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Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

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United to reach the nations in our neighborhoods

by Sue Hodnett

PLYMOUTH, MI – These are big numbers. 275 million people are estimated lost in North America. That's men, women, young adults, and children. Among that population is more than 40 million people living in the United States who were born in another country. That's about 1/5th of the world's migrant population—more than any other country. Almost every nation in the world is represented in North America, making it one of the most complex mission fields. And immigrants continue to come here for a better life, even from countries closed to the gospel. But these aren't just numbers. They represent people made in God's image—people in need of gospel hope. When we come together to reach the nations and our own neighborhoods, the Church becomes a beautiful representation of God's vision for every nation, tribe, and tongue to be saved and united in praise to Him. Through all our differences, we can be transformed and united by the unchanging, life-giving gospel of Jesus.

**(Statistics from Pew Research and NAMB Missional Research) *NAMB-Day 1 Prayer Guide Michigan Baptists can be a part of reaching those big numbers by being a part of the North American Mission Emphasis on March 6-13, 2022.*

Help Michigan Baptists become more aware of the depth of lostness in North American by promoting the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

Contact your convention/WMU office to order free offering print materials.

Website: <https://www.bscom.org/missionofferings>

Email: wmu@bscom.org

The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® Through your church's gifts to the Cooperative Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering, you are making a difference in spreading the gospel in North America. People are hearing the gospel and growing in their commitment to Christ. Churches are being started in areas where Baptist presence has been limited. Every dollar given to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering supports thousands of missionaries across the U.S. and Canada. Time and time again our missionaries relate how the offering is their lifeblood. They know that behind each penny given, there is someone who believes in the ministry they do and are affirming by supporting the need to equip them to share the gospel with those who need a Savior.

Lives are changing as a direct result of your support of North American missionaries through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Today, more than \$2 billion has been given through the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®. All gifts—100%—support thousands of missionaries in church planting and compassion ministries across the U.S. and Canada.

“UNITE” with us again in 2022 to continue this mission that is transforming lives. Your gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering:

- Support more than 2,200 missionaries and their families.
- Enable hundreds of churches to be planted and thousands of disciples to be made.
- Continue the SBC’s 177-year commitment to North American missions.

Week of Prayer Missionaries watch the inspiring stories from:

- [Michael & Traci Byrd, St. Louis, MO](#)
- [Jared & Jennifer Huntley, Washington, D.C.](#)
- [Brianna McKinney, Denver, CO](#)
- [Itamar Elizalde, Guaynabo, PR](#)
- [Steven & Cindy Martins, St. Catharines, ON](#)
- [Amer & Vicky Safadi, Cincinnati, OH](#)

Be sure to check out the online Resource Page: <https://www.anniearmstrong.com/resources>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Hodnett is the State Director of Women’s Ministries for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan as well as the Executive Director of Michigan WMU. She is married to Wayne; they have 4 adult children and 2 grandsons. Sue is dedicated to ministering to women and supporting them in their leadership development.

5 Reasons why we give to the Annie Armstrong Offering

by Garth Leno

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

So, why give?

Here are five reasons why we give—and more specifically— five reasons why we’ve chosen to give to the North American Mission Board’s [Annie Armstrong Easter Offering](#) (AAEO).

1. We give because we love people.

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

2. We give so we can be a blessing to others.

God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:2: *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”* I will bless you...and you will be a blessing to others. This is our privilege and calling as people of God. We are blessed by God to be a blessing—to be generous—to others. Our gifts to the AAEO bless church planters and missionaries in compassion ministries, and through them, it blesses Christians and non-Christians across North America through Send Network and Send Relief.

3. We give to preach the gospel.

It takes money to reach lost people with the gospel. Evangelism, church planting, developing residencies, strengthening churches, meeting needs— it all takes money! If we are committed to spreading the gospel, then we have no choice but to support it with our finances, and that includes the AAEO.

The AAEO helps to train and financially supports church planting missionaries. It helps to resource their plants with funding for ministry equipment, worship space rent, community outreach events and much more.

4. We give because it’s a biblical principle.

There is a force of financial blessing that is released in our lives by the giving of our money. In 2 Corinthians 9:6 it says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” Our giving is the seed which awaits a harvest at a later date. Our level of harvest through Send Network may be directly related to our level of giving to the AAEO.

5. We give to fill a void.

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

There are many great organizations to give to that are advancing God's mission. But perhaps what's just as important as *where* you give is *that* you give and are generous stewards. As for us, we have found significant kingdom impact and personal joy by supporting thousands of missionaries in church planting and compassion ministry through the AAEO.

To learn more about how you can generously invest in the work of church planting in North America and find resources to lead your church to give, visit AnnieArmstrong.com.

Want to hear more about what it means to be a generous steward? Listen to [this episode](#) of the *We are Send Network* podcast

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Garth Leno lives in Windsor, Ontario Canada, with his wife and one daughter, Jamie. Two more children, Nathan and Kristin, are married with families of their own. Garth is the senior pastor at The Gathering, which he planted with friends in 2014. He also is on the Send Network Canadian Advisory Board. He has a doctorate from Bethel Theological Seminary and loves to preach.

In the desert but not deserted

by Chad Wells

PORTAGE, MI – You've seen the scene: the camera sweeps across vast desert terrain, following a solitary track, zooming in on the lonely struggler. "Water, water," he says, crawling through the desert sands crying through parched lips, "Water..."

Perhaps you've found yourself in a similar struggle. You wander, calling out for what is so desperately needed, but as yet unseen. You wait, searching for illusive answers as you traverse a desert of the soul. "Why am I here?" "Where is God?" "What is the meaning of this mess?" You believe, but the underlying unbelief challenges your perseverance, if not your faith itself.

Spiritual deserts have a way of drawing us inward. The big picture gets lost as self begins to dominate the landscape. Confusion. Isolation. Loneliness. Temporary circumstances seem eternal. Momentary inconveniences seem insurmountable. Remembrance of past provision fades. The reality of ever-present help is forgotten.

Consider the story of Israel. An enslaved people, desperate for deliverance, brought out of Egypt by the mighty hand of God. Yet, the same generation that was given incontrovertible evidence of God's presence and power failed to walk faithfully in the wilderness. There they groaned for a return to the land of their burden, longing for the predictable life of oppression over the vulnerability of dependence. With each complaint their hearts hardened. With each groan, their conclusions become clear: the God that would lead them to the desert could not be trusted.

To be clear, they were in the desert, but they were never deserted. The Lord was present in the cloud by day and the fire by night. His power and provision were seen at every turn. The mountain quaked with the weight of His glory. From the tent of meeting to the tabernacle, the Lord was with His people. Rocks brought forth water. Manna rained like dew. Meat was miraculously provided. Yet, the sojourners complained, failing to recognize the greatest blessing of the desert. God was with His people Israel.

You may be in the desert, but you are not deserted. He has promised to never leave or forsake you. To those who thirst, He gives springs of living water. To the hungry, the Bread of Life. The desert is never easy, but it is not a curse. If anything, the desert makes clear our need to die to self. It reveals our own insufficiencies, and highlights our need for our Shepherd to lead us home. Will you learn in the desert what a generation of Israelites failed to grasp? Will you look past your own circumstances and comfort, and see that He is with you? Will you trust His leadership and love as He walks with you through the shadowed valley?

Look up and remember. Depend on and trust. He is faithful. He is with you. You are not deserted in this desert. He is leading you home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Wells is the pastor of First Baptist Church-Portage and AMS for the South Central Baptist Association.

Leading yourself well

by Karen Blanchard

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MI – My husband is a pastor and we have been in ministry our entire relationship. Since he was already on staff at a church when we started dating, our relationship hasn't known anything else. If you know anything about ministry, you know it isn't a Monday to Friday, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm job. There are many demands that come along with ministry and it can be very draining.

For the majority of our ministry, we didn't establish great boundaries. We were constantly giving of ourselves and our time, which finally caught up to me several years ago. God began to show me how out of balance we were, and He also convicted me about how I replaced "being with Jesus" with "doing for Jesus." These two things are not the same. Since I was so busy with ministry and not prioritizing time for my relationship with Jesus, my other relationships began to suffer. Oftentimes, God allows us to hit a point of frustration, to wake us up and see the need for a change.

Before we can ever lead others, we first have to learn how to lead ourselves.

One way I learned how to lead myself well was by learning to choose my "best yes." Early in ministry, I didn't know how to say "no" to things; consequently, I would say "yes" to everything. Somewhere along the line I bought into the lie that the more I "do" for Jesus, the better I would look in his eyes. I learned that I could say yes to a lot of things, but I couldn't do a lot of things well.

I love this quote by Lysa TerKeurst:

"A person who lives with an overwhelmed schedule will ache with the sadness of an underwhelmed soul."

I now pray and ask God to remove the things in my life that he never intended for me to do. I only want to say yes to my "best yes" and do that thing well!

Another way I have learned to lead myself well is to implement a Sabbath during my week. My Sabbath is the day of the week I live for. On this day, I give myself time to linger longer with the Lord. I am not rushed to get things done for ministry or for my personal life. It is the time I can sit at the feet of Jesus and feed my soul. When I do this, I am able to drink from the living water that Jesus provides; and then out of that water, I can overflow into the lives of others. When we fill ourselves up with Jesus, we can then give Jesus to others.

In John 15:4 Jesus says:

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

Our ministry should not replace our time with God; instead, it is from our time with God we get what we need to minister to others.

Peter Scazzero, author of *The Emotionally Healthy Leader* says:

“You cannot give what you do not possess. What you do is important, but who you are is even more important. The state you are in is the state you give to others.”

Serving God doesn't mean you have to run yourself into the ground in exhaustion by doing all things! Pray and ask God to show you exactly where he wants you to minister. Then live that out after you have taken time to sit at his feet and are overflowing with his Spirit.

These verses are great to meditate on when praying and asking God for endurance to run the race well while leading people to walk closer with Him.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. - Colossians 1:10-12

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. - Galatians 6:9

We can lead others well when we first lead ourselves well.

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!

Red Goose Shoes

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – At one time my hometown of Kermit, Texas was a thriving, pristine community. Though established in the middle of the sand hills of West Texas, it had been developed into a town that would make the community of Beaver and Wally Cleaver green with envy. (Those of you of a certain mature age will know of whom I speak)

The tax base in that little hamlet was enormous because of the oil and gas production from which it drew the lion's share of its resources. The county was, to say the least, wealthy and used its finances to create a living atmosphere that was storybook perfect for families. It was a planned community to some extent by what was then called the Gulf Project funded by the Gulf Oil Corporation.

The downtown area reflected what you might imagine as the perfect town of the 50's. Today many of the new subdivisions and planned communities being developed across the country are very similar to this homey little hamlet. The long main street was lined with business after business that ranged from the Rexall Drug Store on the corner to a feed store at the far end of town.

One business we would frequent only once or twice a year was Richies Shoe Store. It was the only exclusive footwear establishment in the town. Other clothing and department stores carried a few lines of shoes, but Richies was the best. Besides, Mr. Richie was the local Boy Scout Troop leader, and could be trusted to give you a fair deal.

Richies was, in my youthful opinion of the time, the premier provider of shoes and boots because they were the exclusive retailer of Buster Brown and Red Goose Shoes. From a young boy's perspective there were no rivals in the world of footwear. Nothing came close to those pentacles of podiatric protectors.

It was extremely difficult for a six year old to make such monumental decisions between the two of the finest footwear known in kiddom, but some slick Madison Avenue marketing techniques were powerful enough to persuade me to go with the Red Goose brand. It had little to do with the quality of the shoe, and everything to do with the big red goose that was strategically positioned near the cash register.

This was no ordinary red plastic goose. If a purchase of Red Goose Shoes was made the extraordinarily fortunate buyer received the privilege of pulling down on the long extended neck and head of the goose. The process of this neck bending would automatically release a golden egg from the geese's entrails, which would be expelled from its, well let's say, posterior.

Within that golden egg could be anything. Toy prizes that were beyond imagination were encased in that golden sphere of surprise. The sheer thrill of chance and surprise beckoned my

imagination to worlds of childhood wonder. The story that circulated through the peers of my little world was that one boy actually received a genuine ray gun that projected images of space creatures on almost any surface.

It is curious to me, that the older I get the less I like surprises. I think it has something to do with control. When I was that little boy of six nothing could bring me more joy and happiness than an egg from the posterior of a plastic goose. It's funny how perspectives and priorities change.

Those changes reflect maturity and understanding or at least they should. The things I loved as a child have faded to the inconsequential and unimportant. Today I have grown and developed a more sophisticated and refined list of wants and needs.

God tells us that as we mature physically we should also mature emotionally and spiritually, but there are some of us who are perpetually stuck in an infantile and childish state. Maturity is a malleable and moving goal, and even now at my present age, I find it a summit I have yet to reach. Yet, I still strive for the prize.

It is time to move on and move up. It is time to find our greatest joy and fulfillment in those things that are eternal and not temporal. I know that those goose-given-golden-eggs were really "swift" and "super neat", but toy ray guns are no match for the wonders that await those who "seek first the Kingdom of Heaven."

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

- 1 Corinthians 13:11-12

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.

1 Couple - 2 Campuses

by Dr. Tony L Lynn

DETROIT, MI – Names of dynamic-duos easily roll off the tongue when we speak about them. Batman and Robin. Captain Kirk and Spock. Chewie and Han Solo. Pastor Corn and Marisa!

For decades, Pastor Cornelius and Mrs. Marisa Roberson have possessed two identities. “Pastor Corn,” as he is affectionately called, has guided people through troubled times as a counselor in group and private sessions. Marisa has taken new employees with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan by the hand, guiding them to unlock all the services of an insurance agency to help people in times of crisis like we have all experienced. Pastor Corn and Marisa, by day, have assisted thousands throughout Michigan to escape troubled-times and discover renewed hope in their successful careers. Simultaneously while pursuing their careers, Pastor Corn and Marisa care for a family of scholars and athletes. Life gives the Robersons a lot and they give back more to others, wrapped-up in love.

Along with all that I already mentioned, Pastor Corn and Marisa established a well-known neighborhood church in the heartland of Detroit’s underserved sections. Our partnership with Pastor Corn and Marisa started more than five years ago as they became an assessed and endorsed church planting couple in Michigan. The church building of Heart and Soul Community Church Detroit has become known as the cornerstone of the ministry because hungry children are fed, a secure environment is protected, and the Good News of Jesus Christ is taught and lived out in action.

However, there is more to the ministry than the building, so don’t miss it. Frequently, the Robersons are seen walking the neighborhood’s one square mile of homes and families engaging people in conversations about faith, current events, sports, and the latest news on families.

Tony Lynn, the church planting leader with Send Network says, “Among the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention, Pastor Corn and Marisa are identified as missionaries; and rightly so, because they will overcome barriers to share the Good News of Christ with everyone within their lives regardless of their age, their background, and their address. They are convinced that Jesus Christ changes everything in people’s lives.” Lynn having witnessed the church’s annual summer baptism celebrations at Kensington Metropark, Milford adds, “Pastor Corn and Marisa’s affection for Christ overflows into their devoted relationships with neighbors. They speak about Christ with others as easily as they breath.”

Marisa, while beaming with pride over her husband’s spiritual influence with others reports, “In the neighborhood, Pastor Corn is referred to as “The Sheriff” because he is always watching out for everyone’s best interest.” Boys and girls intentionally ride bikes or walk to the church building where they know they will encounter Pastor Corn or Marisa. When they speak to one

another, everyone knows one another by name. There is a sense of family within this one square mile of Detroit.

Pastor Corn, with a warm affection in his eyes and a smile on his face will tell you, “Marisa is my rib. I couldn’t do any of this without her.” The two are inseparable and committed to one another. It is hard to believe that a spiritual romance like theirs started at a Detroit Tiger’s baseball game, but it did. The Lord has taken their game into multiple innings and the city of Detroit is all the better because of Pastor Corn and Marisa.

Yet suddenly this past year, through some pivotal moments, the Roberson’s lives shifted unexpectedly and dramatically! Like the day Peter Parker was bitten by a radioactive spider then became Spider-Man, a new story started to unfold for Pastor Corn and Marisa.

A friend of Pastor Corn was a longtime and loved pastor in West Bloomfield. Though the two men served miles away from one another, the two pastors made it a point to share life together and enjoy one another’s company. One day, Pastor Corn’s friend passed away leaving a widow and a congregation behind without a local shepherd.

Recognizing the bond between the two pastors, Pastor Corn was asked to perform the memorial ceremony for his dear friend and the congregation of the deceased became rapidly attached to Pastor Corn and Marisa.

Through a series of conversations, the members of the established church in West Bloomfield decided to merge their building, property, parsonage, and its leadership with Pastor Corn and Heart and Soul Community Church. The details are amazing. The new campus in West Bloomfield is across the street from the local high school which is a perfect combination for “Coach Corn!” That is right. He has another identity and superpower he is using for the Lord. A coach.

Many volunteers contributed money and muscle to prepare the new site as Heart and Soul Community Church West Bloomfield. Separated by fifteen miles distance from the original campus, the Robersons and volunteers from churches like Merriman Road Baptist Church, Garden City, descended on the new site during long evenings and busy weekends, to redirect previous flooding problems, perform demolition, then refit and rebuild the space for a fresh start. During these past chilly winter months, the church launched at the new site: one couple, two campuses, God’s strength.

Would you pray for the leadership and the members of the church as they find ways to minister in two locations fifteen miles apart? The leadership understands that in Detroit and West Bloomfield people need Jesus Christ because he changes everything. This one couple, Pastor Corn and Marisa, are focused on the two campuses with one eternal mission: to see every man, woman, and child offered an opportunity to know Jesus Christ.

Would you like to encourage Pastor Corn and Marisa? Occasionally, God does things that are not on the agenda or in the budget for a local church. If you would like to express your appreciation in a tangible way to Pastor Corn and Marisa Roberson you can do so by sending a card and writing a check to Heart and Soul Community Church, then mail it to:

Heart and Soul Community Church
Attention: Pastor Cornelius Roberson
18701 Grand River Avenue, Suite 257
Detroit, Michigan 48223

Your expression of love will be greatly appreciated.

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.

Let me introduce you to the world

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – Hi Silas and Abel, your mommy and daddy asked Grandma and I to record a message so you could hear our voices. It's such a great idea! I'm Papa by the way and I want you to know my voice and hear it often. From the moment you were born January 16th, Grandma and I have longed to hold you and welcome you into our lives. Though our arms remain empty because of the special care you need, you are held firmly in our hearts and surrounded in our love.

I remember when your parents told us the news they were expecting. We barely got seated in the restaurant before your daddy told us that they were going to have a baby. Joy flooded our hearts. You are the answer to multiple prayers offered years before that special moment.

We couldn't stop smiling. As we drove away from dinner, Grandma said: "Wouldn't it be great to have twins?" Your mommy is a twin and some say that it's not uncommon for twins to have twins. Imagine our surprise when we got the call that next day that you were indeed twins!

A few days later we got another call. One that introduced us to a whole new vocabulary. Your mommy told us that you were MoMo Twins, meaning that you were identical twins sharing the

same amniotic sack. Your Momma's pregnancy would be special in a way that few are. You would face challenges as you developed in the womb - especially as your cords wrapped around each other much like a braid. That braid posed potential challenges to your health. Your daddy, and especially your mommy, made incredible sacrifices to give you life.

One of our many prayers for you came from the Bible: "For it was you who created my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13). We entrusted you to God - asking Him to knit both of you together in His miraculous way.

And here you are! You are born into a world full of wonder. Your 3½ or so pounds look so tiny, yet you are perfect in every way. Right now, you are surrounded by caring doctors, nurses, and machines in the NICU that are helping you grow, but soon you will enter a whole new world! Your mommy and daddy will introduce you to a world that is beyond anything you can even begin to comprehend. And Silas and Abel, you will introduce your parents to the world in a whole new way. Your growth, your discoveries, your looks of surprise, laughter, and even tears will take them to depths of wonder they didn't know existed.

The fun part is that Grandma and I get to experience it with you too! We can't wait.

Like you, your world is pretty small right now. It won't stay that way. Beyond the walls, and all the medical devices, are scores and scores of people who are praying for you. We are grateful for each one. It means the world to us!

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.

You can turn the other cheek

by Coye Bouyer

LANSING, MI – Jesus teaches that if someone slaps us on the cheek, we should turn the other to them also (Matt. 5:39-40). Furthermore Paul teaches us that we should never retaliate against our enemies and those who try to harm us.

Now in both cases these are not references to times of war or times of protection of our loved ones, but rather personal attacks from another. We are instructed not to retaliate or seek

revenge. But how in the world are we supposed to overcome harmful attacks, physical abuse, or the verbal onslaughts that can leave us in physical pain or psychological and emotional instability? While it may be more difficult to decipher through the words of Jesus in the 'Sermon on the Mountain,' Paul gives us a sure way to put up with and even apply the biblical principle of turning the other cheek.

Paul says, "*we are to overcome evil, with good*" (Romans 12:21). In essence, Paul is trying to get us to see that the only way to overcome evil is to make sure that we are committed to the practice of '*doing good*.' Doing the right thing just doesn't happen. It takes time, patience, and practice. Any successful athlete, actor or professional would agree that they did not get to the heights of their career without putting in long hours of practice, patiently and persistently trying to get it right.

In the same way you and I will never achieve the ability to overcome evil with good, if we don't first spend much of our time planning for and practicing the right thing so when personal attacks take place, we can do in public the good we have been practicing in private.

So, what is the point of this month's article? Simple, in order for you and I to live out the more difficult teachings of Jesus and biblical principles such as turning the other cheek, we must first practice them on smaller scales in the everyday scenarios in our life. You and I can start at home by sometimes holding our tongue instead of speaking our mind, thinking of something nice to say instead of something harsh. We began to think about the concerns, needs and even desires of others first before ourselves. At work we can hold the door for someone else, when we are driving slow down, let someone else into your lane, look for opportunities to give instead of receive.

By doing things like these, we prepare ourselves for the day when someone attempts or even succeeds in wronging, taking away, or simply mistreating us. Only then will we still be able to turn the other cheek like Jesus said, and overcome their evil with our good like Paul teaches. God Bless!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Coye L. Bouyer is the founding pastor of Kingdom Life Church in Lansing, MI where he has served since March of 2010. Pastor Bouyer recently stepped into the Diversity Ambassador role for the BSCM and firmly believes that he was not only called to Preach the Gospel as part of the process of reconciliation of man to God, but also using any platform as a bridge of reconciliation of man to man, and even more so amongst the brethren. Pastor Bouyer and his lovely wife Keturah (Gen. 25:1) have been married four over 20 years and have four children; Sierra, Seth, Cayla and Coye II.

The power of one

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Can one person make a difference? Back in the early 90's when I was an intern on staff with a church in Florida (my birthplace), I met regularly with associate pastors who would speak into my life and mentor me.

During this time, I also became engaged to my forever sweetheart (now 25 years married). In one of our weekly meetings one of my pastor friends shared with me this statement - "What's more important, your rights or the relationship".

Wow, what a thought, especially as I was about to be a husband! That one statement has replayed itself in my mind continuously over the years of marriage and ministry. A constant guide and reminder that people are more important than my personal selfish agenda.

I have discovered in 25 plus years of ministry that it is easy to get consumed with numbers, programming, outcomes, budgets and forget that God's heart is for people therefore so should mine. Amazingly that one statement has replayed itself in my mind on many occasions to keep my perspective correctly focused. So, the answer is yes! One person can make a difference.

It's easy to believe you are insignificant in the grand scheme of things. However, please understand you were created by God for a specific purpose and impact in this life on this planet, and God does not scheme. God is not playing games with us. This is real life with eternity in the balance. God has placed you right where you are to impact those around you with the love and life of Christ.

Nevertheless, in case you still doubt your significance and the impact you can have on the world, let me give you a few of my favorite examples:

Moses - who had a speech impediment, yet led a nation to freedom

Gideon - who led an army of 300 to defeat an army of thousands

David - a sheep herder who defeated a giant

Mary - a young virgin who believed by faith she was to give birth to Jesus (the son of God)

Saul - who killed Christians, yet called by God to be Paul and be a missionary

George Washington - who led a country to freedom over tyranny

Winston Churchill - Leader of Great Britain during World War Two

Bill Gates - Founder of Microsoft

Steve Jobs - who transformed the music industry

Rosa Parks - who campaigned and fought against segregation and racism

Neil Armstrong - who walked on the moon

Obviously, this list is just some of my favorites and the list could go on and on. History is packed full of people who impacted their community and the world. God uses folks of all shapes and sizes to achieve His purposes. Your shape and your size are included in His plans.

This article is simply a reminder to you and me of how important our witness is in this hopeless culture. It's a reminder of the "Power of One". That's one person (you/me) impacting one other person who impacts another person, and so on and so on. May we not be content with living our lives just for our own glory and satisfaction. Let's live every day with a Kingdom mindset, on a Kingdom mission for Kingdom glory!

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.

The importance of rest in church planting

by Dr. Noe Garcia

I wanted to reach people. I wanted to grow the church. I wanted to make an impact. But I didn't recognize what I was doing.

Editor's Note: *This is an excerpt from the [Church Planting Masterclass](#). Sign up for the Church Planting Masterclass at [NewChurches.com](#).*

When I first arrived in North Phoenix Baptist Church, I knew it needed revitalization. It was a great church. It had great bones. But there were things that needed to be done.

I wanted to reach people. I wanted to grow the church. I wanted to make an impact. But I didn't recognize what I was doing.

I was moving 100 miles an hour. My mind was constantly going, thinking about the church. When I would go home after work I was still thinking about the church, to the point that I began unintentionally neglecting my family.

Hitting the wall

I began to run so fast, my eating habits, my mental state and my physical wellbeing became very unhealthy. And honestly, my spiritual life suffered too. I was preparing sermons every

week but preparing a sermon and sitting alone with God — just God — simply to know Him are two completely different things.

Eventually, I hit a wall, and I became really irritated. I was irritable at home and at work. I was frustrated when things didn't go well. I was disappointed most of the time. I never felt like it was enough. If the church grew, I wanted to grow more. If people were saved, I wanted more to be saved. If people were baptized, I wanted more to be baptized. And because I never felt like I attained the goal, I began to question my calling.

Here are a few of the common thoughts I had:

- “Man, I’m not going where I want to go with this church.”
- “Things aren’t turning out the way they should.”
- “People aren’t responding how I want them to respond.”
- “There is staff turnover; people are talking bad about me.”

I lived this way for five years. It was discouraging. Think about that. Five years of pretty much non-stop work. That’s pretty crazy.

Sabbatical

I took a month-long sabbatical, and I left my cell phone in Arizona and went to an entirely different state. I forced myself to rest and let my mind rest, to let my thoughts rest and to let my body rest. During this time, three things happened:

1. God began to bring up what I was suppressing.

Over the five years, I suppressed the criticism, the staff turnover, people leaving the church or the things said about me and my failures.

I was moving so fast I didn't stop long enough to take time to deal with the pain and grief. So, while I rested, God brought those that pain back up. He brought the failures back up. He brought the brokenness back up, and I could no longer suppress it by running fast. Because I slowed down, I was forced to deal with them.

God did the miraculous work of bringing up the stuff that was in me, but once He showed it to me, He helped me to see how these things were connected to the other things He showed me.

2. I realized I was unhealthy.

I was unhealthy in these areas of my life because I was so eager to be successful, and I neglected my own spiritual walk, my own mental health, my own physical health, and my own family. I neglected the most important things so that I can become successful.

Sometimes I ask myself, “Did I want success for His Name, or did I want success for my name?” And that’s a hard question to have to answer.

So, not only did rest cause these things to come up to the surface, but when He showed me these things, rest also showed me there were some internal things I needed to work on and deal with.

3. Rest renewed my sense of calling.

Being a pastor is hard. Here are some commonly cited states that show this:

- 70% of pastors constantly fight depression[1]
- 38% of U.S. pastors have thought about quitting full-time ministry in the past year[2]
- Only one in three pastors is considered “healthy[3]” in terms of well-being

Pastors are exhausted. We don’t know who to trust. We’re tired of feeling like we’re never enough. We’re tired of feeling like we can’t hit a home run sermon like we want to hit. We’re tired to feel like we’re not growing.

No matter who leaves the church, even if it’s for the better, it always stings. You question your leadership. You wonder if you should go do something else, somewhere else. All of these things come to mind often. And we often feel like we’re failing.

When I rested, and I dealt with these things that surfaced the unhealthiness was exposed. As I was dealing with these emotions, God reminded me, “Son, I have called you to this work.” He never promised it’s going to be easy. In fact, God knew the pains we would walk through when He called us into this work. He knew that as pastors, we would end up washing the feet of the very same people who would betray us, who would deny us, who would doubt us, just like they did Jesus first.

Now, I get it. We’re not Jesus. But I think we can get an idea of what it’s like to wash the feet of the same people that end up hurting you.

Church planters need rest too

It was so good for me to stop, breathe and rest. And to be reminded that God has called me to this great task. God, the Creator, who hung the moon and the stars has called us to this work.

I get it, pastor. It's frustrating, and it's exhausting. But let me encourage you with something. You can rest. You need rest.

When was the last time you really rested? When was the last time you left your phone or email at home? Not just a quick half day break or even a day break. The truth is, it takes about three days just to unwind.

Take time to rest and focus on you family and Jesus and be reminded of this call. You don't have to do it once a year. You can find rest every day. You can come to the Father and find rest every day. You can find rest for your soul and be reminded that He has called you to this great task, and He will accomplish His purposes through you.

Sign up for the Church Planting Masterclass at [NewChurches.com](https://www.newchurches.com).

[1] Francis A Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development research studies in 1998 and 2006.

[2] Barna

[3] Barna defined "healthy" pastors as those who score themselves either "excellent" or "good" on all six of these six well-being categories. Currently, only 35 percent of America's pastors fall into the healthy category.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 2016 Noe became the senior pastor at North Phoenix Baptist Church. Shortly after arriving in Arizona Pastor Noe began to pursue and receive his Doctorate of Ministry and Executive Leadership degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Noe Garcia is a passionate preacher who loves challenging and encouraging people with God's Word. He is not only passionate about the city of Phoenix, but he is passionate about people knowing Jesus and following Jesus. Noe and his wife Clancey have been married for 11 years and have 4 children. They both have a strong desire to see the lost get found and to see the found share the Lord's saving grace.

Imitations

by Joel Wayne

HUDSONVILLE, MI – We crave authenticity. We don't like knockoffs. Copycats are seen as a degradation of the original. We don't like imitations. They are not the real thing. When you want an oatmeal cookie with a cream filling you want a Little Debbie's oatmeal cream pie.... You don't want the knock off brand.

As Paul writes to the Church in Corinth He says, *"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."* (1 Corinthians 11:1)

Paul is pointing out that he is imitating Jesus. He is imitating Jesus. It is only in imitating the proper source that we discover the value of leadership transference.

Leadership transference is the modeling of Christ in order to gain the courage to press forward.

This begs an important question? Are we being sincere, authentic, to the call of God in our churches? Are we "copycats?" Are we simply replicating that which came before, or what the guys are doing down the street? Or are we attentive to the "new thing", the "authentic call" God has for our lives. How would your leadership answer the above?

We have been called to imitate those who follow Christ, but to also recognize when we have given up our identity for the sake of not having to do the difficult task of exploring all God may be asking from us.

It comes from deep conviction and is rooted in that not seen (Hebrews 11:1). It is teaching first that which God has called us to; while equipping others to make decisions that don't slowly drift from the original call. I think back of when I was installing a 4-foot picket fence in my twenties. I cut the first picket, and then proceeded to use each additional picket as the template and model for the next cut. In time, my pickets were more than "off". They stopped resembling the original. Have our churches stopped resembling the original call God put on our hearts?

Are you transferring a calendar and program to your people, or are you transferring a movement of God that propels a ministry to engage your community with love and power?

Are we imitating the right thing? The truth we discover in answering this question forces a deep evaluation of self.

I know the leaders within the state are ready to not only help you discover that which you are transferring, but how to imitate the call and passion of Jesus. Don't be afraid of the answer, fear being unwilling to ask the question. We are here to join you in serving a mighty God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joel Wayne is the Pastor of Chapel Pointe and Executive Director of [Be The Church](#).

Our labor is NOT in vain

by Jason Aaron

MONROE, MI – A few weeks ago, after a very encouraging Sunday, I sent the pastor from my home church in Kentucky, a message summarizing the events of the day and said, ‘I want to do a better job of celebrating ALL the things God is doing by sending them to you. That way when I get discouraged, you can tell me to shut up and remember the faithfulness of God.’ I know that may sound a little crass, but it’s the message my sinful, but redeemed heart, needs.

Outpost Community Church was birthed in January of 2019. A time where it felt easy to invite strangers and neighbors to the church doors and to our bustling home table for dinner. A time where we would pack into our living room every Thursday to learn from God’s Word, and not have to report fear, confusion, or even symptoms to those who attended three to five days later.

Planting a church in a pandemic has come with its fair share of discouragement. Almost all the people who started the church with us have left. We shut the doors for months on a newly purchased building during 2020, and we’ve had to cancel several services since then because of last minute staff quarantines.

How could I possibly be steadfast, immovable, and abounding in the work of the Lord with all the uncertainty of then or even now? Because the Apostle Paul says to keep pressing forward in the work of the Lord because our labor is not in vain! God has redeemed, reconciled, created, sustained, and provided EVERY. STEP. OF. THE. WAY. While the world seems to be broken and heavily divided...we have seen marriages strengthened, leaders birthed, visions created, and new people joining. It has been a beautiful reminder that God is sovereign over all things.

By God’s grace, we had our first youth night at the local community center at the end of 2021, and we’ve had several more since then. Our first event for middle-school aged youth drew 2 to 30 kids, many of whom I met through mentoring at the community center and local elementary school. This has been a five-year investment. Loving and serving these kids with the hope that seeds would be planted, and I could witness gospel transformation through the saving work of Jesus.

It’s been an incredible first few months of this ministry, and we look forward to seeing all that God is going to do. For many of them it was their first time hearing the good news of the gospel. Even after five years, the labor is not in vain. Be encouraged brothers and sisters, the seeds you are planting now are NOT IN VAIN! There might not be fruit now, one year, two years, five years, or even in ten years, BUT be steadfast in pursuing the lost in your community. Your labor is not in vain!

Just as important as pursuing the lost, the call of a shepherd is to equip and invest in the saints inside the church building. In my first couple of years I could sense that most of the men felt

very inadequate with handling the Word. After being the primary leader of our men's small group gatherings for the first couple of years, I wanted to equip new leaders.

With a little brotherly love and maybe some arm-twisting, we've now developed a six-man rotation and are currently walking through the book of Proverbs. Not only have the men grown so much by leading our group discussion and studying the passage, but I've grown through their teaching. It seems small to celebrate five men accepting the invitation to lead, but that's what we need to do! Celebrate ALL the work the Lord is doing, the big things and the little things.

I pray these stories will encourage you to write down and consider what God has been doing in your life, in your family, or in your ministry during the past two years. Reach out and share it with your mentors, congregation, co-workers, family, neighbors, or friends. This will add fuel into your spiritual tank. Remember, your work for the Lord is not in vain so ALWAYS ABOUND in the work of the Lord.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason is the Preaching Pastor at Outpost Community Church where he also serves as an elder. Jason went through a two-year Pastoral Internship at Parkway Baptist Church in Bardstown, KY from 2015-2016 under Pastor James Carroll. Upon completing that, he accepted a Church Planting Residency at First Presbyterian Trenton under Pastor Aaron Carr in January 2017 and completed in December 2018. Jason completed his M.Div. from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in May 2018. Jason is married to Amanda and they have 5 children...Mackenzie, Ashken, Noah, Kane, and Trey.

Are you headed in the right direction?

by David Thompson

NASHVILLE, TN – Where are you going to be when you get where you're going?

That question was often posed to me by a great mentor and friend, David Jones. I dare say that most of us think we are headed in the right direction.

I heard about a man who had moved from the country to the big city of Atlanta, and did not know the roads very well at all. He was talking to his wife on the phone as he drove home from the inner city after his first day at work. She was at home watching the news live feed from a helicopter which was reporting that someone was going the opposite direction of traffic on the interstate. She told her husband, "Be careful honey—someone not far from you is driving the wrong way on the interstate!"

He replied, “Oh, it’s not one! It’s thousands!”

Maybe you have felt like that man before. You’re going in the wrong direction. Ancient and wise king Solomon was right when he said in Proverbs, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death?”

Motown favorite, Diana Ross, proposed the same question in a song over 40 years ago—

*“Do you know where you’re going to?
Do you like the things that life is showing you?
Where are you going to?
Do you know?”*

Here are a few perspectives on how to finish well:

1. Always aim high

One of our greatest American military snipers hit his target at 2.2 miles. In trying to determine the exact settings on his scope, his partner said you must go at least 80 yards above for distance, the shooter then estimated another 70 yards for a total of 150 yards above the target when considering the wind and humidity. The point is it is not enough just to have a goal out there in the far distance. Your goal should have a higher purpose.

The apostle Paul told the believers at Colossae, “If you are then risen with Christ, seek the things that are above... And set your affection on things that are above.” In other words, if Christ is in you, He should be your aim. So, AIM HIGH!

Yet we have all lost our way from time to time. Will Rogers said, “Men show their ignorance not by what they don’t know, they show their ignorance by what they know that just ain’t so.” So where will you be when you get where you’re going? Are you following the way that seems right to the crowd, to the average person, or to the general public?

2. Know that if your goal or direction causes you to stand alone—you are never really alone.

A rite of passage for one Native American tribe here in the south was for a young man at age 12 to go spend his first night completely alone in the middle of the wilderness far from anyone. He was challenged to stand in a small 3-foot circle all night long, and not leave in order to pass the test. The young boy was terrified listening to the howls of wild animals all around him. At first light, while trembling and scared and nearly frozen, what would he see... but his own father—standing not 50 feet away behind a large tree with his bow drawn ready to kill anything that would attack his son.

Listen child of God, do you think God loves you any less? The very last words of Jesus to his disciples were, "I will never, ever, ever, leave you!"

3. To know where you will be when you get where you're going requires faith.

President Kennedy said, "We need men who can dream of things that never were." I hope your dream is impossible as far as man is concerned.

When called of God, Abraham set out on a journey having absolutely no idea where he was going. The Hebrew writer puts it like this, "By faith, Abraham, when he was called to go to a place he should receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out not knowing where he was going. By FAITH, he sojourned in the land of promise... he looked for a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God."

Like Abraham, you will get what you are "looking" for. Simply stated, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith!" That, my friend, is how you finish well.

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.

How should Christians talk about racism?

by Alex Ward

NASHVILLE, TN – In a moment of politicization and tribalism, conversations are always difficult. There are any number of topics today that cause controversy: who to vote (or not) for in the next election, responding to COVID restrictions, and how to think about protests both domestically and abroad. But there are few conversations that are as difficult to have as discussions of race. While Christians should be able to have these conversations because of our shared identity in Christ, we too are prone to avoiding the topic because it can be hard, difficult, and awkward. Isaac Adams wrote his new book, *Talking About Race: Gospel Hope for Hard Conversations*, to counter that problem. Adams offers hope for how to have these conversations and some guidance on where to begin.

Alex Ward: You originally set out to write a book about what to do, and instead ended up writing about how to talk about the issue of racism. Why was it essential to make that shift, and why do we need to start there?

Isaac Adams: Often when I teach on race and racism, the question I know I'll be asked is, "What can I do?" And in so many ways this is a great question. While we Christians aren't saved by good works, we are saved *for* good works (Rom. 7:4; Titus 2:14). Yet, as a pastor, I often find people wanted to go and do big things as regards racial justice — they wanted to march down the street; they wanted to maintain unity in their church — yet these same people couldn't even have a constructive conversation with the person they dreaded seeing at Thanksgiving, much less on Sunday morning. It seemed to me, then, that before we could talk about *action*, we'd do well to figure out why we couldn't talk *at all*. Figuring that out would have us be that much better equipped for the good and right active pursuit of racial justice.

AW: In the book, you use these fictional characters to unpack some of the common responses to the topic and provide an entry point. Why start with a story? Why not just begin with application and teachings?

IA: There's something in people that loves a story. We see Jesus use them so often — the parables. Nathan, in 2 Samuel 12, when confronting David uses what? A story! David is sucked into it before he realizes that *he* is the bad guy. Isabel Wilkerson's [*The Warmth of Other Suns*](#), though massive, reads beautifully because it's told primarily through the lens of story. And so, I landed on a story because a fictional account would help me grasp the complexity that people are. Writing straightforward, didactic stuff, while I do that, doesn't allow for painting the complexity that you and I so often live in. A person is more than their political opinions, their racial perspective, their racial sins. A story helped me to paint that complex picture more clearly.

AW: When reading the chapter about the two sisters, Anna Beth and Samantha Lee, I was struck how often I have seen their argument play out, whether in real life or social media. One is more concerned with structural issues and doesn't think her church and peers care enough about racism. The other thinks an overemphasis on race is part of the problem causing the divisions and anger. So as you look at the state of the discourse among white evangelicals today with one another, what counsel would you offer?

IA: I try to offer a lot of different counsel in the book, as there are so many things to address. One piece of counsel I would give is to listen to the perspective of non-white evangelicals, and I praise God for many of my white brothers and sisters who do that. That said, often, the things that determine "the race conversation" are the anxieties and burdens of white evangelicals. But it's important to realize that all people in the kingdom of God have anxieties and burdens that need to be addressed.

AW: One of the main reasons, you write, that we should engage in cross-race conversations about this topic is because “love compels” us. What do you mean by that? And if so, why are we so hard-pressed to have these conversations?

IA: I meant that love ought to be the main motivator behind our conversations. Without this, we could have all racial knowledge in the world and still be a clanging cymbal (1 Cor. 13). To love God and love neighbor are the two greatest commandments, and so it's love for God's glory, love for our Christian witness, love for our hurting neighbors that ought to motivate us — not revenge or power.

In terms of being hard-pressed, I think it's easy for many American Christians to have a biblical gospel in name but a prosperity gospel in function — a gospel that says life should always be easy. But, of course, we know that Scripture says quite the opposite. In the world we will have trouble (John 16:33). I say this because I think it's easy to assume that love should be pain free. But the cross shows us that love can be painful, difficult, messy. And so much of what's going on in our conversations about race is painful, difficult, messy. So while love is our motivator, it actually presses us further into hard things rather than further from them. Still, those hard things, I'd say, are good and worthwhile things to wrestle with.

AW: The recent COVID lockdowns and the protests for racial justice of the last few years have highlighted the exit of many African Americans from predominantly white congregations. Your book thinks through that process and doesn't condemn Christians who make a decision to stay or leave. How would you encourage Christians to wrestle with that choice? Are there clear reasons why someone should choose to leave or stay?

IA: I appreciate this question! In the book, I tried to tackle questions like these head on. My main encouragement for Christians wrestling with this choice would be to fear the Lord most in the decision. It's easy to fear what people will say about you, whether they call you an Uncle Tom for staying or a theological liberal for leaving. It turns out, though, that these aren't the only two options. What's more, someone's opinion of you pales in importance compared to the Lord's opinion about you. That said, the decision to leave or stay can be so difficult, so painful. As an African American who often navigates white spaces, I felt I had to address The Black Exodus from predominantly white churches.

Regarding the clear reasons to stay or leave, yes — there are some reasons that are clear, and some that aren't so clear. I lay that out on pages 32-36 in my book.

AW: A helpful part of the book is the reminder that conversations about race are not just about the white-black binary, even if it appears to be the most pressing and visible. As you wrote about Jane (Eun-ji) and Luis, what were you hoping Christians would understand about this conversation?

IA: The black-white conversation is obviously an important one, and it's a historically unique one. However, the kingdom of God is wonderfully colorful; it's not just black and white. And I

wanted to convey that in the book because if we're going to faithfully follow Jesus amidst race relations, we're going to have to remember that he bled and died for all tribes, not just ours.

AW: Throughout the book, I was constantly thinking about the way that tone was essential to the conversations, particularly one of humility and lament as well as a refusal to impute motives to others or respond with sarcasm and condescension. How can Christians go about cultivating that in their own lives and conversations? The lives of their families? Their churches?

IA: Start with prayer. Ask the Lord to reveal to you your hidden faults (Psa. 19:12). Then, go to a brother or sister from the “other side” and admit to them some things they’re *right* about. Then pray some more. Apologize for some of the ways *you* have not conducted yourself helpfully in these conversations. Then pray some more. Then, tell that person some things you are afraid about regarding this conversation. Then pray some more. Confession, humility, vulnerability, prayer — this is how we lower defenses rather than make other people defensive.

AW: For a topic that is so polarizing, what encouragement would you offer for how to get the conversation started? And what should be our goal in that conversation?

IA: There’s no better goal than Ephesians 4:29: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” The goal, then, is to benefit others. In terms of getting started, you would be shocked at how much talking to God (praying) before talking to that person can help you. After prayer, you might just print out this interview, ask the person to read it, and ask two questions: 1) What did you think of this? 2) Can I please share what I thought, and some of my hopes and fears in this conversation?

This article first appeared [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex Ward serves as Lead Researcher for the ERLC. He assists with the oversight of the Research Institute under the leadership of the Director of Research. Additionally, he serves as an Associate Editor for the organization. Alex is currently pursuing a PhD in History at the University of Mississippi studying evangelical political activity in the 20th century. He holds a Master of Theology in church history from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, a Master of Theological Studies from Vanderbilt Divinity School, and a Bachelor of Arts in English and Philosophy from Mississippi State University. He is married to Lindsey and they have one daughter.

Chicago pastor says ‘dinner tables’ key to racial reconciliation

by Tom Strode

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Achieving racial reconciliation calls for building friendships over a meal, the audience for a Southern Baptist-sponsored conversation was told Wednesday (Feb. 23).

In an [online event](#) hosted by the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), four Southern Baptist panelists – including both the current SBC president and the convention’s only African American president – addressed ethnic relations under the title “Pursuing Unity: A Discussion of Racial Reconciliation Efforts and the SBC.”

“It doesn’t matter how many panel discussions you watch,” Chicago pastor Jon Kelly said. “It doesn’t matter how many books you read, how many conferences you go to. None of that will do better than dinner table ministry.”

Kelly urged viewers to consider their five to 10 closest friends and ask themselves why everyone “looks like me, votes like me, thinks like me in such a diverse world.”

“[T]he biggest challenge we have is when we talk about racial reconciliation we want the fruit of reconciliation without the relationships,” said Kelly, lead pastor of Chicago West Bible Church, a member church of the Illinois Baptist State Association (IBSA). “[U]ntil our dinner tables become diversified, you can’t hire this away, you can’t appoint this away. Until we eat bread together and fellowship together, we won’t make any progress.”

Ed Litton, current SBC president, told viewers that pastors in Mobile, Ala., began gathering to solve race problems but instead spent two years eating lunch together and talking.

“But what emerged from that was God transformed our hearts with one another,” said Litton, senior pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., a suburb of Mobile. “We fell in love with one another, and we started serving the Lord together.”

Litton is asking Southern Baptists to “initiate this kind of love for one another,” he said. “Start to get to know each other. Listen to each other. Humble yourself to learn something you thought you knew and understood, but you didn’t.”

“This is spiritual warfare of the enemy that we cannot as blood-washed, born-again, baptized believers in Jesus Christ come together, realizing the separation that we have because of our skin color is an attack of the enemy.” – *Fred Luter*

Messengers to last year’s SBC annual meeting in Nashville communicated their desire for progress in this area, Litton said.

“[T]he message that came through very clear is that this convention wants to deal with [sexual] abuse and wants to deal with racism,” he said. “We want to deal with having racial reconciliation. And I take that as a mandate.”

Southern Baptists have made some notable advances in racial reconciliation, said Fred Luter, who was elected in 2012 as the SBC’s first African American president.

He has “seen this convention grow in leaps and bounds as far as including non-Anglos in leadership roles, and I think that’s the key,” he said. “It’s one thing to say that we are racially connected, but if it doesn’t show across the board in positions of leadership, I think that’s where we miss the mark at.”

Luter cited the recent selection of Willie McLaurin as interim president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee and the 2020 election of California pastor Rolland Slade as the committee’s chairman.

Challenges remain in the SBC, the panelists told the audience.

“[T]he lack of humility and the tone of the things that are discussed,” especially on social media, has made his efforts with potential church planters through the North American Mission Board’s Send Network difficult, Kelly said.

“It’s one thing for Christians to disagree,” he said. “I think what’s very discouraging for me is the sarcasm and tone and the belittling, and the way that we do it I don’t think we realize kills our witness, especially when it’s coming from men and women who profess Christ and who have roles within denominations, and our pastors as well. And I think being slow to speak, quick to listen, slow to anger would really help us all.

“It’s been a serious blow for the work of missions – trying to talk to minority church planters about partnering with Send, which is a great network, when all they’re looking at is what someone posted or what someone said and what’s making the news.”

Missie Branch, assistant dean of students to women and director of graduate life at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, said a “unified Christian message” and “courageous leaders” are needed.

“So many people are saying so many things about what it means or what we should be talking about or what we shouldn’t be talking about,” Branch said. “And to the world, we’re not able to present a unified message of what it means for us to come together as believers in Christ from every color, every stripe, every economic background.”

Also, she said, “it takes a level of courage for a leader to say, ‘We’re going to say the things that need to be said, and we’re going to preach the Gospel the way it needs to be preached, and

we're going to pursue unity in spite of the fact that this might cause this group of people to be upset.”

The primary challenge, Luter said, is God's people “must recognize the enemy's attack in all of this. This is spiritual warfare of the enemy that we cannot as blood-washed, born-again, baptized believers in Jesus Christ come together, realizing the separation that we have because of our skin color is an attack of the enemy.”

Public discourse, especially on social media, regarding the issue “is at a low,” Litton said.

“What we need is to fear God before we ever hit a ‘Send’ key,” he told viewers. “We need to fear God before we take on somebody and attack their character and diminish the work of the Gospel in their community.

“But the hope that we have is the Gospel that we preach. We need to preach it to each other; we need to preach it to ourselves; and we need to preach it to a lost world. And they're saying, ‘Well, do you live by what you preach?’”

Branch said, “[O]ne of the things that I think we're bringing to the table too is this almost prideful ideal that someone else is more sinful than we are. So when we are speaking to people, we're not coming with the humility of: ‘We're all broken, and we're all a mess. And there are hurdles you have to jump to get to the middle, and there are hurdles I have to jump to get to the middle.’”

“It doesn't matter how many books you read, how many conferences you go to. None of that will do better than dinner table ministry.” – *Jon Kelly*

Kelly and Luter responded to a question about the departure of some influential black pastors from the convention. Some left when the presidents of the six SBC seminaries issued a statement in November 2020 that said “affirmation of Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality and any version of Critical Theory is incompatible with the Baptist Faith & Message.” The statement reaffirming the BF&M 2000, the SBC's confession of faith, also condemned “racism in any form.”

The National African American Fellowship (NAAF) of the SBC objected to the seminary presidents' broad condemnation, saying it had “the effect of delegitimizing and dismissing the lived experiences of African Americans and other ethnic groups.” The NAAF said, “[C]ertain limited insights from CRT, not as an ideology or worldview, can be useful to identify and repudiate racial bias and systemic racism in organizations and institutions.”

His church “wrestled with the tension” in 2020 involved in its affiliation with the SBC and decided to stay, but those who chose not to leave should humbly ask those who did the reasons for their departures and what can be learned, Kelly said.

Minority pastors and church planters “can’t preach the Gospel without getting over the hump of history,” Kelly told the audience. “I can’t go talk to a guy on the corner without him saying, ‘Well how do you believe in a Jesus that was given to you from slave masters? Well why would you be a part of a convention that was founded upon slavery?’

“Other people don’t have to answer that question,” he said. “And I don’t think we realize the hump that that takes to get over when you have to articulate the Gospel in the midst of historical context and historical narrative for people in your context. And so I can understand why there have been men and women whom we all love and respect who have decided to transition because they felt like that was too much to bear.”

The seminary presidents’ statement “really caused havoc across this convention and particularly in African American churches,” Luter said. Some members of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church even requested it leave the SBC, he said.

He respects and admires each of the pastors who left, but Luter said he wishes they had discussed their differences with those they disagreed with and attempted to resolve them.

After the seminary presidents issued their statement, Luter talked to three of them “personally and got insight on what happened and why they thought it was necessary to do that,” he said. “And after sitting down and talking to them one on one, ... we were able to come with some understanding — apologies, forgiveness and working things out — that we could work together again.”

Brent Leatherwood, the ERLC’s acting president, moderated the discussion.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Strode is Washington bureau chief for Baptist Press.

Send Relief responds to Ukraine crisis

by IMB/Send Relief staff

Send Relief, the combined compassion ministry effort of the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board, is currently working with local Baptist partners in Ukraine to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis. This crisis has been created by the escalated tension mounting around the border between Ukraine and Russia and Russia’s invasion.

Send Relief partners are already on the ground providing emergency food relief, shelter, clothing and more to displaced families. As the situation worsens, Send Relief partners are ready to provide further food relief, meet shelter needs and offer transportation to assist those impacted by this escalating crisis.

“With the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, we join all those in Eastern Europe in praying for peace,” IMB President Paul Chitwood said.

“We know that God is sovereign in all situations, and Scripture reminds us that He is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. We keep our focus on Him, asking for His protection of the innocent and trusting that His justice will prevail. Pray with us that Jesus Christ would be glorified through the crisis in Eastern Europe, and that Southern Baptists would remain vigilant in meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of those who are suffering.”

Reports continue to indicate that as many as 5 million Ukrainians will be displaced in neighboring countries such as Poland and Romania, and a large number of internally displaced people are beginning to form in Western Ukraine. The greatest needs for these displaced families will include finding access to food, water, shelter, clothing, sanitation and hygiene.

Gifts to [Send Relief’s Ukraine Crisis Fund](#) are vital to these relief efforts. The best way for Southern Baptists to respond is through prayer and giving.

Send Relief encourages churches and individuals to pray for Ukraine by [downloading the Ukraine Prayer Guide](#):

Pray for:

- The people of Ukraine. Pray for strength, courage and perseverance as their home is threatened by conflict.
- Safe passages out of conflict zones for displaced populations.
- Government officials to lead with wisdom in this tense time.
- The estimated 4 million displaced people who will be forcibly removed from their homes. Pray that in the face of conflict, they will find psychological, emotional and spiritual healing from this trauma.
- Soldiers on both sides of this conflict to be safe from harm.
- Local churches, relief workers and humanitarian aid organizations to care for what could be a massive wave of displaced peoples in Ukraine.
- Disciples Church in L’viv, Ukraine, and its church plant in Bryukhovychi. Many of the people there are displaced from the East. Pray for peace for these believers as they had hoped this conflict from eight years ago was over and now, they are facing it again.

- The Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary as it wrestles with how to assist its students in this time of crisis.
 - Ukrainian believers as they seek to be a light in the darkness.
 - Ukrainians who have never heard the gospel to have an opportunity to experience the hope of Jesus.
-

NAMB missionary baptizes West Point cadets in icy Hudson River

WEST POINT, NY – A pair of cadets at the United States Military Academy (USMA) in West Point, N.Y., celebrated a day they are not likely to forget any time soon. On Feb. 12, Brooke Parker and Zhaoxin (Jenny) Ma were baptized by Baptist Campus Ministry (BCM) director Joshua Austin in an icy Hudson River.

The two cadets had other options: wait for the warmer weather of spring or be baptized in a baptistry that is in the basement of a chapel on campus. But both cadets felt like the choice was clear.

“The basement almost felt like hiding my faith as few people would be able to attend and celebrate with me the good things God has done,” said Parker, “and nobody would be able to just happen upon this event as they would if I were to be baptized outside. This would eliminate a big opportunity to share this experience and Christ with others who may not have previously considered attending.”

So, the indoor baptistry was eliminated as an option.

“I didn’t want to wait any longer to show others what God has done for me and what God can do, which is why I chose to get baptized in the icy waters,” Ma said. “I couldn’t wait any longer to show others all His greatness but also to proclaim to God that I am His, and I welcome Him into my heart, and I want to follow Him.”

Austin, a North American Mission Board (NAMB) missionary, received the go-ahead from the USMA Chaplaincy chain of command, and 60 onlookers stood on the banks of the Hudson to witness the two ladies share their testimonies and receive baptism.

Austin shared a brief message about the free gift of grace from Ephesians 2 before wading out into what he described as “painfully frigid waters.”

“They have boldly taken advantage of every opportunity to tell others about what baptism means to them and what Christ has done in their lives,” Austin said.

Ma came to West Point focused on success and achievement, but the degree of difficulty increased at the academy. She put a lot of pressure on herself and began struggling with her sense of worth, eventually isolating herself as depression and anxiety set in.

But a friend kept seeking her out to check on her and asked her if she had ever considered turning to God.

“At first, I laughed, and I told him how stupid I thought that was and how evolution and science made much more sense,” Ma recalled. “But he told me his story, and although I did not believe in God at the time, the thought was planted in my head.”

Ma began attending chapel services and BCM meetings, but her mental and emotional health took a turn for the worse, resulting in a 12-day hospital. She found a Bible in the hospital library, and something changed. Before entering the hospital, she had never sought help, but after her release, she made appointments to seek academic, medical and spiritual help.

“Chaplain Major Jose Rondon [a Southern Baptist chaplain] was the first appointment I made,” Ma said. “Something inside told me it was time to, and that day, Chaplain Rondon helped me open my heart up to Jesus, and words cannot describe the amount of relief and joy I felt that day. I cried knowing I made it, that there is hope for a brighter future and a better life.”

For Parker, she had grown up in a religious home, even asking Jesus into her heart at a young age, but difficulties at her church and in her home made it tough to believe in God.

“If God loved us so much that he sent His Son to die for us, I didn’t understand how he could let people hurt us that way,” Parker said. “At that time, I felt a presence of darkness, I felt lost and alone in the world.”

By high school, though, she began meeting students who were positive representations of Christ and Christianity. A friend during her senior year helped her to start actively believing in God again. During her military training after high school, she began meeting more and more believers who showed her what it looked like to follow Christ.

“I realized over time that God had changed my attitude to one of repentance and that He had developed a desire in me to be closer to Him,” said Parker. “As I prayed about it more, I felt God urging me to be baptized and telling me that I had no reason for shame or to be hesitant.”

Ma and Parker met in a discipleship group through the BCM, and their desire to follow Christ in believer's baptism, even on below-freezing, February day has afforded them opportunities to tell others about their faith.

"Because I followed His lead, God has further used my baptism to make His name greater," Parker said. "In the week following the event, I received many congratulations from complete strangers. My hope is that God sparked something in their hearts."

Austin became BCM director at West Point in January of 2020, right before the pandemic. Even in the face of those challenges, he has still seen God working to bring hope and peace to cadets' lives, like Ma's.

"I am placing myself and building my relationship with God above all, and I have never been more happy and joyful," Ma said. "I have fallen in love with life again, and it is because of God."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

Most open to spiritual conversations, few Christians speaking

by Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Americans are curious about the religious devotion of others and are willing to discuss the topic, but most say they rarely have conversations about faith with their Christian friends.

An [Evangelism Explosion study conducted by Lifeway Research](#) found Americans are widely receptive to spiritual conversations in a variety of settings.

"This study reveals that most Americans are open to talking about faith," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "It really isn't about religious liberty, people not wanting to hear, or religion being off-limits. The reason conversations are not happening about the Christian faith is that Christians are not bringing it up."

Half of Americans (51 percent) say they're curious as to why some people are so devoted to their faith, including 60 percent of the religiously unaffiliated. Curiosity is also more likely among younger adults. Those 18 to 34 (61 percent) and 35 to 49 (55 percent) are more likely

than those 50 to 64 (43 percent) and those 65 and older (40 percent) to say they're curious about others' religious devotion.

Amid this curiosity, however, most say their Christian friends don't often bring up their religious beliefs. Six in 10 (60 percent) Americans say many of their friends who claim to be Christians rarely talk about their faith, including 52 percent of the religiously unaffiliated.

Most Americans (61 percent) say the pandemic has not changed their interest in spiritual matters. For a third of Americans (32 percent), however, COVID-19 has made them more interested. Few (7 percent) say they are less interested now compared to before the pandemic. One in 5 religiously unaffiliated Americans (20 percent) say they are more interested in spiritual matters now.

Still, for many, religion is not something they think about unless others broach the subject. Two in 5 Americans (40 percent) say they wouldn't think about faith on their own unless a friend or family member brought it up. The religiously unaffiliated (50 percent), young adults 18 to 34 (49 percent) and men (47 percent) are among those more likely to say they do not think about matters of faith unless others bring up the topic.

"There is a quiet chasm between the religiously devoted and those who have no religion in the U.S.," McConnell said. "The irony is that religious devotion intrigues many people, yet many avid Christians fail to share why faith is so important in their lives."

Heavenly certainty

Most Americans (55 percent) say it's very important to be sure they will go to heaven or have eternal life, and another 19 percent say it's important. Fewer say it's somewhat important (9 percent) or not important at all (12 percent). Even among the religiously unaffiliated 1 in 5 (19 percent) say it's very important.

Despite how important most Americans say eternal life is, few say they have such certainty. Slightly more than a third (37 percent) say they are sure they will be with God in heaven. Another 11 percent say they are somewhat sure, while 23 percent say they hope they'll be in heaven. Few (4 percent) don't expect to make it, and 6 percent are sure there is no God or heaven. According to 17 percent of Americans, no one can know if they'll go to heaven.

When contemplating a conversation with God about getting into heaven, Americans are split between pointing to their goodness or trusting in Jesus. Considering the question, "If God asked you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you say?" 38 percent say they would respond that they trust in Jesus Christ alone, while 34 percent say they would respond that they are a good person. Few (4 percent) say they would bring up that they've been a very religious person. Some don't know (12 percent) or prefer not to answer (5 percent). Another 7 percent don't believe God exists.

“A quarter of Americans see heaven as a question mark or less,” McConnell said. “But the rest are evenly divided between relying on someone else – Jesus Christ – or themselves to be admitted. There’s a stark difference between heaven being a badge of affirmation for your human life or a mark of God’s ownership of your current life.”

Willing to talk

Around two-thirds of Americans say they are open to different types of spiritual conversations with a friend. Two in 3 (66 percent) say they’re at least open to having a conversation about faith with a friend, including 41 percent who say they are very open. Similarly, 66 percent of Americans are at least open to specifically discussing the Christian faith with a friend, including 40 percent who are very open. And 65 percent are at least open, including 36 percent who are very open, to talking with a friend about having a relationship with God.

Even among the religiously unaffiliated, few say they’re not open to having spiritual conversations with a friend at all. One in 5 (20 percent) aren’t at all open to a conversation about faith with a friend. One in 4 (26 percent) say they are not open to having a conversation with a friend about the Christian faith or having a relationship with God, yet 20 percent say they’re very open to either.

Fewer Americans are open to these types of conversations with people they don’t know, but still, at least half will talk about spiritual matters with a stranger. Half of Americans (51 percent) say they’re at least open to faith discussions with a stranger, with 26 percent saying they’re very open. When asked about having conversations with a stranger about the Christian faith specifically, 52 percent say they’re at least open, with 27 percent saying they’re very open. Slightly more than half say they are open (24 percent) or very open (30 percent) to talking with someone they don’t know about having a relationship with God.

The religiously unaffiliated are less open than others, but still most have some level of openness to religious conversations with strangers. Fewer than 2 in 5 (38 percent) say they’re not open at all to having a conversation about faith with a stranger. Almost half of religiously unaffiliated Americans (45 percent) are not open to talking with a stranger about the Christian faith, but 14 percent are very open. More than 2 in 5 (43 percent) say they have no openness to talking with a stranger about having a relationship with God, but 15 percent of the religiously unaffiliated are very open.

“Religion is a taboo topic for some, but actually very few people feel this way if it is between friends,” McConnell said. “There is typically no way of knowing ahead of time if someone hates the subject of faith, but the majority are open to you bringing it up even if they don’t know you.”

When meeting someone new, 71 percent of Americans are at least open to hearing about that person’s life story. A similar number (69 percent) say they’re at least open to hearing the life story from someone new if it includes faith.

Compared to in-person conversations, Americans are less likely to want to have a spiritual discussion on social media. Fewer than half (48 percent) say they're at least open to having a conversation about faith on social media, including 26 percent who say they are very open. A third (33 percent) say they are not open at all to that type of conversation on social media.

As most Americans are already open to spiritual conversations, there aren't many tools or tips that would make them more likely to engage in those discussions.

Almost half of Americans said it would not change their level of interest in continuing a conversation about faith if the other person shared a pamphlet or brochure (45 percent), showed information via an app (45 percent) or quoted from their religious text (49 percent). Similarly, around half (49 percent) say they wouldn't be more willing to listen to someone else's religious beliefs if the other person first listened to their beliefs.

"Many differences between potential types of religious conversations have no impact on people's attitude about engaging in those conversations," McConnell said. "The biggest thing that influences people's willingness to talk about faith is the presence of a relationship with that person or faith being tied to their life story. If your relationship with God isn't impacting your life, why would someone else want to hear about it?"

Very important needs

Americans of all religious convictions want certain things to be part of their lives. Most say it is very important to have peace (74 percent), hope (71 percent), and purpose and fulfillment (66 percent) in their lives. Religious Americans are more likely to agree these are very important aspects to have in their lives, but a majority of the religiously unaffiliated also say it's very important their lives contain peace (63 percent), hope (54 percent), and purpose and fulfillment (55 percent).

As most consider these to be essential aspects of life, Americans may be more interested to hear how someone's religious beliefs contribute to obtaining these. Around 7 in 10 Americans (69 percent) say they want to hear why someone thinks their faith helps meet a core human need. Close to 1 in 5 (21 percent) disagree. The religiously unaffiliated are more likely to disagree (32 percent), but the majority still say if someone they knew thinks their faith helps with a core human need, they want to hear more about why that person thinks that.

"For Americans with no religious affiliation, faith is not a goal or a destination," McConnell said. "While some have reached a firm conclusion that they are not interested in faith, most are open to hearing about faith when someone can show it matters or when it is shared by someone who matters to them."

Methodology

The study was originated and commissioned by Evangelism Explosion. The online survey of 1,002 Americans was conducted by Lifeway Research Dec. 8-17, 2021, using a national pre-recruited panel. Quotas and slight weights were used to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity, education and religion to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,002 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.3 percent. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

For more information, view the [complete report](#) and visit LifewayResearch.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

Churches still recovering from pandemic losses

by Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE, TN – Compared to the beginning of 2021, more U.S. Protestant churches are gathering in person and more churchgoers are filling the pews. The return to pre-pandemic attendance levels has stalled, however, in recent months.

The [latest Lifeway Research study](#) found, despite a new variant wave of COVID-19, 97% of U.S. Protestant churches met in person during January 2022, while 3% say they did not gather for in-person services.

The percentage of churches meeting in person is statistically unchanged from an [August 2021 Lifeway Research study](#), when 98% of churches physically gathered, but is up significantly from the 76% that met in [January 2021](#).

“Almost all churches are able to meet in person for worship, though a few are struggling to re-open their doors,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “Many more churches are working to restart all their important ministries and continuing to encourage people to resume in-person participation.”

More than 1 in 5 U.S. Protestant pastors (22%) say their church is close to their January 2020 attendance, with 10% saying they are at 90% to 100% of pre-pandemic levels and 12% reporting attendance is now higher than before COVID-19. The same percentage of pastors (22%) reported crowds reaching at least 90% of their pre-pandemic attendance in August 2021. In January 2021, however, only 8% of churches had such levels.

Compared to January 2021, far fewer churches today have crowds of less than half of what they had in January 2020. At the beginning of last year, 31% of churches were at less than 50% of their pre-pandemic attendance levels, including 8% of churches that were below 30%. Now, 14% are below 50% attendance, and only 1% still say their congregation is less than 30% of what it was before COVID-19.

More than 8 in 10 churches have an attendance of at least half of what it was prior to the pandemic. The average U.S. Protestant church reports attendance at 74% of what it was prior to COVID-19, which means 1 in 4 pre-pandemic churchgoers are still missing from in-person worship services.

“People’s return to in-person worship services has stalled,” said McConnell. “There has been virtually no change in average attendance since August 2021. Some of this is the direct impact of COVID with people getting sick, needing to quarantine or being at high risk. But this also likely includes healthy individuals choosing to not return.”

The smallest churches, those with attendance less than 50 before COVID-19, are the most likely to be back at pre-pandemic levels. More than a third of those small churches (37%) report their attendance is at least 90% of what it was in January 2020, including 18% who say they have grown numerically during the pandemic.

Online transitions

Most churches shifted to some type of online video services during the height of the pandemic. Now, many are asking those watching online to participate in person.

In January 2022, more than 9 in 10 U.S. Protestant pastors (94%) say their churches provided some type of video content for their congregations, including 84% who livestreamed their worship services and 10% who posted a video of the sermon later. Prior to the pandemic, Lifeway Research found [2 in 5 churches said they neither livestreamed their service nor posted the sermon online later.](#)

As the pandemic progressed, more churches shifted to livestreaming services. In March 2020, around 2 in 3 pastors (65%) said they livestreamed services, and more than a quarter (27%) posted a sermon online later.

With more churches using online video in recent years, 45% of Americans said they watched a Christian church service online during the pandemic, including 15% who say they normally don’t attend church, according to a [2021 Lifeway Research study.](#)

Now, however, as almost all churches are holding in-person services again, many pastors say they want to see some online viewers transition to physical participation. Three in 5 pastors

(60%) say they are exhorting online worshipers, who are able, to resume or begin to attend in person.

“Livestreaming has done a lot of good for churches, allowing members to hear weekly messages during the pandemic and allowing churches to reach new people,” said McConnell. “Many pastors are hoping and actively working to reduce the number of shut-in members who are physically able but aren’t gathering in person with other believers.”

Evangelical pastors (70%) are more likely than mainline pastors (49%) to say they’re specifically encouraging those watching online to physically attend if they are able. Pastors of churches with 200 or more in attendance on Sunday (72%) are more likely than smaller churches to also say they’re asking those able to transition from online to in person.

Pandemic impact

The pandemic continues to have a lasting impact on congregations, and most pastors say that it’s been a negative one. Half (51%) say COVID-19 revealed weaknesses that already existed in their ministry, and 14% say the pandemic caused considerable damage to the church’s ministry. Far fewer say COVID-19 has hardly had any ministry impact on the congregation (12%) or has launched the church to greater levels of ministry (17%).

Most congregations have faced COVID-19 directly. Almost 9 in 10 pastors (88%) say someone in their church has been diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last six months. Around 1 in 5 congregations (21%) say a churchgoer has died from COVID-19.

Additionally, 88% of U.S. Protestant pastors say attendees at their church have helped each other with tangible needs in the past six months. Almost 2 in 3 (63%) say churchgoers have recently met pandemic-related needs in the community. In a [2021 Lifeway Research study](#), most Americans (53%) said churches in their community have been helpful during the pandemic.

While only 12% of churches say they have grown numerically during the pandemic, most say they have connected with new people during the last six months. More than 4 in 5 pastors (83%) say new people who haven’t attended their church in the past have recently attended or connected in person. Around 3 in 4 pastors (74%) say they’ve had new people attend or connect with their church online in the past six months. Still, a third of pastors (33%) say the considerable number of needs within their congregation has made it hard to focus on reaching their community.

Two in 5 pastors (40%) admit that it’s hard to keep a positive tone among the leaders of the church. When asked directly about the attitude of the congregation, a quarter of pastors (24%) say the church is concerned about having fewer people and activities than before the pandemic, 27% say their congregation is moving forward but is exhausted trying to cover all the bases, and 44% say the congregation is excited about what God is doing today.

Ministry recovery

In addition to returning to in-person worship services, most U.S. Protestant pastors say their churches are also restarting small groups, student ministry and kids ministry.

More small groups are meeting now, and more are meeting in person compared to last January. On average, pastors now report 79% of their small group classes for adults that existed prior to the pandemic are now meeting, including 69% that are gathering in person. In January 2021, 36% of groups that existed before COVID-19 met in person, 25% connected online or by phone, 33% didn't meet and 6% no longer existed. Today, 13% of groups aren't meeting and 8% no longer exist.

Among churches that had student and kids ministry activities prior to the pandemic, most have restarted but have yet to see their attendance return to pre-pandemic levels. Churches also remain more hesitant to resume all activities for children compared to teenagers.

Almost 9 in 10 pastors who had student ministries prior to COVID-19 say they have resumed at least some activities in person (86%), including 70% who say all their activities are back to meeting in person.

The average pastor with at least some of their student ministry activities meeting in person says attendance for those is 65% of what it was prior to the pandemic. Most (58%) say attendance is below 90% of pre-COVID levels, but 33% report attendance close to early 2020 levels. Another 10% say their student ministry has grown.

Like student ministry, close to 9 in 10 churches who had kids ministry activities before the pandemic say they have restarted at least some activities in person (86%). Churches are less likely, however, to say all their activities for children are back to gathering in person (64%). Almost a quarter of churches (22%) say they are only doing some of their kids' activities in person.

In the average U.S. Protestant church holding at least some of their kids ministry activities, 64% of kids are participating compared to pre-pandemic attendance. Three in 5 (60%) say attendance is below 90% of what it was before COVID-19. And again, like with student ministries, 32% report attendance close to early 2020 levels, and 8% say their kids ministry has grown.

"The typical church has made great progress this last year in resuming Bible studies for all ages," said McConnell. "Restarting Sunday schools and small groups have allowed the majority of pre-pandemic participants to re-engage in this vital connecting point."

For more information, read the [complete report](#) and visit LifewayResearch.com.

Methodology

The online survey of 560 Protestant pastors was conducted Feb. 1-11, 2022. Invitations were emailed to the Lifeway Research Pastor Panel followed by two reminders. The probability sample of Protestant churches was created by Lifeway Research through direct recruiting from random samples selected from all Protestant churches. Pastors who agree to be contacted by email for future surveys make up this Lifeway Research Pastor Panel. Each survey was completed by the senior or sole pastor or a minister at the church. Responses were weighted by church average attendance, region, ethnicity of pastor and whether the pastor self-identified as evangelical or mainline to reflect the population more accurately.

The final sample is 560 usable surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 6.2%. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups. Comparisons are made to a survey using the same methodology conducted Feb. 1-11, 2021, with 430 completes, April 27-29, 2020, with 470 completes and March 30-31, 2020, with 400 completes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Earls is a writer for Lifeway Christian Resources.

ABOUT LIFEWAY RESEARCH

Lifeway Research is a Nashville-based, evangelical research firm that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches. For more information, visit [LifewayResearch.com](https://www.LifewayResearch.com).

ABOUT LIFEWAY CHRISTIAN RESOURCES

In operation since 1891, Lifeway Christian Resources is one of the leading providers of Christian resources, including Bibles, books, Bible studies, Christian music and movies, VBS, and church supplies, as well as camps and events for all ages. Lifeway is the world's largest provider of Spanish Bibles. Based in Nashville, Tennessee, Lifeway operates as a self-supporting nonprofit. For more information, visit [Lifeway.com](https://www.Lifeway.com).



Michigan Campers on Mission Monthly Newsletter

**FEBRUARY
2022**

Presidents Notes

Hello, MI COMers!

Michigan is a beautiful state! We have a lot of lakes and trees, many campgrounds, and scenic places to visit. We enjoy four seasons! Spring, summer, fall, and... winter. Many people love the first three and go south for the winter. We have enjoyed that for a few years now, but this year we are here in the midst of a big snowstorm and icy roads. Cindy loves the snow; however, Rick is a little less excited about it. Whether you enjoy the winter weather, it's difficult to look outside and not thank God for the pure white covering on the ground and the tree branches glistening with snow. Our prayer is that you will be thankful for whatever season we are in and praise God for His beautiful paintings in nature.

We are in the winter of our life span and still struggling with health issues. Cindy has been diagnosed with CAD (Coronary Artery Disease) and has been unable to do much these past few months. However, we continually praise God for this season of our life and depend on His promises to see us through the rougher days. We appreciate your prayers for us as we seek His will as we make plans for MI COM in 2022. We ask you help as our chapter grows, and especially in the days ahead. We need leaders and workers along beside us. We are assured there are needs in Michigan that MI COM can fill, and many are lost who need to know about our Savior. Continue to stand firm in our commitment to MI COM and we know God will bless our efforts.

Sharing Christ as We Go,
Rick and Cindy



Rick & Cindy Truesdail

Upcoming Events & Opportunities



BAMBI WORK WEEK & SPRING RALLY 2022

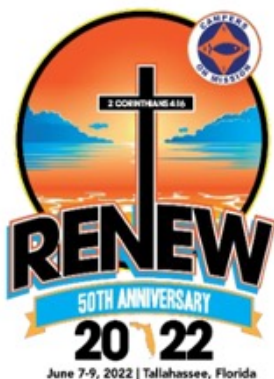
May 9-14, 2022 Monday noon – Saturday am
Bambi Lake Baptist Camp, Roscommon, MI

Mark your calendars NOW!

Set aside this week to come to and be a part of MI COM on mission. We have four work teams: Construction, Cleaning & Beautification, Sewing, and Kitchen. There is always a place for you! Contact Cindy to make your reservation for a campsite or room in the lodge.

We will have the MI COM Country Store set up, so bring something to put on the table if you can. Proceeds go to the treasury to pay for our non-profit/corporate expenses.

National COM Event



2022 NATIONAL COM RALLY
JUNE 7-9, 2022
North Florida Fairgrounds
Tallahassee, FL

This will be the Golden 50th Anniversary of COM.
"Renew in 2022" will be the theme.
Mark your calendars, start saving your money for travel, and be ready to register when it's available. More information will follow as we get it over the next few months.



Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. II Corinthians 4:16

For more information, contact: Rick & Cindy Truesdail Phone: (810) 869-4716

Email: michigancampersonmission@gmail.com

Website: www.michigancampersonmission.org

Facebook: Michigan Campers on Michigan

MI COM LADIES SEWING EVENT

MI COM Ladies met again in January to continue working on the sewing projects for various ministries. Some sewed youth bags, some worked on a new project of wash cloth mitts for children, and others cut and tied fleece throws for youth.

Sewing Events will be scheduled periodically so that we can meet the needs that are growing each week. Ladies from Heritage Baptist Church join in to work with us too. Plan to join us when the announcement for the next one is posted and bring someone with you. MI COM membership is not required for this workday.

We are always very thankful for the labor put into these items and know they are a blessing to foster and refugee children.



Article from our MI COM Member



Henry & Christine Truer

As retired pastors from Galien, MI, Henry and Chris are full-time RVers. They have committed to work at Lake Ann Camp near Traverse City, MI from May to November each year. They joined Michigan Campers on Mission to connect with the National COM register of mission opportunities.

This winter they are working at Black Mountain Home for Children, Youth and Families. Henry and Chris were able to travel about 30 miles to Billy Graham's Training Center, "The Cove", to tour these facilities. The Cove is also a National COM mission opportunity.

Black Mountain Home for Children, Youth & Families, a Nonprofit Organization in NC, seeks to glorify God by caring for children, youth, and families. This is one of our National COM projects. Learn more at www.BlackMountainHome.org

Representing MI COM in Black Mountain, NC

By Christine Truer

We arrived at Black Mountain Home (BMH) on Tuesday, January 4, 2022. When we arrived, many of the Black Mountain staff were out due to COVID. Paul and Esther Shogren from the North Carolina Chapter of Campers on Mission were here to greet us and get us settled. They are currently the RV Hosts until sometime in February. We got settled but hit the ground running because so many people were out with COVID. I went up to Black Mountain Home's Smith Building to volunteer for whatever I could. They put me to work taking down and storing Christmas decorations with Esther and another volunteer, Pam. Once that was complete, I began cleaning the restrooms for the staff who work at BMH. Henry also worked on taking down the larger Christmas decorations and lights that were around the tops of the buildings. Then they put him to work painting the main Smith Building. We work 4 days a week, I work 4 hours per day and Henry works 6 hours. We have Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays off. We also have the last full week of each month off to explore the area.

This past week, Henry has been working on electrical and painting. They have asked me to volunteer in the office with my computer skills and office experience. I have been answering phones, stuffing envelopes for bulk mailings and data entry. We are not able to interact with the 150 children who live here at the home due to COVID. They are hoping that will change in the near future so that we can be able to have one-on-one time with the kids to tutor and read to them. But until that happens, they are keeping us quite busy with their everyday needs. We met Jon and Brandi Dyke from MI COM before they left here and headed to Florida. What a lovely couple and sweet children. We did not have the privilege of working with them (Henry did with Jon for about 1 day); however, we are looking forward to the opportunity in the future as they loved being here at Black Mountain and hope to be back.

Blessings from Black Mountain Home for Children, Youth and Families
Henry and Chris Truer

Birthdays & Anniversaries this Month

Happy
Birthday!

Keith McKnight	2/3
Pam Palmiter	2/8
Chip Collins	2/15
Jeannie Peck	2/20
Martha Henson	2/21

Happy
Anniversary

Skip & Debra Maxson	2/3
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MI COM Officers & Executive Board

Presidents/Project Coordinator	Rick & Cindy Truesdail	Secretary	Brandi Dyke
Vice-President/Project Coordinator	Tony Morningstar	Treasurer	Gary Hannuksela
Hospitality/Food Coordinator	Kim Norrington & Maria Hannuksela	Chaplain	Pastor Chip Collins
Sewing Project Coordinator	Cindy Truesdail & Terry Simmons	Historian	Cindy Truesdail
Cleaning & Beautification Coordinator	Sharon Hessling & Ruth Farwell	Disaster Relief Liaison	Warren Hessling

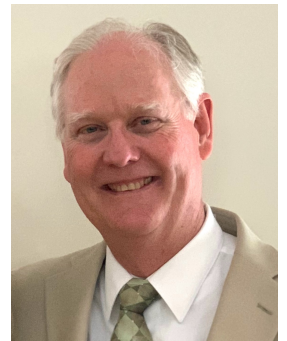
Chaplain's Corner

The Taxman Cometh! Try as I can, I simply cannot find the origin of this phrase on the internet. If any of you know it, I'd appreciate an education from you. Anyway, it's February 1st, and thus time for me to get all my tax ducks in a row—because indeed ... the Taxman cometh! I know, some of you may be thinking I'm starting far too early, but the way I look at it: better to know where I stand sooner rather than later!

And really, isn't that the way it is spiritually? I mean, one day the Lord Himself definitely cometh! Every eye will see Him, and anyone who is not ready will pay the eternal consequences! Oh, but those who are indeed ready because they have been washed in the blood that fully pays for all spiritual debt—it is those blessed ones who will gain an eternal refund of blessings from the Father!

Really now, who ever says: "*Taxman, come quickly?*" No one! But how many of you expectantly and gleefully say: "*Come quickly, Lord Jesus!*" I know I do, and I certainly hope all of you do as well!

To the Praise of His Glory,
Chaplain Chip



Pastor Chip Collins
Heritage Baptist Church
Grand Blanc

Prayer Request and Praise Report

Prayer Request

- Pray for the Roelleke family from Florida Campers on Mission. Gerhard died from a scooter accident in August 2021, and Sheila died from a car accident the first Friday in February. May God comfort their children and families in the days ahead.

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light." Colossians 1:9-12 NIV

Praise Report

- Praise God for all things!

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." Hebrews 13:15-16.

If you have a prayer request or a praise report, please share it with us
and we will include it in our monthly newsletters.

MI COM Tees and Hats

For Sale

We have fun things and essentials for you to let others know you are a MI COMer !!! We encourage you to wear the tees whenever you are working or on a COM event.

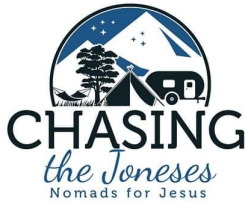
- Tees are printed on the front and the back
- Patches are iron-on or easy to sew onto your shirts or jackets
- Key Chains are plastic on metal holder
- Hand-held fan is paper on wooden handle
- Hats are gray with embroidered logo, adjustable
- Lapel Pins are easily attached to a suit jacket or coat.
- Stickers to put on notebooks, computers, etc.
- Pens to accent your writing

Contact Cindy for your purchase.

MI COM Logo Items For Sale



Networking Center



Tim and Gayle Jones are traveling full-time to reach people for Christ. Tune into their Facebook for their scheduled Bible studies.

Facebook: [Chasing the Joneses](#)



Cindy Truesdail sews and does machine embroidery, per your request and can be personalized, to support their MI COM mission.

Facebook: [Cindy's Stitch Art](#)



Sharon Hessling bakes delicious homemade pies, cookies, breads etc. to support their missionary fund for Africa.

Facebook: [Sahara Pies Plus](#)



Follow Jon and Brandi Dyke and their four girls, full-time RVers, as they share about their mission journey for the Lord.

www.movingbyfaith.home.blog



Adam and Sara Moss and their three children are full-time RVers on mission to encourage Christian service and create a Gospel-centered, Mission-focused, Adventure-driven community among full-time RV families.

Facebook: [The Abundant Journey](#)



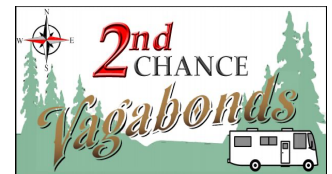
TJ and Helena Witherell love to share the Gospel through word and song. They travel full-time in their RV and seek opportunities for TJ to preach and Helena lead in worship. They share Christ to the homeless and communities.

Facebook: [TJandHelena](#)



Volunteers meeting the urgent needs of hurting humanity in crisis situations with loving care and timely response, in the US and other countries when needed

Facebook: [Michigan Southern Baptist Disaster Relief](#)



Larry and Mary Allen blog about Larry's recent double transplant and recovery as they are full-time RVers sharing their testimony. A retired pastor, Larry still ministers to many people.

www.secondchancevagabonds.com

Always be in the know...



Keep checking at our Website and Facebook for announcements!

Website: www.michigancampersonmission.org

Facebook: Michigan Campers on Mission

For more information, contact: Rick & Cindy Truesdail

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To view the corresponding images and links that accompany these stories or to read past stories and issues of the Baptist Beacon, visit BaptistBeacon.net.

The Baptist Beacon is the official newsjournal of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM.org), in association with the Southern Baptist Convention. The mission of the Baptist Beacon is to communicate with Michigan Baptists in our shared mission of punching holes in the darkness through starting, strengthening, and sending churches.

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