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# Loving family; "warts and all"

by Tim Patterson

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – The stress of the past few months, because of the ongoing pandemic, economic swings in world markets, and the never-ending presidential campaign, is really taking a toll on many of us. In just a matter of days, the nation will have selected their new/old Commander and Chief and depending on your political persuasion, the situation may be more stressful than ever. I will just be relieved to not have to watch another political television commercial! Nevertheless, remember Who really controls the affairs of man.

Taking all of this into consideration, as we move into the holiday seasons, even our times of celebration can be very enjoyable and stressful at the same time. Statistics show there is a great deal of depression and even suicide during what should be the most joyous and festive seasons of all. Many marriages won't make it through to the New Year because of the added tensions that seem to pile up from Thanksgiving through Christmas.

It is my opinion that 2020 and 2021 will be banner years for marriage disintegrations. But for those who have strong families and committed marriages this will be a wonderful time to renew family bonds and strengthen those relationships. Millions of families and friends travel thousands of miles just to be with each other while untold others cannot wait to be separated.

One such couple used the emotions of the season to their advantage. Maybe you can identify with them.

An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; 45 years of misery is enough."

"Pop, what are you talking about?" the son screams.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her." Then he hangs up.

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced," she shouts, "I'll take care of this." She calls Phoenix immediately, and screams at the old man, "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?"

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Okay," he says, "They're coming for Thanksgiving and paying their own fares."

Some people will do anything to be with the ones they love! Take time to be thankful for the friends and family God has placed in your life. Oh, I know that they are not perfect and that they get on your nerves now and again, but that's part of what it means to be family. Being part of a family or being a true friend requires that you accept one another, "warts and all". It means loving and accepting them just as they are and just to let you know, love AIN'T for sissies! Sometimes it's just plain hard to love those who can be downright unlovable.

During this season of Thanksgiving, take time to be truly thankful. Do whatever it takes to seize an opportunity to express to your friends and family your thankfulness for them being a big part of your life. We have lost too many during this crazy and stressful year and for many we have been made painfully aware of just how fragile and uncertain life can be. Love without limits. Don't wait until it's too late to say, "I'm sorry. Forgive me. I love you....." When all others forsake you, family and true friends will remain. For that we can be thankful.

#### **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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## **Grateful for grit**

by Dr. Tony L. Lynn

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – COVID tried to crush everything, but I am here to remind us that Christ is still King!

I am thankful for the spiritual grit I saw during 2020. Grit is having the courage, resilience and dedication to pursue a quest while overcoming obstacles. A 1969 Hollywood film with John Wayne, entitled "True Grit," displayed some not so spiritual examples of grit; however, during 2020 I have seen some sterling examples. We may look cleaner and more sophisticated in our uploaded images compared to Darby, Wayne and Campbell's theater poster but our fight to rescue the millions of unsaved Michiganders is an urgent fight we can only win with an unbreakable alliance.

Ephesians 6:12 (NLT) rightly directs our eyes to the correct battlefield and our enemies when it says, "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world."

Here are some shining illustrations of what COVID could not stop.

### **Courageous Planters**

Single men and young couples still pursue their personal pathway in starting new congregations. Nathan and Alison Sharpe of Adrian attended a thorough virtual assessment retreat for two days followed by an endorsement from the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM). The Sharpe family will replant a formerly non-Great Commission Baptist church into a Great Commission Baptist church in Adrian, MI. The pastor and church sending the Sharpe family out as missionaries is Josh Tovey and Redemption Church of Grandville. Nathan and Josh's friendship goes back a decade and displays how God orchestrates his plans throughout our entire lives to increase his glory throughout our lives. My friend Josh Tovey says, "God has you where he has you to advance the Gospel through you."

### **Sharing Shepherds**

Some established pastors are assisting new pastors and planters during the most difficult times. New planters lost meeting places, such as school buildings, due to COVID restrictions. Could you imagine how discouraging it would be that no one would be willing to share what they have with you, including space?

That is why the partnership of Ed Emmerling, the lead pastor at Westside Church, Flushing and church planter Jason Loewen of Union Church, Flint and the founding pastor Shea Prisk of Grumlaw Church, Grand Blanc rises to the top as one of my 2020 celebrations. Emmerling offered space to Jason with details of unselfishness that will bring tears to your eyes. While Prisk continues to develop Loewen as the newest church planter in the Greater Flint area, Emmerling will share space with Loewen and the Union Church launch team. Emmerling said, "By sharing our space with Union Church we will share in the ministry to a part of Flint that has been ignored for too long."

### **Established Churches Joining Us**

Suburban churches as well as urban churches, decades old throughout Michigan, are joining the convention family. What attracts a church to move from decades of independence to cooperation within the BSCM family?

I believe there are two important factors. First, pastors are creating authentic, caring friendships where they share their hearts and dreams about impacting communities. Second, those same men conclude that they can achieve more by working together than alone.

A large church, with years of impact in the western region, recently joined our BSCM family, not because of what they could receive from us, but rather for what they could give to pastors, churches and communities throughout the state's robust network. Lead Pastor Joel Wayne and

Associate Pastor Luke Bilberry of Chapel Pointe Church, Hudsonville have a passion for leadership development, revitalizing established congregations and church planting.

After months of conversation, built upon prior friendships with pastors already participating in the state's network, Joel who has the heart of a lion for the Lord and Luke who knows how to construct processes and systems to bring glory to God, asked their congregation to join the BSCM family in order to do more for God's kingdom. That mood of collaboration and unselfish sharing is on the rise.

We do not know what the winter months will bring concerning COVID, but I am certain of this, Christ is still King and COVID cannot crush what the Lord will continue to do! I am thankful for the spiritual grit I saw during 2020. Just remember, grit is having the courage, resilience and dedication to pursue a quest while overcoming obstacles. Can I ask if you have that same sort of grit for the Lord, for your family, for your church, and most of all for the lost around you?

It's been my experience after decades of observation, that when we as a spiritual community are laser focused on salvations, baptisms, discipleship and missions we are at our best.

At the national convention in 2012, the Southern Baptist Convention created a second name which displays our aspirations. That is why in this article I sometimes referred to "Great Commission Baptists".

#### **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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## **A 100-dollar word**

by Mike Durbin

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – There's an old story about Rudyard Kipling, the famous British writer. At the height of his popularity, a newspaper reporter approached him and said, "Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over \$100 a word."

Mr. Kipling raised his eyebrows and said, "Really, I certainly wasn't aware of that."

The reporter cynically reached into his pocket and pulled out a \$100 bill, gave it to Kipling and said, "Here's a \$100 bill Mr. Kipling. Now you give me one of your \$100 words."

Kipling looked at the \$100 bill for a moment, took it, folded it up, put it in his pocket and then said, "Thanks."

The reporter got a great word for his money. "Thanks" is certainly a big money word. It's important to the economy of social relationships. Forgetting to say "thanks" can be costly. People who lack the social grace of gratitude are considered rude and unappreciative. A grateful spirit is something that all of us can cultivate in our lives. Giving thanks is an important part of our relationships with each other and our relationship with God.

Jesus is heading to Jerusalem in Luke 17. As he approaches one of the villages on the way, ten lepers cry out to him, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Jesus cleanses all ten lepers of the dreaded disease as he sends them to the priests, but only one returns to say, "Thanks." Jesus points out his gratitude and asks, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?" He sends the grateful, former leper, away with the words, "Get up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you."

It is Thanksgiving in that former leper's life. A spirit of gratitude fills his life as he literally falls at the feet of Jesus and thanks him. He's glorifying God with a loud voice. We don't know what he says, but it might have been something like:

"Thank you Jesus for my health!" The text does not tell us the degree to which the disease has ravished his body, but it's gone. The man is cleansed and he's grateful for his health. He may never have realized how important his health was until he didn't have it the day the first spot appeared.

"Thank you Jesus for reuniting me with my family and friends!" Leprosy was such a dreaded disease that lepers were banned from their homes and forced to live outside the cities. If anyone approached them, lepers covered their lips and cried, "unclean, unclean" so people could stay away. The isolation ate away at their souls as they were cut off from everyone - especially those most precious to them. But this man is on his way home grateful that he can embrace those dearest to him. As he hugs each one, you can almost hear him say, "Thank you Jesus!"

"Thank you Jesus that I can worship with Your People again!" He never knew the pain of being separated from his spiritual family - until it happened. He tries to do the things they did together alone, but it's not the same. He realizes just how important community is and he's so grateful Jesus gave it back to him. Now that he can be with his faith family, he lingers longer, sings louder, and gives more as he thanks Jesus for making it all possible!

So much in this story sounds familiar in 2020: fear of a dreaded disease, isolation from loved ones, inability to gather with our spiritual family for in person worship. As Thanksgiving

approaches, I hope the part that most describes you and me is gratitude. “Thanks” is still a “high dollar” word...one that never loses its value.

#### **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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## **Giving thanks and living thankful**

by Mick Schatz

**ROSCOMMON, MI** – The year 2020 has been a unique year to say the least. Back in 2019 I remember looking ahead to 2020 envisioning an amazing year here at Bambi, and relishing the endless possibilities the year could bring. If only I would have had 20/20 vision to see the realities of the coming year maybe I could have been better prepared - probably not, but WOW! what a year it has been. Now I don’t want to get caught up in reminiscing about 2020, but I do want to share a truth that has been pressing on my heart over the course of the year.

I’ve been challenged to ask myself, “Am I truly thankful?” - “Is being thankful simply a mental or emotional state of being or should it be reflected in how I live everyday?”

Growing up in Florida it was steamy hot in the summertime, and having access to water was essential for staying hydrated as well as keeping plants and grass growing. At my house we put down shallow wells to supply our sprinkler system so the grass wouldn’t die. If mom wasn’t watching, we would run like wild banshees through the sprinklers in our bathing suits or whatever we had on at the time and get as muddy and nasty as possible. It was awesome!

Nevertheless, the problem with shallow wells is just that - they are shallow. They will run dry if there is not an abundance of rain because they are not down very deep in the ground, especially in Florida. They also have a pungent sulfur odor that smells like rotten eggs - you could drink it if you wanted, but we didn’t, no matter how hot or thirsty we became. However, in our front yard we had an old fashioned hand-pump. It was connected to a well that ran deep, deep into the aquifer, and tapped into some of the best and coldest water you could imagine! On hot days when we were playing or working outside, we would prime that pump and crank up some cold, refreshing H2O.

That memory has given me pause to question whether my thankfulness to God depends on the shallow well of my circumstances which is wet or dry depending on the good or bad times in my life. Or does my thankfulness come from a deeper well that will never run dry. A well full of faith, hope, trust and an ever deepening relationship with Christ-the source of life.

You see, when I keep my soul hydrated from the deep well of Christ, living and expressing a heart of thankfulness renders my circumstances powerless. I can't help but be thankful because my thankfulness comes from the overflow of a life wholeheartedly serving and enjoying a relationship with the One Who provides everything for which I should be thankful. Over the past months I have tried to purposefully make the choice to give thanks and live thankful in spite of the present situation we all find ourselves facing.

Amazingly, choosing thankfulness has opened my eyes to see all of the ways God has been moving in my life, my family's life, Bambi, and those around me. He has reminded me of His provision in the past, present, and His continued provision in the future. It has given me strength to stay the course and not lose heart.

So how about you? Do you need to be refreshed and renewed. Choose to give thanks and live thankful. Take a look at Joshua 24 and read how Joshua called the people to a time of remembrance and thanksgiving to reinvigorate their relationship and exuberance for God. He was challenging them to live with thankful hearts. Being thankful will enable you to see and experience God through the fog of the chaos. Drink deeply and stay refreshed and hopeful as you journey through this present craziness. Maybe we truly can have 20/20 vision in 2020 and beyond!

#### **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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## **Conspiracies, persecution, and thanks**

by Chip Falkner

**HILLSDALE, MI** – Are you feeling more and more like an exile in a foreign land? Do you find it a challenge to remain thankful as attacks to your faith grow more blatant? What is the right response to conspiracies and persecution aimed at you?

Daniel was a captive in Babylon and faced constant pressure to compromise his convictions. Yet, in spite of his difficult circumstances, Daniel remained faithful to God. The Lord had placed



him in a position of influence, but Daniel was not exempt from high-level collusion. His enemies looked hard to unearth corruption in his life, but they were disappointed to find him a completely honest administrator. Driven by jealousy, they knew the only way to bring him down was to conspire against his belief in God. Daniel's devotion to prayer was actually the strategy the jealous rivals used to bring an indictment against him.

Three times a day Daniel was consistent to get on his knees and pray. What's even more amazing is the customary theme of Daniel's prayer. He "gave thanks to his God." His heart longed for home, but he habitually expressed gratitude despite his circumstances. When Daniel learned of the evil plot against him, he still managed to give God thanks. Note also that he added to his prayer a request for God's help.

The fact remains that "all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12 CSB). Even as a target of unjust attack due to your bold faith, you can still learn to be a thankful intercessor. Evil people may use the law and government as traps, but you can remain faithful in offering gratitude to God. In times of intense oppression implore God for his help. You may even be thrown into the lions' den, but God will ultimately rescue.

"Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7 CSB).

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Chip was called to Hillsdale Baptist Church, Michigan in March of 2020. He has served churches in Oklahoma and Illinois and also as a missionary with the IMB. Chip and his wife Gail have three grown children and 5 grandchildren.

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## **Developing a heart of thankfulness**

by Ken Nether

**SOUTHFIELD, MI** – Can I be honest? I believed this year would be a year of exponential growth in our ministry. Just as we started catching momentum, COVID-19 came knocking at our door and it seemed that everything we worked for came to a screeching halt.

So for the next several months, my living room became our sanctuary, and instead of preaching from the pulpit on Sunday mornings, I would wait until everyone in the house was sound asleep as I would muster up the energy to preach as if I was speaking in front of a packed house. Well, one thing is sure, it was at my house, but it was far from being packed.

At first “home church” was exciting for me because I was learning so much about online ministry, and how we can creatively share the gospel with people who ordinarily would not step foot in our church. However, as time went on, I became weary of connecting with people’s profiles and not being able to see people’s faces. Amid “homeschooling” our kids due to the virus and learning various new skills as a pastor, I started to become frustrated because most of what I was doing was not a part of my “job description.” Amongst homeschooling, racial tensions, political divisiveness and the like, I began to feel overwhelmed with leading myself, let alone leading a church.

Have you ever felt that your best was not good enough?

One thing that has helped me get out of moments of discouragement is to cultivate a heart of thankfulness. So how do we begin to have a heart of thankfulness? It begins with our mindset.

***Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.***

Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

As a result of the “stay at home” orders, my wife and I started to think about how we could spend time together as a family and do things creatively. Since my living room was already converted into a studio for filming my messages, we decided to do a family photoshoot which allowed us to create memories with our kids that are now portraits which are plastered on our wall in the dining room.

I am thankful for Debbie who is the wife of Tim Shrader, a Church Planting Catalyst for NAMB, who gave my daughter piano lessons online and in-person as she needed to release some stress due to her being away from her friends from school.

I am thankful for Mile City who allowed me to use their facilities to record my messages when I became weary of staying up all night editing videos for our online broadcast.

I am thankful for my fellow Church Planting Catalysts who have decided to engage and offer solutions in regard to racial reconciliation so we can serve our churches more effectively moving forward.

I am thankful for Crossover Church, as we were able to provide free pizza for more than 200 families in need over the summer when people needed hope.

Now that I think about it. This was the year of exponential growth in our ministry. Also, I believe it was the year of growth in yours. Perhaps God was more interested in growing us instead of growing our buildings. Maybe God was teaching us to learn how to have a thankful heart regardless of the hardships we face.

I don't know what the future may bring but, in the meantime, I have decided to be thankful. I think you should too.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ken Nether is the lead pastor of Crossover Church in Southfield, MI, and also a Church Planting Catalyst with the North American Mission Board. He has been married to his beautiful wife Tolice for 9 years and has two children Kennedy (8) and Lincoln (6).

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## **Kentucky pastor finds treasured photo of Billy Graham in filing cabinet**

by Mark Maynard

**TAYLORSVILLE, KY (BP)** – A Kentucky Baptist pastor unearthed a real treasure in the church office on Monday.

Pastor Chance McConnell had heard about the photograph from 1953 of the late Rev. Billy Graham holding a child on his lap in the church parsonage, but he'd never seen it.

Until Monday. And thanks to social media, a lot of other people have seen it now too.

The color photograph shows Graham holding Bill Crouch, the son of Henry Crouch, who was pastor of First Baptist Church in Taylorsville, Ky. That little boy grew up to become the president of Kentucky's Georgetown College, retiring in 2013.

They were doing some sprucing up around the office and found the photograph in a filing cabinet with some office supplies like staples and paper clips, McConnell said.

"I know it sounds kind of weird but I was excited," he said. "Somebody like Billy Graham is such a giant in the faith. It's cool to think he was here. It was cool to me anyway. I put it on my Facebook page, and it started picking up some traction. It was getting likes from some of my high school classmates and even a comment from Dr. (Adam) Greenway, the president of Southwestern Baptist Seminary. It's funny the range of people who were liking it, from my high school friends to the president of a seminary. It speaks to the testament of Billy Graham."

The most well-known evangelist in the world, Graham died in 2018 at the age of 99. That would make him 34 in the photo. McConnell said that Henry Crouch was from North Carolina, as was

Graham, so the two may have known each other that way. He believes the photograph may have been taken while Graham was holding one of his two crusades in Louisville.

McConnell, who has been at Taylorsville FBC for two years, said he is a bit of a history buff. The church will celebrate its 195th anniversary in a couple of years, and McConnell promised to do something special with the photo during that time.

He has a photo in his office of a 1947 youth and children's choir of about 20. One of the little girls in the photo is now a church member in her 80s. "In a non-COVID world, she'd be in our auditorium singing some of the same songs she sang then," he said.

As for the Graham photo, he said it would be stored in a safe place.

"It didn't just make my day, it made my week," he said of the find.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mark Maynard writes for Kentucky Today, [www.kentuckytoday.com](http://www.kentuckytoday.com), where this article first appeared. Kentucky Today is a news resource of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

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## **Signs of slipping theology?**

by Meredith Flynn

The 2020 State of Theology survey, released in September by LifeWay Research and Ligonier Ministries, had both good and bad news for churches seeking to share the gospel in a culture moving farther from it.

First, the good: 65% of Americans agree God is a perfect being and he cannot make a mistake. A similar percentage agree the bodily resurrection of Jesus really happened. And over half agree God counts a person as righteous not because of his or her works, but only because of faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, the challenges: More than half of Americans say religious belief is a matter of personal opinion (although the percentage is down from 2018). Almost two-thirds say people are good by nature. And just over half agree Jesus was a great teacher, but not God.

That question also elicited a troubling response from evangelicals: 30% agreed at least somewhat that Jesus was a great teacher, but not God. The finding shows "a significant need

for Christians to be taught Christology, the doctrine of the nature and identity of Jesus Christ,” Ligonier said.

It also may show a connection between church attendance and belief, said LifeWay’s Trevin Wax. In a blog post about the research, Wax noted attendance appears to matter more than affiliation. “Those who claim the evangelical label and also attend church at least once a week were much more likely to have beliefs that align with Christian orthodoxy,” he wrote. Wax noted 76% of evangelicals who attend church at least once a week disagree Jesus was a great teacher but not God. But among evangelicals who attend church less often, only 42% disagreed.

That’s more good news and bad news for churches: it’s encouraging that Christians appear to grow in their knowledge and embrace of Christian orthodoxy while at church. But it’s also a particularly tricky time to be a churchgoer, as some gatherings are still limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

More Americans disagree than agree that churches must provide entertaining worship services if they want to be effective (49% to 37%), giving churches an opportunity to hone in on meaningful worship, even if it happens online for now.

A few statements in the survey garnered 100% agreement from evangelicals, who expressed a high view of the Bible’s authority and affirmed that Jesus’ death on the cross is the only sacrifice that can remove the penalty of sin. The survey also found 100% of evangelicals agree strongly that it’s very important for them personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.

In a challenging year, that’s good news.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Meredith Flynn is the managing editor for Illinois Baptist.

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## **NAMB to emphasize Hispanic church planting in 2021**

by Brandon Elrod

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** – Over the course of the next decade, demographic projections estimate the Hispanic population will increase by 30 percent, up from the 2016 figure of 57 million to 74 million people by 2030. In recognizing these demographic shifts, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) will emphasize Hispanic church planting starting in 2021.

“We are on the path to becoming the largest ethnic group in the United States, even larger than the Anglo population,” said Julio Arriola, executive director of Hispanic relations and mobilization with the the SBC Executive Committee. “Most of these Hispanics don’t have a relationship with Jesus.”

The Hispanic population currently makes up nearly 20 percent of the U.S. population and is far and away the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S., a fact that led NAMB in recent years to produce Send Network planting resources in the area of assessment, training and coaching for Spanish-speaking church planting missionaries. Send Network also made a Spanish version of its Multiplication Pipeline available.

“We want to be strategic in reaching North America with the hope of the Gospel,” NAMB president Kevin Ezell said. “That means that we need to be sure to emphasize Hispanic church planting. The demographic shift that is taking place is incredible, and we must take the Gospel to the places where it is needed most.”

Ezell announced the Hispanic focus at a meeting with NAMB’s Board of Trustees Oct. 6.

Arriola, whose role with the Executive Committee is jointly funded by NAMB, serves as a major catalyst for seeing more Hispanic churches launched.

“We have great interest from church planters to plant more Hispanic churches, but we need more missionaries,” Arriola said. “We ought to pray and call out the called. We need to explore all of the different ways to harvest champions for Hispanic church planting in the United States.”

Anglo Southern Baptist churches across North America can help, Arriola said, by opening their eyes to the Hispanic communities found within their own cities, towns and neighborhoods. From there, a team effort within the Southern Baptist ecosystem could lead to flourishing Hispanic ministries and church plants.

“Those churches located in communities with large Hispanic populations should consider opening Spanish-speaking services and starting Hispanic churches,” Arriola said. “Those in the SBC are here to help and assist in the process through collaboration with NAMB, our seminaries and through the state and regional conventions,” Arriola said.

While emphasizing the need for this focus, Arriola also spoke about the need to conduct these Hispanic ministries with excellence.

“There are no shortcuts to developing a healthy, thriving Hispanic church or service,” Arriola said. “Churches need to make sure those leaders and church planters are well trained and biblically sound in their beliefs and practice.”

Through seminaries, the SBC's Hispanic fellowships, NAMB and state conventions, there is a pipeline of Hispanic ministers who are ready to serve.

"We are putting together a pool of new leaders and future church planters that will help us reach our goals," Arriola said. "America has the second highest population of Hispanics in the world behind Mexico. Through all of our Southern Baptist partners and our 3,500 Hispanic SBC churches, we are seeing leaders prepared and developed for the ministry."

Arriola believes Latino culture is a major asset for reaching everyone, not just Hispanics. There is a need beyond simply focusing on Spanish-speaking ministry opportunities.

"We can't expect Anglo churches to be intentional in reaching Latinos and other ethnic groups if we, Latinos, are only intentional in reaching Hispanics," Arriola said. "We ought to reach all people from every town, every city and every nation. Our unique Hispanic culture is a great platform to help us reach more people even beyond our own ethnicity."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

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## **Gateways to gratitude**

by David Ferraro

**"...give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."**

1 Thessalonians 5:18

**GARDEN CITY, MI** – If you're like many people, you may find it challenging to heed Paul's admonition here to "give thanks in everything". People often struggle to express gratitude in our attitude from day to day - this year is no exception. You may feel like the year 2020 can't end soon enough! And yet God desires that we would give thanks even for 2020! So, let me suggest a few ways that we can learn to trust the Lord more with this command to give thanks in everything.

True gratitude is a heart condition. Gratitude comes through the personal awareness of what God has done. Believers know God's gift of grace through his Son, Jesus Christ, but we can still become short-sighted, forgetful and ungrateful.

All of us can become overly busy and neglect to pause, rest and remember what God has done. We need rest. Rest teaches us this reality - the Lord is God and we are not! When we rest from

our labors, we can see more clearly all that God continues to do without us. Resting places us in a posture to learn gratitude. We can see God's wisdom in giving us the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper as opportunities to remember Him and express our gratitude. How are you taking time to rest and reflect?

Gratitude comes as we recognize God's grace in every situation that we are in. The kingdom of God has come in Christ – He is reigning today! Rather than looking with a critical eye at what we think may be wrong, we learn gratitude when we look for the grace of God at work in making all things new. In every situation we can look for God at work. We can see the people God has placed in our lives and how he is drawing people to salvation and growing them in faith. We can look at our unique situation as an opportunity God has entrusted to us. We can view resources we have as treasures to make eternal investments. Resist the temptation to dwell on what is wrong or to criticize what you feel may be wrong. Remember to answer the question, "Where is God working?"

Gratitude comes when we take time to acknowledge progress. We can fall into discouragement when our goals or expectations are not realized. While we make mistakes along the way, remember that God does not. Acknowledge to God and to others how you see God working for your good, the good of his people even in difficult circumstances or unrealized expectations. When you reflect on a day, week or year answer the question, "What went well?"

Amidst this pandemic many have experienced heightened isolation, yet we know we are called by God into community and cooperation. Amidst the challenges, make every effort you can to continue to maintain your relationships in the body of Christ and forge new ones. Working for the Lord with others allows us to see how God has gifted other people in the body of Christ, and gives us occasion to thank God for his wisdom in gifting each one uniquely according to His will.

I thank God for you as co-laborers in the Gospel across Michigan! Trust God to give thanks in all things so that you might experience His will to receive the blessing of seeing how He is working in the world from day to day.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

David Ferraro is husband to his bride Becky and father of 7 super kids. He serves as Pastor of Discipleship of Merriman Road Baptist Church in Garden City, MI and also as Coaching Champion for Send Detroit.

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# 5 surefire ways to recruit more volunteers

by Matthew Gibbs

**WARNER ROBBINS, GA** – “I don’t have enough volunteers.”

Have you ever heard a ministry leader in your church say this? Perhaps you have said it or at least thought it. Here’s a question to ponder: Can we ever have enough volunteers?

I am convinced that one of the biggest mistakes that I have made in ministry was to assume at any time that I had enough leaders and volunteers. Volunteer recruitment and leader development in the church should be an on-going, all-the-time thing. Successful and healthy ministries almost always have a pipeline for recruiting, training, and developing volunteers and leaders. The reality is that we can never really have enough volunteers because the back door never fully closes. As our ministry grows and expands, there will always be a need for additional volunteers and leaders.

The challenge becomes even more difficult with the new circumstances we face in 2020 – a pandemic and churches trying to figure out how to safely reopen. As churches open up and provide ministry programs, finding, recruiting, and training volunteers has now become a tremendous discussion and frustrating subject. Many of our previous volunteers are not returning because of health concerns or fear over the pandemic. Others are not volunteering because they have gotten comfortable with not serving. This has happened as churches have been forced to temporarily suspend some of their ministries.

In a recent blog, Thom Rainer writes that many in our churches have also lost their motivation to serve. He goes on to say that “many church members in small groups are motivated to volunteer together with fellow small group members.” As small groups have stopped meeting or suspended in-person meetings, the motivation to serve has diminished among group members.

So, what are we to do?

How are we to move forward and recruit, train, and develop new and returning volunteers? It takes people to minister to people, and we know that we need more people to do this effectively. I have read several articles and blog posts about volunteer recruiting. Here are a few suggestions to consider as you move forward with volunteer recruiting and training.

## **Build ministry teams**

Spend more time building teams and investing in your volunteers. We can become the lid for ministry impact, volunteer recruitment, and leader development. We spend time doing ministry, but little to no time building ministry teams, training volunteers, and developing leaders.

Some have suggested that ministry leaders should spend as much as 80% of their time developing and investing in their leaders and ministry teams. The more time we spend recruiting, developing, and expanding our volunteer teams, the more significant our ministry impact can be. Essentially, we multiply our influence. Remember, TEAM stands for “Together Everyone Accomplishes More!”

### **Make it personal**

We are guilty of “cattle call” recruitment for volunteers all too often in our desperation for volunteers. Email blasts, bulletin ads, sign-up sheets, and church-wide announcement videos are usually very ineffective recruiting good volunteers. People pay little attention to these because they are impersonal. When we spend intentional and personal time with an individual and recruit through a relationship, our recruiting will be more effective. We will recruit better volunteers, and our volunteer retention will go up significantly.

This type of recruiting process allows you to cast a vision for the ministry, share job/position descriptions, and get to know the individual you are recruiting. You can share your own passion for the church and gauge their passion and giftedness for the ministry position. This type of intentional and personal recruiting also communicates the high value you place on the service/ministry position. Still, even more, the value you place on the individual as a servant.

### **Offer training and help**

One of the best ways to lose a quality volunteer is to stick them into a ministry position with little or no training and support. You are essentially setting them up for failure and frustration. Remember that you must prepare them to serve, and this includes adequate training.

Training and support give volunteers the tools needed for success and the opportunity to grow and develop as a servant and leader. Some ministries even offer apprentice type positions to help volunteers to learn the ropes and get their feet wet in a service position. Make sure that they have an avenue to ask for help and additional information. This line of communication can be with you or with another volunteer leader.

### **Align your ministry calendar and programs**

Often our church calendars are overcrowded and crammed full with church events, programs, and other things. If your church culture communicates that people are expected to be at every event and involved in every program, people actually can’t find the time to serve. This is a sure-fire way to create burn out among your volunteers and leaders.

Being at every event and involved in every Bible study does not make you a better Christian. In fact, it could actually lead to stagnation in your spiritual growth. A healthy, balanced approach to ministry provides opportunity and time for people to serve.

## **Show your appreciation**

One way to ensure that you lose good volunteers is to fail to appreciate them. People need to hear you say, “Thank you.” People need to be recognized for their faithful service and appreciated and even rewarded. The primary motivation for serving as a volunteer is the love of God and love for people. That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t let them know how much we appreciate and love them.

Appreciation dinners, small gifts, and even something as simple as a hand-written card expressing appreciation can be a powerful encouragement for those who serve in ministry so faithfully. As we show gratitude, we must also communicate that we value them as individuals and not just for the service they give.

There are certainly some other things that you can do to increase the effectiveness of your volunteer recruitment. Still, the five I have mentioned above are a great start if you find yourself stuck and even a little frustrated with volunteer recruitment. I have found that when I using these best practices, the volunteers that were recruited became great servants in our ministry and some of our best recruiters as well.

Another great takeaway? As they were empowered, trained, and appreciated for their service, they naturally invited their friends and fellow church members to join them in ministry.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Matthew Gibbs is the East Central Region Discipleship consultant for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board.

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## **Southern Baptists’ generosity brings gospel to Kenya and Tanzania**

### **Doctor's family of nine arrives safely in Kenya**

Kenya looks a lot different than Alabama, but Eric and Heather McDonald made it safely to Africa with their seven children, six travel partners and around 75 pieces of luggage. One month into their new lives as IMB missionaries, they remain hopeful, content and sure of God’s calling on their lives.

“Learning to live in an unfamiliar culture is a full-time job, but God is so faithful,” Eric says. “Life looks very different, but God has shown us that different is not bad, it's just different.”

Eric, a medical doctor, and Heather, a registered nurse, will serve as healthcare professionals at the Baptist hospital in Kigoma, Tanzania. But first, they will make a home in Kenya while they study the language. Eric says that they have already visited local churches and have met with people in their village homes. “The kids are thriving,” they have begun school, both virtually and in-person, and are making friends in the area surrounding their home.

“We are growing our community every day and enjoying investing in those that are around us,” says Eric.

Eric shares the following prayer requests:

- “After visiting local churches and doing some home visits in the village, the need for language and culture learning is even more evident. We are so thankful to be sent by churches and an organization that believes people should hear the gospel in their heart language.
- “Pray that we can quickly learn the language and culture we need to effectively share with people in a meaningful way.
- “Pray for continued transition, that we will be solidly rooted in the faithfulness of our heavenly father to remember our calling to be here--even when times are hard.
- “Finally, pray for our marriage and family as a unit that we will, not only, be supportive and loving to one another, but also that we will be a light in the community and that God will prepare the hearts of those that we run into.”

Your generous gift to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® will sustain the vital work of missionaries Eric and Heather McDonald. Will you join Southern Baptists in giving for the first time or increasing your offering this year? Our goal is \$175 million and every dollar will go directly to the work on the mission field. With your support, we will surpass this goal and advance the kingdom as never before.

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## Digital church becomes a reality, connecting families from Central America

by Scott Barkley

**GREENSBORO** – The physical effects of COVID-19 hit people hard, but the impact is felt just as strong in areas a little harder to measure.

Pastor Neftali Coronado arrived in the United States from southern Mexico 21 years ago and would soon plant La Iglesia Bautista El Buen in Central Baptist Association. A prolific church starter, he would go on to begin congregations in the Georgia cities of Washington, Athens, and most recently, Milledgeville. With the onset of COVID-19 and subsequent shutdown in travel, many of those Hispanic church members were cut off from visiting their families.

Coronado, said Georgia Baptist Missions East Central Region consultant Jeff Gongwer, decided to use technology in helping keep families together digitally.

“Pastor Neftali had the idea of connecting his church members’ families who had COVID-19 through What’s App and Zoom,” Gongwer stated. “He’d get the phone numbers of their loved ones in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and other Central American countries to do this.”

Neftali himself would become part of the calls, asking questions as to how he could pray for the families. Over time, he would present the gospel. “In one instance he led an entire family of six to the Lord,” Gongwer reported. “The mother of this family had COVID and was in a coma. He prays over her during Zoom calls often.”

Three times a week, Neftali produces recordings of him singing Christian songs and sharing Scripture. The recordings of 2-3 minutes are received by approximately 120 people.

The effort has become a long-distance digital outreach, one where consistency has been the key. “He’s also leading several families through basic discipleship materials, focusing on five subjects,” Gongwer said. “Those are ‘Read the Bible,’ ‘Memorize the Bible,’ ‘Share the Bible,’ ‘Apply the Bible,’ and ‘Meditate on the Bible.’”

In addition, people from different churches and countries join for the worship services Neftali leads on Tuesdays and Thursdays over Zoom. The services stay within the 45 minutes limited on Zoom’s free accounts.

Future plans include Coronado contacting pastors local to those he has reached. Whether they have become believers or are still investigating Christianity, finding a nearby church home is important to maintain personal contact.

Hispanic church planting is a growing need in the Peach State, Gongwer stated, and ministers such as Coronado are leading the way. “Pastor Neftali’s passion is for the gospel and planting churches,” he testified. “He’s always looking for opportunities to plant churches or to assist others to do that. His dream is to have a center where he can train Hispanic church planters and see churches started.”

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Scott Barkley is editor of The Christian Index.

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# Bears quarterback Nick Foles partners with Chicago church to help students

by Diana Chandler

**CHICAGO, IL (BP)** – With Chicago Public Schools continuing virtual learning, Chicago Bears quarterback Nick Foles is working with Progressive Baptist Church to distribute hundreds of laptops to low-income students.

Progressive Baptist Church Senior Pastor Charlie Dates announced the donation on social media.

“Today, our church received hundreds of these, Acer Google Chromebooks, that are being given to students in Chicago who are doing school remotely, some of them even on a cellphone,” Dates said Thursday (Oct. 22). “Our friend, Chicago Bears quarterback Nick Foles, has helped us once again meet a real need so that we can introduce people to the personal work of Jesus Christ.

“And when we give these to students who are in need, here will be our message, ‘Only Jesus,’” Dates said, referencing the work of Jesus among the less fortunate. “Thank you Nick.”

Chicago Public Schools (CPS), with enrollment of more than 340,000 students, will begin the second quarter of the current school year Nov. 9, with remote learning, the district has announced. The CPS hopes to phase in onsite learning for students who are not served well under any form of remote learning.

Foles, an evangelical Christian who runs the philanthropic The Foles Believe Foundation with his wife Tori, launched a program in September to serve low-income communities during the COVID-19 pandemic in cooperation with The Chicago Partnership for Church Planting (TCP). Dates is a board member of TCP, a group of six churches representing multiple denominations and ethnicities.

In cooperation with TCP outreach Chicago Delivers and using Progressive’s parking lot, the Foles foundation has distributed more than 3,500 hot meals since September to vulnerable populations, the foundation said in a press release.

The TCP has planted more than 20 churches in Chicago over the past 12 years and has a vision to plant more than 100 over the next decade, according to [TheChicagoPartnership.com](https://www.thechicagopartnership.com).

The Foles Believe Foundation describes its mission as “dedicated to impacting and serving those in need ... in Jesus’ name,” and refers to Luke 3:11 (“He replied to them, ‘The one who has two shirts must share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same’”). In April, the foundation announced inaugural grants to nine food banks across the nation,

including locations in Illinois, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, California and Pennsylvania.

Foles, who has played with the Los Angeles Rams and Philadelphia Eagles, was Super Bowl LII most valuable player when the Eagles defeated the New England Patriots in 2018.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' senior writer.

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## **Thankfulness: finding joy in the day to day**

by Karen Blanchard

**SHELBY TOWNSHIP, MI** – This year has been one we will never forget! We have experienced a pandemic, shutdowns, multiple losses, racial tensions and political uneasiness. It is so easy to focus on our circumstances, and get burdened with all that is going on around us. Paul reminds us in Philippians 1:27, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Back in the Spring, I was among the parents who were “homeschooling” their kids virtually. I used to be a schoolteacher, and I was excited for this new adventure with my kids. The first day we got up, had our devotions, and I was excited for this new opportunity to be home with them and teach them! It didn’t take long for the excitement to wear off.

I was running back and forth all morning between both kids and helping them with whatever needs they had. By 1:00 pm I was exhausted, my kids were frustrated, and I hadn’t even had the chance to do any of my work. This continued for a few weeks. I had a bad attitude about the situation, and I wasn’t being the mom and teacher my kids needed me to be. I was focusing on all I was missing, and I was having a hard time seeing past my current circumstance. To put it plainly, I was having a “pity party.”

Finally, I began to pray for God to help me find joy in this situation. After a few days of praying this, I went out to walk one morning; which was my big adventure of the day. As I was walking, I took a different route than normal. I remember stepping over something right in the middle of my path. I wasn’t really paying attention, but I felt led to go back and see what it was. When I looked down, I saw a purple painted rock that said, “JOY.” Tears filled my eyes. I remember looking up and thinking how much God loves me to send me this reminder that He sees me, He hears me, and He cares about me. Some people may look at this and think it is a coincidence, but I assure you it was not. God had directed my steps that day. This is how He works. When we surrender our circumstances to him, He is faithful to meet us where we are.

That little touch from God was exactly what I needed to help shift my perspective. I began to look each day for little moments of joy. My situation didn't change, but my perspective did. When I began to focus on what I was thankful for in my life and not in my current situation, my joy increased.

I love this quote from Lysa TerKeurst, "The mind feasts on what it focuses on." If we allow our mind to focus on the negative or what we are missing, then it will spiral us down to a bad place. Once we flip the script in our mind and begin to focus on what we are thankful for and all God has done in our life, then we can have joy because our circumstances won't dictate the way we feel.

I love Philippians 4:8 – Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

What are you allowing your mind to think on? I encourage you to think on the things of God and the blessings in your life and not on what your circumstances are.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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## **First-Person: Disagreeing wisely**

by Noah Adams

**ELGIN, IL (BP)** – No matter what you believe, what you think, how you vote, or how you live your life, someone is going to disagree with you. Even in church, disagreement is inevitable, especially in this political season. But how do we handle it?

From the Book of Proverbs, I find 13 or so passages about disagreeing wisely. And from those verses, I see six principles to help guide political discussions. They're not for posting on Facebook for all who disagree with me to see. These verses are for me. (And maybe you.)



### **1. Disagree only after listening, hearing and seeking to understand (Proverbs 12:15; 18:2, 13).**

These verses are a gut punch to me. Reading them, I realized just how often I “think my own way is right,” just how often I “have no interest in understanding and only want to air my opinion,” and just how often I “give an answer” before I really stop to hear the other person.

I have several close friends who have helped me realize this very practically in my life. I have political disagreements with one and theological disagreements with another. Both are patient enough with a hothead like me to calmly explain their stances. And I am very grateful for both of these friendships because they have helped me begin to grow in wisdom.

### **2. Disagree with patience, calmness and gentleness (Proverbs 12:16; 15:1).**

Fools get into arguments with people due to quick tempers and harshness. Even when people speak in anger, the wise person doesn’t return the favor. Wisdom responds to disagreement by being slow-tempered, by staying calm when insulted, by refusing to retaliate.

This may be hard to do, but the only way to end escalating insults is for one person to respond with a gentle answer. Proverbs says a gentle answer will deflect the anger. Bullying rarely leads to unity.

### **3. Disagreeing wisely can be persuasive or beneficial (Proverbs 15:2; 16:21-24; 18:20).**

Solomon calls an attack of insults “belching out foolishness.” By contrast, wise words “satisfy like a good meal” and “bring satisfaction.” Healthy, wise, godly disagreement is defined by pleasant words, kindness, wisdom, and self-control. Pleasant words are persuasive. And even if we don’t persuade the other person, our demeanor makes all the difference. The other person can walk away saying, “Well, I sure disagree with them, but at least that Christian listened to me.”

### **4. Only disagree if you can preserve relationship (Proverbs 17:9; 18:19).**

Have you hit “block” or “hide” on Facebook for someone who annoyed you with their political posts? You may think their political ideology is crazy, unethical or even unbiblical, but relationships with the people around us are always more important than our opinions of their opinions.

Proverbs warns that “an offended friend is harder to win back than a fortified city.” Ideally, we never let relationships get ruined by disagreement in the first place. But when we cross a line or someone crosses a line against us, the wise thing to do is to forgive and pursue reconciliation.

People will have different opinions – even in church– and that’s OK. But we can’t let disagreement “separate close friends.”

## **5. Only disagree if you know when to stop (Proverbs 20:3, 9).**

This is a big one. One of my favorite quotes is “Never argue with a fool. They drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience.” It’s a sort of silly quote that really echoes the truth of Proverbs: “Don’t waste your breath on fools.”

The problem today is that people don’t know where to draw the line. Some fights aren’t worth having. It is not wise when we argue about something that neither person will ever change their minds on. Don’t even start disagreeing with someone if you don’t have it in you to stop. Because if that happens, you’re probably falling into a spiritual trap that is dangerous to you personally.

## **6. Don’t spend time with disagreeers or become one yourself (Proverbs 22:24-25).**

Some might read this proverb as hyperbole, but I think that would be a mistake. There’s a very real, destructive threat to our lives by associating with disagreeers. “You will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.” Sadly, non-Christians already tend to see Christians as argumentative because we believe in absolutes.

What’s at stake if we become argumentative? Joy and happiness in this life are at stake. Healthy relationships are at stake. Evangelism and effective witness are at stake. Jesus didn’t lay down His life on the cross so that we could argue our way through life. We are not called to shove our opinions about politics and everything else on other people. Instead, to live wisely, even when we disagree, is to live like Christ.

If that hasn’t been proved before the election, it surely will afterward.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Noah Adams is pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Elgin, Ill.

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## **Diverse group of Southern Baptist pastors sign Deep South racial justice statement**

by Diana Chandler

**MOBILE, AL (BP)** – Fifty-two years after the U.S. outlawed the importation of enslaved persons, the Clotilda docked in Mobile Bay with 110 West Africans purchased for \$9,000 in gold and valued at 20 times more in 1860 Alabama.

“The Deep South has a skilled passive resistance mechanism,” in the words of white Southern Baptist pastor Ed Litton, who helped write the regional “Deep South Joint Statement on the Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and Justice,” which was released today (Oct. 27) by three groups of diverse Christian pastors spanning two states.

“It took time for me to really see (the passive resistance) and get under conviction of what I needed to do and start to lead my church in that direction,” said the senior pastor of Redemption Church in the Mobile suburb of Saraland, Ala.

Litton, who noted the slave ship while discussing the city’s scarred past during an interview with Baptist Press, has worked for racial reconciliation for at least six years as a member of The Pledge Group of Mobile.

Since August, pastors and community leaders comprising the Pledge Group, One Charleston of Charleston, S.C., and Awaken Together of Montgomery, Ala., have worked on the statement aimed at spurring Bible-based racial reconciliation, multiracial conciliation and racial justice across the nation. Together, they represent decades of racial reconciliation efforts in the region.

“The reality is we have a steep history. We have a deep and painful scarred past, and we’re saying in spite of that, we believe God can heal us,” Litton told Baptist Press.

The statement noted that all three cities were prominent in the slave trade. Mobile is the last city where slaves were known to have been imported. The charred remains of the Clotilda were discovered in 2018 in the Mobile River. The ship’s captain had claimed he had scuttled and burned the ship in 1860 after the illegal delivery of enslaved persons.

The pastors and community leaders released the joint statement in a Zoom press conference today, announcing a [Change.org](https://www.change.org) petition that had garnered 85 of a desired 100 signatures at the time of this article’s publication. Leaders encouraged other grassroots groups to start additional petitions across the nation.

African American Southern Baptist Philip Pinckney, pastor of Radiant Church and a church planting associate with the Charleston Baptist Association (CBA), said he hopes the statement will encourage pastors in knowing that others within and outside the Southern Baptist Convention are concerned with their historical plight.

Principally in the statement, leaders “recognize and lament how the historic nature of our cities and region contributed to racial oppression and division in our country;” “realize that the problems we face are broad, the division caused by sin goes deep, and the hearts and souls of our neighbors remain profoundly and justly hurt by this sin;” and say they “believe that every person no matter what their color, culture, or creed is made in the image of God and because of that they have infinite worth, value, and dignity.”

The leaders, who come from several denominations, confessed that “our churches and our leaders have focused more on keeping things comfortable than on making things right;” and that the “Good News of Jesus mandates Christians to pursue a reconciliation that is centered on His redemptive work for humanity.” They committed to act in their own cities and in the region “to sacrificially love our neighbors of all backgrounds, to lay down our lives for one another, to work for justice to right past wrongs, and to rebuild our ancient cultural and relational ruins and raise up the age-old foundations (Isaiah 58:12) of trust, peace, and integrity....”

The statement comes as America prepares to elect a president and as the nation continues in months of racial strife following the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others. Leaders use the analogy of the Parable of the Good Samaritan in saying that to ignore the issues of racial reconciliation and justice is tantamount to passing by on the other side of the street as the injured bleed in pain.

Marshall Blalock, senior pastor of Charleston First Baptist Church, who was among those who collaborated on the statement, was unable to participate in the news conference because of a funeral at the church. But in an interview with Baptist Press, he noted that for more than 100 years, Charleston First’s membership included enslaved Blacks who worshiped in the church’s balcony without the comfort of seating. They had to stand, as white members sat in pews on the main floor of the church.

“One of the steps involved in racial reconciliation is to acknowledge the sin and the wrong,” Blalock said. “Now I didn’t personally put slaves in balconies, but the legacy of that lives in the pain that people even today still experience as a result both of slavery and Jim Crow, separation, separate but not equal, all those things that have been heartbreaking, divisive and the result of sin and hatred.

“But the Gospel calls us to reconciliation. Ephesians 2 joins the atonement of Christ and the breaking down of the barrier of the dividing wall of hostility,” Blalock said. “There’s no more theological truth in the Bible than the atonement of Christ. And the apostle Paul tells us the atonement of Christ calls us to break down the barrier of the dividing wall of hostility between people of different backgrounds.”

In addition to Litton and Pinckney, other Southern Baptists on the call included One Charleston Executive Director RaShan Frost, pastor of the Bridge Church in Charleston; Craig Tuck, a One Charleston leader and CBA director of missions; Neal Hughes, director of missions for the Montgomery Baptist Association and member of the SBC Executive Committee; Jay Wolf, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church of Montgomery; and former Alabama pastor Alan Cross, who now pastors Petaluma Baptist Church in Petaluma, Calif.

Leading the Zoom conference was Bishop Kyle Searcy, senior pastor of Fresh Anointing House of Worship in Montgomery and an international church leader.

The statement, printed in full below, is also online at [change.org](https://change.org).

## **Deep South Joint Statement on the Gospel, Racial Reconciliation, and Justice**

As a group of racially, ethnically, and politically diverse church leaders in the Deep South areas of Charleston, SC, Montgomery, AL, and Mobile, AL, we recognize and lament how the historic nature of our cities and region contributed to racial oppression and division in our country. Each of our cities were centers of the slave trade in the Antebellum South as well as racial oppression and division through Jim Crow segregation. However, we now see growing networks of Christian pastors and churches from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds loving, praying, and serving together in their communities as they work together to follow Jesus in the midst of continuing challenges. It is from these historic cities that we speak.

When the very public killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in 2020 brought the nation to a crisis, our cities were affected too. The pain, the fear, and the trauma in our communities revealed a division that many hoped had been relegated to the past. We realize that the problems we face are broad, the division caused by sin goes deep, and the hearts and souls of our neighbors remain profoundly and justly hurt by this sin. To ignore this, or hope it will go away, is to become the indifferent priest in the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

We believe that every person no matter what their color, culture, or creed is made in the image of God and because of that they have infinite worth, value, and dignity. As followers of Jesus, we believe every life is irreplaceable, unique, and valuable and that the pursuit of justice is absolutely essential as commanded by God throughout the Bible. Because of this, we believe that all followers of Jesus are called to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31), value others above ourselves, and look not to our own interests, but to the interest of others (Philippians 2:3-4), and be peacemakers in the midst of personal and societal conflict (Matthew 5:9). Therefore,

We Confess that, too often, our churches and our leaders have focused more on keeping things comfortable than on making things right. We confess that, too often, people of color in our cities have borne alone the burden of contending for racial unity and of educating people in the community regarding issues of race and justice.

We Believe that the good news of Jesus mandates Christians to pursue a reconciliation that is centered on his redemptive work for humanity. Furthermore, we believe that in this specific moment, God is calling the church to respond in a way that acknowledges past and current sin, proclaims the good news of Jesus as the only source for true reconciliation and peace, and commits to strengthening our discipleship structures in order to bring about generational change.

We Commit to act locally in our own cities and region to sacrificially love our neighbors of all backgrounds, to lay down our lives for one another, to work for justice to right past wrongs, and to rebuild our ancient cultural and relational ruins and raise up the age-old foundations

(Isaiah 58:12) of trust, peace, and integrity so that the church would be unified in love and concern for each member and for our communities regardless of race, ethnicity, cultural background, economic status, or zip code and so the church can give a witness to the watching world of the justice, love, right actions, and humility that should accompany followers of Jesus (Micah 6:8). We Invite Christians across the South and across America to join us in this endeavor to “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24) and to bring healing and unity to our long-standing divisions.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' senior writer.

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