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Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

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The grandparent factor

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – My earliest memories of him come when I was three or four years old. In the hazy corners of my mind I can see him sitting alone in the kitchen in the wee hours of morning while the sun was still hiding its face. There on the surface of the yellow topped and chrome legged table sits the morning paper, cup, saucer, butter dish, a pan of fresh baked biscuits, and a can of black strap molasses syrup.

Paw Paw is doing what he has done almost every morning for sixty plus years. He rises at 4:30 am, waits for the world to open its eyes, and makes sure his chickens herald their announcements on time. Of course, when the sun went to bed he did as well. I have found that in my present stage of life, his sleep patterns and habits have become mine with the exception that I do not “saucer” my coffee. I still prefer drinking from a favorite cup.

As I peered around the corner from the hallway, I could see his dark silhouette as he mixed the right proportions of butter and syrup to make his plate of “bzero” as he called it. He said it would put hair on your chest, and from my vantage point in my bathroom mirror every morning, he was right.

I shuffled my way to the table and crawled up on his knee for a taste of his concoction and a little early morning comfort. The smell of Old Spice was still strong from his morning shave, as I lay my head on his red plaid flannel shirt. Even today my olfactory senses respond to that unique spicy odor, I see Paw Paw dressed in his brightly colored flannel shirts with a pack of Lucky Strikes peering out of his breast pocket, a freshly ironed pair of khaki pants and his ever present brown felt fedora.

In his early years he was a master carpenter and builder, and just after the war was responsible for building a good portion of the homes in our little hamlet. Now, he was a groundskeeper for the county hospital, and a rose gardener of the highest caliber. Apparently, his love for roses was genetically passed on to me.

As I grew in years, Paw Paw and I were very close. Everyone who knew him said not only did I have his facial features, but my mannerism and gate mimicked his.

When I entered those tumultuous teen years he watched with amazement. It was the Sixties and everything was being turned upside-down. He never really understood all that was happening in our society or me, but his love and guidance never faltered.

One day he came by after work, and said he wanted to take me for a haircut. Now, at this time my hair was well over my ears and then some, and had the curly-kinky consistency of a steel wool pad on a caffeine overdose. I consented to the barber’s chair with specific instructions to the barber to only trim the edges. The barber was true to his word, but Paw Paw didn’t think he

was getting his money's worth so he had the barber keep cutting until he could see "white side-walls".

Now if my mom or dad had been there and tried to get me in that coiffeur's coffin I would have rebelled, but because it was Paw Paw, how could I say no? Whatever he said or whatever he did was right. Because he was never wrong? No. Because he was Paw Paw.

God's Word teaches us that a parent's role does not diminish when the children marry and leave home. In fact, the real fun begins. When grandchildren come along, grandparents are given the wonderful opportunity to continue their impact on the lives of their children and children's children.

Phil Waldrep, in his book, The Grandparent Factor, answers the question: "Can grandparents really make a difference?"

"Absolutely! Children today are looking for sincerity. They are regularly exposed to hype and phony behavior on television, at school, and sadly, in many of their homes. They are looking for, in fact, are desperate for authentic love. That's what grandparents can give them. Kids see through all the marketing efforts to sell them \$70 jeans and \$100 shoes. When they see the real thing—the warmth of the grandparent's love—they zero in on it like a radar beam."

Grandparents have the opportunity to touch and influence their grandchildren for their good and God's glory like no other person on the face of the earth. It is usually not until you ARE grandparents that you understand what a wonderful and precious gift children truly are. You also have invaluable experience that can only come through time tested success and failures.

If you are a grandparent, seize the opportunity to make an eternal difference in the lives of those little ones. Love them. Lead them. Spoil them with the special treats they might not get at home, and yes, give them candy between meals. Let them crawl in your lap, and love them while they are young. Later on when they really need direction and influence then the memory of a warm lap, a fragrant smell, and early mornings in the kitchen with biscuit and "bzurp" will remind them that you really do love them, and know what is best. How can they say no to that?

"Children's children *are* the crown of old men; and the glory of children *are* their fathers."
(Proverbs 17:6 KJV)

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.

48 Missionary Families in 96 Lines

by Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – Would you let me introduce you to the single men, the married couples and the families raising school-aged children as missionaries throughout Michigan and Windsor? These missionaries are somewhere between their year of preparation or their fifth year of service. Since 1957, among people groups, disadvantaged communities, urban centers, suburban neighborhoods, metropolitan areas, rural counties, small towns and university campuses our churches have planted new churches for 63 years.

1. Jason & Amanda Aaron & their children of Outpost Community Church, Monroe – outpostmonroe.com – Write to Jason at jason@outpostmonroe.com
2. Dave & Danisse Abberger & their children of Hope Church, Zeeland – hopechurchmi.com – Write to Dave at hopechurchzeeland@gmail.com
3. Drew & Alisha Ansley & their children of Refuge Church, Detroit – refugedetroit.org – Write to Drew at info@refugedetroit.org
4. Kevin & Meghan Armstrong & their children of New Life Church, Detroit – newlifedetroit.org – Write to Kevin at kevin@newlifedetroit.org
5. Jamison & Chelsea Bebiak & their children are preparing to launch in Owosso in the near future – hisonelife.com - Write to Jamison at Jamison.bebiak@cornerstone.edu
6. David & Amanda Blok & their children of CrossWinds Church Godfrey-Lee, Wyoming – windschurch.net – Write to David at daveblok@gmail.com
7. Josh & Emily Bowers & their children of Cross and Anchor Church, Detroit – crossandanchorchurch.com – Write to Josh at josh@crossandanchorchurch.com
8. Phil & Kathryn Box & their children are preparing to launch Trails Community Church, Farmington in the near future – trails.church – Write to Phil at phillip@milecity.com
9. Tom & Merri Bradley of CrossWinds Church Westside, Grand Rapids – windschurch.net – Write to Tom at pastortbb@gmail.com
10. Torion & Jasmine Bridges & their children of The Commonwealth of Faith, Redford – commonwealth313.org – Write to Torion at pastortjb@commonwealthoffaith.org
11. Rick & Katie Bristol & their children of True North Community Church, Petoskey – truenorthcommunitychurch.com – Write to Rick at rick.bristol@gmail.com

12. Roland & Tedirika Caldwell, Jr. & their children of The House Church, Detroit – thehousechurch313.com – Write to Roland at caldwell.roland@gmail.com
13. David Clark is preparing to launch in Detroit the near future – Write to David at davidvclark@yahoo.com
14. Tristan & Jodi Clark & their children of The Caravan Church, Marquette – Write to Tristan at marthainthefold@gmail.com
15. Tito & Mollie Diaz & their children of Rhiza Church, Ann Arbor – rhiza.church – Write to Tito at tito@rhiza.church
16. Chris Gentz of H2O Church, Kalamazoo – h2okzoo.com – Write to Gentz at gentz@h2okzoo.com
17. Malcolm & Maisha Griswold & their children of Reformation Church, Detroit – reformationchurchdetroit.org – Write to Malcolm at malcolmgriswold90@gmail.com
18. Michael & Emily Guyer & their children of Treasuring Christ Church, Ann Arbor – tccannarbor.com – Write to Michael at michael@tccannarbor.com
19. Jon & Chelsea Hackett & their children are preparing to launch Imago Dei Church, Ann Arbor in the near future – Write to Jon at hackett_jonathan@yahoo.com
20. Bryan & Tonia Kent & their children of Compass Church, Mason – compasschristians.com – Write to Bryan at bryanlkent@icloud.com
21. Shakil & Angela Khondoker & their children of Reach Out Church, Hamtramck – Write to Shakil at Khondoker.shakil@gmail.com
22. Robert Lodge is preparing to launch Fresh Start Church, Detroit in the near future – Write to Robert at robertlodge.jr@gmail.com
23. Jason & Laura Loewen & their children are preparing to launch Union Church, Flint in the near future – grumlaw.com – Write to Jason at jason.loewen@unionflint.com
24. Garth & Patty Leno & their children of The Gathering Church, Windsor – tgcw.org – Write to Garth at garth@thegatheringwindsor.com
25. Rick & Rachel Marcus & their children of The City Church, Clio – citychurchclio.com – Write to Rick at marcusrick@yahoo.com
26. Tom & Shannon Metz & their children of The Valley Church, Saginaw – valleychurchsaginaw.org – Write to Tom at pastorc323@gmail.com

27. Bob & Cindy Morrissey & their children of The Church at Clawson, Clawson - clawsonchurch.com – Write to Bob at pastorbob@clawsonchurch.com
28. Chad & Jennifer Nelson & their children of The Journey Church, Mount Clemens – journeychurchmtc.org – Write to Chad at pastorchadnelson@gmail.com
29. Kenneth & Tolice Nether & their children of Crossover Church, Southfield – crossover.church – Write to Ken at pastorken@crossover.church
30. Corey & Milicia Parker & their children of The City Church, Ypsilanti – Write to Corey at thecitychurch734@gmail.com
31. Alin & Shelly Patularu & their children of Life Giver Church, Windsor – lifegiver.church – Write to Alin at alinpatularu1@gmail.com
32. Ricky & Sandra Pearson of Cornerstone Fellowship Church, Traverse City – cornerstonefellowshiptc.com – Write to Ricky at rpearson1@sbcglobal.net
33. Shea & Andrea Prisk & their children of Grumlaw Church, Grand Blanc – grumlaw.com – Write to Shea at shea.prisk@grumlaw.com
34. Cornelius & Marisa Roberson of Heart and Soul Community Church, Detroit – heartandsoulcc.org – Write to Cornelius at family15067@sbcglobal.net
35. Ray & Mari Ruffin Jr. & their children of New Found Hope Community Church, Redford – newfoundhopecommunitychurch.com – Write to Ray at pastorray@newfoundhopecommunitychurch.com
36. Seth & Taylor Springs & their children of Transformation Church, Waterford – transformationchurchmi.com – Write to Seth at seth.tcmi@gmail.com
37. Scott & Amanda Statson & their children of The Way Church, Fenton – findandfollow.org – Write to Scott at scott@findandfollow.org
38. Eric & Lori Stewart & their children of ONELife Church, Grand Blanc – hisonelife.com - Write to Eric at eric@hisonelife.com
39. Daniel & Chandra Tackett of Restoring Hope Church, Wyandotte – restoringhopechurch.squarespace.com – Write to Daniel at dtackett77@gmail.com
40. Matt & Beth Thompson & their children of Redemption Church, Grand Rapids – redemptionmi.org – Write to Matt at matt@redemptionmi.org

41. Josh & Stephanie Tovey & their children of Redemption Church, Grandville – redemptionmi.org – Write to Josh at josh@redemptionmi.org
42. Maki & Sony Umakoshi & their children are preparing to launch in the near future – milecity.com - Write to Maki at maki@milecity.com
43. Daniel & Stacey Vandock & their children of Lake Life Church, Alanson – lakelife.church – Write to Daniel at dvandock@gmail.com
44. Austin & Lesley Wadlow & their children of The Commons Church, East Lansing – thecommonschurch.org – Write to Austin at austin@thecommonschurch.org
45. Derrick & Christine Watkins of Jachin Baptist Church, Flint – jachinbaptistchurch.com – Write to Derrick at pastor@jachinbaptistchurch.com
46. Travis & Jen Whittaker & their children of Mile City Church, Plymouth – milecity.com – Write to Travis at travis@milecity.com
47. Miah & Jessica Williams & their children of Mile City Church, South Lyon – milecity.com – Write to Miah at miah@milecity.com
48. Antonio & Jessica Wimberly & their children of One Mission Church, Inkster & Westland – onemissionchurch.org – Write to Antonio at antoniowimberly@gmail.com

How to Use This List

Would you, please, save this list in a frequently seen place, such as, in your Bible or on your breakfast table? Would you remember to pray for these church planting missionaries during your personal quiet time or with others as a team of prayer warriors? The Holy Spirit may synchronize your prayers with the church planting families' needs in unbelievable ways. Some of you indicated that you would like to help missionary families who plant churches in our region. Using this list, you can do any of the five activities by directly contacting the church planting family with the information provided in this article.

- **Pray with others** - Intercede regularly for these families during your private devotion, as a church or with a small group.
- **Help with school** - Provide financial assistance for the children as they return to school.
- **Bless at Christmas** - Give gift certificates to a family during Christmas.
- **Collect and give** - Receive a collection in your small group or church then share that gift with a family any time during the year.
- **Write to encourage** - Send handwritten-cards or email messages offering encouragement to these families throughout the year.

Let's find ways to let these families know we are grateful for their service and sacrifice. These missionaries and their children are planting churches everywhere for everyone. This year continues to be a strange and stressful year, especially on families creating new churches in order to share the good news of Christ and develop bold disciples. They are establishing gospel-centered churches in communities all around us, so let's surround them with our love.

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.

SPARK 2020

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – SPARK 2020 is premiering in Michigan, August 28th. What is SPARK 2020? It's our one-day Church Equipping Conference totally online at www.thesparkconference.com. Through our partnerships, we are able to make this equipping conference the most flexible training ever.

What makes the Spark 2020 Conference different?

Registration is FREE

Through our partnerships as Michigan Baptist, we are able make Spark 2020 free on the day of the event and for 3 weeks following.

Flexible schedule

You can attend all day August 28 as the session releases in real time. After that, during the free portion of the event, you can watch online anytime. Each presentation will be available via free access for 3 weeks.

No travel required

There is no gas or lodging expense. That's hundreds in savings! Attend from your own computer and still be at home with your family or church.

Everyone can benefit

It does not matter what stage you are in ministry, there is something for everyone at SPARK. This conference is designed with YOU in mind, no matter your experience or skill level!

Over 50 session leaders

We've assembled a diverse team of practicing leaders prepared to give you best practices in their field of expertise. Every part of the gathering - from our keynote speakers to our SPARK breakout sessions - has been intentionally designed by our team to equip and inspire your leaders. Make plans now to join us online for [#SPARK20!](#)

Special guest speakers

- Paul Chitwood - President of the International Mission Board,
- Robby Gallaty - Pastor, Long Hollow Baptist Church
- Tyrone Barnette - Pastor, Peace Baptist Church

One year affordable access to the training

The content for the entire conference will be immediately archived and available at no cost from August 28 - September 22. If you want 12 month unlimited access to the content, it will be available.

How You Can Use Spark 2020:

- Host your own one-day event with digital keynotes and breakouts.
- Use the content for ongoing training on Sunday or Wednesday nights.
- Give access to your leadership teams to meet, view, and discuss at their convenience.
- Bi-vocational: schedule in the evenings or on weekends to view and discuss the breakouts with ministry leaders.
- Develop your own creative ideas and we would love to hear how you are using it.

Register for FREE at www.thesparkconference.com.

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.

Light it up!

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – I realize this article is being published in August, however I was recently reminiscing with some friends about favorite holidays. One of my favorite celebrations is July 4th. I love the color, the pageantry and celebrating. The fact that our country was established on Christian principles. Also, no matter how old I become, I still get excited to watch and hear fireworks.

My favorite place to watch fireworks is in Flagler Beach, Florida, close to the pier where the fireworks are launched. As a kid there was nothing better than laying on the beach looking straight into the sky, and feeling as if the kaleidoscope of colors were going to fall right on top of me. The colors would be so vivid and expansive it seemed as if you could reach out and grab them. The boom would be so loud and explosive it would make your teeth rattle, and shake you to the core of your being. The only bad part of the evening was it seemingly ended too soon. However, it would go out with a bang – a continuous 3-4 minutes of explosions of color, and sound would fill up the beach sky – it was always an amazing finale!

Reflecting back on this I am reminded of how God has called us to be light. In Matthew 5:16, we are instructed to let our light (God in and through us) shine before others so they may see our good deeds and bring glory to our Father in heaven. Imagine for a moment living a life so infused with Christ, so empowered by His love, and so visibly loud for His glory that our lost neighbors would be in awe of our lives and know that only God could be responsible. Amazingly, we do not need to just imagine it. When we die to our old nature, and let God's nature supernaturally change us from the inside out, we become reflectors of His glory. We begin to shine in dark places and light up the night sky like the 4th of July. We are to let the light of God manifest and shine so brightly in all that we do the world will not only take notice, but will give glory to God our Father for it.

Oh, and do not forget, this light does not disappoint. This light has no end. It has no finale. It shines on and on for all eternity. Eradicating darkness wherever it shines. Healing broken lives, resurrecting lost dreams, restoring hope to the hopeless, replacing heaviness with joy, restoring relationships – this is the power of God's light. So, don't hide His light, don't be afraid where it may lead you. As long as His light is illuminating the path you can be sure of your next step. You never know, you may just be the fireworks that grabs the attention of your co-worker. You may just be the boom that causes your lost family member to wake up and look up. Go! Let your life light up the dark night. Light it Up!

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.

Showing grace with a mask

by Roy Henry

BATTLE CREEK, MI – This past week I found myself needing to go to a large hardware store to pick up some items for a project. I dutifully donned my mask, entered the store, and collected the items I needed. I got in line, and again trying to be a good neighbor, I kept my distance from the customer who stood in front of me, an older middle aged lady. Opposite of her in the other line was a younger middle aged man.

I'm not sure what triggered the conversation (I was thinking about my project), but the lady in front of me began complaining loudly about the numerous "Mexicans" she had witnessed in the store without masks and how the young employee at the main entrance wasn't doing his job "to protect us." I'm not sure who her audience was. As she continued on in her abrasive manner, the cashier in the other line asked the man something, to which he replied, "I'm just listening. I have my own opinion on masks, but I'm wearing it out of respect for others." Apparently, this was not to the liking of the lady, who began to attack the man for his unspoken opinion. He tried to disengage, but she was not willing to stop. Both finished checking out about the same time and walked out to the parking lot, where the lady continued yelling at the man, cursing him and calling him everything except a child of God.

These kinds of interactions are becoming more commonplace in our increasingly on-edge society. The tensions of living in a global pandemic, with the concomitant challenges of economic stress, reduced human interactions, uncertainty, and a 24-hour news cycle that must be filled with something, have caused many to lose what little civility still existed. While we might expect this from the world (after all, we can't be surprised when the lost act like they're lost), it is disheartening when we see the same attitudes and actions occur in and between brothers and sisters in Christ. Times such as these require *more* grace on our part, not *less*. How might we better show that grace?

Guard our hearts.

- Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (ESV). In computing, there is an old acronym: GIGO. Garbage in, garbage out. What is true of programming is true for our hearts and, consequently, our actions. If we fill our hearts with conspiracy theories, fear-fueled media reports, and half-cocked social media posts, then suspicion, fear, and ultimately despondence will be what overflows into our lives. Fill your heart with Scripture, and watch what sloshes out when you get "bumped" by circumstances.

Love our neighbors.

- The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) reminds us that loving our neighbor will require doing some things that both make us uncomfortable at times and might

even be costly. For the vast majority of us, wearing a mask might be slightly uncomfortable, and we might chafe at the restriction of our “right” not to wear one, but these are incredibly minor inconveniences in the face of a global pandemic. As believers, we are called to count others as greater than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). Why jeopardize our witness in our community simply because we don’t want to be slightly uncomfortable for a few minutes?

Remember the grace you’ve been shown.

- Have you ever held a wrong perspective? (That’s a rhetorical question.) Now, think about those who tried to correct you. Did you respond to those who yelled at, berated, and insulted you, or were you more willing to listen to the one who came to you with a different opinion – but in grace? As believers, each of us has been shown grace upon grace by our Heavenly Father. Will we extend that grace to others with whom we disagree, or will we adopt the world’s standard of “scorched earth” warfare against all who dare take a different perspective? Can you imagine how the Kingdom might advance if Christians, those who have received the fullness of God’s unmerited grace, actually showed it to others?

Showing grace in the best of circumstances can be difficult; extending it in the midst of a public crisis, with all of its cross-cutting pressures, is impossible apart from the Holy Spirit. Yet our Lord has not called us to an easy, comfortable, costless life; He has called us to take up our cross, die to ourselves daily, and follow Him and His example. Wearing a mask in public is a simple way to show grace to others, many of whom don’t know the grace of God through Jesus Christ. If wearing a mask might show someone that we love and care about them because Jesus does, isn’t it worth it?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roy Henry serves as Senior Pastor to the flock at Faith Baptist Church in Battle Creek, Michigan. He is married to Aryn and they have three wonderful children: Isaac, Reagan, and Elijah. He also serves as the First Vice-President for the BSCM and as the trustee from Michigan for NAMB. In his spare time, he works to convince the people of Michigan of the wonders of Southern BBQ (vinegar-based sauce, of course), unsweetened cornbread, and sweet tea.

The clicking odometer

by Jerome Taylor

BURTON, MI – It happens. The odometer is clicking over that milestone number. I am watching it with excitement and curiosity. After four decades of life and two plus decades in ministry I feel that so much has already occurred, yet I wait with bated breath what the next part of life's road trip holds. And I do so, knowing that the One who is in Sovereign control over our lives keeps things interesting.

This journey with Jesus will at times bring you to peaks that seem to have breathtaking vistas of an almost immeasurable horizon. The possibilities seem innumerable and all of them delightful. At other times, the roads are curvy through wooded thickets, and you wonder if the GPS is working. The possibilities seem bleak. Whether or not you find yourself in either place, I have found the one great constant is to stay focused on Jesus and His mission for the church. The hope and trajectory of the resurrection.

In the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle of Corinthians, the apostle Paul is moved by the Holy Spirit to pen words of great importance to the church. This is why the resurrection should be the potent octane boost for our souls and ministry. But it starts a bit rough by asking the what if. What if there was no resurrection of Jesus? Here is the case for its value for the road ahead. Pardon the "preacher-isms" about to be unleashed.

If there is no resurrection:

1. Our Jesus's grave is still grave (1 Cor. 15:13, 16)
2. Our preaching is preposterous (1 Cor. 15:14)
3. Our witness is wickedly worthless (1 Cor. 15:15)
4. Our faith is futile (1 Cor. 15:17)
5. Our sins are still enslaving (1 Cor. 15:17)
6. Our deaths are damning (1 Cor. 15:18)
7. Our presence should be pitied (1 Cor. 15:19)

But the victorious hope of Jesus' resurrection is so essential to our walk of faith that it changes everything.

Because of the resurrection...of Jesus:

1. The grave of Jesus no longer looks so grave (Matthew 28:6)
2. The preaching of the saints has immeasurable potency (1 Corinthians 2:4)
3. The wonderful calling is to be a worthy witness (1 Peter 3:15)
4. The faith grows with resurrection life that is fruitful (Romans 7:4)
5. The sins no longer enslave us (John 8:31-32, Galatians 4:7)
6. The death of a saint is merely ultimate deliverance (Philippians 1:21)

7. The presence of the Gospel in our lives is precious (Romans 5:1-5)

I have not learned everything there is to know about life's journey as the odometer crosses this new mile-marker...but the reminder that carries me forward is that the power of the cross, the glory of the resurrection, and Jesus the Eternal Living Author & Perfecter of our faith is always our worthy and treasured pursuit. The only one who sustains.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerome Taylor is the pastor of Eastgate Baptist Church in Burton since 2013. He and his wife, Melinda have 4 kids. Jerome is the former President of BSCM and currently serves the BSCM Executive Committee as Recording Secretary.

SPARK Conference keynote speakers

by Scott Barkley

DULUTH, GA – Tyrone Barnette, pastor of Peace Baptist Church in Decatur, will be the third keynote speaker for the upcoming Spark Conference.

Barnette joins International Mission Board President Paul Chitwood and Robby Gallaty, senior pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., as part of the annual church leadership training event. Known previously as Go Georgia, Spark will be held entirely online this year with various breakout sessions and keynote addresses becoming available Aug. 28. Groups or individuals who register prior to that date at TheSparkConference.com will have free access to those resources from Aug. 29-Sept. 22.

Called into the ministry in 1985, Barnette and 14 others founded Peace Baptist on Feb. 7, 1993 in his home. Since then the church has grown to more than 3,000 members with an average of 1,200 in Sunday attendance. Barnette has preached around the world, including Brazil and parts of Africa, where he helped build five churches and witnessed more than a thousand people receive Christ.

Chitwood was elected IMB president in 2018, having previously served as executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention since 2011. Prior to that he was pastor of several churches of varying size for 18 years. Gallaty has served at Long Hollow since October 2015. His testimony has led him to the platform of "making disciples who make disciples" through resources at Replicate Ministries.

“Pastor Tyrone Barnette is one of the most genuine and effective leaders in our state,” said Scott Sullivan, director of Spark and Georgia Baptist lead strategist in Discipleship on the Church Strengthening Team. “His ability to connect with an audience and communicate biblical truth is next level! Every pastor in the nation needs to hear how he grew a church of 14 meeting in his home to over 3,000 with a worldwide Gospel impact.”

Barnette’s address will be titled: “Making disciples where you are with what you have.” He, Chitwood, and Gallaty will also be taking part in live Q&A sessions Aug. 28.

Register for FREE at www.thesparkconference.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley serves as editor of The Christian Index.

2020 Black Church Leadership and Family Conference includes focus on WMU’s “Sisters Who Care” ministry

by Trennis Henderson, WMU National Correspondent

NASHVILLE, TN – Southern Baptists’ annual Black Church Leadership and Family Conference took on a significantly different look and feel this year. Like many other events across the nation, the 2020 gathering shifted from in-person to online amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

But that didn’t deter Black church leaders, including Woman’s Missionary Union’s “Sisters Who Care,” from producing vibrant, interactive missions, ministry, discipleship and leadership training. The five-day online conference, held July 20-24, featured approximately 100 virtual breakout sessions as well as daily livestreamed Bible exposition and evening worship services.

“I think we can all agree these are challenging days – the pandemic, racial tensions, unemployment, sickness, death and more,” said conference coordinator Mark Croston, national director of LifeWay Christian Resources’ Black Church Partnerships. “That’s why we did not want to cancel our 2020 Black Church Leadership and Family Conference.”

Noting that this year’s online conference was offered free of charge to participants, Croston added, “Our theme, ‘Challenged 2 Love,’ is right on time for this moment.” The theme is based on the words of Jesus in Mark 12:30-31 to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

The annual event, hosted by LifeWay, marked the conference's 27th year. Usually held at Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina, BCLFC is promoted as "the premier worship and leadership development event for Black churches." While the onsite conference typically attracts about 1,200 people, last week's online version far exceeded that number with more than 4,500 registered participants.

A diverse lineup of workshops ranged from "Internet Preaching" and "Meritorious Marriage" to "Black Millennials and the Church" and "The Emotionally Healthy Pastor." Amid heightened racial tensions across the nation, other breakout sessions addressed such issues as "The Church and the Racial Divide" and "Break the Power of Prejudice."

Serving beyond the church walls

Sisters Who Care, which Valerie Carter Smith describes as "Women on Mission contextualized or customized for the African American church," also was among featured conference tracks.

Carter Smith, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia, serves as National WMU's volunteer coordinator for Sisters Who Care. She said the Sisters Who Care structure was designed "to get Black women to see that WMU is valuable, that there is a place for them in WMU, that there is a place for them to come to the table and to partner."

"Historically, we as African American Christians have always been on mission," Carter Smith affirmed. She said that meshes well with WMU's focus on "the Great Commission and that's why we do our work and the Great Commandment of loving our neighbors – all of our neighbors – as we love ourselves and love God."

Leading a WMU overview session as well as a workshop on "Lead Like Jesus: Starting a Sisters Who Care Ministry," Carter Smith said African American churches can support missions through a variety of WMU-related ministries such as Baptist Nursing Fellowship; Christian Women's and Christian Men's Job Corps; Pure Water, Pure Love water projects; WorldCrafts fair trade products; and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions.

"I always suggest that we take a fresh look at how we're living out missions in the life of the local church," Carter Smith emphasized. "How are we getting out of the walls of the church and into the streets and into the community here and around the world?"

"WMU ensures that people of all ages can be involved in hands-on missions and can be involved in mission groups from preschool to senior adults," she explained. "WMU equips and mobilizes the church to be on mission. It's as simple as that."

Connecting missions and ministry

Carolyn Fountain, president of Louisiana Baptist WMU, led an online workshop on “Connecting M & M Dots: Missions and Ministry in the Local Church.” Drawing from her experience of serving with her husband as church planters, Fountain encourages churches to consider combining the work of WMU and women’s ministry groups to help maximize available leadership and resources.

“One of the things that I learned quickly was that both WMU and LifeWay Women had some marvelous resources and some great leadership training,” she shared. “As we began our work as church planters, I also learned very quickly that we just didn’t have the capacity to have a WMU and a women’s ministry group so what I wanted to do was to equip the leadership that I did have to do it all. I wanted the best of both worlds.”

Citing her desire “to combine the missions and the ministry focus,” Fountain said, “It was just as important to grow in Christ, to be strong disciples and for that to pour over into missions service. Rather than dividing our workforce, I advocated for us coming around the table and figuring out how we could work together to be our best for Christ. To me, it was just a win-win to do both.”

Fountain said missions and ministry efforts typically overlap in such areas as having a heart for the lost, being grounded in Scripture, gaining strength through prayer, mobilizing for Kingdom work and being empowered through unity.

“I don’t want to be educated just for the sake of education. I don’t want to be spiritually strong just for me,” she emphasized. “I want to be spiritually strong so that He can use me to help someone else, to help others to grow, to help others to see how He can use them in service.”

Evaluating missions relevance

Michelle Fergus, a member of WMU of Texas’ African American Advisory Counsel for Sisters Who Care, led a breakout session titled “Missions Relevance Test: Are You Really on Mission?”

Fergus, who has a background in process improvement management, posed the question to church leaders: “Are you doing drive-by, statistics-driven missions or are you creating relevance for those you’re ministering to?”

Encouraging churches to determine whether their mission efforts are producing long-term impact, she urged individuals, leaders and churches to evaluate what mission actions and strategies they should keep doing, stop doing and start doing.

“To me, the Missions Relevance Test is a moment of self-check for the individual but also for the church because I think leaders have the tendency to sometimes become deeply entrenched in the way they think, in the way they operate and in the way they lead people,” Fergus said. “It is definitely a personal challenge to stop and think about what God has called us to do as

individuals and then use that exercise to have a group discussion that will hopefully bring impact and change.”

Citing the Black Church Leadership and Family Conference’s transition to an online setting amid the coronavirus pandemic as a timely illustration, Fergus said, “I actually think our current situation is a great example of why we need continuing development. How do we pivot when things unexpectedly come up? How do we continue to reach people when there are technology barriers?

“My personal opinion is this pandemic was kind of a measurement tool to show how equipped we really are to deal with the unexpected,” she concluded. “It’s just very telling of where we are versus where we need to be and you can’t get there without training.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trennis Henderson is a freelance national correspondent for the Woman's Missionary Union.

Earn a Doctor of Ministry Degree

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, with Dr. Charles Harvey leading, is offering an excellent, convenient and affordable way to earn a Doctor of Ministry Degree (D.Min.) for those living in the Great Lakes region. The seminary offers a 50%-reduction-in-cost for those within our network who will register, enroll and participate in the “Great Lakes D.Min. Cohort.” Pursue a quality education without ignoring your ministry. The Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) is partnering with Southeastern Seminary and other Great Lakes states.

The deadline for registration, through [Southeastern Seminary](#), is quickly approaching on September 1, 2020. Six students have already registered from Michigan. Four other students have registered from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Indiana. The seminary will explain the prerequisites for a D.Min. degree and can discuss financial aid with you, if necessary.

Dr. Danny Akin, the president of Southeastern Seminary said, “If you desire a mentoring relationship with an experienced professor and want to avail yourself of the encouragement of a cohort of like minded ministers, this degree is for you.” Students from Michigan will gather together and join other Great Lakes students for online class discussions.

Tony Lynn, the State Director of Missions for BSCM said, “The reading, discussions and writing completed during a D.Min cohort often helps those students become people who influence others and the future in positive, significant and practical ways. Some students even publish their project after completing their studies.” Lynn added, “I believe the future of the state

convention will become clearer and stronger as students from Michigan participate in this D.Min. cohort.”

Orientation class for this cohort begins this September. This cohort is set-up in such a way that the pandemic and adjustments to movements with COVID-19 should not hinder the Great Lakes D.Min. Cohort.

You can apply now at <https://www.sebts.edu/admissions-and-aid/application-process/>

Hope forever more

by David Clark

DETROIT, MI – The apostle Paul wrote we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. Hebrews 6:19

With so much going on around us I believe as Christians we need something to hold true to, and that anchor for us is Jesus Christ. If we were to be honest no one foresaw any of the events that have occurred so far. COVID is not a myth, but a real and relevant enemy that we must continue to take precautions against. Behind the death and response of George Floyd we have seen anger and tension surface like a pipe ready to explode. Many Pastors have been challenged in new ways as we are adjusting to the new norm of our lives. Will life ever be the same? I think the numerous masks that we see on a day to day basis is a subtle reminder that life has changed forever. But my admonition to you is that there is a Hope that assures each of us that we are not alone.

Hope forever more

In times of uncertainty, we as Christians are certain about one thing, God is in the midst of it all. James, the brother of Jesus, says draw near to God, and he will draw near to you (James 4:8). This is the perfect time for us as Pastors to not self-destruct but to engage in self-reflection to search for the nearness of God in the sanctuary of our hearts, and to remind those who we shepherd that in spite of what’s going on around us, God is faithful and He dwells within us. The word of God tells us on several occasions to remain in hope, and if we didn’t need hope before (which we did) we certainly need it now. Never lose hope. We must remain hopeful today, tomorrow, hopeful for our families, communities, and hopeful for our churches.

This has been a challenging year. It was in March when my father went into the hospital and discovered he had COVID. Nevertheless, ministry didn’t cease. It was tough but I continued in

preaching, teaching, and praying for others while my family and I dealt with the unknown future of my father. While in the hospital, my father suffered compounded pneumonia along with the coronavirus and was steps away from being placed on the ventilator, but we prayed, and Send Network prayed. We remained in hope. It was on June 5 after being hospitalized for sixty plus days that my father was released from the hospital. I write this not for some point of boasting because I am sensitive and sorrowful for the many families who have lost and are grieving loved ones. I write because as of July 17th we celebrated my father's 64th birthday with a family fish fry. It was refreshing to spend time with a family who has been distant for the last four months. As much as I wanted to hug and catch up with everyone my duty as senior chef called, and I was responsible for delivering everyone fresh hot fish. I think we fried every fish in the great lakes and beyond. We fried bass, walleye, catfish, pangasius, orange roughy, red snapper, perch, and tilapia. But, as chatter and laughter went on, God reminded me that a day of celebration could have easily been a day of grief and mourning, but God allowed it to be a day of family, food, and fellowship. To those who may be in a state of hopelessness, I want to encourage you to be anchored in Jesus. With hope, I am assured that yesterday's tears were needed for today's joy. The pain we endured yesterday showed up today as Jesus claimed the victory. As we move forward with our ministries, let us not forget that Jesus Christ is the perfect anchor for the soul, and he gives us the hope we need to make it today and forevermore.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Clark is a Detroit native who is currently serving as the connection Pastor at The House church in Detroit, MI and church planter of The S.E.E.D Church. If you would like to become a partner with The Seed Church ministry please email us @ theseedchurch313@gmail.com

The Psalms

by Tim locoangli

MONROE, MI – At the end of 2019, our pastoral staff could have never imagined what lied ahead in 2020. We all got together in a little room to discuss what our preaching calendar would look like for the upcoming year. We prayed together and discussed what direction we felt we needed to go based on where our church currently is, and the state of our society. In doing that we decided we would spend June and July in the book of Psalms. If I am being honest, we thought it would be some good uplifting sermons in between a couple of, let us say tougher sermon series. Little did we know that we would be in Psalms after a long layoff of church services. We did the online stuff and stumbled along with technology, but as we all know that is not really the church assembling for worship. So, when it came time for us to finally meet back together, we found ourselves entering the Psalms.

At first, I thought maybe we should go in some other direction. Maybe we should find some passages that deal with our current situation and address some of the fears people are having. Thankfully in the end, I trusted that God had us in the Psalms for a reason. Over the past two months we have been reminded of God's transcendence. We have seen the promises of the Only Begotten Son, and we have been held fast by the fact that God cares for His own. The Psalms have also given us the opportunity to repent of sin, and lament with the things that are happening all around us.

This week we will be in Psalm 139. In it we see God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. In a time when it seems like we are given so much information that is contradictory, it is good to know we serve a God who knows all things and is never confused by anything. Too often we feel left alone with no one who cares. We can find ourselves surrounded by voices, but no one to really talk to. Yet in verses 7-12 we find comfort in knowing that God is always present, everywhere, all the time. On top of that we see God all throughout scripture communicating with His people and comforting them in the darkest moments. If that is not enough, we then see in verses 13-18 God's omnipotence. If God were all knowing and always present, but lacked the power to really do anything about our current situation, what good would He be? The answer is He would be no good! He would be a know-it-all who was always around. But we know God is all powerful as well. He not only knows all things and is present everywhere, He also has the power to make all His plans happen. He doesn't make empty promises like politicians or the kid running for the 6th grade presidency. His Word is firm because He has the power to make it firm.

The Psalms really have been a gift to us at Monroe Missionary Baptist Church, during these difficult times. I am glad that God knows the past, present, and future. I am thankful that God directed us back in 2019 to the book Psalms for the summer of 2020. It is as if He knew we would need it!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim locoangeli is Lead Pastor at Monroe Missionary Baptist Church which is in the Southeastern Association. He is married to Amanda and together they have 4 children.

SPARK Conference featuring sessions in Spanish

by Scott Barkley

DULUTH, GA – The upcoming SPARK Conference will feature several breakout sessions as well as the keynote addresses translated or led in Spanish.

“This will help mobilize Hispanics to accomplish the Great Commission,” said David Cardoza, Hispanic representative of Pastor Wellness in the Central Regions. “It will teach them how to build effective teams for leadership and discipleship.”

Otto Sanchez, a pastor in the Dominican Republic, author, and speaker, will lead the breakout sessions on building leadership teams as well as discipleship programs in the church. “He has written several books on discipleship and been a connection for Georgia Baptists for a while,” added Cardoza.

International Mission Board Church Mobilization strategist Oscar Tortolero will lead sessions directing Hispanics toward opportunities for international missions.

“These sessions will help Hispanics be ready to go and share the gospel with others,” Cardoza stated.

Other breakout sessions to be translated into Spanish include:

- How to Disciple Your Family
- The Acts 1:8 Missions Portfolio
- Preschool Kids Ministry Safety and Security Equipping Parents for Family Ministry
- Sunday School that Really Works
- Creating a Healthy Worship Culture.
- The keynote addresses by IMB President Paul Chitwood, Decatur pastor Tyrone Barnette, and Tennessee pastor Robby Gallaty will also be translated into Spanish.

The SPARK Conference will feature more than 50 breakout session leaders in addition to the keynote addresses. Live Q&A sessions will take place with Chitwood, Barnette, and Gallaty on Aug 28, the day materials are released for those who pre- registered. As of 10 a.m. July 21, there were 511 registrants for SPARK. With 57 host sites plus individuals logging in for the digital experience, the expected viewership for SPARK would exceed 3,000 as of today’s numbers.

Register for FREE at www.thesparkconference.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley serves as editor of The Christian Index.

As non-whites become majority, youth ministries adjust

by Tess Schoonhoven

ORANGE, CA (BP) – For Ricardo Vides, young adults pastor at Ministerios Betesda Church in Orange, Calif., approaching ministry from an ethnically diverse perspective is just reality. A more pressing reality all the time.

According to recent U.S. census data, for the first time ever, the majority of people age 16 and under are non-white, as reported by the Associated Press.

The statistic does not surprise Vides, whose southern California ministry has always included people who have migrated from Latin America. But he said it is critical for ministry leaders across America to recognize the shift in demographics and to make adjustments.

"We have to understand the reality that we live in a country that is so diverse and unique with all the people that come to live in this country from all over the world," Vides said.

Ministerios Betesda is a Hispanic Church, but Vides said he chose to conduct his ministry in English, because most of the people he's trying to reach are bilingual.

The decision was not easy for the church to accept initially, he said. But the church has seen that the children of first-generation immigrants in Vides' ministry are growing up speaking both English and Spanish.

"[Ministry] will have to continue to evolve," Vides said. "[We have] to understand the cultural impact each of these teens are going to be going through with having to live in two distinct cultures -- one from their home country and how their parents have been raised, to the second one where they came to live in and be raised in now."

Richard Ross, professor of student ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, says the shift is just beginning.

"The shift in racial balance was expected," Ross said. "What is newsworthy right now is the fact that nonwhites and Hispanics became the majority for the first time. That shift will continue for decades."

Ben Trueblood, director of student ministry for LifeWay Christian Resources, said pastors are going to have to do a better job of understanding the differing perspectives of people in their communities.

"Each person has a story, and in a broader sense, each race has a story," Trueblood said. "Those stories, or histories if you will, impact how people see and interact with the world. We have a

tendency to see and understand things through the perspective of our own narrow story, and youth pastors will need to break out of that pattern."

Trueblood said this statistic is already showing up in schools and communities around the U.S., and ministry leaders need to evaluate how they are shifting to represent the areas they are seeking to serve.

"As a white leader in the SBC, my love for people needs to move beyond just saying, 'I love people of color,' but actually into deed and showing that love through personal friendships, ministry partnerships and through personal initiative to research, learn and understand other perspectives," Trueblood said. "For us to see revival among this generation of teenagers, I think the church, broadly, has to adopt a posture of loving in word and deed when it comes to issues of race."

Shane Pruitt, National Next Gen Evangelism Director with the North American Mission Board, agreed. He said the question to be asked in the current environment is no longer, "Why are you a diverse church?" but instead, "Why are you not a diverse church?"

"If we're going to be serious about reaching our diverse communities, diverse schools and a diverse generation, we will naturally become diverse ministry," Pruitt said. "We'll have to be intentional by putting our ministries through hard evaluations. Do our stages represent who we are trying to reach? Do our leadership and volunteer teams look like who we are trying to reach?"

Pruitt said the generation of those 16 and under in U.S. are exposed to brokenness at an earlier age and are looking for a solution. He believes this searching is an opening for an awakening.

"This is an extreme generation," Pruitt said. "Everything they do is extreme, so when they surrender to Jesus, they are doing it with extreme, all-in surrender. I believe we could see a great spiritual awakening in this generation."

Ross noted that hot topic issues for the 16-and-under generation include science and the Bible, gender issues and racial attitudes.

"If teenagers have friends at school who would not be welcome at their church, that can be a deal-breaker," Ross said. "We need strong, biblical preaching and teaching to precipitate a change in adult attitudes. If attitudes in the adult church change, then student ministry can be effective in reaching all students in the community."

Ross said as student pastors adapt their ministries to relate to a more ethnically diverse population, they need to make the right moves for the right reasons – and that will entail listening.

"When the student pastor has the right motives, has the support of the adult church, and community teenagers still won't come -- it may be time for him to listen," Ross explained. "With a humble attitude, [pastors] might need to ask minority teenagers, or their parents, what keeps them away. He also may need to ask a minority youth leader to teach him about dynamics he knows little about."

Even as student ministry evolves to become and remain effective in a new context, Vides said the backbone must remain the Holy Spirit, as revealed through God's Word.

"If this age range is willing to be moved by the Holy Spirit and open their hearts to God like no other age has done in recent times, then I believe there can be a revival," Vides said. "But we need men and women with a true desire and passion to do what is needed to be used by God to initiate this revival."

Biblical unity calls for action, Ross emphasized.

"If our teenagers see their churches creating biblical unity among all God's people," Ross said, "then they can turn their attention to King Jesus and all He may in store for a young generation."

Pruitt said understanding must come before action.

"We have to figure out bridges we can build and what barriers we can remove," Pruitt said. "If we're going to have a future as evangelical churches, it must be a diverse future."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tess Schoonhoven is a Baptist Press staff writer.

Praise and serve neighborhood block party

by Stan Parker

LANSING, MI – Over the past twenty years the Potter/Walsh neighborhood has grown accustomed to having a Neighborhood Block Party each July presented by Faith Fellowship Baptist Church. Given the COVID-19 pandemic the neighborhood was feeling very sad and hopeless thinking the Neighborhood Block Party was not going to exist this year. However, Pastor Stan Parker and a team begin to pray to ask for God's guidance. The team wanted to do something for the community, but was not sure what could be done given the various Executive Orders issued by the Governor. The team was concerned about the safety for the neighborhood.

After two weeks of praying, God delivered an answer to the team. The Lord made it clear the traditional Praise in the Park Block Party was not a wise decision for this year. Instead the Lord directed to have the event on a different scale, with masks and social distancing. Out of prayer and fasting Praise and Serve Block Party was born. The team decided to praise God with some singing and handing out tracks while other service functions were going on.

Pastor Parker contacted the Local Health Department to secure free COVID-19 testing at Walsh Park. Then the Health Department contacted Meijer's Food Store to partner to give out gift cards and other goodies. Arrangements were made to have free chair massages to ease some of the stress due to the COVID-19. Another partner, the Ladies of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, sponsored screening for high blood pressure.

The Praise and Serve Block Party was held on July 11, with wearing of masks and practicing social distancing along with free bagged lunches. The Prayer Team was able to engage in gospel conversations with some of the individuals, and extend information on the church services of Faith Fellowship Baptist Church. The next day 31 additional people viewed Facebook Live with Faith Fellowship. Six individuals contacted the church to ask for additional information.

The birth of Praise and Serve has also increased the faith of the prayer team even in the midst of the COVID-19. The event served to confirm that God is still in charge. The Potter Walsh Neighborhood Association, thanked the Faith Fellowship for "Walking by Faith and not by Sight".

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Stan Parker is the Pastor of Faith Fellowship Baptist Church in Lansing Michigan. He is the current President of the Michigan African American Fellowship. He is married to First Lady Char Parker.

First-Person: How to pray for missionaries displaced by COVID-19

by Samuel Brittain

FORT WORTH, TX (BP) – COVID-19 has upended many plans. From vacations to graduations and everything in between, the global pandemic has left few events or lives intact. One group of people whom COVID-19 has profoundly impacted is missionaries. Many missionaries have had to shelter in place and quarantine in their host countries. Their lives were put on pause, and missionaries tried to find creative means to continue ministry.

As more time passes, many missionaries find themselves unexpectedly back in their countries of origin. While many might assume "coming home" is nothing but fun, many, if not most, missionaries are standing in a now unfamiliar place without the blessing of goodbyes to friends or much time to pack. Many of these missionaries also had to make this return without knowing when, if ever, they would be able to return to their home and place of service.

My family went through something similar when we had to leave the field abruptly due to health issues in our family. A quick return to the states helped us address our son's health, but also took us away from a country and people whom we love. Having walked through similar circumstances, here is how I would suggest we pray for missionaries who have been unexpectedly displaced:

Pray that they feel the freedom to grieve.

Praying for someone to grieve might seem morbid, but being ripped out of your life and ministry is traumatic and hurtful. Pray that these missionaries would give themselves the freedom to feel and express their grief.

It is easy to shut down emotions like grief in the name of moving on or "trusting the Lord." Grief is not a denial of faith in the Lord; instead, expressing our grief to the Lord says that we acknowledge He is big enough to handle it. If we do not acknowledge our weakness, we rob ourselves the opportunity to see His strength.

Pray for trusted listeners.

Returning missionaries often feel out of place in their home country. This home country is not really home anymore! The missionary is changed, and her old friends have changed. Everything is different.

On top of this reverse culture shock, missionaries have already undergone trauma and pain -- pandemics and forced relocations aside -- that are hard to express to someone who has not walked in those shoes. Ask God to provide safe friends, church members, even counselors, who will listen, mourn with those who mourn, and point towards Christ -- the incarnate One who shares in our sufferings.

Pray for peace.

Missionary life is uncertain by nature. However, the complete chaos caused by COVID-19 means many missionaries have no idea when they will be able to return to their place of service. Pray that the Lord would give them peace that passes understanding. Ask also that the Lord would make clear the next good works He has prepared for them.

Pray for spiritual intimacy and growth.

Unexpected changes often leave us open to stagnancy or aimlessness in our walks with the Lord. Removed from ministry that can give meaning and identity (and not always in healthy ways), missionaries can feel far from God's presence. Ask that the Lord would fill these missionaries with knowledge of His steadfast love. Ask that this time would be the beginning of a deeper walk with the Lord.

We know that the sudden displacement of missionaries did not surprise the Lord. Even where grief springs up, the Lord is at work. Missionaries being displaced does not mean disciples are not being made and churches are not starting. Many missionaries remain on the field.

Around the world, local churches and believers are faithfully meeting needs and sharing hope. Displaced missionaries and the Southern Baptists who sent them also find the peoples of the world all around us. In the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, for example, there are more than 400 people groups, of which more than 100 are unreached with the Gospel.

As we pray for these missionaries, let's also pray that the Lord would use us to make disciples of the nations around us. Also, consider asking if your church or association knows of any missionaries who have returned to your area. Consider writing them a note or dropping off a meal to let them know you are praying for them.

As it is safe and permissible to do so, ask some of these missionaries to teach you about their people and go with them to share the Gospel with internationals. Let's pray with our brothers and sisters and join them in making disciples of all peoples!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samuel Brittain, who previously served in South Asia, is associate director of the World Missions Center at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.
