

## BAPTIST BEACON TAKES NEXT STEP

*Staff*

**FENTON** — This issue of the Baptist Beacon launches a new era of publishing for the Michigan Baptist state publication. Going forward the Beacon will be available to anyone, anywhere, and for free.

At the annual meeting in November, Baptist State Convention of Michigan Executive Director, Dr. Tim Patterson, announced the new direction for the state publication. He said that with the cost of postage and printing of The Beacon, "it is not financially responsible to continue to provide the paper in print."

The BSCM commissioned a survey of the state convention's pastors and 75% wanted to receive the news through the Internet and social media. Patterson said, "by taking the Beacon online, it will allow it to be better, more current and more interactive."

The online look of the Beacon is part of an overall rebranding of the BSCM including the logo, state convention website, Facebook page and Twitter account. The online version can be found at [www.baptistbeacon.net](http://www.baptistbeacon.net).

For those who would prefer a print version, a synopsis of each issue of the paper will be available in a pdf form of the Beacon, where individuals or churches can download and print it.

Dr. Patterson said, "The goal of the Baptist Beacon is to communicate, and this transition will allow the BSCM to be a better communicator with our state partners."

## 2015 BSCM CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

*Staff*

**FENTON** — Pastors, church leaders, groups, individuals, and children attended the Christmas Open House at the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Groups took tours around the updated offices, which included learning how each staff member is uniquely positioned to assist churches. Guests heard about the new vision and experienced the growing enthusiasm for the future of Michigan Baptist Churches. The majority of the time was more informal as guests chatted with state staff over hot cider and cookies. BSCM Executive Director, Tim Patterson said he was especially delighted that so many guests spoke of the openness and warmth they found at the state office. Patterson said, "It seems everyone was encouraged with the direction the Convention is taking."



## BSCM ANNOUNCES CHURCH PLANTING CATALYST TEAM

*Staff*

**FENTON** — The Baptist State Convention of Michigan's Church Planting Catalysts (CPC) are anxious to see what God does as they pursue the goals of starting, strengthening and sending churches in 2016. Director of Missions, Tony Lynn, announced the addition of several CPC's to kick off the new year. "Collectively these men bring an abundance of experience as well as deep commitment to our work here in Michigan," said Lynn. Adding to the existing team already at work brings the total number of Catalysts to five.

**Darren Greer** is no stranger to the BSCM as he has spent the last 27 years planting churches, pastoring and leading teams here in Michigan. He noted the biggest challenge continues to be enough church planters called to Michigan. Greer views the challenge as a goal for sharing the need, identifying potential church planters, and finding SBC churches to sponsor the new work. Greer serves the Northwest, Pines Bay, and Genesee Association.

**Kevin Litchfield** continues to serve in the Greater Detroit area where his focus is on the Iraq and Bangladesh population. Litchfield recognizes one of the most important tasks in his ministry is to spend time praying for each church planter and pastor serving these people groups. He challenges himself to be an encourager and resource to them, and hopes to mobilize college students this summer to put feet on the ground in Detroit working alongside those serving there. Litchfield serves the Greater Detroit area which includes the Greater Detroit and Motor Cities Baptist Associations.

**Darryl Gaddy** begins his service as Church Planting Catalyst in the Metropolitan Detroit area of Wayne County while continuing to serve as senior pastor of Victory Fellowship Community Church located there. Gaddy identifies himself as an indigenous church planter, who was born and raised in the urban core of Detroit. He knows of the overwhelming challenges, created by poverty and drugs, synonymous with this area. He understands how such conditions make it almost impossible to plant an effective church yet after nine years the church he started is sustaining and growing. Gaddy notes this people group is severely underserved by evangelical, mission-minded churches.

**Dan Ghramm** arrives to start a new work and brings with him notable wisdom for the task. Serving in the southwest corner of Michigan, Ghramm recognizes the need for regional assessment, and developing of relationships with churches and community leaders as he begins to determine the areas of greatest need for a church. He also understands how prayer and planning will be tantamount to creating patience along the way, seeking God's leading and not his own. "When we pinpoint a spot on the map, we are going to know this is where God is leading," says Ghramm. In addition, he wants to initiate leadership development among guys just beginning to consider ministry, or seeking to plant a church that will have longevity and reproduction. Dan Ghramm is serving the Woodland, Southwestern and Southcentral Associations.

**Tim Shrader** begins work in the Lansing, Jackson, Hillsdale, Adrian, Monroe communities as well as surrounding areas, as the newest member of the CPC team. His many years of pastoring local churches have prepared him for this task. Shrader sees leadership as key to encouraging existing churches while planting new ones. He understands the critical importance of church sponsorship and hopes by developing relationships with local pastors, they too, will recognize how sustaining churches can be missionally-minded in their own communities and across the state.

Lynn says, "If you would like more information about planting a church in your area contact us at the Baptist State Convention of Michigan offices. We will be glad to be of assistance."



Click image to enlarge.



## CHURCH PLANTING: NOT ABOUT FAME OR FORTUNE

*Eric Stewart - ONElife Church*



Eric Stewart, lead pastor of ONElife Church in Flint Township, MI.

**FLINT** — A little over a year ago God called us to plant a church in Flint, MI. Yes, that Flint... the one that shows up as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. It is honestly not that bad, and it is a city that I love. We had our beginnings as a pioneer work with just a handful of us meeting in our living room and dreaming of what could be. By God's grace that handful has multiplied as we have grown and witnessed God producing fruitfulness through our ministry. We are not "breaking any records" but we have certainly witnessed God's faithful hand in everything and this Sunday we will baptize our 20th person since launching just over a year ago (we don't just baptize anyone that has a pulse either... we take our time and do our best to assess that they are actually regenerated). All of that to say this; I am certainly no "expert" when it comes to church planting. In fact, I have probably done more things wrong than I have done right. One of my favorite quotes upon starting the church came from William Carey, "The man who never makes mistakes never makes anything." With my heels dug in the ground, by the grace of God, I have committed to saying, "Here I am, send me." On that note, as I have been going I have learned a few key things about church planting.

### It Really Is Christ's Church

I know this sounds so simple, especially for my fellow Calvinist friends. We love to talk about the sovereignty of God, in particular when it comes to salvation. By talking, I mean we love to impress each other with our vast knowledge and insight on the topic! Intellectually I have never had a hard time grasping the sovereignty of God. On the other hand by planting this church I have slowly learned how to actually apply God's sovereignty and ultimately rest in the words of Jesus when He said, "I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18 ESV).

In the early days of our church plant, Dan (Worship Pastor and Co-Planter) and I worked really hard and followed through on so many "right" things purely from a pragmatic and marketing perspective. We did get the word out through many different channels and we were even able to land a spot on our local news station. This led to us having a decent size crowd at launch to not knowing if we were going to make it another year a few months later as the crowd dwindled so quickly. It was at this moment that Dan and I, as leaders, had some pivotal decisions to make. Did we believe we were called to plant and were we going to rest in God's sovereignty when it came to the fruitfulness of our church? We have chosen to continually rest in God. This does not mean that we don't work like crazy though. The second thing I learned is that at the end of the day God works through "gospel-centered" leaders.

### Gospel-Centered Leadership

As the old adage goes, "Everything rises and falls on leadership" (John Maxwell). That is true in the ministry as well. God does not bless and use a sloppy and unprepared leader. Striving to grow as a gospel centered leader I have come to a few clear convictions of structures a gospel centered leader must build and continued actions he must take.

First, a gospel centered leader is one who actually rests in the Bible and subscribes to building the church the way that God prescribed it in the Bible. This was something I was not clear on when we began, but I am emphatically clear on now. A true church is not one that meets critical mass of numbers and budgets, but one who has a plurality of gospel-centered elders with members actually following them. Paul's instructions to Titus were not "Go to Crete and hit critical mass" but to "appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5c ESV). This was a valuable lesson for me as we walked our young church through the stages of being covenant members of a local body under the leadership of a plurality of elders.



Dan Dameron, Worship & Creative Arts Pastor and co-planter of ONElife Church.

## CHURCH PLANTING: NOT ABOUT FAME OR FORTUNE (continued)

Second, I have learned that gospel-centered leadership (especially in a pioneering work) is being willing to pave the way for others to follow, and rejoicing in God that they walked with you. This has continually revealed to me that I need to always be growing as a leader, and that whatever I am asking my team to do I must do first. Here are five levels of leadership that I have learned I need to continually walk:

**Level 1: Follower** - The person that is too big to follow is too small to lead. I meet weekly with a mentor to seek his wisdom and counsel to grow as a leader. On a side note, I am shocked at how few pastors/planters do this. Most are arrogant and think they know it all.

**Level 2: Server** - The true test of a gospel-centered leader is not how many people are following him or are under his authority, but how many people is he serving. If serving is below you then leadership is above you.

**Level 3: Shepherd** - In the CEO movement of pastoring and church planting this is lost. I have learned that God has called me to be a shepherd and to care for His flock.

**Level 4: Equipper** - Be a talent scout. I have learned to search for people that the Spirit has set aside for leadership and pour as much time into them as possible to equip them to walk through the levels of gospel-centered leadership.

**Level 5: Equipper of Equippers** - Find others that have the ability to equip others. By God's grace and perseverance I strive to be this type of leader.

Third, I have learned that I need to give leadership away as often as I can. This always makes sense on paper but it is always more difficult in practice because we are prideful men who love to be in control and have the praise brought to us. I have learned that you have to work through this by preaching the gospel to yourself and then entrust responsibility to those around you who God has called and equipped. This is the only way that the body will grow fruitfully and exponentially.

### Conclusion

I have learned that church planting is not about fame and fortune (although many of us go into planting for that reason). We want to write and publish books like J.D. Greear and preach like Matt Chandler. Now I praise God for these men, but the vast majority of us won't be like that. We will be slugging away in the trenches, faithfully preaching God's words, and making disciples. I have learned to be content with that. God is sailing this ship and I am just along for the ride.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eric Stewart is lead pastor of ONElife Church in Flint Township, MI. Prior to planting ONElife, Stewart served as an associate pastor for nearly seven years and proceeded to serve for several months as an interim pastor. During this time he preached over 500 sermons and gained valuable experience in leading, creating, and managing nearly all systems and ministry teams of the church.



## STUDY: NEW CHURCHES SHOW APPEAL AMONG THE UNREACHED

Lisa Cannon Green - Facts & Trends Magazine

**NASHVILLE (BP)** — America is launching new Protestant churches faster than it loses old ones, attracting many people who previously didn't attend anywhere, new LifeWay Research studies show.

More than 4,000 new churches opened their doors in 2014, outpacing the 3,700 that closed, according to estimates from the Nashville-based research organization based on input from 34 denominational statisticians. And on average 42 percent of those worshipping at churches launched since 2008 previously never attended church or hadn't attended in many years, LifeWay Research found in an analysis of 843 such churches from 17 denominations and church planting networks.

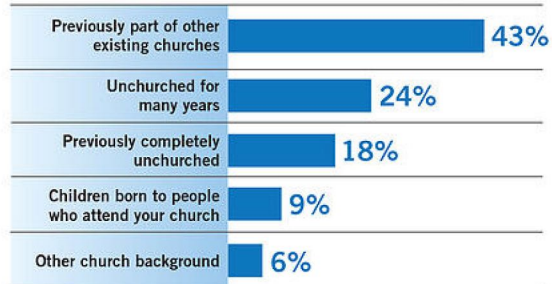
The church planting study indicates newly planted churches are more effective than existing ones at drawing people who aren't connected with a church, said Ed Stetzer, LifeWay Research executive director. "In winning new converts to Christ, church plants are light-years ahead of the average church because of their focus on reaching the unchurched," Stetzer said.

### Characteristics of success

Successful church launches have several factors in common, the 2015 National Church Planting Study shows:

### Among American Church Planters:

#### Of the people who currently attend your church, what is their background?

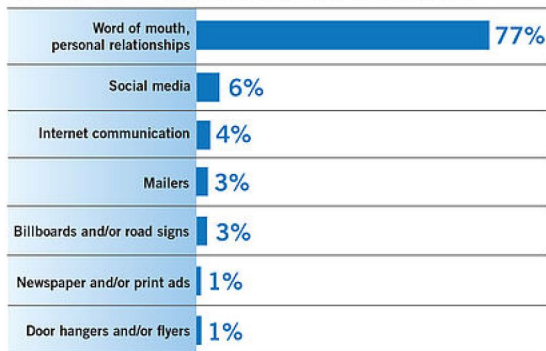


LifeWay

LifeWayResearch.com

### Among American Church Planters:

#### What form of publicity is the most successful at attracting new members?



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LifeWayResearch.com

- Meeting in a public space. New churches meeting in schools have significantly higher worship attendance than other new churches. They report more new first-time commitments to Christ and are more likely to become financially self-sufficient.
- Focusing on outreach. New churches offering sports leagues, social gatherings and children's special events are significantly more likely than other startups to be congregations with a majority of people who previously did not attend church.
- Supporting their leaders. Adequate compensation and health insurance for the church planter are linked to higher worship attendance and a greater likelihood of financial independence for the new church.
- Starting more churches. New churches that invest in church planting and launch at least one additional new church in the first five years report higher worship attendance and more new commitments to Christ.

"Healthy new churches have an outward focus from day one, communicating every month that the goal is to be a multiplying church," Stetzer said.

### Back to basics

Though some pastors bristle at new churches coming into their community, they have more to learn -- and less to fear -- from the startup down the street, Stetzer said. One lesson is the value of time-tested methods. While most church plants use the Internet for outreach, 77 percent say word of mouth and personal relationships are the most effective forms of publicity. Only 6 percent say social media is most effective. Nearly two-thirds of new churches (63 percent) say Bible study is their primary small group activity.

"It's not the most innovative things that matter most. It's the nuts and bolts," Stetzer said.

## **STUDY: NEW CHURCHES SHOW APPEAL AMONG THE UNREACHED** (cont'd)

"An existing church can take notice and ask, 'Hey, are we doing those things? Are we making sure people in the community know we exist? Are we inviting people to come and making them feel welcome and all those things a church plant does?'" In addition, Stetzer said, new churches can attract demographic groups that may be largely unreached by existing ones. Sixty percent of church plants aim to reach a cross-cultural or multiethnic group of people from the outset.

"It takes multiple methods to reach a diverse population," Stetzer said. "The United States from its founding has been a very diverse population. A one-size-fits-all church has never been part of the American equation.

"As much as ever, we need different approaches to reach different types of people."

Additional reports from the study will be available at [NewChurches.com](http://NewChurches.com).

**Methodology:** The 2015 National Church Planting Study report analyzes 843 churches started in 2008 or later that continue to exist today. The study was sponsored by 17 denominations and church planting networks that participate in the Church Planting Leadership Fellowship: Assemblies of God, Baptist Missionary Association of America, Center for U.S. Missions (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod), Christian and Missionary Alliance, Converge Worldwide, Evangelical Free Church of America, Free Methodist Church USA, International Pentecostal Holiness Church, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod Texas District, New Thing Network, North American Mission Board (Southern Baptist Convention), Presbyterian Church in America, Project Jerusalem, Path1 (United Methodist Church), Southern Baptists of Texas, Vineyard Church and The Wesleyan Church. Lists of church plants were provided by the sponsors and the Church of the Nazarene and the Missionary Church. From May-August 2015, planters were individually invited to complete the online survey by email, phone and postcard. Factors associated with church planting success were determined after controlling for church demographics, denomination/church planting network, U.S. state, church planter characteristics and other characteristics.

Estimates of the number of 2014 Protestant church starts and closures are based on unofficial reports LifeWay Research gathered from 34 denominations that represent 55 percent of U.S. Protestant churches. The pattern in this large sample was applied to the non-reporting and non-denominational groups to provide the overall estimate.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Cannon Green is senior writer for Facts & Trends magazine ([www.factsandtrends.net](http://www.factsandtrends.net)), published by LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.



## 10 WAYS TO DRIVE AWAY FIRST-TIME GUESTS

*Thom Rainer - LifeWay Christian Resources*

**NASHVILLE, TN** — If you attend a church regularly, you've probably noticed the phenomenon. A guest shows up for a worship service, but he or she never returns. It is, unfortunately, a common issue in many churches.

I did a Twitter poll to ask these first-time guests why they chose not to return to a particular church. While some of the responses were anticipated, I admit being a bit surprised with some of them.

Though my poll is not scientific, it is nevertheless fascinating. Here are the top ten responses in order of frequency.

### 1. Having a stand up and greet one another time in the worship service

This response was my greatest surprise for two reasons. First, I was surprised how much guests are really uncomfortable during this time. Second, I was really surprised that it was the most frequent response.

### 2. Unfriendly church members

This response was anticipated. But the surprise was the number of respondents who included non-genuine friendliness in their answers. In other words, the guests perceived some of the church members were faking it. In other words, the guests perceived some of the church members were faking it.

### 3. Unsafe and unclean children's area

This response generated the greatest emotional reactions. If your church does not give a high priority to children, don't expect young families to attend.

### 4. No place to get information

If your church does not have a clear and obvious place to get information, you probably have lowered the chances of a return visit by half. There should also be someone to greet and assist guests at that information center as well.

### 5. Bad church website

Most of the church guests went to the church website before they attended a worship service. Even if they attended the service after visiting a bad website, they attended with a prejudicial perspective. The two indispensable items guests want on a website are address and times of service. It's just that basic.

### 6. Poor signage

If you have been attending a church for a few weeks, you forget all about the signage. You don't need it any more. But guests do. And they are frustrated when it's not there.

### 7. Insider church language

Most of the respondents were not referring to theological language as much as language that only the members know. My favorite example was: "The WMU will meet in the CLC in the room where the GAs usually meet."

### 8. Boring or bad service

My surprise was not the presence of this item. The surprise was that it was not ranked higher.

### 9. Members telling guests that they were in their seat or pew

Yes, this obviously still takes place in some churches.

### 10. Dirty facilities

Some of the comments: "Didn't look like it had been cleaned in a week." "No trash cans anywhere." Restrooms were worse than a bad truck stop." "Pews had more stains than a Tide commercial."

## 10 WAYS TO DRIVE AWAY FIRST-TIME GUESTS (continued)

There you have it. The top ten reasons first-time guests said they did not return to a church. I can't wait to hear from you readers. You always have such good additions and insights.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thom S. Rainer is the president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources. He has written more than 20 books including the bestsellers *Simple Church* and *I Am a Church Member*. You can connect with Dr. Rainer on Twitter @ThomRainer and at [facebook.com/Thom.S.Rainer](https://facebook.com/Thom.S.Rainer).

## SYRIAN REFUGEE SEES 'JOY' AT BAPTIST CHURCH

*Diana Chandler - Baptist Press*



As the Syrian civil war enters its fifth year, more than 10 million Syrians have been displaced from their homes, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported. (BP File photo)

**MARIETTA, GA (BP)** — When Syrian refugee Mohammad heard the choir sing at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., he remarked, "I don't know if I believe what they say, but they sure do have a lot of joy." Johnson Ferry Baptist Church pastor Bryant Wright recalled the story as the church continues to help Mohammad, his wife Ebtesam and their 4-year-old son Hasan settle in the Atlanta area. "We thought that was significant because he hasn't seen much joy," Wright, former Southern Baptist Convention president, told Baptist Press. "The Muslim refugees in Syria are just so weary of the hatred and the violence within Islam that obviously they are open as never before to the Gospel, which is very exciting to see."



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**SYRIAN REFUGEE SEES 'JOY' AT BAPTIST CHURCH (continued)**

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The family was approved for entry into the U.S. after spending nearly three years in a refugee camp in Jordan, denied certain freedoms, forbidden to work while there and dependent upon siblings in the United Arab Emirates for income. They are hopeful their lives in the U.S. will be different, Wright said, even though there is a growing mistrust and fear of Syrian Muslims in America. "The overwhelming majority are truly victims of the violence in the war of Islam and the Syrian civil war," Wright said of Syrians.

As the Syrian civil war enters its fifth year, more than 10 million Syrians have been displaced from their homes, according to December numbers from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). About 4.3 million have fled to neighboring countries, 6.5 million are displaced internally and a total of 13.5 million are in need of humanitarian aid, OCHA reported. A quarter million have been killed. "Christ calls on us in the old covenant and in the new covenant, to care for the widow, the orphaned and the alien or stranger, which is another word that we would use today as immigrant or refugee," Wright said. "So we're just called to do what Jesus and the Word of God teaches us to do in sharing the love of Christ with people in need."

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal is among the governors trying to ban Syrian refugees from settling in their states following the Nov. 13 ISIS terrorist attacks in Paris. It was later reported one of the terrorists may have accessed Paris as a Syrian refugee. Concerns toward terrorism continue to mount with the Dec. 2 shooting at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, Calif., committed by a radical U.S. Muslim and his wife, who entered the U.S. from Saudi Arabia on a 'fiancée' Visa. The couple killed 14 and injured 21 at the husband's place of employment before police killed them as they tried to flee their home hours later. Investigators learned the couple had pledged allegiance to ISIS, according to news reports. U.S. mistrust of Syrians is further evidenced by Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump's rise in popularity after he said Syrian refugees should be blocked from entering the country.

Wright noted he fully understands the risk of terrorism and respects government's role to protect the citizenry. After Georgia's governor announced a ban on Syrian refugees in the state, Wright wrote the governor a letter explaining that his church had already made plans to help Muhammad and his family in partnership with World Relief ministries. "[The governor's] role is different," Wright said. "Romans 13 teaches the role of government is to protect the citizens, to administer justice and to punish evil. I certainly understand his concern. [I] don't agree with it, but I understand he's in a different position from where the Christian and the church are to respond to refugees in need. There is risk and people are scared to death in America today, understandably, because Islamic terrorism is a very real threat. But that doesn't remove the calling we have to minister to refugees in need."

In addition to sharing the Gospel with Muhammad's family, teaching them English and helping them understand the culture, Johnson Ferry Baptist Church is helping the family with living expenses. Wright described the family, whose last name is withheld, as hopeful, despite the backlash they may experience in the U.S. "They're very hopeful coming to America," he said of the family. "In light of what they have lived through, with relatives and friends being shot and killed and bombed, and then living in just desolate conditions there in Jordan. ... We have told them about the backlash that they may encounter from Americans who are so afraid right now with Islamic terrorism being such a real threat. So we've tried to prepare them that that could happen," Wright said. "But I don't think they're afraid. In light of what they've lived through, they are greatly relieved to be here."

Wright reached out to World Relief months ago to help Syrian refugees resettle here, he said, and encourages other Christians to do what they can to help the population group. "I would hope every church would be open to ministering to Syrian refugee families that are in our midst. We're called to share the Good News of Christ and the love of Christ with our neighbor, that's all mankind," he said. "I just would encourage churches to reach out in faith in Christ, not fear of man," he said. "I think right now a lot of people are responding in fear."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press' general assignment writer/editor. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and internationally.

## IMB RESET PROMPTS REFLECTION ON MINISTRY MOVES

*David Roach - Baptist Press*

**RICHMOND, VA (BP)** — The first phase in the International Mission Board's "organizational reset," completed in December, has led hundreds of missionaries to confront a question that, at some point, many in Christian service face: How do I know if God is moving me to a new place of ministry?

The IMB has not released the results of Phase One -- a voluntary retirement incentive (VRI) offered to all staff and field personnel 50 and older with at least five years of service -- because IMB officials say employees have been asked to focus on God's will rather than on numbers.

"At every step, we have sought to guard the integrity of the process so as not to sway any IMB personnel as they make their decisions," IMB spokesperson Julie McGowan told BP in written comments. "Instead of personnel looking at each other wondering, 'How many more of us need or don't need to make a transition?', we want personnel looking to the Lord and asking, 'Are You leading me to make a transition?'"

Results of the entire voluntary resignation program, designed to bring the IMB's expenses in line with its income, will be announced in early 2016 following Phase Two, which will prompt all remaining IMB personnel to ask whether God is moving them to new fields of service, McGowan said. The number of missionaries and stateside staff to accept the VRI was finalized Dec. 11. The IMB projects the two phases of its reset will yield a total reduction of at least 600 individuals.

### Discerning God's will

Consistent with the focus on God's will, Baptist Press asked several ministry veterans, including two missionaries who accepted the VRI, how they have discerned the Lord's leading in ministry moves. Missionaries Stewart and Lissa Roberson, who served more than a decade overseas in the Asia region, told BP God led them to accept the retirement incentive in a way that shattered their paradigm. "We were just getting to the point where we had reached our language requirement," Lissa Roberson said. "We felt like we were gaining traction in the community with some relationships we had built. We felt like things were just beginning for us. Then suddenly we were feeling this pressure [from God] to leave. We just could not understand that."

The Robersons' process of discerning God's will involved Scripture reading and prayer, requesting prayer and advice from "committed prayer warriors" and thinking through the practical implications of their decision. Though God typically has given them an inner sense of peace before they make a major decision, this time the peace didn't come until after they accepted the retirement incentive. They did not sense taking it was wise from a human standpoint, they said, but felt a strong leading they believed was from the Holy Spirit.

The Robersons are in the process of moving from Japan to the Nashville area, where a local congregation has arranged housing and transportation. They are still seeking a ministry opportunity. "When it came down to it, we knew we needed to take this" offer, Stewart Roberson said. "And we couldn't really tell why at that point. We just believe the Holy Spirit was really influencing that decision."

### Leaving something good

Robby Gallaty, pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., said it is not unusual for God to lead His people away from thriving ministries. That's exactly what happened to him in October, when he moved to Long Hollow from Brainerd Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tenn.

"You don't always have to leave a church when things are bad," Gallaty told BP, citing advice from a mentor. "God could actually be calling you away at the peak season of ministry in preparation for the guy who's coming behind you. Why do you always have to leave a church when it's bad?" At Brainerd, Gallaty said, "over the course of seven years, our disciple-making ministry grew from about 12-15 in discipling relationships to over 1,200 in discipling relationships" out of 2,100 worship attendees. Though Gallaty was not seeking to leave, he said God confirmed to him, "You have finished the task of creating a disciple-making DNA."

To leave one ministry and begin another, a Christian should have both a sense of release from the old ministry and a desire for the new one, Gallaty said. "If you don't have those two elements ... then it's probably best you stay."

### 'My work was not done'

For Fred Luter, God has never given a sense of release. Luter still serves as pastor of the first church to call him, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans. Nearly 30 years ago, the congregation voted on him as pastor when it had 45 members. Today thousands attend worship each Sunday.



## IMB RESET PROMPTS REFLECTION ON MINISTRY MOVES

Christians in ministry "need to approach every position as though this is the place they're going to stay forever," Luter, a former Southern Baptist Convention president, told BP. "...Don't despise small beginnings. You bloom where you're planted unless God tells you for sure, 'This is another place I want you to go.' "I tell young guys all the time," Luter said, "It's unfair to go to a church that has called you as pastor with a resume in your back pocket for the next church that comes along."

If it is God's will for a minister to move to a new field, Luter said, He will provide "an inner peace" through wise counsel, full support from the minister's wife if he is married and has a vibrant, personal relationship with Jesus.

Though Luter has been invited to leave Franklin Avenue on multiple occasions, "each time I just felt my work was not done," he said.

### Practical questions

Sylvan Knobloch, director of church leadership development at the Illinois Baptist State Association, advises ministers considering transitions to answer a series of questions:

- Why am I considering this transition at this time?
- Does my current ministry setting allow me to be a good steward of my spiritual gifts, passion for ministry, abilities, personality and experiences?
- Does the current ministry setting allow my spouse and me the opportunity to develop sustainable relationships? Are we able to develop comrades within the church and confidants outside the church?
- Do the current ministry setting's organizational values and mission match my personal values and mission?
- What are the lessons I have learned in my current ministry setting that will allow me to be more discerning when considering future ministry opportunities?

"Change is a part of life. Our ministry settings change and the minister's gifts, family and calling evolve," Knobloch told BP in written comments. "Therefore, it is necessary for the minister to exercise discernment regarding their calling to a ministry. I suggest the pastor answer the above questions and pray, asking God for insight and direction. "The second step in the discernment process is to set an appointment with a trusted friend to review the insights again. The counsel growing out of such a relationship will give the minister invaluable insight as he prayerfully considers his decision and calling," Knobloch said.

### 'Listen to God'

Roger S. Oldham, vice president for convention communications and relations at the SBC Executive Committee, told BP he did not want to leave his longtime pastorate in Martin, Tenn., when he was called to the EC in 2007. But "the dread of being out of God's will outweighed my reluctance to follow His lead."

Oldham said he has often returned to seven principles of knowing and following God's will given to him by a mentor in college:

- Be sure your heart is in a neutral position, willing to go or stay or do whatever God guides you to do (Proverbs 3:5-6).
- Pray specifically for guidance and wisdom (Philippians 4:6-7).
- Meditate on the Word of God (Psalm 119:105).
- Seek godly counsel from trusted mentors (Proverbs 11:14).
- Trust the Lord for His inner conviction (Colossians 3:15).
- Don't discount common sense (2 Timothy 1:7).
- Maintain a good conscience before God and others (Acts 24:16).

As Christians in all walks of life seek to discern God's will, IMB missionary Stewart Roberson offered a final piece of advice: "Listen to where God is leading, and don't limit God in our thinking."

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Roach is chief national correspondent for Baptist Press, the Southern Baptist Convention's news service. BP reports on missions, ministry and witness advanced through the Cooperative Program.

## VOLUNTEERS DELIVER LUNCHES TO OFFICERS SERVING COUNTY

Ray Kisonas - Monroe News

**MONROE** — Toni Cooper stood in the middle of a room full of Monroe law enforcement officers and uttered the words that she felt weren't said enough: "Thank you." On Wednesday, in a show of appreciation, dozens of CrossPointe Church volunteers delivered 176 lunches to the law enforcement members serving Monroe County.

"You make the streets safe for our kids," an emotional Mrs. Cooper told the members of the Monroe Police Department and the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. "We respect what you go through on a daily basis. We're doing this completely out of love. All we can say is 'thank you.'"

The 62 volunteers spent the day delivering meals to law enforcement officers, including Border Patrol, Michigan State Police and corrections officers at the county jail. Monroe Police Deputy Chief Charles McCormick IV said that during these times of much anger aimed toward law enforcement officers across the United States, having community members doing something nice is appreciated. "It's hard not to find it touching," Deputy Chief McCormick said. "People do care. And it's nice to know there are men and women in the community who believe we make a difference. It means a lot."



Monroe News Photo by TOM HAWLEY — Cpl. Kent Klemz of the Monroe Police Department helps bring in the lunches provided by CrossPointe Church members. "These lunches are our way to say thank you," said Toni Cooper (right).



Monroe News Photo by TOM HAWLEY — Yvonne Goff of CrossPointe Church thanks Sgt. Chad Tolsted of the Monroe Police Department while Jennifer Vida looks on. Members of CrossPointe delivered lunches to law enforcement members serving Monroe County in appreciation for all they do.

Mrs. Cooper, CrossPointe's ministry leader, said the idea to make lunches was born during sessions of Bible study. She said there is so much negativity regarding law enforcement that the group wanted to create a supportive gesture. So they got together and made each officer, deputy and trooper a lunch consisting of a pulled pork sandwich, chips, water, apple and cookies.

Called Random Act of Kindness, the church members now plan to do something nice for specific groups four times a year. They began Wednesday when volunteers arrived at the police headquarters on E. Second St. with dozens of lunches ready to be distributed. "Thank you for your service," Yvonne Goff said to the officers outside the building. "We're praying for your families, too." Karyn Cooley, another CrossPointe member, said she has wanted to do something nice for the community's law enforcement officers for a long time. But she wasn't sure exactly how to go about it.

"God answered my prayers," she said. "I've been waiting to tell them how much I appreciate them."

Capt. Brett Otolano of the sheriff's office said the gesture was a welcome effort. "We really do appreciate their support," Capt. Otolano said. "We do work hard to gain the community's trust. We believe we have a special relationship with the community and this is positive feedback."

In each lunch was a card created by children at CrossPointe Church, Church of God and at Holy Ghost Lutheran School. One officer opened his card that read: "Thank you for protecting us! God Bless You." It was signed Caleb.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ray Kisonas is a staff reporter and columnist for the Monroe News, Monroe County, MI.



## CAROLS AND COOKIES BRING NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

*Cecil Cogswell - Church Planter*



Cecil and Jayne Cogswell moved to Sarnia, Ontario, Canada and didn't know anyone. They invited their neighbors to their home for 'Cookies and Carolling' as a way to get to know them, but they also used it as an opportunity to share the gospel at Christmastime. (Photos by Cecil and Jayne Cogswell)

**SARNIA, ONTARIO** — A simple act of kindness and opening of a home brought an opportunity to share the Gospel to farm county on the shores of Lake Huron. Cecil and Jayne Cogswell after many years of urban ministry in the Greater Toronto Area (Canada) moved to Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. They didn't know anyone, nor did they have any connections. Once settled in their home and with the Christmas season approaching, the Cogswells wondered 'what can we do to meet our neighbors?'. The couple decided to extend an invitation to their home for 'Cookies and Carolling' in December.. They created an invitation inside a Christmas card – so that their neighbors would receive Christmas greetings and also be invited to a local 'event'.

With this idea in mind, they shopped some book bargains and obtained the Max Lucado booklet 'A Love Worth Giving To You At Christmas', which contains the gospel message. They also purchased a few carolling books. Jayne prepared some goody bags with jars of jellies and candies and the Lucado booklet was included as the guests left.

Thirty three homes received a personal invitation. Neighbors, whom they never met, came to their home for an evening of singing. Cecil presented a gospel message from John 1 with a personal testimony of how Christ changed his Christmas from growing up in an alcoholic home.

There were 20 RSVP's, but more than 30 people actually attended, including husbands, wives, and children of all ages. Neighbors met each other, some for the first time, and enjoyed each other's company. Everyone sang and heard about the Light of the World. Jayne said, "The atmosphere was festive and many lingered afterward."

A simple idea - to meet neighbors – became a wonderful and warm way of introducing the Christ of Christmas. The Cogswells said, "it is the 'First Annual'....but next year's venue will have to be larger." Cecil said, "It was such an exciting way to reach new people in this tiny hamlet on Lake Huron with the Good News."

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cecil Cogswell serves as a church planter in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada, where he and his wife, Jayne, partner with The Gathering Church of Windsor, Ontario, part of the Send Detroit Initiative.

## FULFILLING OUR DREAMS

*Kevin Hester - Church Planter*

**ST. JOSEPH** — The Shore Church and church planter Kevin Hester recently learned how God can connect our dreams with His vision. Over the past year and a half, they have taken every opportunity to share the gospel, participating in festivals and sporting events throughout the community. This past fall, the church had a booth at the Berrien County Youth Fair, one of the Largest Youth Fair's in the Midwest. Kevin was excited for the opportunity to have one on one conversations with young people about Jesus and to pass out Gospel tracts.



Jacob Adams, left, is owner of the Legacy Martial Arts Studio with Kevin Hester, church planter of the The Shore Church. Adams became a Christian after an initial encounter with Hester at the county fair. (Photo by Kevin Hester)

On the day of set up, a last minute change placed a martial arts business, Legacy Martial Arts, in the booth next to them. God was at work and an awesome plan was about to unfold. Kevin and the members of The Shore Church began building a relationship with their new friends and, after a few days, Kevin had the privilege of leading the owner and the main instructor to salvation in Christ. These two young men now have a future home in Heaven, but God wasn't finished just yet.

Kevin revealed that months before, while writing his "dream things to do as a church planter," offering martial arts classes at The Shore Church was one of his dreams. Sharing his dream with his new brothers in Christ, the owner and the instructor thought it was a great idea as well. Shortly after the youth fair ended, they began holding classes on Thursday nights and Saturday mornings in the church's small gymnasium. The second week of class there was also a father of some martial arts students who came to faith in Jesus Christ.

Martial Arts has been a great tool, to evangelize, see new visitors at The Shore Church, and build a positive platform to connect to the community. But God may not be done with this story as the martial arts business owner wants to partner in community evangelistic outreach and desires to expand to other churches. Recently he came forward and made a public profession of his faith. Legacy Martial Arts is not only making an impact in Southwest Michigan, but it is sure to leave a legacy in eternity! Kevin and the members of The Shore Church, encouraged by the experience, continue moving forward in new ways to connect and be the church in their community.



Children from the community practice their kicks in The Shore Church's martial arts outreach classes. (Photo by Kevin Hester)



A martial arts class being held at The Shore Church gymnasium. These classes as an outreach of the church are "a dream" that pastor, Kevin Hester, has had for many months. (Photo by Kevin Hester)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kevin Hester is a church planter and pastor of The Shore Church in St. Joseph, MI.



## MICHIGAN BAPTIST WOMEN GOING "BOTH FEET IN"

*Staff*

### **BAMBI LAKE CONFERENCE CENTER, ROSCOMMON —**

Michigan Baptist Women are being invited to go "Both Feet In" with Bible Study Leader Dr. Tony Lynn, BSCM State Director of Missions. Dr. Lynn says he will be teaching women how to plant both feet firmly in the Word, and challenge them to live everyday walking more deeply with Christ so they might touch more lives for Jesus. Inspirational worship will be led by "Legacy and Friends." Retreat planners hope the weekend will provide fellowship of women from different churches going "Both Feet In!" In addition, newly retired IMB Missionary, Sharon Hessling will be the Missions Study Leader. Hessling will offer personal accounts of living with "Both Feet In" for the cause of Christ. She says she hopes her stories will encourage Michigan women to go on mission for God. Saturday evening will include an overseas mission trip experience. Participants will go on

a vicarious mission trip to Africa, complete with the opportunity to interact with missionaries, experience the culture, taste the cuisine, have their passport stamped, and just maybe be intimidated by customs officers.

Check-in registration begins at 3pm on Friday with a evening dinner. The retreat ends on Sunday at 11:00am with Brunch.

Retreat sponsors remind participants that it will be colder so pack accordingly, and dress in layers. Jeans and sweatshirts are the preferred dress code with extra credit for pink camouflage.

Retreat programming includes 12 different breakout sessions featuring a variety of topics designed to challenge women to take their ministry to the next level.

In addition to the retreat sessions, free time will allow women to enjoy the Northern Michigan outdoors, go shopping in town, participate in service mission projects and many other activities.

Shopping opportunities include; "More Beautiful Than Diamonds Boutique", "LifeWay Christian Bookstore", "Worldcrafts", and Bambi's "JB's Place."



## MICHIGAN BAPTISTS AMONG 23 STATES INCREASING CP GIVING

*Tammi Reed Ledbetter - Southern Baptist TEXAN*

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** — Michigan Baptists are among twenty-three state conventions that voted to increase the portion of Cooperative Program receipts being forwarded to Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries in the coming year, continuing a trend inspired by passage of the Great Commission Task Force recommendations five years ago. The Baptist State Convention of Michigan will increase CP giving by 1 percent in 2016.

This year, Florida Baptists made the largest shift, moving from 41 to 51 percent allocated to SBC causes. "This epic, pacesetting decision will set a precedent in the Southern Baptist Convention," said Michael Tatem, president of Florida's State Board of Missions. "We are doing what the Southern Baptist Convention was called to do in 1845 -- to take the Gospel to the nations."

Iowa Baptists celebrated an 11 percent increase in giving to the Cooperative Program after messengers voted last year to boost the SBC portion from 20 to 50 percent, while Nevada Baptists reported a 13 percent increase after moving from 35 to 50 percent for SBC causes last year. "Several Iowa churches have significantly increased their financial support to missions through the Cooperative Program," Tim Lubinus, Baptist Convention of Iowa's executive director/treasurer, said. "I think it is likely that our decision last year to increase our giving to the Executive Committee from 20 percent to 50 percent provided us with momentum and incentive to give through the Cooperative Program."

In addition to Florida, other state conventions voting to increase by more than 1 percent the portion of their budgets sent beyond their borders include Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Maryland-Delaware, Minnesota-Wisconsin, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee and Utah-Idaho. Meanwhile, state conventions in Arkansas, California, Dakotas, Kansas-Nebraska, Mississippi, New England, New Mexico, Northwest, Pennsylvania-South Jersey and West Virginia voted to increase the SBC portion in amounts ranging from .005 to 1 percent. The four conventions that forward half or more to the SBC without a "shared ministries" calculation are Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (55/45), Florida (51/49), Iowa (50/50) and Nevada (50/50). State conventions in Florida and New England quit designating any items providing dual benefit to the state and national convention. While 15 state conventions continue to use the classification, five reduced the portion designated as shared.

The actual dollar amount of a state convention's allocation fluctuates annually depending on how well cooperating churches in the state are able to fund their respective budgets. On the positive side, more than 4,400 Southern Baptist churches met or exceeded the 1% CP Challenge last year, increasing their CP giving by at least 1 percentage point of their budgets from undesignated gifts by their members and visitors. The total undesignated CP receipts received by the state conventions are projected to decrease by \$5 million as total giving to churches remains in decline, and yet, with more than half of the state conventions increasing the SBC portion, the national allocation is likely to increase by more than \$5 million.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tammi Reed Ledbetter is news editor of the Southern Baptist TEXAN.



## STATES SPOTLIGHT SANCTITY OF LIFE, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

*Tammi Reed Ledbetter - Southern Baptist TEXAN*

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** — The sanctity of human life and defense of religious liberty remained the most often addressed concerns among many state Baptist conventions during their annual meetings as messengers penned resolutions endorsed by fellow Southern Baptists.

During business sessions, South Carolina messengers voted to end fellowship with a church whose pastor performed a same-sex marriage. Resolutions calling for an end to the funding of Planned Parenthood gained support in eight state Baptist conventions this year, with others declaring the sanctity of human life. Pro-life concerns remained on the minds of messengers in light of undercover videos released by the Center for Medical Progress allegedly showing Planned Parenthood executives discussing the sale of baby parts obtained through abortion.



During business sessions, South Carolina messengers voted to end fellowship with a church whose pastor performed a same-sex marriage. (Baptist Courier photo)

Identifying Planned Parenthood as the single largest abortion provider in the nation, the resolution approved by Oklahoma Baptists, for example, called on policymakers to redirect taxpayer funds to more reputable medical providers of women's health. Other state conventions joining in the call for defunding Planned Parenthood included Alabama, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Utah-Idaho and West Virginia, with sanctity of life statements passed in Arkansas, Georgia, Kansas-Nebraska, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia.

Last summer's Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage led messengers in Kansas-Nebraska, Louisiana, New Mexico and Tennessee to voice objection, while resolutions in Arkansas, Nevada, New England, Oklahoma, Utah-Idaho, Baptist General Association of Virginia and Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia affirmed the sanctity of marriage. Appeals for a defense of religious liberty also arose in resolutions passed in

Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and Baptist General Association of Virginia. Tennessee Baptists worded their resolution by stating that "no governing institution has authority to negate or undermine God's definition of marriage" and that "the religious and conscientious liberties of individuals and institutions should not be infringed upon as a result of living according to deeply-held biblical convictions about marriage."

Several state conventions added references to the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message in their governing documents or guidelines. Mississippi Baptists approved the first reading of a constitutional amendment specifying the current BF&M as their doctrinal guideline. Tennessee Baptists now require members of boards and committees to act in accordance with the statement of faith while Florida Baptists affirm it as the theological foundation for convention ministries.

In Kentucky and Utah-Idaho state conventions, congregations that affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior will not be considered cooperating churches, with the latter adding the requirement that they complete the Annual Church Profile. Michigan Baptists adopted a new constitution and bylaws, addressing requirements of a cooperating church that involve the state convention's vision, mission and doctrinal statement, credentials, submission of an Annual Church Profile and contributing to the Cooperative Program. Louisiana Baptists approved guidelines for disaffiliation of any local congregation no longer in agreement with beliefs and practices of the state convention.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tammi Reed Ledbetter is news editor of the Southern Baptist TEXAN.

## ANGOLA WARDEN RETIRES LEAVING A LEGACY OF FAITH

*Brian Blackwell - Louisiana Baptist Message*

**ANGOLA, LA (BP)** — Burl Cain, known for a much-heralded transformation at the "bloodiest prison in America," retired Jan. 1 after nearly 21 years as head of the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Cain, 73, the longest serving warden of any prison in the United States, governed the sprawling 18,000-acre facility that sits next to the Mississippi River with a firm hand and a strong love for Jesus. Cain, a Southern Baptist, is quick to tell everyone it was Jesus Christ who pacified Angola.

As he prepares to leave his post, Cain said he wanted to share with Louisiana Baptists his gratitude for the role they played in making such a lasting change at the prison and in the lives of so many prisoners. "Over the years it has been my pleasure to work with so many religious groups of all denominations who have offered their support to our efforts towards moral rehabilitation at Angola," Cain said in a statement to the Baptist Message, newsjournal of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, after announcing his retirement during the week of Dec. 7.



Burl Cain has announced his retirement as warden of the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola on Jan. 1. He is known worldwide for turning the "bloodiest prison in America" into a place of moral transformation. (BP File photo)

"None have been more supportive than Louisiana Baptists," Cain said. "Those who have so generously offered their time and efforts truly have no idea the impact their contributions have made on the stability and security of this institution," he said. "More importantly, they've had a profound impact on these men's lives." With the help of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, the Louisiana convention and numerous Baptist congregations and pastors, Angola now has eight churches on the prison's grounds, daily Bible study and the yearly Angola Revival.

"I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart for the part they played in transforming this place from a facility of violence and despair to one of peace and morality," Cain said. "I truly believe my legacy will not be in the bricks and mortar here, but in the hearts and lives of these men."

### Life-changing experience

Cain became Angola's warden in February 1995 after serving as warden of Dixon Correctional Institute in Jackson, La., for 14 years. Just a few months at Angola, Cain participated in his first execution by lethal injection of an inmate convicted of murder. He planned to do his part in the procedure, nothing more, nothing less, feeling then that a successful lethal injection execution would be one that went according to plan without a hitch. Thomas Ward had been sentenced to die for murdering his mother-in-law and Cain viewed him as little more than a criminal whom society had ruled should die for his crime. "I didn't worry about what he must have been experiencing in the hours before his death. I didn't go to his last meal, and I didn't share Jesus with him," Cain later recounted.

When it was time for the court's order to be carried out, Ward's face was a mask of fear as the deadly fluids began flowing into his veins. "There was a psshps from the machine, and then he was gone," Cain said. "I felt him go to hell as I held his hand. "Then the thought came over me: I just killed that man. I said nothing to him about his soul. I didn't give him a chance to get right with God. What does God think of me? I decided that night I would never again put someone to death without telling him about his soul and about Jesus."

### Transformation begins

Cain knew that a changed life, a morally rehabilitated life, would result in a less-violent prison and he invited New Orleans Seminary to start a training program on Angola's grounds. So far, 278 inmates have graduated from the seminary's extension program, and some of those graduates have even transferred to other prisons as missionaries. Now, Cain says, instead of inmates committing crimes, they are witnessing to other inmates, studying for a seminary test or holding a Bible study. And the result has been a multitude of inmates who have professed Christ as their Lord and Savior and an 85 percent drop in violence at Angola. Of the 6,300 inmates at Angola, nearly half are thought to be Christians.



## ANGOLA WARDEN RETIRES LEAVING A LEGACY OF FAITH (continued)

In September, NOBTS President Chuck Kelley dedicated a new 11,000-square-foot building that houses its extension center, built by the inmates and funded by donors. The Joan Horner Center, with a computer lab, two classrooms, an auditorium and library, is named in memory of benefactor Joan Horner, founder of Premier Designs of Dallas, who with her husband Andy Horner were longtime supporters of the Angola ministry.

A month later, Washington Baptist Association accepted a church at Angola into its fellowship. Grace Baptist Church is believed to be the first church at a prison that a Baptist association has approved to join. Led by Angola prisoner Paul Will, a 2007 extension center graduate, Grace Baptist is five years old and is the only Southern Baptist congregation among the prison's 28 inmate-led churches. Other states have taken notice of the change inside Angola and adopted the seminary's programs at their prisons, including San Quentin State Prison near San Francisco; the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman; the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women at St. Gabriel; the Darrington Unit near Houston, Texas; and Phillips State Prison in Buford, Ga.

### Optimistic about the future

Despite Cain's retirement, Louisiana Baptist leaders are optimistic about future work at Angola. Darryl Vannoy, acting warden at Dixon Correctional Institute and a former deputy warden at Angola, has been appointed interim warden. Wayne Jenkins, evangelism and church growth director for the Louisiana convention, said Vannoy shares Cain's strategy for changing inmate's hearts. The change that has taken place inside the prison since Cain became warden has been nothing short of remarkable, Jenkins said, noting, "The difference since he took over is daylight and dark. He saw the condition and knew the only hope for the men in the bloodiest prison in America was what he calls 'moral reformation.' He opened the doors for groups to minister to the men.

"When Washington and the state cut the funds for education due to budget constraints, NOBTS was able, with funds from Louisiana Baptists, to provide the Bible college," Jenkins continued. "This has led to spiritual renewal and trained men and churches on campus. The result is crime on the inside drastically reduced and the institution has become one of the safest maximum security prisons in America. Warden Cain was the person God used to get this done."

John Hebert, missions and ministry director for Louisiana Baptists, called Cain a pioneer in true prison reform through his philosophy of rehabilitation. "His belief is 'If you change the heart of the inmate, you change the inmate,'" Hebert said. "At this time, we do not know who will be the new warden at Angola, but it is our prayer whoever is chosen, we will be able to have as good a relationship as we have had with Warden Cain. Burl has our prayers and best wishes for his retirement."

Chuck Kelley, president of New Orleans Seminary, said, "Twenty years ago Warden Burl Cain called us with a radical idea: Launch a process of moral rehabilitation in America's most violent prison. Our role would be to bring the [seminary's undergraduate] Leavell College curriculum for training ministers inside the prison. We said 'yes,' and the partnership worked with spectacular results, transforming Angola in undeniable ways and leading to similar programs in other prisons across the country."

Warden Cain had the vision and courage to give the inmates of Angola an opportunity to become ministers," Kelley continued. "We gave them the tools of theological knowledge and ministry skills. With that opportunity and those tools, the inmates of Angola transformed the bloodiest prison in America into the most influential prison in America, becoming ground zero for true innovation in the process of justice. The greatness of Warden Burl Cain is his confidence that Jesus Christ can change any life, even one filled with terrible decisions, and his willingness to let inmates be the heroes in a story of redemption," Kelley said.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Blackwell is a staff writer for the Baptist Message, newsjournal of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

## RUSSELL MOORE'S BOOK WINS CHRISTIANITY TODAY AWARD

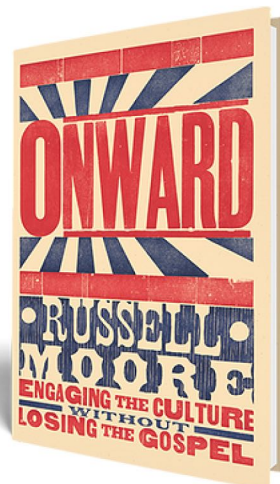
NASHVILLE, TN — Russell Moore's latest book, "Onward: Engaging Culture without Losing the Gospel," was announced today as the recipient of the [Christianity Today 2016 Book of the Year](#), winning the overall category, "Beautiful Orthodoxy."

*Christianity Today's* editorial team chose books most likely to shape evangelical life, thought and culture. "Onward" also won the top award in the Politics and Public Life category.

"Moore provides a primer on how our commitments to Christ and his kingdom (as opposed to our political, social and cultural agendas) should shape not only how we live our lives, but also what our lives should say to a watching, listening world," said Harold Smith, president and CEO of *Christianity Today*.

"Onward" was published in August 2015 and released by B&H Publishing Group. The book was also named a [2015 Top 5 Religion Title](#) by *Publishers Weekly* in November.

"Dr. Moore is uniquely gifted to speak to the issues of our day," said B&H Trade Book Publisher, Jennifer Lyell. "From his early days working on political campaigns, to dean at one of the largest seminaries in the world, all while



preaching in churches small and large across the country for decades, Dr. Moore's perspective is grounded by biblical truth, rooted in theological depth and seasoned by the people he's met through decades of gospel ministry. This all combines with the pen of writer as gifted as any I have ever met, to produce messages that have the potential to shape a generation. We at B&H Publishing Group are so grateful for the recognition that "Onward" has received and believe that it is very much deserved.

*The Southern Baptist Convention is America's largest Protestant denomination with more than 15.8 million members in over 46,000 churches nationwide. The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission is the SBC's ethics, religious liberty and public policy agency with offices in Nashville, Tenn., and Washington, D.C.*

## N.C. SUED FOR CONSCIENCE PROTECTIONS FOR MAGISTRATES

Wayne Stender - WORLD News Service

ASHEVILLE, NC (BP) — Three couples are suing the state of North Carolina over gay marriage discrimination that apparently isn't happening. The lawsuit targets protections for magistrates who oppose same-sex marriage on religious grounds and don't want to be forced to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. The state legislature passed the bill protecting religious convictions of state employees earlier this year, overriding a veto from Gov. Pat McCrory. The bill outlines a process for magistrates to declare a religious objection to participating in same-sex unions. It requires government employees seeking an opt-out to recuse themselves from issuing marriage certificates for both heterosexual and homosexual couples for at least six months.

Three couples are now suing over potential discrimination. They say the bill places religious belief above the obligations of magistrates to carry out their duties. "People are entitled to have their religious beliefs about marriage," plaintiffs' attorney Luke Largess said during a news conference in Charlotte, N.C. "But, the state can't ... pay for it." As of last September, 5 percent of the state's approximately 670 magistrates have filed recusal paperwork for protections under the new law. In McDowell County, all of the magistrates filed recusal paperwork, requiring the state to bus in magistrates from a nearby county to issue marriage certificates.

But the law's supporters note no couple has been unable to marry because of magistrates' objections. "They [filed] a lawsuit based on a law they don't like," Tami Fitzgerald with the North Carolina Values Coalition told the ABC affiliate in Raleigh, N.C. She noted that critics "can't point to one single case where a homosexual couple has been denied the right to get married." North Carolina's gay marriage opt-out law is one of two in the country. It will be defended in court by Attorney General Roy Cooper, who has made it clear he doesn't support the bill. Cooper is running for governor in upcoming elections.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wayne Stender writes for WORLD News Service, a division of WORLD Magazine ([www.worldmag.com](http://www.worldmag.com)) based in Asheville, N.C. Used by permission.



## A NEW YEAR — A NEW BEGINNING

*Tim Patterson - Executive Director/Treasurer*

Tears ran down her cheeks making crevasses in her make up and leaving tracts of mascara that ended in black pools on her blouse. Her body shook like a blade of grass in the wind as she lamented her condition. Between heaving sobs she repeated the phrase, "If I could just start all over, I know things would be different now!"

It was one of those times as a pastor and counselor that you feel totally helpless. No amount of "good counsel" or encouraging words would take away the pain and hurt. Nothing could be done to change the events of the past. The ominous cloud of guilt and shame that seemed to hover over her would nourish its fruits in the soil of her wounded soul for seasons to come.

This scenario has taken place at many different times and in thousands of places, with the only difference being that the names and faces change. The age-old axiom remains the same from generation to generation, "What we plant, we shall reap." As one sage has said, "Many sow their wild oats, then pray for crop failures!" Oh, how mankind refuses to believe the principle of The Law of the Harvest! But nonetheless, it is true and we suffer for our deeds.

We cannot undo what is done. We cannot avoid the consequences of past actions. They will track us down and find us like a bloodhound on the trail of a varmint. "Be sure your sins will find you out." That is just a fact of life, though unpleasant it might be. But if this were the only fact of life then indeed we should have just reason for continued despair and grief.

God, through His infinite wisdom, mercy, and love has looked upon mankind in his dilemma and provided a means by which he can find relief. That Sovereign provision is truly a "Land of Beginning Again."

It is that beautiful place of grace where we can start all over again. It is that place surrounded by the walls of forgiveness that refuse to let the enemies of past failures enter in. It is that place of peace, contentment, and joy. It is that place where a King keeps careful watch over His subjects. But only those who are willing to enter in by the one and only gate can enjoy the benefits of this blessed land. This gate can only be opened by using two special keys. The key of forgiveness and the key of forgetting. Both must be used to open the locks that bar us entrance. The keys are not difficult to obtain. In fact, all that is required is to request them of the King who will freely give them to all who ask. And once you receive His gift you become a Child of the King and an Heir to the Kingdom.

But sadly, few ask and few receive. Many of us will on a daily basis make resolutions and promises of change. Some for the better and others for worse. Maybe you have blown it in the past or possibly you have made such a mess of your life that you see absolutely no hope. I am not going to tell you that your past will change nor that you will not suffer the consequences of past actions. I am telling you that you can start afresh and new.

You can enter into a land of beginning again. But you must be willing to receive forgiveness and forgive yourself and you must choose to forget the past. You must throw it out like yesterday's garbage. Yes, it will be difficult. Sure there will be painful times of relapse and of course, it will be frightening as well. But if you want to start all over again, you can. Is that what you want? Or do you want to continue to wallow in your past failures?

Today can be a new day. A time for a new start. The keys are in your hands. Will you open the gate and enter in? It's a beautiful land, this land of beginning again. Jesus said, "Come unto me all you who are burdened and heavy laden and I will give you rest."

If you would like to know more about how you can begin again, please feel free to contact us here at the Baptist State Convention of Michigan offices. Any of our staff would be thrilled to share with you how to enter into "Land of Beginning Again."

## The Land of Beginning Again

by Louisa Fletcher

I wish that there were some wonderful place  
Called the Land of Beginning Again,  
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches  
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,  
And never be on again.

I wish we could come on it all unaware,  
Like the hunter who finds a lost trail;  
And i wish that the one whom our blindness had done  
The greatest injustice of all  
Could be at the gates like an old friend that waits  
For the comrade he's gladdest to hail.

We would find all the things we intended to do  
But forgot, and remembered too late,  
Little praises unspoken, little promises broken,  
And all of the thousand and one  
Little duties neglected that might have perfected  
The day for one less fortunate.

It wouldn't be possible not to be kind  
In the Land of Beginning Again;  
And the ones we misjudged and the ones  
whom we grudged  
Their moments of victory here  
Would find in the grasp of our loving handclasp  
More than penitent lips could explain.

For what had been hardest we'd know had been best,  
And what had seemed loss would be gain;  
For there isn't a sting that will not take wing  
When we've faced it and laughed it away;  
And i think that the laughter is most what we're after  
In the Land of Beginning Again.

So I wish that there were some wonderful place  
Called the Land of Beginning Again,  
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches  
And all of our poor selfish grief  
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,  
And never be put on again.

## SPIRITUAL PEDICURES

*Tony Lynn - State Director of Missions*

### My honeymoon

During my honeymoon in the summer of 1977, Jamie and I walked in flip flops. It was the first time my new bride got a good look at my bare feet. She frequently teased me, "Let go of the carpet," or she would smile and ask, "Why are you clenching the floor with your toes?" She was right. My toes have a naturally scrunched position. I will even confess that I have what our family calls, "Shy baby toes." You know what I'm talking about. They curl and hide behind the other toes. So you can imagine what I am thinking about when I read certain Bible passages.

### Wiggle your toes

Wiggle your toes, inside your shoes, as you continue to read. Better yet, take your shoes off and look at your feet for a moment then read this text. Romans 10:13-15 (NLT) says, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, 'How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!'"

***"How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"***

***"Will you join me for a spiritual pedicure?"***

### New Year Pedicure

As 2016 begins many of us will set new goals. I think it would be nice if each one of us set an appointment for a spiritual pedicure. Let's apply Romans 10:15 by saying, "Lord, I am going to make my feet more beautiful (poetically speaking) in 2016 because I am going to bring good news to those in Michigan, North America, and the world?"

Will you join me for a spiritual pedicure? During 2016, let's share our faith, teach a Bible class, host a small group, volunteer in the community, start a new church, participate in a mission trip, remodel a basement in the Warren area, or make a significant sacrifice in 2016.

### Call to Bare Feet

Pastors and Bible study leaders, would you challenge your people in a memorable way? Consider leading them in a study of Romans 10:13-15 during a sermon or lesson. Then invite the members to remove their shoes while making their commitment for "beautiful feet" in 2016. It will leave a lasting impression.

### My Commitment

Next year's annual meeting of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan is scheduled for November 4-5, 2016 at Eastgate Baptist Church in Burton, Michigan. At that meeting, when I give my report, I will do it without shoes or socks. Not because my feet are physically beautiful; but rather, I will do so to represent the tens of thousands of Michigan Southern Baptists who will have made a commitment in 2016 to share the good news of Jesus Christ with an entire world. The best is yet to come.



### 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.

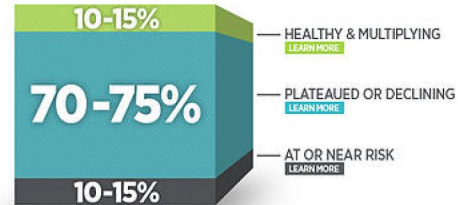


## REVITALIZATION BEGINS WITH GOD'S PEOPLE

*Mike Durbin - State Director of Evangelism*

I had the unique experience of pastoring a church that turned 100 years old during my ministry there. The church had a great heritage. It was planted, built, and supported by men and women who loved Jesus and sacrificed their time, talents and treasure for Him. Through decades of faithfulness, the lives of many people in the area had been transformed by Christ through the ministry of this church.

As the centennial approached, the church was in need of revitalization. She was plateaued and in danger of declining. Just about every part of the building needed repair. The church was at a low point by most metrics, but there was a group of dedicated men and women who loved Jesus and each other. The church family started a journey toward health and vitality that taught me some life-long ministry lessons. I want to share two of many lessons learned that may encourage those who long for revitalization in their churches.



(Courtesy namb.net/replant)

### **Celebrate the heritage of your Church.**

A church that is approaching 100 years has a lot of history. It's amazing to think about the amount of world change that took place in that century. And yet, the church followed Christ and served Him and each other through good times and bad. The fact that they were approaching this milestone was a testimony to Jesus and His work in their lives. I was a small part of a very long story and I learned to truly appreciate the men and women who came before me. They left a legacy that I had the privilege to be a part of and build upon.

They also left traditions. I learned that it's hard to let go of something that was vital at some point in the church's history but has lost its effectiveness. Revitalization involves change and change is hard. Some people naturally think we are being critical when we change things. We should be careful not to leave that impression. It's much easier to develop new initiatives when people know that you value and celebrate what was done as you move in a new direction for tomorrow.

### **Cast fresh vision and celebrate victories.**

The time leading up to the centennial celebration was an incredible opportunity to cast vision. Conditions were right for a new challenge from God for the future. There was a desire in the church family not just to celebrate the history of the church, but to write the next chapter under the Lordship of Christ.

We started with the building since everyone wanted it to look good for the anniversary. The classrooms hadn't been painted in years and the ceilings needed to be replaced. It was surprising how much everyone in the church was excited with the results. One project lead to another and before long the people decided to remodel the outside of the building too. There was new energy in the church family and the conversations about the church in the community were encouraging. People started inviting their family and friends to church services and events. Attendance increased and just about everything else with it. People committed their lives to Christ as Lord and followed Him in baptism. We celebrated every step of the way.

Please understand that it wasn't a building that brought revitalization. Christ was moving in His people. They longed for Him to work in their lives and in His church. He brought them together in that context around their place of worship to start the revitalization. The revitalization was not of a place. It was of a people - the people of God who came together to glorify God and advance His 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.

## CLASSIFIEDS

### Bilingual pastor needed

New Day/Nuevo Dia Baptist Church is a bilingual congregation (Spanish/English) searching for a pastor. In addition to salary, the church is able to offer use of a house, retirement, and help with utilities for three months of the winter season. Resumes may be sent to [newdaynuevodia@gmail.com](mailto:newdaynuevodia@gmail.com).

### Bi-vocational pastor needed

Victory Baptist Church, Portage is searching for a bi-vocational pastor. Send résumés to [bfiguydale2007@yahoo.com](mailto:bfiguydale2007@yahoo.com) or Victory Baptist Church, 308 W Milham, Portage, MI 49024 or contact the chairman of deacons at (269) 655-6511 with any questions.

### Bi-vocational pastor needed

Liberty Missionary Baptist Church, Monroe is searching for a bi-vocational pastor. Send résumés to [retiredchief1980@att.net](mailto:retiredchief1980@att.net) or [curtpat33801@live.com](mailto:curtpat33801@live.com). Contact Curt Ellison, pulpit committee chairman, at (734) 605-8961 with any questions.

### Theological library items needed

Trenton Missionary Baptist Church, Trenton is collecting Bibles, lexicons, concordances, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and training material for Cordilleras Ministerial Academy. Located in the Philippines, this ministerial school is for rural pastors who have little or no theological training. To donate items, contact Pastor George Wood at [joannew2600@yahoo.com](mailto:joannew2600@yahoo.com).

### Church Information Packets

The information previously mailed out in the Church Information Packets will now be available online at [www.bscm.org](http://www.bscm.org) for all churches to download, print, and use!

### Classified Ad Submission Guidelines

1. Baptist Beacon classifieds are posted free of charge.
2. All classified posts will run for 2 consecutive months. Longer or shorter times may be requested. Publication of classifieds correspond with the monthly publication of the Baptist Beacon.
3. Classifieds must be from a BSCM church.
4. Be sure to include thorough details of request, name of church, contact information as well as a point of contact.
5. Submissions must be made no later than the 10th of the month prior to publication.
6. Submit all classified ads to [beacon@bscm.org](mailto:beacon@bscm.org)

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## ABOUT US

The Baptist Beacon is the official newsjournal of the [Baptist State Convention of Michigan](http://www.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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