



## **BSCM State Mission Offering; punching back against decline**

**PLYMOUTH** – The Frances Brown State Mission Offering and Week of Prayer will be September 10-17. The goal for this year’s offering is \$80,000. Gifts will be used to assist Michigan pastors, church leadership, and churches with revitalization.

Every year Michigan Baptists set aside a week to specifically pray for the spiritual needs of our state. To participate in the Week of Prayer, [you can download a prayer guide and other free resources at \[bscm.org/smo\]\(https://bscm.org/smo\)](https://bscm.org/smo).

Some of the prayer emphasis for this year will include; praying for pastors and leaders, praying for local Michigan communities, praying for Michigan churches that are struggling, and praying for our Michigan language churches.

Studies show that 80% of American churches are in decline or plateaued, and that includes Michigan churches. That’s why this year’s offering will be used to provide tools and guidance to churches that need to revitalize the mission to their community.

The Frances Brown State Mission Offering is an annual offering taken by Michigan Baptist churches to fund special mission projects for starting and strengthening churches within the state of Michigan.

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## **Ragged Women’s Conference**

**MONROE** – The Ragged Women’s Conference is being held at Monroe Missionary Baptist Church on September 22-23. Our desire in planning this conference is that women will be reaffirmed in the vast love Christ has for them, strengthened in their faith, encouraged in their eternal hope (Hebrews 6:17-20), and refreshed as they go about their daily lives. Ultimately, God will receive glory because of it. If you are weary in your responsibilities, struggling in your faith, feeling guilty about your failures, overwhelmed with expectations, or experiencing anxiety about your weaknesses, this conference is for you.

In her blog post, *The Gift of Collaboration*, Gretchen Ronnevik shares some of the thoughts she had while writing her book, *Ragged: Spiritual Disciplines for The Spiritually Exhausted*. She says,

“...the message I want to drive home is that it is finished. We are complete in Christ. Christian women are inundated with “law” in what feels like every single publication. It’s a constant. I wanted to write about “gospel.” I wanted to write about how the gospel wasn’t just for salvation (justification), but for all of the Christian life (sanctification). I wanted to relentlessly point to Christ, not our works.”

Clear your calendars and register right away! We are so excited that Gretchen is coming to share with us in person the themes in her book.

Her author bio describes Gretchen Ronnevik as someone who “loves rich theology rooted in real life. She created Gospel Mentoring, a training program for intergenerational discipleship and is the co-host of Freely Give, a podcast on living free in Christ. She has published articles at 1517, the Gospel Coalition, and Women’s Ministry Toolbox and regularly speaks at events. She lives on the family farm in Minnesota with her husband and six children.”

Gretchen’s book, *Ragged: Spiritual Disciplines for The Spiritually Exhausted* is full of grace and encouragement. Everyone who attends the conference will be given a copy of the book. There will be one session on Friday evening, with light refreshments following. Saturday morning holds two sessions with a coffee bar during the break. After the two morning sessions, there will be a question-and-answer time with Gretchen. We’ll end the conference with a delicious soup and salad lunch with dessert.

You can register online at [www.mmbconline.org/events/mmbc-womens-conference/](http://www.mmbconline.org/events/mmbc-womens-conference/). If you prefer not to register online, you can call the church office at 734-241-6860 and speak with Anna, who will get you registered.

The price is \$35.00 and includes all three conference sessions, a copy of *Ragged*, all the food and refreshments, a goodie bag containing items for your encouragement and enjoyment, and several giveaways. There are also “Freely Given” podcast stickers for the first 100 people to register.

Feel free to listen to the conference [playlist](#) on Spotify to encourage your heart.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Cara Schramm is the Women’s Ministry Leader at Monroe Missionary Baptist Church. Her interest in women’s ministry began during a season of numerous heartaches in which she was greatly ministered to by ordinary women. She and her husband Marty are parents to six children aged 7-25. Together, they share a heart for everyday hospitality.

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# State Mission Offering: a revitalization story

**ANN ARBOR** – It was two weeks before the world closed down for the Covid pandemic, and Rhiza Church launched its very first church service in Ann Arbor. It was a joyous and successful launch, but 14 days later it felt like it was over before it began.

Rhiza Church had been meeting in a public school so immediately they were without a home. Pastor Tito Diaz, his wife Mollie and the remaining members of the church would spend the next 3 years trying to find a place they could call home. During that time, the church met in six different locations.

Meanwhile, in another part of Ann Arbor a much more established church was facing its own challenge. Graceway Church had been around for decades, but even before the pandemic, they were in decline. By 2022, there would be fewer than 20 people on a Sunday. They had all the space they needed, and no one to fill it.

One of the few remaining leaders at Graceway, Steve Worrell, said he would have to give himself a pep talk each week because the church “was just so empty.”

Steve and the other leaders were facing a decision of whether to close the doors of the church forever. But before they took that step, they decided to reach out to the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) to see if the BSCM staff had any suggestions. Steve said, “It was worth a shot.”

BSCM staff knew about Rhiza’s struggles for a permanent place to meet, and they introduced the Diaz’s to Graceway’s leadership. In just a few months, the two churches had merged into one. Steve Worrell said, “It just seemed like a perfect fit.”

A year later, the churches came together as one, and after three years Rhiza Church now has a permanent place to meet. Mollie Diaz recalls the first Sunday together saying, “It was home, it was actually home.”

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This year’s State Mission Offering goal is \$80,000, and will be used to revitalize churches like Graceway who are in decline. BSCM will provide support and training to leaders to help churches begin to reverse declines, or to find other paths to continue their witness.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** You can find [free resources to promote the State Mission Offering at bscm.org/smo](https://bscm.org/smo). Resources include videos, poster, flyer, and prayer guide.

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# Thriving in the return to normal

**MONROE** – September is here, which means it's time for Michigan students to head back to school. No doubt they have been taking advantage of their last opportunities to enjoy the luxuries of summer. Staying up past midnight and sleeping in until noon or later. Filling their days with all manner of entertainment; from swimming to video games to riding dirt bikes. Spending days at their friends' houses while parents wonder if they're wearing the same clothes for the third day in a row. Families have wrapped up any last minute vacations and quality time together.

Summer is filled with fantastic highs for churches as well. Events like youth camp, VBS and summer mission trips pack church calendars with activity. Excitement builds and builds from seeing the way that God is at work in His people through their ministry to one another. Then - just like when an energy drink wears off - you feel the crash of back to school. It's time to get back to normal life, a life that's scheduled, predictable, and repetitive.

Compared to a summer full of late nights, camps, retreats, vacations and hours with good friends, "scheduled, predictable, and repetitive" does not sound very appealing. Despite how it sounds, there's a lot of good that comes from normal, and churches should welcome its return.

Families thrive in the midst of routine. Parents of young children know how important a predictable routine is for their kids and, the truth is, a routine is just as helpful for adults and even churches. Routine provides structure, communicates expectations, and protects what's important from a world full of distractions. Routines are freeing; in a world that presents you with so many options and choices, established routines make the choice for you.

It's through routines that we can complete some of the most difficult tasks and accomplish our greatest achievements. Everyone has seen the transformation video of someone who showed the results of a workout routine after one week, four weeks, four months, one year. We look at the transformation in wonder and awe, but if we saw the routine that was used to get there we would understand that there was nothing wonderful or awesome about it. It was actually pretty predictable and repetitive.

Churches - especially youth and children's ministries - can fall into the trap of expecting big results from big, one-time events that happen in the summer. But it is usually the repetitive, predictable - dare I say ordinary - things the church does that make the biggest difference in the lives of families.

Parents want to know how to help their children grow spiritually. The freeing news for them is that it's actually pretty simple. Utilize simple, ordinary routines in your family's life that will produce fruit over time. This is why going back to school provides churches and families with a great opportunity. Families are already transitioning back to the routine of school life; encourage them to return to the routine of church life.

Come to church on Sunday, attend a Sunday school class since you're already there. If your church provides a mid-week service or utilizes small group meetings throughout the week, make those part of the rhythm of your family's life. Encourage families to take 15 minutes to read a devotion and pray together a few times a week, on the same day at the same time - because routine is important. To serve families well, churches need to encourage a routine that is simple and practical. Overburdened, complex schedules only lead to more stress, guilt and frustration.

The most important thing for pastors to do is pray for families. There are so many things competing for attention and time in their lives. School, sports, clubs, hobbies, the list goes on. We can't force them to choose and we can't compete with the world. What we can do is pray that God would lead them to trust Him to use the ordinary, repetitive, and predictable things in the lives of their kids. So let's go back to school on our knees.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Scott Slater lives in Monroe, MI with his wife, Alesha and their three children: Nolin, Thomas and Abigail. He serves as the Family Ministry Pastor at Monroe Missionary Baptist Church.

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## **Arabic language church planting**

**PLYMOUTH** – Pastor Amer Safadi, originally from Jordan, and Pastor Amgad Beshai, originally from Egypt are two of the key leaders driving and fueling the ever-growing, bilingual Arabic Church Planters & Pastors Network & Gathering. Both men, with their families, reside in Ohio and Michigan, respectively. Though the ministry is a daily undertaking led by these two volunteers, two annual gatherings offer a glimpse of this young network's expansion.

#### **Inspiring Growth**

Look at the comparison. Last year, in July of 2022, approximately fifteen leaders from across North America came together for the first annual gathering in Cincinnati, Ohio. This year, on July 13-15, 2023, forty-six pastors, church leaders, church planters, potential planters and their wives came from California, Arizona, Florida, Alabama, Ohio, and Michigan met in Troy, Michigan. That is an inspiring increase in just one year!

#### **Busy Lives**

While creating and sustaining this one-of-a-kind network, Safadi and Beshai serve as full-time pastors, husbands, and fathers. Safadi is the lead pastor of the Arabic Church of Cincinnati, of West Chester, Ohio. Beshai is the lead pastor of Evangel Baptist Church of Troy in Michigan. Both congregations are growing and yet Safadi and Beshai carve out time from their personal schedules to make personal visits, conduct online interviews, provide assessments, and answer questions from the curious who have heard about the outstanding reputation of this network. Safadi and Beshai rely heavily on the valuable resources of the Send Network.

### **Personal Multiplication**

Safadi and Beshai are respected practitioners. Safadi and his young church plant are assisting an Arabic-language church plant in the state of Kentucky, just south of the Ohio River. This bluegrass Arabic-language church plant will be the first of its kind in Kentucky! Beshai, during the most recent gathering in July, announced that not only did his congregation launch the newest Arabic-language church earlier in 2023, but that they have plans to launch three new church plants within the next twenty-four months during 2024 and 2025. These two titans of church planting are sterling examples of vision and determination.

### **Partnership**

Working with Safadi and Beshai for years, Tony Lynn, the Church Planting Leader for the Send Network in Michigan, says, “The partnership between these two men is perfect. The skills and insights of one is complemented by other strengths found in the other man.” Tony goes on to explain that “Having trustworthy, reliable men of God, like Safadi and Beshai, whose interest in a Gospel movement both locally and globally is contagious!” Lynn reports that specific state conventions and specific Send Network regions contributed to and sent individuals to the two annual gatherings. Partnerships in the bilingual Arabic Church Planters & Pastors Network & Gathering are continually expanding and are processed personally by Safadi and Beshai.

### **Horrible and Heroic Stories**

“Because my adult daughter would not wear a veil at the university, those in my country took her life. All she wanted to do was become a doctor and help others,” is what the man said without a hint of emotion on his face, reported Lynn. Stunned by the horror, Lynn was silenced. He thought carefully before speaking his next words of sympathy and support. Lynn says that his new friend went on to explain the heroism of others, “Friends and family helped us escape our country knowing that our teenage daughter would be next if we didn’t flee. After a series of refugee camps overseas we finally ended up living in southeastern United States. Relieved and safe there, we felt lonely and sad until attending this network, Pastor Safadi and Pastor Beshai invited us to come.”

### **Contact the Leaders**

That is just one of the stirring conversations Lynn had at the second annual meeting of the “Arabic Church Planters & Pastors Network & Gathering,” during July 13-15, 2023, in Troy, Michigan. If you are interested in connecting with the leaders of this network you can contact them directly with your questions: Pastor Amer Safadi at [amer.safadi.sm@gmail.com](mailto:amer.safadi.sm@gmail.com) or (414) 949-4900 and Pastor Amgad Beshai at [pastor@churchoftroy.com](mailto:pastor@churchoftroy.com) or (248) 583-1833.

### **Next Year’s Gathering**

Safadi and Beshai welcome those interested in attending, supporting, or contributing to the network. Next year’s gathering is already scheduled for July 11-13, 2024. The location will be announced at a later time.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Tony L. 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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## **Reset, refocus, revitalize**

**PLYMOUTH** – These are words of hope and new beginnings. They grab our attention in the opening seconds of our 2023 state mission offering video. They remind us that our mission as the church is critically important and must always be our primary objective.

Jesus’ words to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 have been on my heart as we enter this season of prayer and giving. They describe how each of the seven churches need differing degrees of adjustment for greater Kingdom impact. From the church at Ephesus that loses her first love in the midst of an incredibly active ministry, to the church at Laodicea that seemingly has everything, Jesus gives these seven churches course corrections they need to make to follow Him moving forward. Even before the first century comes to a close, Jesus gives His church new directives for a world in transition.

Churches need to constantly reposition themselves under the Lordship of Christ to thrive in the present and live in the next generation. Revitalization takes a posture of constant prayerfulness and surrender as the church listens to Jesus and follows His directives in an ever-changing world filled with new opportunities to advance the Kingdom. The message of the gospel never changes. Its power is sufficient to transform people in every culture, every language, every race,



and in every generation. It is more than sufficient for the days we face. The risen Lord Jesus is with us!

Some of our churches are facing discouragement. The difficult challenges that surround them feel overwhelming, but there is hope. Michigan Baptists are praying together and giving to help churches experience the “Reset, Refocus, and Revitalization” they need.

Two words stand out to me as I read Revelation 2 & 3: “I know....” Jesus speaks these two words to each of the seven churches. He knows what each church is experiencing and what steps need to be taken by each church. He provides each one with a path forward.

He knows where each church is: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon....

He knows what each church is facing: hardships, affliction, and poverty...

He knows the path forward: remember, repent, do the things you did at first...

Jesus both affirms and corrects the seven churches. Some of the words fill His church with joy. Some are hard to hear, but they are spoken to reveal how each church can thrive in the present and live fruitfully in the next generation. Every one of the seven churches has a future, but only as each realigns herself fully to Jesus moving forward. Continuous alignment to Christ’s direction is an essential component of church vitality. It’s Christ’s church and His mission. Totally following Him is the only way forward. Let’s read the Word, pray, and obey. In the words of an old hymn:

Trust and Obey  
For there’s no other way  
To be happy in Jesus  
But to trust and obey!

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#### **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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## Train up a child

**WINDSOR, ONTARIO** – The most famous parenting verse in the book of Proverbs says, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

Rarely is a proverb so often quoted and so often misunderstood. “Train up a child” has become the slogan of parenting seminars. It gets referenced as a surefire promise. We see it printed on banners for the annual family week at church. Pastors quote it every time they dedicate a baby at church. Grandparents cling to it as a guarantee.

Young parents hitch their wagons to this proverb-turned-promise with a determined hope that their diligent training will ensure the gospel-faithfulness and salvation of their children. Trevin Wax believes older parents “feel the proverb’s implicit judgment, weary from watching a child or two depart from ‘the way,’ and wondering whether their children’s disobedience points backward to their own failure in ‘training.’”

Most of us feel the weightiness of this proverb, don’t we? First, as parents and grandparents who want to see our kids and grandkids love God and love others, and secondly, as pastors or leaders who preach and teach families how to make disciples of children who need to worship the only true God who sent His one and only Son to rescue them from sin.

“Unfortunately, some interpretations of this verse miss both the genre of the proverb in general and the meaning of this proverb in particular. And getting this proverb wrong leads to wrongheaded conclusions about parenting, training, and the hearts of our kids,” writes Trevin Wax.

The first problem for some interpreters of this verse is to forget that the proverbs are just that – proverbs. They are general truths about the way the world normally works, not specific promises that encompass every possible situation.

The second misstep in interpreting this verse is getting the meaning right. Professor Jason DeRouchie, Research Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests that the ESV’s “in the way he should go” is a very idiomatic way of capturing the Hebrew “according to the dictates of his way.” So, the command line of the proverb literally reads, “Dedicate a youth according to the dictates of his way,” or perhaps more commonly, “Dedicate a child according to what his way demands.”

I believe Proverbs 22:6 encourages parents to train up their children according to the gifts, abilities, and natural interests of the child, according to what his way demands. In other words, we are not only giving children general training in godly living, but showing specifically how a child might utilize their own gifts and abilities – their bent – in the fulfillment of their God-given vocation in life.

To not “depart from it” means they will bear fruit as they walk the path God has assigned to them. They will not depart from using the gifts, skills, and talents God has given them, and we have nurtured in them, and they will be successful and fruitful in that way.

However you interpret Proverbs 22:6, we cannot deny the implication that the parents’ intentional moral and religious shaping early on will have a permanent effect on their child for good. This statement is not a hard-and-fast promise to parents, however, for the rest of the book of Proverbs makes clear that the power of the youth’s future depends not only on the parents’ guidance but also very much on the choices he or she makes.

This proverb, placed in context of the whole Bible, is telling us that we should take our training of children seriously – both where we guide them and how we shepherd their hearts. But it’s also telling us to trust in the God who gave us this proverb, the God that all our training points to.

In Jesus Christ – not in our training – we place our hopes for our children. In Jesus, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we find the motive, strength, and foundation for raising our children to be godly boys and girls who mature and grow in their faith to become mature, fruitful disciples in their chosen vocations, whatever that may be.

As God the Father raises up parents in the way they should go, parents, in turn, raise up their children in the way they should go, and our Father gets all the credit.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Garth Leno is the Pastor/Planter Care Specialist with the BSCM. He serves in a similar role with the Canadian National Baptist Convention, and he is the founding pastor of The Gathering Church in Windsor, Ontario, a church he planted with his wife, Patty, and a few of their friends.

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## **Closing a chapter at Bambi Lake**

**ROSCOMMON** – I was first introduced to Bambi Lake Retreat and Conference Center in the fall of 2016 having no idea where this introduction was going to lead. For almost seven years Bambi has been my home, my work and my passion. Rarely a day has gone by that I have not dreamed about what Bambi could be or thankful for what it has been.

God has been mighty in this place and I’m humbled to say He is still moving and working in the hearts of those who come here. God meets people here in very real and personal ways.

Searching hearts are still finding Him, and hurting souls are still finding healing here in His presence. From the first day I stepped foot on Bambi property until this very moment, I am keenly aware that I am walking on sacred ground.

More than a half century ago God chose Bambi to be a special place for the Southern Baptist of Michigan. A special place to encounter Jesus, hear His voice, and be transformed by His presence. A special place to find rest from the journey and nourishment for the soul. A special place to be spiritually equipped and refreshed. A special place to fellowship in a community of believers and be strengthened by their stories and friendships. A special place to bless God while completely immersed in the splendor of His creation. A special place of salvation for those who respond to the call of the Holy Spirit. A special place of declaration for the hundreds who have been baptized in the cold spring waters of the lake. A special place where all are welcome - a special place, a God place.

I am honored and humbled to be a chapter in the story of Bambi. However, like all chapters in a book, they must end so a new chapter can begin. The end of 2023 will mark the end of my chapter as a director for the BSCM and Bambi Lake. It has been the most incredible blessing and privilege to serve the churches of the BSCM. I have been blessed to work alongside you as we together have striven to “punch holes in the darkness” and bring Kingdom light to the lost and blind.

Thank you for allowing me to worship with you in your churches and together here at Bambi. Thank you for inviting me to encounter your many unique cultural expressions of worship. I am extremely grateful for the many opportunities to be on mission, side-by-side with the nations who have come to Bambi to encounter the Father of Lights, the only King forever.

I would like to say thank-you to BSCM Executive Director Tim Patterson for allowing me this incredible opportunity to serve here at Bambi Lake. Your friendship and mentoring in my life has challenged me to be Godly and love Him more everyday. Thank you BSCM staff for your encouragement and friendship. Your passion for gospel transformation in Michigan is awe-inspiring and infectious. Lastly, thank you to my amazing family, that is the Bambi Staff. It's been an incredible journey and I will miss your friendship and love. Because of your hard work, servant attitude, and hospitality, Bambi truly represents the heart of God - a place of love for all people. May the God of peace, bless you and keep you and continue to shine His light on Bambi and all the churches of the BSCM.

Peace out!

#### **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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# A celebration of the life of Fern Dannelley Goree

**MIDLAND, TX** – Fern Heath Dannelley Goree used Jesus' example and listened to each individual at their core. All who knew her were enhanced and blessed, and all are lessened because of our loss.

Fern Heath was raised in Andrews County, TX. She did well in school which allowed her a WWII wartime opportunity to graduate from high school a year early, and begin college the summer before regular students would attend. She arrived at Howard Payne University as a 16-year-old freshman. She and the other early starter students found a church to attend, pastored by a young man who had just graduated from college himself, Jay Dannelley.

There came a time when Pastor Jay was ready to look for a wife, and his eye was on a young woman who had a heart for mission. He noticed a maturing in her spirit and Christianity. He also thought she was very beautiful. By 19 she was a mother, a pastor's wife and a student. It was a glimpse of her life to come.

Husband Jay took other pastorates, and Fern moved their children and life wherever God led. She made friends, raised children and worked in the church. During these early Texas days, she also took classes to work on that college degree wherever she was.

Edgar Roberts came to Texas to make a plea. He came from Michigan, where there had been a great influx of people from the South to fill the manufacturing jobs in the Detroit area. He asked pastors to pray about God leading them to come to Michigan to start new Southern Baptist churches for the Southerners moving to Michigan. It sounded like a million miles away from Texas, home, and extended family. And in some ways, it was. Jay Dannelley answered that call.

They packed up their 3 children, Jay Jr, Deborah, and Bekah, and moved to Detroit in 1956, and began building a church. When that church got stronger, they moved to another neighborhood and built up another small church. At every place, Fern dedicated herself to her family, and to the church: developing children's programs, women's ministries and making lasting friendships. Eventually, she was pregnant again, and baby Ellen came into their lives.

The Southern Baptist Convention of Michigan was a "becoming" entity led by its dynamic Director, Fred Hubbs. He was a mover, a shaker, and a finder.

At one point, he found a campground near Roscommon. He shared his vision for what that camp could mean to their state work, and to individual children and adults in spiritual growth and training. They stood on the land in a circle, held hands and prayed. Fred Hubbs asked for a \$100 commitment from each family to provide the downpayment for the property. Jay and Fern were there. They made the commitment and followed through with their \$100 contribution. Thousands of lives have been changed at Bambi Lake Baptist Camp.

By this time, Jay Sr. was a Director of Missions in the Central area of Michigan, and Fern, having finished her bachelor's degree, was a teacher. She soon began working on her Masters to become a school social worker. The family watched her walk across the Michigan State fields accepting her Master's Degree.

For many years, Fern was a school social worker. First in Holt, and later in Bay City, when they moved to Midland, MI for Jay Sr. to take the Director of Missions position in the Bay Area Association.

In the early 70's Fern and Jay Sr. found an opportunity to do global missions. There was a need for a Bible teacher at a Baptist Seminary in Arusha, Tanzania. It began the family's love affair with East Africa. Each person in the Dannelley family has lived or done mission trips in Kenya since that time. It was their heart-home.

While living in Midland, MI, Jay Sr. developed a brain tumor and died quickly in 1975. Fern's experience of strength through the day, and tears through the night were the examples she displayed. She pastored all the heartbroken people who came to her, even though her heart was the most broken.

While continuing to work in schools to help children and educators, she became more active in Michigan Baptist's work, and was honored by being elected First Vice President of the Michigan State Baptists. She was the first woman to ever have that position.

Fern was involved in women's work and missions in every way at the local church and state level. The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention asked her to be on their board of trustees.

The call to Africa was always on her heart. Gaborone, Botswana became her home as she became a single missionary at the age of 55. She once again set to work making relationships, creating a welcoming home, and developing and implementing the Bible Way Program. It was a study for those wanting to grow in relationship and ministry with the Lord, even though they were far away from a Christian educational center. Fern was in Botswana for 10 years before she retired and returned to the USA. Her mother and family needed her, so she moved to West Texas to live in Midland, TX.

At the age of 70, Fern married long-time friend from Howard Payne, Bill Goree, who she first met when she was 16. She and Bill lived in Midland, TX and did many extensive mission trips to Southern Africa. They continued to enjoy family and work in ministries as their health allowed.

Fern passed August 22, 2023 at the age of 95. Her funeral and interment were held at Walnut Creek Baptist Church, 12062 N. Lamar Blvd, Austin, TX 78753 on September 3, 2023.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ellen Bierlein is the youngest daughter of Fern Dannelley Goree.

# Overcoming the first month of “back to school”

**GARDEN CITY** – The clamor exuding from a passing school bus, last minute efforts to squeeze out the final drops of summer, and ah the smell of new school supplies (looking at you Crayola crayons!), the sights and sounds that punctuate this time of year have been defined through the years.

Back to School time can be equal parts exciting and daunting. Our family has four children whose ages range from 8 to 16. They have always attended our local public school. It is from that perspective that I offer some tips that have helped our family ease the transition that I hope can help you and your child/children as well.

## **Tip #1: Bathe the school year in prayer.**

Pray before school begins. Do a prayer walk (or drive) around the schools your child is attending (or even all the schools in your neighborhood). Pray for the students and staff. Pray specifically for your child and their teacher and classmates.

When school starts, take time to pray for and with your children each day. For our family, praying on the way to school has been a long-established practice and the day doesn't seem to be quite right if ever it is skipped. Inviting God into our day and turning our hearts and minds toward Him first thing helps us remember to Whom our days belong and Who will be with us to help and guide throughout our day.

## **Tip #2: See schooling, whatever type of schooling your kids do, as a mission.**

If your children attend school outside of your home and they know Jesus, school is their mission field, and yours as well. Take frequent opportunities to show love and grace to each individual you encounter at their school and pray for opportunities to share the Gospel, especially for your kids.

I have been amazed to hear accounts from my kids and, sometimes, their teachers, of how they have shared Jesus in their classrooms, after-school activities, and even at the bus stop. I heard once that school is the biggest mission field in America. Let God use your family to shine His light in your kids' school and take comfort in knowing God can and will use your child for His Kingdom while they attend school.

## **Tip #3: Remember that God will go with your children wherever they go.**

The first place we ever had to leave our child was when our son (our firstborn) was in a host (foster care) home when he was two days old. God used Joshua 1:9 to comfort our broken hearts during that time and my husband and I clung to the truth that God was with our son when we could not be with him. It was the ONLY thing that gave us the strength to survive the

time away from him. I often still have to rest in that truth when my kids are away from me, particularly when they are at school.

**Tip #4: Give lots of grace as your children (and you) adapt to the new schedule that comes with the return to school.**

For our family, September is not usually a “pretty” month. Our kids are tired from adjusting their sleep schedules and working to adjust to a new teacher, new classmates, and, perhaps, a new school.

Also, in our experience, there is often sickness that comes with the September package, as classmates reintroduce their germs to one another after the summer hiatus. Even if the changes to your home are minimal, it is likely there will be some changes. Give lots of love, patience, and support to make the transition as easy as possible. Also, if it appears your children need more “downtime” try to keep after school and weekend schedules to a minimum in this pivotal month.

**Tip #5: If you want to hear about your child’s day in more detail than the classic one-word response of “fine,” ask more specific questions.**

Instead of asking a generic, “How was your day?”, ask questions that require a more specific answer. You could ask, “Who did you sit by at lunch today?” or “Did anything funny happen today?” Specific questions may do a better job of rooting out more detail from your child.

Also, choose your conversation time wisely, based on your child. If your child needs some decompression time when they get home before they answer your questions, let them have it. If your children are like mine, though, it means the best time to get the most information is as soon as they get in the car after school. Try to time your inquiries when you are more likely to get an informed response, based on your child/children.

**One final tip: Between me and my children, I am usually the one that feels the impending separation most keenly.**

I simply don’t like my babies being away from me, but God has called our family to public school, so off they go each year. It has gotten a little easier as they have gotten older, but I still struggle watching them go into school those first few days.

I am determined; however, they will never know! I would never want to add unnecessary stress or fear onto them. Two things help me to “hide” my feelings: sunglasses, and (this is a trick I wish I would have known sooner) to stop yourself from tearing up, press your tongue firmly to the roof of your mouth-it works every time!



I pray some of these tips and those you receive from other sources help make back-to-school time in your house a little bit smoother. May God bless this school year for your children and your family.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jessica has been on staff as Minister to Children at Merriman Road Baptist Church, Garden City, Michigan since January 2003. She and her husband, Joe, have four kids, one son and three daughters.

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## **Investing spiritually in back to school**

**PLYMOUTH** – This year we have a college sophomore, a high school sophomore and a high school junior heading back to class. Gone are the years of the matching backpacks and lunch boxes. Crayola markers have been replaced with ipad cases and \$12 mechanical pencils! Don't even get me started on how much we've spent on clothes and shoes for three teens!

Our budget reflects this season and we are not alone. The National Federation of Retailers released their projections for back to school spending for 2023 at 41.5 billion dollars in the US. That is more than every national holiday except Christmas. Let that sink in! Back to school is a BIG deal and whether you have a college student or a second grader, you are feeling the pinch.

Preparing our children for the school year with supplies is important, and a great way to care for and prepare your children for a successful school year. But is there something we should be focusing on even more? Absolutely. Regardless if you homeschool or are sending your kids back to public, private or college - there are some ways that we as parents can invest in our kids' hearts all year long.

### **3 Simple (and free!) Ways to Spiritually Invest in Our Kids:**

#### **1. PRAY: No, REALLY pray.**

Pray for God's leading in every area of their school life. Pray for protection and wisdom. Pray that God will give you sensitivities to know when you need to step in, and when your child has to "grow" through a situation. Pray for their friendships, their teachers and coaches, and their God-given gifts to shine. Pray with your kids on the way to and from school. Send teens or college kids your prayers for them via text message or instagram DMs. Get creative! Our kids need to know that we believe that prayer is important and powerful. It truly reflects our own faith in God.

## **2. EQUIP**

As Christian parents we cannot be complacent with our children and their exploration of who God is. Make worship, Bible study and spiritual conversations part of your family rhythm and daily expectation. This does not have to feel awkward. Worship music in the car, scripture memorization challenges, recapping the Sunday sermons. Put verses on sticky notes on your kids bathroom mirrors and instead of vain affirmations - give them God's affirmations. Spend time together talking about what you see God doing in your lives and home. Your faith should be seen every weekday, not just Sundays! Keeping faith real in your home helps equip our kids to keep their faith real at school too!

## **3. CHECK-IN**

Spiritual check-ins should be part of authentic family conversations in a Christian home. We ask our kids if they are brushing their teeth, taking their vitamins and finishing their homework so why would we not incorporate check-ins with their walk with God? For some, they may not even have a relationship with Jesus yet, but that should not deter us. This is even modeled by Jesus who is recorded as having asked 307 questions in the Gospels alone.

Questions help kids to critically think and allow us to have a peek into their thoughts. Ask the hard questions and help your child navigate the answers through the Scriptures. Trouble with a classmate? Facing temptation? Struggling with faith? What does God have to say about that? By checking in spiritually with your kids you are showing them that trusting God matters. Placing a higher importance on checking in on those straight A's will never matter more than a student learning to follow after Jesus.

Want your children to have a good school year? Keep pursuing their hearts! Pray for them, equip them and purposefully check-in with them, always pointing them back to Jesus.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

April is a Pastor's wife and a mom of three in Plymouth, MI. She directs the Children's Ministries at Mile City church and enjoys every crazy second of it! She loves giving gifts, hosting people in her home, podcasts and learning new skills! (Currently learning to can fruits and veggies!)

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# Bivocational pastor and staff lead growing church in Hodgenville

**HODGENVILLE, KY (KT)** – DeWayne Gibson’s everyday life is like a blur.

Not only is he in his 18th year of teaching in LaRue County but he’s a chaplain two days a week at Baptist Health in Hardin and teaches classes at Campbellsville University.

That’s all on top of being the senior pastor of Parkway Baptist Church in Hodgenville that has grown from 35 when he arrived to more than 600 every Sunday. Sleep? It’s overrated. There’s work to be done.

Gibson is a bivocational pastor that has a bivocational staff and a membership whose light is always green – meaning "GO!" —when it comes to evangelizing their community. Simply put: They follow their leader.

“I’m totally blessed,” Gibson said between classes where he teaches at LaRue County Schools residential facility. “I’ve come to the realization it’s absolutely not me but all God. If He can use somebody like me, he can use anybody.”

Gibson is going into his 12th year at Parkway, which was founded in 1991. He was leading a booming youth group of 150 at South Fork Baptist Church when God began nudging him to pastoral ministry. He finally relented. “God provided Parkway,” he said.

Hodgenville is his home community, living in the area since he was 9 years old. He has coached football, track and field and girls’ softball and everybody knows his name. That has helped the ministry, the pastor said. But when he stepped into the pastoral role at Parkway, the challenge hit him in the face quickly.

“I never knew much about Parkway,” he said. “My first Sunday there were 35 people there. I had stepped out of a booming youth group and my first Sunday, I was like, ‘What have I done?’ Into the second year, we started seeing good regular growth.”

The worship center was mostly carved out of a ranch home and only seated about 150 with two narrow walkways. “By the second Easter, I was sitting the deacons down the hall so others would have a place to sit,” he said. “The church took a big step of faith, and we built a \$350,000 worship area.” That was in 2015. The church paid it off in three years.

And the growth continued as Parkway Baptist started becoming known for being involved in the community. “We’ve done some evangelical trainings,” he said. “We are learning. We don’t do everything perfectly but we’re investing in our communities, not just LaRue County. We have someone who attends our church from every county around us. It helps I’ve taught here and coached here. Now I’m doing their weddings. We invest in schools and local businesses.

“So many in Hardin and LaRue who don’t go to church. If we get them to come to church, they will come back.”

The idea that if you want something done, find a busy man certainly pertains to Gibson, who loves the life that God has chosen for him. He has surrounded himself with similarly hard-working bivocational leaders that make his job at the church easier.

Shawn Edwards, the associational mission strategist for the Severns Valley Baptist Association, has watched Parkway Baptist blossom under Gibson.

“For several years I have been amazed at how God is moving under the ministry of Pastor DeWayne and his church leadership,” he said. “I am excited that God will use Pastor Gibson at the upcoming Bivocational Conference sponsored by the Kentucky Baptist Convention. I believe the attendees will be encouraged by Pastor Gibson’s words.”

The Bivocational Pastors & Wives Retreat will be Sept. 15-16 in Bowling Green at Calvary Baptist. The generous giving of Kentucky Baptists through the Cooperative Program and Eliza Broadus Offering covers all meals, lodging and resources for 60 couples. [CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Parkway has a husband-and-wife team, Caleb and Kate Canter, that minister to youth; a sound technician in Paul Dangerfield; Demarcus Compton leads praise and worship and Brittany Compton guides a children’s ministry that has 70 regular attendees. On Wednesdays the church has a group of professional teachers leading a group of 50 children, he said.

Michelle Milford, an administrative assistant, is not fulltime, but “puts in those kind of hours because she’s passionate and loves it,” Gibson said. Her husband, Todd, a former deacon, is a connection pastor and fills the pulpit occasionally to give the pastor a break, or an opening for a mission trip. He has traveled to Northern Ireland the last 26 years.

Parkway has baptized 80 this past fiscal year and 131 joined the church, Gibson said. “I only know those numbers because we just turned that in. I’m thrilled and aware but don’t focus on the big numbers.”

One of those he baptized recently was his 17-year-old daughter, Lilli, who had been immersed at the age of 7 but felt the need to be baptized now. Her father had been preaching about baptism recently.

Gibson said he wouldn’t change his busy life for anything. “Everyone has caught the vision here,” he said.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mark Maynard is the Managing Editor for [Kentucky Today](#).

# IMB missionary credits GenSend with teaching him to ‘step out of the boat’

**RICHMOND, VA (BP)** – Kai Ininstoma,\* a missionary in training with the International Mission Board, said his path toward full-time missions was heavily shaped by his experience with [GenSend, NAMB’s summer missions program](#).

Ininstoma was a part of the first official summer of GenSend in 2013, while he was a student at Texas A&M University. Ten years later, he is completing his final training before going to South Asia to serve full-time with the IMB.

He credits GenSend for both changing his life and guiding his path.

“Looking back, GenSend really has helped shape my life, how I lead, and how I view ministry,” Ininstoma said. “I’ve just continued to use a lot of the same tools I learned from it.

“I’m such a fan of GenSend and that was really my first ministry thing I’d really ever done. It just really grew me a lot.”

A self-described country boy from Texas, Ininstoma is the son of a pastor, but admits he never really had much missions experience until college.

As an ecology major, he pictured himself working on a ranch somewhere out in the country, before a summer mission trip to South Sudan made him have second thoughts.

Just as Ininstoma was “questioning what my future would look like,” NAMB’s Steve Turner, director of Next Gen Mobilization, visited the college ministry Ininstoma attended to talk about the GenSend summer program.

Ininstoma soon signed up and joined a group of students spending their summer ministering in Portland, Ore., which he said “might as well been Mars,” for him.

Despite how different Portland was from Texas, Ininstoma soon began to learn practical ministry tips which he said prove effective to this day.

Some of those include:

- How to build relationships through a “third place” that people frequent besides work or home such as restaurants, coffee shops or gyms
- How to understand the spiritual climate of the city you are in
- How to meet people where they are in evangelism

Upon returning from GenSend, Ininstoma would later become an IMB Journeyman, but struggled to “reorient,” back to life in the states.

Eventually he fell into a season where he was working in West Texas as a horse trainer, but later thought to himself, “I’m more than what I’ve become.”

In this time of confusion, Ininstoma returned to the message Turner gave his college ministry when talking about GenSend.

“I remember Steve talking about that story where Peter steps out of the boat when Jesus was walking on the water,” Ininstoma said.

“When he came and spoke to us, it was like ‘What is your boat? What does it look for you to step outside of your boat, out of your comfort zone, and trust in the Lord that He’s with you and to see that God is moving?’ Looking back on my 10 years, there’s been a lot of seasons where I was like, ‘Am I really going to step out of the boat or do what’s comfortable?’

“The biggest thing God showed me through GenSend was stepping out of the boat. It’s served me well.”

Ininstoma said the reason GenSend is such a valuable program, is it catches college students at the exact crossroads he was at 10 years ago, and teaches them missions skills they keep for the rest of their lives.

“There’s nothing new under the sun,” Ininstoma said. “College students still to this day before they graduate are in the same pickle I was in. If all you ever show people is you can work a 9 to 5 job, you could live an hour from where you grew up and you could have 2.5 kids ... then that’s usually going to be the vision for their life.

“But if you could cast a vision of stepping out of the boat and that you only get one life. We’re all going to spend it on something, so why not jump out of the boat and try to trust God for what He’s going to do? It’s worth it and it’s going to draw people to live in those Send Cities and it’s going to push people all over the world. They’ll use those same experiences wherever they go.”

This vision will soon be a reality for Ininstoma.

“So much has been given to me through experiences and through availability,” he said.

“I don’t know what tomorrow holds, but for right now as a single guy, it’s hard for me to justify doing anything else that I feel like could leverage what I’ve been given for the Kingdom more than this.

“So, I’m jumping out of the boat again.”

*\*name changed*

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Timothy Cockes is a Baptist Press staff writer.

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## **Sunrise Children’s Services’ 25-year legal battle ends in victory**

**LOUISVILLE, KY (BP)** – A 25-year-old legal dispute has finally been settled in favor of Sunrise Children’s Services. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in Cincinnati unanimously affirmed the final dismissal of all the plaintiffs’ claims against Sunrise with prejudice in a ruling Tuesday.

The dismissal with prejudice is the functional and legal equivalent of a final judgment on the merits in Sunrise’s favor following a full-blown trial. This was Sunrise’s fifth trip to the appeals court, and it prevailed each time.

“We are grateful it’s over and grateful we were not found guilty of any wrongdoing,” said Sunrise President Dale Suttles.

The case dates to 1999 when the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ruled for Sunrise in a dispute involving former employee Alicia Pedreira.

Pedreira and the ACLU then sued Sunrise and the Commonwealth of Kentucky in federal court in 2000, falsely accusing Sunrise of LGBT and religious discrimination.

The court rejected those discrimination claims immediately, and the dismissal was unanimously affirmed by the appellate court in the early 2000s. The discrimination claims remained dead and buried for the remainder of the case.

Sunrise has never been found to have unlawfully discriminated against anyone on any basis. However, the dispute over Kentucky’s reimbursements to Sunrise for essential childcare services continued for the next two decades.

Kentucky settled the case, but Sunrise refused to go along.

Attorney John Sheller of Stoll Keenon Ogden PLLC represented Sunrise throughout the 25-year ordeal.

“What the court of appeals has done here is approve the district court’s decision to dismiss the case because of the settlement between Kentucky and the ACLU, a settlement to which Sunrise was not a party and did not agree,” Sheller said. “The essence of the case was the state’s decision to continue to partner with Sunrise. The judge determined if Kentucky and the ACLU want to settle their disputes, they can do so.”

The dismissal of the case with prejudice means it cannot be refiled, he said.

It is essentially a victory for Sunrise, Sheller said, “because it was not found liable, isn’t found to have done anything wrong and is free to continue doing what it was doing. That’s the long and short of the decision.

There is a concurring opinion from the court that further underscored the First Amendment rights of Sunrise as a faith-based organization, Sheller said.

Among the settlement terms between Kentucky and the ACLU were: engaging in affirmative action, recognizing same-sex marriage and having the LGBTQ community on staffs and in foster families. Again, Sunrise’s First Amendment rights as a faith-based organization were upheld.

“Sunrise didn’t agree with that even though Kentucky did,” Sheller said of the settlement.

Several recent religious liberty decisions rendered by the Supreme Court, including *Fulton v. Philadelphia*, and other federal and state courts reinforce the protection of Sunrise’s First Amendment rights.

It is now the law of the land in all 50 states, thanks to Sunrise and others like it, that faith-based child-care providers can continue their support for vulnerable children without compromising or abandoning their religious values.

Suttles said he was thankful for the 25 years of support and many prayers.

“This is a case that never hindered us from serving these needy children, but it was always out there, always haunting us and it would always frustrate us,” he said. “We just wanted to serve children.”

Sunrise achieved the outcome without a single child, parent, or guardian ever being forced to testify in the case or without ever having to disclose private, sensitive, and confidential information or documents about the children and their families, Sheller said.



Sunrise never lost its state contracts, state funding, and never cut back on the children and families it was and is helping. In fact, over the last quarter-century, Sunrise has greatly expanded its size and scope and continues to be a top provider for the commonwealth's most troubled and endangered children.

"I really think God has some major plans for Sunrise to help the commonwealth through the crisis it is facing in trying to place teenagers," Suttles said.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Lawrence Smith is the communications director for the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

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## **Russian persecution of evangelicals exceeding that of Soviet era, Mission Eurasia president says**

**MOSCOW (BP)** – The raid by secret police of Russian evangelical leader Yuri Sipko's home will not silence the former Baptist Union president's "uncompromised" stance.

Sergey Rakhuba, president of Mission Eurasia, promised as much in comments he shared with Baptist Press. ([See related story.](#))

"I have personally known Yuri Sipko for a long time," Rakhuba said. "He is an uncompromised, powerful leader and preacher of the Gospel for whom truth is the most important thing."

Sipko's home was one of many among prominent evangelical leaders that was raided by the FSB, Russia's secret police, [Mission Eurasia reported](#) on Aug. 8.

A critic of his home country's invasion of neighboring Ukraine, Sipko was accused of spreading false information about the Russian government and its army's actions in Ukraine.

He fled his home prior to the raid and is now in a safe location, reported Mission Eurasia.

Rakhuba said the raid of Sipko's home was "widely televised all across the news channels in Russia."

"[Aug. 15], the Department of Internal Affairs of Russia actually announced that Yuri Sipko, the former president of the Baptist Union of Russia and the president of the World Baptist Alliance, is Russia's most wanted criminal. This means that his name is everywhere and his family is now

being targeted. Yuri has 10 children and many grandchildren, and they are feeling threatened wherever they go,” Rakhuba said.

Sipko’s opposition to Vladimir Putin extends back to the Russian president’s early days in power, particularly Putin’s past as a KGB officer. Those stances continued with Russia’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. The next year Sipko spoke at a consultation hosted by Mission Eurasia at the Bishop of Canterbury’s headquarters in London to raise awareness over the invasion.

The Russian government has continued targeting evangelical leaders across denominational lines who dare to criticize the Putin regime, Rakhuba said. One leader and his wife were detained, threatened and interrogated for two days. When released they were warned about sharing anything that happened during interrogation.

A friend of Rakhuba’s was invited to share a word of encouragement at one of Moscow’s larger churches on Aug. 13. Sipko had previously preached at the church and was well-respected there. Before the friend spoke, church leaders warned him to not mention Sipko as they had received a warning from the FSB.

“Most deny that this is the beginning of a new wave of repression by the Russian regime. [But] we are monitoring churches in the occupied territories in Ukraine through our Religious Freedom Initiative and have discovered that more than 500 churches have been seized, many pastors have been deported, some have disappeared and many have been killed by the Russian regime.”

A common thread is emerging in those areas, he noted. Only the Russian Orthodox Church is allowed to remain. Religions and “any foreign religious influences” are being removed from the nation.

“Mission Eurasia is doing everything possible to raise more awareness about this situation,” said Rakhuba. “We would really like the global Christian community to know more about all of our educational programs in Ukraine where we are training pastors to understand and deal with persecution, and to offer their prayers, support and involvement to help ease the pressure.”

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Scott Barkley is national correspondent for Baptist Press.

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To view the corresponding images and links that accompany these stories or to read past stories and issues of the Baptist Beacon, visit [BaptistBeacon.net](http://BaptistBeacon.net).

The Baptist Beacon is the official newsjournal of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan ([BSCM.org](http://BSCM.org)), in association with the Southern Baptist Convention. The mission of the Baptist Beacon is to communicate with Michigan Baptists in our shared mission of punching holes in the darkness through starting, strengthening, and sending churches.

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