



# Boots

by Tim Patterson

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – I had to have been very young, but the memory is still quite vivid and clear today. I was probably three or four years old when my father and I were walking down the streets of Kermit, Texas. I still recall the wooden sidewalks that lined the storefronts, and the sounds they emitted as we shuffled along.

The spaces between the boards revealed the eerie darkness that lay below. I was sure they contained marauding monsters just waiting for me to slip through one of the cracks, or for one of them to reach up and pull me under. For a three year old this was a real and dangerous certainty. The only security I had was my chubby little hand wrapped around my father's mammoth index finger.

With my memory, I can still feel and see the size and sense of that one digit. As I look at my hands and fingers now, I can only imagine how small they must have been as they clung to this singular security.

The general store that we entered had an old screen door, braced across the middle with a metal screen guard that advertised Baird's Bread. I had no idea how to read the words displayed, but I recognized the smiling little girl with a slice of the soft white manna in her hand.

A long spongy spring slammed the door behind us as we entered this marvel of modern merchandise. A long counter sat just to our left and on top, and within it contained the very necessities of life; clothing, sundries, threads, pocket knives, pots & pans, tools and food all lined the shelves and hung from the walls. The strange odor of things old and new hung in the air as well. Sacks of animal feed and planting seed added to the cacophony of scents that assaulted my olfactory senses.

One of my favorites sights was the mammoth block of cheese that sat waiting to be cut in perfect proportions by the mechanical slicer that pivoted from side to side with the watchful motion of the proprietor. My eyes would stay fixated on that golden block until the owner would remove a small sliver, and hand it to me on a piece of white butcher paper. My mouth waters even now at the thought of that moist morsel being laid on my lips, golden goodness and tasty memories.

Yet, the vision that is most present in my memory is that of a shelf that from my perspective must have been more than a hundred feet tall. It was perched at the very top of a row of the most beautiful and colorful western boots this side of the Pecos. They all were handcrafted of the finest leathers by artisans from Mexico.

The ones I longed to be able to wear were composed of a black foot with the upper part of the boot being deep red and white in color. Stitched within those colors was the most beautiful eagle I had ever seen. It seemed as though it was ready to take flight at any moment.

I told my father that those were the ones that I wanted, and that one day I would be big enough to wear them. All he needed to do was purchase them now. I was sure it would not be many days before they would fit perfectly.

He did purchase them and all that time I thought they were for me. As far as I was concerned, my dad was just taking care of them until I was able to put them on.

There are photographs of me as a little boy wearing those boots with the tops going all the way up to my hip. Some of the fondest memories of my dad that remain in my limited and fading memory have within them the vision of him in those very same boots.

I thought they were my boots to fill. I know it was childish, but that was the way I felt. A child. Those boots were far too big for me, yet periodically, I would slip into them and pretend.

By the time I could wear those beauties they were well worn and my desire for that style had diminished. It was not until many years later, I realized I would never be able to fill my father's boots, and that my heavenly Father has given me my own boots to fill.

Watching my dad and my Father have taught me that one's boots are something that you grow into and by the time they really fit, they are usually worn out. It is then we realize that we could never fill anyone else's boots, and no one can fill ours.

God has given each of us our own life to live. We can learn from the experiences of others and they can have an enormous impact on us, but we are still responsible for our own actions and outcome.

Too many individuals desire to be someone else. To long for the place and position that another occupies is ludicrous and unrealistic. Those are not your boots and they will never fit.

As a young pastor or new church planter, it may be enticing to mimic the ministry or even the mannerisms and style of another pastor or leader, but the results will not be what you expect. The power and presence of God will be woefully absent, and any positive results will be suspect. In no way does that mean you should not follow the directives and examples of a mentor or coach, but their guidance must be fleshed out in the real you.

You have your own boots. Fill 'em up. Be who God made YOU to be.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tim Patterson is Executive Director/Treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Elected unanimously in May of 2015, Patterson formerly served for 9 years as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla. He also served as trustee chair and national mobilizer for the North American Mission Board.

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# Wanted: 300 Champions of Prayer

by Tony Lynn

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – Wanted: 300 champions of prayer. One per church. Male or female. Older teen to adult. Must have experience and the pastor's recommendation. A person who prays and can influence others to pray. Offer your recommendation to Andrew Parsons at [andrew@bscm.org](mailto:andrew@bscm.org) or (810) 714-1955. Convenient, online orientation in October. Launch of year-long prayer emphasis in November. Twelve months of teamwork. Praying for healthy churches, increased salvations/baptisms, empowered disciples of Christ, called-influencers and more churches. Join the statewide team by applying now at [bscm.org/300champions](http://bscm.org/300champions).

## Summary of the Vision

In response to the pastors' and churches' interests throughout the state, we are coordinating a five-year movement, with annual initiatives, that offer opportunities for every church to increase its local health, and both its local and global impact by elevating the transforming power of the good news of Jesus Christ.

## Free Resources

We are seeking prayer champions, who in response to the local pastor's leadership, will invite the adults, teens and children of their local church to pray for the health, growth, and increase of churches throughout the state of Michigan. We will provide free, age-graded resources for the adults, teens and children, each month, for twelve months. The prayer champion, in coordination with the local pastor, will share the monthly resource in their local context as they deem most helpful.

## Make a Recommendation

Pastors, do you have someone in mind as a prayer champion for the church? Enlist that person then fill out the application at [bscm.org/300champions](http://bscm.org/300champions). Both the pastor and prayer champion will receive confirmation and ongoing correspondence. We will need the following information.

## Required Information

- Name of recommended prayer champion
- Prayer champion's easy-to-contact phone number
- Prayer champion's preferred email address
- Prayer champion's local mailing address
- Name of pastor making the recommendation
- Pastor's easy-to-contact phone number
- Pastor's preferred email address
- Pastor's local mailing address

- Name of the local church being represented
- Church's easy-to-contact phone number
- Church's preferred email address
- Church's local mailing address

### **Call to Prayer**

In order to continually increase the number of persons and churches involved in this year-long call to prayer, invitations to join the movement will be shared throughout the year. The details on the schedule and resources, listed below, will be made available to churches, pastors and prayer champions starting in October 2020.

1. Monthly, age-graded, 2-3 minute videos for adults, teens and children will be available that are suitable for churches, small groups and social media.
2. Monthly written proposals for prayer emphases among adults, teens and children that can be conducted, gathered or scattered, depending on trends with the pandemic.
3. Quarterly online gatherings where pastors and prayer champions can share updates and celebrate the progress on the year's prayer emphasis.
4. Two separate one-hour, online simulcasts (winter and summer) where churches statewide will worship and pray together for the health, growth and increase of churches throughout the state of Michigan.
5. Annual corporate celebration, during November 2021, at the state's annual gathering where we will celebrate the past year of prayer and add another important element to the five-year movement.

### **Final Plea**

During 2020, health concerns overturned life as we know it. Radical recommendations were made and residents of Michigan adjusted. What if God's people, throughout the region, felt a similar urgency when it comes to the spiritual well-being of the state's churches and residents and we made the pursuit of the Heavenly Father's desires our priorities during the next year and even the next five years? What might happen? Could the movement be larger than anything that we could ever construct ourselves? I hope so. It all begins with prayer. Will you join me in a united effort of prayer unlike we have ever experienced before?

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tony Lynn is the State Director of Missions for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as lead pastor for more than six years at Crosspoint Church in Monroe, Michigan. He and his wife, Jamie, also served with the International Mission Board in Africa and in Europe.

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# Dairy box give-away

by Mike Durbin

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – “We sent the truck back empty!” Those were the words of Pastor Roland Caldwell about the Dairy Box distribution in Metro Detroit. He went on to say, “Within three hours it was gone. People came from everywhere.”

Hundreds of people received the much needed dairy products in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Odelle Cadwell, President of our state Women’s Missionary Union, was actively involved in organizing the ministry and was present the day of the distribution. She said, “It was a blessed display of mission and evangelism when the Greater Detroit Baptist Association under the leadership of Pastor Roland Caldwell distributed 1,056 boxes of dairy products in the Detroit area on Saturday July 23rd.”

The product was donated by Hope and Encouragement for Humanity (HEH), who partnered with the Department of Agriculture to provide families with these products during the pandemic. The boxes included (2 gallons of milk, 1 quart of chocolate milk, 1 quart of strawberry milk, cottage cheese, cream cheese and French onion dip). The Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) provided the funds for the first truck to come to Detroit, the hardest hit area in Michigan.

BSCM Executive Director, Tim Patterson, was active in fulfilling this mission. Celise Tillery, WMU Director for the Greater Detroit Association, was instrumental in securing the banners and the fork-lift which was used to remove the boxes off the truck. There were 13 churches represented on that Saturday. Many pastors who were not able to attend sent members of their congregation to assist. These pastors and staff loaded boxes into the trunks and back seats of the vehicles. More than 35 different zip codes in the Detroit area were served.

The WMU ladies were packing and distributing tracks to give with the boxes. Saturate Detroit packages were also distributed. While vehicles were in line awaiting their turn, volunteers were able to pray and share Jesus. Pastor Caldwell also saw to it that a nearby senior citizen apartment received several boxes. When HEH bus driver Gary Phillips pulled away there was not a single box on the truck. What a blessing!

One of the significant things about this event is that there was not just one church that took leadership. It was a great example of the church outside the walls. This is an example of what a family of churches can do. It was fun and exciting. It was an example of how partnerships can help Southern Baptist ministries to do greater things together than one church or entity can do alone.

We thank Pastor Caldwell, Tim Patterson and Celise Tillery for their leadership as we continue to Punch Holes in the Darkness in Michigan.”

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mike Durbin is the State Evangelism Director for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before joining the state convention staff, Mike served as Church Planting Catalyst and Director of Missions in Metro Detroit since 2007. He also has served as a pastor and bi-vocational pastor in Michigan, as well as International Missionary to Brazil.

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## **Bambi Lake – past, present, future – God's got it!**

by Mick Schatz

**ROSCOMMON, MI** – What a ride! I have now been at Bambi Lake for 3 years and 5 months, and what a ride it has been! Trying to navigate through the disruption of a global pandemic has caused me to think about how good God has been, how good He is, and how good He will be leading us into the unknown future. I may not know the future, but I do know who holds the future - an awesome God! He reassures me that His hand is still on Bambi and reminds me of the three things about Bambi Lake I am passionate about– it’s past, present, and future.

### **Past**

At every Camp or Retreat we host, I encounter stories of how Bambi Lake has impacted a life for eternity. I hear testimonies of individuals who were saved here as a child, now serve in a church or full-time ministry. Most often those individuals are now bringing their family or student group or church to Bambi Lake. I watch as friends reunite and share memories of first meeting each other at a camp or retreat fifteen years ago or more. I listen to students tell of the first time they heard the voice of God speak to them in the quietness and calm sitting by the lake. There are numerous tales of cramming a few hundred into Hubbs chapel, but it didn’t matter because worship was the priority of the day. Being uncomfortable was not an issue because God was in the house and His presence was imminent. That will preach! Many lives have been transformed by the power of the gospel here at Bambi Lake. What a heritage, what a legacy.

### **Present**

It has been said the best gift we can give ourselves and those around us is to be present. With such an amazing heritage to learn from and stand on, by the grace of God Bambi Lake now has

the responsibility to be present. We cannot be satisfied and rest on the accomplishments of our past – however great – we must be present. We must be engaged in raising up new leaders and fiercely empowering young and old alike to share the Good News of salvation, the Good News of Jesus. I am excited to say that this is a reality at Bambi Lake. Every Camp and every Retreat new stories are emerging. New chapters are being written in the lives of those who are discovering freedom, healing, joy, and forgiveness in Christ. Bambi Lake is discovering new ways to encounter the culture with the love of Christ. We are implementing new programs and opportunities for the Body of Christ to be encouraged and empowered for the Kingdom. Bambi Lake is striving to be a lighthouse in our community, state, nation and world. Bambi Lake is present.

## **Future**

With a legacy of life change and a mandate to be present, I am ecstatic about the future of Bambi Lake. We should all be. As great as the past has been, I believe the future is going to be even more amazing. Not just because of new camps, retreats, or new activities, but because of people like you. Yes, people just like you who are reading this article. God's people, Christian Michiganders who love God and worship together with other believers at churches filled with worship because the presence of God is evident. How may you ask? By praying for Bambi Lake and taking advantage of opportunities to participate.

Many of you already have stories written at Bambi Lake. Others have yet to experience a weekend or week of enjoying fellowship with God and making new friends and memories. I believe, like many of you, God has great plans and designs for Bambi Lake. His presence is being felt and experienced here in new and refreshing ways. The cool part? He is inviting you and me to come. So, come join the ride. Come be refreshed. Come find rest. Come be present and see God move.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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# State Mission Offering: Ministering to those who minister to us

by Staff

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – No one was spared the effects of Covid-19 and the following quarantine, and that includes the pastors who are leading our Michigan churches. Just like so many others, they lost loved ones and jobs. And in some cases, they or their immediate family members even contracted the virus. But when pastors know firsthand the challenges facing those who they minister to, they are often not willing to ask for help for themselves.

That is why the leadership of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) have decided to make our pastors the focus of this year's Frances Brown State Mission Offering. The money raised for this year's offering will go to a relief fund to help pastors who have been impacted financially or medically.

Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) Executive-Director Tim Patterson says, "I wanted to ask for the help that the pastors wouldn't ask for themselves."

## PROMOTE THE OFFERING IN YOUR CHURCH

Churches who want to promote the State Mission Offering can access video resources for online or in-person viewing and can be downloaded from [www.bscm.org/smo](http://www.bscm.org/smo). Additionally, you'll find suggestions and ideas for promoting the offering at your church, on your website, and on social media. There is also an episode of the BSCM podcast "*Punching Holes in the Darkness*" where BSCM staff talk in depth about the need for this relief fund. It can be accessed at [bscm.org/podcast/episode/d4425067/helping-those-who-help-us](http://bscm.org/podcast/episode/d4425067/helping-those-who-help-us).

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## Working in the mess

by Scott Statson

**FENTON, MI** – God is working, no matter how chaotic His plans might seem to us. He is rescuing His people out of the darkness of slavery and drawing them into a life of freedom. That's exactly what we set out to discover as we began a new series through the Exodus this past March. Just a few weeks in and we'd come to learn how easy those words were to say, and how difficult it would be to live by them.

Like many churches, we were shut down for a season and forced to rethink everything. The world changed overnight, and ministry would never be the same again. We began asking questions to prepare for this new reality. *How would we develop relationships in a time that mandated distancing? What would our protocol be for opening our gatherings? Our groups? What would it look like to be the church without meeting in a building that looked like a church?* We questioned, planned, & adapted. Yet, things seemed to change almost every day. Like Moses, in Exodus chapter 2, we found we were too quick to take matters into our own hands instead of trusting that God's plan was better.

Weeks turned into months. We longed for the day when we could just be with the saints again. As a newer church plant, we'd only been together for a year & a half, but we were anxiously anticipating the day when we could be together again. Finally, that day came. It seemed as if our days of slavery were over. (Okay, not literally, but that's how good it felt to be with our church again!) We were set free: delivered out of quarantine, across the sea, and into freedom! By the grace of God, in June we made the decision to gather again. We thought our days of difficulty were over, but we had no idea what was waiting for us on the other side.

Regathering the church brought its fair share of unique challenges. Masks & social distancing seemed to be the new normal. Though we were together again, as the church, it was anything but normal. Many chose to stay home and join our weekly gatherings live online. Some used this as an opportunity to wander away for good. Others rose to the occasion and began getting serious in their pursuit of Jesus. We were in a wilderness, and God was using this time to expose His people.

Even in the chaos, God was at work. Slowly the views racked up. Those views turned into phone calls, and pretty soon we were building relationships with people in our community who we had not known. In these past few weeks, we've seen people rededicate their lives to Christ, and we've watched as some have even made the decision to follow Jesus for the very first time. God was drawing people towards Himself and He was using a pandemic to do it!

This year has been nothing short of crazy. But one thing's for certain: God's plan is good. It might seem like chaos, but He is in control. The world's a mess, but God is working behind the scenes of it all. Trust Him.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Scott Statson is the Lead Pastor of The Way Church. Prior to planting The Way Church, Scott held various positions in ministry in several churches throughout Michigan & Nebraska. Scott & Amanda reside in Fenton, MI with their two beautiful daughters.

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# Virtual town hall highlights the SBC's diverse African American perspectives

by Diana Chandler

**FAIRFAX STATION, VA (BP)** – New York Pastor Frank Williams sees in God's pastoral call a broader application with the advent of COVID-19 and renewed cries for racial justice.

"This was the first time in all of my years of pastoral leadership that I felt the urgency to go beyond the preaching moment, in terms of addressing justice and issues of racial disparities in our city, in our country, and just being a voice and being a part of local protests as the church. I found that ... being a steward of justice is a pastoral responsibility and a church responsibility, that we are also stewards of justice."

Williams, senior pastor of the Bronx Baptist Church and Wake Eden Community Baptist Church in Bronx, N.Y., shared the revelation during a virtual town hall hosted by the National African American Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention (NAAF) Tuesday (Aug. 25) at 1 p.m.

"As focus shifted from the pandemic to the racial crisis in our land at the end of March, that compounded on top of the pandemic really created this kind of a moment and a season in our country that I have never experienced before," said Williams, who also serves as NAAF vice president.

Addressing justice and racial disparities was one of many topics discussed during the town hall, including racism in the church and society, maintaining Christian behavior while engaging in politics, equity within the SBC, and the work and survival of the church during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NAAF President Marshal Ausberry, senior pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax Station, Va., and SBC first vice president, facilitated the town hall showcasing diverse insight and experiential wisdom from Williams and other African American leaders in various SBC posts.

Speakers included Jason Lumpkin, campus pastor of Woodstock Church in Austell, Ga.; Fred Luter Jr., pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans and SBC president from 2012-2014; Connia Nelson, senior vice president of human resources for LifeWay Christian Resources; Trillia Newbell, director of community outreach for the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, and Kevin Smith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

Luter, in addressing racism among Southern Baptists, recalled his election in 2012 as the first Black president of the SBC. Shortly after his election, ABC News featured him as Person of the Week, and President Barack Obama called to congratulate him.

“I’ve never said this publicly, but when I was elected as the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, there were churches across the country that got out of the convention, that sent their letters in, and said that, ‘We will never be a part of convention where a Black man is president.’ That’s just crazy, yet these people say they’re going to heaven. So, it’s something that needs to be dealt with,” Luter said.

Luter praised leaders including SBC President J.D. Greear and SBC Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd, who have vocally and proactively worked to make the SBC more diverse. But Luter affirmed the comments of other panelists when he said “we need more of our Anglo brothers to stand up against racism as much as they stand up against abortion, as much as they stand up about the Bible being inerrant, we need Anglo pastors to stand up and say that racism is wrong, and it needs to be addressed.”

Luter’s comments echoed those of Lumpkin, the youngest pastor on the panel, who said the perceived lack of a Gospel witness to racial inequality threatens to distance younger pastors from the denomination.

“It seems like the denomination as a whole seems to look at the issue as maybe more of a passing project for some individuals and it’s kind of optional overall,” Lumpkin said. “Other issues, like religious liberty [are] fully supported and pushed by SBC leadership. And I think this can result in this unintentional feeling that there is the ability to put issues that matter, or maybe the issues of racism and injustice, maybe they don’t matter to the leadership, so they’re not being supported.” Lumpkin clarified that he also supports religious liberty.

Each panelist offered insight from their respective areas of leadership, with Newbell addressing Christian behavior in politics.

“Unfortunately, the two-party system has infiltrated the church, and it’s been ... idol worship for many of us. We’ve got to ask ourselves are we bowing to the Lord or bowing to a political system,” Newbell said. She sees the Gospel as politically transcending, and encouraged churches to stay on mission during the 2020 election cycle and to hear others’ sorrow.

“We need to buckle up because November’s going to be hard,” she said. “...Our church members are being fed, and so we’re going to have to be prepared as leaders to speak a better word, because we have a better word.”

Human resources professional Nelson encouraged intentional diversity, and a culture of dignity influenced by love, grace and empathy.

“We do not all have the same experiences, but we should be willing to be open and have those courageous conversations that can be uncomfortable in the environments that we’re in. But we need to have them, and we need to listen to each other,” she said. “Listen to diverse colleagues and hear their heart for some of the hurtful experiences they’ve had to endure and to really see them for who they are, to see them and affirm them for the value that they bring to the table.

“Get this right though, we also have to embrace our own shortcomings,” said Nelson, who is the highest-ranking female employee at an SBC entity. “And so that means every team member has to be encouraged to really examine their own heart. I believe that this is a heart issue. And really to recognize those conscious and unconscious biases we have.”

Smith, a state executive, addressed the health of churches during the COVID-19 pandemic that has exacerbated mental health issues. He encouraged churches to remember their biblical foundations.

“Post COVID, I pray Christians, not just people in our society, but Christians will have a little more biblical thought about family and things like the commandments, like honor your father and mother, and how that doesn’t end when you turn 18,” he said. “I think the American dream and autonomous individualism have made us not think about family in biblical paradigms and biblical ways.”

He encouraged leaders to address the needs of the age in a way that proves their Christianity.

“In a world of Me Too, Christians have to make sure that it is obvious that brothers and sisters love each other. And brothers have to make it obvious to sisters that we love you,” Smith said. “In a world of racial injustice and excessive force or brutality, Christians have to make it clear, ‘Hey brother or sister who’s in this particular type of environment, I want to make sure you understand that I love you.’ and when the world sees our love, Jesus says it will be a testimony that we are truly His disciples.”

NAAF Executive Director Dennis Mitchell said the town hall was the first in a planned series of panel discussions highlighting African American perspectives in the SBC. The full town hall will be available at [NAAFTogether.org](https://NAAFTogether.org).

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

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## **Five types of members who won’t return from the quarantine**

by Thomas Ranier

**FRANKLIN, TN (BP)** – It is one of the most common questions we get from church leaders: When will all the church members return to in-person services?

Leaders do not like my response: Never.

It is a reality church leaders and members are hesitant to accept. For most churches, not all the church members who were attending before the pandemic will return. In fact, our anecdotal conversations with church members and church leaders indicate somewhere between 20 percent and 30 percent of the members will not return to your church.

From an attendance perspective, if 20 percent of a church with a pre-pandemic attendance of 200 do not return, the new reality attendance will be 160 in attendance after everyone feels safe to return. You can do the math for your own church.

So, who are these non-returning church members? Why are they not returning? Here are the five most common dropout groups. The groups are not mutually exclusive; there could be significant overlap.

1. **The decreasing attendance members.** These were your members who, at one time, attended church almost four times a month. Before the pandemic, their frequency of attendance declined to twice a month or even once a month. COVID accelerated their trends. They are now attending zero times a month.
2. **The disconnected church members.** If a church member is in a small group, his or her likelihood of returning is high. If they attend worship only, their likelihood of attendance is much lower. Please let this reality be a strong motivation to emphasize in-person small groups once everyone feels safe to return.
3. **The church-is-another-activity church members.** These church members see gathered attendance as yet another activity on par, or lower, than other activities. They were the church members who let inclement weather keep them from church but not their children's Sunday soccer games. Commitment to the church was a low priority before the pandemic. They have no commitment in the post-quarantine era.
4. **The constant-critic church members.** These church members always had some complaints for the pastor. In fact, your pastor may be dying a death by a thousand cuts. They are likely still complaining even though they have not returned to in-person services. Many of them will not return at all.
5. **The cultural Christian church members.** They were part of a declining group well before the pandemic. They were those church members who likely were not Christians but came to church to be accepted culturally. Today, there are few cultural expectations for people to attend church. These cultural Christians learned during the pandemic that it was no big deal to miss church. It will be no big deal for them never to return.

Church leaders and church members, however, should not fret about these losses. Your local church has the opportunity to write its future on a blank slate, and these church members really had no plans to be a part of that future anyway.

You may feel the pain of the losses; that is normal. But God has a plan for your church to embrace the new reality to which you are headed. Head into His future with confidence. God's got your church. And He's got you.

It's cliché, but the best days are likely just ahead.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Thom Rainer is founder and CEO of Church Answers, where this article first appeared.

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## **Team road trip**

by Tony Lynn

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – The Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) team went north during August. The five-day road trip for nine members of the ministry team of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan took place on August 24-28. Two dozen churches, pastors, and church leaders with their children were invited to attend the dinners.

The BSCM team listened to pastors, planters, and church members from the region just below the bridge, as they recounted inspirational stories from each of their churches. The gatherings allowed occasions for casual fellowship and delicious meals. Host churches overwhelmed everyone with their hospitality and kindness. Mike Durbin conducted brief video-interviews which will be released on Facebook in the very near future.

State convention team members wanted to hear church leaders describe their church's current condition, the wins, and the areas of development. Interlaced in the conversations were inspiring testimonies of salvations, baptisms, blessings, and callings to new ministry ventures. These visits were made possible because of the contributions of Michigan churches to the Cooperative Program.

The nine travelers visiting the northern churches below the bridge were Executive Director-Treasurer Pastor Tim Patterson, Women's Ministry & WMU Leader Sue Hodnett, Disaster Relief Coordinator Bob Kiger, Retreat Center Director Mick Schatz, Church Strengthening/Evangelism Director Mike Durbin, Executive Ministry Assistant Jamie Lynn, Ministry Assistant Nancy Spears, Properties Manager Tim Jacobsen and Director of Missions Tony Lynn.

One pastor, after leading members of his church into the fellowship hall where the evening was spent, said, "I had to bring my leaders to meet the state staff. I've known you guys for years and

trust you. I knew if I could get me leaders here they would understand better why we work with the state convention and give to the Cooperative Program.”

A pastor’s wife, overcome with emotion, expressed her gratitude when she said, “We feel isolated up here, but we’re certain we are where God wants us. Having you call us together and giving all of us an excuse to get together was a great idea. The isolation of the quarantine has been hard on my husband. He has been looking forward to this evening together with everyone else. Look at him talking to everyone. He is so happy. Thank you for doing this.”

State Executive Director-Treasurer, Pastor Tim Patterson expressed the state convention staff’s collective feelings when he opened each evening’s gatherings by saying, “We’re not here tonight for long speeches or to sell you on a new program. We’re here to show you how much we respect, value, and love you. We want you to know we are grateful for your dedication to the Lord and for your devotion to the people of the communities in which you serve. We want to hear what God has been doing in your lives.”

State convention leadership is grateful to a number of churches and individuals who made extra effort to help host the events. Grace Church in Rogers City with Pastor Richard Reinhart, True North Church in Petoskey with Pastor Rick Bristol, Roscommon Church in Roscommon with Pastor Erickson Aldridge and Antrim Church in Bellaire with Pastor David Hiser, along with their wives and church leadership, were outstanding hosts. In addition, from the Bambi Lake Retreat and Conference Center, Mick Schatz, Nancy Spears and Tim Jacobsen provided food service while inviting pastors and their wives to retreat to the camp for times of renewal as the autumn season arrives. This week was a large team effort.

The Baptist State Convention of Michigan team hopes to conduct future tours in other regions. Please, contact [andrew@bscm.org](mailto:andrew@bscm.org) if churches in your region would enjoy spending a mealtime with members of the state convention team discussing the wins, areas of development, and the latest ministry initiatives in your area. We want to share your stories with others throughout the state, and elevate the news about what God is doing in our lives and communities.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tony Lynn is the State Director of Missions for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as lead pastor for more than six years at Crosspoint Church in Monroe, Michigan. He and his wife, Jamie, also served with the International Mission Board in Africa and in Europe.

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# The power of unity

by Joel Wayne

**HUDSONVILLE, MI** – Many leaders go to sleep in the evening feeling that they did well if they kept civility, much less unity. Emails are received, phone calls made. They are trying to keep the tension of preferences to a manageable number. Churches are notorious for requiring, even forcing, leaders to spend all of their time and energy on inward matters of the church, rather than outward needs of the community. The question; What is the best way to change that scenario? How can a leader go to bed at night with less worry of dissension within the walls of the church, and more vision for how God can use their church to grow the kingdom?

Ephesians 4:2-3 says, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Keeping unity in the midst of little change, little opposition and with the same people can be challenging. However, keeping unity in the midst of constant change, great opposition and in a culture in which every person is taught to value their opinion above all else, is impossible without God. It is HARD, but it is vital and essential. So, this begs the question, how must we keep unity in the midst of tremendous change? Is the answer to keep things as “normal” as possible. No!

Today, with daily upheavals in change, we can easily make decisions that provide temporary peace. We can cater to the loudest voice for the sake of ease. The goal of the leader is not to avoid conflict (being a peacekeeper) but to manage conflict biblically resulting in wise decision making and problem solving (being a peacemaker).

When you allow anything other than Godly-wisdom in making decisions, your unity is automatically at stake. Caving to the least amount of opposition (conflict) doesn't lead to the greatest amount of biblical unity.

Unity for churches gives the courage to leaders to claim greater territory for the Kingdom of God. People become less concerned about what others may not like, or personal preferences, and more concerned about what God is desiring. Life is too short to be interested in a false sense of unity that does not help people explode with the love and compassion of Jesus. It is a community of biblical unity that allows the spirit to give oneness of mind of and heart, nudging people toward Christ. This is the result of biblical unity.

Key ways to keep unity is to:

- Rely on Godly-wisdom, not human preference (seek scripture and pray to know the difference)

- Clearly and continually state what God has called you (your vision)
- Build a strategy to accomplish the vision (this lets you know when to say ‘no’ as well as when to say ‘yes’)
- Bring alignment at the level of implementation to execute the strategy (helping teams own and accomplish the vision)
- Celebrate the victories (wins create momentum and passion)

God is on the move. Christ is building His church.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Joel Wayne has spent twenty years improving leadership and cultivating healthy culture within churches and organizations in Connecticut, Kentucky, and Michigan. He is the lead pastor of Chapel Pointe in Hudsonville, Michigan. Joel also founded Be the Church, a movement that assists churches and ministries in revitalization and renewal. Joel and his wife, Melissa, have four children, Carson, Kate, Ashley, and Bennett.

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## **State conventions work together for One Day women’s training event**

by Tess Schoonhoven

**COLUMBIA, SC (BP)** – In light of COVID-19, many Baptist state conventions have canceled onsite women’s training events. But seven conventions have joined together to develop a virtual event this fall to provide encouragement and training for women in ministry.

The result – a training event called “One Day. One Focus.” – will be held Oct. 29 from 4-8 p.m. Central.

“We want women to recognize God has gifted them to serve just as it says in Ephesians 4, for the equipping of the saints,” event co-coordinator Ashley Allen said. “It’s for the unity of the body. So regardless of where we serve, we are to be unified in accomplishing one goal, and that’s making disciples. Every part of the body is needed. We need every woman serving as God has gifted her, in order to make disciples.”

Allen, who works in women’s ministry for North Carolina Baptists, joined other leaders Simone Lake with the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention, Beverly Skinner with the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, Carmen Halsey of the Illinois Baptist State Association, Amy Cordova with

Oklahoma Baptists, Melanie Ratcliffe of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, Laura Taylor with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and others to plan the event.

Registration begins Sept. 1 and is \$10 per person. This includes access to all the sessions, led by more than 15 different women's ministry consultants from various state conventions. Sessions will be available for the remainder of 2020 through the website.

The theme Scripture for the event will be Ephesians 4:1-16, with an emphasis on discipleship. Author Susie Hawkins will deliver the keynote address; Emily Rhyder of Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., will lead worship.

SBC seminaries will hold three sessions to present options available for ministry training. Wives of North American Mission Board (NAMB) church planters and women serving with the International Mission Board (IMB) will also hold breakout sessions. The registration fee will be waived for up to 500 women from each of these groups.

While the majority of the event will be pre-recorded, Allen said speakers will be available for live chat with attendees during their breakout sessions, and there will be a live "exhibit hall," which will include SBC seminaries, NAMB and IMB participating from respective cities.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tess Schoonhoven is a Baptist Press staff writer.

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## **State Mission Offering: Pandemic relief**

by Tim Patterson

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – How can something so small cause such big problems? We can't see it without the aid of specialized microscopes and when we do get a good look at it, it appears to be a harmless little globe of goo wearing a crown. Yet this miniscule mass has been wreaking havoc on the entire terrestrial globe we call earth and, in many ways, has taken over the world and all of its inhabitants. The COVID-19 virus is a nasty and unrelenting enemy that is leaving a worldwide path of destruction wherever it goes. That destruction and damage is not limited to a select few or to those it infects. It's hurt and harm goes far beyond the physical illness it inflicts.

The churches of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) have for the most part pushed through this pandemic with a victorious spirit and an entrepreneurial attitude. They

have adjusted, shifted, and changed where necessary to make sure that they continue to be the church, and meet the needs of their members and the community at large. Truly they have “become all things, to all men that they may reach them”.

A cursory glance at our churches would give the appearance that all is well, but on closer inspection one would find that many of our pastors have made enormous financial, physical, and emotional sacrifices in order to keep our churches whole and healthy. Some have even sacrificed their own health for the health of the church. Many of our pastors are bi-vocational or co-vocational as they serve our churches. It is not uncommon for some of them to have more than one part time job, and this is true for their spouses as well. They gladly do this so that they may be able to minister in lower income areas that desperately need the Gospel message of a local church.

These pastors did not go into the ministry for money. They do so because of a calling from God and a compassion for the lost. Every one of them could be more financially prosperous in another profession, but have chosen to obey the heart of God. Because these men are driven by a passion to serve others and help meet their needs, very seldom will they acknowledge their own needs.

During this pandemic, many of our pastors have lost income and or have sacrificially relinquished their paychecks in order for the local church to stay solvent. Knowing the hearts and lives of these men, I would expect nothing less. They are true servants. Now we as the family we call the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, have an opportunity to help these dear servants of God, and truly make a difference in their lives as they have in the lives of so many of us.

This year’s Francis Brown State Mission Offering (SMO 2020) will go totally to help pastors who have suffered and sacrificed during this pandemic. These men would never ask for help for themselves, but I will ask for them. This is a great opportunity for us to give back to those who give so much for so many.

Will you prayerfully consider giving above and beyond your characteristic generosity and make a sacrificial gift this year? Remember, we are never more like Jesus than when we are giving.

To donate to this year's Frances Brown State Mission Offering, or to find FREE resources to help promote the offering in your church or on social media, please visit [bscm.org/smo](https://bscm.org/smo).

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tim Patterson is Executive Director/Treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Elected unanimously in May of 2015, Patterson formerly served for 9 years as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla. He also served as trustee chair and national mobilizer for the North American Mission Board.

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# Life at Bambi Lake: God has been gracious

by Michael Ritchie

**ROSCOMMON, MI** – I could see the frustration grow on the young man's face. The 11-year boy named John was shooting a bow for only the second time in his life, the first being 4th grade camp. Day one of Kicking Bear/Centershot camp at Bambi Lake Camp and Conference Center in Roscommon, MI. We were doing a practice round for Saturday's Centershot tournament. John was not even hitting the target half the time. Introducing myself to the youngster in the coonskin cap, I asked him if I could make some suggestions on his shooting form. Looking down he nodded and said "Yes".

The name John is a biblical name and means "God has been gracious." Talking to his foster care father, I learned that John has not had an easy life. Both of his parents struggled with addictions and John has bounced from foster care home to foster care home. Remembering Kicking Bear Founder Ray Howell's testimony, I could see a young Ray standing before me and I instantly saw a boy with a huge future in the hands of God and just one adult that cares. "John, squint your left eye and keep your right eye open, then relax your grip." I told him. He immediately began to hit the target, and I could see his confidence soar.

Saturday's Centershot tourney had 62 registered shooters, including John. In the end John shot a very respectable score of 160 of 300. Not bad for his very first time ever shooting competition! After giving out the awards, we were scheduled to baptize 3 young people in the lake who had made professions of faith. As we were baptizing the last person John wandered down and stood in the water. "John," I said. "Why are you here?" "I want to be baptized," he replied. Surely God has been gracious! John and his foster dad have been in church the last two weeks, and we have been speaking to him about salvation and discipleship. Remember, every child is just one caring adult from success. Put a bow in the hand of a child, and lead them to Jesus.

I must say, many meaningful days have been spent at Bambi Lake. My wife's grandparents, Wil and Evelyn Jansen, were saved there. Laurie (my wife of 38 years) and I were baptized together on July 3, 1983 in Bambi Lake. Our church Roscommon Baptist Church has been blessed to hold our annual Wild Game dinners there and have seen God reach hundreds of people for Christ. I have met some of the most wonderful people there, heard the most inspiring sermons, walked some of the most beautiful hillsides there, and spent some of my most meaningful times in meditation in a tree stand there. Bambi Lake is a place to meet with God. Come and spend some time.

## Autumn Pursuit

*Come alone and hunt with me  
Among the falling crimson leaves*

*Rest atop that brushy knoll  
will cleanse your mind  
and fill your soul*

*You never know what you may see  
A buck in rut or chickadee*

*Staying quiet my voice be heard  
In footsteps as the leaves are stirred*

*In the coyote's howl, the song of birds  
in the sun warmed breezes you'll  
hear my words*

*Come alone and spend some time  
in autumn pursuit with the divine*

Michael L. Ritchie D.C.

### **1 Kings 19:11-13 (KJV)**

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Michael Ritchie D.C. and his Wife Laurie have been part of Michigan Baptist since 1983 and have been serving at Roscommon Baptist Church the whole time. Mike Says, "If I wasn't Baptist I would be Ashamed". They have two grown children, Jacob (Kaleigh) and Sarah with one grandchild Lucas who Mike calls, "The best child born since Jesus". When they have time they own and operate Higgin-Houghton Chiropractic Clinic in Higgins Lake, MI.

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# Hope in things we'll never see

by Gary Ledbetter

**GRAPEVINE, TX (BP)** – What gives you hope? Our ultimate hope is eternal life in Christ, and that is the best answer to that question. But there are human analogs for ultimate hope – light in the darkness, the protection of a hen for her chicks, a land of milk and honey, the bosom of Abraham, and so on. What in this life, a pure thing, encourages you to put up with the frustrations of the day?

For the past 37 years or so it's been something out of Psalm 127 for me. "Children are a heritage from the LORD," "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior," "He, [with a full quiver of 'arrows'] shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate."

Arrows are stand-off weapons – they go where the warrior or hunter cannot or should not go. When my children began to become resources to me, people of spiritual and even temporal wisdom, I began to sense the power of having them at my back. That confidence grows as they do. They go where I cannot and do things that are beyond my ability.

There also comes a day when you take some level of hope from things you'll never live to see. I think of grandparents or great-grandparents who hold on to see that next baby born – a baby they likely won't know as an adult. At that point the hope is real, but the reality of it is beyond our sight. But it's important nonetheless. These kids, all of them, will on some days give us reason to despair, just as we did for the earlier generations. But we take joy in what could be rather than in the gritty details we know will come with child-rearing.

But this doesn't have to be only about kids. Think of bereft Job ("Though he kill me, still I will hope in him") or formerly childless Hannah ("My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation"). In the midst of the specifics, it is the LORD who builds the house and who watches over the city (Psalm 127:1).

Some of us do the other thing, like Naomi in Ruth ("The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me"). Maybe they focus on the cost or pain or multiplying themselves. Some are hopeless and cannot imagine doing something as hopeful as reproducing, spiritually or physically. Can it be that we are more hopeless when we stop being obedient and useful to the kingdom of God? Is that why we get fractious as the days of relative isolation and uncertainty drag on? I observe that inactivity in good works and despair are traveling companions these days.

Although I think Psalm 127 is literally talking about parents and children, maybe grandchildren as well, remember also the comfort Timothy was to Paul ("his father in the faith") during Paul's last phase of ministry. With whom have you shared generously the things God has shown or given you? Our spiritual children, those to whom we have witnessed or those we have taught, give us a reach beyond our imagination, a hope for things we will never see finished. These I think are also our arrows when we face the enemy at the gate. Those whose lives you have

touched during your ministry so far are those who will encourage you as they reach their own maturity.

Consider Naomi near the end of Ruth chapter 2, when she sees hope for herself as God opens a door for her widowed, pagan daughter-in-law. She comes alive, guiding Ruth at a strange and crucial moment, and then later, she was called blessed by the neighbor ladies because she was not left without a redeemer. This redeemer was not her own son, but from the young woman she adopted and taught. And Naomi was neither hopeless nor ashamed.

So reproduce yourself, physically if you are able, and spiritually if you are one of the redeemed of the Lord. Be confident, as Paul was, to say, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” to those who are your spiritual and physical children. It is a God-honoring, prudent bit of self-interest to prepare those who will one day be your strength and confidence – God’s provision for a warrior in the gate.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Gary Ledbetter is editor of the Southern Baptist TEXAN, where this article first appeared.

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## **New study Bible takes readers on a Holy Land journey**

by Aaron Earls

**NASHVILLE, TN** – Millions of Christians read the Bible each day, but few have a full grasp of the historical, cultural and geographical context of what they read. The new “Holy Land Illustrated Bible” from LifeWay Christian Resources aims to change that.

The latest study tool to feature the text of the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), the “Holy Land Illustrated Bible” is the result of a two-year editorial process, but an even longer period of collecting the more than 1,000 photos displayed throughout the resource. “The high-quality photos and historical/archaeological content collected for the Bible was the result of more than two decades of research and effort,” said Andy McLean, director for Bibles and References at LifeWay.

In addition to the photography, the Bible includes maps and illustrations to provide greater insight and understanding of the people, places and objects of Scripture. Editors also included 275 full-length commentary articles and more than 40 “Digging Deeper” callouts placed throughout the text for further explanation.

This type of resource can help Bible readers better understand the context of a passage.

A recent LifeWay Research study found 57% of Protestant churchgoers say they find it challenging to make sense of the Bible when they read it on their own. Yet nearly all (96%) say it is important to understand the context in which the Bible was written.

Those are the readers the creators of the “Holy Land illustrated Bible” had in mind, as McLean said the new resource was designed for “anyone who has a desire for gaining a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context surrounding the Bible.”

For McLean, the “Holy Land Illustrated Bible” also serves as an excellent tool for readers who have not had the opportunity to travel to the Middle East and Israel to explore the areas depicted in Scripture.

“Our desire was to invite Bible readers who couldn’t visit the Holy Land physically into an experience that would engage them right in their homes with a beautifully designed visual journey,” he said, “adding valuable historical and cultural context to the Scriptures with photos of cities, homes and even ancient artifacts that were used throughout the Bible.”

With the immersive aspects of reading Scripture in the “Holy Land Illustrated Bible,” McLean said those who worked on the project “hope readers gain a strengthened understanding of the history, culture and worldview behind the pages of Scripture, as well as a strengthened connection to how Scripture can impact our lives today.”

For more information on the “Holy Land Illustrated Bible,” visit [CSBHolyLandIllustratedBible.com](http://CSBHolyLandIllustratedBible.com).

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

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## **Charles Grant named Executive Director of African American Relations and Mobilization**

by Diana Chandler

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** – Charles Grant has been named executive director of African American relations and mobilization at the SBC Executive Committee. In a partnership jointly funded by

the SBC EC and the North American Mission Board, Grant will work to equip and mobilize African American churches, as well as to engage potential new churches.

In announcing the hire, Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC EC, called Grant a “gifted, experienced, and highly respected leader.”

“We believe God will use him in a great way,” Floyd said. “As a former pastor, church planter, and ministry leader with a state convention as well as with a national entity for over a decade, he has relationships with pastors and churches all over the country.

“We believe Charles will be used of the Lord to further our commitment to serving African American churches and continuing to mobilize them towards the Great Commission.”

Willie McLaurin, the SBC EC vice president for Great Commission Relations and Mobilization, called Grant “a gifted leader” who will help Southern Baptists increase the mobilization of African American churches.

“His high levels of character and competency will assist the entire network of Southern Baptist churches in their task of fulfilling the Great Commission,” McLaurin said. “For such a time as this, Charles is the right man who will lead our convention in serving Black churches. Charles has an authentic love for his wife, children and for the local church.

“I am extremely grateful that God has led Charles Grant to the SBC Executive Committee.”

Grant comes to the EC from LifeWay Christian Resources, where he has served since 2008 as a regional church partner. He also served concurrently with the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board since 2013 as a new church catalyst. Before coming to Nashville, he planted New Life Baptist Church in the Tampa area in 1997; he served as New Life’s senior pastor until 2007.

In accepting the position, Grant thanked God for guiding his life since his 1985 salvation at a Black Southern Baptist church.

“I am honored for the Lord’s preparation and strategic timing to serve the Southern Baptist Convention,” Grant said. “I recognize that I stand on the shoulders of many faithful servants before me who have served churches passionately for the glory of God. I am most grateful to each of them.

“I am excited and look forward to serving alongside Dr. Ronnie Floyd as he leads the SBC Executive Committee, Dr. Willie McLaurin as he leads our Great Commission relations and mobilization efforts, and our entire team as we endeavor to serve churches for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission.”

NAMB President Kevin Ezell said Grant “will help keep Southern Baptists focused on the need for more evangelistic churches that will reflect the diversity in North America.”

“Charles knows Southern Baptists well, and he has a heart for reaching everyone with the Gospel,” Ezell said. “As we take to heart the command from Jesus to disciple all nations, Charles brings the skills and background to help us do that.”

Grant holds a Master of Divinity from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (now Gateway Seminary), a Master of Special Education from the University of South Florida and a Bachelor of Science in business management from San Jose State University.

Grant’s wife Jackie is an administrative assistant for the Black Cultural Center at Vanderbilt University. The couple has three adult children.

Grant’s arrival marks the fulfillment of Floyd’s commitment to hire three fulltime associate directors to focus on diversity. Julio Arriola was named executive director of Hispanic relations and mobilization in November 2019, followed in December 2019 by Peter Yanes as executive director of Asian American relations and mobilization. Filling Grant’s position was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The three executive directors promote active participation at every level of Southern Baptist life among their respective demographics, as well as increased Cooperative Program engagement and involvement.

Referencing John 9:4, Grant said he desires “to partner with our various SBC entities and churches to help us respond to the ... Vision 2025 call to reach every person for Jesus Christ in every town, every city, every state and every nation.”

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

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