



Newsjournal of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan

Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

September 2019
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Re | Envision God's Desire

By Sue Hodnett

PLYMOUTH, MI – This September we commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the France Brown State Mission Offering. In November of 1978 the Executive Board of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) voted to name the state missions offering after Frances E. Brown in honor of her twenty years of service to Michigan Baptists. The “Michigan Baptist Advocate” dated November 12, 1978 summarized the service of Frances Brown. “Miss Frances Brown visited in associations and churches giving encouragement and challenges to reach out and touch the lives of people here in Michigan and around the world. Her determination to speak out for missions, her love of everyone and her commitment to work faithfully in missions is an inspiration to us all. Missions was Frances’ heartbeat.”

Each Fall, Michigan Baptists celebrate the work of missions in our state when we give to the state mission offering. The giving has grown from \$28,518 in 1979 (the first offering) to almost 105,000 in 2006. The offering has only exceeded the \$100,000 goal two times in its history. We are praying that in 2019, the 40th Anniversary of the offering, we will see our goal reached and exceeded. September 8-15 is our week of emphasis for this special offering and prayer for Michigan missions. The goal for this year’s offering is \$100,000. This year’s offering theme is “Re-Envision, God’s Desire”. 100% of the offering goes to fund special mission project around our state in the area of Strengthening & Starting Churches, Disaster Relief, Women’s Ministry/WMU, and Bambi Lake Camp.

Will you join us in prayer and in giving as we seek to reach the lost in Michigan for Christ through special mission projects?

The BSCM is providing a wealth of resources to help Michigan churches promote the special offering. Churches can find posters, flyers, and bulletin inserts to share with their members the areas of need, and how they can support the offering. The state convention is also providing three videos for download. Two of the videos tell the stories of Michigan churches who had gone into decline, but then made a comeback. The third video is an overview of the offering explaining the (Re-Envision” theme and the areas of impact. Finally, there is a podcast story sharing the ups and downs of a Michigan church over 50 years of its life. The podcast is an excellent story to share by social media. Go to bscm.org/smo to order free posters, prayer guides, and offering envelopes to promote the offering in your church. There are also additional information and free downloadable for resources such as flyers, bulletin inserts, videos, and audio podcasts.

Thank you, Michigan Baptist, for your support over the years and for what you will give this year to accomplish God’s Mission here in our great churches across our state. In closing, Miss Frances’ favorite verse, “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Phil 1:3-6

A Comeback Story

By Staff

PLYMOUTH, MI – “It was sad. One day you go from pulling into a parking lot where nobody knows where to go, to “Oh, you can sit anywhere you want.” When Jimmie Nelson first visited First Baptist Church of Swartz Creek in the late 70’s, there were hundreds showing up on Sunday. But several years later, the church was barely keeping the doors open. It’s the story of many Southern Baptist churches, plateaued or in decline. Scores of churches across North America close for good every week.

The low point at First Baptist was when God began to call Jimmie Nelson to pastor the church. It was the high point in Nelson’s personal life. Larry Gatlin wanted him to move to Nashville and write songs for him. To hear more about the Comeback Story of First Baptist Swartz Creek, visit bscm.org/smopodcast for a podcast about their journey.

Swartz Creek is one of three stories of churches that came back from a low point. It’s part of the emphasis of the Frances Brown State Mission Offering. This year’s goal is \$100,000, and a portion of the offering will go to strengthening churches like First Baptist. The week of prayer for the offering is September 8th-15th. For more information and resources, go to bscm.org/smo.

The Center of God's Will

By Tom Bradley

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – Twenty-plus years ago Merri and I planted a church on the northwest side of Grand Rapids, called Westwood Community Church. It began in the urban northwest, but a facility opened in the suburb westside, so we took the opportunity to relocate there. Over a number of years, the ministry established itself, we paid off our building and served the community, sharing the gospel. Likewise, Merri and I settled, purchased a home and raised our two sons while continuing to serve at Westwood. We also worked with a team to plant other churches. Through that network, a number of churches were planted. Merri and I became grandparents, and we continued to serve at Westwood. But then something happened that would ultimately change everything.

Through the influence of our Urban Church Planting Teams and community connections, I began seeing the deep needs in the Urban westside of Grand Rapids. By MapQuest it is only about three and a half miles, but in the distance of three miles, a whole different world emerged to me, defined by beauty and brokenness. The more we served here, the more we felt called to join our urban church planting team CrossWinds, and add a westside congregation.

It has been two years since we made that decision, and it is difficult to summarize the journey in a short article. We left our suburb ministry, we began serving in the urban setting, we sold our house and moved to the city, and are coming up on a year since we have launched our Sunday morning service. Here are some of the exciting things I love and also find challenging.

We are Together

Many people in my neighborhood don't have cars. As a result, I see them on a regular basis. There are single moms, their boyfriends, neighborhood teens, and my neighbors. I see them multiple times a week and seek to speak Jesus into their lives.

Brokenness

A young couple, homeless with baby in December, not knowing where they were going to sleep that night in below zero temperatures.

A neighbor with PTSD from combat struggling with forgiveness.

A homeless teen living with a relative who has a serious drinking problem.

One attendee stabbing another neighborhood friend multiple times.

And on and on in brokenness.

Beauty

A group of neighborhood teens who come without any relatives, set up, help run the church service, and afterwards break down. Young men (bigger than me) who are eagerly welcoming

an older man speak into their lives. Merri reading the Bible with neighborhood ladies who know virtually nothing about Jesus, church, or anything related to that.

And for all these things we are thankful to be a part of it.

The prospect of leaving much that was familiar to us, was hard to envision. Many of my friends are at the stage where they are finishing, not starting major life projects. The call was too compelling though, and we always felt that the best place to be, no matter where that was, was the center of God's will.

Tom Bradley and Merri are North American Mission Board missionaries in Grand Rapids Michigan. They have been involved in Church Planting for over 25 years. They have 2 children and four grandchildren and are completing the Second year of their adventure at CrossWinds West Side. Follow their community on FB at [facebook.com/cwindswestside](https://www.facebook.com/cwindswestside)

False Advertising

By Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – It seems as though almost every day someone is claiming fantastic benefits from using their product, procedure or following a prescribed practice. Everything from simple dietary supplements to radical blood cleansing processes are being touted as the physical, mental and spiritual cure-alls of the world.

I recently read an article that was quoting from a previous article that was written decades past. It struck me as rather bizarre. Charles B. Loftin, vice president of San Antonio College of Chiropractors, was quoted in an AP item as saying: “Had ex-Kaiser Wilhelm received chiropractic adjustments for whatever abnormal conditions from which he was suffering, the First World War would have been averted.” Right, and if Saddam Hussein had better dental care the invasion of Iraq would have been unnecessary! If the radical Muslim terrorist of the world had access to better hair care products, then we would not be in the mess we’re in right now. Well, at least they would look better. Now before you go off on me about chiropractors and their benefit to healthcare in America, just know that chiropractors provide a wonderful and needed service. On many occasions, they have been of great benefit to me personally, and I believe they are legitimate health care providers.

The point I am making is that we generally exaggerate the positive, and gloss over the negative when we want someone to buy into our way of thinking or to win an argument. It is human nature to want to be right and have others agree with you, but it is wrong to stretch the truth or lie, no matter what your motive. The ends do not justify the means. It is still wrong to do that which is wrong no matter what your motive or desired results.

I am afraid that most who are promoting the new “cure-alls for what ails us” are doing so for one reason. Money. And what is worse is that millions of Americans are following these “Pied Pipers of Promise” into physical and financial ruin. They are taking advantage of mankind’s hope for health and prosperity and using the naiveté of the masses to deceive and manipulate, never disclosing the dangers and damage they can cause.

I sure am glad that our Lord didn’t use the tactics of these modern-day hucksters. He was straightforward and open about what it would mean to be a “follower” of His. No hidden agendas. No undisclosed problems. No fine print. Everything was and is in big bold letters, “Take up your cross and follow me.” That’s it! He doesn’t want just part of us, He wants all of us. He wants our lives. Total, complete surrender. In return He truly is “the cure all for what ails us.” And what is even better is that what He offers really works. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, **If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.**" (Matthew 16:24 KJV)

Register to Ramp-It-Up

By Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – Summer is over, and it is time to return to the routine, or is it? Would you like to ramp things up at the church? Would you enjoy seeing some positive changes this next season? Generous contributors? More volunteers? Aspirations turned into actions?

Three articles in this issue of the Baptist Beacon may help rev-up the future, and three invitations to which you should respond quickly, may offer some practical solutions. Please, locate the links to September Baptist Beacon articles and register for September's online meetings if you want to ramp things up at church.

Reading the following three articles below will offer a glimpse of September's online meetings:

1. [Generosity Inspire](#)
2. [Volunteers Increased](#)
3. [Mission Focus Intensified](#)

Register below for a time slot of these convenient online meetings. The morning and evening meeting are identical, so you need only to register for one time slot for each subject: generosity, volunteer and mission focus. Invite your church leaders to join the meeting too. Select the time slot that best fits your schedule. During the one-hour, online meeting you will create your customized action steps that will help you collaborate with others in your context.

Generosity

Inspiring generosity increases when people see their personal contributions solve big problems. Helping others see the epic influence of financial contributions through the local church has never been as easy as it is now. Vibrant images and dramatic stories can be shared within the church community from sources around the world. When people see giving at the local church helps others over the globe, generosity increases, locally and globally. People will connect their personal debit cards and checking accounts to the good deeds of God's Kingdom when they see meaningful causes in real-time that tug at their hearts and minds.

Generosity Zoom Discussion Registration

Wednesday, September 11 – REGISTER for one time slot

- 9-10 AM Morning
(<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/87d94ed4018720164ac87b605f06faf5>)
- 9-10 PM Evening
(<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/9f7d04ace9166a368c34be5db4a05ad8>)

Volunteers

Increasing volunteerism is about raising the bar, not lowering it. There are two ways to enlist volunteers. Sadly, too many volunteers are enlisted with the following discouraging words, "Would you fill this spot for us? Anyone can do it. There is little to no preparation. If you don't do

it, we won't have anyone else to ask. In fact, we just may quit doing it. I need a quick answer. What do you say?" A better invitation to help sounds like this, "I've been meeting and praying with others over a role in the church that impacts people's lives. You came to our minds. I would love to sit down with you at a convenient time for you. I would like to describe the value of this ministry. I want to invite you to dream with us about the possible outcomes. I want you to know why we believe you're a great fit for the role. I will give you time to reflect and pray over the invitation after our conversation. We will orient and train you for this important ministry if you agree to serve. When may I meet with you?"

Volunteer Zoom Discussion Registration

Wednesday, September 18 – REGISTER for one time slot

- 9-10 AM Morning
(<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/91a90fdf863774547510d14dfea9e911>)
- 9-10 PM Evening
(<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/b0bf48f58ce9900a4ac87b605f06faf5>)

Mission Focus

Some churches look like cruise ships with something for everyone: entertainment shows, casinos, 24-hour restaurants, pools, personal-massages, deckchairs, gyms, shoreline tours, something for everyone and everyone doing their own thing. However, the most effective churches permit activities, spending and people's time to be invested in the narrow, well-expressed mission focus of the church. Shouldn't churches be more designed as rescue watercraft that cruise waterways with well-trained crews ready to save lives? Intensifying mission focus is about less not more. I observe the most effective ministries achieving more with less. Less words. Less calendared activities. Less busyness. More intensity. More precision with their resources. More depth achieved by sharpening the tip of the mission focus.

Mission Focus Zoom Discussion Registration

Wednesday, September 25 – REGISTER for one time slot

- 9-10 AM Morning
(<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/04480fba464c4d387c24e00bf0acd2b8>)
- 9-10 PM Evening
(<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/03a3208afaa9acac7510d14dfea9e911>)

I look forward to seeing your face and hearing your voice on my laptop during September's upcoming, online LIVE meetings where we will interact with others from around the region.

If you have questions about the ZOOM.US meeting you may call my ministry assistant, Andrew Parsons, Monday through Thursday during normal business hours at (810) 714-1907 or send Andrew an email at andrew@bscm.org – he is resourceful and helpful

Leaders are Learners: Church Equipping Conference

By Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – The Church Equipping Conference is September 28 at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Roseville. We design it to inspire, encourage and equip church leaders for their areas of ministry. What benefit does the CEC offer you and your church?

The most obvious reason is practical ministry training

A phrase I heard years ago still echoes in my head: “Leaders are learners.” It’s absolutely true! It’s hard to lead beyond where you are. Our workshop presenters excel in their areas of ministry. They are practitioners who are able to share best practices with us. At the CEC, you will encounter fresh and innovative ideas to use in your ministry. It will help you grow as a ministry leader!

It affirms those who serve

The unsung heroes of churches are people just like you. You make ministry that matters happen. Imagine pulling into church this Sunday and the grass has not been mowed, the building has not been cleaned, and the preschool teachers are nowhere to be found. You would notice immediately - you would notice because things like this rarely happen. Behind the scenes, volunteers are serving the church in more ways that can be counted: teachers are preparing, deacons are ministering, musicians are practicing, and believers are sharing Christ through their words and actions in countless, untold ways. The CEC is an incredible opportunity to encourage, inspire and affirm God’s people for ministry that matters to the Kingdom!

See the power of partnership vividly displayed

Partnership is in our DNA as Michigan Baptists. We know that our impact for Christ is greater together. The CEC happens because Michigan Baptist churches of every size and make-up give through the Cooperative Program. Our collective resources allow us to send missionaries, train ministers, start churches and equip believers in our own state through events like the CEC. Presenters from LifeWay, the North American Mission Board, Women’s Missionary Union, GateWay Seminary, other state conventions and our own will be with us. Together, we are stronger. Our partnership exists to advance God’s Kingdom and it will be on full display at the CEC.

Strengthen teamwork in your church

Sundays are busy for the men and women who serve as volunteers in our churches. They arrive earlier and stay later than everyone else. Watch them and you will see them preparing spaces and gathering materials before services and cleaning up after. It’s easy to be so focused on the task at hand that silos can form. It can be a challenge to connect meaningfully with leaders in other areas of ministry. Sharing time together getting to and from the conference,

during breaks and lunch, and talking about the CEC after gives your team the opportunity to form deeper relationships with each other. It's a great way to build your church's ministry team.

Equip potential leaders

It's important that we create the conditions for people to succeed when we ask them to serve. Most of our churches have areas where they need more people to serve. People are willing to do so, but they need and want training before they begin. Lack of meaningful training keeps people from volunteering. The CEC is an excellent opportunity to provide that training.

Start discussions for the future

Next step Ideas will abound at the CEC. It could be that God will speak to you and your church about new areas of ministry or new ways of doing current ministry. It just might just be the catalyst for ministries that advance God's Kingdom through your church for His glory!

For more information or to register for the Church Equipping Conference, visit bscm.org/cec.

Strength in Joy

By Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Do you wake up in the morning and say, “I choose joy”? I don’t. I should, of course, but being joyful is not on the top of my list in the morning. In a culture that thrives on the misfortunes of others, and is constantly broadcasting sadness and tragedy, we need the power and presence of joy.

James 1:2-4 says “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Seriously? I should be full of joy when circumstances come against me? My joy should increase as pressures mount? This sounds completely crazy and counterintuitive. My self-nature is not wired this way! Joy is a spiritual response grounded in faith. One of my favorite sayings is, “People make choices and choices make people”.

Choosing joy is a great example of this. When you choose joy in the face of struggle you are choosing hope, faith, and strength. You are choosing reliance on Christ, and His power and protection instead of your own. You are choosing to see with His eyes and perspective instead of your own dimly lit eyesight. By choosing joy, you are allowing Christ to form you more and more into His image! When we choose fear we are saying “yes” to depression, discouragement, anxiety, apprehension, unbelief, disobedience and on and on. This usually means we made a choice to react out of selfishness and pride. We chose a fleshly reaction grounded in unbelief. Unbelief is a virus capable major life-changing damage.

There have been times in my life when unbelief crept in and began to wreak havoc on my belief system (God’s Word) and my relationship with Christ. Questions began to play on repeat in my mind - if God really cares why is this happening? - Is this all there is? - I’ve given my life to you God and this is my reward? Sound familiar? Do you hear a theme in this whining? Selfishness. Me, me, me! Nevertheless, God has always been gracious to forgive my sinful selfishness and remind me of His faithfulness even in the middle of my faithlessness.

I have discovered when I reflect on the joy of my salvation, the joy of my calling, the joy of kingdom ministry, the joy of marriage and family, the joy of friends and the faithfulness of God, unbelief disappears, the virus is destroyed. My heart changes, my faith enlarges, and I can face any circumstance because the “joy of the Lord is my strength!”.

On a final thought, I have also discovered joy is contagious. Visible joy in difficult times will always provoke questions from those around us. How can you be so optimistic? Why aren’t you a basket case right now? How can you keep going? The answer is simple - “I choose joy!”.

Volunteers Increased

By Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – If you already read my column “Register to Ramp-It-Up” you can skip down to paragraph number two.

Increasing volunteerism is about raising the bar, not lowering it. There are two ways to enlist volunteers. Sadly, too many volunteers are enlisted with the following discouraging words, “Would you fill this spot for us? Anyone can do it. There is little to no preparation. If you don’t do it, we won’t have anyone else to ask. In fact, we just may quit doing it. I need a quick answer. What do you say?” A better invitation to help sounds like this, “I’ve been meeting and praying with others over a role in the church that impacts people’s lives. You came to our minds. I would love to sit down with you at a convenient time for you. I would like to describe the value of this ministry. I want to invite you to dream with us about the possible outcomes. I want you to know why we believe you’re a great fit for the role. I will give you time to reflect and pray over the invitation after our conversation. We will orient and train you for this important ministry if you agree to serve. When may I meet with you?”

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- 9-10 PM Evening
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After I served in my first church as a pastor, I implemented what I thought was a very helpful practice in subsequent churches. Except for very few roles, it was stated that volunteer service was for a one-year term. People often think that enlistment to a volunteer role is for a lifetime because many churches do not train-up new leaders and allow people to serve in one role for decades. Recently, a pastor from a very effective and large church in the south explained that even the elders of the church where he leads, are annually elected to 7-consecutive-renewable-terms-of-service. Meaning that each year, no one assumes continual service. I like his idea and wish I would have implemented that one, too.

Some refer to this annual habit as clearing the board. I like to think of it as helping people to find their most effective place of service. This practice allows ineffective leaders to be set aside after one-year of trying without success. It also allows faithful servants to exit gracefully when life’s demands create conditions where someone needs to step away from a role or ministry. Before you think of me as harsh, keep in mind that an ineffective volunteer hurts just those she is not leading effectively, she hurts herself by not finding her correct place of service, and she keeps the effective leader away from the role she should rightfully hold.

Here is my checklist I work through when I consider enlisting others to serve through the church. These six topics will be a part of our discussion on September 18 at 9 AM or 9 PM.

Character

Is the person trustworthy and honorable in all that they do in life? Does this person display consistent, godly attitudes during the rough times of life? Does this person bring out the best or worst in others?

Calling

When this person speaks about their life outside of church, do I get the sense they are on mission with God at work, in their neighborhood and among friends? Is there a fire in their belly to serve the Lord?

Competency

Am I comfortable enlisting humble people who are willing to learn? Churches fail many volunteers by not orienting them or training them to serve. Does your church provide training for teachers, caregivers, and financial leaders? A church who has difficulty enlisting volunteers is usually weak at training, supervising and thanking their volunteers.

Commitment

Does the person I am considering have a proven track record of finishing well in whatever they undertake? Do I get the sense they serve others to benefit others or do alarm bells go-off and it appears this person is more interested in making a name for themselves? I need to be convinced the person serves to bring glory to God.

Chemistry

Often things come down to the simplicity of kindergarten. Does the person I think will make an effective volunteer, play and work well with others? At gatherings, do people surround them and seek out their company and conversation? If so, that person will be an effective influence.

Confirmation

Before I call someone to have a conversation about service in church, I ask two or three trusted advisors what they think of the person. I ask them, "Would you enjoy working with them?" I look them in the eye and say, "Is there anything I should know about the person before we entrust them with a ministry role in the church?"

If you want to learn more about increasing volunteers, please click on the link above to register for a morning or evening discussion on "Volunteers Increased" on September 18. There is much more to discuss. On 9/18, I will point you toward helpful resources that will help you go further. By the time you finish our one-hour, online discussion you will have some personalized action steps for your church and its future.

If you have questions about the ZOOM.US meeting you may call my ministry assistant, Andrew Parsons, Monday through Thursday during normal business hours at (810) 714-1907 or send Andrew an email at andrew@bscm.org – see you online in September.

Mission Focus Intensified

By Tony Lynn

If you already read my column “Register to Ramp-It-Up” you can skip down to paragraph number two.

Some churches look like cruise ships with something for everyone: entertainment shows, casinos, 24-hour restaurants, pools, personal-massages, deckchairs, gyms, shoreline tours, something for everyone and everyone doing their own thing. However, the most effective churches permit activities, spending and people’s time to be invested in the narrow, well-expressed mission focus of the church. Shouldn’t churches be more designed as rescue watercraft that cruise waterways with well-trained crews ready to save lives? Intensifying mission focus is about less not more. I observe the most effective ministries achieving more with less. Less words. Less calendared activities. Less busyness. More intensity. More precision with their resources. More depth achieved by sharpening the tip of the mission focus.

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As a teenager, I received a set of bow and arrows as a gift. Three of the arrows had blunted tips made of soft rubber. They were intended as starter arrows. They did not penetrate wood or straw bales. They simply made a thud sound then dropped to the ground after they hit the intended surface. As you can already imagine my friends and I enjoyed shooting the blunted tipped arrows at one another. We knew that was not the intended purpose of the rubber tipped arrows. Paper notices within the packaging warned us not to shoot at others.

Yet, can you envision the difference if we would have shot the sharpened, metal tipped arrows at one another? Those arrows flew well, they hit the intended targets and they penetrated deep into the surface. Isn’t that what we desire of our churches’ mission focus. Wouldn’t it do the members of your church and you well to see the mission focus penetrating the community and the lives of yet unbelieving people around you? We do not want to see people hurt with arrows jutting out of their flesh, but you would love to see the transforming power of the good news of Christ change lives.

In the past, church ministries have become chronically weakened by striving unsuccessfully to completely fill-out two popular templates for church. First, some believe every church must be like the other churches within the community. Every congregation must offer an incredible ministry when it comes to five areas: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and mission.

Programs are set-up that stumble along because there are too few and poorly trained servants trying to fill the gap and feeling guilty for failing in their tasks. That goal is simply not reasonable nor encouraging. Second, some churches believe the best way to grow a church is to please every age group by thinly spreading out the resources of people, calendar dates, facilities and funds so that no one is left out. Every ministry receives a meager portion. However, those churches, in both cases, come to realize that their mission focus is too broad, too dull and too soft. There is no real spiritual penetration in the lives of early believers and the spiritually lost in the community. Spreading the church too thin creates a thud, and everything becomes mundane with no anticipation of anything great happening.

You can prepare to discuss more on this subject, on September 25, by reflecting on a couple of questions. What are the strengths within the people who are in the church? What are the real, obvious needs of those around you? What will it take and who needs to be involved to transform the most immediate need within your larger community?

Today, there is a healthy way to look at your church's future. We will talk with you about these healthy elements on September 25 at 9 AM or 9 PM. Please, click on the link above to register for a morning or evening discussion on "Mission Focus Intensified." There is much more to discuss. I will point you toward helpful resources that will help you go further with those around you serving the Lord. By the time you finish our one-hour, online discussion you will have some personalized action steps for your church and its future.

If you have questions about the ZOOM.US meeting you may call my ministry assistant, Andrew Parsons, Monday through Thursday during normal business hours at (810) 714-1907 or send Andrew an email at andrew@bscm.org – see you online in September.

Generosity Inspired

By Tony Lynn

If you already read my column “Register to Ramp-It-Up” you can skip down to paragraph number two.

Inspiring generosity increases when people see their personal contributions solve big problems. Helping others see the epic influence of financial contributions through the local church has never been as easy as it is now. Vibrant images and dramatic stories can be shared within the church community from sources around the world. When people see giving at the local church helps others over the globe generosity increases, locally and globally. People will connect their personal debit cards and checking accounts to the good deeds of God’s Kingdom when they see meaningful causes in real-time that tug at their hearts and minds.

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Clear

Giving is better when people know why they are asked to contribute. When people understand funds are used in meaningful ways in their local church, their region and throughout the world they become enthusiastic investment partners. During September’s meetings on “Generosity” I will highlight some of the seven easy-to-find and easy-to-use videos, images and stories that will inspire generous giving. I will explain how others are using these resources to bring-up the passion for giving within their congregations. If the church, you attend or lead, contributes to any of the following offerings there are many ways to inspire generosity:

1. Cooperative Program
2. International Missions Offering
3. North American Missions Offering
4. State Missions Offering
5. World Hunger Offering
6. Local association of churches
7. Baptist Global Response

Convenient

Generosity in the church is better when it is convenient. Have you noticed that people pay more often with debit cards? Cash and checkbooks are rarely seen at the stores, restaurants and gas stations. Is it possible those participating in your church have funds in the bank account, but cannot easily access their funds? There are services and smartphone apps that make church contributions convenient. Seventy percent of all Americans now own smartphones. Banks will set-up regular contributions transferring funds from a checking account to a church's account with the account owner's instructions. Are you offering multiple pathways to give?

Celebrated

The power of sincere gratitude is just as overwhelming as it has ever been. Hosting an annual "Generosity Banquet" or highlighting the impact of generosity, one or two times a month, from the podium will create a culture of generosity in the church. The annual or regular celebrations could catapult people's hearts toward greater charity for future endeavors within the church. Imagine a wife and mother expressing her gratitude to the congregation by saying, "I want to thank you for babysitting my two children after school until I returned home from work for six weeks and for paying our month's utility bills while my husband recovered from an injury sustained at work." Or envision the impact of the people who were baptized the previous year standing shoulder-to-shoulder before the congregation. There are many ways to display the outcomes of regular giving within a faith-community.

Please, click on the link above to register for a morning or evening discussion on "Generosity" on September 11. There is much more to discuss. On 9/11, I will point you toward helpful resources that will help you go further with those around you serving the Lord. By the time you finish our one-hour, online discussion you will have some personalized action steps for your church and its future.

If you have questions about the ZOOM.US meeting you may call my ministry assistant, Andrew Parsons, Monday through Thursday during normal business hours at (810) 714-1907 or send Andrew an email at andrew@bscm.org – see you online in September.

Your state convention helps churches reach your state and our world for Christ

By Dr. Paul Chitwood – President, International Mission Board

My first international mission trip took place on a farm in central Kentucky. As a new pastor in the community, I found myself interacting often with migrant workers from Central and South America. And I soon realized that most were spiritually lost. From conversations with farmers, I learned many of them were as concerned as I was about the eternal state of the souls of these (mostly) men who were so far away from their homes and families. As we began to pull together churches in our association and piece together a plan to begin a migrant ministry, we found an organization ready and eager to help us: our Baptist state convention. With the assistance of our state convention staff, we were soon seeing people from all over Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua come to Christ — though we never left Kentucky.

Ministries in our 41 Southern Baptist state conventions vary from state to state, but their mission is the same: help churches reach their state and our world for Christ. As we enter the fall of the year, most of our state conventions are promoting their annual state mission offering to support these vital ministries. My family will be giving to support the work in our state. As grateful and enthusiastic as I am for Southern Baptists' support of international missions, I'm also thankful for and supportive of the ministry and mission work of our state conventions.

From my past experience as a pastor and state mission leader, I have seen firsthand the missional impact of state convention ministries. Where I served in Kentucky, more than 100 missionaries in the state receive varying levels of support for their work. Ministries to refugees, migrants, and ethnic minorities are often led or assisted by state convention team members and resources. State conventions help facilitate church planting, church strengthening and revitalization efforts, as well as provide evangelism training and coordinate Disaster Relief ministry. In many states, collegiate work is led by the state convention and support is also provided for the ministry of local Baptist associations.

One of our adopted daughters was rescued and kept safe by our state convention's orphan and foster care ministry before she came into our family. The lives of unborn children are being saved by crisis pregnancy centers that are often funded, in part, by the state convention. Several state conventions are actively involved in lobbying efforts for legislation that will protect unborn children from the horror of abortion.

Many state conventions provide training and funding for prison ministries, through which inmates are hearing the gospel, trusting Christ, and being baptized by local churches. Women in the adult entertainment industry are being shown pathways to freedom and salvation, and churches are equipped for ministry to the homeless and those suffering addiction. Across America, people are finding new life in Christ as churches work together through their state convention ministries. In addition to your church's Cooperative Program support, your annual state mission offering is an opportunity for Great Commission and Great Commandment giving. Will you join my family and be a part of what God is doing through these ministries by giving through your state mission offering this year?

Why Baptism Sunday?

By J.D. Greear

EDITOR'S NOTE: J.D. Greear is president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of The Summit Church in the Raleigh-Durham, N.C., area. Baptist Press will be releasing a series of columns leading up to Sept. 8, which is Baptism Day in the SBC. For resources, go to namb.net/baptism-sunday-resources.

DURHAM, N.C. (BP) – For several years now, I have been greatly burdened by the declining number of baptisms across the Southern Baptist Convention. I believe the baptism numbers serve as one of the best indicators of evangelism in our churches. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and that means that proclaiming the Gospel is the core of who we are -- not only as Southern Baptists, but most importantly, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

That's why I'm challenging every Southern Baptist church to call for baptisms in services on Sept. 8th, the date our SBC Executive Committee has designated as "Baptism Day" on the SBC Calendar.

Baptism Sunday will be an opportunity for thousands of people in our churches to take their step of obedience and faith. Many of them already know they should be baptized, and you can schedule baptism celebrations in advance. Other people in your churches may decide on Sept. 8th that God is calling them to those same baptismal waters.

I know that conversations about immediate-response baptism services tend to draw some objections, many of which are grounded in healthy concern about encouraging insincere professions of faith. Trust me, I understand the concerns: I have seen dangerous and irresponsible calls for spontaneous baptisms. God forbid that we ever declare someone "saved" when they aren't. Not only does this give them false assurance, but it also makes them that much more immune to future calls to repent and believe.

Our fear of extending these invitations wrongly, though, should never make us shy away from making the invitations at all. After all, every single baptism recorded in the New Testament, without exception, is spontaneous and immediate. For New Testament believers, the pattern was alarmingly simple: Believe, confess, get baptized. There was never a gap between when a person trusted Christ and when that person was baptized. Not one.

This follows the example of Jesus' Great Commission: "Make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is a believer's first act of discipleship, a step of obedience that stands as a witness that we belong to Christ.

Baptism is like the wedding ring of salvation. I put on my wedding ring at the moment I decided to publicly declare my commitment to my wife. Putting on the ring did not make me married. I am no more married when I wear my ring than when I don't. But the demonstration of my

commitment to my wife that the ring represents was a crucial first step in marriage. Had I refused to do it, my wife would have had reason to question my intentions.

In the same way, baptism is an outward symbol of an inward covenant we've made in response to Jesus' offer of salvation.

Every one of our churches ought to do everything in its power to ensure that everyone who comes forward to be baptized understands the Gospel and the significance of what they are doing. Just because the decision is more immediate doesn't mean it should be hasty or sloppy. During baptism services at our church, for instance, we individually counsel every person who comes forward. Those conversations take time -- often extending into the next service -- and we always end up turning some people away. But that moment is important, because it starts a conversation about what it means to follow Jesus.

Baptism is of tremendous importance, but we need to keep the biblical order in mind: Baptism is the catalyst to spiritual maturity, not the sign of having attained it.

When we invite people to be baptized, we are calling them to make a decision. That's exactly what so many of our people need. They come to our churches as consumers, going along with Jesus but never deciding for Him.

This is personal for me. My dad became a Christian because he responded to an invitation in the middle of a church service. During the worship service, he didn't think he needed to change. He thought everything was fine. But then one day the pastor called for a decision. It was one of those traditional invitations, too -- the kind where they sing 58 stanzas of "Just As I Am." Well, for my dad, that was the moment the Holy Spirit came after him. He knew in that moment that he had to make a decision. When he let go of the pew and walked forward, his life changed.

Several years ago, our church chose to hold our first baptism service after we noticed the biblical pattern of spontaneous baptisms while preaching through a series in the book of Acts. Starting with that service, we saw three times more people choose to be baptized that year than we'd ever seen! I believe that's because our church had been faithful in sharing the Gospel, and we chose to be faithful in calling for a response to that good news.

I've been encouraged by the many stories of faithful evangelism in our denomination through initiatives like "Who's Your One," and I believe God is preparing a harvest of souls. Let's faithfully call them to respond by publicly declaring faith through baptism!

For resources, go to namb.net/baptism-sunday-resources.

Multisite church identification shift can help strengthen SBC ties

By Aaron Earls and Carol Pipes

NASHVILLE, TN – The Southern Baptist Convention is built upon relationships between local churches, associations, state conventions and national entities. A new change to church tracking could help strengthen those relationships and provide more information to better reach communities with the gospel.

A growing trend in the Southern Baptist Convention is the multisite church—a single church that meets in multiple locations. Until now the SBC has not addressed this trend in the way the convention tracks congregations.

“We know of at least 500 multisite campuses of SBC churches based on what’s been reported in the Annual Church Profile survey,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “However, we know more exist but haven’t been counted.”

As of now, a multisite campus could meet in one area of a local community and other churches or the local association might have no idea, McConnell said. He hopes that will change soon. Beginning immediately, campuses of multisite churches will be given a unique SBC ID number. Currently, more than 51,000 congregations have an SBC ID number.

This shift will enable local associations to directly contact campus pastors in their area to better engage them. It can also encourage those local campuses to connect with other churches and pastors around them.

Randy Davis, executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, believes the change will benefit state and local leaders in a number of ways. “Making sure the campuses in a multisite situation are counted is a good mechanism for tracking both progress and needs,” he said.

For Davis, the growth of healthy campuses of multisite churches is similar to previous times when churches may have “‘mission sites’ or ‘preaching points.’ It all is accomplishing gospel advancement,” he said.

Each campus having its own unique identification number will also help convention leaders and entities to see geographically where Southern Baptists are gathering, worshiping and serving. It will particularly benefit the North American Mission Board in church planting strategy, according to Kevin Ezell, president of NAMB, who expressed gratitude toward LifeWay and state convention partners for making the tracking change possible.

“Currently, we can’t tell where church campuses are located unless we contact each church in the area and ask,” Ezell said. “This addition will be a great enhancement to us as we track the presence of gospel congregations throughout North America.”

Each campus having a unique ID will also enable SBC entities to better evaluate the long-term health and impact of those campuses.

“Assigning an ID number to each campus of a multisite church would allow us to track the life cycles of those campuses,” McConnell said.

A church with multiple campuses can contact their state convention and request an SBC ID number for each campus. The state convention will create a new campus organization in SBCWorkspace (the database of SBC congregations) and LifeWay will assign the SBC ID to that record.

While this change will grant the SBC more information, according to McConnell, it will not require changing the definition of a church or church-type mission in the Annual Church Profile.

McConnell said churches will still complete one ACP survey regardless of how many campuses they have. The ACP is a statistical survey of SBC congregations compiled each year by LifeWay in cooperation with Baptist state conventions.

It will also not impact the number of messengers each church can send to the SBC annual meeting. Those allotments will still be determined by the size of the church as a whole. Individual campuses will not be able to send messengers separately, according to Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee.

“Our missional vision is to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the United States and around the world,” Floyd said.

“Tracking multisite campuses will help us have a better grasp of where Southern Baptists are already shining as lights of the Gospel so we can plan expansion and growth in each community more strategically. It will not in any way change messenger representation at our annual meetings.”

In the new tracking method, campuses are defined as “an additional site or location where a congregation meets for worship, discipleship, fellowship, evangelism, and ministry. This is not an additional worship service or venue at the original location, but an ongoing expression of the congregation in a different community or another part of the local community. A campus is not autonomous but exists under the authority of the entire multisite congregation.”

Many may see the change in data collection as insignificant, but it can have far reaching implications, according to McConnell.

“At the end of the day, yes, it is just a number,” he said. “But it does give us a better view of where Southern Baptists are meeting and hopefully will strengthen the ties between churches within our convention.”

NAMB announces 'Replanter of the Year'

By Brandon Elrod

ALPHARETTA, GA (BP) – The words cut deep for Sam Calhoun who, at the time, pastored Windsor Hills Community Church in La Mesa, Calif.

A young African American man, who attended a block party the church organized to reach young people in their community, made the following comment: "I don't come here because this is a white church." Calhoun recalled the young man making that statement when asked why he would not attend church at Windsor Hills.

The demographics of the surrounding community had changed over the decades, and the church had not done a good job of reaching the diverse groups of people who created the shift.

"I knew what the church looked like back then," Calhoun said. "And it wasn't the neighborhood."

Today, more than 10 years later, Windsor Hills -- now called The Hill Church -- is back from the brink of collapse. On Aug. 27, during its annual Replant Summit, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) awarded Calhoun its inaugural Billy Heriford Replanter of the Year award for the turnaround the church experienced.

"When this church was started in the '50s," said Calhoun, "they were reaching a lot of young families here. They had a great youth group, great music. They had all the classrooms full. Everybody in town knew it as 'that church on the hill.'"

As the congregation dwindled to a faithful few, they realized that in order for the church's best days to be in the future, they were going to need help. Faced with the reality that their days were limited unless they altered their trajectory, they did the only -- and most important -- thing they could.

"All we knew to do was pray," Calhoun recalled. "So, that's what we committed to do."

In presenting the award, Mark Clifton, NAMB's senior director of replanting, noted, "Sam Calhoun had the heart, the passion and the vision for the next generation and to see what God would do."

The audience of roughly 200 pastors and spouses serving in replanting and revitalizing churches gave Calhoun a standing ovation.

"God put together the plan," Calhoun said of the replant process. "I would love to give to you a strategy and a plan, but I don't have one. Just follow what God is doing, and He will take care of the rest."

Part of the answer to his congregation's prayers came when a young church planting missionary arrived with a launch team. While Jimmy Steele, his family and his team anticipated starting a new church, a few meetings with Calhoun and conversations with the Windsor Hills congregation revealed that God wanted to do something special.

Calhoun said of the church's new pastor, "God was at work because unbeknownst to me, He brought the best in the world to come to be my son. That's how I look at Jimmy. I look at him as my son."

Billy Heriford pastored and replanted churches across rural north Missouri from the 1930s through the 1980s. The Replanter of the Year award bears Heriford's name because of his love for the local church and his passion for raising up young leaders in ministry. Calhoun received the first award because he displayed those same qualities.

"The reason we selected Sam to get this award was because in order for the replant movement that God desires to take place, men like Sam have to be willing to do what he's done," Clifton said during the ceremony, "that is to let go and trust the Lord with that next generation."

An average of 1,000 Southern Baptist churches each year are removed from the Southern Baptist Convention database. NAMB research indicates that about half of those removals are because a church has died. NAMB's replant efforts focus on re-launching churches that have died or are near death.

NAMB hosted this year's Replant Summit at its home offices in Alpharetta, Ga. The theme focused on worship's role in replanting and church revitalization. Speakers included Jared Wilson, assistant professor of pastoral ministry at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; Thom Rainer, immediate past president of LifeWay and director of the Revitalize Network; and Mike Harland, director of LifeWay worship.

“We like to see people cry.”

By Seth Springs

Waterford - Summer in Michigan doesn't last long, so we have to make the most of it. Summer offers many opportunities to connect with neighbors and have warm conversations that the cooler months do not. At Transformation Church our vision is to see lives transformed by the Gospel, and with that in mind we decided to leverage our Summer to that end. Our town, Waterford, has close to 75,000 people and very few Gospel-centered churches. We believe that God deeply loves Waterford and is doing something about that.

Over the Summer, God gave us many opportunities to join Him where He is already working through what we called “Mission Weeks.” With the help of 4 out-of-state mission teams, we blitzed our community with the Good News of Jesus in hand and in heart. Over 3 weeks we knocked on close to 1000 doors and had many productive conversations about Jesus and His church. We were able to serve our community through a free car wash, washing 40 cars and 2 bicycles. People insisted that we take their money, but our firm “no” gave us the opportunity to share about God's free gift of salvation through Jesus. God also gave us the opportunity to connect with 166 of our neighbors (non-TC) through a Community Block Party. It was amazing to connect with people that we had not yet met but have been praying for.

While the canvassing and big events were awesome, they were not my favorite part of the summer. During our mission weeks, we engaged in 4-yard clean-ups for neighbors who can no longer do the work themselves. Each neighbor and home were different, but each were overwhelmed by a local church that they do not attend coming to do yard projects that they have watched grow more intimidating over the years. My favorite clean-up was for a lady who is slowly but surely losing her sight, having to read her mail with a magnifying glass. When we arrived, she met us on the front steps with tears running down her face. She apologized for her emotion. One of our team members replied, “It's okay, we like to see people cry.” That may sound cruel, but it is true. What a blessing it is to have a front row seat to God's work in people's lives. Over the next few hours, we cut grass, trimmed shrubs, and cleaned gutters. A few of our ladies even helped sort through her kitchen, checking expiration dates that she can no longer see. When we first arrived, this lady admitted that she doesn't believe that the Bible is God's Word, but by the time we left she was open to having a conversation about Jesus and voiced a desire to investigate church. God was at work and His is the glory. Her heart was softened and the tears running down her face told the story. This is why we like to see people cry.

With Summer winding down and Fall on the horizon, we have a new season to leverage. With the fall season comes different opportunities to engage our community with the Good News of Jesus. Church fellowships, bonfires, skate nights, and community trunk-r-treats. Please pray for us as we strive to see lives transformed by the Gospel. And, what do you know, we may even get to see more people cry.

BIO: Seth Springs. Waterford, MI. Transformation Church. Church Planter and Pastor. Wife Taylor and two daughters, Layla and Lily Joy.

3 Mass. collegians seek to impact peers for Christ

By Stephen Sargent

EDITOR'S NOTE: The experience of new birth -- and the witness of baptism -- undergird the intent of three Massachusetts collegians to reach their peers for Christ. Baptism Sunday will be Sept. 8 in the Southern Baptist Convention. For resources, go to namb.net/baptism-sunday-resources.

BRIDGEWATER, MA (BP) – College sophomore Victoria Williams saw God change her life a year ago just before entering Bridgewater State University, the second-largest state school in Massachusetts.

Victoria's best friend, Bayleigh Westerlund, had invited her to summer camp. Though Victoria spent countless hours in a Catholic pew growing up, it was first time she ever felt a significant connection with God.

"I loved how everything was modern and fun," Victoria said. "The sermons were inspirational. They moved me." On the last night of camp, she asked Jesus into her life.

"I remember thinking, 'I never want to lose this.'" A few months later she was baptized.

Last fall at Bridgewater State, though the school's enrollment was nearly 12,000 students, there was hardly any Christian presence on campus or in the town for Bayleigh and Victoria to connect with other believers. Meanwhile, Grace Church -- a Southern Baptist-affiliated multi-location church -- had just planted a new location in Bridgewater to reach college students for Christ.

The two women soon connected with Grace Church and started serving in the kids ministry and student ministry together.

Though Bayleigh had grown up in a Christian family and been walking with Christ for several years, it was the first time she'd ever had a close friend to share her faith journey with each day. "I was so excited when I saw Victoria start to follow Christ," Bayleigh said. "She was already my best friend, and to see her turn from her sin and follow Jesus -- it caused me to cry all the time!"

Both students were passionate about helping their peers at Bridgewater State discover the saving grace that they had encountered in their own lives. Victoria, who played for the basketball team, regularly shared her faith with her team in hopes that God would use her to impact her friends the same way that Bayleigh's friendship impacted her.

And that's what happened.

Kailyn Aguiar, a senior on the basketball team, had been actively looking for a church in the area for several months. It had been years since she'd been a part of a faith community. As a freshman in high school, her church told her parents that she could no longer participate because of her sporadic attendance. Crushed and disheartened, Kailyn left the church.

That is, until she saw Victoria's Facebook post inviting her to Grace Church's Easter service.

Kailyn eagerly said yes to attending with Victoria and Bayleigh. Though it was unfamiliar to her, she was comforted in knowing she had two friends to sit with when she arrived.

"The church felt like a family," Kailyn said. "I loved how much they talked about the Bible." Just a few weeks later, Kailyn asked Jesus into her life. On Sunday, Aug. 18, she was baptized -- with Victoria and Bayleigh cheering her on in the front row.

This is how revival begins: God stirred in Bayleigh's heart to invite Victoria to church. God rescued Victoria from her sin. Then God used Victoria to reach Kailyn a few months later. Now, these three friends are eager to see what God will do in and through their lives as they start a faith-based student organization at Bridgewater State this fall.

Stories like these are happening on campuses across New England in college ministries and collegiate church plants that draw support from the Baptist Convention of New England and its Baptist Foundation of New England, online at bcne.net/bfne.

Terry Dorsett, executive director of the Baptist Convention of New England, noted, "Though campus ministry should be important anywhere, it is even more significant in New England than in other places because of the incredible volume of political, cultural and business leaders educated in the colleges and universities here. Most of our U.S. presidents and Supreme Court justices as well as a majority of our Fortune 500 CEOs were educated in New England.

"If we want to change America, we must meet these future leaders when they are college freshmen and help them discover Christ," Dorsett said. "Then we can disciple them for four to six years before sending them out across the nation as leaders with a Christian worldview.

"To this end, the Baptist Foundation of New England has partnered with the Baptist Convention of New England in a bold attempt to raise \$3,000,000 to bolster the efforts of our 30 New England collegiate ministers.

"Such an effort might sound unrealistic to many," Dorsett said, "but to New England Baptists, it sounds like a worthwhile investment in reaching our nation for Christ."

Puerto Rico: NAMB breaks ground on Send Relief center

By Brandon Elrod

GUAYNABO, PUERTO RICO (BP) – Send Relief celebrated the start of construction of a new ministry center in Puerto Rico with a ceremonial groundbreaking on Monday, Aug. 19. As the compassion ministry arm of the North American Mission Board (NAMB), Send Relief expects the new facility will be a major boon to outreach efforts on the island.

"It's not so much about the building, but it is about our testimony here on the island as to why we're here," said Send Relief President David Melber. "We're here because God commands us and gives us the privilege to be here to be able to meet needs, to see lives change, to be able to share the hope of the Gospel and see a movement all across this island."

In the aftermath of the historic impact of Hurricane Maria in 2017, Send Relief prioritized a response to the crisis and has continued sending volunteers to help homeowners rebuild. The new ministry center will expand the ministry's ability to serve and equip mission teams who come to the island to meet needs and change lives through the power of serving communities.

"This gives hope to our people," said Angel Perez, mayor of the municipality of Guaynabo, where the center is located. "In this moment, after two years and still having hundreds of families with blue tarps, with other needs, establishing this organization permanently here in Guaynabo gives hope for our families and through the whole island."

Send Relief has established strong relationships with local government officials in Puerto Rico through their persistent presence, serving people affected by the massive storm. Volunteers have invested 12,278 days' worth of service, engaged in 1,510 gospel conversations and seen 107 professions of faith.

Since the hurricane, Send Relief has helped distribute more than 760,000 meals, provided 1,134 water filtration kit and assisted in the clean-up or repair of 400 properties.

Ricardo Agudelo-Doval, a representative with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Center for Faith & Opportunity Initiatives and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), called the ministry center something Puerto Rico has needed for a long time.

"This is not a recovery that's going to be over in the next few years," Agudelo-Doval said. "This is something that's going to take a long time to finish, and having an organization as established, as important, with the background that Send Relief has, is an amazing opportunity for Puerto Rico."

Once construction is complete, Send Relief will have the capacity to house more than 100 mission volunteers at any given time as well as space for missions leaders. There will be a dining hall with a full, commercial kitchen as well as an event space that will seat between 100-120 people.

"The facility creates a permanent presence in Puerto Rico," said Jonathan Santiago, Send Relief's ministry center director in Puerto Rico. "It's not just for relief efforts but for community engagement on behalf of Southern Baptists. We will run logistics from a centralized location, which will help facilitate ministry on the island."

Melber said the permanent ministry center communicates a level of commitment to the residents of Puerto Rico.

"The fact that we're still here, that Southern Baptists are still here, two years later and committing for the long term speaks volumes to the fact that we're going to be here," Melber said. "We want to embed ourselves in Puerto Rico, to know the culture and see these communities transformed."

NAMB President Kevin Ezell noted the work in Puerto Rico revolves around starting new evangelistic churches and strengthening existing churches.

"We intentionally involve local pastors in the work the volunteers are doing," Ezell said. "Meeting the physical needs is an urgent priority right now, but we know the larger, long-term need is spiritual, as it is everywhere. NAMB's work will be all about the Gospel as we share Jesus in Puerto Rico."

Kendricks discuss new film's unique qualities

By Aaron Wilson

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Alex and Stephen Kendrick's latest film "Overcomer," which is now in theaters, breaks the mold from their previous movies in one important way.

"Every movie we've done before has contained a 'go-and-do' call to action," Alex Kendrick said. "This one isn't go-and-do; it's know-and-understand."

Whereas the Kendrick brothers' past movies called on Christians to increase their prayer life ("War Room") or strategically work at becoming a better father ("Courageous"), the movie "Overcomer" encourages believers to rest in their identity in Christ.

"Once you understand where your identity is found, you're in a much better position to fight your battles and go do the action," Alex said.

The theme of identity that's woven through "Overcomer" finds its inspiration in the book of Ephesians, specifically where Paul says, "Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

"Everything changes for the Christian when they understand they're God's beloved child in Christ," Stephen Kendrick said. "There's wind in the sails. It's not just me rowing my hardest to try to live the Christian life on my own."

"Now, when I approach the Father in prayer, it's not as if I'm a stranger begging for bread from the king who doesn't have time for me," he noted. "No, I'm God's beloved child -- a joint heir with Christ."

The Kendricks say their approach to "Overcomer" reflects the initial chapters of Ephesians, which contain almost no commands for actions.

"Paul doesn't really tell Christians to do anything in those early chapters except to remember who they used to be," Stephen said. "But then the imperatives kick in in chapters 4-6. In a similar manner, the goal of this movie is to provide Christians with a better understanding of who God says they are, so they can be equipped to live the Christian life."

In order for viewers to understand what it means to actually be a Christian, the Kendricks clearly articulate the Gospel in a speech by returning actress Priscilla Shirer.

Shirer plays a school principal in the film and also authored two resources for teen girls that go along with film on the subject of identity: the book "Radiant: His Light, Your Life" and the Bible study, "Defined: Who God Says You Are."

While the film may have some new elements, fans of the Kendrick brothers will find a lot of what they've come to expect from the duo's previous movies.

Familiar flavors in "Overcomer" include relatable characters and circumstances, inspirational moments, personal struggles, the questioning of faith, and an emotional journey that will have moviegoers laughing and crying, the filmmakers note.

"If you've seen our previous movies and enjoyed them, this is like going back to your favorite restaurant, but getting a new and better dish," Alex said.

"Overcomer" has the biggest budget yet for a Kendrick brothers' film. This allowed them to shoot with anamorphic lenses -- the same kind used on the latest "Star Wars" and "Mission Impossible" installments.

"We also have more professionals and use more production vistas in this one," Alex said. "And a lot of it was filmed outside. We think it's the best-shot film we've made. Everything is at a higher level."

From the first scene of "Overcomer," fans will notice how this movie raises the bar for the Kendrick brothers' cinematography. The opening shot uses a drone that starts a half-mile away from the actors and weaves its way into buildings and around set pieces for one continuous shot that involves numerous actors.

"There are a few other shots like this one we're excited for people to see because we've filmed scenes in this movie we've never done before," Alex said.

But regardless of the budget, cameras or special effects, the Kendricks consider cinematic innovation as simply a tool to help draw people to the truths of Scripture and the Gospel.

"We hope this movie serves as a way to help God's people understand what their identity in Christ means," said Alex. "That if the peripheral things or material things are stripped away, we've ensured the order of our identity is first founded in Christ."

"Overcomer" is in theaters nationwide. For more information and to reserve tickets, visit OvercomerMovie.com.