

Building bridges

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – In Bob Tasler’s work on restoration, he relates a story that I have heard many times and have read in various publications. It has been around for a long time and its origins are a mystery, but its message is quite apparent.

Once upon a time, two brothers who lived on adjoining farms fell into conflict. It was the first serious rift in their 40 years of working together. It began with a small misunderstanding, grew into a major difference, and finally exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by weeks of silence.

One morning, there was a knock upon John's door. He opened it to find a man with a carpenter's toolbox. "I'm looking for a few days' work," he said. "Perhaps you would have a few small jobs here and there that I could help with? Yes," said the older brother. "I do have a job for you. Look across the creek at that farm. That's my younger brother. Last week, there was a meadow between us, but he took his bulldozer and dug a small river between us. Well, I'm going to do him one better. See that pile of old lumber? I want you to build an 8-foot-high fence between us. Then I won't need to see his place or his face anymore." The carpenter said, "Show me the nails and the tools, and I'll do a good job for you."

The older brother had to go to town, so he left for the day. At sunset, when he returned, his eyes opened wide, and his jaw dropped. There was no fence there at all. The carpenter had built a bridge that stretched from one side of the river to the other, with handrails and all! And his younger brother was coming toward them, his hand outstretched. "You're quite the guy," he said, "after all I've said and done." The two brothers met in the middle and shook each other's hand. They turned to see the carpenter leaving. "No, wait! Stay a few days. I've a lot of other projects for you," said the older brother. "I'd love to," the carpenter said, "but I have many more bridges to build."

When you and I come to the end of our days, just remember this: God won't ask what kind of car we drove, but He will ask how many people we helped get to where they needed to go. He won't ask how big our house was, but He will ask how many people we welcomed into our home. God won't ask what neighborhood we lived in, but He will ask how we treated our neighbors. And He won't ask how many fences we made, but He will ask how many bridges we built.

Building bridges takes time and effort. They don't just happen because we talk about them. Talking is a good start, but if that is all that is done it will have a bad ending. In the crazy, emotionally charged, politically divided and racially explosive day in which we live, how desperately we need to build lasting and loving bridges across the chasms that divide us. We were formed as "one nation under God" and there is only one race that matters and that is the

HUMAN RACE! It's time to stop hating and hurting one another and time to heal. But that will never happen until we learn to forgive.

Since moving to Michigan almost 6 years ago, one of the most difficult issues for me to grasp and understand is how so many in this great state of ours have such a difficult time with forgiveness. It is almost like there is some ancient code that has been written into the DNA of those who are indigenous to this state that if someone ever hurts you or offends you then you somehow have the right to hold an eternal grudge and never forgive them.

Not only do you resolve to be unforgiving to those who offend you, but if they offend or hurt any of your extended family then forgiveness is to be rightfully withheld from them as well. I even know some individuals who have the attitude that forgiveness is just not the manly thing to do. (Pride is a hard demon to deal with.)

Harboring hurt and feelings of ill will is an odious thing to do. It creates in the one who has been offended a bitter spirit that will eventually permeate and saturate every fiber of their being, and cause a hideous metamorphosis. A Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type of transformation can take place. In many it will even change their physical appearance.

I personally know some individuals whose visage has been permanently marred by an unforgiving spirit and a root of bitterness. Just take a good look at some of the folks around you. There is a reason they look like they have been weaned on a pickle or baptized in lemon juice.

There is too little time and too little life left to hold on to and nurse our hurts. Yes, the hurts are real. Yes, the injustices are grievous. This does not in any way belittle or make light of what has been done. But it is long past time for us to build bridges, and restore those broken relationships. It is time to forgive.

Besides, some of us could really use a face lift and cannot afford any more facial damage. Time and age is taking enough of a toll. There is no sense in risking being hit with an ugly stick of unforgiveness.

Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

Hebrews 12:14-15

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 6:14-15 (NKJV)

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.

6 Short Stories in 600 Words

by Dr. Tony L Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – During January, I relished a 90-minute online meeting with the Send Network team in Michigan. I asked each church planting catalysts to describe one person who is approaching church planting then select someone on the screen to pray for that candidate. It was worship time.

For privacy, I will change the name of the candidates.

Tim Shrader, sporting a red St. Louis Cardinal jersey said, “Let me tell you about Darrick. I’m excited about him because he has a great job in Detroit and believes God is calling him to continue his employment while creating a new church. He wants to continue his career while planting because he sees his work site as a mission field.”

Eric Stewart, revealing the wintery scene of his yard through the window behind his chair, spoke about Lyle, from Flint. Eric said, “Lyle wants to put washing machines in the church building he creates in order to provide a safe place for people to spend time. Lyle is in a community filled with need and he wants the church to help restore to the people what God wants them to have.”

Ken Nether, in his smooth, calm voice said, “I’m excited about Michael who has been a longtime friend. He helped us tremendously with the start of Crossover Church. He has been a great partner. He came to me one day and said that God was calling him to start a new church just as we did together with Crossover. We’ve been focusing on that ever since. I love the way God called Michael out to plant a new church in his hometown of Oak Park.”

Matt Thompson, with his boyish looks leaned into the screen with a big smile and said, “God is up to something big with Harrison. He wants to start a church among his people living in the Grand Rapids area who migrated here from Myanmar (Burma). Harrison is burdened for the 2,000 Burmese living near him and he is equally troubled for the people of his homeland. Harrison is working on his Ph.D. so he can prepare people to return to Myanmar as missionaries, and to plant more churches throughout America for the Burmese people.”

Barry Martin, intermittently rocking back and forth in his office-chair and adjusting his cap spoke of Rick with a concern in his voice. “We’re excited about Rick because he is the first planter to be called-out of our church plant even though we’ve partnered with others who came to us to join our residency program. Rick wants to create a new church in Wayne because it’s where he grew up. We believe Rick will have a big impact on his hometown. Rick needs your prayers now because, even though he is in his thirties, during this winter he is having health problems. Please, pray for his healing.”

Darren Greer, with the video connection freezing his image in one place spoke in a strong voice over the audio connection when he said, “We’re excited about Matt. He has been part of one of our established churches here in northern Michigan. He took part in elder training and church leadership has seen continual evidence of Matt’s spiritual progress. During December, Matt preached his first sermon after learning how to prepare from the leader pastor. Matt has indicated to us that God may be calling him to pastor or plant a church. We’re early in the process, discerning God’s will, but we’re happy to watch what God is doing in Matt’s life.”

Would you please, pause and pray for these candidates?

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.

Tools to reach goal of 500 by 2025

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – Our Convention finished 2020 much stronger than any of us imagined as the pandemic spread across our state, nation and world. Michigan Baptist churches demonstrated a resilience that testifies to our enduring dependence on the Lord. We are strategically positioned for Kingdom advance as we implement the 500 Churches by 2021 vision that Pastor Tim Patterson cast at our annual convention last November. Through this compelling vision, God is calling us to punch holes in the darkness!

As we embark on this journey, we are organizing our strengthening and sending ministries to assist churches with tools to implement the Vision. Here is an overview of the themes and resources churches can consider using for the [500 Churches by 2025](#).

Every Church Praying

It is estimated that four out of every five people in Michigan do not have a personal relationship with Jesus. Many have never heard a clear presentation of the Gospel, and some have no one praying for them. Paul's passion for those who need Jesus is our example as he cries out: "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation!" (Romans 10:1).

We are recommending two resources for focused prayer:

- ***Who's Your One?*** challenges and equips believers to pray for and share the Gospel with one person in their lives who needs Jesus. WhosYourOne.com
- ***Bless Every Home*** is a tool churches can use to pray by name for the community that surrounds them. BlessEveryHome.com

Every Church Thriving

500 Churches by 2025 is not just about more churches - it's about healthy churches working together to magnify God and punch holes in the darkness! It starts with "Healthy leaders who strengthen and start churches to advance a Gospel movement."

We are partnering with "Be The Church" out of Chapel Pointe in Hudsonville to strengthen leaders. The heart of "Be The Church" is to see spiritual leaders raised up and sent out to witness regions of the world transformed by the Gospel. By equipping leaders to discover and expand their spiritual voice and influence, hurting churches can experience revitalization and healthy churches can be multiplied. That will fuel the transformation of life for Jesus in communities around the world. BeTheChurch.org

Every Church Equipping

Equipped disciples are critical to mission and ministry advance. We are partnering with Michigan Baptist churches to punch holes in the darkness by providing training to strengthen and start churches.

The Multiplication Pipeline is a resource from the North American Mission board that helps churches train leaders and send their people on mission. It uses simple, proven survey tools and an online training system to identify and train missional leaders within the congregation. Multiply the ministry of your church in your community and beyond. namb.net/pipeline

We will provide Strategic Conferences to equip believers to share the Gospel and make disciples resulting in existing churches being strengthened and new churches started.

Every Church Engaging

Through Evangelism Grants, we will partner with Michigan Baptist churches to saturate the communities around them with the Gospel.

Servant Evangelism is a strategic ministry to serve local communities in the name of Christ and increase opportunities to share the Gospel. Jesus sets the example as a servant. He said,

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:45

Compassion Ministries focus on “Meeting Needs, Changing Lives.” Send Relief provides multiple ideas and opportunities for churches to minister in their communities and beyond. “There are people in your community and around the world who desperately need help. Send Relief provides a way for you to respond directly to these needs in lasting, meaningful ways while sharing the hope of the Gospel.” [SendRelief.org](https://www.sendrelief.org)

Every Church Celebrating!

Michigan Baptists are embracing a vision that will advance God’s Kingdom in our state and beyond. We desire to glorify God as we serve Him together. Our expectation is to celebrate God throughout the journey and especially in 2025 as we see an increase in believers, stronger churches, and 500 churches partnering through our network to advance God’s Kingdom.

For more information on any of these tools just go to www.500churchesby2025.com, or contact me at mike@bscm.org.

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.

Opportunities to shine

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Some of my fondest memories from childhood come from the dark nights in the summertime when we would have a hotdog roast over an open fire. We would roast or usually burn plump juicy hotdogs as well as marshmallows and s'mores, and our hands and face would get really messy and sticky. It was the best!

We would cut the branches off the palmetto bushes and use them as roasting sticks. As we finished-up eating we would take the sticks, put the pointy end in the fire and let it get glowing hot. We would then run around the yard with our stick lights making shapes and circles in the air just like sparklers on the 4th of July.

My dad would always pull-out his harmonica and play gospel songs or whatever came into his head. Inevitably he would play "This Little Light of Mine" as we were playing with our fire sticks and trying to catch lightning bugs. Living in the country, away from the city lights, the darkness could be so thick you could feel it. The intense darkness made the stars, our fire pit, fire sticks and even the lightning bugs extremely visible and bright. Even the smallest ember that would escape from the fire could be easily seen floating high into the dark night.

At the time, I didn't really think about the appropriateness of my dad playing and singing "This Little Light of Mine" against the backdrop of our fire sticks and the darkness. Here, in 2021 that song has taken on a renewed importance and mandate for me. In this current culture or you may call it "This Present Darkness" (also a book title), it's easy to become discouraged and overwhelmed by the darkness. It can lead to feelings of futility and ineffectiveness in our perceived inability to shine bright enough to make a difference. However, the same Jesus who identifies Himself as the Light of the world wants to shine through me.

No matter how limited I consider my influence or my little light to be, Jesus says SHINE!
Matthew 5:14-16 says this:

"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

My mission is to SHINE! No matter how little or big my sphere of influence. As a child of God, my mission is to SHINE - at home, at work, at church, at play, on social media - in every context. Just SHINE so everyone will see Jesus and give Him the glory. When we love and value our neighbor no matter their race, religion or political preference, we SHINE!

The darker the night, the brighter the day. You may feel your light is not very effective - don't underestimate the LIGHT of the world! Just be faithful to SHINE. I believe as individuals and as

members of the body of Christ (the church) we have the greatest opportunity to SHINE brighter than we ever have had in recent history. In Christ, we are the light of the world. Let's light it up one little light at a time!

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.

5 Reasons to Give to the Annie Armstrong Offering

by Dr. Garth Leno

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – Stewardship is not just about money. It involves faithfully managing everything that God has placed in your charge for the advance of the Kingdom. Open-handed giving is a powerful principle of God, designed to be a blessing both to the giver and the recipient of the gift. It is the genuine, supernatural overflow of a generous heart that desires to express the love and glory of God.

Why give?

Because we love people.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV). What motivated God to sacrifice His son was not a sense of indebtedness, or obligation. The love He had for us compelled Him to send Jesus in order to meet our most pressing need. If love for others was what prompted God to give, then should it not be our primary motivation for giving as well? With spiritual maturity we should become less attached to our possessions and more concerned with meeting the needs of others and planting churches everywhere for everyone.

So that we can be a blessing to others.

God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:2. “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” I will bless you...and *you will be a blessing* to others. This is our privilege and calling as people of God.

To preach the Gospel.

It takes money to reach lost people with the Gospel. We pay the salaries of pastors and missionaries. Evangelism, church planting, developing residencies, strengthening churches, SEND Relief – it all takes money! If we are committed to spreading the Gospel, then we have no choice but to support it with our finances, and that includes the [Annie Armstrong Easter Offering](#) and [Lottie Moon Christmas Offering](#).

It is a biblical principle.

There is a force of financial blessing that is released in our lives by the giving of our money. In 2 Corinthians 9:6 the Bible says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” Our giving is the seed which awaits a harvest at some later date. Our level of harvest through the BSCM and SEND Michigan may be directly related to our level of giving to our local churches, the cooperative program, and the Annie Armstrong offering. The [Annie Armstrong Easter Offering](#) is the primary way we support mission efforts in North America.

To fill a void.

As important as money is, it will never fill the void that people have inside them. Ever since Adam fell, and sin entered the world, man has been seeking fulfillment in external things. He has tried to rebuild the Garden of Eden by his efforts, looking to find satisfaction in pleasures, possessions, and status. The void can only be filled with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Turn to Jesus! Nothing else will satisfy the inward yearnings of our souls. But once our hearts have been filled with the Spirit of God, and Jesus lives in and through our lives, then giving becomes a joyful ministry of obedience to the Word of God. Giving gives meaning to life!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garth Leno lives in Windsor, Ontario Canada, with his wife and one daughter, Jamie. Two more children, Nathan and Kristin, are married with families of their own. Garth is the senior pastor at The Gathering which he planted with friends in 2014. He is also on the Send Canada Advisory Board. He has a master’s degree in church planting from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and D.Min from Bethel Theological Seminary.

Turning point

by David Longstaff

GRAYLING, MI – The summer of 2020 was a turning point in our church, as God used us to reach thousands in our community through a weekly food truck ministry. Our dedicated group of volunteers were instrumental in carrying out the Lord's work to the community of Grayling.

Each week, a truck from the Eastern Michigan Food Bank arrived, and our volunteers unloaded the truck, packed boxes and bags for the needy. They worked tirelessly all morning and afternoon every Thursday in rain, wind and extreme heat. They served snacks, filled trunks with fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, meats, and canned foods, and also shared Christ and offered prayer to those driving through.

As the summer came to a close, our team brainstormed on what more could be done. This led to a vision for the future that will include a food pantry, thrift store & donation center, and a mission center that will house up to 12 people. It is our desire to offer a hand up in place of a handout. The mission's Christ-centered program will involve Bible study, job coaching, life skills, and require service to the church and in turn the community. The new building will also include an event center with additional classrooms, as we outgrow our current space.

It is our plan, if the Lord allows, to have the foundation set within one year, with the project completed in three years. We know that this will take much dedication, volunteer hours, manpower, and funds. We ask you to pray for God's provision in fulfilling His plan for Grayling Baptist Church. It is our heart to serve the lost and needy in our community and share the love of Christ with them in this tangible way.

Last summer we also had the privilege to host Tim & Krista Morris, missionaries who hooked up their RV behind the church. They were such a blessing to many. From prayer, to visitation, to grounds upkeep, and much more, we truly appreciated their service to the Lord and our church. We are seeking another couple for the upcoming summer, so contact me if you are interested.

I will leave you with this life-changing scripture from 1 John 3:16-18: "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dave Longstaff has been ministering in northern Michigan for more than ten years. God has allowed him, his wife Jennifer, and their five children to plant four churches in the U.S. and assisted in planting a church in Togo, Africa. He has been serving at Grayling Baptist Church for four years.

Your church needs a social media policy

by Matt Ward

THOMSON, GA – 2020 has taught us many things, not the least of which is that Christians don't have enough guidance for how to use social media. We like to think that we can say, "Christian, just be smart with social media," but that's not very helpful. And it hasn't been very effective.

There are only a few webpages that approach social media from a Christian perspective; our church thought there should be more. What follows is our draft of potential guidelines for what a Christian should consider when using social media. I've also included two additional lists: some of what the Bible has to say about communication, and some of what secular heavy hitters have to say about social media.

Consider these guidelines as a starting point for a discussion in your church about how to help your members engage social media. We incorporated our church's values into these guidelines; you could easily do the same for your church.

Social media guidelines for churches

We have access to far more people in the digital world than in our physical neighborhood. We *should* be using our social media presence and influence to engage our world with truth, hope, and the good news of Jesus Christ. In fact, with social media, we can think of the entire world as our neighbor! Most churches have websites, good tools for disseminating information. But social media – stories, pictures, observations – connects more strongly with more people.

In using social media, we should remember two things. First, it is in the "as we go" part of our lives governed by Christ's Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20:

Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Second, social media is communication. Everything the Bible says about communication is true of digital communication. Consider James 3:9-10:

With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in God's likeness. Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers and sisters, these things should not be this way.

We need to treat every tweet and post and pic with the same care and consideration as our face-to-face words. But it is not always clear how we should do that! Below is a proposal of social media guidelines, organized by obligation.

But we should do it wisely

We expect every church member to pay attention to all of these guidelines because we are all, first and foremost, ambassadors for Christ. And that comes with a high expectation from God Almighty Himself. Paul summarized in Philippians 2:14-16,

Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world, by holding firm to the word of life.

We have a high obligation to use social media with care and caution. Sadly, many Christians seem to think that God's expectations for us as His children do not apply to our social media use! That's simply not true.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Ward is the associate pastor at First Baptist Church Thomson.

Making sure churches cover their bases for pastor allowances

by Max Herr

FRESNO, CA – Every year, churches need to approve housing allowances for eligible ministers as well as accountable reimbursement plans for their pastors and other employees. Many churches are still doing things incorrectly by giving their pastors undocumented auto allowances and improper reimbursements for personal health insurance.

Income tax-free reimbursements for individual health insurance premiums were prohibited beginning January 1, 2014, with the full implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as Obamacare. Churches can be fined up to \$36,500 per year (\$100/day) for violating this provision. However, beginning in 2020, changes to the Department of Labor and IRS regulations regarding Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) plans now permit churches to adopt an Individual Contribution Health Reimbursement Arrangement (ICHRA) which allows churches to reimburse employees for up to 100% of their insurance premiums as a tax-free benefit. The church must adopt a compliant plan document and **cannot** reimburse employees for health insurance premiums subsidized with Advance Premium Tax Credits obtained by purchasing individual health insurance through Covered California.

Despite changes to tax law in the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017*, many churches continue to provide pastors and other employees with a monthly auto allowance. These flat-dollar payments are given without requiring employees to keep track of and report their actual ministry miles to the church. When that is true, such allowances are known as nonaccountable reimbursement plans, and those plans were prohibited beginning January 1, 2018. All such payments under a nonaccountable reimbursement plan must be added to taxable income and reported on the employee's Form W-2.

The proper way to reimburse pastors and other employees for the business use of their personal auto is to adopt an annual accountable reimbursement plan. This requires a specific line item in the church's budget and/or a resolution passed by the church Board of Directors or the church at-large authorizing such payments. Business use of one's auto may be reimbursed at the rate of \$0.575 per mile in 2020. That rate is being reduced to \$0.560 in 2021. Commuter miles – driving between work and home – and other personal driving cannot be reimbursed. All miles must be strictly accounted for, and may be accomplished with a written log of ministry miles driven, starting and ending odometer readings and a description of the purpose of the trip. There are several smartphone apps for this purpose which simplifies the reporting process.

Few pastors are provided with a church-owned parsonage for housing. Instead, most pastors must purchase or rent their homes. The Internal Revenue Code provides for the ability of ministers to receive a housing allowance as an income tax-free benefit. This privilege was upheld by the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals when it ruled against the Freedom From Religion Foundation in early 2020, and it is unlikely to be overturned in the future – the decision was not appealed to the US Supreme Court. A pastor can receive up to 100 percent of his compensation as housing allowance.

Note: SBC pastors who contribute a portion of their taxable income to the GuideStone Church Retirement Plan may later withdraw some or all their retirement funds as tax-free housing allowance. Normally, all pre-tax contributions to a qualified retirement plan are fully taxable when withdrawn. Senior pastors who contribute at least \$50 per month to their GuideStone retirement account, and whose churches contribute at least \$50 per month through CSBC for the Cooperative Program, also receive the GuideStone Protection Benefit at no additional cost.

However, for a church to provide housing allowance to its pastors or other ministers, it must also specifically provide for this in its annual budget and/or pass a resolution authorizing such payments. The allowable allowance is the lesser of the minister's actual housing expense, including mortgage payments, utilities, property taxes, maintenance, insurance, and even replacement of household furnishings, or the fair rental value of the home as a furnished, utilities-paid residence. The church should provide the minister with a worksheet to calculate his/her permissible allowance in advance. Although the amount of housing allowance may be adjusted at any time during the year, it **CANNOT** be granted retroactively – a minister cannot say to the church in December, "I should have received \$25,000 of my compensation as housing allowance this year." Housing allowance may only be approved prospectively.

Finally, the IRS introduced a new Form W-4 in 2020. Existing employees were not required to submit the form in 2020. But any new or existing employee who did not submit a new W-4 to the church in 2020 must do so in 2021. The new W-4 has worksheets designed to more accurately determine the number of tax exemptions a taxpayer may claim to avoid being underwithheld for the year.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Max Herr is the ministry specialist for Human Resources and Church Compliance for the California Southern Baptist Convention. Used with permission from [CSBC.org](https://www.csbc.org).

Send Detroit update - January 2021

See what God has done in 2020 and how the new year in Detroit is getting started by His grace!

What is Send Detroit?

Send Detroit is church planting strategy that covers a region of 4.7 million in population and 5 counties (including Essex county across the Detroit River in Canada). Detroit is known as the Motor City by the world and continues to be a major influence in the automotive industry. Since 2013, we have seen God work in the planting of 39 new churches. We have continued to see God answer the prayer of Luke 10:2 to send out laborers into his harvest as He raises up leaders to answer His call. It is encouraging to recognize that 90% of these leaders are indigenous to Detroit. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Commonwealth of Faith - "Rooted in Redford"

The Commonwealth of Faith Church in Redford, Michigan has been a consistent model of compassion and care as they have ministered to their community throughout the pandemic. Pastor Torion Bridges leads the church who prepares up to 300 hot meals weekly and giving away thousands of pounds of produce, dairy products, meat and other groceries. Cars lined up each week from June through December. This new church was also able to host a free fair for the community and be a community site for drive-up COVID-19 testing. The church is engaging more servant-leaders and standing as a beacon of Christ's love in Redford.

Sending from within

We continue to see new church planters answering the call and being equipped and sent into the harvest. In November, Ryan Cabildo was assessed and approved as a church planter apprentice out of Mile City Church (Plymouth, MI) with the aim of planting Lanterns Church in Wayne, MI. Though Mile City Church has launched 4 other church plants out of their new church, Ryan is the first planter who came to faith and has been discipled from the ministry of the church. Pray for Ryan in his journey!

Send Network Orientation

Also in November, the Baptist State Convention of Michigan hosted a watch-party style Send Network Orientation for Michigan and Ohio church planters. Included in that group were David Clark, Malcolm Griswold, Jon Hackett and Maki Umakoshi from the Send Detroit Network.

Christmas care for church planters

Over the Christmas holiday, we were able to care for church planting families by sending packages with Send Detroit hats, coffee mugs and coffee gift cards. As you see their smiling faces, select the link on their pictures and pray for these men, their families and their churches.

Gathering struggles

Pray also for many church plants in Send Detroit who continue to struggle to find places to meet in doors and in-person. Most of our schools and community centers have been closed due to locally mandated COVID-19 regulations. Among the affected are Treasuring Christ Church (Ann Arbor), Rhiza Church (Ann Arbor), The City Church (Ypsilanti), Transformation Church (Waterford), Life-Giver Church (Windsor).

Trails Church launch - Sunday, Jan 10

Pray also for the Trails Community Church (Farmington Hills, MI) led by Phillip Box, who held online public launch of services on January 10. Phillip and his wife Kat prayerfully planned this launch along with team members that came with them out of their sending church, Mile City Church.

Send Network Gathering

Mile City Church, Plymouth, MI
March 17, 2021

Join us for the Send Network Gathering that will encourage, inspire and equip you and your team to run into the harvest so together we can plant churches everywhere for everyone. We will have our own local church planters and pastors sharing with us!

Schedule

9:00 - 10:00 a.m. Check-in and Fellowship
10:00 - 11:15 a.m. Main Session #1
11:15 - 12:30 p.m. Lunch and Hangout
12:30 - 1:30 p.m. Breakout #1
1:45 - 2:45 p.m. Breakout #2
3:00 - 4:15 p.m. Main Session #2
4:15 - 5:00 p.m. Wrap-Up

Register at sendnetworkgathering.com

NAMB missionary reaches broken people with unique approach

by Brandon Elrod

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (BP) – Mo Wildey was working as a consultant for an inner-city parachurch organization and became an elder at a nondenominational church with a strong focus on church planting. When some of the work the inner-city ministry was conducting resulted in a need for a new church, Wildey approached his own church for help.

“The church told me, ‘We will be involved with the church plant if you’re leading the effort,’” Wildey recalled.

So, about seven years ago, Wildey and his wife, Susan, moved into an inner-city apartment building. Two murders took place just before they moved in, and Wildey described the complex as a place where an individual could buy whatever he or she wanted, “substances as well as people.”

From there, he started to develop a model for reaching broken people, people who may never enter a church building.

“To reach the lost we have to be able to go where they are,” Wildey said. “We need to meet them where they are and build a relationship with them, which leads to an opportunity to talk about Jesus in their purview. Now you’re talking about really being able to reach the lost.”

Wildey developed the plan to put together a community engagement hub that would provide a place to help those fighting substance abuse and addiction. As they did so, they would plant

churches among those broken people. Wildey calls his church planting movement the Yeshua Society.

Callen “Cal” Ealy, Yeshua Society’s chief operating officer, is one of the lives that was radically changed by the ministry. Ealy was an alcoholic who had lost his business, his kids and his wife because of his substance abuse. Wildey met him at a Salvation Army shelter after Ealy had come close to taking his own life. He wound up committing his life to Christ and getting baptized.

As Ealy went through the Yeshua Society’s recovery program, he told Wildey that he was all in and that he would do whatever God wanted him to do with his life.

He neared the end of the program and informed Wildey that he had been offered a high-paying marketing job.

“I told him that I was happy for him and that I hoped he would stay in touch,” Wildey said. “He said to me, ‘Why are you saying that? It’s like you’re saying goodbye. I told you that I said I would do whatever God told me to do, and God wants me to be with you guys.’”

Since going through the program, Ealy has remarried his wife and reconnected with his estranged kids.

While Wildey was seeing God move, he was not connected to a larger network of churches, but in 2017 he and his wife took a vacation that would change that.

They needed some time away, but they also wanted to be intentional with their break from ministry. So, they looked for a Christian conference to attend and discovered NAMB’s Send Conference in Long Beach, Calif.

“We had no idea what it was, but it looked like there were some pretty good people speaking at the conference,” Wildey said.

During the conference, Wildey learned about NAMB’s Send Network and its focus on church planting and multiplication of churches.

“When I went to Long Beach, I didn’t know what Send Network was,” Wildey said, “but I’ve never run across an organization, a group of people, who have a greater desire to plant churches for the right reasons – building the Kingdom of God.”

With Send Network’s help, Wildey has planted a church in San Diego that follows his model – finding and reaching those in need within a community, helping them and making disciples. There are opportunities to go international.

“What we’re doing now, we could not do without Send Network,” Wildey said.

Including Indianapolis and San Diego, there are 200 people plugged into the Yeshua Society in some way. Of those, 75 either attend in person or are going through discipleship training. They began with their current model in 2019.

“I think it’s time for all of us to be open to new ways, if you will, as America is going through what it’s going through,” Wildey said. “If we are going to reach the lost, we need to be open to new ways. Of course, what we’re doing is not new. It’s the way that the church in Acts got started.”

Wildey is one of 51 missionaries or chaplains featured in NAMB’s 2021 prayer calendar, which can be ordered at nambstore.com or by calling 866-407-6262. The calendar is also available in a [downloadable version](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

When God's plans are better

by Michael Goforth

PORT AUSTIN, MI – It was our biggest outreach event of the year...and it was canceled. At least that’s what we thought

The Background

We are a church plant in the tiny town of Port Austin, Michigan. If you hold out your handy map of the state and look at the tip of your left thumb, that’s where we are. A charming beach town on the shores of beautiful Lake Huron with a year-round population of 600. (And I’m convinced Hallmark should film their next Christmas movie here.)

God has blessed our church plant with a beautiful little building, and we are very thankful. However, when I say it’s little, I mean it. In fact, the people of Port Austin literally call it, “...the little white church on the hill.”

But every year on Christmas Eve, more than 100 people cram into that little church building, including many first-time visitors. Together, we celebrate the One who came to rescue us from sin, and reconcile us to God on that very first Christmas.

Unfortunately, an event like this with no form of social distancing would be impossible in 2020. We couldn't offer multiple services for a variety of reasons, so we simply decided to rent a larger building.

But when December came around, COVID-19 cases in our area spiked and the building we had lined up became unavailable. After exhausting our options and coming up with a lot of bad ideas, I was pretty convinced we would have to cancel.

Another Bad Idea

It was at this point that I came up with another bad idea. What if we met outside? I mean, how charming would a Christmas Eve service be in 20 degree weather with 25 mph winds coming off of Lake Huron?

With a lot of hesitancy and the attitude of, "anything is better than canceling," we moved forward with the idea. I reached out to the wonderful folks at our village hall and they graciously let us host the service next to the town Christmas tree on the village green.

This is the part of the story where our church members came in clutch. They took the initiative to line up fire pits, secure a portable sound system, help set up a makeshift stage, and so much more. It was awesome to see the people of God doing the work of the ministry. (Eph. 4:11-12)

The Big Day

The day came around and we eagerly anticipated 12 people would show up. I'm slightly exaggerating, but the weather didn't seem conducive to many more. That's when God stepped in and completely exceeded our expectations. (He has a knack for that sort of thing. Eph. 3:20)

I was amazed as the village green of our little town filled with people. It was the most well-attended Christmas Eve service we have ever had. People who happened to be walking by decided to join us and others pulled up in their cars to listen.

On that cold December night, I had the incredible privilege of proclaiming the good news of great joy over a loudspeaker in the heart of downtown Port Austin. Jesus was lifted high, and people who may have never set foot in a church building heard the gospel that night.

The Takeaway

This experience was added to a large and ever-growing list of mine labeled: "God's plans are always better." I don't know what 2021 is going to look like for your ministry, but I'll echo what many have already said this year, "Don't put your hope in 2021."

It may just be that in the sovereign plan of God, this year will be another difficult one. We may have to set aside plans, make adjustments, or even cancel some things. But we know that our

Father is always working, even in the mess. (John 5:17) We would be wise to look for God's activity, enter in, and trust that no matter what happens: His plans are always better.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Goforth is the lead pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Port Austin, Michigan. He led a group to plant this church in November of 2016 with a vision to spread a passion for the glory of Jesus in Port Austin and beyond. He and his wife, Shannon, have been married for six years.

Prepare for takeoff

by Jonah Fair

SHELBY TOWNSHIP, MI – “Prepare for Takeoff.” Hearing these words from the captain, I begin to imagine what we must look like in the eyes of our Creator as our plane begins to ascend 30,000 feet into the sea of blue and white above. With every hundred feet of ascension, I can't help but think of heartbreak and unrest that currently rests below as the earth groans from the current worldwide pandemic and social unrest.

I can't imagine what we look like through God's eyes.

As I look around the cabin of the plane, I notice many responses as the plane continues the ascension higher... and higher. To my left, a man sits slouched as his baseball hat attempts to cover his eyes. Across the aisle, a woman is looking intently at the man sitting next to her with an apparent desire for comfort from him in an anxious circumstance. In front of me, I see many other people of all ages, races, and creeds stare out of the little windows of the aircraft, each holding onto their own unique and individual thoughts, worries, insecurities, prayers, and concerns... yet our Creator cares for each and every one with utmost passion.

30,000 feet never fails to remind me how small we are, but how GREAT the Father's love is for us!

I can only imagine the sorrow that our Creator must feel to know the brokenness that plagues us all. Tears swell in my eyes thinking of the fragile state of existence we live in. We are loved more than we can ever comprehend. I can't imagine the sorrow our Creator feels to zoom in to view His precious daughter on her knees heartbroken and CRYING out for relief in a house below! I begin to try to imagine the sorrow He feels to see a husband and wife venomously yell at each other with hurt and insecurity spewing from the mouths that He created! Looking out into a sea of blue & white ... ALL I CAN SEE IS GRACE!! Despite all of our brokenness, WHILE we

were still sinners Jesus died for us! (Romans 5:8) Tears flood my eyes as my perspective changes from our failures... to our Savior!

Whether heart-broken or in awe and wonder, we have a Creator, Savior, and Sustainer *relentlessly* trying to capture our attention and shift our perspective from ourselves and our brokenness, to His Kingdom and His AMAZING Grace that surrounds us day-to-day EVEN IN THE DARK SEASONS OF THE SOUL! We spend so much time fighting a war that has already been won. Through it all, the sun never stops shining.

***My friend, you are not alone.
May we hold on to the Light that:
Never leaves
Never hides
Never surrenders.***

Jesus, help our gaze be on You. Help us love as You love. Help us forgive as You forgive. Help us see ourselves, and others, as You do. These days matter. Forgive us for our shortcomings and lead us in Your way everlasting. Give us a humble heart.

And through the darkness and the turbulence, may our heavy hearts reflect on this beloved hymn:

*"O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see?
There's a light for a look at the Savior, and life more abundant and free!
Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace..."*

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."

John 1:5 (NLT)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonah Fair is the Student Pastor at Lakepointe Church in Shelby Township, Michigan. He also hosts *The Colorinchaos Podcast*.

No Wasted Opportunities

by Garth Leno

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – Although God’s work of redemption has begun, and his victory is sure, we still live in a world that is terribly broken. It does not function the way God planned when he put all things in place by the power of his word. The Coronavirus pandemic has turned the spotlight on that truth and on the church, like nothing else in recent history. Let’s not waste this opportunity.

No passage of Scripture underscores the current brokenness of our world and our culture better than Romans 8. The Coronavirus pandemic magnifies the *brokenness* we see all around us. The creation is *subjected to futility*. It’s in *bondage to corruption*, groaning in *the pains of childbirth*. There is a constant, merciless, unforgiving senselessness to life in a fallen world. The pandemic amplifies this ever-present futility a thousand-fold for most of us and most of our churches.

The Gathering in Windsor, Ontario is a Send Network church planted by God’s grace in 2014. We are determined to focus on the gospel and not waste the virus. We don’t want to squander the opportunities God gives us to share the love and majesty of Jesus *because* of the virus, not *in spite* of it.

As a local church we aim to move and minister every day according to the grace of God.

We have been able to provide some financial support to an assisted living residence in our city where many residents tested positive for Covid. We came alongside two church plants in our area and presented them with a cheque. We gifted more money to a local organization that works with the homeless.

The Gathering Church celebrated an anniversary during the pandemic, and we gave away gifts to every car that stopped in for our Drive-By Birthday Party. At Christmas our generous people collected dozens and dozens of requested items like coats, mittens, hats, scarves, sweaters, food, and hygiene items for two groups that minister to people in the downtown core of our city.

We assembled “baskets of encouragement” and delivered them to people struggling with the lockdown, and later, with the help of a locally-owned bakery, we made up bags of cookies with a letter of encouragement and delivered them to some of our most vulnerable friends to remind them of the hope we have in Jesus. Recently, we provided lunch for eight group homes in the area and for the staff and nurses who are working at one of the largest Covid vaccination centers here.

We are seeking God’s wisdom daily to understand how he wants us to address the fear people have about the Coronavirus. We don’t want to waste the virus!

So, we seek His wisdom to understand how we can speak to people boldly about something far worse than COVID-19, and that is their sin which can result, not in a fever and chills, but eternal separation from God our Father.

If you are infected with the coronavirus, you may experience severe symptoms and even end up on a ventilator. In comparison, the consequence of living in sin, without hope, and without God (Ephesians 2:12) is far worse. The wages of sin is death – sure and certain eternal separation from God.

So we must not waste this opportunity to share the love of Jesus with as many as possible. God has opened a door for us (1 Corinthians 16:9) to speak to people openly, and many times they begin the conversation with fear and worry. We know One who can help. Let's guide the conversation to Him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garth Leno lives in Windsor, Ontario Canada, with his wife and one daughter, Jamie. Two more children, Nathan and Kristin, are married with families of their own. Garth is the senior pastor at The Gathering which he planted with friends in 2014. He is also on the Send Canada Advisory Board. He has a master's degree in church planting from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and D.Min from Bethel Theological Seminary.

Adapt and Available: Allowing God to use us

by Kevin Hester

ST. JOSEPH, MI – These are different times that we are living in. A lot has changed in our country and in the world over the past year. As the world changes our strategies for evangelism must change, too. Like Paul said he became all things to all men, so that he might win some.

Because evangelism has been a big concern and a deep passion of mine, I have had to learn over the years to be adaptable, and to be willing to try many unconventional things in order to open doors to share the message of the gospel with the unsaved. I've tried many different things in my community to share the Gospel. I have used photography, coaching sports teams, community events, and many other means to try and make opportunities to share Christ with individuals.

A few years ago, God opened the door for me to become a part of our local Law Enforcement as a Berrien County Sheriff's Deputy and a St. Joseph Public Safety officer. While the training I

must pass periodically are challenging for me, by God's grace I continue to pass them so that I can continue to serve Him as I serve our community.

Because of God's perfect timing, I have been able to be at the right place at just the right time to pull drowning victims from Lake Michigan, to pull an injured person from a devastating car crash, and even talk people out of suicide. Most importantly God has opened doors for me to share the Gospel with many people from officers to convicts. I have even had the privilege of baptizing fellow officers in our beautiful Lake Michigan. I have also become acquainted with judges, attorneys, others working in our criminal justice system, and even those who have found themselves on the wrong side of the law who now watch our sermons online and seek me out for counsel when they face trials in their own lives. It hasn't been easy or comfortable. I have had to overcome my own fear as I navigate the dangers of law enforcement, but I am thankful that God has been able to use me to help others physically and spiritually, and to uphold His law and man's laws.

Here are some valuable lessons that He has taught me along the way.

1. With God all things are possible.
2. Don't fear
3. He is able to do more than we can think or ask.
4. We make our own plans, but God is the One who directs our paths.

During these difficult and quickly changing times, it's so important that we remain willing to adapt as our ministry environment changes. We know as the coming of Christ draws nearer and nearer that sharing the Gospel is going to become more challenging, and will require that we are willing to try things that we thought we would never do. We need to be bold with the Gospel, and fearless as it relates to personal safety and comfort.

Most importantly, we must be willing to walk in faith realizing that if we will only make ourselves available in some way, that God will do more than we could ever think or imagine that He would. Whether you are a pastor or a lay worker, please pray and consider how God wants to use you outside of the four walls of your church to reach those in your community with the soul saving message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Hester is the Pastor of The Shore Church in St. Joseph, Michigan. He and his wife Mary reside in St. Joseph and have 8 children, (4 of which are still at home). Kevin is also a Berrien County Sheriff Deputy and St. Joseph Public Safety Officer.

Life Pursuit: Couple clings to hope on adoption journey

by Meredith Flynn

MT. VERNON, IL – “Are you sitting down?”

When adoption specialist Regina Thompson called Jennifer Money in October 2019, she knew what she had to say was potentially life-changing. Money and her husband, Daniel, had recently adopted a little boy after years of struggling through an often difficult process.

Now, Thompson and Baptist Children’s Home and Family Services had another opportunity for the Money family—a baby would be born that evening, and would arrive in immediate need of a family. The couple only had an hour or two to decide what to do. After a few additional phone calls, the Moneys drove to the hospital, where they were handed hour-old Asher Brave.

“We had been praying about this for years,” Jennifer said. The family, who attend Ozark Baptist Church, pushed through the fear and uncertainty of the unexpected second adoption with hard-earned faith in the God who had made their son in his image.

“One thing we know is he’s the giver of life,” Jennifer said. “He knit him together in his mother’s womb, and he had a plan for this little boy.”

She called their adoption story a “double miracle.”

Joyful, painful journey

Regina Thompson has served 30 years with Baptist Children’s Home and Family Services. As project manager of the agency’s Faith Adoptions ministry, she helps couples complete the home study process, which involves several hours of interviews. As a licensed child welfare agency, BCHFS can also place children in adoptive homes.

Thompson works with both birth mothers and adoptive families in Illinois, which is how she came to meet the Moneys.

As a young married couple, Daniel Money used to joke that he and Jennifer would have 10 kids. Their oldest daughter, Abigayle, is in college now. Eight years after her birth and a struggle through infertility, the Moneys welcomed a second daughter, Anna. But severe complications after the birth left Jennifer unable to have more biological children.

Jennifer said she struggled for a while after that, grieving something she wasn’t going to have. But God intervened. “I remember the day he opened our eyes to see that he wasn’t absent in our pain or suffering, but that he was literally in the midst of it,” she said, her voice breaking. God had a bigger picture, a bigger plan, she said. “When I rested in that, there was so much freedom, and so much life that was given.”

God's plan for life is at the center of BCHFS's ministry to families across Illinois. At Angels' Cove Maternity Center in Mt. Vernon, they provide a place to live for mothers and babies, as well as parenting education, counseling, and family care. Across the street, the newly opened GraceHaven pregnancy resource clinic offers counseling to expectant parents and free ultrasound services.

Adoption is both a joyful and a grief-filled process, Thompson said. The hardest part of what she does is seeing couples grieve over infertility, and birth mothers grieve over an extraordinarily difficult choice. But, she said, "There's joy from the grief of the one making the sacrifice." There's joy over knowing a child will have a loving home.

In 2013, the Moneys started the adoption process, with Thompson helping them complete their home study. Soon after they completed it and the required training, they were chosen by a birth mom to adopt her baby girl. But at the hospital, the mother decided not to go through with the adoption. In the months that followed, the Moneys heard about several other children, but the birth parents chose other adoptive families.

"You have to stay grounded in the faith and where God has placed you," Jennifer said. "For us, it was like, 'God has a plan.' Whether we get to take this one home or not, we are compelled to keep going forward in it."

Knit together

The next year, another mom chose the Moneys to adopt her son. The couple sat with her at the hospital for 30 hours, but they knew she wasn't ready to let him go. They gave her all the things they had for the baby, who turned four last year. The Moneys still pray for him and his mom.

The difficult experience was followed by a period of silence, the couple said. At the same time, abortions were increasingly easy to procure. The family went to St. Louis to protest Planned Parenthood. They also decided to cast a wider net, signing up with a Christian adoption agency and increasing their fundraising for an adoption. Still, any possibilities eventually came up empty.

The process was wearisome, Jennifer said, and they were getting older. With their home study set to expire in February 2019, the couple decided not to renew it. After following through for several years, they thought God was saying no.

She was waiting for her daughter to finish a violin lesson when she got a call from an acquaintance who knew of a baby due in February. The mother wanted to choose adoption, and the Moneys' friend asked if they would be interested. On Feb. 26, they were at the hospital when Abraham was born. "It was the most bittersweet thing we've ever walked through," Jennifer said. A birth is typically joyous, she said, but the couple was guarded because of past disappointments. And they were watching Abraham's mother grieve too. When she was

released from the hospital, the Moneys gave her a ride home. Then, they took Abraham home with them.

The couple got to know their son's birth mother well through the private adoption process, and still schedule visits for her and Abraham. Jennifer recounted a conversation that cemented their connection, when the young woman said she knew God is the creator of life, and abortion was not an option for her despite very challenging circumstances.

"From the point that I heard that, it knit me closer to her," Jennifer said. "And we would be in love with this boy together."

'Relentless trust'

The Moneys finalized Abraham's adoption on Sept. 16, 2019. Two weeks later, Thompson called and asked the fateful question. "Are you sitting down?"

BCHFS had gotten a call that day about a mother in labor who wanted to place her baby for adoption. "Our family and friends I'm sure thought that it was a little crazy," Jennifer said of the possibility of a second adoption so soon after the first. But the couple trusted that God's plan was perfect. Now, Jennifer said, "We can't imagine our life without Asher."

Asher has since met his birth mom and extended family, and the Moneys pray everyone they've met through their long process will eventually come to know Jesus. Their years-long adoption journey has inspired what Jennifer called "relentless trust" in God, whose plans can't be thwarted or changed.

"I wouldn't change any of it, at all," she said. "Even our ages, where we are now.

"His timing is perfect."

Even now, it's easy to tell the story and forget the very real struggles and darkness they walked through, Daniel said. It's not for the faint of heart, he added.

"It's going to be hard no matter what. But he is always good. He's always right. He's faithful."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meredith Flynn is the Managing Editor of the Illinois Baptist. Used with permission from the Illinois Baptist.

First Person: Prepare yourself and your church for the missionary task

by Todd Lafferty

RICHMOND, VA (BP) – We might not know what to expect for 2021, but we do know that God is still moving and Southern Baptists need to be prepared to answer the call to reach the nations.

At the International Mission Board (IMB), we've been so grateful to hear from individuals and churches who remain committed to using their gifts, skills and experiences to share the Gospel, make disciples and plant churches. We're thankful for each of you because there will never be enough missionaries from any country to complete the job of reaching the unreached with the Gospel.

One of IMB's strategies is to stay focused on the Core Missionary Task (CMT). This includes entry to a people group or country, evangelism among non-believers, disciple making of believers, church planting, leadership development and, finally, exit to partnership. This final step is crucial to leaving the task in the faithful hands of local church leaders and national partners.

The great thing about the missionary task is that there are opportunities for short-term teams to engage in every aspect. Let me share with you three quick insights I learned about short-term teams and partnerships while serving almost 29 years overseas.

Partner with IMB missionaries as soon as possible.

Joining existing work can multiply your efforts. Missionaries are uniquely situated on the front lines to direct you and your teams to the most strategic work that can lead to long-term results.

Here's an example of what that looked like for one church in Arkansas. This church chose an unengaged, unreached people group and committed to pray. They also decided to make trips to South Asia to try to find their people group. On these first trips, they did not contact the IMB for help.

They went for five years in a row and were not able to find the people group. They finally connected with Steve*, a missionary in South Asia. Steve assured the church he would start looking for members of this people group.

The next time Steve held a church-planting training event, he asked if anyone knew a person from this people group. Right there in front of him was a fairly new pastor from this exact people group. Steve rejoiced that he had met this pastor. Until that time, he did not know of

any believers among this group. The young pastor was leading a small group in his village who had come to faith.

When Steve asked the pastor when the people in his village had come to faith, he found out that they had all come to faith in the previous five years. Once the church in Arkansas started praying, the Lord started working. The church was excited to hear this news and to finally have contact with the people for whom they had been faithfully praying. On their next trip to South Asia, they met these dear people and visited their village with the missionary. They shared the Gospel and 10 more people gave their lives to Christ and were baptized.

Over the next few years, as the church partnered with Steve, more than 200 came to faith. The believers started a church and built a training center so that they could reach out to the other 42 unengaged, unreached people groups in that area.

Look for some Epaphroditus-like qualities in your short-term volunteers.

Epaphroditus is my favorite short-term partner in the Bible. His story is found in Philippians 2:25-30. When I read this passage, I see some important qualities that Paul described in his friend, sent as a short-term worker from the church in Philippi.

How did Paul describe this short-term missionary?

- Brother – Epaphroditus was saved, a brother in Christ.
- Fellow Worker – He worked with Paul. He didn't bring his own agenda but chose instead to learn from Paul and to join in the plan that Paul was implementing.
- Soldier – Soldiers lock arms and fight battles together. Paul had spiritual battles to fight and he needed partners to fight alongside him. Thankfully, Epaphroditus was a partner, even in the difficult times.
- Messenger – This literally means “apostle of the church.” Epaphroditus was sent by the church with a mission to engage the lost alongside Paul.
- Minister – He had a heart to serve the needs of the frontline workers and almost lost his own life doing so.

What qualities are the short-term workers in your church bringing to the team? How might you, personally, develop these qualities in your own life before your next mission trip?

Nurture the cross-cultural calling you see in members of your church.

Here are three ways you can nurture and train those who are sensing a call to serve cross-culturally:

- Short-term trips for cross-cultural ministry – The report of what was happening in Antioch came to the attention of the apostles in Jerusalem, so they sent Barnabas to check it out. That short-term trip turned into a lifetime calling. (Acts 11:22)
- God’s blessing in ministry – Look for fruit in their ministry that flows out of abiding in Christ and walking in the Spirit. (Acts 11-23-24)
- Leadership in the local church – Is this person engaged in ministry now? If someone indicates an interest in missions, help them learn, grow and engage in ministry through your church and in your community. (Acts 13:2)

The Revelation 7:9 vision promises that one day we will see a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language before the throne worshiping the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Your preparation now and your continued partnership with us will multiply laborers across the world so that we can make disciples of all nations.

If you or your church would like to explore short-term mission opportunities or a partnership with an IMB missionary as you prepare for your next mission trip, connect with the IMB now by emailing info@imb.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Todd Lafferty is executive vice president of the International Mission Board.

Political insights into Black churches revealed in Barna study

by Diana Chandler

VENTURA, CA (BP) – The sense of political powerlessness Black Christians expressed in a new Barna research study is a factor in how pastors steer their congregations toward political engagement, two pastors told Baptist Press.

Barna released its findings on Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Jan. 18), showing that 73 percent of Black adults and 75 percent of Blacks who attend church felt powerless politically in 2020. The number is up from 61 percent in 1996, [the report said](#).

Marshal Ausberry, president of a fellowship of about 4,000 Black Southern Baptist pastors, said he encourages Black Christians to be politically engaged, despite his belief that data indicating a feeling of powerlessness might be skewed by recent political events.

“I often remind Blacks that while we have a moral responsibility to engage in the political process, our ultimate hope is not in who occupies the White House, but the One who occupies Heaven, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” said Ausberry, president of the [National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention](#), and senior pastor of [Antioch Baptist Church](#) in Fairfax Station, Va. “I remind Christians that Jesus Christ does not ride a donkey or an elephant. He is the king of kings and the president of presidents.

“So much of the progress for Blacks has come through the educational and political process. So while their first loyalty is to Christ, they must allow that loyalty to influence their political decisions. We want to represent Christ well in all of our politics.”

Emory Berry, senior pastor of [Greenforest Community Baptist Church](#) in Decatur, Ga., described the Barna data as “pivotal in our current spiritual and social climate.”

“This empirical, numerical and quantifiable research can truly help guide the Christian church’s efforts in ministry and politics,” Berry said. “Inasmuch, Micah 6:8 reminds us ‘He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?’ To this end, my hope is that white, Black and all Christians will take the time to read through these important research data points and pick up the mantle modeled by the Old Testament prophets and the transforming Savior Jesus Christ.”

Barna, in its study conducted April 22-May 6, 2020, also found that 80 percent of Blacks in predominantly Black congregations, and 65 percent of Black adults in general, agreed that the “Black Church is comforting because it is a place where Black people have control over their lives.” That’s up from 50 percent among Black adults in 1996.

Ausberry encourages Black Christians to influence political parties instead of letting political parties influence them as Christians. He said he does not endorse candidates nor allow candidates to speak from the pulpit during worship services.

“I encourage Black Christians to take a missionary approach to politics. That is to represent Christ well no matter their party affiliation,” Ausberry said. “There are Christians who are Republicans, Democrats, Independents, etc. But whatever the party affiliation, represent Christ well in your party of choice.”

Barna, which plans to release the full results of the Trends of the Black Church report in June, also announced Monday the political affiliations of Black Church churchgoers. According to the findings, 76 percent of the group of Christians identify as Democrats, 5 percent as Republicans, 14 percent as Independents and 5 percent as politically unaffiliated. The numbers compare to 67 percent of all Black adults who identify as Democrats, 6 percent as Republican, 19 percent as

Independent and 8 percent as unaffiliated in 2020. Among all U.S. adults, Barna said, 43 percent identify as Democrats, 36 percent as Republicans, 16 percent as Independents and 5 percent as unaffiliated.

Barna gained its data from an [online survey](#) of 1,083 Black adults, plus 822 Black Church churchgoers, and reports a sample error of plus or minus 2.3 percent with a 95 percent confidence level.

“Any effort to capture a political snapshot of the ‘Black Church’ is complicated due to the theological and denominational diversity that characterizes Black churches in the U.S., not to mention the many other ways individual congregants may differ,” Barna said in releasing the data. “There is not a ‘Black Church;’ rather, there are Black churches. Furthermore, common categories (i.e., conservative, moderate, liberal) commonly used in polling may only offer limited insight into a wide array of ideologies (i.e., Black nationalism, Black feminism, liberal integrationism).”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

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