



## **Five Things I've Learned About Urban Church Planting**

By David Jackson

Boston (BP) - The “urban jungle” – it’s a phrase we’ve often used to describe the challenging environment where more and more of our population lives every year. Business, recreation, tourism, education and family life all converge in the teeming masses that inhabit our cities. The sheer volume of people who live in these places creates a unique opportunity for the church in the twenty-first century. In reality, with more than half of the American population now living in the urban world, it’s more than an opportunity – it’s a responsibility. We must take the Gospel to them.

Historically, Southern Baptists have struggled in our efforts to impact metropolitan cities. Our strength has been located in the rural and suburban areas. To our credit, we’ve recognized the sociological changes that led to urban migration and have attempted to embrace the challenge of urban ministry. However, early efforts led to modest, limited impact. Not before the SEND NORTH AMERICA strategy of the past decade have we really found any modicum of effectiveness. The reason is church planting.

Over the past twenty years of my work in the world of church planting, I’ve discovered that no two church plants are the same. All of them are unique in special ways, from the planter who serves with God to establish it to the name that expresses their identity and purpose to the environment in which they serve. Nowhere are these differences more significant than in the cities. Planters and churches who understand and incarnate their uniqueness as God leads them will find greater success. But they must also come to grips with the following five things to have lasting impact on the urban world in which they serve.

### **COMPLEXITY**

The world of complexity. Everybody is busy; it’s our modern world. But nowhere is that more evident than in the city. The complex domains of work or school, family, transportation and recreation (especially for children) create tensions for social networks and congregational life. They all demand our time, and they pull us in difference directions. Busyness and complexity go hand in hand and make the challenge of church more difficult for many to embrace at the most basic, practical level, even if the desire is there. The key for effective church planting is to keep it simple. This offers refuge for fellow strugglers and security in a volatile, changing world.

### **DIVERSITY**

The must of diversity. The urban landscape is not monochromatic; it is Technicolor. This diversity is seen not simply in race and ethnicity but also in economics. In fact, the urban environment is more diversified by socio-economics than anything else. This urban caste system creates “haves” and “have nots” based on education, jobs, wealth and heritage (in the Northeast, at least), in addition to race and ethnicity. Effective church planters know their own

neighborhood well and transcend these differences with the Gospel in effective, practical ways. They welcome diversity and refuse to allow these sociological differences to define God's people.

### **VARIETY**

The seduction of variety. The city offers a buffet of options on everything from outdoor activities to means of transportation. While variety has grown everywhere, the options in the city are endless and are available 24/7. Comparative analysis and consumer thinking are two inevitable results for city dwellers. "How is this option better than that option?" "What's the benefit to me?" These are the questions that run through the minds of many urbanites. Effective church planters refuse to fall prey to the overwhelming cultural push toward unlimited options. They remain focused in their service, relying on the strengths God has given them and the passion He provides to direct them to carve out their initial niche of impact for Him.

### **TOLERANCE**

The deception of tolerance. Urban society has embraced a sophistication that has redefined basic terms for its own benefit over the years. None has been more readily embraced in the urban world than "tolerance." This word, which formerly meant respect, now means acceptance. Anything less is seen as racist, misogynist, homophobic and politically incorrect. Evangelical Christians are often stereotypically thrown into these hateful categories by others. The effective urban church planter knows what he believes and, with compassion, refuses to veer from it. He overcomes this slander with demonstrations of love, service, patience and perseverance.

### **SOUL**

The worth of a soul. Brokenness is a real thing in every life and family. Nowhere is that more evident than in the city. The tensions of urban life stress the greatest of believers. Unredeemed souls too often are shattered by the brute force of the dehumanizing, impersonal forces that undermine their worth. Into this reality steps the church to bring good news of reconciliation and redemption for broken people. Effective church planters always keep the main thing, the main thing. They are the ultimate optimists, because they know the ability of our eternal God to "make all things new."

These realities are not just in our cities, to be sure. Perhaps they are simply magnified there, because of the density of people, the exaggeration of emotion and the desperation of need. But with each of these realities comes the opportunity for us to demonstrate the difference the Gospel makes. It is a responsibility we **MUST** embrace, for it is the power of the Gospel (Romans 1:16).

David Jackson is the church planting director/strategist at the Baptist Convention of New England. This article was first published in the Baptist Convention of New England, The New England Baptist Connection.

### **Staying the Course**

Cecil and Jayne Cogswell

Lambton County, Canada- Why start again? Why farm the farmlands of Lambton County? The Scripture in 2 Corinthians 5 seems to highlight our answer – 'if I acted crazy, I did it for God...Christ's love has moved me to such extremes.'

For over 30 years, we have been involved in church planting and re-planting work in a large urban area outside of Toronto, Canada. When God moved us from that place – He really moved! We landed in the serene setting of Lake Huron, in the middle of farm country. How is this going to work? We don't know anyone. We don't even know how to get to the next town. This is going to be an adventure.

2 Corinthians 5: 11-14 (The Message)

That keeps us vigilant, you can be sure. It's no light thing to know that we'll all one day stand in that place of Judgment. That's why we work urgently with everyone we meet to get them ready to face God. God alone knows how well we do this, but I hope you realize how much and deeply we care. We're not saying this to make ourselves look good to you. We just thought it would make you feel good, proud even, that we're on your side and not just nice to your face as so many people are. If I acted crazy, I did it for God; if I acted overly serious, I did it for you. Christ's love has moved me to such extremes. His love has the first and last word in everything we do.

In 2014 our lives were turned upside down. From city to country, from health to illness, from strength to weakness, from fulfilled urban lives to lonely farm roads. Really God? What is this about? Our path to the North American Mission Board was about to become even more strange. We felt deflated and defeated. The very weakest of the weak. But God had a plan.

The plan was not drawn on a white board. It wasn't devised in a board room. It developed on the back of a napkin in a tiny restaurant when someone simply reached out and said 'let's get in touch'. It wasn't long before that became a birthday in a blizzard, an unexpected farm country sleep over, ensuing 'questions about the Bible' meetings. Life on life. Christ's love moved us.

More detours. More people. Free Bibles were given to us – and we had no idea why. But God did. It was His architectural drawing that was beginning to unfold and we couldn't see how the plan was taking shape. A caring pastor became a friend (and ultimately became our sending pastor). LOVE in unexpected places.

Then the North American Mission Board...and now The Bridge Gathering. A group that desires to connect community to Christ because He loves us. It has been a bumpy, beautiful ride – very much like you would get on a hay wagon. We meet people where they are – on the streets, in a coffee shop. We love them – because God has placed us together in this confusing place called the world. Our bridge across the water and our eternal Bridge have been established to bring the message of LOVE where it might not have existed before. As we live this life nurturing those whom God has placed around us – it's not difficult to understand the answers to our original question of 'why'? It's because of LOVE. His Love for all of us.

Jump ahead to 2017 we are full of anticipation for what God will do in Lambton County. We have already been having discussions about how to reach those around us who have either forgotten the precious Gospel or who have not heard it. This involves planning and resources. As a tiny group of eager messengers – we have had lots of conversations about our ideas and our passion for the Message. Now we are tasked with prayerfully considering what ideas we might ensue to focus on sharing the Good News to those around us.

Meanwhile, we have had very encouraging conversations with a number of people who need Christ in their lives. We have also spent time encouraging a few saints along the way. We have offered cookies to coworkers, pizza to the ill (whose appetite can be enticed by it), time to the tired, and encouragement to those whose point of view is limited to their own circumstances. At The Bridge Gathering – we're doing life together, while we continue to consider our mandate 'connecting community to Christ'.

Cecil Cogswell is a NAMB Church Planter in Canada. Jayne is a Church Planter's wife and together they serve at The Bridge Gathering, Sarnia, Ontario, Canada.

### **First Provo plants Gospel of Christ in Utah**

by Karen L. Willoughby

PROVO, Utah (BP) -- Four Southern Baptist church plants are in their early stages in Utah County, a traditional Mormon community, but home to First Baptist Church of Provo since 1948. Pastor Russ Robinson has led the Baptist congregation to plant other churches rather than expand its church building. First Baptist Church meets in a former Mormon or Latter-day Saints "ward meeting house" the church purchased in 1963. Located in an out-of-the-way residential neighborhood, First Baptist Provo is at near-capacity for the perhaps 100 people who worship there Sunday mornings.

"We're very much invested in proclaiming the Gospel in Utah County and to the ends of the earth," Robinson told Baptist Press. "We're a small church but we think we can do a whole lot more." Among First Baptist Provo's church plants is one in Springville, a town south of Provo that has more than doubled in size since 2000, but has only one evangelical church for its nearly 35,000 residents. Another congregation is set for southeast Provo, home to more than 10,000 college students and perhaps 10,000 more young families. Others are planned for Lehi, which has increased by 13,000 people since 2010, and among the area's growing Hispanic population, about 12 percent of the county's population.

Despite its size, First Baptist Provo is already doing "a whole lot more" than it was when Robinson was called from Tennessee seven years ago to his first pastorate. Missions giving at first was less than 1 percent of the annual church budget, but is budgeted at 10 percent for 2017. Mission trips were non-existent, except for Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief. Now the church goes to Haiti at least once a year to work with an orphanage and local churches in evangelistic outreaches. A new missions endeavor to southwestern Wisconsin in partnership with the Salt Lake Baptist Association is being planned for the summer.

Mission partnerships were unheard of with the church seven years ago. In the summer of 2016, First Provo housed 175 short-term missions volunteers from various churches to work in Utah County, and trained them in evangelizing Mormons and other groups. This is essential because the area's dominant religion, Mormonism, teaches that God was once a man, and that men can become gods. Numerous other doctrines -- such as salvation -- deemed essential to Christians are different for Mormons, Robinson explained.

First Baptist Provo conducts various types of evangelism, including relational, event-driven and door-to-door, aimed at "the Gospel being presented clearly, compassionately and boldly," Robinson said. "Our training usually focuses heavily on making clear the doctrine of 'imputed righteousness.' "Most Latter-day Saints will agree with you that Christ died for sins," Robinson

said. "Almost all will disagree that we can be seen as righteous as Christ today by faith, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21. This is a necessary point of the Gospel that needs to be made clear to LDS neighbors who trust in their own righteousness for salvation." Many Mormons believe that everyone is going to at least one level of heaven, "affirming a gospel of religious relativism and pluralism, although you won't find that in their scriptures," Robinson said. "When you preach a Gospel of the exclusivity of Christ, there are some real obstacles of faith."

In a population the U.S. Census Bureau said was 516,564 in 2010, Utah County tallied a total of 2,540 evangelical Christians, 6,792 Catholics, 423 mainline Protestants, 211 African American Protestants, and 459,847 Mormons, according to the Association of Religious Data Archives. ARDA statistics "can be computed to show that Utah County is 0.49 percent evangelical/mainline," Robinson said. "Keep in mind the International Mission Board's definition of 'unreached and unengaged' is 2 percent or less." Mormons are dominant in Utah County primarily because Brigham Young University (BYU), the religion's flagship school, was started in Provo by Young in 1875. More than 33,000 students attended BYU during the fall 2016 semester.

At the same time First Baptist Provo is sending out four families to plant churches, the congregation is planning to "develop a person to lead in missions training and biblical counseling," Robinson said. "We want to send out more short-term missions teams, and we have suicide and prescription drug abuse epidemics here. And ... almost every person who comes to us out of Mormonism has a great load on them." First Baptist Provo seeks to identify God-called church planters, nurture them, guide them, mentor them and help them locate areas that need a Gospel witness, but because of its size, it cannot underwrite all the church plants members believe God wants them to help start, Robinson said.

"We perceive we need more financial resources," the pastor said, "and we'd love to have more missions-minded people who would invest their lives here in our community. "Here's what we don't have, which is our dream, our prayer, what we're laboring for," Robinson noted. "The indigenous person. The goal is for churches in Utah to be led by people from Utah, to reach the people of Utah with the message of biblical grace that isn't earned through works but is a free gift that comes from God the Father through the work of Jesus Christ by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit."

Karen L. Willoughby is a national correspondent for Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention's news service. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

 **STRENGTHENING****Reaching the Urban Community**

By Ebony Robinson

Ypsilanti, MI - A Sunday morning service in the African American community looks different in 2017 than it did thirty years ago. Years ago the church was the bedrock in the community, but times have changed, and thoughts about church and God are not as allegiant. There are challenges that may have contributed to this change such as the need to work, competing childrens' extracurricular activities, the relevancy of the church, and the apathy that has bubbled up in the society.

Director of Ministries at Reach Church in Ypsilanti, Ebony Robinson asks the questions "So how do we reach a community that may not be as "excited" about God and religion as their forefathers? How do we reach a community where the concern is about social injustices not which worship song is being sung? How do we reach a community who may have felt like God has forgotten them? And how do we do that despite the numerous challenges that may be prevalent?"

Robinson says, " At Reach Church we do not believe we have all of the answers – by no means – but we do believe that when a person is personally "reached" we are attempting to make a difference. If we can get over these hurdles separating us, we believe a person can experience the love of Christ.

Reach Church has an Outreach System that serves the purpose of drawing people to church and inviting them into a relationship with Christ. While Reach does a number of things, two are having a particular impact. First, church leaders engage the congregation to participate in this effort by implementing the Reach One campaign. This campaign challenges and encourages every member to invite and/or share their faith at least once per week, with the use of invite cards and other tools. Robinson adds, "Most people are going to share their "faith about something" but it may not be their faith of Our Heavenly Father. I have witnessed the power of an established relationship with the Father when it is leveraged. I have seen college students bring their suitemates, mothers bring their adult children, and managers bring their team members from the workplace. It only takes one person to inspire another person to action and it has the likelihood to transform a community. Yes, one person can influence those around them to do something different – in this case draw them to church so they can meet Christ. We give the congregation the tools and the confidence to share their faith on a weekly basis to Reach One."

Another impactful opportunity is through events at church. Sometimes the community may not try something if they feel like there may be a chance they will be singled out. So holding an event gives that person a chance to be a part of the crowd. Being one guest versus many guests is not as intimidating for a person. At Reach they focus on events that will reach the

immediate community; college students, and families that live around the church. For example, they held their first Fall-O-Ween (Fall Harvest) around Halloween. To promote this family-fun day they canvassed the community and used social media. Families came to the event who would have never come to any church. They had fun and felt the love of Christ through our volunteers' cordial spirit and willingness to serve. The next Sunday the service included more guests than normal because they saw the significance of the church. Robinson says, "When I see God grow a member in their faith, a person in our community walk in the church for the first time or in a long time, I see a community transforming."

Ebony Robinson is Director of Ministries for Reach Church, Ypsilanti, MI.

## **How Pastors Can Help Prevent Substance Abuse**

By Denise George

Nearly 1 in 10 Michigan residents abuse illicit drugs. It's a higher rate than the national average. Drug abuse among men, women, and youth in Michigan, as well as the rate of drug-induced deaths, is rapidly increasing. Drug and alcohol use among the state's adolescents is skyrocketing, resulting in high numbers of youth, under the age of 18, arrested for drug abuse violations. Some of these drug-abusing adolescents are as young as twelve years old. The Michigan Department of State Police reports that 61% of people incarcerated in Michigan have a history of drug and alcohol abuse. (1)

Some believe that Michigan's rising drug epidemic results from the state's high unemployment rate, bringing great financial pressures to residents due to lack of employment opportunities and unexpected job losses. Others cite recent budget cuts that have reduced the number of Michigan's substance abuse prevention programs. (2)

Michigan's Most Abused Substances (in order of abuse)

- Marijuana,
- Heroin,
- Prescription Opiates,
- Cocaine
- Alcohol
- Methamphetamine.

### **How Pastors Can Help**

Pastors, alarmed by the rising statistics for drug and alcohol abuse, can often help prevent substance abuse in their church and community. Here are some suggestions:

- Speak/preach often about the increasing rate of substance abuse in your church and community. From your pulpit, promote SBC Sunday emphases, such as Substance Abuse Prevention Sunday on March 19, 2017. Plan a special service, talk about the problem, invite a guest speaker to give information, ask a former abuser to give a testimony, etc.
- Educate your church members on the most abused substances in your community/state. Teach them how to recognize substance abuse signs, and encourage them to report a possible abuser to church leadership. (See sidebar: "How to Recognize Drug Abuse and Addiction.")

- Research, check out, and make a list of qualified health care providers and drug/alcohol treatment centers in your area. Keep the information available and updated in order to contact in an emergency, enlist help, or recommend treatment to abusers and/or their family members who care for them.
- Plan separate church events/programs for youth and parents that expose the dangers of drugs and alcohol, offer insights into understanding commonly used drugs, addictions, and the health/emotional consequences of illegal drug/alcohol abuse.
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**SIDEBAR: "How to Recognize Drug Abuse and Addiction"**

Here are a few common physical and behavioral signs of drug abuse/addiction:

- anxiety, irritability, hyperactivity, lethargy, and unpredictable mood swings;
- tremors, shakiness, red eyes, runny nose, problems with coordination;
- a constant need for money; poor work or school performance; unexplained confusion;
- unusual weight gain or loss; physical withdrawal symptoms when not taking the drug; changes in attitude or friends for no reason.

[Some information in this sidebar above found at: <http://addictionblog.org/FAQ/identifying-addiction/how-to-identify-drug-abuse/>. Accessed: Jan. 10, 2017.]

**SIDEBAR: Online Resources**

- For a directory that lists information for inpatient and outpatient treatment centers in Michigan, please see: <https://www.mentalhelp.net/care/substance-abuse/mi/>.
- For the Southern Baptist Convention's website that recommends drug treatment programs for addiction and substance abuse by state, please see: <http://www.drugtreatmentprogram.net/tag/southern-baptist-convention/>. (The SBC website with recommendations specifically for Michigan Drug Treatment Programs and Rehabilitation Centers is: <http://www.drugtreatmentprogram.net/state/michigan>. You can call the 24-hr help line at 866-923-1134 to talk to a live counselor.)
- The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services: [http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550\\_2941\\_4871\\_45835---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4871_45835---,00.html).

**Endnotes:**

1. Found at:

[https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/state\\_profile\\_-\\_michigan.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/state_profile_-_michigan.pdf) and <https://www.thetreatmentcenter.com/michigan/>. Accessed: Jan. 10, 2017.

2. Found at: <http://aforeverrecovery.com/blog/drug-abuse/drug-and-alcohol-abuse-growth-in-michigan/>. Accessed: Jan. 10, 2017.

3. Found at: [http://www.ncbuy.com/health/drugs/us\\_mi.html](http://www.ncbuy.com/health/drugs/us_mi.html). Accessed: Jan. 10, 2017.

4. Found at: <https://mic.com/articles/80091/which-drug-is-your-state-most-addicted-to-this-map-reveals-a-disturbing-trend#.exEVE5ysm>. Accessed: Jan. 10, 2017.

5. Found at: [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/state\\_profile\\_-\\_michigan.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/state_profile_-_michigan.pdf). Accessed: Jan. 10, 2017.

Denise George, author of 30 books, is co-author of the new Penguin Random House book: *The Lost Eleven: The Forgotten Story of Black American Soldiers Brutally Massacred in World War II*. She is married to Dr. Timothy George, founding dean of Beeson Divinity School, Samford University.

## **A Voice for the Hurting in African American Communities**

By Sarah Houston

Lansing - God has brought Michigan African American Churches into a deeper partnership with each other through the Michigan African American Fellowship of Southern Baptist. Unfortunately, many of our urban areas are suffering due to what may appear to be overwhelming social issues. These issues include high unemployment, high dropout rate, useless killings, teenage pregnancy, and too many single mom households. Despite these challenges, Dr. Stan Parker, Pastor of Faith Fellowship Baptist Church and President of Michigan African American Fellowship, is still very optimistic for the future of African American families and churches.

Dr. Parker stated "God is still in charge, he is able to bring healing to the various homes where many of these social ills are occurring". He believes our churches, especially African American Churches must be about the Lord's business, which is soul winning. Dr. Parker stated the term "soul winning" still has meaning and value in the African American community, however, the issue at hand is our churches must make it relevant again. This is why our churches must continue to respond with love to those who are hurting and are vulnerable to being attacked by the evil one. We can take heart in knowing that throughout history our churches have served as the only institution which remains when times are difficult.

When asked is there a solution, Dr. Parker responded by saying, "The answer is Jesus. We must not just talk about Jesus; we must live and serve as Jesus did." Dr. Parker travels throughout the state encouraging pastors to continue to minister by including social ministries as part of the church's ministry. Many churches have responded positively to Dr. Parker's challenge. Many African American Churches are providing social ministries such as food pantries, clothes closets, job seeking skills workshops, before-and-after school programs along with housing assistance programs. These types of social ministries in urban areas have opened the doors for sustainable relationships to be developed and relationships are where we touch the soul of an individual, then a family, and before you know it a community is transformed.

Social Service Ministries has a long standing history in the African American community and has served to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, and ushered many into the marvelous light and life of Jesus Christ. The Michigan African American Fellowship churches are continuing to work together to bring the message of hope and healing to the hurting. This includes providing the traditional ministries of Sunday school, Vacation Bible Schools, Backyard Bible clubs, and inspirational morning worship services. These ministries connected to the Social Service ministries speaks a language of love which meets many families and individual right where they are.

Dr. Parker is excited and believes God is going to move this year in ways which will bring result in very productive, life-changing growth in the African American Community. He believes Michigan churches will experience a record year in baptisms. As Henry Blackaby says, discover where God is working and join in. If you are interested in partnering with the Michigan African American Fellowship in serving urban areas within the state contact Dr. Stan Parker at 517-853-9897.

Submitted by Sarah Houston, Sophomore at Michigan State University, serving as a student missionary with Just For Christ, Campus Ministries.

## **Church Partners Reach Family of 9**

By Darryl Gaddy, Sr.

Detroit - One Sunday in the middle of January a family of nine came to Victory Fellowship Community Church in Detroit. By the end of the service, that family responded to the preached message, accepted Christ as savior, and chose Victory Fellowship at their church home. But that is not where this story begins.

On Christmas Day, Victory Fellowship invited the families of nearby Hamilton school to come to their Christmas Service, and as part of the service their children received Christmas gifts.

Victory Fellowship's pastor, Darryl Gaddy, says "It was an awesome day, and the spirit of love and blessings were in the air." While engaging the family of nine in membership, Gaddy learned that this was one of the families who were a part of the Christmas gift outreach. However, the story still begins earlier.

The Christmas Gift Outreach was made possible because the Liberty Heights Church (LHC) in Liberty Township, Ohio, partnered with Victory Fellowship. Liberty Heights donated Christmas gift boxes that allowed the Victory Fellowship to partner with three schools in the metro Detroit. Tyrone and Beacon Schools in Harper Woods, and Hamilton School in Detroit helped the churches find children in need.

Gaddy says, "While the work is great, no where is it written one church must do it alone. Partnership among churches builds the faith, touches countless lives and transforms entire communities. This kingdom growth would not have been possible without the intentional way that Liberty Heights Church partnered with us serving in tough communities."

If you are looking for a church to partner with or a church looking to partner contact us at the BSCM. We have a growing list of opportunities waiting. Contact us at [information@bscm.org](mailto:information@bscm.org) or call us 810-714-1907.

Dr. Darryl Gaddy, Sr. is pastor of Victory Fellowship Community Church in Detroit, MI.

## **FIRST-PERSON: 'We don't get religion'**

by Doug Parkin

JACKSON, Miss. (BP) -- "We don't get religion," New York Times executive editor Dean Baquet said, his words sparking a whirlwind of attention. The "media powerhouses," as Baquet put it in an NPR interview Dec. 8, "don't get the role of religion in people's lives."

As a Christian, I can understand Baquet's observation. In order to "get" religion, one has to "get" faith. This often seems to be a challenge for those who see themselves as intellectuals. They have a faith; however, their faith is limited to their understanding of the thoughts and

observations of other "intellectuals" -- thoughts and observations collectively known as science. It is understandable why many place their faith in science as the ultimate explanation of what we observe as we analyze our surroundings. Science provides a means by which the physical circumstances which affect us can be justified and explained. Because of the testable and re-creatable nature of scientific principles, we develop confidence, or faith, in our scientific explanations.

Science, however, has its limits. Science, for example, argues for a spontaneous natural occurrence of the formation of the universe, yet struggles to explain what happened prior to this moment of origin. Scientists continue to argue about how something -- that something being the entirety of the universe -- came from nothing. Different theoretical explanations are described in scientific "models" of the origin of the universe. Consider, however, that the renowned scientist Stephen Hawking has explained that, in order to be valid, a model of the origin of the universe does not have to prove reality; it only has to "work" in a theoretical argument. Science, in other words, only has to appear to be correct.

Faith in a spiritual Creator, however, demands a much higher standard. For spiritual faith to be true, the spiritual Creator has to be eternally valid. Such a Creator is not bound by our concepts of scientific truth or physical reality. Such a Creator would be, instead, the author of all physical law and would therefore supersede these very concepts and, at the same time, would not invalidate them. Indeed, belief in this Creator does not deny an instant of origin. In fact, Genesis 2:4 describes Genesis, chapter 1, as "This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven" (New American Standard Bible). The concept of a Creator reaches beyond the finite point of creation into the eternity of an existing supreme being.

Like train tracks stretching into the distance, the principles of both spiritual faith and scientific faith converge into the acknowledgement of a single moment of origin of existence, an instant of physical creation. At this point, however, these faiths instantaneously diverge to the greatest extreme imaginable. Those who practice a scientific faith often do so in a derogatory manner toward those who practice a spiritual faith. Spiritual faith is often condemned as insupportable by physical evidence and theoretical equations, with its practitioners called unenlightened, fearful and naïve.

As Christians, however, we trust in what we have personally experienced in God through our relationships with Jesus Christ. We concede that we can't prove God or Christ by any equation, but neither can anyone disprove by equation our experiences of faith. As the Bible states, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, King James Version). It is very difficult to consider a hope as reality, and to then trust what is evidenced only by that hope. Yet, that is the very nature of spiritual faith.

My hope is that Mr. Baquet's recognition that he does not "get the role of religion in people's lives" would lead him and others like him to explore the possibilities of Christian faith. They may find it surprising that they are the ones who are restricted in their enlightenment, limited in their universal experience to only the physical realm while fearful of a co-existing spiritual reality, and naïve of the incomprehensible fullness of living a spiritual life based on faith in Jesus Christ.

Doug Parkin is a pharmacist in Jackson, Miss., and a member of First Baptist Church.

## **The Aggression of Depression!**

By Billy Walker

Southgate, MI - President of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan's (BSCM) Pastor Conference shares the following story. "One year my wife and I took the girls to Fort Myers and made a purchase we didn't think through at the time. We bought a body board down at the beach. It was a great idea until someone asked how we were going to get it on the plane! So we wound up leaving it at the Condo. That is not the part of the story that's important. (Except to the people who stayed at the condo after us.)

When I finally decided to try it out – I watched countless people out on the waves – some on surfboards, some windsurfing, some on body boards and others just swimming. They were doing great – the waves just seemed to be moving them effortlessly along. So I jumped on – only to be hit by a significant wave that caused me to lose the board, and be driven under. As soon as I could get above the water and start to get my bearings, another wave came crashing over me. This happened time and again until I was finally deposited, a ragged mess, back in the shallows."

For some, this story is an accurate depiction of what life is like when discouragement and depression sets in, and pastors can easily find themselves in the same condition. Wave after wave – while other churches, ministries, and ministers seem to be floating effortlessly, an individual can hardly keep his head above the waves to get their bearings, only to be hit again.

God's Word gives insight into people who experienced this and how God reacted to them. Two of the greatest of the Old Testament would be David – victorious over Goliath and powerful King of Israel; and Elijah – powerful prophet who called down fire and rain from heaven on the same day. David would share where he was in Psalm 34:18 – "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed!" A crushed spirit. That seems even worse than a broken heart. Broken hearts can be healed, But a crushed spirit? That brings to mind concrete that has been sledge hammered into powder and pieces. Many pastors and their families have been there. But David promises – from firsthand experience – that the Lord rescues those who find themselves in that predicament. Elijah actually is a little more of a process than David. He has experienced this wonderful victory, and yet within 24 hours he is ready to call it quits. God gently restores him. He doesn't scold him – or tell him to put on his big boy pants. He feeds him, He lets him rest, He prepares him for a journey, He assures him of His presence, tells him that he's not alone, and then gives him an assignment, and puts him back to work. How incredibly cool is God. He speaks the same to leaders today. "You are not alone! You will get through this. There is more for you to do and accomplish."

There are some wonderful resources that the North American Mission Board (NAMB) has given to us. There is a Pastor's Hotline – 1-844-Pastor1 (1-844-727-8671) The conversation stays confidential, and it gives a safe, secure place to talk and share. There is also a collaborative effort at [www.care4pastors.com](http://www.care4pastors.com). Combining the resources of Lifeway, Focus on the Family, and Great Commandment ministries, this website gives insight, sermons, a calendar of events for couples and other great tools to help you navigate the waves that ministry brings. Take advantage of these, plus the encouragement that comes from the BSCM with the Pastor's

Conference, CEC, Galatians 6 retreats, and Date nights (coming in April!) All of these events have a purpose in moving pastors forward in their relationships, ministry, and personal life.

Next month – there will be more practical tips from the life of Elijah and David. Watch for The Aggression of Depression Part 2 in the March Beacon. Until then, remember that the God who created the waves will give the ability to ride the waves rather than be swept under by them. And when He is allowed to do that, it's quite a ride!

Billy Walker is the lead Pastor of Calvary Church in Southgate, MI. He serves as the President of the BSCM Pastor's Conference, and the Vice President of the Billy Walker Evangelistic Association. He lives in the downriver Detroit area with his wife Laurie. You can read more at [www.billywalker.org](http://www.billywalker.org)



## **The Chaplain's Sacred Moments**

By Chaplain Bob Dennis

Grand Rapids - I came along side his bed and he said "I don't need a chaplain because I believe just like the Indians." I asked him what kind of Indians and he told me all about it. I asked him, "Do you truly believe what you just said because your doctor told me that you only have two weeks at the most before you go to the "happy hunting ground." He already knew this because his doctor had explained it to him before they sent for me.

He looked down at the floor then raised his head with tears running down both cheeks and said, "I really, really need to get ready to meet Jesus. I've been impressing other truck drivers for many years with the Indian story but I know Jesus is out there. How do I apologize to Him? How do I get ready to meet Jesus? I want to go to heaven." After a short trip down the Bible's "Romans Road" he prayed to receive Christ as his Savior. We were both a tearful mess in happiness. I never made it back in time for the second hospital visit because he didn't wait the two weeks to go meet Jesus.

To be a Chaplain is to be in the right place at the right time and that is a matter of being inside the will of God's calling. You can find yourself as a minister of the Gospel in a hospital, prison, battlefield, or disaster scene and that is what it means to have the Chaplain's Sacred Moments. If you are called by God to be a chaplain or feel called to give prayer support to our Michigan Chaplains please feel free to contact me ( [bdennis@bscm.org](mailto:bdennis@bscm.org) ). You can also visit our Baptist State Convention of Michigan website ( [bscm.org](http://bscm.org) ) and visit the Chaplaincy page under "Sending" or directly at [bscm.org/chaplain](http://bscm.org/chaplain). There are several topics addressed about the chaplaincy and links for even more information.

**2017 BSCM EVENTS FOR CHAPLAINS:** Soon, we will be scheduling a one-day Chaplain Training and Fellowship Meeting at BSCM Ministry Building (8420 Runyan Lake Road, Fenton, MI 48430). It will be a good time to swap "Sacred Moments Stories" and learn from each other.

I am working with the Salvation Army to make Crisis Intervention Classes available to our chaplains. These will help our Michigan chaplains get the required classes for their endorsement from the North American Mission Board. Watch the BSCM.org website for the dates and locations of the upcoming meetings and classes.

Chaplain Bob Dennis is our new Chaplain Coordinator for the BSCM. He became a North American Mission Board endorsed chaplain for the State of Michigan after ministering as a

pastor in the Woodland Baptist Association for many years. He currently is a chaplain assigned to the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans.

## **Bigger Expectations**

By Rachel Lipovsky

Detroit - "If I tried to place my finger on the right word, it might land somewhere between you and me, seated in the back of a friend's car, stopped in Michigan's darkest city, paused in prayer for the light to come. It reminds me I never quite grasp God's glory – that I never quite have big enough expectations. Allow me to explain."

FRē Outreach, the sex trafficking outreach at Legacy Church, has branched out from its suburban hotel outreach in Novi, Michigan to cross with international interests. The North American International Auto Show draws nearly one million people to Detroit, and human trafficking is escalated in the city of Detroit during these two weeks. Minors makeup a large demographic of individuals that are sexually exploited, and information on them is sought by both police detectives and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

I wake up once a month to take pictures of missing kids to local hotels. In the hopes that one child might be seen or found, our FRē Outreach team is dedicated to the search for missing kids and to the hotel staff we educate on sex trafficking. On January 15, our team took the latest pictures and our educational packets into the hive of the Michigan sex trade, every hotel and motel in Detroit. We were given a peek into the hive. As I predicted, my expectations were too small for God's glory.

I often find that prayer is a companion we see as small but mighty, as the mustard seed can move mountains. I regret that I have never seen a mustard seed literally move a mountain, as it would be a wonder of the natural world. However, I have seen such a wonder through the power of prayer.

Our team spent months in prayer for God's protection, His direction, and His motivation to put our hands and feet to work. Then, the outreach came. Prayer was essential. The WMU Prayerwalking team and members of the FRē team joined together in their cars and prayed as we traveled through the city. Have I yet stated that God will conquer our expectations and prove them to be inconsequential? Here is what my eyes beheld.

I never expected that I would be calling the Toledo Police on a tip. I never expected that a woman at a motel would listen to us. I never expected that God would put me in a motel in Detroit, have me stand face-to-face with her honest eyes, have me equipped with 12 photos, and have one of those photos spark a memory in her mind. The staff member remembered seeing one of the girls on our posters; she had recently come to the hotel for a room. A missing girl from Toledo made it onto our posters for the outreach, and we happened to visit the motel where she would be recognized.

Prayer, an open conversation with God, is more potent than I can comprehend. It took one million international visitors, all the hotels and motels of Detroit, five carloads of willing servants, and one motel employee to hear the whisper in my ear. I never anticipated the opportunity to

pass on information concerning a child's case. Prayer enabled our outreach serve one lost sheep, and I heard the word – God is faithful.

About the Author: Rachel Lipovsky is a writer at Divinely Enchanted, a soon-to-be university graduate in marketing and management, and a mad lover of Jesus and his ministries. You can find more about the author and her work at [DivinelyEnchanted.com](http://DivinelyEnchanted.com).

## **Sheik sent to kill pastor professes faith in Christ**

by Morning Star News/East Africa Correspondent

AMURIA, Uganda (BP) -- Islamic extremists ambushed a church leader in eastern Uganda this month after a sheikh sent to assassinate him during worship instead accepted Christ, sources told Morning Star News. Sunni Muslim extremists had sent the sheikh, an Islamic teacher trained in Islamic proselytization, to the Pentecostal Upright Church to kill pastor George Edweu. But during Edweu's sermon on hearing and understanding the voice of God, the power of the Gospel convicted the sheik of sin, Edweu said.

News of the former sheikh's conversion shocked the community, and the 24-year-old newly converted Christian went into hiding. He, his wife and two children, ages 2 and 4, took refuge at an undisclosed location. A month later on Jan 2, Muslims ambushed Edweu when he arrived for a devotion at the church in Amuria, about 170 miles north of Kampala. Six masked men grabbed Edweu and demanded that he reveal the whereabouts of the sheikh. Some of the gang began slapping and kicking Edweu; others hit him with sticks. "As I fell down, a vehicle with bright lights flashed, which scared them away, and they disappeared into the nearby bush," Edweu told Morning Star. "The vehicle arrived and took me into the church compound. Inside the church building we found a letter with a threatening message: 'We are going to destroy your church unless you show us where name withheld is.'"

Area Muslims have reportedly been announcing the conversion weekly as they gather for mosque prayers. A local Christian resident told Morning Star News that on Fridays he has heard over the mosque loudspeaker, "Name withheld needs to die for forsaking Islam." When converted, the sheik had rushed up to the podium and fell at the feet of Edweu, who stopped preaching and questioned the young man. As tears rolled down the sheikh's cheeks, he answered, "I was sent to come and attack, to kill the pastor and destroy the church," according to the pastor.

The Muslim repented in front of the congregation, Edweu prayed for him, and the would-be assassin put his faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, the pastor said. Since the ambush, Edweu and his congregation fear more persecution could be imminent. The ambush was the latest in a series of anti-Christian attacks in eastern Uganda. Also in eastern Uganda, Muslim relatives of 24-year-old Sandra Summaya coerced her into taking poison at a New Year's celebration, she said, because she accepted Christ at a Christmas worship service. Muslims in eastern Uganda beat Christians at a Christmas worship service and wrecked the home of a single mother on Christmas Eve, sources said.

This past December, relatives of a former Islamic teacher attacked his 60-year-old mother for becoming a Christian, wounding her head and breaking her hand, sources said. Aimuna

Namutongi sustained a deep cut on her forehead. She and her son Malik Higenyi, whom Muslim relatives had beaten unconscious on Nov. 13 after he made a public profession of faith in Christ, managed to escape the attackers in December. Namutongi had been converted through her son's testimony, a local source said. Villagers recounted isolated attacks dating back to last June.

About 85 percent of the people in Uganda are Christian and 11 percent Muslim, with some eastern areas having large Muslim populations. The country's constitution and other laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to propagate one's faith and convert from one faith to another, but Christians in eastern Uganda are suffering continual attacks by non-state figures.

Morning Star News is a California-based independent news service focusing on the persecution of Christians worldwide.

### **Stanley's expansive In Touch Ministries reaching globe**

by Gerald Harris/Georgia Christian Index

ATLANTA (BP) -- When pastor Charles Stanley launched "The Chapel Hour" in 1972 on Atlanta-area television stations, he probably never dreamed that 45 years later his ministry would become so expansive that it would cover most of the earth. Many may contend that few people have had the impact upon the world for good and for God like the pastor of Atlanta's First Baptist Church and the founder and president of In Touch Ministries.

"In Touch with Dr. Charles Stanley" programs are seen and heard around the world on more than 2,800 radio and television outlets. And, through the means of modern technology and communication, the former Southern Baptist Convention president's messages can be heard on every continent in 150 countries. His sermons have been translated into 114 different languages and counting.

### **'The most exciting time in history'**

In his book "Courageous Faith," Stanley writes, "We are now closer than ever to getting His Word out to all people. With the Bible in more languages and with technological improvements, God has enabled us to reach even the most secluded tribes on the planet. "I believe we are living in the most exciting time in history, able to tell so many people in so many different countries about Jesus. Platforms for communication that no one dreamed possible when I was a boy are now everyday tools for taking the Gospel around the world."

One of the communication devices Stanley was referring to is the pocket-sized Messenger, In Touch Ministries' flagship solar-powered audio device that holds up to 65 of Stanley's sermons, the New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs in a variety of languages. The Messenger can hold content in two languages at a time. There are actually eight different devices in the Messenger Lab family, each one designed to meet the needs of specific people groups who have their own communication challenges.

### **Distribution of the solar-powered audio devices**

To date In Touch has given out more than 750,000 of these solar-powered audio devices valued at a total of more than \$26 million. In Touch does not sell the devices, but gives them away as a part of their worldwide ministry. Since the shelf life of each device is long and each device must pass certain stress tests to ensure durability they can be used for years. Some of the devices are used to communicate the Gospel to house churches and Bible study groups. So, one device could potentially touch the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of people.

### **Saved from a bullet by the Messenger**

Many soldiers in the Ukrainian army were given Messengers, which they put in their uniform shirt pockets. In one battle one of those soldiers was shot and the bullet hit him in his chest where the Messenger was in his pocket. The device saved his life. The soldier was apparently only momentarily dismayed by being shot, but devastated that the bullet had disabled his Messenger. He sent the damaged Messenger to the offices at In Touch in Atlanta and requested one that was operational and would allow him to hear Stanley's messages. Stanley, in sharing the story of that Ukrainian soldier, held up the Messenger that stopped the bullet, and exclaimed, "The device will save your life; but the message will save your soul."

In 2014 when pro-Russian separatists were fighting Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine a Russian soldier got a Messenger off of a dead Ukrainian soldier. After listening to Stanley's messages on the Messenger the Russian soldier accepted Christ as his Savior and decided to go to a Ukrainian church. He walked in with his military uniform on and weapon in hand, but sat down and listened to the sermon. After the service ended the congregants invited him back for the following Sunday. But they urged him not to wear his Russian military uniform or bring his weapon, to avoid causing people to be anxious and uneasy.

### **From the Pygmies of Africa to prisons of El Salvador**

Brad Brown, chief information officer for In Touch Ministries, noted, "The missionaries we work with have been able to take the Messenger into the rainforest of the Congo to the Pygmies. These people are among the poorest of the poor, but are as deserving of the Gospel as anyone. We love getting the message of redemption to people who couldn't get it any other way." Brown continued, "One of our Messenger Lab devices is called the LightStream, which we've put on water towers in Africa and South America. People within the vicinity of that tower can pick up the messages from this device on their cellphone Bluetooth or Wi-Fi and download Stanley's sermons and the Bible. "We also plant the Lightstream outside refugee camps so that those inside the camps can get the good news of the Gospel," Brown said.

"We also have Southern Baptist missionaries in countries where there are significant restrictions on preaching the Gospel. They are able to distribute the Messenger where large groups of people gather to listen to the Word of God. "There is a blind man in Budapest, Hungary," Brown said, "who gives out Messengers to other blind people. Those who can't see can hear. And those who can't read, can also hear. "We have missionaries in Norway, Turkey, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia -- all over the world," he said, "who are delivering the Messenger to people who would never be able to hear the Gospel otherwise. We even have access to prisons in El Salvador. We have distributed the Messenger to every continent on earth, including Antarctica."

### **A teaching partner with In Touch**

Bill Loveless is spending his retirement years in ministry as a teaching partner with In Touch. In 2016, Loveless went to South Sudan to distribute some Slates (electronic tablets with Messenger content and pastor resources) in a small village at the base of the Lopit Mountains. Loveless reported, "When I was praying about the trip, my friends kept telling me, 'It's dangerous over there.' But God took me to Psalm 31, which is a beautiful Psalm on God's protection, and I felt like He was saying, 'I've got your back. Don't worry about it.' "Other than the civil war that's been going on, the main problem is tribal warfare. But at no time did I feel in harm's way. All of the men carried AK-47s on their shoulders, mostly to ward off cattle thieves. If you didn't have a gun, you were a pastor."

Loveless commented about how receptive the pastors and others were to his teaching and how thrilled they were to understand the truth of God's Word that they had never understood before. He told about showing the Jesus film, how the whole village turned out to see it, and the wonderful response of those who trusted Christ as Savior.

### **Distributing 10,000 Messengers a month**

In Touch currently distributes approximately 10,000 Messengers a month. They are available for distribution through missionaries, church volunteer mission groups, and to those in the military and those in prison. Stanley noted, "The Gospel can penetrate any darkness, any theological or philosophical defenses, any hardened heart. People are saved because the Spirit testifies that what they've heard is the truth."

J. Gerald Harris is editor of The Christian Index ([www.christianindex.org](http://www.christianindex.org)), newsjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

## **COLUMNS**

### **God is Pro-Choice**

By Tim Patterson

Fenton - Some of you who just read the title to this article had to race to the medicine cabinet because you had to take your blood pressure medicine in order to keep you from going into cardiac arrest. You can't believe that anyone would have the audacity to think that God would come down on the side of the pro-abortionist. Others of you may be saying to yourself or someone in your presence, "Now that's the kind of enlightened thinking I like to hear." But before any of you "blow a gasket" or enter into a joyous jig, you should consider what the title states and what it does not.

Your presuppositions may have again taken over your thoughts before you know all the facts. You see, presuppositions are like wearing tinted glasses. Everything you see through those eye coverings affects and changes your perception of reality. Even though the change may be slight, nonetheless what you perceive is not always completely accurate. The problem is that we get our presuppositions much like we contract the measles. We are not quite sure from whence they come, but the evidence that we have been infected is without doubt. The question then arises, "Can we truly be without presuppositions?" The answer is no, but we can be aware that we are affected by them and adjust our actions, attitudes and decisions accordingly.

Hence, It is vitally important that we see and understand things from God's perspective. That is, we must presuppose God is the ultimate source of truth and knowledge. Such an issue to which we can apply this premise is that of "Pro-Choice vs Pro-Life".

- First of all, I believe (presupposition! based on the fact of and faith in the living, personal, creative God) that He sets apart human life as unique and valuable since it bears His image. [Gen.1:26,27].
- Secondly He therefore preserves and protects human life as no other life on earth. [Psa. 8:4-5] We are not just plants and animals that are only pieces of an enormous floating ecosystem.
- Third, that kind of life begins at conception and continues to develop in the womb where God is at work; shaping the child into the precise kind of person He desires it to be. [Psa. 22:9-10; Psa. 51:5; Psa. 139:13-16; Matt.1:18-20; Luke 1:41]
- Fourth, since it is God's will that every child's life be protected after birth, (thou shall not kill) it is certainly His will that such protection apply to the child in his or her prenatal state.

It is, therefore, my presupposition that we are ultimately responsible and accountable to God for our actions. If my logic and presuppositions are correct then I understand God to be Pro-Choice. That is, HE CHOOSES LIFE for all humans and so should we. We should especially do so for those who do not have the opportunity to choose for themselves, the pre-born.

The sanctity of human life is precious to God and thus must be precious to man. Those who do not chose life but say that before birth the human within a mother's womb is nothing more than a mass of lifeless tissue presuppose that God is not who He says He is and that life within a womb is not precious. Their argument is based on the faulty presupposition that a woman's right of choice, whether for convenience, health or circumstance must take precedence over the rights of the pre-born to choose life and the choice of God to give it.

What we must do in addressing this or any issue is to honestly analyze our logic and reasoning, and decide whether or not we are presupposing there is a God to whom we are accountable or not. The man or woman who believes they are nothing more than animals and that there is no God will ultimately act and think as animals. The Choice is up to us.

## **Stop Flushing Money**

By Tony Lynn

Fenton - Family stories are funny. Decades ago, my mother paid the family bills by laying out money on the dining room table. You might remember the past when we put cash in envelopes to be used each week for groceries and gas. One evening Mom noticed that money was mysteriously disappearing from the table as she tried to balance the family budget.

About this same time of the year, it seemed my younger sister, Tonya, had learned the art of blowing and wiping a runny nose. At the age of three, Tonya would put her hands in her armpits and flap her arms like a chicken to get more blowing-power.

To my mom's surprise Tonya had spent part of the evening walking by the dining room table and using the cash to blow her runny nose. Being a neat and tidy child, Tonya had flushed the cash down the toilet. She was fascinated by the swirl of the toilet. There was no retrieving that money!

### **North American Missions Offering, March 5-12, 2017**

During 8 days, Sunday, March 5 through Sunday, March 12, 2017 you, your family, and your church will be given an opportunity to make better use of your finances. Fifty thousand Southern Baptist churches will collect the annual North American Missions Offering. Some of us call the collection the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO), named after a prayerful, passionate, and writing woman who died in 1938. Please, watch this 2:31 video about one of the families who partner with us in Windsor, Ontario just across from Detroit. Garth Leno and his family partner with us.

<https://www.anniearmstrong.com/resources>

### **Menu to Create a Movement**

Please, click on this link to see the fantastic resources available to you:

<https://www.anniearmstrong.com/resources> -Let me suggest you review this menu of resources available to you, your family, your class, your small group, and your church.

- 11 short inspirational videos
- Planning guide
- Bulletin inserts or handouts
- Bookmark
- Prayer Map
- Prayer guides in different languages
- Study guides for Bible studies
- Sermon illustrations & information
- Contact information for missionaries

### **Be a Leader Not Just a Follower**

Take the lead and encourage everyone to give to this year's North American Missions Offering. Have fun with this:

1. Host weekly meals at home for friends & family then ask them to contribute what they would have paid to eat-out at a restaurant to the missions offering.
2. Show one of the videos to your children each night and ask them what they would sacrifice in order to contribute to the offering. You'll weep.
3. Inspire your youth group to serve others within the church family with house cleaning, snow removal, or carrying donations to the local Salvation Army. Ask those served to make contributions to the missions offering.

The creative ideas are endless. Simply inform and inspire others and watch what God does with your efforts. This year's theme is "Together for His Kingdom." Don't do this alone; bring others along with you. Create a movement for God.

Don't be like my sister Tonya and simply flush your finances during the month of March. Make a powerful difference by contributing to missionary support, missionary development, and missionary benefits in North America.

## **Love is in the air**

By Mike Durbin

Fenton - Valentine's Day is approaching, and lovers of all ages are looking for just the right way to express their feelings. I received my best Valentine's Day gift my senior year of high school. Newspaper class was interrupted when fellow students entered the class with a Singing Valentine to the tune of "O My Darling Clementine."

O Mike Durbin, O Mike Durbin  
Will you be my Valentine?

You are sweet, so warm and tender  
Will you be my Valentine?

My face turned bright red, I'm sure, as my lifelong curse of blushing took over. They sang (actually it was more reading than singing) and left without a word about who it was from. I spent the rest of the day in suspense. Who would do such a thing? I'd look at a cute girl and think, "Was it her?" Everyone was suspect. I knew who I wanted it to be. I hoped it wasn't Mom. It wasn't until the end of the day on the bus ride home that I found out who it was.

I was sitting with a young lady from that Newspaper class, and she asked if I knew who sent me the Singing Valentine. "No," I responded, secretly hoping it was her. We talked for a few minutes until I mustered enough courage to ask, "Was it you?" We'd been sitting together on the bus since the start of the school year. Those moments on the way to and from school were my favorite parts of the day. We were in the same grade, had gone to the same Middle School and High School, but didn't really meet each other until we ended up on the same bus our Senior year.

She says that when I got on the bus that first day I looked like I was mad at the world. Catching the bus at six something in the morning will do that to a guy. Just saying! She felt an inner nudge to talk to me, but got scared and didn't (not bugging the angry guy sounds pretty smart to me). She overcame her fear and the next day when I got on the bus by slapping the seat beside her and said, "You can sit here."

We spent hours talking. She even asked me out. Well, sort of. A bunch of people were getting together at a basketball game and going sledding afterward. She asked if I wanted to go. I did, and it was one of the most enjoyable nights of my life despite a flat tire and a lost toboggan.

One night we were at a school function together and she offered to give me a ride home. On the way home, she took a little detour because she wanted to tell me something. She pulled into the parking lot of an elementary school near our homes and said, "I think the world of you" and some other very kind things.

I wrote her a letter the next day in my English class. It was a step up from: I like you. Do you like me? Circle yes or no, but not much. She had the same teacher the next hour so I asked the teacher to give it to her when she got to class. It worked. She accepted my invitation to go out. It could have worked earlier, but I'm a little slow. I missed hints, fumbled, and bumbled, but I married my high school sweetheart and Shar will always be My Valentine.

## MICHIGAN NEWS

### Focusing on God's Goals

By: Sue Hodnett

Report on the 2016 Special Missions Offerings:

"Our goal for the 2016 Frances Brown State Mission Offering was \$90,000 and we missed it! We only needed \$1,528.68 more for the win yet somehow we came up short! If only we would have done..." When I was given the final report on what was received, I began to focus on the \$1,528.68 shortfall. I measured the success of the state mission offering campaign on the amount we didn't receive. I questioned, would this failure prevent God's light from being shared in Michigan?

*"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." (Proverbs 3:5)*

In leaning on my own understanding I put the emphasis on the short fall, on that portion which had not been received. When I began to trust in the Lord, my focus changed and I began to realize all that had been received, all that had been accomplished. It was apparent when focusing on the \$88,471.32 that many had sacrificed personal income and many churches had given a significant amount from their budgets to share in the financial support of our state missions offering. Why would they do that?

They did so because they believe by partnering together more can be accomplish together. They did that because they are moved to advancing the light in Michigan. They did that because they believe in working together to make an eternal difference in others lives. Sharing about the one and only true sources of Hope is the driving power behind their giving.

Here's is a review of just a few of the ways God's light will continue to be shared in Michigan as a result of your generous giving to the State Missions Offering.

-Partnering together, Michigan Baptists gave \$88,471.32 in 2016 because they understand the vision for Michigan.

-The Gospel will be shared in more communities throughout Michigan with the new resources made available to partnering churches because you gave.

-Your gifts helped many church planters, like Bill and Cindy Haas in the Upper Peninsula, who are reaching Native Americans and others for Jesus. Planting new churches is a major part of how we effectively reach all areas of our state.

-Your investment in the missions offering also means that retreats, children's camps and youth conferences like the Children's Ministry Day, are able to share the love of Christ with children, which will transform the next generation.

-The state missions offering also provides resources to make a difference in people's lives, disaster relief support, as well as quality training and education throughout many community churches and resource hubs. Michigan Disaster Relief will celebrate 25 years of ministry this year because of your faithfulness to give year after year.

-Your giving provides the opportunities to resource all of our churches with ministry strengthening options, new Bible study kits and discipleship materials, training conferences, retreat and worship forums, all designed for men and women in leadership and ministry. The "Every Believer A Witness" conference offered in February and March of this year is one example of the conferences supported by the offering.

The monetary value received is an important part of the state mission offering campaign, but valued even more is the prayer support given during the Week of Prayer of State Mission and continued throughout the year. We thank you for your continued prayer support of church starting, strengthening and sending.

Thank you for "Sharing the Light" in Michigan!

*"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." John 12:46*

The Frances Brown State Mission Offering and Week of Prayer for 2017 is September 10-17.  
Michigan Baptists Giving Totals to Special Mission Offerings in 2016

Frances Brown State Mission Offering:	\$ 88,471.32
Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (NAMB):	\$ 134,526.15
Lottie Moon Christmas Offering (IMB):	\$ 208,044.53

Sue Hodnett serves as the BSCM Women's Ministry Director and WMU Michigan Executive Director.