



Newsjournal of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan

Telling the story  
of Michigan Baptists

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## Flying Blind

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – In my early years of ministry, I had the privilege of serving in the West Texas town of Marathon at First Baptist Church. It was a small dusty little town on the edge of the Big Bend National Park, and not many miles from the Mexican border. The church building was what one might imagine as the typical turn of the century wooden clapboard country church. The town was small and quaint and boasted a population of about 500 people on a very good day. That of course included any visiting relatives or truckers that might have stopped at the Shamrock Station for 10 minutes to get fuel and a Bar-B-Q sandwich.

The amazing thing about our little country church is that we had a great pastor with a vision to reach the world. His heart for missions took us across the globe via radio waves and by airplane. He became a very accomplished pilot and used his skills to take the Gospel to some of the most remote places in the region. It was during that time that I became fascinated with flying and particularly with private planes. It is difficult to explain the sense of euphoria that comes with a single engine airplane as it garners enough ground speed to create the required amount of “lift” to cause the craft to become airborne. After hundreds of take-offs and landings on dirt strips throughout that region, the thrill was and still is exhilarating.

On many occasions we found ourselves in difficult situations. Unexpected storms, cattle on the runway, severe thermals caused by the intense heat of the Texas sun, and navigational issues were but a few of the surprises we encountered. All of these could cause more than a modicum of digestive acids to be secreted into our stomachs. At times we were even caught flying blind and had to completely depend on his ability to fly by instruments only. Not all pilots are trained and certified to fly by instrument. Most never reach that level of skill and must fly by sight.

One such pilot that was not instrument rated was caught unexpectedly by a front that moved in much more quickly than was forecast. He was lost in the clouds and could not find his way to the airport. The control tower was aware of his dilemma and was in constant communication with him, but could not direct him to his landing site. The pilot was very upset, almost to the point of being emotionally out of control. They were very concerned. The tower contacted a military fighter jet that was in the vicinity and asked if the pilot would fly to this small private plane, and then lead him back down to the airport using his cutting-edge technology and instruments.

The pilot agreed and tracked the small plane on his radar and within a few minutes was flying adjacent to the lost pilot. The military pilot said when he looked over at the civilian pilot, he could see the tears streaming down his face. He was able to contact the small plane on his VHF radio frequencies and began talking to him and calming him. The fighter jet had to use full flaps, extend landing gear and throttle down just to fly slowly enough to maintain the speed and altitude of the civilian. He told the lost pilot to follow him at about 100 yards and he would lead him home. Within a matter of minutes both the fighter jet and the small plane were safely on the ground. When the civilian pilot got out of his plane he ran to the military pilot and

embraced him and wept uncontrollably. He kept saying over and over, “Thank you for showing me the way home. Thank you for showing me the way home.”

I have thought much about that scenario, and how it so relates to our role and responsibilities as Christians. We have the knowledge and ability to lead others to the safe harbor of heaven, and there are untold millions who are still flying blind without any hope. They are crying out for help and all they need is someone to lead them. May I encourage you to do whatever it takes to rescue those who are lost. Change your course if necessary. Slow down. Communicate on their frequency. Show them the way. Hopefully, one day they too will take to the skies and lead others safely home as well.

### **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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## **I climbed the Summit in 2020**

### **Exceeded My Expectations**

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – Save January 18-20, 2022! You will thank me twenty-four months from now. More specifically, make plans to attend the “Advance Midwest Leadership Summit” on that month in 2022. At the time of this writing, I just returned from this year’s event and I have to say it went far beyond my expectation! I am glad I made the climb in Springfield, Illinois. Why?

### **Two-year Rewarding Collaboration**

Can I reveal a secret to you? From my observations, the state executives are still pastors-at-heart meaning they want to empower people to become all that they can in Christ. The state executives and the staff, from twelve states, worked hard during the past two years on this project. Twelve-hundred people registered. Over one-thousand attended setting a new record for the highest attendance despite cancellations and weather hindrances. More than one-hundred break-out sessions filled a forty-hour time period. Practitioners in every area of ministry offered proven solutions relevant to the Midwest. The hallways were noisy with spontaneous, meaningful conversations. New friendships and partnerships were created. There was a sense of family that surpassed the national gatherings.

## **J.D. Greear and Todd Unzicker**

The president of the Southern Baptist Convention along with his personal assistant took time away from their ministry and family to share an evening with us. One day of travel to join us and another day of travel to return home or to another destination is what it cost them. Can you imagine how many tens-of-thousands of hours J.D. and Todd have spent away from wives, children, friends and ministry to meet all of us throughout the entire convention these almost two years? I am overwhelmed by the generosity of these two men.

I had the privilege of praying with J.D. before he entered the hall to speak to more than one-thousand people. His own humility and interest for ministry leaders is apparent all of the time. I watched and listened as people greeted J.D. and Todd with excitement in their eyes and voices, then watched as I saw J.D. make the conversation about the other person. He would ask, "Where are you serving?" Or he would wait patiently for the answer to "How is the ministry going?" I saw the esteem of weary leaders grow as J.D. and Todd listened to people's stories.

## **Sandy Wisdom-Martin**

Until the evening when Sandy spoke at the event, I was not aware that the executive director-treasurer of the Woman's Missionary Union was a fellow-Midwesterner. When she talked about influence and looked out at the audience calling out the names of people from Illinois and other states I felt a lump in my throat. She said, "Sue, you're a person of influence." Little did those faithful servants who taught and guided Sandy as a young girl, or those who currently guide women and girls know the power of their lives; but, after Sandy spoke they clearly understood their mission, their calling, and their influence.

## **Lewis, Tovey, Vance and Shaw**

Three men talked about new initiatives. Dharti Lewis, Vice President of the Send Network, wove a tapestry of his personal experiences with exhortations to demonstrate the good news of Christ. He offered examples to follow. His heart was open and his voice was strong. Josh Tovey, a church planter in Grand Rapids, Michigan talked about keeping Jesus in the center of all that we do. His laser focus destroys every excuse not to do better.

Mark Vance, lead pastor of Cornerstone Church in Ames, Iowa, stole our imaginations as he described the inspirational movement of new adults dedicating their lives to ministry and church planting in North America and throughout the world.

Hadyn Shaw, author and speaker, shed light on how generations can work together better so that the ministry of Christ can flourish. The benefits of understanding one another and overcoming our differences as we strive for harmony and unity in Christ and His ministry is well within our reach.

## **Worship**

David Higgs and five others from Illinois and Missouri caused the hall of Midwesterners to raise their voices in song and praise to the God of the Midwest and the Universe. If there was one thing that I wanted more from the three days, it was worship. Wow! The NFL playoffs and the recent collegiate championships paled in comparison to the celebration I heard each time we met. The robust harmony from people in love with the Savior, and confident in His power to save is explosive and contagious.

### **Generous Partners**

The best Southern Baptists have open hands and generous hearts. Guidestone, the North American Mission Board, the Woman's Missionary Union and LifeWay gave generously to the Midwest so that we could have this gathering more frequently, moving it's frequency from every-three-years to every-two-years. Mere words are too weak to express my heartfelt gratitude as I watch volunteers, ministers, lead pastors and church planters dream of greater days in the Midwest. We love and appreciate our partners more than they know.

### **Two-years from Now**

As all the participants departed this year's event, we understood that the real measure of this event is answering this question, "How big of an impact can each one of us have in our respective communities during these next two years?" All I can say, is that I cannot wait until January 18-20, 2022 to hear what God has accomplished in the Midwest. Will you be there, with me, to hear what God has done?

### **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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## **Numbers tell the Michigan story**

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – Simple black letters on white paper captivate our imaginations as great authors use them to carefully craft words that draw us into their stories. They put the ABC's together in such a way that the images formed in our minds move our souls. Words are powerful!

Black numbers on white paper pale in comparison to the ABC's in their effect. The 123's of a spreadsheet quickly cause our eyes to gloss over - unless those numbers tell a story that matters to us. A story is emerging from the 2019 Annual Church Profile (ACP) data that is of interest to our cooperative mission efforts. It is a numerical story of churches partnering to advance God's Kingdom. It is about lives transformed by Christ and churches on mission. Every baptism points to Jesus as a person professes his or her faith in Him. Every dollar given tells about someone's generosity and investment in Kingdom advance. Small group numbers remind us that people seek to know God, long for community, and opportunities to serve together. Every number matters!

What do the black numbers on the white pages of the Annual Church Profile (ACP) from 2019 tell us about our partnership as Michigan Baptists? There's a wealth of Information, but here are some thoughts I have after looking at some of the data:

### **1. The downward trend of baptisms in Michigan has stopped.**

Michigan reached a low of 709 baptisms in 2017. From there, the number grew in both 2018 and 2019 to a high of 1055 baptisms - a 49% increase. The reversal happened as Michigan Baptists engaged in church planting, awarded evangelism grants for local church outreach efforts, provided numerous evangelism resources, and trainings. The "Who's Your One" prayer initiative mobilized believers all over the state to pray.

### **2. Church planting increases total number of churches in Michigan by 24 in 2 years.**

The total number of churches in the BSCM has grown from 268 churches in 2017 to 292 churches in 2019. The growth is clearly the result of the BSCM's church planting efforts and our partnership with the North American Mission Board (NAMB). Without church planting, the total number of churches would have declined due to churches that died or left the Convention. More people are worshipping God, living in Biblical community, and serving Christ on mission because Michigan Baptists are committed to planting churches.

### **3. New strategies are needed to engage churches in our cooperative mission.**

The data, or more accurately lack of data, also reveals that 94 churches entered no ACP information. That's roughly 1/3 of Michigan Baptist churches. To lower this number, the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) has dramatically increased efforts to reach out to these churches. A discussion is constantly taking place amongst BSCM staff about engaging with Michigan Baptist churches. New strategies will emerge to keep churches informed and connected to our cooperative mission as Michigan Baptists.

### **4. ACP data reveals Michigan's growing, stable and declining church percentages.**

I looked at the ACP average worship attendance numbers from 2015-2019 to see the trends in our churches. The study only used data from churches that submitted the ACP for 3 or more

years. Although the study was not subjected to rigorous scientific methods, the results are informative for our purposes.

- 28.7% experienced 10% or more growth (Growing)
- 42.6% experienced 10% or more decline (Declining)
- 28.7% experienced neither 10% growth nor 10% decline (Stable)

The ACP numbers are revealing. There are many stories in the numbers and questions needing to be asked. In the coming days, the data will generate conversations to help us start, strengthen and send Michigan Baptist churches.

### **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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## **Every day is a challenge**

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** Nancy Spears is filling in as guest-writer for Mick Schatz's column this month. She serves as administrative assistant for Mick Schatz and the Bambi Lake Baptist Retreat and Conference Center.*

**ROSCOMMON, MI** – Did I tell you that I love serving at Bambi Lake? Every day is a challenge met with the blessings and wisdom that comes from God, because we are fully incapable of doing this enormous task on our own. It is as it should be in ministry. If it is a job we can do without God, it is not worth doing. And so, we get up in the morning expectant of what God is going to do in and through us.

Truly we have been promised that the floodgates of heaven will open and pour down a blessing on us too big to contain. (*Malachi 3:10b*) We have seen the flood gates open and powerful streams of water rushing through. I know that is not quite the blessing spoken of here, and yet, it is a blessing that has followed the destruction that was caused by water here at Bambi Lake.

When you come to Bambi, you will, of course, want to have a milkshake. That is a given. You will walk into the shake shop on new ceramic tile that was laid by a youth leader and a church member (working separately to accomplish the task.) There is a new refrigerator, stainless sink

and tables for prep work. This is the blessing that followed the damage of water seeping into the old floor and causing its removal and the renovating of the shake shop again.

Many people like to stay in the lodge, I know, because it is closer to morning coffee, the family room and the game room. It also has a nice covered walkway to the Wilson building. But, today, there are some new places that can be enjoyed by guests brought to you by floodgates of water washing over them.

Cabin 2, newly renovated, has new carpet, fresh paint and an on-demand water heater. This is a foreshadowing of what we want to have in all our rooms. New and fresh! This refreshing was preceded by the rush of water down the stairs and out of the walls when a pipe broke and water was filling rooms A and B.

A three bedroom mobile home with deck has become guest housing near the campground. Featuring a kitchen and living room set for your relaxation and comfort, this trailer has been completely renovated with new carpet and flooring, kitchen appliances, lighting and bathroom fixtures. The damage from roof leaks and leaky pipes was all torn out, new wood was installed. The cause of the damage was found and repaired.

The house by the beach has become guest housing. This was the original manager's house on camp. It is a great addition for families or small groups who want to cook their own meals. This building has been completely repainted inside with new carpeting and new blinds throughout. Only minor water issues were there as older pipes needed replacing. Of course, two years ago, the water damage to the basement led to a complete renovation of that area.

And then, there is Chalet 2. This building is not currently available for anything. If you have been on Facebook, you may have seen the results of the water damage there. As pipes separated and water flowed, sagging ceilings fell and walls and carpet were destroyed. A team from Disaster Relief, with staff and others, tackled tearing out all the damage. Now the upstairs and downstairs are waiting for a team that is scheduled in late March to tackle the renovations. We know that newness is on the horizon.

Doesn't this remind you of the redemption that only comes from God? First, see that there is a problem, sin (or in this case water damage), admit and repent (here we had to find the extent of the damage and remove it) and believe and confess that Jesus is Lord (in this case, trusting Him for the resources to fix the problem, and then do it). It would be easy to dwell on the damage that we have seen.

It is easy to be consumed with the lack of resources – money and labor – as we get overwhelmed by the circumstances that we see and cannot control. But God, we must keep our focus on what God is doing in and through our circumstances. God in his infinite mercy and knowledge has allowed what we need to compel us to do over and above what we could think or imagine, in only His strength to see these improvements and changes that are and were needed at Bambi Lake. Only by His grace have these things been accomplished.

**Revelation 21:5, “And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”**

I believe this applies here at Bambi Lake. He is making this place new. And His Word is trustworthy and true. And did I say I love serving at Bambi Lake? Every day is a challenge met with the blessings and wisdom that comes from God. Daily, no... moment by moment we see the Hand of God and His grace flowing out in us and through us.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Nancy has been a Christian since 1978 and served in various positions in church and WMU. She began working at BSCM in 2013. Four years later, God placed a desire, then a call to serve at Bambi Lake where she is blessed to work with an excellent director and staff. God gives her opportunity at Bambi to use the hobbies she enjoys – to bake, sew and decorate for the camp, as well as some down time to knit, crochet and quilt. Nancy is married to Daniel, a wonderful and understanding man who encourages her to serve where God calls. She has 5 children, 13 grandchildren and one great grandchild. They all love spending time at Bambi Lake.

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## **Midwest ministry leaders embrace missional resurgence**

**SPRINGFIELD, IL (BP)** – Secular pundits say the evangelical church is on its way out, Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear said at the Midwest Leadership Summit in Springfield, Ill.

Things are changing, Greear admitted, but proposed that God might be reviving His church.

"We're dealing with a significant loss of influence. We're watching our culture come unraveled all around us. What was unthinkable to our parents is going to become standard fare for our kids," Greear said. "We know that and we lament it and we worry about it."

What if God, Greear asked at the summit held Jan. 21-23, is returning His church to simple convictions that compelled the earliest Christians? What if by removing some of the things we're accustomed to, He's setting up something Baptists have longed for over the past century: a transformative missional resurgence?

More than 1,000 leaders from the Midwest gathered to learn from local and national leaders in large-group sessions and 98 breakout sessions. The event, held every other year, is facilitated by Midwest state conventions and national SBC entities.

Greear wasn't the only speaker to call churches to embrace Christ's clear calling to make disciples. Leaders in church planting, evangelism, and discipleship urged churches to return to essentials.

Scholars say there were about 7,500 believers at the end of the first century, Greear said at the Summit. Three centuries later, half the Roman empire identified as Christian because each believer and each church saw a responsibility to multiply, Greear said.

"That is the strategy," Greear said, "that grows the church in every generation."

### **Midwest mission field**

Charlie Robinson spent the first years of his ministry in a small Kansas town in an unusual seat: the passenger side of a tractor. That's how Robinson, pastor of Northridge Church in Sabetha, Kan., built the relationships he says are essential for church leaders in a small town.

"There is no better program than one-on-one time," Robinson told leaders attending his breakout session on leadership principles for small-town church development. The pastor echoed Greear's words about church members being the ones in fulltime ministry.

"Pastors are in fulltime equipping and unleashing," Robinson said. "The people are in fulltime ministry."

At his church, ministry training is for everyone who is willing. Regular training sessions inspire church members to birth ministries and outreaches with Gospel implications. Northridge meets in four locations near the Kansas-Nebraska border, with two sites in each state.

"Your outreaches, your ministries, are only going to be as good as your ministry team," Robinson advised. That's why the principle of "unleashing," he said, must become greater than a church leader's need for control. Pastors don't have the market cornered on the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling a believer, Robinson said.

"It must be the people's understanding that it is their responsibility to be on mission and to do the work of the ministry."

### **'God, force us out'**

"Is a person a fisherman if, year after year, he never catches a fish?"

Dhati Lewis, an Atlanta pastor and North American Mission Board vice president, posed the question after reading the fishing analogy from Darrell Robinson's 1995 book "People Sharing Jesus." In the passage, a group of people who call themselves fishermen invest their lives in

everything related to their profession. The only thing they don't do, Robinson writes, is actually fish.

In a keynote address, Lewis urged leaders not to fall into the same trap. Instead, he said, ask God to force us out of our comfort zones, toward people who desperately need Jesus.

"We need more people that are willing to live amongst the people. In proximity," Lewis said. That's how believers can bring a tangible expression of the Gospel.

"The harvest is plentiful, but it's the laborers that are few," Lewis said, quoting [Matthew 9:37](#). "Too many of us define God's will by the path of least resistance, that God's will is all about getting easier and better." But often, what He's calling us to is harder, Lewis said.

He encouraged leaders to pray a simple prayer: "God, force us out."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Meredith Flynn writes for the Illinois Baptist, the newsjournal of the Illinois Baptist State Association.

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## **Removing the dividing walls**

**DETROIT, MI** – January 20, 2020 was not just another day in the winter season of Michigan. Yes, many remembered it was a National Holiday, Martin Luther King Jr Day. However, for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) it was a day of celebration at the statewide Martin Luther King Jr Service. The service was held at the Middlebelt Baptist Church where Larry Johnson is the Senior Pastor. BSCM Executive Director Tim Patterson was correct when he stated: "This will be a great time of celebration and unity for all churches in the Baptist State Convention". The atmosphere was one of unity and strength.

The service was opened with the Middlebelt Praise team lifting their voices in praise to our God, whose desire is for there to be unity in the Body of Christ. As the service progressed we heard from Merriam Road Baptist Church where Wayne Parker is the Senior Pastor. The choir inspired all who were in attendance with their harmony and joy. The music portion of the program ended with a combined choir singing with such soul stirring melody. As a result many of the congregation was moved to stand and express personal praise. Joyce Larkin stated "the music presented was voices directly connected to heaven".

The main course for the service was the preaching of God's word. The congregation was captivated by the guest preacher, Rev. Dr. James Dixon who serves as pastor of El-Bethel Baptist Church in Fort Washington, Maryland. The theme for the service was "Removing the Dividing Walls" using Ephesians 2:13-14 as the background scripture. Pastor Dixon encouraged and challenged the congregation to be part of those who would actively take God's Word and use it to remove the dividing walls, within our churches, community and state. He exhorted us to remove the walls of injustice, racism, sexism and denominationalism. This direction is very consistent with the beliefs of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, who once stated "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Pastor Dixon reminded the congregation Christian has to be the answer and the moving force behind removing the walls which divide us. He exhorted us to remove the walls by operating in the love of God. As the service ended, the congregation was given a ministry challenge to be intentional in reaching out to those who don't look like you. Pastors were challenged to consider pulpit exchanges and have their congregation do a community project together to be an example to the world. We are praising God over a dozen churches signed up to participate in this challenge. Curt Wright, lead pastor of Crossroad Church of Lansing, accepted the challenge and he stated he had a great time at the MLK celebration.

Middlebelt members worked to serve a delicious meal after the service to all who wanted to gather together. There was laughter and good fellowship as those present shared the pleasure of good food. We thank Pastor Larry Johnson and the Middlebelt Baptist Church for hosting the service and the meal.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Stan Parker is senior pastor of Faith Fellowship Baptist Church in Lansing, MI and a regular contributor to the Baptist Beacon.

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## **Why did you come here?**

**TRAVERSE CITY, MI** – Traverse City is a beautiful place to live. A land of hunting, fishing, hiking, beaches, swimming, snow skiing, snowboarding, sledding, antiques, awesome restaurants, snowshoeing, biking, camping, wineries, canoeing, having a small town, easy going atmosphere, etc. We are called the playground of the north, and for good reason. One thing is missing – strong, multiplying churches. In fact, the landscape is full of dead or dying churches. How could this be?

In order to want to live here, you must have the means to do so. Many who can afford it do retire here and want to enjoy all the recreational amenities the area has to offer. When they come, they do not want God interfering with their dreams and plans. Thus, Traverse City is one of the largest de-churched cities in America (#12 in the USA).

Also, Grand Traverse County has become the number one county in America for millennials who are millionaires to live. They can work from home in a country setting and enjoy the recreational playground this area provides. They do not have a need for God. When people get up on Sunday morning, they are not thinking, "Where can I go to church today?" God is the farthest thing from their mind.

Traverse City is very liberal, with the countryside being very conservative. Michael Moore calls Traverse City his home – "nough" said. It has his fingerprints all over it. People do not have God on their radar screens. The dark places of Traverse City are not what most people think of – drugs, poverty, child or spousal abuse, alcoholism, murder, theft. Yes, these do exist, but the dark places here take the form of recreation. Yes, recreation is the god of this area.

My wife and I are from the south and when people hear our southern accent, they ask, "Why did you come here?" Our answer is God.

God loves us and has prepared us for this new adventure. He also loves the people here in Traverse City. In order to survive and start a multiplying church from scratch, you have to know God loves you and has called you to love others in this specific place. It is only this conviction that allows us to press on and not be discouraged.

Most of our time is spent establishing relationships with those who are far from God and seeing how we can be God's hands, ears, feet, and arms to love people to Jesus. Please pray that they would trust us enough to walk with them through their pain. This is slow, especially when you are trying to build with unbelievers. For those who think they are saved, God must work to get them unsaved before they can get saved.

We praise God that many lives are being transformed by the love of Christ. This year, we actually launched our church in a middle school and now have a beachhead in Satan's domain. Pray that our church will not become discouraged at what some call "slow growth". In times of weakness, I find myself praying that God would just send us some normal couples. If it were not for the love and compassion of Christ compelling our church to reach out, it would be easy to simply let the lost go. However, we all know this is not God's will. As we follow Christ, He gives us His joy in seeing lives transformed, one at a time. God is at work and there is no time to get discouraged.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ricky and Sandra Pearson are church planters at Cornerstone Fellowship in Traverse City, Michigan. They have successfully planted four other self-supporting churches prior to coming to

Cornerstone Fellowship. Ricky and Sandra are the parents of three married children with five grandchildren.

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## **oneMESSAGE: Video Bible Stories to a New Audience**

**BALL GROUND, GA** – Long-time communicators Paul Wynn and Doug Keesey have partnered with churches and ministries to produce videos that tell what God is doing in a particular place. Their new initiative, [oneMESSAGE.tv](https://www.onemessage.tv), is aiming at an even wider goal. They're creating videos they hope will have long-lasting gospel implications around the world.

In 2019, they turned a remote village in Colombia into a movie set. With villagers serving as the actors, Wynn and Keesey filmed Bible stories in a language that doesn't have a written translation of Scripture. Their goal: to create a way for missionaries to communicate God's word with people who haven't heard it before. And they're hearing it in their own voices.

Wynn and Keesey officially launched [oneMESSAGE.tv](https://www.onemessage.tv) in 2019, but the project started years ago when Wynn's church contacted the International Mission Board about praying for an unreached people group. The Georgia church got connected with a people group in Colombia, and eventually started taking mission trips to work with missionaries in the region. Those trips led to another people group, one that had been pushed into refugee centers amid the country's civil war.

Before one mission trip, the missionary in Colombia asked the visiting group about their areas of expertise. Wynn and two others had experience in video, so the missionary devised a plan where they would create Bible stories using children from the refugee center as actors. The story would be narrated in the indigenous language. The team filmed the stories of the Good Samaritan and Zacchaeus and distributed them on DVD to the parents.

"This is the first time they've ever seen a video of any kind in their own language," Wynn remembered. Through video, the team was able to deliver something previously impossible—a portion of Scripture in a language that would take years to create in a written format.

In September 2019, Wynn and Keesey went back to Colombia to shoot 10 Bible stories for a people group of 30,000. Fewer than 2% know Christ. They partnered with two missionary families who will distribute the stories largely through a texting app.

Before each shoot, the missionary told the story in entirety. Actors from the people group then acted out the story, and narration in the indigenous language was added later. Wynn said they

selected stories that speak specifically to the people group's current belief system, based largely on animism. The team shot stories from the Old Testament, including Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf. They also filmed from the New Testament, including Jesus' birth, resurrection, and ascension.

Shortly after the trip, new restrictions in the village where they worked blocked non-indigenous religious groups from coming into the village. "It just reinforces the idea that when we have opportunities to go and share in whatever way, we need to seize on those opportunities—quickly," Wynn said.

In 2020, they hope to create libraries of Bible stories for three more people groups, possibly working again in Colombia and in Kenya.

Their overall goal is a big one: there are 3,200 unreached people groups around the world, and most are oral learners, Wynn said. "At [oneMESSAGE.tv](http://oneMESSAGE.tv), we want to help everyday believers reach those 3,200 groups."

To view video stories and find out about upcoming projects, go to [www.onemessage.tv](http://www.onemessage.tv).

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Meredith Flynn writes for the Illinois Baptist, the newsjournal of the Illinois Baptist State Association.

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## **Send Detroit update - January 2020**

Read below for recent highlights in the Send Detroit Network and what we are anticipating God to do next!

### **16 Planting Couples Assessed!**

At the November Detroit assessment we were able to host church planters and spouses that represent the potential of 16 new churches across North America. We are grateful for the team of assessors and volunteers who made this event happen and even more excited about what God will do through these planters and wives as they are sent out into His harvest! Three couples are focused in the Send Detroit Area, two others also in Michigan while other areas represented were throughout the Midwest and even some from Florida.

Our November 11-12, 2019 assessment required three teams of assessors working together to assist church planting candidates in God's calling.

### **Ladies Nights Out & Guys in a Gondola**

We were able to host a few special planter care events in December that assist us in growing the relationships in our Send Detroit family. Ladies got together on two occasions for cookie decorating lessons and guys had a night out hanging above the ice in the gondola at Little Caesars Arena watching the Detroit Red Wings together.

### **Commonwealth Grand Opening Feb 2**

After acquiring a new facility that was the Old St. Robert Bellarmine Catholic Church in Redford, Pastor Torion Bridges and the Commonwealth of Faith have been busy preparing their new space for public services. This Sunday, February 2 is their grand opening service at 10:31am. Pray that the Lord would continue to move in the midst of this church and the community of Redford to bring salvation.

### **Rhiza Church is coming March 1**

Tito and Mollie Diaz are excited about the upcoming launch of Rhiza Church in Ann Arbor, MI. They have been building a team, holding preview services and are preparing for a public launch of March 1 at Tappan Middle School. Please pray for God to be glorified through Tito, Mollie and Rhiza Church.

### **Send Network Gathering in St. Louis April 27-29, 2020**

We're heading to St. Louis with church planting pastors, wives, and team-members, sending church pastors, and potential church planters from across the Midwest. The aim of this gathering is to inspire every church to see themselves as a multiplying church in the making and to equip every church to discover their next step in the multiplication journey. If you'd be interested in going with us via charter bus from Detroit please let us know!

### **Catch the Vision Tour**

Come and see for yourself how God is moving in Detroit at our next Catch the Vision Tour. We'll show you the city, introduce you to church planters so that you can pray for them effectively and see how you and your church can be involved in spreading the good news of Christ in Detroit.

Next tour is March 9-11

Please email [wparker@namb.net](mailto:wparker@namb.net) if you'd be interested in coming to Detroit.

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## Compassion in action

**FLINT, MI** – Harry Houdini, though famous for his illusions and spectacular escapes, was also famous for being able to take a punch to the stomach. Men would line up to see if they could buckle Harry's knees with their "best shot". Ironically, a punch to the gut may have helped to bring about the demise of the great magician. A college student asked Mr. Houdini if it was true about his ability to take punches, but before Harry could answer, the student started hammering away. Harry was caught completely off-guard. Unable to tighten his abdomen muscles may have led to the damage of his appendix or masked the pain of the oncoming condition. Leading to his death.

Compassion is a "gut-shot". It hurts deep down. But, the punches to the stomach we see in the Bible bring restoration and revival and healing and everlasting life. It's the feeling Nehemiah had for his God and his city. Even if it meant death, he had to do something. It's the feeling Pharaoh's daughter had toward Moses. Even if it meant losing her standing with her father, she had to do something. It's the good Samaritan helping a stranger, no matter the cost. It was the right thing and he had to do it. Or the father in the story of the Prodigal. Running to his son, grabbing his son by the back of the neck, hugging him and restoring him to the family. Against the religious leaders and the fears of other fathers, the father had to save his Son. And it's that pain that pushed Jesus toward the Cross. In Luke 19, Jesus is getting closer to Jerusalem and He starts to weep. He hurts for the lost. He has to do something. He can't help Himself.

Christianity is a constant gut-shot. My pastor used to say, "The disciples saw the people as problems, Christ saw the problems of the people." The disciples sent the people away, Jesus said come. The disciples wanted to rain down fire and brimstone, Jesus showed grace and mercy. Jesus had compassion on the hurting; the blind, the lame, the possessed, the diseased, male or female, Jew and Gentile. He went against what society thought, what the religious leaders thought, what his earthly family thought, and it would cost Him His life.

I have been blessed to witness compassion in action. My Grandma King was a Girl Scout leader. But Grandma's troop was for all the "undesirables", the kids who were "different" physically and mentally. Back then the parents would isolate or institutionalize these children. When a child wasn't allowed to go to school, Grandma would get that feeling in her stomach, and she would go to their house and beg them to let that girl become a scout.

Churches have become more like Houdini. We tighten up so the punches won't affect us. We are getting better. At Ainsworth we are coming together to feed, aid, and minister to our community. We have to. It hurts too much to remain silent and do nothing. We must show them Jesus is alive, or we'll end up dead, like Harry.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jeff King is the pastor at Ainsworth Baptist Church in Flint, Michigan and he lives in Flushing. He married his high school sweetheart Lisa and the two have been married almost 39 years. They have two daughters and four grandchildren.

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## **First-Person: 3 ways to harness social media to the glory of God**

**MAYHILL, NM (BP)** – Social media can be an awesome tool, but it can also be a terrible temptation. It's a mixed bag that gives people a platform to say whatever they want -- the good, the bad, and the ugly -- whenever they want, with little to no consequence.

I've made several friends on social media and have been encouraged by thousands of tweets and Facebook posts. There have been days, however, when I've been ready to delete every last one of my social media accounts.

But I've determined every second God gives me is an opportunity to "make the most of the time" (Ephesians 5:6). For this reason, I block the trolls, mute the troublemakers and am intentional and particular with what I decide to post.

Another reason I do this is because of what Jesus says in Matthew 12:36: "I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak." Social media can be a breeding ground for careless words, which is why wisdom and caution are necessary.

While I'm not always successful, before sending on an online message, I try to ask myself:

- Is this true or false?
- Does it build up or tear down?
- Does it amplify or diminish Christ's Gospel?

These questions help me accomplish three things in an effort to post to the glory of God:

### **1. Speak the truth**

"Lying lips are detestable to the Lord, but faithful people are his delight," (Proverbs 12:22).

I might have tens of thousands of friends and followers on social media, but the audience that really matters consists of three persons in one: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

It's out of the new nature I received from Christ I aim to speak the truth in love to those in my circle of influence (Colossians 3:9-10; Ephesians 4:15).

These verses also inform how I process and respond to the news. When breaking news occurs, I try to wait at least 72 hours before giving commentary, as more facts often come to light after the story breaks.

May we be known as a people who value honesty and likewise share the truth in love.

## **2. Share to edify, encourage and embolden**

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

I'm a pastor of a normative size church in the middle of absolutely nowhere. The people I have the privilege of serving and leading are gifts from the Lord.

But like all pastors, there are days when the rise and grind of ministry gets me down. Since most of my online friends and followers are pastors who are in the same boat, the absolute last thing I want to do is add to their headaches and heartaches.

There's a time for everything, and I've found the time I spend on social media should be primarily dedicated to cheering on my brothers and sisters in Christ. Do I agree with all of my social media contacts on everything they post? Of course not.

I'll never be in lockstep on tertiary issues with every pastor I follow on social media, but if we agree on the main things and aim to advance the Kingdom of God, I'll cheer them on with everything in me.

We church leaders are fully aware we have more than enough critics. We could use a cheerleader or two to build us up rather than tear us down.

So before you craft your next post, ask yourself, "Is this loving? Will it encourage my brother or sister?" If so, fire away. If not, holster that message.

## **3. Spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ**

"This is why you are also to be ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44).

I'm going to assume most readers know what the Great Commission says. I'm also going to assume you agree with what the Bible says about eternity.

Accordingly, I'm going to assume you haven't the slightest clue when you'll post your last tweet or breathe your last breath. For all any of us know, today could be our last day on this present earth. And none of us knows the day and time when Christ will return.

In light of these truths from Scripture, are you posting with the Great Day in mind? Are your posts guiding people *to* salvation or away from it?

The world is watching, and whether you have 50 online followers or 40,000, each post you launch into social media is either a flare of life or a missile of death.

Our posts are either guiding people to an eternity in heaven or everlasting torment in hell. That should be enough to give us pause before we click "send."

Be careful what you post knowing heaven and hell are real, eternity is a long time and every second is an opportunity to make the most of the time. Use your social media to speak the truth, encourage others and spread the good news.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Matt Henslee (@mhenslee) is managing editor of LifeWay Pastors, coauthor of the book "Replanting Rural Churches" and pastor of Mayhill Baptist Church in Mayhill, N.M. He is married to Rebecca, and they have four daughters.

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## **Ridgecrest looks to fill 100-plus summer staff positions**

**RIDGECREST, NC** – For each of the past four years, Ridgecrest Conference Center has seen around 65,000 guests pour into its camp and retreat facilities nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.

Many of those guests choose to visit from May to August—the conference center's busiest season. To accommodate this year's expected crowds, Ridgecrest is now looking to fill more than 100 summer staff positions.

"At Ridgecrest, we desire to see lives impacted for God's glory," said Chris Fenske, support staff coordinator. "We want to serve our guests with excellence, and we need help to do that well."

The conference center is looking to deepen its pool of summer staff candidates to help accomplish their mission of *cultivating experiences, nurturing relationships, and impacting lives for God's glory*.

“My personal relationship with Christ was impacted in a true and authentic way working at Ridgecrest,” said Morgan Hays, who served as a summer staffer in 2017 and is returning again this year for a summer position.

“I made so many lifelong friends,” she said, “I also picked up skills I’ll hold going forward, not only as a believer, but also as a professional in the workplace.”

Fenske encourages Christians who know of college-age young adults who are looking for a summer job opportunity to check out Ridgecrest by visiting [RidgecrestConferenceCenter.com](https://www.ridgecrestconferencecenter.com)

### **Summer staff opportunities**

Ridgecrest is looking to expand its summer staff with young adults who have an authentic and growing relationship with Jesus. The conference center offers opportunities to learn and develop skills useful in future careers and everyday life.

Staffers will gain training and hands-on experiences, while learning about the responsibilities and rewards that come with a variety of work roles.

In addition to pay, staffers receive meals and shared, dorm-style housing, plus a chance to meet new friends and make connections. Their spiritual walk will be strengthened and challenged through small-group interaction and fellowship.

Summer staffers also attend weekly chapel services, participate in planned activities, serve together and have free time to enjoy God’s creation. Start and end dates are flexible, and staffing opportunities range from 9-16 weeks.

“Ridgecrest’s summer staff program is more than just a job,” Fenske said, “It provides a transformational experience and imparts lessons that staffers will carry with them for years to come.”

### **Current summer staff work areas include:**

- Recreation—facilitate high ropes courses, climbing tower, zip line, team-building activities, laser tag, sports tournaments and more.
- Kitchen—learn all aspects of food preparation, including entrees, salads, bakery, clean-up, dishes and organization.
- Food services—cater events throughout campus and serve on the buffet lines in the dining room.
- Outlets—serve guests through the operation of an on-site coffee shop, ice cream shop and retail store.
- Guest spaces—provide a welcoming setting for guests while serving in housekeeping, custodial and laundry services.

- AVCs—assist with cleaning and set-up of classrooms and auditoriums to create a space that is both functional and inviting for guests.

For more information about Ridgecrest's summer staff opportunities, visit [RidgecrestConferenceCenter.com](http://RidgecrestConferenceCenter.com).

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## What can unite us?

**FORSYTH, GA** – America is as divided as never before, and people are wondering what to make of it or what to do. Polarization is where people divide themselves into sharply contrasting groups or sets of opinions or beliefs, with these political/religious communities sometimes called “tribes.” I am hoping and praying some reflections and suggestions make America a better place, and help Christians have a better witness.

There are multiple reasons why Facebook and social media contribute to this polarization. First, most people have “friends” or followers who believe similarly. These friends reinforce and strengthen what they already believe. This is nothing new. An old saying is, “Birds of a feather flock together.” Facebook and social media make flocking together easier.

Second, people say things online that they would not say face to face. Facebook confrontations are often callous and uncaring.

Third, Facebook does not fact-check political ads. They also do a poor job of monitoring other posts and articles. This results in many newsy-looking posts that are misleading and/or false. What looks and sounds like news is not. Comparing major news outlets to Facebook is comparing apples to oranges.

Fourth, political and religious groups, and even other countries, are using Facebook to influence thinking and believing through deceptive communications. Facebook and social media are great for family photos but poor at helpful confrontation and building a healthy community.

Another factor in polarization is that most people currently trust their political tribe more than their faith's teachings. America has moved away from its past religious and spiritual moorings. Many people even view God and country as equally important in practice, even though they deny it. There are religious leaders who communicate political positions in conflict with Scripture, and there are people who put their trust in ministers over Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

Another factor in polarization is that people view their own tribe with their heart but view others with their mind. When presented with unflattering facts about their tribe, many people immediately think of facts about the other tribe they consider worse.

People are more forgiving of people in their tribe. This disparity only adds to the distance people feel towards those not of their tribe.

So, what are Christians to do?

First, we need to get on our knees and repent! The Christian community is known more for its political leanings than its scriptural teachings. We need to seek the Holy Spirit for direction in our lives instead of trusting other sources or people. Psalm 146:3 states, "Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save." As Christians, we are first and foremost citizens of heaven.

Second, I recommend we spend more time face-to-face and less time online. It's harder to misunderstand or criticize someone in front of you. Third, it is scriptural to confront people privately and not publicly (Matt. 18:15-17). Fourth, do not use Facebook as a news source. Stop sharing posts that look like they are news even if they contain some true facts. Finally, do not let politics influence your faith, and let your faith become more important than politics.

Mark 12:17 says, "Then Jesus said to them, 'Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.'" Christians need to put God first! Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Chris Fuller is pastor of Russellville Baptist Church in Forsyth.

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## **Churchgoers divided over armed congregants**

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** – In the aftermath of several high-profile church shootings, most Protestant pastors say their congregations have taken some precautions to protect those in attendance.

Since 2000, 19 fatal shootings have taken place at Christian churches, while gunmen have also taken lives at other religious sites like Jewish synagogues, a Sikh temple and an Amish school.

Around 4 in 5 Protestant pastors (80 percent) say their church has some type of security measure in place when they gather for worship, according to a survey from Nashville-based LifeWay Research.

"Churches are some of the most common gatherings in any community, and that makes them targets," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "Most churches understand this and have responded in some way."

### **Security specifics**

The most common form of preparation is making an intentional plan. Almost 2 in 3 pastors (62 percent) say their church has an intentional plan for an active shooter situation.

The more people who show up to worship services each week, the more likely the church is to have made plans for a potential gunman.

Pastors of churches with 250 or more in attendance (77 percent) and those with 100 to 249 (74 percent) are more likely to have an intentional plan than those with 50 to 99 in attendance (58 percent) or those with less than 50 in their worship service each week (45 percent).

More than a quarter of churches (28 percent) have radio communication among security personnel.

African American pastors (47 percent) and pastors of other ethnicities (46 percent) are almost twice as likely as white pastors (25 percent) to take this step.

The question of guns in church is very much a live debate among pastors, as close to half of pastors (45 percent) say part of their security measures include having armed church members.

Combining this with the percentages who say they have uniformed police officers or armed security personnel on site, 51 percent intentionally have firearms at their worship services as part of their security measures.

Evangelical pastors (54 percent) are more likely than mainline pastors (34 percent) to say they have armed church members.

Half of pastors in the South (51 percent) and West (46 percent) say this is the case compared to a third of those in the Northeast (33 percent).

Pentecostal (71 percent), Baptist (65 percent) and Church of Christ pastors (53 percent) are also more likely than Methodist (32 percent), Lutheran (27 percent) and Presbyterian or Reformed pastors (27 percent) to say they have armed church members as part of their security measures.

Other churches place their emphasis on keeping all guns away from the worship service.

More than a quarter (27 percent) have a no-firearms policy for the building where they meet and 3 percent have metal detectors at entrances to screen for weapons.

African American pastors are the most likely to implement these strategies, with 50 percent saying they have a no-firearms policy and 8 percent deploying metal detectors.

Almost 1 in 5 pastors (18 percent) say their church has taken none of the precautions asked about in the survey, while 2 percent aren't sure.

"While methods vary, most churches start with the resources they have to prepare for what they hope will never happen," said McConnell. "With planning, a church can be prepared without being distracted or paralyzed by the threat. Pastors are trying to balance two responsibilities -- protect those on the inside, while being as welcoming as possible to those on the outside."

### **Police protection**

The survey took place prior to the Dec. 29 shooting West Freeway Church of Christ in White Settlement, Texas, near Fort Worth. Three people died, including the gunman, who was shot by a member of the church's security team.

Close to a quarter of Protestant pastors (23 percent) say they have armed private security on site. Additionally, 6 percent say they have uniformed police officers on site as an added security measure.

For the vast majority of churchgoers (73 percent), the presence of a uniformed policeman or security guard at church makes them feel safer, with 37 percent saying they feel much safer.

One in 5 (20 percent) aren't sure and 8 percent say it makes them feel less safe.

African American pastors are the most likely to say they have both armed private security personnel (41 percent) and uniformed police officers (18 percent) on site.

However, non-white churchgoers are more likely than white churchgoers to say they feel less safe at church seeing those individuals during worship services.

Around 1 in 10 non-white churchgoers (10 percent) say they feel less safe with uniformed police and security guards at church compared to 6 percent of white churchgoers.

Female churchgoers, on the other hand, are more likely than their male counterparts to say those visible individuals make them feel safer (75 percent to 69 percent).

Churches with 250 or more in attendance are the most likely to say they have armed private security personnel (43 percent) or uniformed police officers (26 percent).

Those who attend such churches are also the most likely to say seeing police officers and security guards at church make them feel safer (83 percent).

"Any organization that has relatively large gatherings of people has a responsibility for the safety of those gathered," said McConnell. "In considering security, church leaders have to consider methods, costs, risks and how those safety measures potentially impact their ministry."

### **Methodology:**

The phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors was conducted August 30 to September 24, 2019. The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Quotas were used for church size.

Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called. Responses were weighted by region to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.3 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

The online survey of 1,002 American Protestant churchgoers was conducted September 20 to 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 percent confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

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## **IMB to commemorate 175 years among the nations throughout 2020**

**RICHMOND, VA** – For 175 years, Southern Baptists have not failed to have a witness among the nations, IMB President Paul Chitwood told home office staff and field personnel this week. 2020 marks the 175th anniversary of Southern Baptist mission work around the world.

To commemorate this significant milestone, IMB announced a 175th anniversary campaign. Throughout 2020, IMB will share stories and videos that recognize the movement of God among the nations and honor those who have followed His call to pray, give and go.

Highlights of the campaign include:

- Short stories, videos and photos on IMB's social media channels, beginning in January;
- An interactive timeline on the IMB website, featuring missionary vignettes and short videos of IMB's work by decade, launched in May;
- A photo book containing IMB photographs and stories of God's movement among the nations throughout its history, released in May;
- An interactive experience at IMB's booth at the Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando in June to allow visitors to walk through 175 years of IMB history.

Prayer is also foundational to the campaign. IMB's "175 days of prayer" begins May 11 and will culminate with IMB's week of prayer for international missions Nov. 29-Dec. 6. In preparation, IMB is seeking to enlist at least 1,750 prayer advocates who will commit to pray for specific IMB requests. Each day will feature one request sent as a push notification from the IMB Pray app, accessed at [imb.org/pray](http://imb.org/pray) or the Pray Daily newsletter, or seen through IMB's social media channels. To register as a prayer advocate, please visit: <http://imb.org/175>

In launching the campaign, Chitwood acknowledged the cooperative effort required by Southern Baptists to focus on achieving the vision of Revelation 7:9 of a "vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language."

"Since 1888, Southern Baptists have given approximately \$4.7 billion to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering<sup>®</sup>," Chitwood said. "Since the introduction of the Cooperative Program in 1925, Southern Baptists have contributed almost \$3.6 billion to international missions through that initiative."

As a result of this level of cooperative praying, giving, going and sending, Southern Baptists have sent almost 25,000 missionaries to the nations since 1845. These missionaries have served in 189 countries and represent 228,000 years of service.

Although these stories and statistics are worth celebrating, Chitwood acknowledged that the SBC and the IMB began "in sin and brokenness."

“In 1845, our legacy began in sin and brokenness as Baptists in the South separated from the northern churches over slavery,” Chitwood said. “Only God’s redeeming love and the reconciling power of the gospel could result not only in repentance but in a convention of churches today that is among the most diverse in the world and whose membership includes thousands of African American churches and many other ethnicities. That diversity, from such a regretful beginning, causes this celebration of what God is doing through Southern Baptists to be even more joyous.”

Chitwood continued, “Each generation of Southern Baptists has answered the call to cooperative missions and given their prayers and support to their IMB missionaries. Today, those missionaries continue to journey into difficult and spiritually impoverished places on earth to sow seeds of love and truth and enable the lost to know the saving grace of Jesus.”

“The stories of our past should propel us forward in our commitment to His work with a great sense of urgency,” Chitwood said. “As we look back on 175 years of witness among the nations, may we be inspired and challenged like never before to pray, give, go and send.”

To register as a prayer advocate for IMB’s 175 Days of Prayer, please visit: <http://imb.org/175>

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ann Lovell is editorial design manager for IMB.

The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® is a registered trademark of Woman’s Missionary Union.

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## **Social media provides key to reaching young adults**

**RICMOND, VA** – Young adults of Latin America have grown up wired, as in many other cultures. They use smart phones to interact but not just when they are apart. Young people in the same room text each other, simultaneously following separate chats, interacting over shared photos and videos. They use phones to check webpages for homework assignments and they email one-paragraph reports to teachers who cut to the chase in lectures, preparing students to communicate in the soundbites of a digital world. As they enter the workforce, they use smart phones on the job. And to relax? Video games and movies are on that same mobile device.

IMB missionary Matt Ostertag understands that leading young Latinos to Jesus is likely to happen through their phones. Ostertag and his colleagues are developing a project to flood social media with Christ-centered content that touches issues concerning Latino students and

young adults. The team recognizes the need for a new method of presenting the gospel and is leveraging cyberspace to reach this tech-dominant generation.

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IMB missionary Matt Ostertag understands that leading young Latinos to Jesus is likely to happen through their phones. Ostertag and his colleagues are developing a project to flood social media with Christ-centered content that touches issues concerning Latino students and young adults. The team recognizes the need for a new method of presenting the gospel and is leveraging cyberspace to reach this tech-dominant generation.

Ostertag's team will develop short gospel videos that springboard off current digital conversation topics. For example, in Guadalajara, where Ostertag lives, young people fear violent crime. They also are disillusioned with once-promising politicians who turned out to be corrupt. Ostertag's videos will use this topic as a bridge to the gospel. Videos will include a pop-up window inviting viewers to chat with counselors. Christians will direct viewers to local events, such as evangelistic concerts, where they will hear more about Christ. The campaign's trajectory will eventually connect interested young people to local churches.

Digital content that presents the gospel is relevant not only to people who don't know the Lord. It is also a tool that helps Christians share their faith.

Ostertag describes the Mexican young adults, mostly in their 20-40s, he disciples.

"They don't like to tell stories, they don't like to read much, though they can," Ostertag says.

If disciple-makers use material that connects with young adults' technology-based communication patterns and learning styles, their students "can get the gospel deeper, and they can share it with others," he says.

"The issue is not that urban people don't want to share the gospel," Ostertag emphasizes. "[It's that] they don't know how. They are scared. They feel inadequate in their knowledge." During accountability sessions, when Ostertag asks those he disciples who they have shared the gospel with, they say they need to learn more first. When opportunities come, young people find themselves unable to explain biblical truths they have received from literate or orality-based methods. They grasp enough to embrace the gospel but not enough to articulate it to a peer outside the faith.

“They are not able to learn well enough by the means we are providing to them,” Ostertag confesses.

Discipleship methods need to fit the learning style and worldview orientation of the people missionaries are trying to reach. In the case of urban young adults, incorporating digital content puts the teaching in their grasp, and offering digital methods for sharing biblical teaching equips them to lead others to Jesus.

### **Volunteer opportunities**

There is an urgent need for young people who understand Latin culture, who speak via tech-based methods themselves, and who can create videos that communicate the gospel. Latino or Third Culture Kids, for example, could transmit the gospel via means that reach those speaking fluent tech. We’ve a story to tell to the nations. Let’s tell it in a communicable way. If you have interest in being a part of this approach, please email [infoamericas@imb.org](mailto:infoamericas@imb.org).

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jennifer Waldrep writes for IMB from South America.

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## **Jesus knows sign language**

Sarah\* is odd, and she knows it. As the only Deaf person in a hearing Christian family, she always felt like “the other.” The Deaf in her Indonesian culture are considered inferior, so that’s the way she felt.

Sarah grew up in church, but it was up to her to figure out how to interpret the sermon. In church and other social settings, Sarah was forced read lips and attempt to speak—a difficult task for the Deaf. But she always felt like she was intruding on conversations. She chose, instead, to stay quiet.

Naya Wilder,\* an IMB worker, invited Sarah to a Bible storying camp where Deaf people learn Bible stories through Sign. Sarah’s mother gave permission for Sarah to attend but was skeptical.

“Sarah has grown up in church, but she probably won’t get anything out of the camp. She’s kind of stupid.”

At the camp Sarah saw Bible stories in her language for the first time.

“Does Jesus know Sign language?” she asked Naya.

The truth that God created all languages empowered Sarah to see her language as an instrument to share the gospel. God transformed Sarah from a quiet girl to a bold evangelist among the hearing and the Deaf. Her desire is for everyone to know that God loves them, and that God can use them for His purposes—even people who feel a bit odd.

IMB workers are aware of 100 Sign languages spoken around the world. Jesus knows each one.

Praise God for the almost 7,000 Deaf who heard a gospel witness in 2018 through IMB workers and partners. Of those, 186 new believers were baptized.

*\*Name changed*

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rachel Cohen is an IMB worker.

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## **First-Person: Why we mourn celebrities we've never met**

**ARLINGTON, TX (BP)** – If you were to venture into the deep recesses of my stairwell closet, you would find several boxes labeled "Jared's Basketball Stuff." In one of those boxes is a Kobe Bryant figurine still in its original packaging, one of many pieces of NBA memorabilia I amassed growing up. Kobe Bryant was no ordinary basketball player, and so his was no ordinary figurine. It was a prized collectible. The six-inch statue was my way of feeling close to an NBA superstar who was far away.

Like so many, the news of Kobe's passing stunned me on Sunday. Surely it was some kind of awful prank or unfortunate misreport. As the minutes ticked by it was confirmed by several news outlets that Kobe Bean Bryant, age 41, passed away unexpectedly in a helicopter crash, along with his daughter and several others.

As Sunday afternoon wore on, I found myself profoundly bereaved at Kobe's passing. This wasn't a general sadness, but something deeper and more personal. How can I be so despondent over a person I've never met? And why is anyone ever upset over the unexpected passing of a celebrity they don't personally know?

Judging from the collective reaction and responses since the news broke, it seems clear my sadness is shared by many. Kobe's death is a cultural moment unlike anything we've seen in recent years.

Here are a few brief considerations as I process this most recent celebrity passing.

First, we grieve because celebrities influentially display God's image in man.

Kobe wasn't the only person to pass away yesterday, and I'm not just talking about in the helicopter accident. Some estimates show that roughly 150,000 people die per day in the world, and about two-thirds of these are age-related deaths, meaning they're expected and therefore not as tragic. This means that around 50,000 people died tragically on Sunday.

But of Sunday's 150,000 deaths, Kobe is the only one that left the greater population forlorn, although every one of the 150,000 people who passed away were just as precious. This is because Kobe influentially displayed God's image in man.

Celebrities, through their public lives, become mascots of the imago dei. As their talents bless us, we see God's incredible creative ability displayed in humanity. When a celebrity passes away, we're forced to pause and reflect upon the beauty of life and the impact a person can make in the world.

Second, we grieve because we're reminded that death doesn't discriminate.

We think of celebrities as immortal. We believe they are impervious to normal things like the flu or debt or in this case, a tragic passing. When a celebrity passes away, we're reminded of the potency of the Fall's curse as it manifests itself in death. We feel that if it can happen to a famous person, then there's nothing to stop it from happening to us. So, we hug our loved ones a little tighter the day a celebrity passes away.

In this sense, a celebrity who is seemingly outside the jurisdiction of tragedy suddenly, through tragedy, becomes a reminder of our own fallibility. We're left to grieve their passing as we consider the imminence of our own.

Finally, we grieve because of unfulfilled hope -- and share the hope within us.

Celebrities are celebrities because they spend their lives sharing their gifts with the world. Through media, they are in our homes more than some of our own friends and family. Whether it's a singer, an actor, or in this case, a basketball player, celebrities grace us with their lives. They're like gifts, but their premature passing means the gift can no longer keep giving, and that leaves us feeling empty.

But it's more than this. In Kobe's case, he leaves behind a wife and three young daughters. We grieve for lost celebrities not merely because of unfilled hopes of an album that won't be

produced or a movie that won't be filmed, but because of children that won't be fathered or mothered or spouses that become widowed.

I did not know Kobe Bryant personally, but I grieve him as if I did. And I think that's a good thing. Celebrity deaths have a unique way of reminding us of God's image in man, of showing us the difference we can make with our lives, and that we all need the hope of Christ as we navigate our way through a fallen world.

As followers of Christ, we have a unique opportunity in this moment to share the hope within us. As Kobe's death prompts reflection -- as our friends and family members ponder their own mortality and the frailty of life -- there may be a window of openness to the Gospel. Even as we grieve alongside them, let's be ready to point toward the One who will one day wipe away every tear.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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