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# Called to more

**Editors Note:** To hear more about “Be the Church” listen to this recent “Punching Holes in the Darkness” podcast. <https://www.bscm.org/podcast/episode/d61f7417/be-the-church-the-cohorts>

**HUDSONVILLE** – I was sitting on the beach at Gull Lake. I was done. Hurt. Broken. I was wrestling with so many things. My life had not gone the way I expected. Ministry had not gone the way I expected. I believed deep down that I was called to the local church, but I had no idea what that was going to look like. A friend introduced me to Joel Wayne. He came and sat next to me on the beach that day. He believed that God had so much more in store for me.

Since that day, I have had the honor to step in and help other pastors see the greater call God has for their lives. The Church is desperate to see spiritual leaders step up to the plate. According to the New York Times, 46% of pastors under 45 and 34% of pastors over 45 are considering quitting.

We launched Be The Church in order to serve the local church. We help leaders clarify the vision God has for them. Sometimes that is all that it takes. We listen to the stories of pastors and help them to assess what the future looks like. We help pastors connect to other pastors through cohorts to foster healthy relationships in which they can grow, encourage, and sharpen one another. We develop a practical curriculum for leadership development. Most importantly, Be The Church lives to empower the Bride of Christ to be all that she can be.

Spiritual leaders live from a place of deep conviction. They know without a doubt what they are called to and will do whatever it takes to accomplish what God has put on their hearts. Our churches are longing for leaders who live in deep communion with God and will boldly teach His Word no matter the cost. They are willing to step into conflict and suffer the consequences. We want to lift up the Bride of Christ. We believe the best way to do that is by empowering spiritual leaders within the local church.

Has God called you to more? Maybe you are restless. You feel something stirring inside you. If you want to connect with like-minded, like-hearted people to explore the greater thing God has called them to, connect with us. Or maybe you’re just tired and you need help parsing out what next steps look like for you and your congregation.

We want to provide you with a community that can help you see the potential that you could have in the next season. Wherever you are at in your journey, come join us at one of our leadership summits. We host several throughout the state and throughout the year. Our next Leadership Summit will be on May 18. Learn more about what Be the Church ([bethethechurch.org](http://bethethechurch.org)) is doing throughout the nation as we serve to empower pastors and how you can go.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Luke Bilberry is the Director of Operations for Be The Church at Chapel Pointe Church, Hudsonville, MI. He and his wife, Kathryn, have 4 children.

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## **Toward Arab Churches**

**TROY** – Early in my childhood years, growing up in Egypt, I was impressed and fascinated by America. I saw it as the most unique of all the other countries in the World. This created in my heart a special attachment and desire to seek and to know more about America. I was especially thrilled when I watched the movies that were so popular in my growing up years. Movies with stars like the late John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, and others.

Watching those movies, and seeing the beautiful nature and cities created in the heart of this young boy, a dream and a desire to one day be there, but means made it nearly impossible.

Years went by, this young boy grew up and became a man, and went to school, learned about Christ and was miraculously saved.

After I was saved, I learned a fact about America I never knew before; I learned of the important influence of American missionaries in impacting the Middle East and the Church in general through translated Arabic Christian literatures and even the Arabic Bible I carried in my hand which was translated from the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts by American scholars. Not to mention the college of theology where I studied and earned my graduate degrees was founded by American missionaries.

I graduated and started serving the Lord in Egypt and neighboring countries.

In 2005, the Lord brought me to America, the country of my childhood dream. Not to be charmed by it, but to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ among my fellow Arabs living in the states. I was asked to preach in a conference of Arabic churches in the states.

My visit made me realize that Arabs living in the States need the Gospel of Christ just as much as those living in the Middle East. Nevertheless, I returned back to Egypt preaching and teaching where God called me.

Three years later, as I was serving the Lord in Egypt, I got a phone call from the States. A pastor friend of mine asked me if I would be interested in pastoring an Arabic church in the States, a church in Michigan. I had never been to Michigan, and all I knew was that it was the “car capital

of the world," where all three auto giants are headquartered. I did not know about the sub zero temperatures, where I grew up the temperatures hit between 100-120° F.

I agreed to check it out. The Lord brought me to Michigan in a miraculous way, and I started pastoring Evangel Baptist Church of Troy. A church that had almost closed. But Christ told us; "...I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Mt 16:18

In a short period of time church attendance grew, and we had no room in the building. We built a larger sanctuary, and the Lord multiplied the ministry. In 2014, the church joined the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM), and the church outreach ministry multiplied.

Our live broadcasts reach the Arab World. Our youth are growing in the Lord and being trained to become future leaders. Evangel Arabic Baptist Church of Troy has become a fortress for proclaiming the Arabic Gospel worldwide on radio, TV, and internet.

The State of Michigan has the world's largest Arabic speaking population outside the Middle East. Yet, it only has a few Arabic churches serving here. The Arabs living here are souls in need of the Gospel of Christ.

In the past, American missionaries burdened in reaching the Middle East had to spend years raising support, learning the language, adjusting to the culture and weather, and being away from their loved ones and families.

Today, however; God is raising His servants from their own people to reach them with the Gospel of Christ. We need to join hands in lifting up the ministry together and work side by side proclaiming the truth that sets ALL mankind Free! Believe me when I tell you from experience, not just talk, that the need for reaching Arabs in the States is just as vital as reaching them in the Middle East.

In Michigan, Middle Easterners are here with their many Arabic accents, backgrounds, beliefs, cultures, traditions, and needs. Our responsibility as partners in the BSCM is to reach those Arabic communities with the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Please pray for me and the Evangel Arabic Baptist Church of Troy, as we seek to launch an Arabic Church planting ministry to serve the increasing need among the Middle Eastern community in Michigan. May the coming days bring about multiplied fruit as together we proclaim the salvation of Christ.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Amgad Beshai is pastor of the Evangel Church of Troy, Michigan. It is Arabic speaking. Amgad and wife, Eman, have 3 children, daughter Verine (20), son Kevin (17), and son Christopher (15).

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# Crisis in the pulpit? Barna reports 40% of pastors have considered leaving ministry

**SUWANEE, GA** – Pastors are feeling increasingly dissatisfied with their jobs and more than 40 percent have considered leaving the ministry in the past 12 months.

That's according to data released this week by the Barna Group, a research organization that monitors cultural and religious trends in America.

"The number of pastors who feel burnt out, lonely or unwell is growing," Barna said, pointed to findings from a recent survey of the nation's pastors. "To put it bluntly, Barna Group's current data does not paint a pretty picture of the state of the American pastor.

Barna said pastors are also losing confidence in their calling and their overall sense of well-being is on the decline.

That's especially true of young pastors, the researchers said.

In 2015, 72 percent of pastors told Barna researchers that they felt "very satisfied" with their jobs. In 2020, that number had dropped to 67 percent. In 2022, only 52 percent of pastors reported being "very satisfied" with their jobs.

"That's an eye-popping 20-point drop over the course of just six years, and it's notable for a few reasons," Barna reported. "First, the trend has continued as the pandemic response has eased, instead of leveling out as lockdown restrictions relaxed. Additionally, the drop is especially notable among younger pastors — just 35 percent of pastors under 45 say they are 'very satisfied.' This troubling decline in vocational satisfaction may cause significant problems for churches in the future."

In 2015, 66% of pastors said they were "more confident" in their calling than they were when they started their jobs. By 2022, only 35 percent of pastors said they were more confident.

"While only 14 percent are 'less confident' now than they were when they started ministry, this is a huge jump from the 3 percent who said the same in 2015," Barna said.

Barna said the overall percentage of pastors who say they have gone through a period when they significantly doubted their calling has more than doubled from the 24 percent reported in 2015.

"Pastors aren't just broadly less happy with their work than they used to be, they may also be less sure of where they're supposed to be," Barna said.

"The pastorate is increasingly stressful in our day and age," said Ray Gentry, a longtime Georgia associational mission strategist and leader of the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders. "So many different pressures are coming against pastors and churches."

Gentry said congregations need to show their love and appreciation for their pastors and provide sabbaticals and retreats so that they can rejuvenate and rekindle spiritually.

"Church members need to keep their pastors at the top of their prayer lists all the time," he said. "Pastors are like everybody else in that they need encouragement, trust and appreciation."

Gentry said the COVID-19 pandemic has added to the stress pastors are feeling.

"Most churches have less attendance than they had before the pandemic," he said. "That makes it harder for pastors to feel like their ministries are as fruitful as they used to be. We know that numbers are not everything, but they are still an important factor to be considered, so it's hard on pastors when the numbers are not what they used to be. And in many cases, the pastor is working as hard or harder than ever."

Chris Reynolds, who leads the [Georgia Baptist Mission Board's pastor wellness team](#), said the Barna findings are consistent with what he and his colleagues have seen among the state's pastors.

"When we are overwhelmed, we have a tendency to isolate ourselves physically and emotionally," Reynolds said. "This is not healthy. I encourage our Georgia Baptist pastors and staff members to reach out to the [pastor wellness team](#). We are equipped with resources and relationships to walk beside you through the stressful times."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Roger Alford is the editor of the Christian Index which was founded in Washington, DC in 1822 by legendary Baptist leader Luther Rice. The Christian Index is the nation's oldest continuously published religious newspaper.

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## **U.S. Hispanic Protestant landscape full of growing, vibrant churches**

U.S. Protestant Hispanic churches are finding success in building community within their congregations and reaching those outside their walls.

Hispanic churches in the United States face unique challenges but are finding success in building community within their congregations and reaching those outside their walls.

Lifeway Research partnered with two dozen denominations and church networks to include what is likely the largest number of Protestant Hispanic congregations in the U.S. ever invited to a single research study. Sponsored by Lifeway Recursos, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Samaritan's Purse, the study surveyed 692 pastors of congregations that are at least 50% Hispanic.

"For decades, the Hispanic population in the U.S. has been growing exponentially, and it is imperative for churches to be informed about the specific needs of this community," said Giancarlo Montemayor, director of global publishing for Lifeway Recursos. "This study will help us to continue the ongoing conversation of how to serve our brothers and sisters in a more strategic way."

### **Congregational snapshot**

The study reveals a picture of Hispanic churches that are newer, younger and more effectively evangelistic than the average U.S. Protestant church.

Most Hispanic Protestant churches (54%) have been established since 2000, including 32% founded in 2010 or later. Fewer than 1 in 10 (9%) trace their history prior to 1950.

Not only are the churches relatively new, but most people in the congregations are also new to the United States. The majority are first generation Americans (58%), born outside of the country. A quarter are second generation (24%), with parents who were born outside of the U.S. And 17% were born in the U.S. to parents who were also born in the U.S. As a result, a majority conduct their services only in Spanish (53%), while 22% are bilingual.

Half of the churches (50%) are in a large metropolitan area with a population of 100,000 or more. Around 3 in 10 (31%) are located in small cities, 9% are in rural areas and 8% are in suburbs.

In the average Hispanic Protestant church, a full third of the congregation (35%) is under the age of 30, including 18% under 18. Another 38% are aged 30-49, and 28% are 50 and older.

"The growth in the number of Hispanic churches in the U.S. has been remarkable," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "While some of these congregations were started within Anglo churches — 14% of Hispanic congregations in this study currently are conducting services within a church that is predominantly non-Hispanic — the missional impetus has clearly come from within the Hispanic community itself as two-thirds of these congregations are led by first-generation immigrant pastors."

In U.S. Hispanic Protestant churches, the average worship service attendance is 115. Like most other churches, they've not yet fully recovered from the pandemic. In January 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the average attendance was 136. Still, 13% of churches are currently around their pre-pandemic levels. And 32% say they've grown in the past three years, despite the pandemic.

Almost every Hispanic Protestant pastor (99%) agrees, including 94% who strongly agree, their congregation considers Scripture the authority for their church and their lives.

Around 7 in 10 (69%) say their church has the financial resources it needs to support their ministry, which include some aspects that are common among most other Protestant congregations. Most Hispanic Protestant churches say they regularly offer weekly adult small groups or Bible studies (74%), weekly prayer meetings (66%) and weekly children's small groups (52%). Fewer have weekly youth small groups (45%), weekly young adult small groups (40%), one-on-one discipleship or mentoring (34%), evening large group Bible study (25%) or evening praise and worship (24%). Just 3% say they offer none of these.

When asked about moving weekend worship service participants to small groups, 42% of pastors say at least half of their adult churchgoers are involved in group Bible studies, including 15% who say at least 75% are connected to a small group. Around a third (34%) say fewer than 1 in 4 churchgoers also are members of small group Bible studies, including 9% of pastors who say none of those attending worship services are involved in groups.

As to what hinders their congregation from participating more regularly in church activities, most pastors point to long work hours for their churchgoers (61%). Others say extended family gatherings (35%) and personal hardships or crises (30%). Around a quarter point to recreational or entertainment pursuits (26%) and lingering fear of COVID (24%). Fewer say sports activities (20%), a preference to watch online (18%), lack of transportation (17%), school events (13%) or caregiver responsibilities (11%).

"Many of the activities within Hispanic Protestant churches look similar to those in non-Hispanic churches in the U.S. with worship services, prayer meetings, Bible studies, and Sunday School classes being common," said McConnell. "But pastors of Hispanic congregations are quick to point out immigrant families often have less time for church as many are working long hours, have family traditions and are impacted by American cultural distractions."

### **Evangelistic outreach**

Almost 4 in 5 pastors at U.S. Hispanic Protestant churches (79%) say they regularly schedule opportunities for members to go out and share the gospel.

Specifically, most pastors say their outreach activities in the past year included church members inviting people to church (86%), using social media to share church activities (74%), children's special events like VBS, Easter egg hunts or Fall festivals (59%), community programs like food



distribution, toy giveaways, or providing clothing (58%), and church members sharing the gospel in conversations (56%). Additionally, some congregations did door-to-door evangelism (30%), evangelism training (24%) and provided financial support for a new church start (12%). Hardly any churches (1%) say they have not been able to do any of those recently.

Their outreach seems to be effective, as close to half (47%) say 10 or more people have indicated a new commitment to Christ in the past year, including 24% who have seen 20 or more such commitments. Fewer than 1 in 10 (9%) report no new commitments.

As they've reached these new individuals, pastors say most are sticking around. Almost 3 in 4 (73%) of those new commitments have become active participants in the life of the church, according to pastors. As a result, 88% of Hispanic Protestant pastors say they consistently hear reports of changed lives at their churches.

"Hispanic congregations are very active in engaging new people," said McConnell. "Not only is there much evangelistic activity in Hispanic churches, but God is also blessing them with new people who commit to following Jesus Christ."

### **Building community**

As new members join Hispanic Protestant churches, they become part of congregations that are actively trying to grow together, according to their pastors. Almost 9 in 10 (88%) say their church has a plan to foster community in their church, including 53% who strongly agree.

Pastors point to numerous activities as vital to building a strong sense of community within their congregations. At least 9 in 10 say praying together (96%), studying the Bible together (95%), choosing to get along and promoting unity (93%), welcoming those from different cultures and backgrounds (93%), choosing to be transparent and accountable with one another (89%) and checking-in or noticing when others are absent (90%) are very or extremely important aspects of unity in their churches. Additionally, most say the same about members working together to serve people in the community (79%), socializing outside of church (81%) and sharing resources with each other (74%).

Most pastors say they've heard about their church members engaging in each of those actions at least a few times in the past month.

"Fellowship among believers in a local congregation is something the Bible communicates should be taking place," said McConnell. "Hispanic churches take this seriously and invest in these relationships."

### **Pastoral portrait**

Among pastors of U.S. Hispanic Protestant congregations, 93% are Hispanic themselves. Almost all (95%) are the senior or only pastor of a congregation, while 5% are Hispanic campus pastors

with a multi-site church. More than half (56%) serve as a full-time pastor, 27% are bi-vocational, 10% are part-time, 6% are volunteer and 1% are in interim positions.

Almost half of pastors in Hispanic Protestant churches (48%) are between the ages of 50 and 64. Pastors are more than twice as likely to be under 50 (37%), including 4% under 30, than 65 or older (16%).

Almost 8 in 9 pastors (85%) are male. Two in 3 (66%) are first generation Americans, while 15% are second generation and 19% are third. Close to 3 in 4 are college graduates, including 44% who have a graduate degree, while 17% have some college and 10% have a high school education or less.

Theologically, 4 in 5 (79%) pastors at U.S. Hispanic Protestant churches self-identified as evangelical. Around 1 in 6 (16%) say they're mainline.

For the [Spanish-language version click here](#). Icons from the [Noun Project](#) via Santri Icon, Ali Coşkun, Deemak Daksina, Niloy Som, Made by Made

For more information, view the complete [quantitative](#), [qualitative](#), and [significant differences](#) reports. View the [Spanish-language release](#) and access [Spanish-language resources](#).

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Aaron is the senior writer at Lifeway Research.

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## **Lasagna life**

**PLYMOUTH** – The longer I live the more I realize that the persons we have become are a composite of all the experiences of our lives. Some of those experiences or events are more impacting and pivotal than others while some are mere blips on the historical radar screens of our past.

It is usually in late evenings when I retire to my study that my mind puts on its hiking shoes and treks back over the landscape of my memories. Sometimes those shoes take me forward to the things that might be, but as more of my years are found behind me than ahead, I seem to walk

around in those hills of previous days. The mental exercise does me good, and sometimes I stumble upon things that had been long forgotten or for some strange reason I am seeing for the first time.

Last night I had one of those mental hiking epiphanies. I came to realize that life is a lot like really good lasagna. It consists of layer after layer of spices, pasta, sauces, cheeses, meats, and who knows what else, baked together to form one unique dish. Each item, though unique in and of itself, has melded with all the others to form something special.

As I was inspecting a slice of my “lasagna life” I discovered a cheesy piece that I had not recalled since the event. At the time I was living in Marathon, Texas near the Big Bend National Park. I was serving there as the Associate Pastor (official title for flunky) of First Baptist Church under the watchful eye and tutelage of Pastor Walt Gallaway. He was a great preacher and a wonderful friend who taught me much about life and ministry.

There was not a great deal to do in that little village, so we learned to entertain ourselves with various hobbies. Walt found pleasure and relaxation in tilling and cultivating a small patch of land as his own personal garden. Now that was no small task seeing that the ground there was composed of 90% rock, and water was at a premium. We may have gotten six inches of rain a year, and as the old ranchers out there would say, “you should have seen the day that it came.”

He had worked for several weeks to get the ground prepared, and finally had a good crop of vegetables forcing their way through the hard surface. He had a really good stand of tomatoes and okra, and of course his favorite, Chiltepin Peppers. Most of the parishioners were quite amazed at his agrarian abilities.

He was faithful to care for them and to keep up a regimen of spraying and fertilization. He was very knowledgeable about his little farming operation because he had worked with his father at his cottonseed processing plant in South Texas which had been relatively successful. He was aware of what insecticides were best, how to use them, and had several bottles of them in his storage area.

One day his wife Gail, decided she would help him with his maintenance and she sprayed his entire garden with what she thought was a premixed concoction of his best bug killer. Her intentions were pure and her motives were sincere, but what she did not know was that the liquid mixture in the pump up sprayer was the very powerful defoliant 2-5-4-T, better known as Agent Orange. Within a matter of hours every green limb and leaf lay limp on the ground. It was not a pretty sight nor was the discussion that ensued.

Gail, like so many in this life, was very sincere and well meaning, but she was sincerely wrong. Many have and still proclaim loudly and fervently if a person is really sincere in the matters of religion and life then that is all that is required. “Sincerity” and “Tolerance” have become the politically correct and socially acceptable standards by which we are to judge a person's veracity.

My friends, ax murderers and rapists are sincere, but that does not make them right. There is only one standard by which we may judge something to be right or wrong, and His standard does not change with the winds of social and political variables. God's Word is the standard by which we must live, not by present cultural norms or today's acceptable practices.

In fact, there was another woman named Eve who was very sincere in her dealings with a certain Garden and look where that got us. She was sincerely wrong.

#### **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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## **IMB/NAMB Overseas Together**

**PLYMOUTH** – I am going to an undisclosed location in South-Central Asia, and I cannot believe the privilege I get to experience. My travel partners, the missionaries on-site, and the people we are going to meet would love to have you pray for us. Four of us are going from Michigan this year.

On April 21, 2023, I will depart from Detroit Metro Airport participating in the first-ever, joint effort of the International Mission Board (IMB) and North American Mission Board (NAMB) venture to send church planters overseas to discover how international mission works among our churches and the world!

Dr. Paul Chitwood, President of the International Mission Board along with Dr. Kevin Ezell, President of the North American Mission Board, and Dr. Vance Pitman, President of the Send Network made this enduring mission effort possible. I agree with, and I am inspired by, their collective vision and the priority of resourcing such an undertaking. This year, approximately fifty church planters will visit one of five mission sites: two are in Europe and three are in South-central Asia. In the coming years, we are hoping one-hundred planters, annually, will take the plunge into a short international mission's experience.

Very few of today's newest church leaders grew up attending age-graded classes at church learning missionary stories, world geography, and memorizing Bible verses about going to the nations with the Gospel. Fewer have met and interacted with missionaries from our churches

on assignment in their mission field. Meeting and interacting with courageous heroes of the faith can be life-altering! I am certain the experiences for these church planters will do the following:

1. Personalize international missions for the man and the church he leads.
2. Increase their generosity in terms of prayers, personnel, and provisions.
3. Display the international pathways open to church members and church leaders.

The outcome of this experience is going to yield results for generations. Here are a few examples of what I believe will occur.

### **See**

The church planters will see a contrast. Endorsed church planters, serving in North America, receive limited supplements to help them and their families create new churches. Endorsed, commissioned international missionaries receive overwhelming support while living abroad for years at a time. Language learning, lodging, travel expenses (locally and globally), salaries, health insurance, and other needs to complete the mission are generously made possible by the generosity of church members in the North American churches. Those funds are distributed worldwide in efficient ways by the IMB to those on the frontlines of the mission.

### **Hear**

The church planters will hear people who need to know Jesus. There is nothing more powerful than the following two experiences:

1. worshiping with believers in a language you do not understand and
2. sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ through a translator then hear the recipient of the message say that he or she wants to invite Jesus Christ into their lives.

Those two experiences display how great God is, and how alike human beings are worldwide. Lostness is the world's greatest problem and Jesus Christ is the solution.

### **Increase**

The church planters will learn to enlarge their vision. As I lived overseas during my thirteen years of international service in Africa then Europe my heart grew three times larger for the multiple people groups scattered throughout the world. It took an overseas life for me to increase my vision. I have watched as church planters in North America experience their first calling to church planting, aim at reaching a precise people in a location or a language group

become so focused that the church planter becomes a spiritual “sniper” targeting precise individuals his local church can reach and disciple. That is normal for North American church planters; but it is going to be inspiring to watch as the hearts of minds of my travel buddies become burdened for the peoples of the world during our excursion. That burden will be lived out locally in North America after their return, as well as overseas as these men will send future generations from their churches to the world. That larger vision will transform the prayers, the lives, the preaching, and even the future of these North American church planters. I am certain!

### **Prayer Requests**

If you would join the families and churches of the church planters in prayer during our preparation and during our excursion, we would be grateful. This is literally the first-ever IMB/NAMB overseas trip in history among our tribe of churches.

Here are the prayer requests:

1. Continued good health in the church planters and their family members so that no one needs to cancel their overseas trip.
2. Precise planning among the IMB missionaries that will bring about the Lord’s desires for salvations and life-dedications among the people groups with whom we will serve.
3. Avoidance of distractions from the mission goals, such as the political riots in the city streets where we are going in South-Central Asia. Life’s unexpected happens all the time, but we want the Lord’s will to be done within our circle of influence while in country.

Receive updates during the next 45 days on Facebook or Twitter, on my personal page DrTonyLLynn or at SendNetworkMichigan/SendMichigan.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Tony L. 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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# The Titanic: sharing the gospel with his last breath

**PLYMOUTH** – It is forever etched in history. April 14th, 1912. That was the night 111 years ago that the RMS Titanic hit an iceberg on her maiden voyage. The ship was built so well that some said even God couldn't sink her. Two hours and forty minutes after impact, it was covered completely by the cold darkness of the Atlantic Ocean in a watery grave.

News of the tragedy quickly spread in newspapers across the nation - much of it totally wrong in the early hours. An internet search of newspaper headlines from April 15th paints an overwhelmingly hopeful portrait of what happened.

The British White Star Line, operator of the ill-fated ship, sent out a news release stating: "I am free to say that no matter how bad the collision with an iceberg, the Titanic would float. She is an unsinkable ship."

"Titanic Sinking" was the eye-catching headline in the Oakland Examiner April 15th. The subtitle read, "Ill-fated vessel begins to founder while limping toward Halifax after all aboard are rescued."

The headline of the Evening Observer in New York reported in bold print, "TITANIC RAMMED AN ICEBERG, LARGEST SHIP EVER BUILT WRECKED ON MAIDEN TRIP." The article declared, "Great Steamers Rushed to Her Assistance When Wireless Flashed Out the Call for Help - Passengers Transferred In Safety--Crippled Monster Being Towed to Halifax."

The Evening Sun (Baltimore) proclaimed in all caps "ALL TITANIC PASSENGERS ARE SAFE; TRANSFERRED IN LIFEBOATS AT SEA".

By April 16th the true horror about the tragic loss of life and the sinking of the Titanic was beginning to emerge. Less than one-third (706 people) of those aboard the ill-fated ship survived. 1,517 people died. Only six of those who fell into the frigid water survived. "In total, 50% of the children survived, 20% of the men and 75% of the women" (Wikipedia).

The tragic news brought 40,000 thousand people to the dock in New York to encourage, comfort and help the survivors brought to safety by the Carpathia.

Investigations in the United States and the United Kingdom sought to discover what actually happened and what could be done to prevent such a disaster in the future. It was discovered that one ship, the Californian, was near enough to the Titanic to see the distress signals, but failed to respond. British investigators came to the conclusion that had the California responded, "she might have saved many, if not all, of the lives that were lost." The committee in the United States concluded that the Californian was "nearer the Titanic than the 19 miles reported by her Captain, and that her officers and crew saw the distress of the Titanic and

failed to respond to them in accordance with the dictates of humanity, international usage, and the requirements of law” (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Not everyone agrees with the conclusions of the investigations. From the beginning, there has been both information and misinformation. Stories of heroism and selflessness abound. One of my favorites is about John Harper - a Scottish preacher on his way to preach for 3 months at the famed Moody Church in Chicago. He traveled on the Titanic with his six-year-old daughter.

After the collision, Harper made sure that his daughter was placed in one of the lifeboats. Survivors reported that after she was secured, he was heard shouting, "Let the women, children and the unsaved into the lifeboats." He gave his life jacket to a man who had none, saying "Don't worry about me. I'm going up, not down."

As the Titanic sank into the depths, passengers jumped into the frigid waters, including Harper.

Four years after the Titanic sank, one of the survivors shared this testimony at a reunion of survivors in Ontario, Canada. As he clung to a piece of debris from the wreckage, "Harper, who was struggling in the water near him, shouted out, "Are you saved?" "No," the man replied. Harper then shouted the words from Scripture: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." The man did not answer, and a moment later he drifted away on the waves.

A few minutes later, the current brought the two men back together. Again, Harper asked, "Are you saved?" Once again, the answer was "no." With his dying breath, Harper shouted, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." He then slipped under the waves for the last time.

Then and there, the man he had witnessed to decided to turn his life over to Christ”  
(BREAKPOINT Commentary - April 14, 1999 By Charles W. Colson).

It was one week after Easter in 1912 that the Titanic struck the iceberg. John Harper believed the Gospel, lived the Gospel, and shared the Gospel. His life inspires us and challenges us to do the same. Happy Easter!

#### **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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# Is your life worth imitating?

**WINDSOR, ONTARIO** – In a piece for the BBC, David Robson asks, “Where would the self-help and business media be without the secret habits of highly successful people? Almost every week there’s a new article outlining a high-flying individual’s behaviors—with the implied promise that using the same techniques could deliver us fame and fortune, too” (July 11, 2022).

You hear about CEOs like Elon Musk who begin work early, skip breakfast, and divide their time into small, manageable tasks. Other inspirational figures are quirky in their habits. Bill Gates, for example, would reportedly rock back and forth in his chair while brainstorming. This was a means of focusing his mind, apparently.

Further back in history, Robson notes, Charles Dickens carried around a compass so he could sleep facing north, something he believed would contribute to more productive writing. Beethoven counted exactly 60 coffee beans for each cup, which he used to power his composing. Benjamin Franklin was known to have sat naked in front of his window each morning in what he called “air baths” that would cleanse his body and prevent illness.

Many successful people have eccentric habits. And we love to read about them, don’t we? We might even imitate them. If it works for them, then just maybe...!

We are social creatures. We are hard-wired to look to people for help and advice. It’s somewhat natural for us to emulate successful leaders. But copying the patterns and behaviors of men like Elon Musk and Bill Gates will not guarantee spiritual success.

On the other hand, Scripture does exhort us to remember our leaders. “Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7 ESV). Paul did tell the church at Corinth to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Also, to the brothers at Philippi, he wrote, “Brothers, join in imitating me....”

Is your walk with God imitable? Would you want men and women in your church to do as you do? To reproduce after your kind? Will it be a good thing if people in your missional community are copying you? If the elders in your church turned out just like you, would you have a mature, disciple-making team?

Following the godly habits of our spiritual leaders is a biblical pathway to spiritual success. So, we must pay attention to the example we set.

D.A. Carson, in his book [From the Resurrection to His Return: Living Faithfully in the Last Days](#) (Christian Focus), asks: “Do you ever say to a young Christian, ‘Do you want to know what Christianity is like? Watch me!’ If you never do, you are unbiblical.”

The Apostle Paul hit this theme a number of times in his letters, as I mentioned above. Here are a few more:

“For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church” (1 Cor. 4:15-17).

“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:9).

“For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Paul was able to say, “I urge you to imitate me” (1 Cor. 4:15-16 NIV).

Can you say the same?

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Garth Leno is the Pastor/Planter Care Specialist with the BSCM. He serves in a similar role with the Canadian National Baptist Convention, and he is the founding pastor of The Gathering Church in Windsor, Ontario, a church he planted with his wife, Patty, and a few of their friends.

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## **A fool’s hope**

**ROSCOMMON** – Have you ever pranked somebody on April fool’s Day? Have you ever been the victim of an April fool’s Day prank? Have you ever been curious as to the origins of the day and why it is observed and recognized worldwide?

I was curious so I did some Googling and after much clicking of the mouse I discovered - no one really knows! There are a lot of historical and literary references, but nothing truly factual. However, the day has generated a lot of pranks on a very public scale such as:

In 1957, the BBC reported that Swiss farmers were experiencing a record spaghetti crop and showed footage of people harvesting noodles from trees.

In 1996, Taco Bell, the fast-food restaurant chain, duped people when it announced it had agreed to purchase Philadelphia's [Liberty Bell](#) and intended to rename it the Taco Liberty Bell.

In 1998, after Burger King advertised a "Left-Handed Whopper," scores of clueless customers requested the fake sandwich

These pranks are creatively awesome and funny, and will be remembered as classic pranks. However, there is another day in April celebrated and observed by Christians that is also considered a Fool's Day by the lost world.

When you really think about it, to a lost heart, Easter must be the most foolish and most elaborate prank ever perpetrated on mankind. A belief, faith and hope in the power of the Easter story? It's crazy, preposterous, foolish - it's a "fool's hope".

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" ([1 Cor. 1:18](#)).

In terms of worldly reason? It really is mind-boggling. The apostle Paul admits as much. The foolishness and weakness to which Paul points in 1 Corinthians is the cross and the proclamation of the cross. The death that Jesus dies alone, betrayed, abandoned is a foolishness and a weakness that shapes all reality.

"The power of God and the Wisdom of God" works according to God's Grace, not man's logic and reason. I like grace. Grace is illogical. Grace is God's wisdom. Grace changes everything. The world needs grace. The world needs to see Christians living in the power of grace and surrendering their lives to the victorious calling of a "fool's hope". Our lives need to exemplify the great Redemptive Love of the Cross not the silliness of an April fool's prank!

Jim Elliot, a missionary who gave his life trying to witness to the Ecuadorian natives, made the statement, "He is No Fool Who Gives What He Cannot Keep, To Gain That Which He Cannot Lose!". If the world considers me a fool, hoping in a fool's hope - Great! Awesome! because God knows this fool's name!

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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# My Post-Christian cringe

**PLYMOUTH** – The reports of spiritual awakenings on campuses and the release of the Jesus Revolution film reignited a personal concern that is always on my heart.

Today as an adult man, I find myself much less tolerant of the term, “Post-Christian.” When I read the term or hear it used, I raise my shoulders. I grit my teeth. I cringe. I guarantee you will never find me applying the label “Post-Christian” to anything. Let me explain my reasons.

Over sixty years ago, on August 3, Christianity Today published an editorial entitled “Hope in a Post-Christian Era.” The article’s opening statement said, “The opinion is current in some Protestant circles today that the tide of history has turned against the Christian church and that the efforts of believers must be directed toward retrenchment or, perhaps ultimately, toward a radical transformation of the gospel message.” In 1962 when that editorial was originally typed on a mechanical typewriter and I was three years old, I could not have understood the title nor the words in the editorial. Today, the term of Post-Christian within the title annoys me.

Recently, during March 2023 while I was outside the United States visiting a Dutch territory, I studied a text written and edited by Professor Herman Paul and Scientific Researcher Adriaan van Veldhuize from the Netherlands. Their book entitled, *Post-Everything: An Intellectual History of Post-Concepts* (Manchester University Press, July 17, 2021) displayed how the term Post-Christian dates as far back as the 1930’s when it was being used by right-wing political secularists who were celebrating the fading influence of Christianity on their respective cultures so that radical nationalism could influence the people toward preparations for World War II. Why would I embrace or use a term, almost one hundred years old, originally created by those who celebrated the decreasing influence of Christianity?

I respect the rights of others who will continue to use the phrase, Post-Christian, but I will never use that descriptive term. I believe this is a case where a label such as Post-Christian is misleading and damaging. I believe those who will continue to use that phrase commonly justify their usage by explaining that Post-Christian signifies:

1. An era in which Christianity is no longer the dominant civil religion.
2. A culture in which Christian values and worldview are marginalized.
3. A people who once defined themselves as Christians now identify as “Nones.”

Why will I never label something Post-Christian? I believe the hyphenated, two-word phrase expresses the wrong message to those who are not following Christ and those who do follow Christ. It gives the impression that the Lord placed an expiration date on an era, a culture, or a people. When in reality I cannot think of an era, a culture, or a people where followers of Jesus Christ did not have to behave as missionaries. From the first century until present day, there have been times of increased and decreased influence. Oftentimes, the ebb and flow of

Christianity's influence had more to do with the health or sickness of Christianity's expression in the lives of its followers and/or leaders than the response of a particular era, culture, or people.

### **Bleak Point of View**

I cringe when I hear or read someone trumpet-out, "We are living in Post-Christian times," or a person describes geographic environments, such as a nation or a continent, as Post-Christian. Some see hopelessness everywhere and they labor to make sure everyone hears or reads their gloomy analysis and their catastrophic predictions. We have all heard that misery loves company; but I often wonder if the Holy Spirit takes delight in the company of those who lost confidence in Him to sustain or start another divine movement. How can the hopeless ones cry out "retreat" when the Holy Spirit advances forward with redemptive plans? I cannot imagine.

### **Erroneous History**

I am puzzled why anyone would think it accurate to describe a period of history, a locale, or a people group as previously, completely Christian. The phrase Post-Christian incorrectly creates the notion that there was a period of time, a location, or a people group that was at some moment 100% Christian and then at some moment God's influence withdrew. Was there a heavenly meeting where the Trinity announced that personnel and resources were being withdrawn from a period of time, one place, or a people to influence others elsewhere? I cannot fathom that. God is the best at multitasking.

### **Incorrect Indicator**

I am grieved when some create the horrible, false impression that God's plans are overturned when believers' societal influence and believers' affluence is taken away. There are believing global heroes who impact others for Christ through suffering and persecution while living in the midst of poverty and enduring the chaos of violence, both in North America and worldwide. God's desires can become reality even when believers lack political influence and even when believers are poor and even when believers are marginalized. Have not God's plans, at times, been conducted and completed because believers suffered? I cannot ignore Scripture. There are plenty of biblical examples.

### **Henny-Penny: The Sky is Falling**

I fear that some have taken it upon themselves to panic, and mislead others away from a better-placed confidence in the Holy Spirit by reenacting the part of Henny-Penny from the children's English fairy tale where a falling acorn hit an old hen on the head. Frightened and believing the sky was falling, Henny-Penny incessantly repeated to everyone she met, "Goodness gracious me! The sky's a-going to fall; I must go and tell the king."

Henny-penny convinced a rooster, a duck, a goose, and a turkey to join her rush to see the king with the worst news. On their way to see the king, the doomsday-barnyard band met a sly fox

who convinced them that his deep, dark den was a short-cut to the king. With Henny-Penny's agreement, she sent her friends one-by-one into the fox's den ahead of her. The fox acted as if he was heroically leading the way to the king, when in reality he lurked in the darkness of the den and dispatched the naïve creatures one-by-one. At the last second, Henny-Penny just before dropping herself into the death-trap suddenly decided to return to her perch to lay one more egg before seeing the king and consequently forgot to tell the king about the falling-sky.

### **Not Post-Christian, Just Divine Patience**

Because there is abundant evidence of God's resolve in Scripture, I will forever believe all of us live in a Christian-something era, culture, and people where the anticipation of God's influence is present every second of every day, even when we do not easily see it.

Rather than waving flags of hopeless surrender in huddles of despair and anger, why not join the Lord in the never-ending war for redemption, discipleship, and transformation? Ephesians 6:12 (NLT) says, "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world."

I especially love the image of God patiently waiting for the salvation of more people as described in 2 Peter 3:9 and 3:14 (NLT) where it says, "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent . . . And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved."

I will never call anything Post-Christian because I know the Lord never retreats from a period of time, nor a place, nor does God abandon people. Psalm 121:4 (NLT) reminds us, the Lord "never slumbers or sleeps."

The next time others write or speak the phrase "Post-Christian," after I finish recoiling; I will smirk and then silently repeat in my head, "There is no such thing as Post-Christian-anything; instead, God is everywhere patiently giving people time to be saved."

I strive to live in anticipation of the Lord's movement every day of my life. As evidenced by today's news, events, and reports, there will be spiritual movements that remind us that the Lord will do what he desires, when he desires, where he desires, and among whom he desires, when he desires. I like living with that reality and that description more than how others choose to describe today's life.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Tony L. 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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# Move In Your Church: the album

**DETROIT** – Lately our church has been experiencing a renewal. During Covid we had dwindled down to well below half of what we had been. At one point our church shrunk down to just 30 people. These times were difficult to say the least.

Seeing people choose to leave or go elsewhere is one of the toughest things to go through as a pastor. And, on top of that, we lost the building where we had been meeting. It was one of the lowest points of our existence as a church.

We were vagabonds for nearly a year before we found a new place to meet, and even it was temporary. It was not a fun thing to experience. In 2022 we started meeting in one location consistently, and got back a little bit of a sense of normalcy.

Despite everything over the past year God has done some miraculous things. Our church has begun to come back to life. Our attendance has gone back up above 100. (Nearly a 300% increase over the year, ha!)

God has moved powerfully beyond the growth in numbers. The life change we see in people is truly remarkable to witness. The tangible presence of God as we worship and commit to preaching His Word is so beautiful. And people are experiencing miracles. God is faithful to build His church. And the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Why do I share these things? To encourage you.

Joel 2:25 says that God will restore the years that the locusts have eaten.

I'm not sure what you feel like you have lost. Maybe it's something to do with your church. Maybe it's a relationship. Maybe it's finances. God is faithful and can restore anything that has gone. Not only that, but He can also turn that situation around and use it for His glory.

In the middle of all of this, we decided to record an album. Our church has always loved to worship. It's been a 3-year journey, but we finally released it. It's called "Move In Your Church" and it comes from a desire to, you guessed it, see God move in His Church.

That's what we're praying for. Not just that God would move in our church, but in His capital "C" Church across Detroit, Michigan, and the world. We're praying for movement. For a re-igniting of passion for Him, His Word and reaching the lost.

The world desperately needs the church. Now as much as ever. We're praying that what we have started to see God do in our church, He would do across the world in all our churches.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Pastor Josh Bowers is the lead Pastor of Cross & Anchor Church, a NAMB church in Detroit Michigan. He and his wife pioneered the church in 2019.

Cross & Anchor Worship has recently released an album called "Move In Your Church". It is available to stream on all music platforms and we pray it is a blessing to you and your people.

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## **At the foot of the Cross**

**SHELBY TOWNSHIP** – One of my favorite places on our church property is the cross that stands in the back corner by the edge of the tree line. I find myself down by the cross time after time pouring my heart out to God. I can pull into the parking lot with no plans to go to the cross then suddenly feel an impression to go, sit and pray. There have been times when I was working in my office and felt overwhelmed, and I would grab my Bible and go sit at the cross. I have taken others to the cross with me to pray, confess, and offer forgiveness. It is truly a special place.

When we come to the foot of the cross, we remember what Jesus did for us. Jesus was perfect, holy, and sinless and left heaven to come to die for you and for me. We are so undeserving of this act of love, and yet He died such a horrible and grueling death so that we could live.

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV), "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Jesus died so that we could live.

Why is it then that we carry around our burdens, cares, and frustrations? These weights hold us down from living the life Jesus intends us to live. He died on the cross so that we could surrender all those things to Him.

I like to think of it in this way:

When we sit down in a chair, what happens to our weight? It transfers, right? Our weight transfers from our bodies to the chair. The same happens at the foot of the cross. When we come to Jesus and we give Him our burdens, cares, and frustrations, this weight we have been carrying then transfers from us to Him. If we truly give it all to Jesus, we should feel the weight lift from our shoulders.



Jesus says in Matthew 11:30 (NIV), "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I also love the Message version of this verse: "Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Who doesn't want to live "freely and lightly?"

When we go to Jesus and remember what He has done for us, we can be confident that He will continue to help us carry the heavy loads we are faced with in life. However, He won't just take it from us. We must surrender it all to Him and invite the Holy Spirit to have an active role in our lives. We can't do this on our own!

Sometimes we try to give the burdens we carry to Jesus, but oftentimes we end up taking them back. We may take them back because we don't really trust God to take care of them. Perhaps God hasn't taken care of them in the way we wanted Him to, so we take them back to regain control of the situation to try to make it turn out the way we think it should. We might take our burdens back because we think God may have forgotten about them, so we step in to help Him out.

Whatever the case might be, by taking our burdens back from God we are essentially saying we know more about the situation than God does. We truly do not believe that He is in control, and we certainly don't trust that He is going to work things out for good. So, we continue to stress, strive, and allow these burdens to steal our joy.

This is not the life Jesus died for us to live.

Today, I encourage you to sit at the foot of the cross and remember the price Jesus paid for you. Are you living a life of freedom and victory? Or are you still bound by the strongholds and sin that Jesus gave His life for? Take time to go before God and confess where you have been carrying the load that Jesus wants to carry for you. Then, visualize placing those things into His nail scarred hands and walk away. He wants to take them from you today, and He wants you to leave them there. It is time to live freely and lightly!

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Karen is married to Scott Blanchard, pastor of Lakepointe Church, and moved from Florida to Michigan in the summer of 2009 to plant Lakepointe Church in Shelby Township. She enjoys mentoring and discipling women and also leads women's life groups through her church. She is passionate about helping women find their purpose in who God created them to be. She is on staff at Lakepointe Church and loves being part of what God is doing in the Metro Detroit area!

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# The Jesus Revolution and me

**JACKSON** – As I began to see the movie The Jesus Revolution being advertised on Facebook and television, I was carried back in memory of that time in my life. It was 1968 and I was in the Navy at the time stationed in Southern California at the Pacific Missile Range at Point Mugu not far from the city of Oxnard. The church I attended there was First Southern Baptist Church of Oxnard and was very active in the community. I was asked to work with the youth department there.

I recognized immediately that something was happening there much of which I had not seen in the churches that I had been a part of in New Mexico as I grew up. The youth group in Oxnard had a fire in them that was causing many of their friends to surrender to Christ. That group was determined that people would come to Jesus. They not only witnessed to people at school, but everywhere they went. They joined Campus Crusade for Christ's (CRU) effort in carrying the gospel to the beaches up and down the coast. Using the tract The Four Spiritual Laws, young people were reaching people for Christ on beaches from Ventura to San Diego. I was so happy to be a part of that.

There were also concerts by contemporary Christian artists of the time like Larry Norman, Love Song, and Dennis Agajanian which had so many people attending that the crowds would flow from the venues into the surrounding streets. I remember attending one at a large church in Hollywood where the church was completely filled, so they put speakers outside and the police closed off the block to accommodate all the people outside who weren't able to get into the church. Those were exciting places to be. I was even given the opportunity to play my guitar and sing gospel music at an Oxnard pizza restaurant named the Pizza Palace.

During that time, is when I met my wife Diana. I had a part in leading her sisters to the Lord, so they brought her to one of our youth group's Saturday night meetings. Their intention was for Diana to hear me teach about Jesus so that she would fall in love with Him like they had. They had no clue at the time that she would not only come to Jesus as the youth group and I witnessed to her, but that she would fall in love with me as well and become a pastor's wife.

A few years after we got married and I had been to Vietnam and back a couple of times, we moved to Poway, California where she worked with children at Poway Southern Baptist Church and helped me as I became a leader in the youth group there. The Jesus movement was still going strong and our youth group there grew from 8 to 63 in a little over two years. Again, it wasn't me, but it was the Lord leading the students to win their friends to a saving acceptance of Him.

The group outgrew every place in the church we were given to meet, so finally the church bought the house next door for us. We would sit shoulder to shoulder on the living room floor during the Sunday School opening where I would lead them in singing songs, and they would share testimonies; then they would break up into classes for different age groups. Also, they

would meet during the week at different homes for Bible discussions and snacks. The youth choir also grew greatly and performed Christian youth musicals. What a wondrous time these years were in the life of the church!

In my 46 years of ministry, I have not seen or experienced anything else like those years when I saw not only teens in the communities, but also sailors in the Navy turn to Christ in great numbers. That is also when I saw my best friend from Navy days, Elton Spurgeon who is now pastor of Thornhill Baptist Church in Hudson, MI, get saved. There is no doubt in my heart that it was truly a time where the Holy Spirit was moving.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Don Anderson was saved at VBS when he was eight years old. He started preaching at the age of 16 and has pastored one mission and four churches since the age of 28. He has a Bachelor's Degree from Texas Tech and a Master of Christian Studies from Union University in Jackson, TN.

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## **Stop playing it safe**

**MIDLAND** – The Parable of the Minas in Luke 19:11-26 contains words and phrases like do business, accounting, increase, bank, interest, kept, saved, maintained, out of fear. In this parable, Jesus implies that Christians should have an entrepreneurial spirit regarding kingdom growth and activity. Even more, Jesus teaches that by playing it safe, you can lose what's been given to you.

In this parable, there are two kinds of people: 1) those who are driven by possibilities and 2) those who are driven by problems (or fear). Those driven by fear are more concerned about what they could lose than what they could gain. One thing is very clear from this parable; **there is no reward for those who play it safe**. Instead, this is a time to take risks – to look at the possibilities more than the potential problems.

Faithful Christians are those who hear the Word and obey what it says. They share the Word and produce a crop 30, 60, and 100-fold. Business people understand this. If you were someone who had a store and went there every day and opened it up and sat behind the counter and never sold anything – that's not faithfulness – that's bankruptcy. But churches do this all the time and call this "faithfulness."

Jesus says, "engage in business." So, there is a side to faithfulness that is about growth and numbers. Jesus wants us to have an entrepreneurial spirit for Kingdom work. Be intentional. Be deliberate. Think about it. Dream. What are the potentials? What are the possibilities? What

could you do differently than you are doing now? Who are the people you need to get to know?

Maybe there is that thing back there in your life that you always wondered about – whether God was calling you to do that and go there and start it. Maybe now is the time to exercise faith and trust God for it. You won't know if you don't try. What changes do you need to make? What adaptations should you consider?

Be mindful that some people might try to discourage you, and the Devil himself might get you to doubt yourself and God with things like "you're crazy, don't overextend yourself, that's too much, just think of what you could lose."

He tried that with Jesus. When Jesus was on the cross, He was told, "come down from there. Prove you're the Messiah. Save yourself." I'm glad Jesus didn't give into temptation and come down from the cross!

Jesus said, "Whoever loses His life for My sake will find it!" Do you believe that?

What are you not doing that God wants you to do?

What are you doing that God wants you to stop?

If you're a Christian, you have the assurance and hope of heaven because you belong to Christ, and He lives in you through His Spirit. So, why are you holding back? What are you afraid of? If you believe God's Word is true, then be a doer of it and not merely a hearer only, deluding yourself.

Stop being at ease in Zion. Stop bowing at the altar of comfort, convenience, and ease. **Stop playing it safe!** Don't spend the rest of your life wondering what God would have done had you obeyed Him.

Listen to *The Richard Blackaby Leadership Podcast*, as much of what I shared in this article came from an episode I heard there.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. David Roberts is Pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Midland and serves as the Associational Mission Strategist for the Bay Area Baptist Association.

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# The family foundation found in the Trinity

**MONROE** – The concept of family is an integral part of our society and personal lives. However, in today's society, defining what a family is and what its roles entail can be challenging. One way to expound on this concept is through the lens of the Trinity, and how it can provide invaluable guidance for family relationships.

The Trinity offers us insights into the importance of headship, submission, and obedience, as well as the need for spiritual growth and intimacy within a God-centered marriage. By looking at the characteristics of Christ's earthly ministry, we can see how they tie together the elements of the Trinity, and provide a clear example of how we should live our lives as family members.

According to Webster's dictionary, family is defined as "the collective body of persons who live in one house and under one head or manager; a household, including parents, children and servants, and as the case may be, lodgers or boarders."

When I think of a family, I instantly think of the collective body, not just individuals acting separate from one another. In all the time I have spent teaching God's word and thinking about family dynamics, I never heard the family dynamic related to the Trinity in such a fabulous way.

Bruce Ware of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary defines family roles in this way: "In each of these roles, the model of the Trinity provides invaluable guidance, for we see in the Trinity that the ones who submit are fully equal to the one who holds ultimate authority in their relationships. Equality and distinction, oneness and difference, unity and harmony, mark the Trinity. These same realities, in finite measure, ought to mark the family relationships we enjoy, as persons created in the very image of the triune God."

Within the context of this Trinity, I believe that the topics of headship, submission and obedience are all displayed heavily. Christ was obedient and submissive to the will of the father (John 6:39-40), yet Christ was no less God, but worked as a cohesive unit to carry out Christ's ultimate goal: redemption of sin for the world (Luke 19:10).

In Christ's earthly ministry, we can also see discipline to the word (Matthew 4:1-11), diligence in prayer (Matthew 14:23), and also purposeful in the deliverance of the word such as the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7). All of the characteristics of Christ's earthly ministry not only tie together the elements of the trinity but are a clear example of what our lives should be like as husbands, mothers, and children.

All members of the family have responsibilities spiritually and physically, but individually we must spend time with Christ to cultivate that relationship. Within a family, I do not believe a husband is a dictator of the home, ruling with an iron fist. Instead, I believe the husband bears the weight of leading the family in a Christ-centered fashion, loving unconditionally just as Christ unconditionally loves each of us.

Lastly, the family dynamic of intimacy and sexuality. I have always believed unapologetically that God created man and women (Gen. 1:27), and that mankind's responsibility was to procreate and populate the earth (Gen. 1:28). The Bible is clear about the fact that intimacy belongs inside a marriage of a man and woman only inside the confines of a God-centered marriage (Gen 2:24-25, Proverbs 5:15-20, 1 Cor. 7:3-5), and that deviance in a sexual or intimate way is a sin.

In conclusion, the Trinity offers a powerful model for understanding family dynamics. As Bruce Ware points out, we can see in the Trinity the importance of equality and distinction, oneness and difference, unity and harmony.

The Trinity provides us with invaluable guidance for understanding the roles of headship, submission, and obedience within a family. Moreover, the characteristics of Christ's earthly ministry show us how we can cultivate a Christ-centered family by being disciplined in the word, diligent in prayer, and purposeful in delivering the word. Ultimately, we must spend time with Christ to cultivate our relationships with Him and with each other. By following the model of the Trinity, we can build strong and healthy families that are grounded in God's love and grace.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Matt Foley is Senior Pastor of Liberty Missionary Baptist Church of Monroe, MI since August 2022. He is a recent graduate of Liberty University with a degree in Biblical and Theological Studies.

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## **How do you choose your sermon Texts?**

**ROSEVILLE** – Most of my ministry has been bi-vocational, primarily by my choice. And the most significant issue I had as a bi-vocational pastor was managing my time. Yet, all pastors must systematically structure their time to complete all their responsibilities each week.

Therefore, how one appropriates their time for sermon preparation is essential. And selecting the text for the following week's message may take time away from their overall preparation time.

Many pastors spend Monday and sometimes Tuesday before the following Sunday choosing their texts. But, unfortunately, this time takes away from critically assessing the text and context, meditating on its implications for them and their congregation, and developing practical applications.

Therefore, one needs a system that helps them quickly move from text selection to text analysis—choosing a text in light of their congregation's spiritual needs and preaching and instructing from all of the Bible, not just from their favorite passages.

Before one begins developing a system to select sermon texts, as the shepherd to their congregation, a pastor should know the answer to the following questions about the preaching schedules of the past.

- Which passages of the Bible have already been preached? What passages haven't been done in a long time?
- Have sermons from the Old and New Testaments been equally distributed?
- Are there any specific topics (like stewardship or suffering) that the congregation might gain from right now?
- Is there a proper division between praising God (worship), encouraging Christians (discipleship), and evangelizing unbelievers?
- Are the major theological disciplines fairly represented among the doctrinal subjects?

Knowing the answers to these questions is helpful as one develops a long-term approach to selecting sermon texts. So, here are some ideas that will help one minimize their time in selecting sermon texts, with the last idea being one I have used successfully for years.

The first idea is to preach through a book of the Bible like Ephesians or a specific narrative such as Genesis 37–50. This idea allows one to develop a series of messages quickly, therefore, less time selecting a text even though one still needs to choose the length of the passage of Scripture intelligently, considering things like the genre.

Another idea is to respond through Scripture to specific issues the congregation may be experiencing. This text selection allows the listeners to observe how the Bible addresses themes essential to their spiritual growth. This type of preaching may be needed; however, a warning is necessary because this type of preaching may be considered as using the pulpit to bully people into one's positions or, depending on the topic, may come across as a sermon directed to a few select individuals in the congregation.

This last idea is the one that I have practiced for many years. I use a Sunday school quarterly. I do this for several reasons:

1. It gives me a scope and sequence that every six years, I will cover all the books of the Bible.

2. It allows me to discover all the major themes of the Bible.
3. It allows me to rotate between an Old Testament Book and a New Testament Book.
4. It automatically will enable me to package my sermons in a series.
5. It ensures I am never accused of picking a text that allows me to attack someone in my congregation.

If I need to preach something different from the quarterly text, I have that freedom, such as when our country experienced tragedy on 9/11.

Let me say that someone always feels a systematic system of choosing sermon texts does not allow God to speak. I would disagree.

Whatever system one uses, there is always freedom to change it if one feels God speaking from a particular passage. Second, God can use any text to address people's hearts when they come to the service focusing on hearing from God.

As Ephesians 5:16 says, making the best use of the time because the days are evil. (ESV)

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tim Steele is the founding and Discipleship Pastor of Cross Waves Church, a house church network, and pastor of The Studio Connection in Roseville, MI. He is married to Terri, and has two adult children and one granddaughter. Tim speaks and writes on discipleship and is also a traveling stand-up comedian.

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## **SBC leaders address NAAF, Send Network gathering**

**NEW ORLEANS, LA (BP)** – Enhanced collaboration in spreading the Gospel was a key focus as national and regional Southern Baptist leaders gathered March 22 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

The regional leaders gathering of the National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention ([NAAF](#)) and Send Network emphasized the benefits of working together, said NAAF President Frank Williams.



“NAAF desires to actively participate in bringing our pastors and entity leaders together to hear firsthand what’s happening in convention life, ask questions, and interact in meaningful ways that hopefully bridge gaps,” Williams said, “that are sometimes formed through misunderstandings, perceptions of each other, or virtual experiences that do not bring out the best in others.”

SBC President Bart Barber, North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell, SBC Executive Committee Interim CEO and President Willie McLaurin, NOBTS President Jamie Dew, Former SBC President Fred Luter, NAAF board members, SBC EC Vice President for Black Church Relations Charles Grant, Lifeway Christian Resources Black church relations leader Mark Croston, Send Network church planters and various pastors were among the 50 invited guests.

Meeting attendees heard an update on a NAAF/Send Network [partnership](#) to plant churches in areas lacking African American Southern Baptist congregations. They also heard reports of diverse church partnerships and church replants, updates on church and discipleship trends, updates on Executive Committee resources available to pastors and churches, and received spiritual enrichment.

“We are indeed better together,” Williams said, “and the Gospel compels us to go through the tough places, love when it’s hard, and celebrate how God is at work in our convention of churches.” Williams is pastor of Wake Eden Community Baptist Church and the Bronx Baptist Church, both in the Bronx borough of New York.

McLaurin attended the meeting as a ministry of care and concern, he told Baptist Press. “The National African American Fellowship invested in me as a young pastor. Because of their investment, I was elected the first president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention African American Fellowship,” McLaurin said. “I needed to participate in the spring NAAF meeting to provide a ministry of care and concern. I’m letting NAAF members know they have a friend and partner serving on the SBC Executive Committee.”

Such collaborations as the NAAF/Send Network partnerships are among convention hallmarks including cooperation and generosity.

“Strategic alliances are best when churches are on a mission together. For almost 100 years Southern Baptist churches, through the Cooperative Program, have demonstrated interdependence,” he said. “I am incredibly thankful for the faithful focus that NAAF and NAMB are placing on partnership. The partnership will mobilize more Black Churches to reach the harvest.”

The partnership is also a valuable tool in expanding Southern Baptists evangelism and diversity, McLaurin said.

“Frank Williams and Kevin Ezell have provided a healthy model of collaboration which will accelerate the advancement of the Great Commission,” McLaurin said. “Now is the time for our

entire convention to double down on our efforts to partner with every ethnicity. Over the past five years, our entities, state conventions and associations have witnessed intentional efforts to appoint minority leaders. In order to accelerate the momentum, the SBC must position more ethnic leaders in positions of service.”

Grant unveiled [a new video series](#) highlighting the Navigating the SBC resource that has been heartily received.

“The video enhances the partnership I have with NAAF. We’re working together for progress in assisting our churches in understanding the structure and functions of our convention,” Grant said. “The end result is to have a voice that edifies our convention for the glory of God.”

Featuring Williams, NAAF Executive Director Dennis Mitchell and NAAF Secretary and Tracy, Calif., pastor Kevin James, the video includes testimonies of the benefits of the Navigating the SBC resources and describes best ways to use the guide.

“It serves as a promotional and supplemental tool,” Grant said, “for sharing the orientation guide in the Black church context.”

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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## **Pioneer of gospel music rediscovered in Pittsburgh archives**

**PITTSBURGH, PA (AP)** – Scattered in crates, dirty and difficult to read, the gospel music of composer Charles Henry Pace sat packed away, unorganized — and unrealized — for more than 20 years.

Frances Pace Barnes, the pioneering music publisher’s daughter who remembers how he could turn a hum into a song, knew the crates held pieces of her family’s past. But she was not expecting those decaying printing plates and papers to reveal an important part of gospel music history.

“I didn’t know it was going to be a legacy,” said Pace Barnes.

As it turns out, her father was one of the first African American gospel music composers in the United States, and the owner of one of the country's first independent, Black gospel music publishing companies.

Today, the University of Pittsburgh is restoring his work from the 1920s to the 1950s and cementing his place in the genre's history. It was the curiosity of music historian Christopher Lynch that set the Charles Henry Pace preservation project into motion.

"This is something that we can, as Pittsburghers, all be proud of," said Lynch with a smile. "Charles Pace was a tremendous figure in music history."

Long after Pace died in 1963, his music store, which was first known as the Old Ship of Zion and later changed to the Charles H. Pace Music Publishers located in Pittsburgh's Hill District, was sold and his archives went with it. Eventually, the materials made their way to auction, and the university's library system bought them in 1999.

The 14 crates sat for more than two decades before Lynch, who also is the project's coordinator with the university's Center for American Music, uncovered the significance of what they held.

Lynch, who moved to Pittsburgh in 2017, was inspired to go through them after taking a tour of the Hill District — the city's first hub of Black culture and art — and learning that a park in the area would be dedicated to Pace's wife and community activist, Frankie Pace.

But his task was large. And in 2021 he began organizing, cleaning and deciphering the 250 printing plates and about 600 photographs that detailed Pace's legacy.

"I quickly realized that 'Oh, we had something here,'" said Lynch.

Although the genre's roots reach as far back as 19th century spiritual songs, the lineage of modern gospel music heard in Black churches today includes the work of musicians and composers who emerged in the 1920s.

Those pioneers include Thomas Dorsey, who is often called the father of gospel music, "giving the impression that he pretty much singlehandedly invented this style," said Lynch. But after digging into Pace's early work, he says it was around the same time, or even a few years before Dorsey. This has helped the historians piece together the community of musicians who pushed gospel music forward as it began entering popular culture.

During this period, African American gospel music composers didn't have access to large publishing companies so Pace learned to do it all himself. Lynch says an important part of the archival work is restoring the true history and giving credit where credit is due since many of Pace's most recorded songs, including, "If I Be Lifted Up," are rarely credited to him, listed instead as "traditional songs."

Pace got his start in Chicago, creating his first publishing company where he worked on the early music of Dorsey. He also formed the Pace Jubilee Singers, which was one of the first Black groups to record gospel music and perform on the radio. Soon after meeting his wife, the couple relocated on Pittsburgh's North Side where Pace introduced gospel music in 1936 to Tabernacle Baptist Church as the music director and later opened their store in the Hill District.

The couple formed the Pace Choral Union, a gospel choir of 75 singers at its inception and 200 at its peak. They helped establish gospel music across the city, performing at churches and events throughout Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania as well as weekly on the radio.

"I really didn't realize until I was much older how talented my father was," said Pace Barnes, who grew up working in his store.

The storefront, which doubled as an office, sold gospel music and church literature. Artists, unable to write their own music, could come to Pace with an idea. He would arrange it, and then, print and publish the songs.

The storefront became a hub for some big name, traveling musicians like Louis Armstrong and W. C. Handy.

Pace was one of few people who knew how to fully print sheet music using photo negatives and metal plates mounted onto scrap wood. This was crucial to the expansion of gospel music in the U.S.

"To think he was doing this basically in the back of a shop or in his house in the thirties, in the forties..." said Pace's grandson Frank Barnes in awe.

Frankie and Charles were also able to build a wide-ranging geographical distribution network of 301 stores across 29 different states. They also had a consistent list of more than 2510 mail subscribers who ordered from him directly.

"He's one of the early evangelists of gospel music," said Kimberly Ellis, an American historian and founding executive director of the Historic Hill Institute, who is currently working on an oral history project on Frankie Pace. "It meant that he literally spread the good news, via music, from coast to coast. Which is amazing."

In addition to co-owning the music store and singing in the Pace Gospel Choral Union, Frankie Pace earned a reputation as a strong community activist. She worked with various groups to improve education and housing conditions, and co-founded a committee that advocated for mandatory community input on any future development in the Hill District.

Thrilled that Charles Pace will be placed in his proper context, Ellis also hopes that bringing this music to light will help "transform what we know about history."

The work has transformed what Pace's grandson now knows about his family history. He grew up in Chicago knowing little about his grandfather, who died six years before he was born. Worried about making his mother sad, he often resisted the urge to ask questions about him.

"Things can so easily get lost," he said. "Whether it be artifacts like the plates, or whether it be the stories of the people in their trajectory, like my grandparents."

Barnes and his mother are glad the Pace archives will remain at the university, giving future generations the opportunity to learn about their patriarch. More immediately, the city will honor the legacies of Charles and Frankie Pace on Saturday (March 25) with a free concert showcasing music composed by Pace and the rededication of Frankie Mae Pace Park.

"This is history, and we are part of making history again," said director and founder of The Heritage Gospel Chorale of Pittsburgh, Herbert V.R.P. Jones, who will be one of the main performers that evening.

Francis Pace Barnes, who hasn't been to Pittsburgh since her mother died in 1989, will be there with her son, listening to her father's music in the church where he once worked.

"I'm looking forward to hearing songs I haven't heard in 40 years," she said.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jessie Wardarski writes for the Associated Press. Associated Press religion coverage receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

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## **No more excuses**

**NASHVILLE, TN** – Learn from one of the greatest presidents, Abraham Lincoln, who noted, "Give me six hours to cut down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the ax." The President understood the balance between action and preparation.

It was the famed professional basketball star from Leeds, Alabama, Charles Barkley that said candidly, "You just can't sit on the sidelines of life." Many would surmise that "sharpening an ax" is akin to just sitting and doing nothing...Lincoln disagrees!!

May this article's be your call to action, even if that means a season of preparation.

## **WHY?**

Because Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The time is always ripe to do right.” There was a man that feared NO man—but did fear the Lord! Let me ask you point blank, do you fear man...or the God who created the universe? If you are like me, excuses have marred you in the past, but “Hey, let us assume you are fresh out!”

## **SO, NOW WHAT?**

If there is a NOW, then there is still time. “Never give up on a dream just because of the time it will take to accomplish it. The time will pass anyway.” Earl Nightingale. No more excuses! You may say, “Well, I have more time in the rear-view mirror than the windshield”—well then...congratulations, you have something to share with those who need to know.

Henry Adams pointed out, “A teacher impacts eternity—he can never tell where his influence stops.” How true! The older and more experienced you are, the more you can pass to the next generation! Please hear me when I say, our next generation desperately needs wisdom from our elders.

What if your next adventure requires you to move or travel or go the distance? Consider this scientific fact, the human circulatory system is more than sixty thousand miles long!! Now if God needs your blood to travel that far, maybe you should be willing to get off your “blessed assurance” and DO SOMETHING!!

You know Carl Sandburg wasn’t all wrong when he quipped, “I’m an idealist...I don’t know where I am going, but I’m on my way.” Scripture challenges us, “whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.” Get a clue friend, you aren’t supposed to have a complete roadmap when you are a pilgrim away from home, and a sojourner headed home. Father Abraham certainly didn’t.

Aha! Still not convinced—maybe your next phase is to learn to treat people better. I mean really—do you ever give yourself a grade? What’s your report card say? “Your smile is your LOGO...Your personality is your BUSINESS CARD. How you leave others feeling after having an experience with you becomes your TRADEMARK.” Jay Danzie.

Or as Martin Luther King Jr. preached, “to like someone is a sentimental something, but to love someone is a positive decision. It’s hard. It takes work. It’s a measure of who you are as a person—your decision to love in a world full of hate.”

It is never too late for you to alter your course. I love the words of that great theologian and philosopher better known as “ZIGGY, “Just remember...If things look hopeless—maybe you’re facing the wrong direction.”

Maybe try just looking to Jesus!

Patrick Mahomes, winner of Superbowl 57 certainly does, said Patrick—“My Christian faith plays a role in everything I do. I always ask God to lead me in the RIGHT DIRECTION—and let me be who I am for HIS Name!”

Dear Sir/Ma'am—guess what...You can too!

No more excuses!!!

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. David L. Thompson holds an undergraduate degree from Belmont University in Psychology and Religion, a graduate degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Education, and a doctorate in Counseling and Pastoral Psychology. He has served as a chairman of the Church Planting Group and Executive Committee Chair at the North American Mission Board for 10 years. He has been a Police Chaplain since 1991 and served as a Corporate Chaplain to the Coca Cola Bottling Company in Nashville, Tennessee where he resides with his wife. He has six children and five grandsons.

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## **Digital engagement paves way for church planting**

What do you do when you want to plant a church in a new area, but travel is restricted? How do you know where in the city to plant the church and how to generate interest when canvassing and prayer walking aren't possible?

Missionaries with the International Mission Board are employing digital engagement as a new entry strategy for planting churches. IMB missionary Brant Bauman uses evangelism ads and QR code stickers on humanitarian relief packages to point people in Eastern Ukraine to an evangelism resource website.

### **Paving the way for new churches**

IMB missionaries and Ukrainian Baptist pastors hope to plant churches in two cities in far eastern Ukraine — a region under an onslaught from Russia. Great need is coupled with great devastation in these areas, but people are coming to faith. Evangelism efforts are reaching the lost.

In many locations, prayer walking and canvassing neighborhoods to meet people and invite them to visit are strategies to help a church plant. Given the dangers that come with war, this

isn't possible in Ukraine. Instead IMB missionaries are engaging these cities through digital media.

Hope for Ukraine is a website launched by the IMB in the spring of 2022 to provide gospel resources, links to download a digital Bible and a chat feature where Ukrainians can reach out for prayer.

Bauman helped create the website, which opened the floodgates for digital engagement in Ukraine and Europe. Bauman and his team are running evangelism video ads in the cities where IMB missionaries hope to plant churches. Almost 12,000 people have watched the videos to completion, which is a large number given the size of the towns.

He is hoping the videos will help "prime the pump" so that when church planters arrive, the ground will be extra fertile.

Bauman recently traveled to Ukraine with fellow IMB missionary Mike Domke, who served in Ukraine before evacuating during the onset of the war. They traveled to visit partners, check on Send Relief projects and for Bauman to connect with digital first responders who answer when someone contacts the website and investigate future opportunities for digital engagement.

He'll continue to look for ways to propel the work of church planters forward faster and further despite the limitations they experience because of the war. Bauman said they plan to continue running the video ads in the area, and they are looking at using this strategy in other countries.

Humanitarian aid is another way digital engagement is pushing the gospel forward.

### **Stickers make gospel connections**

Send Relief has facilitated 98 projects to serve Ukrainians. In Ukraine, there have been 45 projects, with 35 of them still in progress.

But as they try to aid Ukrainians in a humanitarian way, Bauman said, "what we primarily know is that the greatest need is the gospel because the greatest problem is lostness."

Bauman said his trip was eye-opening, and it quickly became evident to him that God is on the move. His goal was to determine how to get people the resources they need. They asked themselves, how do we incorporate the gospel into humanitarian relief?

An ongoing method of digital engagement is affixing QR code stickers to humanitarian boxes being sent to eastern Ukraine. Nine hundred boxes were shipped in a single day. Bauman said attaching a sticker increases the likelihood someone will see it, because brochures may be lost or discarded. With a scan of the QR code, people can have access to the gospel message.



Since the launch of the Hope for Ukraine website, QR codes leading to the website have been scanned 626 times.

Bauman said they will continue to look for ways to intertwine digital engagement with Send Relief. He hopes the opportunities resulting from digital engagement opened in Ukraine will be an example for other cities.

“We want to continue to be faithful to let this be a shining example of how God is working in and through digital engagement strategies,” Bauman said. “If we give God the ability to work in all ways and through every means possible, He comes through.”

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tessa Sanchez writes for the IMB.

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