world," he said. "Now, God is spreading those people out all across the world. This is a wonderful time for the church to care for and to reach those people."

Only about 1 percent of refugees will be relocated to North America, DeLoach said. But the opportunity for churches is still great. Organizations like Refuge Bowling Green in Bowling Green, Ky., are helping churches welcome refugees, build relationships, and help them acclimate to the community. Similar organizations exist throughout the U.S.

WMU is helping bridge the gap as they host refugee simulations called Seeking Refuge and Displaced: Seeking Home.

"Seeking Refuge focuses on what a refugee experiences at a detention center and refugee camp," said Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of WMU. "Displaced: Seeking Home focuses on what a refugee who's been relocated to the U.S. experiences."

Wisdom-Martin said the simulations build awareness so people will "engage the lost among the displaced."

Simmons said a collaboration of efforts increases the chances the Gospel will reach the displaced.

"There is a far greater likelihood that an American Southern Baptist will grow in their compassion for refugees in the Middle East or Africa if they've had the opportunity to engage in refugee ministry here on U.S. soil," he said.

Wisdom-Martin hopes that ongoing conversations between ministry leaders will produce new partnerships in efforts to reach the displaced.

"There is a synergy with joining hearts and hands for the sake of the Gospel. Each entity brings strengths to the table that can enhance the entire effort," she said.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Brandon Porter is editor of Kentucky Today.

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## **Miracle off the ice: Lake Placid Baptist Church traces roots to 1980 Olympics ministry**

**LAKE PLACID, NY (BP)** – David Book didn't have a ticket to the hockey game on Feb. 22, 1980, that earned the description "Miracle on Ice." He lived half a mile from the arena, but it was the toughest ticket in town to get.

So, like most Americans, Book and his family watched on TV as the U.S. men's hockey team stunned the mighty Russians in the semifinal of the 1980 Olympics. As the game ended, the Books stepped out onto their veranda and heard the cheers and chants from the arena in the distance: "USA! USA! USA!"

That game 40 years ago became an iconic event, forever connecting the town of Lake Placid with sports and hockey history. But for Southern Baptists in Lake Placid, the Miracle on Ice wasn't the only legacy from those 1980 Olympics. That year was the first time Southern Baptists had organized a large outreach during the Olympics, and those efforts led to the planting of Lake Placid Baptist Church -- a congregation that Book served as pastor for six years and a church that is still active and vibrant in a resort community far outside the Bible Belt.

"It's pretty amazing what God has done over the years just to continue the ministry," said Jim Koenig, the church's pastor. "God continues to build our influence."

Book first came to Lake Placid in the summer of 1978 to do some advance work for the Southern Baptist outreach that was scheduled for 1980. This was the first time for Southern Baptists to attempt such a ministry at the Olympics, with the Home Mission Board leading the effort.

"Almost every agency of the SBC actually participated," Book said. "It was a massive undertaking."

Book was working in student ministry in Kentucky when he led that advance team in 1978. He wasn't planning to relocate to Lake Placid on a long-term basis. But after Book came home from that trip, Southern Baptist leaders in New York kept trying to persuade him to return to Lake Placid. They were hopeful that the outreach planned for the Olympics would be the catalyst for a new Baptist church in Lake Placid, which didn't have a Southern Baptist congregation.

Book and his wife Marianne eventually relented and moved their family to Lake Placid in November of 1978, with Book serving as a missionary with the Home Mission Board. He was one of the leaders of the Olympic ministry, started Lake Placid Baptist Church and was the pastor there until 1986.

Claire Thayer was one of the first local residents to become part of the church, even before the Olympics began. A native Floridian who was saved at a Billy Graham crusade in the Orange

Bowl, Thayer spent most of her childhood and early teenage years at a Southern Baptist church in Miami.

"I was very close to Jesus until I discovered alcohol and the party life as an older teenager," she said.

After attending college in New York and traveling for a few years, Thayer eventually settled in Lake Placid where she was "deep into the party life."

"I knew about God," Thayer said. "I had him on a shelf, kept telling Him I'd get back to Him. But I just wasn't quite ready yet."

One day she was in her car alone, stopped at an intersection in Lake Placid the locals had dubbed the "Barmuda Triangle" because of bars on three of the corners. She said she heard a voice distinctly. She doesn't know whether it was audible or not, but she knows she heard it saying, "I want you back."

"I knew it was God," Thayer said. "And I thought, 'Oh no. The party's over.'"

"On the radio at that very moment came an ad," Thayer continued. "The local radio station said, 'Lake Placid Baptist Chapel invites you to services on Sunday.'"

Thayer couldn't believe it. She knew there hadn't been a Baptist church in town, but she showed up the following Sunday. "When God calls, you answer," she said.

Thayer was the first local to be part of the church plant. Though she's now a member of another congregation in Lake Placid, she remains "eternally grateful" to God for the ministry of Lake Placid Baptist Church.

Southern Baptist ministry during the 1980 Olympics was extensive, with dozens of mission teams and hundreds of volunteers from all over the country participating. Community engagement was one of the priorities. With heavy traffic clogging many of the Lake Placid streets, Southern Baptist volunteers helped senior citizens by delivering groceries and medications. They ran a daycare for students of all ages since schools were closed during the Olympics.

That attitude of service became part of the DNA of the church that would remain in Lake Placid long after the Olympic flame had been extinguished. Over the past 40 years, Lake Placid Baptist Church has been characterized by its outreach to the community.

A resort community, Lake Placid retains connections to its Olympic heritage by housing the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Center and by regularly hosting bobsled and luge competitions, hockey tournaments and events like the Ironman triathlon, which is scheduled for later this year. The church always provides volunteers to meet these community needs.

Koenig serves as chairman of the board of directors for the local business association and has been the volunteer coordinator for many events in town because the city knows the church will help.

Koenig takes seriously the verse of Jeremiah 29:7: "Seek the welfare of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the LORD on its behalf, for when it has prosperity, you will prosper."

"We have this relationship with the community that's pretty incredible," he said.

When the church officially constituted in 1982, it had about 20 members. Now a church of about 75 members, the congregation largely consists of first-generation Christians -- people who came to Christ after high school. The church, Koenig says, has learned to be missional and to love its community in concrete ways.

Derek Spain, who served as pastor of the church from 2001-2011, said the church is a beautiful mix of people from all over the world -- natives of the town and the Adirondack region, those who have been transplanted because of work or other reasons and visitors who are there for vacation or for the athletic competitions. The church is welcoming and committed to sharing the Gospel with those who are lost, a testament to the authentic faith of the church members.

"There's a group of people there who really love Jesus and love one another," Spain said.

For Book, as he looks back on the church that began in Lake Placid 40 years ago, he does so with a great sense of fulfillment and gratitude to the Lord. There's no big secret to the church's growth and endurance, he said. It's just basic discipleship that has allowed the church to thrive.

"People living out their faith, people committed to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, people living according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit," he said.

The U.S. win over the Soviet Union in 1980 may have been a miracle on the ice. For those like Thayer touched by the church's ministry over the past 40 years, Lake Placid Baptist Church may be just as much of a miracle.

"We worked together. We played together. We did life together," she said. "It meant so much to me, because I had no extended family in the area, so the church really was family to me."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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## Most Protestant churchgoers don't go to church alone

**NASHVILLE, TN** – When traveling to church, most people have company, but a significant number say they make the trip alone.

A [new study from Nashville-based LifeWay Research](#) found 1 in 5 Protestant churchgoers (19%) say they typically travel to church alone.

Most travel to church with their spouse (54%), while close to a third say their child or children ride with them (31%).

Fewer say they typically travel to church with another family member besides their parent or grandparent (18%) or a friend or acquaintance (11%).

A small percentage say they travel with a grandchild (4%) or someone from their church who lacks transportation (3%).

“Many weeks, it’s hard enough for attendees to get themselves to church, so it’s not surprising few are stopping to pick up a neighbor,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

“The reality is, if every Christian driving or riding to church this week used the extra vehicle seats around them to bring other people, churches would likely not be able to contain the crowds.”

Men (64%) are more likely than women (46%) to say they travel to church with their spouse, which indicates wives are more likely to go to church without their husbands than vice versa. Women (36%) are also more likely than men (24%) to say their children travel with them to church.

African American churchgoers are the least likely to say they travel to church with their spouse (31%) but are more likely than white churchgoers to say they go to church with their children (40% to 24%).

African Americans (16%) are also twice as likely as white churchgoers (8%) to say they travel to church with a friend.

Younger churchgoers (22%) are the most likely to say they typically go to church with a friend. Protestant churchgoers 50 and older (23%) are more likely than those 18 to 34 (13%) to say they attend church alone.

## **Childhood church trips**

For three-fourths of current Protestant churchgoers (76%), a parent typically took them to church as a child.

One in 5 (20%) say they went with a grandparent, while 1 in 10 (10%) say it was another family member.

Few churchgoers say they went alone (6%), with a family friend their age (5%), rode a church bus (5%), or went with someone they knew primarily from church (4%).

Among those regular church attenders today, 6% say they did not typically attend church as a child.

“The legacy of grandparents taking their grandkids to church has been impressive,” said McConnell. “Yet today far fewer churchgoers are taking grandkids with them—even when looking only at older attendees.”

African Americans are more likely to say they were taken to church as a child by a grandparent (32%) or another family member (20%).

Regular Protestant church attenders in the West (11%) are more likely to say they typically did not attend church as a child than those in the South (4%).

## **Methodology**

The online survey of 1,002 American Protestant churchgoers was conducted September 20-27, 2019 using a national pre-recruited panel. Respondents were screened to include those who identified as Protestant/non-denominational and attend religious services at least once a month.

Quotas and slight weights were used to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity and education to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,002 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.2%. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

For more information, visit [LifeWayResearch.com](https://www.lifewayresearch.com) or download the [full report](#).