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Telling the story  
of Michigan Baptists

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## Fried ice cream

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – Several years ago Sabrina and I frequented a particular restaurant that served a variety of foods at a reasonable price. The service was good, but the food was good enough to make you slap your grandma.

One day the waiter, who had come to know us by our first names, told us about a brand new desert item and suggested that we try it. On most of our dining occasions, by the time we got to the desert portion of our meal there was no room for anything, especially dessert. But this particular time, the dessert that was offered and the unusual nature of this treat captured the attention of our curious little taste buds.

The dessert that our waiter offered was fried ice cream. Just the thought of how frying ice cream could take place made you want to place the order. How would it keep from melting? What would it taste like, or for that matter, what would it look like?

How could two seemingly opposing tastes, textures and states of being be brought together to produce anything that tasted good, or for that matter was edible? It was almost incredulous to me that one could fry that which was to be an ice cold dessert, and it remain frozen and maintain it's cold, smooth and creamy texture. Would modern miracles never cease?

When our waiter did deliver our confectioners crazy cold creation, it was a culinary delight. The combination of a hot flaky crust encasing a frozen center of vanilla ice cream was a gastronomical delight that sent my salivary senses into extreme agitation. In other words I slobbered all over myself it was so good. The improbable and seemingly opposing tastes and textures had been combined to provide a most memorable dining delight.

The same sort of culinary combination is accomplished with the "sweet and sour" sauces used in Chinese food. Logic and experience would tell us that these opposing tastes and textures should not get together, but the fact of the matter is that they do. I have found that these diverse combinations that produce unexpectedly wonderful blends are not unique to the world of foods. They are found in our life experiences as well. One of the life passages in parenting takes place when your offspring move into their own homes and starts their own families. We watched both of our sons, I might say with great heartache and great joy, as they moved away and started on their grand adventures of life. One lives in Kentucky and the other lives in Colorado. The best part is that they have given us five wonderful granddaughters.

I still remember vividly the grief I experienced as both of them left the nest and flew to new heights and adventures. I was happy for them but I cried like a baby. If you are a parent, or know what it is like to be separated from the ones you love then you understand the difficulty of such an event yet at the same time this new life in a different place is exciting and fulfilling. How can these two blend to create a wonderful life experience? How can the joy of seeing your

children step out into life's great adventure mingle together with the grief of loss? Does one outweigh the other, and thus make it bearable?

No! The fact is that God takes the joy and the sadness and combines them to create a brand new life experience that will be used to make us more like Him and honor His wisdom. He mixes the good and the bad, the joyful and sorrowful, the sweet and the sour, and makes something wonderful and new. It goes beyond our logic and the experiences of our past. It really doesn't make sense, but God somehow synthesizes it for our good and His glory.

If you have not already encountered God's special way of combining life's experiences, you will. Just relax and enjoy the meal. His fried ice cream is a tasty treat indeed. (Over the holidays we will have the opportunity to gather together to celebrate the seasons and to laugh and love with each other. But I really believe the best part of the Fried Ice Cream experience is the GRANDGIRLS. But don't tell the boys.)

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." – Romans 8:28

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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## **IMB open for business**

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – "More than 155,000 people die daily without Christ. That is a harsh and unacceptable reality," said Dr. Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board (IMB) of the Southern Baptist Convention. My heart pounded when I heard Chitwood say, "We need 500 more missionaries by 2025."

President Paul and Michelle Chitwood caught my attention during the first session of a three-day event. I was in a room surrounded by over 250 attendees who had arrived from thirty-one states, and I was hanging on every word they uttered. It may be strange to say, but it expresses my feelings, the tone of their testimony was layered with rare, sincere humility.

The president and his wife explained how tough their lives were in the early years as children. Then they shared how blessed they were, as adults, in each of their previous ministries always

thankful for the honor to serve the Lord, never seeking to be elevated or raised to another place of service. A phrase echoes in my memory as I recall their testimony, “We were the unlikeliest of candidates to lead the International Mission Board.”

I now see what others sensed as they considered Chitwood. He influences others to serve the Lord by helping others to succeed and to feel valued. I was stunned when I heard that the president had already visited two-thirds of the IMB mission force in just eleven months. Then minutes later, I chuckled with the entire crowd when we learned that Chitwood asked missionaries at the start of his appointment as president, “If you were president and could change something before sunset today, what would that change be?” One of the most often desired solutions was, “Please, provide fitted sheets for the beds at the International Learning Center.” In short time, fitted sheets were provided for all the beds. It was a practical, I-hear-you gesture of love and value that will forever mark his legacy among missionaries.

One of the pillars of the IMB is Dr. Gordon Fort, Senior Ambassador for the International Mission Board. He, like other personnel of the IMB can easily tell you how many presidents and interim-presidents he has served under throughout his decades of service. Tears rolled out of my eyes when Fort asked retired missionaries to stand-up in the crowd, and I spotted two men standing who influenced my life; Bill Bullington and Dr. John Floyd. Looking at those upon whose heritage we now stand, Fort took a breath to clear his throat and said, “I believe now more than ever that we will see in our lifetime the moment when every tribe and every tongue will hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Others throughout the days said, “The current cooperation among our people and the anticipation that God is about to do something miraculous is obvious to all of us.”

Scott Ray, one of the most recent missionaries to take on a large task in Richmond, encouraged attendees to do two important things:

Correct an ongoing misunderstanding by letting everyone know that the IMB is open for business and ready to appoint new missionaries. Ray added, “We have more open slots than candidates.” In a break-out session, Ray reported, “We only have 298 long-term applicants and 399 mid-term applicants meaning that if we do not fill-up the pipeline with more candidates that the number of overseas personnel will decrease in the coming year.”

Fill the candidate pipeline with those whom God calls to international mission service by informing others about the pathways open to overseas service. Ray, like Fort and Chitwood, echoed the importance of prayer and sharing correct information concerning the mission of the IMB. Ray informed attendees about the variety of service opportunities; assignments from 1 year to career, financial and administrative support team members, roles that do not require college degrees and more. Attendees responded with enthusiasm and commitments to return to their churches with the news that the “IMB is open for business!”

As we approach Christmas and that time of year when in early December 47,000 churches are invited to collect a special offering for international missions, would you join me in prayer?

Asking the Lord to influence more churches to participate in the offering? I learned that less than 50% of our churches give to the international missions offering.

Asking the Lord to influence pastors to challenge members of their churches to step-out into overseas service? There are more unfilled requests for mission personnel than we have candidates in the pipeline. Ray warned, “With retirements and personnel returning to the United States after their mid-term service is ended our number of overseas personnel will decrease if the pipeline is not filled with more God-called candidates.”

Blessed, I oversee the discovery, development and deployment of 40-50 active church planters in Michigan in my daily life. I see unprecedented evidence of a God-movement in my home state. After attending a three-day advocate conference with the International Mission Board, I am burdened and want to see a God-movement upon the people within our churches moving from sanctuaries to overseas service. Would you join me by praying, informing, going and sending others?

You can find more information at [imb.org](http://imb.org) or follow the International Mission Board on Twitter @imb\_sbc or on Facebook @imb.sbc – let’s see what God is going to do in our lifetime.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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## **Missions, ministry, and disciple-making**

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – As the New Testament unfolds, we see the missionary expansion, ministry, and the disciple-making of the early church. They earnestly lived out the command of Jesus to be His witnesses in all the world. We read how the Greek speaking widows were neglected in the daily distribution of bread. When the Apostles were told, they led the church to set apart what are commonly believed to be the first Deacons to make sure the widows’ needs were met. Paul dramatically steps into the story, and before long he is mentoring, instructing, and developing disciples like Timothy and Silas to lead the church as she reached a new generation.

Missionary expansion, ministry, and making disciples are still at the heart of the church’s mandate. The question is: “How is my church engaged in accomplishing these tasks today?”

Lost people still need the Gospel, hurting people still need ministry, and new leaders are still needed for today's generation and the next.

One of my strategies as a pastor to fulfill these responsibilities was to get involved in Convention and Associational life. I actively took leaders and potential leaders to training events to equip them for mission, ministry and leadership. Giving through the Cooperative Program was one of my strategies to help my local church ministry and beyond. I came to the conviction early that I needed help in ministry, and that I needed to be a help.

A healthy church needs to be involved in mission and ministry that is both local and global. The struggle is not to pick between the two, but to develop strategies for the church to engage in both. Jesus sees us, and He sees those beyond us. He wants His church to do the same. Our cooperative efforts are one way to help us minister locally and globally with sister churches to impact the world.

This month Michigan Baptists will gather for the 62nd Annual Meeting of our State Convention at Mile City Church in Plymouth on November 8th. It will be a time to hear about our cooperative work, approve the ministry budget, make new friends and connect with old ones. There will be times of celebration, inspiration, and vision casting.

The part that thrills my heart about our Annual Meeting is that it helps us see the missions, ministries, and leadership development that we do together.

Together...

- Michigan Baptists have 40 new church plants
- Bambi attendance is growing dramatically
- Women's ministry is impacting lives
- Disaster Relief is serving people
- Baptisms are up 20%
- And much more

And that's just part of what we are doing in Michigan together! Our partnership goes beyond our church, beyond our state, beyond our nation, to the ends of the earth. We are Partners in Advancing God's Kingdom!

#### **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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## Whatever it takes

**ROSCOMMON, MI** – “Whatever it takes” - If you have ever spent much time here at Bambi Lake you may have heard those words spoken by Jimbo, one of our Bambi Lake volunteers and residents. Jimbo would usually utter these words when a simple repair turned into a renovation, a fairly common occurrence here at Bambi. I imagine if Jimbo had a dollar for every time he has spoken that statement of faith over his 15 years of service here at Bambi, he could buy his own private island.

Now, although Jimbo may not own an island, he does possess something(s) of much greater value. Jimbo has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ which he would tell you is his greatest treasure. Ask him to tell you about what Christ means to him and you better be prepared to order a pizza, sit down and listen. He will tell you his journey with Christ has been filled with forgiveness, joy, excitement, pain, sadness, miracles, blessings and unconditional love. He will tell you that life can be done God’s way or the hard way. He will remind you that obedience brings blessing and serving gives fulfillment and you can’t out-give God!

“Whatever it takes” is more than a trite saying for Jimbo. It exposes his character and faithfulness to do what God has called him to do no matter the difficulty. Serving at Bambi has had its share of reward as well as challenges. Most often having to fix big problems with limited resources or not being able to purchase the right tool for the job - toilets overflowing, septic tanks backing-up, equipment not working, pipes freezing and on and on. However, in all the time I have spent with Jimbo, I have never heard him complain about dealing with crazy circumstances or minus 25-degree weather. His heart and attitudes are always about glorifying God in the task that needs to be accomplished. He is always seeking to do what is best for Bambi Lake and the guests who enjoy the property and events.

For 15 years, Jimbo has been a testimony of Christ-likeness, faithfulness and servanthood here at Bambi Lake. He has served with a joy, selflessness and love rarely found in our culture today because Jimbo does not serve man, he serves God. Of course, Jimbo is not perfect, Vicki his wife will tell you that, however the love he has for Christ is encouraging and contagious. If you ask, he will humbly tell you that since Christ did “whatever it takes” to save him and forgive his sin, how can he do any less to serve and follow his Savior.

I wanted to personally share all this about Jimbo because he is retiring from Bambi Lake at the end of November. After 15 years of faithful service and witness for Christ, Jimbo is excited to experience the next season of his journey doing whatever God has for him. To say he will be missed cannot begin to describe the thoughts and emotions of our Bambi Lake staff. Nevertheless, we are excited to know that God already has ministry for Jimbo and that he will do “whatever it takes” to see it accomplished! Thank-you Jimbo, Bambi Lake Loves You!

## **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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## **Michigan reaching the world**

### **WHAT is this offering used for?**

Since 1845 the International Mission Board (IMB) has been partnering with local churches in equipping and sending missionaries to the world. 100% of your Lottie Moon offering sends and keeps 3,417 missionaries on the field (as of September 1, 2019), providing 60%+ of their support, with your Cooperative program gifts covering the rest. In 2018, 847 people groups were being engaged worldwide. Our personnel are actively involved in evangelism, church planting, humanitarian care, medical missions and in theological education. They are equipping nationals to reach their own people and partnering with other Great Commission Christians with the end goal stated in

“There was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” – Revelation 7:9

### **WHY should we give?**

As we cooperate together to send missionaries, we can do more! Each church in Michigan, regardless of size, can send missionaries! We may be small, but we are MIGHTY when we work together to advance the Gospel to the nations through our PRAYING, our GIVING, our SENDING and our GOING! Michigan Baptists are on the international field as a result of Lottie Moon gifts. MORE members of Michigan churches are preparing to go in 2020. We want Michigan to be well represented in the praying, the going, the sending and in the giving.

### **HOW will your church give to the LMCO this year? What will YOU do personally?**

I was saddened to learn that more than ½ of Southern Baptist Churches did not give to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering last year. I don't know what the Michigan statistic was for 2018, but I do know what I pray for this year: That EVERY Michigan church will give to the offering and pray for the featured missionaries, making our statement that we want to participate in this ONE SACRED EFFORT to live out the Great Commission. We are raising our goal this year at my church. I am raising my personal giving level. What will you do?



## **One final question, for anyone who doesn't yet know: WHO is Lottie?**

The short story is this: "Well over 100 years ago, a single missionary named Lottie Moon, while serving in China, began writing letters challenging the American church to send and support more workers to go there. After her death on the field, her challenge was heeded in the formalization of an offering in her name. Even if you're not a Southern Baptist who has given to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, her life is a reminder of why we must give to send and support missionaries serving among unreached peoples in unreached places."

You can find more of Lottie's story at: <https://www.imb.org/who-was-lottie-moon>

Free promotional materials for Michigan churches: <https://www.bsccm.org/missionofferings>

For online LMCO resources go to: <https://www.imb.org/lottie-moon-christmas-offering-resources>

To order WMU resources go to: <https://www.wmystore.com/missions-resources/lottie-moon>

Can we help you with your Lottie Moon Offering Emphasis?

Contact me, Karen Villalpando at [karenvilla722@gmail.com](mailto:karenvilla722@gmail.com) or reach out to Sue Hodnett at [sue@bsccm.org](mailto:sue@bsccm.org)

I am your Michigan Trustee to the International Mission Board, and I am excited to give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering! Will you partner with us?

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Karen Villalpando is a Michigan Baptist, an IMB Trustee and the director of Child Care at Memorial Baptist church in Sterling Heights, MI.

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## **The Way Church**

**FENTON, MI** – Years ago, my wife and I felt the Lord leading and prompting us in the direction of church planting. We prayed for an opportunity to do so and, for what felt like a lifetime, only grew more and more discouraged. Everything changed with a phone call. After hearing about a church in Fenton (right where we wanted to focus our efforts) being forced to make decisions about its future, we knew God was closing one door and opening another.

Months later, we launched The Way Church with the mission of helping people find and follow Jesus. We set out to reach young families, and God continued to provide. Since our launch we've celebrated with people who've come to know Jesus, and we've watched as individuals took the next step in their walk with Christ.

As a new church with a heart for our community, we've had our work cut out for us. So this summer we decided to put our hands to worship. On Serve Sunday we cancelled our gathering, and set out to serve Fenton. We painted park restrooms, cleaned up yards, wrote letters of encouragement to residents of local nursing homes, and took part in a road clean-up effort. A day later, township officials were calling us with more needs to fill in our community, and we've been busy meeting those needs ever since.

In the days following Serve Sunday, God opened the door for more service opportunities and opened our hearts to a deeper love for the people in our community. We even picked a couple of random mornings to show God's love in a much sweeter way. By passing out donuts and coffee to community members who drove by our building. We were able to say, "we're here for you."

We've watched as God used service projects, and even something as simple as a donut to draw people towards Himself. People have been coming to know Jesus, but we've also been intentional about growing in our walk with Him. Take for example our FIVE52 Initiative, where we've challenged our people to read, pray, and give every week for an entire year. For 52 weeks we're asking our people to spend time with God in prayer for 5 minutes, spend time in Scripture for 5 minutes, and commit to giving at least \$5 every week. In doing so, we're seeing people growing in their love for the Lord, growing in their understanding of Scripture, and being more open handed with the resources God has blessed them with.

Ten months ago we launched with the intention of reaching young families in our community. While we've experienced our fair share of obstacles along the way, this journey has been nothing short of encouraging. People have come to know Jesus, and we've seen them intentionally take that next step in their walk with Him. We're helping people find and follow Jesus.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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

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## Putting the blinders on

MONROE, MI – The vast majority of my life has been lived in the great state of Kentucky. One of the things which Kentucky is well-known for, outside of men’s basketball, is horse racing. I am almost embarrassed to say that my knowledge of horse racing is slim to none. However, my brother currently works for a horse farm in Lexington, so at least I have that connection. Although my knowledge of horse racing is lacking, I have attended races at Churchill Downs and Keeneland. One thing I noticed when attending these races is that many of the horses have blinders on. The purpose of the blinders is to keep them focused upon what is directly in front of them. If their attention is distracted by something, it can promote anxiousness in the horse and they could go off course.

In Colossians 3:17 Paul says, “And tell Archippus, ‘Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it.’”

Archippus is a young man who is being encouraged by the Apostle Paul to stay focused upon the ministry which he has received from the Lord. Paul is not telling Archippus to look to the left or to the right and see what others are doing, Paul is telling him to stay centered upon what God has called him to do. In a sense, Paul is telling Archippus to put blinders on and persist with the task that God has placed before him.

As church planters, we need to put blinders on. The tendency for us is to play the comparison game with other church planters. But like horses, if we lose sight of what is in front of us and focus on the things around us, it can promote anxiousness and cause us to go off course. The Lord has called us to pay attention and focus on the ministry we have received.

We are all aware of that well-known passage in 1 Corinthians 3 where Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” Staying focused upon planting the seed and watering the seed has to be the emphasis of our labor. As a church planter, it can be frustrating to constantly be casting seed and see it fall on hard ground without bearing fruit.

Currently, I am preaching through the gospel of Mark, and it is remarkable how repeatedly the disciples fail to understand who Jesus is and what he came to do. Did Jesus get frustrated with them at times? Absolutely, read chapters eight and nine in Mark’s gospel. But did that keep him from the task in which He came to accomplish? No. Jesus continued teaching them, loving them, and patiently enduring because that was his ministry. Jesus stayed focused upon the will of the Father. Jesus says in John 6:38, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.”

In the back of my mind I can still hear the voice of my pastor, friend, and one who spent significant time discipling me, “Jason be faithful, Jason be faithful.” Those few words have been a comfort to me during times of difficulty and frustration in this journey of church planting. May

all of us put blinders on and focus upon being faithful to the ministries in which we have received from the Lord.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jason is the Lead Pastor of Outpost Community Church, a church plant in Monroe, MI. Jason went through a two-year Pastoral Internship at Parkway Baptist Church in Bardstown, KY from 2015-2016 under Pastor James Carroll. Upon completing that, he accepted a Church Planting Residency at First Presbyterian Trenton under Pastor Aaron Carr in January 2017 and completed it in December 2018. Jason completed his Masters of Divinity from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in May 2018. Jason is married to Amanda and they have 4 children - Ashken, Noah, Kane, and Trey.

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### **IMB values partnerships, Chitwood tells advocates**

**RICHMOND, VA** – More than 155,000 people die daily without Christ. This is a harsh and unacceptable reality facing Southern Baptists, IMB President Paul Chitwood told a recent gathering of advocates near Richmond, Virginia. The lost — those living apart from a relationship with Christ — need people who will advocate on their behalf by praying, giving, going and sending.

The gathering, which included Baptist state executives, associational and WMU leaders, former missionaries, student leaders and representatives from other Baptist entities and churches across the United States, encouraged partnerships and networking for the sake of advocating for the lost around the world. IMB leaders shared the vision from Revelation 7:9 of “a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

The vision is “not one we crafted, but one placed in front of us through the revelation to John,” Chitwood told the more than 250 gathered advocates.

“If we are to ever see the Great Commission completed toward the vision of a multitude from every tribe before the throne, then we must amplify our voices together,” Chitwood said. “Using our voices, God can move professionals, students and retirees from the comfortably padded pews of U.S. churches into the presence of unreached people. Advocacy is how we unleash the body of Christ.”

Michelle Chitwood, who shared the platform with her husband Paul during the opening session, compared advocacy for the lost to her role as a foster parent.

“When we were going through training to be a foster parent, our trainer told us a lot of people won’t foster because it is hard,” Michelle said. “The kids are traumatized, and they come with a whole lot of baggage. But being an advocate is when you stand in the gap, when you carry their hurt, when you carry the load they can’t carry. You fight for them in court, and you fight for them in school.”

Advocacy in missions is very similar, Michelle said. “Being an advocate for a missionary is one of the highest callings. It is living well.”

***“Being an advocate is when you stand in the gap.”***

“When we stand in the gap for our missionaries, we stand in the gap for a lost world,” Chitwood agreed. “[Understanding my role as an advocate] changed my approach to everything. It changed my approach as an IMB trustee. It changed my approach to pastoring. It changed my approach to teaching seminary classes ... and it changed how I approached leading 2,400 churches” as executive director of the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

During the conference, IMB leaders presented different ways God has led IMB missionaries to engage the lost around the world and how believers in countries like the Philippines and South Korea are now sending their own missionaries.

Chitwood and other IMB leaders also emphasized the need for partnering churches to come alongside IMB personnel to engage the unreached. IMB leaders encouraged church leaders and advocates to “lean on” the 175 years of field experience IMB offers as they seek to develop healthy partnerships around the world.

Daryl Cornett, Pastor of Aberdeen First Baptist Church of Aberdeen, North Carolina, tweeted during the gathering, “I’m encouraged greatly for the advance of the gospel through the IMB in the days ahead! A great heritage and an exciting future!”

“You have been given a voice, one designed to amplify the voice of Christ among the nations,” Chitwood told the group. “God has chosen to use you as His mouthpiece, calling others to participate in fulfilling the vision of Revelation 7:9. God has equipped you to join Him in your praying, through your giving, your sending, and your going. You have a part to play in this task ... alongside everyone at your home church.

“Together we can do so much more than we could possibly do alone!” Chitwood said.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ann Lovell is editorial/design manager for the International Mission Board.

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## Send Relief Pittsburgh looks to multiply through churches

**PITTSBURGH, PA (BP)** – While more than 100 volunteers and well-wishers filled Vintage Church's freshly renovated basement during the grand opening of Pittsburgh's Send Relief Ministry Center, Adam Sewell heard one word repeat in his mind. Faithful.

That's how Sewell, a Send Relief Missionary in Pittsburgh, described the Oct. 19 grand opening ceremony, which included a homeless care package assembling event, a Chick-fil-A lunch for volunteers and a time of worship and sharing the Gospel. Volunteers filled 250 backpacks with food and daily living supplies.

"God has definitely been faithful," Sewell said. "This has been a dream for so many years. So just to be here with over 100 people who were in here just serving, the bags up front, the love being shown here -- this is God's people serving God's people. It's pretty overwhelming."

Rob Wilton, the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) Send City Missionary in Pittsburgh and a former New Orleans church planter, echoed similar sentiments.

"This has always been a dream of mine," Wilton said. "I'm thankful to God that we're able to see this dream come alive."

Send Relief is NAMB's compassion ministry arm. The Pittsburgh ministry center is the seventh, joining centers in New York City, Appalachia (Ashland, Ky.), New Orleans, Clarkston (Ga.), Las Vegas and Puerto Rico.

Each ministry center focuses on one of Send Relief's core ministry areas: poverty, refugees and internationals, foster care and adoption, human trafficking and crisis response.

Pittsburgh's center, housed in Vintage's lower level, will focus on poverty and includes showers, a laundry room and serves as a point place for feeding and clothing ministries.

For Sewell and Wilton, Vintage Church's lead pastor, the ministry center's launch is a culmination of more than a year of watching God's hand work by knitting together unlikely relationships and partnerships to create a way for Southern Baptist churches to provide compassion ministry to Pittsburgh's most vulnerable.

Six years ago, Sewell, a central Pennsylvania native, and his wife planted The Well Church, launching it from their home.

"Later, we were able to rent a storefront right down the road from here, and when that happened, we felt it was God opening a door to compassion ministry for us," Sewell said. "It made sense to us because these are our neighbors."

When Sewell and his church plant made the move out of his house, he began seeing God provide as only He can.

"We had no budget for the kind of ministry we wanted to do here," he said. "We just had availability. I didn't know how to stock any of it. We put out our vision to our neighbors, and the neighbors were the ones who showed up. All the clothes in our clothing store came from our neighbors, so many of our neighbors heard the Gospel regularly.

"People would say, 'How is a small church plant going to do this?' But it was people in the city who heard the vision and saw the vision, and then God just stepped in and said, 'I got this.'"

God's provision crystalized when Wilton left New Orleans -- a place where he'd spent 10 years as a church planter and chaplain for the New Orleans Saints -- to become Pittsburgh's Send City Missionary in August 2018.

He launched Vintage on Easter 2019 as a merger with Sewell and The Well, because both pastors sensed God calling them to something larger than themselves.

"Coming into the city, we could tell God was already doing amazing work here," Wilton said. "So, the first step here was getting to know the faithful guys serving here along with faithful churches which allowed me to link arms with Adam and The Well."

When the idea of a merger first emerged, Sewell didn't balk. In fact, once he discerned Wilton as a kindred spirit, it didn't take much thought at all to know it was a God-ordained connection.

"Rob and I have the same heart, so I said, 'Let's do this together,'" Sewell said. "For us, it was a no-brainer. I don't care what name you call the church or who's in charge. None of that matters to me. Our neighborhood needs this, and this place is now alive because of Jesus."

The need is also what drew Wilton.

"My wife and I took a trip here to pray and consider, and God did what He does," Wilton said. "The appeal was the need. To have this opportunity, specifically with the SBC and Send Relief, to come into a city where there's not been a lot of traction and to be a catalyst to do ministry all over the city -- when we saw what was needed, we wanted to be here."

But both Wilton and Sewell see an even more expansive vision for the center.

"We're dreaming of planting 25 new churches by 2025, and we want to use this center to make sure that every church is equipped with Send Relief's mission to meet needs and change lives," Wilton said.

"This place is just the beginning of Send Relief in Pittsburgh," Sewell added. "Here will be the hub, but we want to see it multiply throughout the city's planters. This is where we want to

train church planters and churches through modeling events similar to this, to let people know it's not so hard to do this yourself.

"In five years, I want this to be one of many spots in Pittsburgh where needs are being met and lives are being changed."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Gabriel Stovall writes for the North American Mission Board.

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## **Retired pastors satisfied and optimistic, but see room for improvement**

**NASHVILLE, TN** – Most retirement age pastors and missionaries say their current life is close to ideal, but some who have entered retirement say they could've been better prepared.

In a survey sponsored by Shepherd's Fold Ministries, Nashville-based LifeWay Research asked 2,451 pastors, ministers and missionaries who were retired or at least 67 years old about their life, health, relationships, reflections on ministry, and how they've adjusted to their current life stage.

"Our number one goal is to provide relevant resources to help retired ministers," said Brent Van Hook, director of Shepherd's Fold Ministries. "The results of this study show specific ways retired ministers can experience genuine higher well-being related to social, spiritual, physical and financial health."

Out of those ministers or missionaries surveyed, 8 in 10 (81%) are currently retired or mostly retired. Around half (52%) have been in ministry 40 years or longer, with 35% serving 40 to 49 years and 17% serving 50 years or more.

The vast majority think fondly about their previous ministry. More than 9 in 10 (92%) say they are satisfied with their ministry efforts before retirement, with 59% saying they are very satisfied.

When asked about their feelings toward the churches or mission field where they served, around 8 in 10 (79%) say they feel thankful. More than half say love (59%), proud of them (53%), or rewarded (52%). Slightly fewer say encouraged (48%) or connected (43%).



Few retirement age pastors or missionaries say they feel disappointed (16%), disconnected (16%), betrayed (8%) or bitter (2%).

When asked to think about their overall life today, including relationships, spiritual health, finances and physical health, 3 in 4 (74%) agree their life is close to ideal in most ways.

Similar numbers describe their current life conditions as excellent (76%), while more than 8 in 10 (86%) say they are satisfied with their life today.

“These three questions were used to create a life satisfaction score,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “Analysis revealed the characteristics that predict higher life satisfaction include being in better health, satisfaction with ministry efforts, positive feelings about where they served, financial stability for retirement, and current relationships.”

### **Physical health**

In describing their overall health, 72% say they are active and healthy, while 14% say they have physical disabilities that limit them, and 12% say their spouse has such limitations.

Fewer retirement age ministers say their spouse has been diagnosed with a mental illness like depression, dementia or Alzheimer’s (5%), they spend a significant amount of their time caring for the health of someone with disabilities (5%), or have been diagnosed with a mental illness themselves (3%).

Around 4 in 10 (41%) agree having more help with their own health or the health of someone they care for would help at least a little.

Retirement age ministers are most likely to say information, tips and best practices for maintaining good health would help the most (25%), along with financial assistance (21%), and Medicare supplementary insurance (19%).

“While many retire from ministry in good health, aging brings with it healthcare needs for pastors and missionaries,” said McConnell. “Some are sidelined by health needs, and others could use financial help for medical care.”

### **Relationships**

Most older pastors, ministers and missionaries say they have close relationships that allow them to share problems, but some may be facing loneliness.

Among those who are currently married, 93% say their spouse is very satisfied with their marriage.

When asked about meeting with someone at least once a month to openly share struggles, 61% of those surveyed say they talk with their spouse. A third (33%) meet with a close friend, 19% talk to a Bible study group in their church, and 3% meet with a counselor.

A quarter (26%), however, say they don't regularly meet and share with any of these.

Around 7 in 10 (69%) say they have at least three close friends with whom they see or speak with at least once a month, with 17% saying they have 10 or more.

Still, 21% say they see or talk to one or two friends, and 10% say they don't have any friends outside of family that they meet with at least once a month.

The vast majority say they have continued to make new friends in recent years (86%) and have many close relationships at their current church (68%). Still, 29% say they often feel lonely or isolated.

Most (58%) say they currently live near their children, 42% live near most of their friends, but 22% say they don't live near either.

Around half (48%) agree if they had more help connecting with new friends it would help improve their overall well-being at least a little. A quarter (25%) say it would not help at all.

More retirement age ministers say they would benefit from making friends who have had a similar experience in ministry (25%), making friends who live near them (23%), and relating to a church in which they are not in leadership (20%).

"Retirement sometimes means separation from past friends," said McConnell. "It's important to continue to invest in new relationships."

## **Finances**

Three-quarters (76%) of retirement age ministers are confident they will have enough money to live comfortably through retirement, with 31% saying they are very confident.

Still, almost half (47%) say they are often concerned about the financial security of their family and 27% say their physical needs or those of their spouse have caused significant financial strain.

More than half (55%) say their household's current annual income is less than \$60,000. Slightly more than a third (36%) have less than \$100,000 in retirement savings.

Virtually all retired ministers (94%) receive Social Security benefits. Around 3 in 5 (59%) have a pension plan with their current or former employer.

Four in 5 (81%) say they currently live in a residence they own, while 10% rent, 3% live in a residence provided by a church or ministry, 3% live with family and 1% live in an assisted living facility.

Three in 5 (59%) say they currently have some form of debt, the most common being a mortgage (37%), a car loan (27%) or credit card debt (20%).

Of those with a mortgage, 42% have 20 years or more left on the loan. Around 3 in 10 (29%) say they have 10 to 19 years. The same (29%) say they have nine years or less.

Those who have debt were asked how much debt their household has outside of their mortgage. A quarter (25%) say they have no non-mortgage debt and an additional 53% say they have less than \$30,000, including 28% having less than \$10,000.

Some retired pastors, however, say they have substantial non-mortgage debt. Around 1 in 7 (15%) say they have at least \$30,000 in debt, including 4% saying theirs is at least \$100,000.

Almost 3 in 5 (58%) say if they had help with their finances it would improve their overall well-being at least a little.

Retirement age pastors and missionaries are most likely to say they need help managing retirement funds (22%), finding work suitable for retired ministers (17%) or learning how to stretch their current resources (16%).

“The fact that most pastors and missionaries feel financially ready for retirement doesn’t negate the fact that a quarter are not in a good position,” said McConnell. “Health issues have complicated the financial picture for many of those with financial strains.”

### **Preparation for retirement**

Among those who are currently retired, 76% say they were prepared for the adjustment to retirement. Seven in 10 (70%) say the transition was easy.

The most common approaches to preparing for the transition were speaking with others who had retired (46%), reading articles on the topic (42%), or attending a retreat or conference for those nearing retirement from ministry (26%). One in 5 (20%) say they did not prepare for the transition at all.

Still, 33% say they have struggled with the adjustment, and 28% feel they lack purpose since they retired from the ministry.

Almost 2 in 5 (39%) say they have had to rethink their sense of value and worth since retiring and 27% say that retirement forced them to think about their value to God.

When asked an open-ended question about what advice they would give those retiring from the ministry in the future, those currently at retirement age most frequently said to save and plan financially (13%), plan ahead (10%), enjoy and embrace retirement (8%), be prepared (7%), find opportunities to volunteer or serve (6%), stay active (4%), trust God (4%), pray (4%) and develop interests or hobbies (3%).

Shepherd's Fold Ministries' Van Hook said the number one piece of advice they would give to those planning for retirement from the ministry would be, "Don't do nothing."

"We learned that just a little bit of action goes a long, long way toward increasing long-term well-being," said Van Hook. "You're in this ministry for the long haul, why not invest in your long-term well-being? Momentum builds quickly, so do something today."

Retirement age ministers also volunteered some ways ministries can best help those like themselves, such as opportunities to serve or minister (16%), a pension or retirement plan (7%), financial planning or assistance (5%), include them (5%), offer seminars, workshops or retreats (4%), opportunities to stay active (4%), keep in touch with them (4%), offer encouragement (3%), show appreciation or recognize them (3%) and provide resources (3%).

For churches and ministries looking to better serve retired and retiring pastors and missionaries, Van Hook said there are two primary ways they can reach out.

"The first way is to partner with the growing number of ministries and resource centers that exist to help retired ministers," he said. "Secondly, simply communicate with retired ministers and listen. Those actions will go a long way to making them feel appreciated."

### **Methodology:**

The online survey of retired Protestant pastors, ministers and missionaries was conducted June 11- July 23, 2019. The study was sponsored by Shepherd's Fold Ministries. Invitations were emailed to retirees and those of retirement age using lists from the following organizations: Assemblies of God, Baptist Missionary Association of America, Church of the Brethren, Church of the Nazarene, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Wesleyan Church, Operation Mobilization, OMF International, One Mission Society, WEC International, and Wycliffe. Reminder emails were also sent. Respondents were screened to include those who had served as a pastor of a church, other minister in a church, or missionary and are retired or of retirement age (67+). Quotas and slight weights were used to balance denominational/organizational affiliation based on the number of eligible retirees. The completed sample is 2,451 surveys.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

For more on this study, visit [LifeWayResearch.com](http://LifeWayResearch.com) or view the complete report.

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## LifeChangers 2019 report

**DETROIT, MI** – Year after year, for the last 24 years LifeChangers has continued to involve youth, collegiates, and adults in changing communities and lives “One House at a Time”. This past July wasn’t any different as the young volunteers enjoyed a week of service, tearing down and building up, praising and worshiping, and even some daily recreation.

This was a NEW year, a year of change. Earlier in 2019 our housing was sold. St Robert Bellarmine school sold their property to a private school. We also had a need to transfer our worksites out of the Brightmoor area of Northwest Detroit. We began to pray, asking God for His direction for housing, worksites, and backyard Bible clubs. God was already ahead of us. Pastor Wayne Parker (Merriman Road Baptist Church) had recommended that we check with Warren Woods Baptist Church and Pastor Larry Allen. They were very kind and receptive to helping LCs out. After getting it approved through their church calendar, Pastor Allen gave us the green light. Pastor Allen also provided some names for us to contact as possibilities for support and involvement. As a result of a few contacts, we held one larger backyard Bible clubs at Faith Outreach Center church where Stephen and Kaye Elliott are Pastor and wife and who did an incredible job hosting the backyard Bible club all week. We invited children and young people from two large, neighboring Mobile Home Parks. Their church is known as the “Ice Cream Church” because it is literally an Ice Cream Parlor. They have a tremendous energy and a great facility. We look forward to their involvement in 2020 and beyond.

We connected with Pastor Mike Osminski in Warren who became a worksite provider. One of a few sites he referred us to was a handicapped single mother who had several needs at her home. During the week we were able to clean out her shed and paint it, clean her pond and reline it, hung drywall in the kitchen and paint and tile. A second house he referred, received a roof repair and insulation rehung in the crawl space of the basement. And many feet of fence was painted. Also, another widow received loving labor from the group as well. Trees trimmed, grass cut, electrical work and other odd jobs. Pastor Osminski’s church paid for all the repairs. He is excited to work with LC again in 2020. Work was also performed at Macomb County Habitat for Humanity supplies warehouse. The young people laid sod, planted trees and shrubs, established shelves, and set up clothing distribution.

Appreciation for providing meals goes to: Memorial Baptist church, Herb Harbaugh, Pastor; Merriman Road, Wayne Parker, Pastor; Colonial Hills, Mt Morris, Brian Southerland, Pastor; Temple of Faith, Rochelle Davis, Pastor; Middlebelt Baptist, Inkster, Woodside Church, Jeff Keith, Pastor.

Everyone said it was a lot of work, but very rewarding. “I can only imagine how great next year will be with all the base work that was accomplished this year” commented Bill Beasinger, Colonial Hills Baptist Church, LC Ass’t Director. We were fortunate to have recruited some Leaders in Training. Alex Meeks, David Clark Rose, and Sabrina Guglielnetti who invested a lot of energy in the program this year. They will continue on the Leadership Team for 2020.

We give a big THANK YOU to Greater Detroit Association for their continued encouragement and support. Thank you to all of the churches and members who continue to provide meals. For more LifeChangers info go to [golifechangers.org](http://golifechangers.org) or call (or text) Wayne Vann at 734-718-4923 or Alex Meeks at 734-620-9592.

Don't forget to:

**SAVE THE DATE – LIFECHANGERS – 2020  
JULY 18 TO JULY 24, 2020**

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Wayne Vann and his wife, Pam, co-direct the teen/College missions camp, LifeChangers, which they started 24 years ago. They have 4 adult children, 2 great-grands and 14 grandchildren.

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## **Lottie Moon Christmas Offering Goal is \$165 million**

*I saw a great multitude from every nation and all tribes and peoples and languages standing before the throne. - Revelation 7:9*

**National goal: \$165 million**

**2019 Week of Prayer for International Missions – December 1-8**

[imb.org/lmco](http://imb.org/lmco)

Generous giving to the 2019 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® makes a difference among the multitudes. Men, women, children, and entire communities are transformed as a result of this offering. Your gifts enable thousands of missionaries to live among, serve, and share the gospel with people who have never heard it until now.

Every December since 1888, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering has empowered Southern Baptist's international missions work. At the beginning of this giving season, we start with a week of prayer dedicated to international missions, taking place December 1-8.

As IMB President Paul Chitwood told messengers at the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting: "The gospel is being preached among the nations, and we are privileged to be part of it." Thanks to your gifts through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, he could report that:

- Overseas baptisms by churches that IMB missionaries have planted or directly partner with have increased by more than 6,000 over last year.

- New church starts reported in 2018 were nearly triple the number of new church starts IMB reported in 2016.
- The number of national believers who received advanced theological training increased by 10,000 over each of the prior two years.

Watch this inspiring video. Together We are able to do so much more together, than if we were chasing this vision alone. <https://vimeo.com/355955618>

The stories in the Week of Prayer brochure and accompanying videos show the impact IMB missionaries are having around the world.

- Here to Serve Walking with missionaries in Africa reminded Dr. Paul Chitwood just how much missionaries depend on your support. <https://vimeo.com/355943959>
- A Season of Change A married couple in a Mexican labor camp were barely holding on—until IMB missionaries introduced them to Jesus. <https://vimeo.com/355945409>
- Gospel on the Move They're hard to find and even harder to stay connected with, but East Asia's nomadic herdsman are slowly hearing the gospel. <https://vimeo.com/355947475>
- Catching a Vision As IMB missionaries train South Korean students and send them out, lives are changed—and the students are too. <https://vimeo.com/355948399>
- A New Beginning Amid heartbreak and loss, some Venezuelans are finding radiant hope in Christ. <https://vimeo.com/355950018>
- Sowing Seeds An IMB emeritus missionary reunites with a young Bulgarian man he disciples decades ago. <https://vimeo.com/355951598>
- Answering Life's Questions A young Québécois' life was sinking until an IMB missionary helped him find his purpose in following Jesus. <https://vimeo.com/355952487>
- Sidewalk Chapel After contemplating suicide, a Japanese man finds new life through a ministry to the homeless. <https://vimeo.com/355954228>

## Decades later, IMB work bears fruit in Singapore, SE Asia

**SOUTHEAST ASIA (BP)** – The scent of pine trees and roasting coffee beans permeates the Southeast Asian air. International Mission Board worker Katelyn Summers\* keeps careful track of the roasting time. Outside on the terraced hill, high school students, who have traveled from their home in Singapore, lug bags of freshly picked coffee cherries to be processed and dried.

The students came to this Southeast Asian nation to serve as part of their church's partnership with Summers to help introduce the Gospel to the people group among whom she is working.

Summers buys coffee cherries from her people group and processes, roasts, and sells the coffee beans. Her coffee sourcing and selling provide the community with a livelihood, and they provide Summers with an opportunity to share the gospel.

And when the Singaporean students help Summers, they carry on the missions legacy of their parents' and grandparents' generations.

### **Southern Baptist footprints in Singapore**

The history between Singapore's Calvary Baptist Church and the IMB began decades ago.

"If you go back far enough, you'll see the handprints and footprints of the Southern Baptist missionaries," said Calvary pastor Koh Kok Chuan.

In the 1950s, many IMB missionaries came to serve in Singapore after being forced out of their former country of service due to the advent and acceleration of Communism.

"You can say that the door was closed to that nation, but it opened a huge door in Southeast Asia and the East Asian diaspora," Koh, who goes by KC, said. "I think Singapore really benefitted from those missionaries that came down."

Calvary was started in 1957 by missionaries from the Foreign Mission Board (now IMB). The church was the culmination of the pioneering work of a Sunday school class that met in the home of missionary Lydia Greene. The church building was constructed using funds from the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, and the first service in the building was held Dec. 8, 1957. Calvary's first six pastors, who served over the course of 15 years, were sent and supported by the Foreign Mission Board. Calvary has since been led by local leaders.

Now Calvary has a Mandarin service, a Hokkien-language service, and two English services. The church has grown through the years from 30 charter members to 700.

### **Partnership for the Gospel**

In 2011, through their contacts with Baptist Global Response and other missions organizations, leaders at Calvary connected with Summers, who serves in a Southeast Asian nation. Over time, through prayer and vision trips, a partnership developed.

Church leaders have made multiple trips to the country. Other teams, like the high schoolers, have traveled to work alongside Summers, and more trips are in the works.

At a recent church fair, Calvary members sipped coffee from Summers' farm as they meandered past booths and stalls with a booklet relaying information about the people group and how they can pray and be involved in making the Gospel accessible to this community.



Summers recently visited Calvary to share about her work, and the church formally voted to join her in a long-term endeavor to see the people group grasp the good news of the Gospel.

### **In it for the long-haul**

Calvary is diving deep into the partnership with a fortified missions strategy that includes educating the church on how each member has a role to play.

Calvary sees this as a generational commitment. Their desire isn't to bounce from people group to people group, or from one strategy to another. They're committed to this people group for the long run.

"We're in it for generations. It's not just one group of people. It's the church moving through various generations [of members] to see how God is going to lead us into the work," KC said.

### **Missions at your doorstep**

Calvary's goal is to integrate missions into their church's identity so that it becomes more holistic rather than compartmentalized.

"If we can learn what we need to do overseas, here, it is very natural for us to do the same [abroad]," KC said. "What you do at home, you must also do outside. And what you are doing in a foreign land, you must bring back. We need to get a mindset that says, 'Missions is everywhere, and whether it's at your doorstep, or you're going somewhere else, we should all be missional.'"

### **Good stewards**

As electric fans work hard to circulate air in the open-air dining area, three middle-aged businessmen share how they've been involved in their church's missions efforts, both financially and through short-term trips. The three friends believe they've been blessed for a purpose -- to share the Gospel and create opportunities for others to share the Gospel. And they are using their influence and resources to do it.

Singapore's influence has grown exponentially in its short history. In the 54 years since becoming its own country, Singapore has become a financial powerhouse with the third-highest per-capita GDP in the world.

"We are an amazing generation, not because we are amazing, but because of the way the country has progressed," KC said.

Just as the past 50 years have been revolutionary for Singapore, they've also been revolutionary for Singapore's churches. Calvary sees going to the nations as being good stewards of what God

has put in their hands. When they are open to using their resources and time to serve the Lord, the church blossoms locally and internationally.

"We need to be out there," KC said. "Our God is a big God. We serve out of that understanding.

"It's not just about the church," he added, "but also [about] my own life. When God calls me to do something, it's no matter of my convenience -- what I want to do, my comfort zone. It's a matter of obedience."

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Caroline Anderson is a writer with the IMB. She currently lives in Southeast Asia. Her childhood in Asia consisted of two important ingredients: braving hot chili peppers and telling people about Jesus.

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## **Kingdom shown in church, Moore says in Hill talk**

**WASHINGTON, D.C. (BP)** – The Kingdom of God is displayed currently not in "dramatic manifestations" but in the church and in the lives of its members with one another, Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore told a Capitol Hill audience Monday evening (Oct. 28).

Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, spoke on the Kingdom of God in this age during the second of three ERLC Academy sessions this fall in Washington, D.C. The academy seeks to equip the next generation of leaders to apply the Gospel of Jesus to the moral and ethical issues facing the church in society. About 65 people -- mostly congressional and administration staff members or Christian college interns -- attended the Oct. 28 event at a House of Representatives office building.

The Kingdom of God presently "can't be seen or verified by the outside world," Moore told attendees.

"Instead, it shows itself in people who are repenting of sin, confessing sin, starting to come to realize, 'I don't have to perform; I don't have to pretend; I'm received by God,'" he said, adding it also is on display in "people who are serving the poor, people who are loving each other, people who are cultivating the spiritual gifts that God has given them within the church, people who are gathering together and worshipping...."

What is happening in "real-life congregations made up of irritating, sinful, aggravating, annoying people ... is a preview of what the Kingdom of God is to be like," Moore said while basing his presentation on Matthew 11:1-15.

"[W]hat the Kingdom ultimately means is that you are dead," he said. "If you're in Christ, you are dead. You're crucified with Christ, which is good news because you don't have anything left to lose.

"The Kingdom of God is not an it. The Kingdom of God is a Who," Jesus.

When a person trusts in Christ, "what happens to that person is that he or she is joined to Jesus and then enters into the life that Jesus has, which is life in the Kingdom of God," Moore said. "So you are legally joined to Christ, but it's not just legal. It's also a lived reality, where the life of Christ starts to be expressed in your own life.

"What the Kingdom of God is doing is invading you, and you are living through a life of cross-bearing and of having all of those parts of you purged away," he told attendees. "You are being purged from all of those things that don't make you fit to rule and to reign with Christ. And so that's going to look like in your life a profound struggle."

An audience member asked Moore during a question-and-answer period for some practical ways to live out the Kingdom of God without reverting to isolationism or triumphalism.

Moore encouraged him to continually seek "for the life of Christ to be manifest in your own attitudes and actions, which means noticing when they're not."

The ERLC Academy is typically held each year either in Washington or Nashville. This year, it is being conducted in both cities. It was held in May in Nashville as a two-day event -- with an additional three-day doctoral seminar. It was held previously in Nashville in 2015 and 2017, as well as in Washington in 2016 and 2018.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tom Strode is Washington bureau chief for Baptist Press.

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## **Nik Ripken releases 'dangerous' book about the joy of sacrifice**

**NASHVILLE, TN** – World missions veteran Nik Ripken wants the church to rethink sacrifice. "Sacrifice in the Western context is negative where it should be one of positive joy," said

Ripken, a 30-year missionary and one of the world's leading experts on the persecuted church. "It expresses one's faith for today while building one's soul to serve more powerfully tomorrow."

Ripken believes this kind of joy has a role to play not just for missionaries and those living in persecuted areas, but in the day-to-day life of every Christ follower. It is through this conviction that Ripken is releasing his newest book, "The Insanity of Sacrifice," with B&H Publishing to help ignite conversations about Christian sacrifice around the kitchen table.

"The center for worship and witness in our world is homes," Ripken said about his new 90-day devotional written with Barry Stricker. "We wrote 'The Insanity of Sacrifice' praying that families will share truths from the Bible and Christ's stories around the table as they share meals with family, friends and their neighbors."

"The Insanity of Sacrifice" follows on the heels of Ripken's two books, "The Insanity of God" and "The Insanity of Obedience," and "The Insanity of God Movie"—resources that have collectively influenced more than 200,000 people.

While his prior books and movie told the stories of believers living amidst persecution and gave a voice to saints living in obscurity who would otherwise be forgotten by the world, Ripken said this time around, he wanted to focus on inviting readers into the story of sacrifice.

"The reader [of 'The Insanity of Sacrifice'] is not allowed to remain a spectator but is personally ushered into the presence of God and challenged with the cost of following Jesus," Ripken said. "It's a dangerous book as it demands we risk everything for the joy of carrying our crosses as we follow Jesus." Ripken admits labeling God's call to Christians "insane" can be controversial. But insanity is a word, he says, that encapsulates a way of living that makes absolutely no sense to the world and describes the holiness God.

"God's ways are so unusual that, by human standards, they are considered outside of the boundaries of what would be called 'sane,'" Ripken writes in "The Insanity of Sacrifice." "He is forever reminding us that He is different—and that His ways are different." By embracing a life marked by sacrifice, Ripken says Christians can fully live out their calling by allowing their declarations of faith to match their body language in a way that's noticeable to the world.

"Believers in persecution often say to us, 'Never have we felt so close to Jesus as when our faith was costing us something,'" he said. "Sacrifice is a joy when it is framed by eternity. "Hopefully this book will lead people to sacrifice their time, because they love Jesus, and therefore cross the street and cross oceans with the good news of Jesus Christ."

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Aaron Wilson is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

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## **Psalm 139 Project, partners place ultrasound in N.C.**

**RALEIGH, NC (BP)** – The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's Psalm 139 Project, an initiative dedicated to aiding pregnancy resource centers in securing ultrasound machines and providing training, partnered with Human Coalition and six area churches to place an ultrasound machine at Human Coalition's Raleigh Women's Clinic in Raleigh, N.C.

ERLC President Russell Moore was joined by leaders from Human Coalition's Raleigh Women's Clinic for a special dedication ceremony Oct. 24 at the clinic.

Area churches involved in the ultrasound partnership include:

- North Wake Church, Wake Forest, N.C.
- The Summit Church, Raleigh, N.C.
- Imago Dei Church, Raleigh, N.C.
- Faith Baptist Church, Youngsville, N.C.
- Bay Leaf Baptist Church, Raleigh, N.C.
- Crossroads Fellowship, Raleigh, N.C.

"We are grateful for our partnership with the ERLC and the six churches that came together to provide a new, state of the art 3D/4D ultrasound machine for Human Coalition's clinic in Raleigh," said Brian Fisher, president of Human Coalition.

"This machine provides clear, beautiful images that will assist our medical staff in diagnosing pregnancy and allow a woman to see her child for the first time. When women are able to connect with their children via ultrasound and access the tangible resources they need, they are more empowered to choose LIFE. We are eager to see the fruits of this ultrasound machine gift as Human Coalition continues its mission of rescuing children and serving families in Raleigh."

Human Coalition is committed to ending abortion in America. The group's National Rescue System includes women's clinics in key abortion-dense communities, like Raleigh-Durham, across the country. Human Coalition has rescued 14,197 children since its inception 10 years ago.

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## **Cooperative Program: When missionaries cry**

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** – Maybe you've seen a missionary cry. Interviewing a missionary in Ecuador some years back, my heart was gripped when he spoke through tears of the persecution experienced by the indigenous people he worked among in the Andean mountains.

It was midday, we were in a cold, dark room. All I could do was sit there and dig for empathy within my soul as he cried.

In a conference more recently, I saw a husband and wife, missionaries to Russia, cry as they described their love for the people they had served.

I had regarded the Russians as communist enemies, people who spoke a distinct language that often burst forth from deep in their chest or the back of their throat.

And they wore furry hats.

Those notions suddenly became an embarrassing caricature in my brain. Through these missionaries' tears, I began to see Russians as real people who, for decades, labored under a governmental system that sought to deny them any precious opportunity to encounter the living Lord.

And just the other day, I saw another couple, missionaries to Malawi for more than 20 years, cry over the country they had left behind as they adjusted to retirement.

The burning desire to share Christ was still aflame in their saddened souls -- souls that remained, in large part, in Africa.

Isn't this something marvelous about the Cooperative Program that should stir us as Southern Baptists to profound gratitude to the Lord? Through CP, and through our missions offerings, we send passionate missionaries to the world's masses who join with local believers in rural villages and towns and in urban centers to share a wondrously redemptive faith.

And thankfully, these missionaries are known to cry with burdened hearts -- and joyous hearts - for the missionary calling which we facilitate through the Cooperative Program.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Art Toalston, now a freelance writer, was an editor with Baptist Press for more than 25 years.