

Executive Director/Treasurer Search Team Announces Candidate

Candidate Recommendation from the Executive Director/Treasurer Search Committee

The search committee appointed to find the Executive Director-Treasurer for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) is thrilled to announce that Ed Emmerling is the candidate that will be presented by the search team at the annual meeting on November 1. The search committee reviewed dozens of resumes, conducted several interviews, and committed time personally and corporately to prayer. They are grateful for the prayers, counsel, and trust of Michigan Baptists as they evaluated candidates seeking the will of God for the BSCM.

Emmerling has served at Westside Church in Flushing, MI since 1997 and as the Lead Pastor since 2002. He has served the BSCM in numerous capacities, most recently as president of the BSCM. The committee is especially impressed by his love for people and the state of Michigan. He is a collaborative leader who is comfortable sitting down with pastors and church leaders from diverse parts of the state with a sincere desire for their health and success in accomplishing the mission of Jesus.

In addition to his local church work, Emmerling has played a key role in BSCM partnerships with national ministries such as Send Relief, helping mobilize resources and volunteers for gospel outreach efforts throughout the state. His experience with these entities has given him a healthy perspective on connecting Michigan churches with the larger Southern Baptist family. Emmerling was heavily involved in the recent partnership with Send Relief through the Serve Tour stop in Flint. At this gathering, over six hundred believers from many states came together for two days to bring the gospel into the community and to support churches ministering in Flint and the surrounding areas.

As the ED-T candidate, Emmerling has expressed his desire to see the churches of Michigan flourish through a deepened commitment to the Great Commission. He is passionate about fostering strong, united, and mission-driven congregations that work collaboratively to see the gospel continue to spread in every corner of the state.

In response to the selection, Pastor Ken Render of Lakeside Community Church in St. Clair Shores said, "There is no better choice the search team could have made than Ed Emmerling. He knows our state. He loves and knows pastors. Ed has a passion to see our churches grow. Ed Emmerling will serve our state well."

"I was thrilled to hear that the Executive Director search committee has chosen to bring forward Ed Emmerling's name to the convention. I have known Ed for many years and have seen his faithful service in his church, association, and in our State Convention. I believe that he will

provide steady leadership for us in the days ahead." adds Wayne Parker, Send Detroit Missionary and Senior Pastor of Merriman Road Baptist Church.

More opportunities to get to know Emmerling will be announced soon including a video interview hosted by search team member Travis Whitaker, Lead Pastor of Mile City Church in Plymouth, MI. In addition to the video interview, several regional meet-and-greet events are being planned where messengers and church leaders can personally engage with Ed and his wife, Renee. Dates and locations for these events will be announced soon.

The search committee is thrilled to have unanimous support for Emmerling as the candidate for the next ED-T of the BSCM. As the state convention approaches this important decision, the search committee encourages all Michigan Baptists to continue in prayer for Ed Emmerling, his family, and the Convention as they seek God's guidance for the future. May this season of discernment bring unity, purpose, and excitement for what lies ahead for the BSCM.

Messengers from the BSCM will consider the search committee's recommendation during the BSCM Annual Meeting on November 1.

You need to be weak

ANN ARBOR – "That was one of the best sermons I've ever heard." These words were delivered to me by a young man after one of our services last year. As a young preacher in my twenties, these are the words I dreamt of hearing.

Complete with tears in his eyes and a hug that said more than his words, I knew this guy was genuinely moved. I immediately began rehearsing which parts of the sermon would have resonated with him.

When I asked what made him say that it was partly because I wanted to continue to engage in the spiritual moment that was clearly unfolding in his life, but also because I was curious if it was my insightful cultural diagnosis, or one of my labored-over-one-liners that I thought would stick perfectly in their hearts.

It was neither of those things.

It was actually something I hadn't given much thought to at all.

It was a moment in my sermon when I was away from my notes, talking off the cuff about a porn addiction Jesus had delivered me from.

He said, “when you confessed your sin, I realized that God could save someone like me.” I was thankful for his honesty, but slightly disappointed it wasn’t one of the points I had worked so hard on.

In fact, it was probably the part of my sermon that I had put the *least* thought into. And it was the part where I was unsure if my vulnerability would be welcome in the pulpit or not.

But here was this conversation with this young man telling me that the most compelling part of my sermon was when I looked weak and vulnerable. And then it hit me.

The power of 2 Corinthians 12:9-11 washed over me like a tidal wave and something broke inside of me.

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

My wife and I, along with 40 other people, came to Ann Arbor, Michigan two years ago to plant Treeline Church. In the throes of church planting, moving venues every week, caring for our launch team, and welcoming new people into our community: I didn’t realize the single narrative that was dominating my thought life:

You need to be strong.

You need to be a strong leader for this young church. You need to be well-read for the educated people of Ann Arbor. You need to be a clear and compelling communicator. You need to have no needs.

But here’s the voice I really needed in my life:

You need to be weak and dependent on Jesus.

In all my efforts to be strong and inviting for our church, I missed one of the greatest joys of being a follower of Jesus: it’s okay to be weak.

I had spent so much of our first-year planting Treeline Church trying to be strong for our launch team and impressive for new people. And every second I spent doing that, I was neglecting those words of the apostle Paul that said just the opposite.

People will be impressed with your strengths, but they will identify with your weaknesses.

The most compelling sermon he had ever heard me give was the one where my people saw *my* need for the gospel and not just their own. I have come to realize that one of the things people need the most is not a bunch of leaders who *preach* the gospel, but a bunch of leaders who *need* the gospel for themselves.

This has been one of the single greatest lessons the Lord has been teaching me over the last year. That when I'm honest about weaknesses is when he can look strong. Instead of trying to cover the gaps in our church and ministry with my strengths and effort, to look to him.

And above all, not to rob the people closest to me the opportunity to see my neediness for Christ. I have seen tremendous fruit in ministry and friendships from this shift in paradigm. I've had friendships with people in the church that only ever felt like people I was leading before, and the weaker I acknowledge I am, the more it seems that people want to follow.

It feels like an anti-growth and anti-leadership strategy: but I've truly found vulnerability as a leader to be the most compelling thing for people to latch onto.

May we all learn the secret of what it means to intentionally and publicly be weak: so that Jesus might be made great in our homes and churches.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Hager is the Salt Company College Ministry Director, at Treeline Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He and his wife, Laura, have been married for three years and have a newborn named Lydia who they absolutely adore. In his free time Andrew is energized by long books, intense workouts, and trips to big cities.

It is time to rise

SHELBY TOWNSHIP – At the beginning of the summer, God was calling me out to meet with Him during the sunrise. I have to be honest, those first few days of summer were so nice not to have to be up at the crack of dawn to get my kids ready for school. I chose my bed several mornings over an early morning sunrise with God. Finally, one morning I woke up early without having to depend on my alarm, and I knew this was the morning I needed to go!

We live about seven minutes from a park right on Lake St. Clair, which has become a sacred place for me to meet with God. I got into the car, put on a playlist, and drove to Brandenburg Park. As soon as I pulled out of my neighborhood and began to head toward the park, I couldn't

believe my eyes! The sky was full of color: purple, pink, and orange hues like I had never seen before!

When I got to the park that morning, I felt like I was in a dream. I had never seen the sky so breathtaking! As I was walking toward the water, I felt the Lord tell me this time with Him was a gift. He knew that once I experienced that sunrise, I would want more, which is exactly what happened all summer long. I spent many mornings in that place with the Lord.

Recently, I have been in a season of recovery from burnout. It has been a much longer season than I would have liked for it to have been, but God has been kind and gracious to me. I was at the height of my burnout in 2022 – 2023 and it has taken me well over a year to recover. There was a period of time where I was too focused on what happened in the past. Little did I realize, my looking back was keeping me from the healing that God wanted to bring.

I went on a spiritual retreat last spring and was challenged to bring an item that represented where I was currently in my relationship with the Lord. I began praying and thinking about it, and ideas started coming to my mind, but none of them felt like they were from the Lord. Then one day He spoke clearly to my heart, “Karen, it is time to rise.” So, the item I chose to take on my retreat was a picture of the sunrise in Florida that I had enjoyed just a few months before.

When God spoke that word to me, I knew exactly what it meant. He was telling me to stop looking back and that it was time to move forward. Truth is, God was realigning things in my life so I could step into the purpose He created me for.

I can relate to this passage that Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations,

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

Lamentations 3:19-26, NIV

Jeremiah expresses in Lamentations such deep suffering and grief. He states in verses 19-20 that when he remembered his affliction that his soul was downcast. Unfortunately, this is where I found myself, too. To put it simply, I was having a pity party. I am so thankful for the Holy Spirit, our internal Counselor, who spoke just the right word, “It is time to rise,” to help me overcome that downcast spirit.

My time with the Lord at sunrise this summer was the reminder I needed of his great love for me. I love verses 22-23,

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23, NIV

I love this version of these verses,

The Lord's unfailing love and mercy continue, Fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise.

Lamentations 3:22-23, Good News Bible

As sure as we know the sun will rise each morning, His love and mercy continue. Great is His faithfulness!

Friend, I don't know what season of life you find yourself in today, but I pray that you will remember to look forward to each new day full of endless possibilities with God's love and mercy flowing over you! We can take what we experienced in those hard seasons, learn from it, and come out stronger and with a greater purpose than we ever thought possible. It is time to rise and step into a new day!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

God mends brokenness

SALINE – On February 29, 2012, I parked my Mazda 3 hatchback in an apartment complex in North St. Louis to facilitate a drug deal. By 19 years old, this was something I had done many times, but as soon as the two men I came to meet got in my car, I knew something was not right.

After briefly talking, the exchange occurred, and a gun was immediately pressed up against the back of my head. As I waited in anticipation for the trigger to be pulled, one clear thought entered my mind, "I am nineteen, and I am going to die tonight."

Seconds later, the man behind me leaned back, pulled the trigger, and a nine-millimeter bullet entered and exited my right shoulder, went through my head shattering my jaw, passed through

the right temporal lobe of my brain, and stopped resting on the tear duct of my left eye. Overwhelmed by the trauma of the impact, I passed out and was left to die in my car alone. By God's grace, I woke up delirious, dazed, and determined to get help.

I picked up my phone and began to frantically call the numbers in my recent call log as blood gushed from my head all over my car. Overcome with adrenaline and shock, I failed to recognize I had just received a gunshot wound to the head. My third contact in my call log, my drug supplier, helped me realize what happened and how I needed to call 911 immediately.

After a 911 dispatcher identified my location, I waited for the police. Minutes later, an ambulance arrived, hooked me up with an IV, and I lost consciousness as I was loaded into the back of the vehicle. Two days later, I awoke with half my skull missing because of major brain surgery, and I began a seven week stay in two different hospitals.

During this time, family, friends, and nurses began to visit my room and many shared a similar message, "God has a plan for your life." As an unbeliever these words did not bring me hope or comfort. Instead, they fell on deaf ears as I was frustrated at God for the pain through which I was walking.

Upon arriving back home, my life revolved around physical and occupational therapy. Learning to walk again, doing exercises to strengthen my body, and spending time alone reflecting on my life decisions that had humbled me. Reluctantly, at the encouragement of my unbelieving mother, I began to attend a local church in my hometown that I had not stepped in since I was in 1st grade.

In vain, I attempted to avoid the warm welcomes, happy smiles, and eager greeters as I quickly looked for a seat in a pew. The service began, and as an observer, I watched things unfold.

The details of that Sunday are lost on me years later, but I remember how I felt when the pastor of that church began to preach. It drew me back Sunday after Sunday as I became fascinated by Jesus Christ. I became captivated by the Word of God and the Gospel, and months later I fully surrendered my life to Him.

Soon after, the desire to serve the Lord in ministry began to take hold of my life. God was faithful to begin to open doors to teach, train, and disciple other believers in churches, college campuses, student ministries, and now Fellowship Baptist Church in Saline, Michigan.

My longing in ministry is to "Teach the word of God to mend the brokenness of others and motivate them to be fruitful."

I pray that pastors in Michigan, and throughout the world, can take hold of Acts 20:24 and finish their race well for the Lord.

But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Connor Johnson lives with his wife Samantha and their three children in Saline, Michigan as he serves as Pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church. Prior to his calling to Michigan, he served on the pastoral staff of Mission Hill Church in Tampa, Florida. He is a graduate of Lindenwood University and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Something big!

PLYMOUTH – I am going to make a prediction as if I am a spiritual-meteorologist. Are you ready for it? Here it is.

Something BIG, I mean really BIG, created by the Lord, with the evidence and current conditions that I observe has moved-in and over the language churches who are part of the Michigan Baptist family!

Did you know that Michigan Baptists already have approximately 30 language churches within the family? Did you know that each week, Michigan Baptists worship, conduct Bible studies, develop disciples, and share life as church families in 12 languages? Are you surprised?

In the immediate months and coming years, we are going to see established-language-churches regain the vitality of their early years, then exceed what they once thought was their maximum performance; additionally, as a result of that renewed focus those same churches are going to launch new church plants all over Michigan; in metropolitan cities, urban communities, suburban neighborhoods, small towns, rural areas, near university/college campuses, and among many language/people groups!

Why the confidence?

Michigan Baptist history gives me good cause to believe in another movement of the Lord. I've witnessed it! Nine years ago, on the first day of October, I was hired by the Send Network of the North American Mission Board to offer strategic leadership to church planting in all of Michigan. Those who enlisted me said, "Your thirteen years of prior service with the International Mission Board will help."

Rapidly during the first and second year of my assignment, I saw the robust pathways and processes of the Send Network church planting system. I liked what I saw and knew God was on the move in Michigan. I recommended, and Michigan Baptists agreed, to become the very first Send Network partnering state convention with the North American Mission Board.

Since then, a continental movement erupted and many more state conventions followed the example of Michigan Baptists. It was a blessing for me to have online meetings with other state conventions who were asking questions about the benefits of the change. That movement to partner their state conventions with the Send Network resulted in an amazing rate of new church plants among Southern Baptists unlike any other time in our history. Since 2010, Southern Baptists have planted more than 11,000 churches all across North America, and Michigan Baptists are part of that movement.

If the Lord can use Michigan Baptists as an early, tiny part of his massive movement to accelerate church planting across the continent in the past, I believe the Lord can use Michigan Baptists again to launch another massive movement of language church multiplication unlike we have ever seen. Michigan Baptists have proven themselves resilient, industrious, generous, and dedicated for many years.

3 Signs of Movement!

As that spiritual-meteorologist I mentioned earlier, I am going to share three conditions that convince me that the Lord is in the process of doing something BIG when it comes to language church planting.

1. Relocation

First, people from other nations are, both freely by choice and sadly by force, scattering from their homelands. People from the nations are coming to North America for security, education, and advancement. We have multiple opportunities to interact with those from other nations who desperately want to improve their English and thrive in the North American culture. We have professionals, small business owners, international university students, neighbors, public school students/parents, immigrants, and refugees.

- The largest Arab population outside the Middle East in the United States is in Dearborn with 55% of its residents identifying as having Middle East or North African ancestry.
- There is a “crescent shape” of South Asian Indians that stretches over the Greater Detroit Metropolitan area from the north starting in Shelby Township to the southwestern corner ending in the community of Canton. In some of the neighborhoods/townships of that area the percentage of residents from South Asia is as high as 27-33% of the local population.
- The small town of Coldwater with a total population of 10,000 reports that an estimated 2,100 Yemeni live among them. Women wear the full-length black burqas covering their entire body while shopping at local stores.

2. Resolution

Second, during the fourth week of September, I was in a Livonia restaurant with 25 influential, dedicated friends who love the ministry of Michigan Baptists. Three guests had joined us from a newly created venture of 4 Southern Baptist entities called the [Diaspora Missions Collective](#). It was the premier gathering of one of the most diverse people groups when it comes to origin and languages. English was the common-spoken language among us at dinner even though 1/3 of us would return home speaking another language with family members.

At a particular moment during the interaction I asked, “How many languages can we speak in this room while quoting a Bible verse that could lead someone to Jesus Christ?” One after another, people recited evangelistic Bible verses in various languages until a total of 10 languages had been spoken! The languages spoken were from the Western Hemisphere, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Europe. It was an awe-inspiring, reverent moment that will remain in my memory for a long time. The experience brought to mind the ability to speak different languages displayed in Acts 2 and Acts 10.

I am convinced those key leaders are just as resolute as I am in their aim to see that those coming to and living in Michigan from different places, cultures, and languages are invited to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ in a gracious and understandable manner. I think the tribe of courageous, mission-minded individuals from that restaurant banquet room will grow larger and stronger month-by-month, year-after-year. If you want to join the movement, let me know.

3. Relationships

Third, the Lord created all things without any assistance from any of us; yet he invites us repeatedly in Scripture to join him and his missionary task of living out, displaying, and expressing the Good News of Jesus Christ to others. I can report that there are some unusual, underlying actions that can only be described as time-sensitive actions from the Lord. When I see a variety of God’s people forming engaging partnerships, I know I am seeing the Lord at work!

- [Hikari City](#), a young Japanese church plant, last month, hosted a traditional, annual Japanese festival called, “Matsuri.” Two sister churches, one in English, the other in Spanish, helped the Japanese church with the arrangements and event. The result surpassed everyone’s expectations with hundreds of Japanese people attending Matsuri who were dressed in traditional Japanese garments having fun, laughing, and getting to know one another on a Friday night.
- A ministry to Arabic language people located in the heart of Dearborn is partnering with a Send Network endorsed church planter in Michigan who is originally from Egypt but relocated to Michigan years ago. That pastor/church planter is strategically forming the foundation for two new church plants in Dearborn and Flint.

Join the BIG Movement!

Remember, you were warned. Something BIG is underway.

In the immediate months and coming years, we will see established-language-churches regain the vitality of their early years, then exceed what they once thought was their maximum performance; additionally, as a result of that renewed focus those same churches are going to launch new church plants all over Michigan; in metropolitan cities, urban communities, suburban neighborhoods, small towns, rural areas, near university/college campuses, and among many language/people groups!

If you want to take part in this movement, please send me an email indicating how you would like to get involved: tlynn@namb.net.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tony L. Lynn is the Send Network Director for Michigan and the Language/Ethnic Church Planting Catalyst. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as a lead pastor in Michigan churches and as an international missionary, along with his wife Jamie, in the Niger Republic, France, and Canada.

Living in digital Babylon

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – I was glued to my seat as David Kinnaman spoke to the audience of pastor-care advocates. The President of the Barna Group, a leading research and communications company that works with churches, nonprofits, and businesses, he spoke about the church's lack of mission, and the lack of resilient disciples in most of our churches.

Kinnaman's 2011 book, *You Lost Me*, argued that the church has a dropout problem. Research at the time showed that 59% of Young Adults who claimed a faith upbringing had left the church. New research shows the problem has gotten even worse.

What accounts for such a mass exodus? Kinnaman and his co-author argue that our culture is "especially and insidiously faith repellent." The biggest culprit, they contend, is our smart devices, which have created a digital culture that actually works against us.

As a result, believers are swimming upstream, fighting to maintain their values and their faith beliefs in a culture that is becoming increasingly opposed and in some cases hostile to these values and beliefs.

The instant [#1](#) New York Times bestseller, “The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness,” by Jonathan Haidt, is making a big splash. Published in March 2024, it has been touted as “a must-read for all parents: the generation-defining investigation into the collapse of youth mental health in the era of smartphones, social media, and big tech—and a plan for a healthier, freer childhood.” It is “Erudite, engaging, combative, crusading,” according to the New York Times Book Review (Editors’ Choice).

Haidt gives readers a glimpse of the true horror of what happened not only in the U.S. but also elsewhere in the English-speaking world, and believers would be well-served in reading his book.

In the Old Testament God promises that if His people will follow Him and worship Him alone, they would be blessed. But He warned them that if they were disobedient, He would bring judgment. Invading armies would conquer them and take them into captivity. His message inevitably falls on deaf ears, and the nation is exiled.

Imagine what it was like to be a Jew living in Babylon. How hard would it be to resist adopting the culture in which you’re thoroughly steeped, while trying to keep your own faith and religious views alive? One of the goals of taking a conquered people into captivity was the systematic dismantling and eradication of their culture, and the assimilation and adoption of the invading empire’s culture and values.

This is happening today. The average person spends 6 hours and 40 minutes per day on screens connected to the internet, adopting the culture. Gen Z (born between 1996-2010) averages around 9 hours of screen time per day. We have not been taken into captivity physically, and we’re not living in a foreign land, as the Israelites did, but the Internet and our smartphones have created a “Digital Babylon,” and too many of us are prisoners of the cultural war.

Our “smart” devices have created a digital environment that is slowly eroding our values and our faith. This is what it means to live in “Digital Babylon.” More people are disciplined by their cellphones than by their pastors and elders.

How can we resist and develop resilient disciples and resilient pastors while living in “Digital Babylon?”

At the very least, resilient disciples and resilient pastors will:

1. Cultivate a deep, intimate relationship with Jesus.

This goes beyond attending church and involves developing habits that will keep you connected with Jesus. This kind of relationship and these kinds of habits are hard to form and maintain on your own, so seek to get plugged into a community of believers where you can share your life and be encouraged to walk with Jesus. Ask your pastor for help.

2. Develop cultural awareness.

It's important to know what you believe and why you believe it. The stronger your theological foundation is, the more aware you'll be of what's happening in the culture and the easier it will be to discern when the culture's values are opposing your own.

3. Take steps to get disciplined and determine your mission.

Resilient disciples are eager to "obey everything" Jesus has commanded, and they are involved in God's kingdom work. By taking steps to determine your contribution towards God's purposes, you'll be much more engaged and less susceptible to drifting relationally.

Do not be satisfied with the status quo. Be bothered every time you see a family of four out for dinner with everyone on the cell phone. We cannot live like this.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

BSCM Annual Meeting program schedule

BSCM Annual Meeting

Friday, November 1, 2024

1705 Cedar St., Holt, MI 48842

(Special Note: You must be present in-person to vote.)

9:00 AM – Praise Him for our Gathering

- **Worship** – Chapel Pointe Worship Team
- **BSC Vision Video**
- **Scripture Reading/Devotion** – Psalm 145:1-13 – Ray Ruffin, BSCM 1st Vice President
- **Welcome and Call to Order** – Josh Tovey, BSCM 2nd Vice President
- **Seating of Messengers** – Jerome Taylor, BSCM Recording Secretary
- **Approval of Agenda** – Jerome Taylor
- **Time, Place, and Date 2025 Annual Meeting** – Jerome Taylor
- **Introduction and Reading of Motions** – Jerome Taylor

Praise Him for Churches Started

- **NAMB video from Kevin Ezell**
- **Vision: Where we are going** – Matt Thompson, Lead Church Planting Catalyst
- **Mission: How we will get there** – Matt Thompson, Wayne Parker, SEND City Detroit, and Tony Lynn, Language/Ethnic Church Planting Catalyst
- **Starting Testimonies** – Ken Nether, Pastor Crossover Church, Austin Wadlow, Pastor The Commons Church, Will Sam, Pastor Anchor College Church, Oscar Luna, Pastor Iglesia Mile City Español
- **Prayer** – Matt Thompson

Praise Him for our Work

- **Old Business** – Jerome Taylor
- **Executive Director Search Team Report and Presentation/Vote** – Scott Blanchard, Chair and Pastor Lake Pointe Church Shelby Township
- **New Business** – Jerome Taylor
 - **Proposed Budget** – Ray Ruffin
 - **Board of Trustees Report** – Jerome Taylor
 - **Election of BSCM Officers**
 - **New Business from Motions**

11:30 AM – Praise Him for our Leader

- **Pastor Tim Patterson (and wife Sabrina) Retirement Celebration**
- **Catered Lunch for Celebration**
- **Retirement Presentation**

1:00 PM – Praise Him for Partnerships

- **Worship and Prayer** – Chapel Pointe Worship Team
- **Scripture Reading** – Psalm 145:14-21 – Josh Tovey
- **International Mission Board (IMB) Report and Stories**
- **Introduction of President/CEO Dr. Jeff Iorg, SBC Executive Committee by Tim Patterson**
- **Message** – Jeff Iorg
- **2nd Business Session** – Jerome Taylor
 - **Miscellaneous Business**

2:00 PM – Break

(Snacks sponsored by Send Network)

2:15 PM – Praise Him for Churches Strengthened

- **Introduction of Church Strengthened** – Josh Tovey
- **Strengthened Testimonies** – Pastor Nate Click, Heritage Baptist Church Monroe, Cornelius Roberson, Heart and Soul Community Church West Bloomfield, and Rick Marcus, City Church Clio
- **Disaster Relief Video** – Bob Kiger, Michigan DR Director
- **Bambi Lake Report** – Wayne Parker, Pastor Merriman Rd. Baptist Garden City
- **Woman’s Missionary Union Video**
- **Women Ministry Leaders, Pastor/Church Planters/Staff Wives Video**
- **Mission Testimony Introduction** – Josh Tovey
- **Mission Trip Testimonies**
 - **Serve Tour Flint:** Joe Brown, Pastor Greater Mount Zion Flint
 - **MI Churches Helping MI Churches:** Dave Longstaff, Pastor Graying Baptist Church and Phil Wallin, Pastor Faith Baptist Monroe
 - **International Missions:** Marisa Roberson, Pastor’s wife Heart and Soul Community Church West Bloomfield

Praise Him for His Mighty Works

- **Introduction of Tim Patterson** – Mike Durbin, Retired BSCM Executive Staff and Tony Lynn, Send Network Language/Ethnic Church Planting Catalyst
- **Message** – Tim Patterson, BSCM
- **Blessing of the New Executive Director/Treasurer**

4:05 PM – Prayer and Dismissal

Travis Whittaker, Pastor Mile City Church

Women in Ministry; A great asset in the church

STERLING HEIGHTS – I serve the Lord in His Church as a woman. For 40+ years I have been faithful in one church and have found that being a woman is an asset. I can go places and do things my husband and the other men can't. I am often received more readily and have unique insight into situations they lack. Wisely, they have embraced that reality and included me as their partner.

Ministry life requires commitment.

There is no room for “maybe” I will, maybe not. It’s suiting up and showing up. Sometimes I don’t feel like it, but I do what I am committed to do. It’s never perfect, but His strength is made perfect in my weakness. I rest, I pace myself, I do what I have to do to keep serving from the overflow. BUT there is no quit.

Ministry life is a family calling.

Our kids were part of our deacon ministry life. One evening I was feeling cranky as we cleaned the church ONE MORE TIME, because someone had left a mess. I was humbled by our young son as he ran happily through the room saying: “I just love serving God in deacon work.”

Well. Ok. Our daughter was very happy to receive 2 crock pots at her wedding shower, knowing she would need the extra to take meals to people. She is a deacon’s wife now.

Ministry life is Great Commandment living.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” This is not just for the “professionals”, but for all of us. We encourage others to be spiritually ready, to be lifelong learners, students of the Word, servants of others. THIS is church life. This is the blessing of being HIS and part of His family, the Church.

Women’s Studies.

I recently found a paper I wrote in the late 1970s for a Women’s Studies class at Oakland University. I had thoroughly researched the topic “Women in Ministry”, interviewing women from various denominations about their roles as pastors, nuns, music leaders, youth leaders, etc. I studied every scripture I could find that referenced women in Kingdom work and used those scriptures in my paper. It impressed the secular professor enough to earn an A. Looking back, I am somewhat impressed that 20-year-old Karen had some insight. But I knew so little, and my older self is still learning as I approach my 70s.

What about now?

1. **I will continue to serve Jesus, His church, His mission regardless** of what others say or do and in spite of changing trends. It’s not about them, and it’s not about me, my life, or my service. It is all about HIM.
2. **I will serve in any way possible**, sometimes in the realm of my giftedness, and at other times, just because it needs to be done and I am able, in His strength, to do it.
3. **It doesn’t matter who gets the credit** as long as HE gets the glory, the Gospel is shared, disciples are made, and the Kingdom comes, on earth as it is in Heaven.

I want to be a Friend of Jesus.

I always come back to the women friends of Jesus. They followed Jesus, supporting Him from their own possessions. (Luke 8: 1-3). They stayed with Him until the end, (John 19: 25) then showed up at the tomb. (Mark 16:2) They were sent by Jesus to proclaim His resurrection. (Matthew 28: 8-10). It doesn't get any better than that. I'm all in.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen serves on staff at Memorial Baptist Church, Sterling Heights MI as the Administrator at Memorial Baptist Child Care Center. She enjoys her church life as the Women's Bible Study Teacher and Mission Team Leader and serves on the Personnel Team and Pastor Search Team. Karen is active in the Deacon Ministry with her husband, Leonard. She has participated in Michigan Baptist life in many ways, including serving as an IMB Trustee and in Michigan WMU.

Southern Baptist relief efforts deployed throughout Southeast in response to historic Helene

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (BP) – More than 100 people have died from the havoc wrought by Hurricane Helene, and Send Relief is supporting dozens of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) sites deployed throughout the Southeast: Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Virginia.

On Monday, Sept. 30, Send Relief shipped out a semi-truck load supplies from its Ashland, Ky., warehouse to support disaster relief sites throughout the Southeast. SBDR teams from 14 different state conventions have mobilized so far.

Hurricane Helene generated some of the most widespread damage from a single event, stretching more than 600 miles from where the storm made landfall in Florida's Big Bend region as a Category 4 storm up into southwest Virginia.

Florida SBDR established feeding and recovery sites at First Baptist Church of Perry, Fla., and First Baptist Church of Live Oak, Florida, with volunteers traveling from the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, Alabama, Ohio and Mississippi to support the response.

"We are grateful for the support of Southern Baptists in this response," said David Coggins Florida Baptist SBDR director. "This has been a devastating storm across the Southeast, and here at First Baptist Church Perry, we are serving a community that has just been hit by its third storm in 13 months."

As part of the disaster relief response to Hurricane Helene in Valdosta, Georgia, A Southern

Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) volunteer from Kentucky speaks with volunteers with The Salvation Army, which has become a key partner in helping distribute meals SBDR prepares out into the community. (Send Relief photo)

Rain and storm surge led to flooding across Florida's coastline, and hurricane force winds downed thousands of trees, and Florida SBDR continues to assess the impacted area as volunteers help homeowners clean up the damage.

"Our Southern Baptist Disaster Relief network have come to help us and support us," said Coggins. "It's a great picture of the Cooperative Program and the cooperative work that we get to do together to bring help, healing and hope that people need when they are impacted with such devastation in their lives."

Helene left a trail of destruction in Georgia from Valdosta, Ga., in the southern part of the state to Augusta, Ga., in the eastern region of the state, leaving millions without power.

Send Relief's Ministry Center in Valdosta has been preparing and providing hot meals to those in their community, and they've opened their facilities for people to take warm showers, wash their clothes and even simply rest and find respite on site.

"Typically, we are a kid's camp," said ministry center director Jay Watkins. "Typically, we have families in crisis, but today, our community is in crisis."

Georgia Baptist SBDR staged a kitchen at Northside Baptist Church in Valdosta, and SBDR teams from Arkansas and Kentucky have begun recovery work in the city. They also have established sites in Alma, Statesboro, Mt. Vernon, Vidalia and Augusta.

The western Carolinas have suffered the most catastrophic damage as Helene's rainfall generated massive flooding that swamped the city of Asheville and surrounding areas. CNN reports that at least 30 people died in Buncombe County alone where Asheville is located.

"We have experienced, in some areas, total destruction from the storm," said Tom Beam, SBDR director for North Carolina Baptists. "We have people who are hungry. We're trying to get meals to them as fast as we can. We've got people in communities that we don't know yet if they're OK because we can't get to them."

Local news stations captured footage over the weekend of entire towns flooded, bridges destroyed and multiple dams, like the Lake Lure Dam, struggling to avoid failure.

North Carolina SBDR has established multiple mass feeding and recovery sites throughout the state with others expected to come online once they are permitted to access areas that have been cut off due to washed out roads.

Beam said that North Carolina volunteers are already in eight different counties doing chainsaw work, flood recovery, installing temporary roofing and mass feeding.

At First Baptist Church of Boone and Biltmore Church's campus in Arden, SBDR began preparing meals on Sunday, Sept. 29 through their mobile kitchens. At their mass feeding sites, distribution into the community will be supported either by American Red Cross or The Salvation Army.

"Every time someone comes and asks for help and we're able to help them, there are many, many more people behind them asking for the same thing or something else," Beam said. "People are running out of oxygen. People are running out of insulin. People are running out of food. It is a very serious situation in western North Carolina."

Beam requested prayers as first responders, he and SBDR's volunteers navigate the historic catastrophe and get help to those in desperate need.

"It is utter destruction," he said.

For more information on how to donate as well as the latest updates, visit SendRelief.org/hurricane.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

Planting churches everywhere for everyone

GRANDVILLE – In the Send Network, our mission is that we are "a family of churches planting churches everywhere for everyone." Our vision is to" join in God's activity to see His Kingdom expand in Michigan by at least 1% over the next decade. If we are going to reach 1% of the lost with the Gospel over the next 10 years, then it must include the mobilization of existing churches that are participating in the multiplication of new churches! Or very simply, it involves "churches planting churches."

Acts 9:31 says, *"So the church throughout [the whole region] had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."*

Very clearly, we see in Acts 9, that the church is being built up, or mobilized, and the church is being multiplied!

I'm excited to share with you that we are seeing Acts 9 mobilization and multiplication happening in Michigan today! Currently, we have 109 BSCM churches that are intentionally engaging in some way in church planting! 109! This is almost 40% of our BSCM churches.

But maybe you're wondering, "how can my church be mobilized to participate in planting?"

In the Send Network we have developed a "Church Mobilization Pathway". This is a pathway to help churches discover what role they can play in the starting of new churches!

On our Mobilization Pathway, there are 5 kinds of churches, and no matter your church's size or age, every church is necessary, and everyone is needed!

- First, we have **Cooperating Churches** that are praying for planters and investing financially in SBC offerings.
- Second, we have **Supporting Churches** that are intentionally partnering with a specific church plant.
- Next, we have **Sending Churches** that are taking responsibility for a church plant by coaching, commissioning, and caring for a planter.
- We also have **Multiplying Churches** that are discovering, developing, and deploying church planters and church planting team members.
- And last, we have **Movement Churches** that are looking to radically multiply and catalyze other churches in planting.

I'm excited to celebrate that this mobilization of churches is leading to great multiplication and momentum in church planting in our state. In previous years we averaged the addition of 9.3 churches a year. But last year we saw 15 churches added (mostly through planting and others affiliating) and we are on track to see another 15 churches added in 2024! This is up nearly 67% from previous years!

Again, if we are going to reach 1% of the lost with the Good News of Jesus, then it is going to take the mobilization of ALL Michigan churches planting churches everywhere for everyone so that we can let every person know that "Jesus changes everything"!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Thompson is the Lead Church Planting Catalyst with Send Network and one of the founding pastors at Redemption Church in Grandville, Michigan. Matt has been married to his wife Bethany for 17 years and they have three boys: Caden, Brennen and Aaron.

Acteens in Action: Empowering Teen Girls Through Virtual Bible Study and Missions

OWOSSO – Acteens in Action, a new virtual program for teen girls ages 12-19, is launching this October 20 at 5pm across Michigan. This innovative initiative combines monthly Zoom meetings with hands-on local and state mission opportunities, allowing young women to grow in their faith and serve their communities.

The third Sunday of every month at 5pm, participants will engage in interactive Bible studies, hear from guest missionaries, and plan local service projects. The program kicks off with a focus on understanding the Great Commission and planning a Trunk or Treat event. Future meetings will cover topics like gratitude, the birth of Jesus, and various ways to share God's love in practical ways.

"We're excited to offer a virtual platform for teen girls across the state to connect, learn, and serve," says Diane Bowen, one of the program coordinators. "By combining Bible study with real-world application, it is our goal to inspire a new generation of mission-minded young women."

Acteens in Action is open to all girls ages 12-19 from Southern Baptist churches across Michigan, and participants are encouraged to invite friends.

For more information or to join, contact Sue Hodnett at sue.mi.wmu@gmail.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diane Bowen is a pastor's wife, mother, and User Experience Researcher living in Owosso. Her husband, Rick, is currently serving as pastor of Central Baptist Church in the Genesee Baptist Association. Diane has spoken at numerous church, associational, and state Women's events. She serves as Worship Coordinator at Central Baptist Church. She looks forward to reuniting in heaven with her loved ones, especially their son, Kenneth.

IMB reports LMCO totals more than \$204 million; trustees approve \$312 million budget

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA (BP) – International Mission Board trustees approved the appointment of 69 full-time, fully funded missionaries during their Sept. 25-26 meeting near Richmond,

Virginia. Fifty-seven of the missionaries participated in a [Sending Celebration](#) hosted by First Baptist Church Park Street, Charlottesville — the historic church where the famous Southern Baptist missionary Lottie Moon was baptized.

Trustee chairman Keith Evans from the Northwest Baptist Convention presided over the meeting. Nate Bishop, first vice chair from Kentucky, called the meeting to order and opened the meeting in prayer. Bishop also introduced guests including Michael Cabell from the Kentucky Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Convention President Clint Pressley.

Cabell, who was joined by pastors from Kentucky, addressed trustees on behalf of the Cooperative Program, as Southern Baptists prepare to celebrate the giving plan's 100th anniversary in 2025. "On behalf of Southern Baptists, we're proud to partner with you toward this missionary task," he said.

Pressley also preached at Wednesday's Sending Celebration in Charlottesville, assuring IMB missionaries of Southern Baptists' support as they leave their homes to share the gospel among the lost. Pressley thanked trustees and IMB leaders for the good news of God's work around the world, giving Southern Baptists reason to be proud of partnership efforts.

IMB President Paul Chitwood recognized Send Relief leaders and combined efforts that continue to grow and bring the gospel to the lost through disaster relief ministries.

President's Report

Chitwood continued celebrating the new missionaries who were recognized the night before when he addressed trustees in their Thursday plenary session. Reflecting on the continuing legacy of Lottie Moon, he said, "Who but God could have imagined that one little girl from the hills of northwestern Virginia would inspire Southern Baptists to give more than \$5.5 billion [in total through the years] to an international missions offering named in her honor?"

Chitwood also shared that, with a few giving days left in the 2023-24 giving year, the Lottie Moon offering was already the largest in the IMB's history, with receipts currently showing more than \$204 million given to date. This generous gift combined with Cooperative Program gifts will have met every ministry need of the IMB this year, Chitwood reported. The official total of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering will be reported in early October after the fiscal year closes September 30.

"We can also celebrate that we just graduated our largest class of missionaries from Field Personnel Orientation in more than a decade," Chitwood said, referring to the training time for new missionaries.

He continued with more good news from the frontlines of missions. "We celebrate that our missionary application pipeline is higher than it's been in more than 15 years. We can celebrate that the IMB brand is strong again, and we are connecting with more churches than ever before

in our 180-year history. We celebrate that the average tenure of service for long-term missionaries is higher than it's been in many years. And we celebrate that Southern Baptist volunteers serving alongside our overseas teams this year topped 11,600, an increase of nearly 20% over last year."

Expanding the total missionary force has been a focus of Chitwood's presidency. He acknowledged that inflation hikes would require even more generosity to support a greater number of missionaries on the field.

"Why is that so important? Because lostness is a growing problem," he added. "So we need even more missionary candidates in the application pipeline, and we need the Lottie offering to grow at a quicker pace so we can send and fully support those missionaries. We press forward because so much is at stake, and God has shown His willingness to bless our efforts."

Chitwood recounted a recent trip he and his wife, Michelle, made to Zambia with a group of Southern Baptist leaders and church planters. The trip included Lynette Ezell, wife of North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell.

Southern Baptist work began in Zambia in 1960. Today, IMB missionaries serve alongside Zambian Baptists who are leading their churches to reach the nations. Chitwood pointed out that Zambia is just one of 155 countries where Southern Baptists sent and supported missionaries this year.

"Beating along for hours in a 4-by-4 into the African bush with our missionaries, joining them for river baptisms, sitting with them and their children in their makeshift homeschool classrooms, and hoping the electricity comes on long enough for a hot shower, was a good reminder of the dedication and sacrifice our missionaries make to obey God's call upon their lives. And it was an opportunity for Michelle and me to renew our own commitment to God's call upon our lives," he said.

"Six years ago, we felt God calling us to the IMB for a very specific reason. Here's how I communicate that to our missionaries: We feel [God] called us into service with the IMB to do everything we can do to ensure they have everything they need to do what God has called them to do."

Chitwood emphasized a concerted, renewed effort to provide well-equipped leadership for missionary teams.

"We are working — and will continue to work — to develop and equip healthy field leadership for our missionary teams," he said, "and will hold accountable those who fail to care well for our missionary teams."

He referenced a lengthy list of specific ways IMB leadership addresses healthy leadership, shared in trustees' meetings on Wednesday and stated a desire "to give assurance to our board,

our missionaries, and to Southern Baptists that our goal is to care for and support our missionaries with excellence — and we will not be satisfied with anything that falls short of that goal.”

He articulated a continued commitment toward his calling to serve IMB missionaries. “Michelle and I feel called to this role to do everything we can do to make sure our missionaries have everything they need, including good leaders,” he said.

New trustees and committee reports

New IMB trustees, who were elected at the SBC Annual Meeting in June, participated in orientation at IMB’s home office. New trustees beginning their terms of service include: Steve D. Holdaway of Nebraska; Timothy J. Hill of Florida; Lyndy D. Stewart of Indiana; Nicholas R. (Nick) Clark of Kentucky; Joy G. Regan of Louisiana; Jangbae Jeon of New York; Scott C. Parkison of Tennessee; Ryan Thurston Brice of Virginia; and Wendell D. Horton of Virginia.

At Thursday’s plenary session, standing committees provided reports regarding administration, global engagement, human resources, LFTT (logistics, finance, technology, travel), marketing and communications, mobilization and training. The session included the approval of a total balanced budget for 2024-25 of \$312,379,000.

Keith Evans thanked the leaders who work in Richmond as he gave closing remarks. Evans, who recently became a grandfather, reflected on how this season in his life has strengthened his walk with the Lord. Reading 1 John 3:1, he asked trustees to consider the gift of being lavishly loved by God the Father.

“Before you’re a missionary or a pastor or a father or mother or attorney or doctor, you are a son or daughter of the King,” he said. “Find your identity in being a child of God, because that is who you are.”

Trudy Crittendon, recording secretary, closed the meeting in prayer.

The next IMB trustee meeting will be Feb. 5-6, 2025, in Charleston, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leslie Peacock Caldwell is managing editor at the IMB.

First-Person: Southern Baptists are a force for good, Part 1

Editor's note: The following is transcribed from Jeff Iorg's address to SBC Executive Committee members and guests at a ceremony marking his installation as SBC EC president and CEO Sept. 16.

The spirit of cooperation is under attack these days – both from external critics and internal detractors. Our cultural proclivity for tribalism and sectarianism – rooted in the sins of selfishness and self-promotion – are flooding over us. Some Christian leaders are more concerned about getting credit, having their way, being recognized on social media, or enforcing their positions than cooperating for a greater good. They complain about compromises and demand unity on specific issues to gain their loyalty. Rather than standing against this secular mindset, too many are embracing it and attempting to reshape what it means to be Southern Baptist.

Is cooperation still a viable expectation or a relic of a bygone era? Is cooperation still the best way for thousands of autonomous churches to work toward the common good of sharing the gospel with the entire world? My answer is yes, for a variety of reasons.

First, we cooperate because the Bible says we can do more collectively than we can by ourselves. From encouragement in group decision-making – “victory comes with many counselors” (Pro. 24:6); to the examples of partnership among believers – “I give thanks to God...for your partnership in the gospel...I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me...” (Phil. 1:3-7); to churches meeting each other's financial needs in the face of natural disaster – “Each of the (Antioch) disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brothers and sisters who lived in Judea” (Acts 11:29); to the Pauline example of almost always working with a missionary partner or team; cooperation is both a biblical pattern and mandate.

Second, we cooperate because it expresses the unity we strive for in Jesus Christ. After describing various leaders as Gods' gift to the church, Paul declared the task of those leaders – and the leaders in this room – is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith” (Eph. 4:12-13a). Jesus prayed “may all (believers) be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you” and “I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may one as we are one” (John 17:21-22). When we cooperate, we become part of the answer to Jesus' prayer.

Third, we cooperate because our churches are autonomous – not independent. Autonomy means self-determining, not selfish or self-centered. All Baptist churches are autonomous, but Southern Baptist churches are not independent. We have agreed to subjugate our personal preferences on ministry practices, mission strategies, financial allocations, and some doctrinal

positions to work together for the overarching goal of – borrowing from our founding documents – “the propagation of the gospel.” When leaders embrace an independent mindset, it results in two kinds of movements. The first is independent churches which operate with few if any partners. The second is tribal groups – formed by independent-minded leaders who will work with others, but only with people who affirm specific positions – thus creating subsets among Southern Baptists. There are multiple tribal groups operating among us today. These are more than fellowships. They are well-funded and well-led movements more committed to their group’s agenda than the overall work of Southern Baptists. They seem determined to reshape the SBC to fit their perspective and promote their specific agenda.

My conclusion about this mindset may surprise you. I do not object to an independent mindset and its two expressions – independent churches or tribal groups. But I would invite those who hold an independent viewpoint to embrace their independence, without pressing us to adopt a societal model. Southern Baptists value cooperation. We are autonomous, but not independent. We have agreed to set aside personal preferences for the greater good of the global advance of the gospel. As I have said on other occasions, I am willing to cooperate with Southern Baptist churches I would not join as a member. We tolerate considerable diversity in our movement – doctrinal, methodological, and strategic – as long as churches are orthodox on the defining doctrines and moral standards of the Christian faith and are committed to God’s eternal mission.

My perspective on cooperation is not new or controversial. These convictions are what define cooperation. It’s the approach that has marked Southern Baptists for almost two centuries. Our commitment to cooperation is the defining mindset imagined by our founders and promoted by countless leaders – despite perpetual naysayers, critics, and detractors.

Finally, we cooperate because it works. While other denominations strain to preserve loyalty through top-down control, experience doctrinal drift when power is vested in a heretical few, demand financial support through assessments, and struggle to produce leaders loyal to their movement – our cooperative efforts have excelled and expanded for more than 175 years. We cooperate because cooperation works – producing supernatural spiritual results which reflect God’s grace, power, and favor on our movement. The examples of God’s supernatural favor are evident to any honest observer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Iorg is president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee.

Refugees find care in city known for slave trade history

A redeeming shift in its treatment of internationals is happening in Charleston, South Carolina. What was once a major port for enslaved people is now a harbor for diaspora groups, and Southern Baptists are an important part of the culture change.

Diaspora refers to “the movement, migration, settlement or scattering of people away from one’s indigenous homeland.” In North America, diaspora people comprise immigrants, refugees and international students.

Congolese refugees meet for Bible study that Steve and Melinda McMillan lead through Centerpoint Church in Charleston, S.C. This is an example of the Diaspora Missions Collective, which was formed by Southern Baptist entities to reach other national people groups that come to North American soil. (IMB Photo)

Earlier this year, the International Mission Board, the North American Mission Board and Woman’s Missionary Union announced its partnership with other Southern Baptist entities to form Diaspora Missions Collective. Christians’ outreach to internationals in Charleston is a great example of what Diaspora Missions Collective wants to accomplish in reaching all nations, people, languages and tribes with the gospel, no matter where they live.

Charleston’s Gadsden’s Wharf received as many as 260,000 slaves from 1670 to 1808. Today, with help from The Hub Ministry Center, Charleston has become a modern day “Ellis Island” for refugees coming from Africa, the Middle East and Central and South America.

The Hub Ministry Center partners with Send Relief, the South Carolina Baptist Convention and Charleston Baptist Association. The center provides refugees with transitional assistance and care in transportation, education, recreation and vocational training. They also provide relational care through community and compassion. The Hub’s future vision is to offer transitional housing and a medical clinic.

“We want to show the Kingdom of God by demonstrating love through welcoming the stranger,” Craig Tuck said. Tuck is the associational missions strategist for Charleston Baptist Association, which has its office located in The Hub Ministry Center.

The history of The Hub starts with a declining church in 2020 that was willing to be “replanted and repurposed” to become Centerpoint Church. Its focus was to be multiethnic and multicultural. Tuck said Centerpoint created The Hub on the church’s eight-acre campus as a non-profit community center. Then refugees started coming to Charleston in 2022, and The Hub increased its missional focus.

“We are saying to those who come as refugees, ‘You are precious lives, and we will help you.’ That to me is the beautiful picture of the gospel and the Kingdom demonstrating itself,” Tuck said.

Congolese refugees find help, hope through The Hub

A group of nearly 50 people from the Congo have been living as refugees for more than 20 years because of political unrest in their country. After living in refugee camps in Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe, these Congolese finally reached Charleston and found a chance for new life and new hope.

The Hub has helped them through their transition, but the Congolese are also finding acceptance at Centerpoint.

“What’s happening is they’re coming to The Hub to get support and care, but then the church here is also welcoming them,” Tuck said. “Some of them are Muslim who are coming to our church every week because they find community and feel loved.”

Steve and Melinda McMillan are former missionaries to the Congo and moved to Charleston five years ago in retirement. God provided them a ministry through The Hub as translators for Congolese refugees and as logistical coordinators for newly appointed refugee residents.

“Steve and Melinda have made great relationships with the Congolese refugees,” Tuck said. “You see the gospel going forward in these relationships. They are now leading a Bible study for Congolese at Centerpoint.”

Modeling the Diaspora Missions Collective’s intention

“The nations are coming in, and here is an example of Southern Baptists meeting a need in Charleston,” John Barnett said, regarding The Hub and its impact of sharing the gospel with refugees. As director of the diaspora mobilization team, Barnett explained the purpose of Diaspora Missions Collective is for collaboration, helping the local church reach the nations.

“Not everybody could do what [The Hub in Charleston is] doing, but it’s a great example of how they are reaching other nations,” he said. “They’ve partnered well in the community.”

Barnett pointed out how The Hub, Centerpoint Church, Charleston Baptist Association, the South Carolina Baptist Convention and other ministries are working the missionary task together in Charleston. Through their recently adopted 10×10 Plan, the South Carolina convention has made a substantial financial commitment to the Charleston Baptist Association to help jumpstart The Hub.

“Craig Tuck’s vision for The Hub is innovative and refreshing,” said Tony Wolfe, executive director-treasurer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. “As opportunity multiplies for

meaningful gospel-centered ministry, the Charleston Baptist Association and its local partners are rising to their time to demonstrate the love of God to all people. Through ministries like this, the greater Charleston area is being saturated and transformed by the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

In Great Commission cooperation, the ministry partners work with churches who are walking with refugees in their life journeys.

“They’re the first touch in helping to welcome them,” Barnett said. “They’re helping people get jobs and learn English, but through all this, they’re sharing the gospel and connecting with the international churches that are there.

“This is what the Diaspora Missions Collective is about,” he continued. “We want to work through our existing Southern Baptist entities, like our associations, that are connected with local churches, so that we can have more impact on reaching the nations here in our neighborhoods.”

Just like the many conversions mentioned in the Bible, the city of Charleston reflects how God’s amazing grace can change the trajectory of a sinful past to a redeeming present and use its recipients to reach the lost.

Find out more at dmcollective.org or contact info@dmcollective.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Doyle is a writer for the IMB.

U.S. Evangelicals Want to Engage Culture More Than They Actually Do

Although evangelicals say they want to engage culture, they often bypass the opportunities in front of them to do so.

Evangelicals may be bigger on cultural engagement in theory than in practice. They say they want to share biblical truth but don’t always take the opportunities in front of them. Some don’t even spend time regularly reading Scripture.

A Lifeway Research study sponsored by the Institute for Faith & Culture surveyed 1,000 Americans who say they belong to a Protestant or non-denominational church within the evangelical religious tradition. More than 7 in 10 (72%) say they attend worship services at their church at least monthly, including 59% who attend at least weekly. Another 9% attend several times a year, and 20% say they rarely or never attend.

The study gives a complicated picture of how U.S. evangelicals view and interact with society around them and make personal value decisions. Robert J. Pacienza, Senior Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and Founder of the Institute for Faith and Culture, stressed the need for Christians to know and understand the Bible.

“For decades there has been a dearth of prophetic Christian voices in our culture. The North American church exists in a time when biblical literacy is at an all-time low,” said Pacienza. “Without an understanding of Scripture, Christians cannot faithfully engage the culture with a biblical worldview.”

Biblical influence

Evangelicals say they believe the Bible provides answers for personal and societal issues, but many of them aren't spending consistent time reading it.

More than a third (37%) say they read the Bible daily and 32% say they read it once a week or several times a week. But 13% say they may engage with Scripture once a month or several times a year, and 19% rarely or never read it.

The lack of regular reading doesn't stop some from espousing support for the Bible's wisdom and application to their lives. Few say the Bible is a good foundation but not relevant for most daily decisions (20%) or that they have trouble understanding how to apply the Bible's teaching to important questions in their life (17%). Almost 9 in 10 (87%) say only the Bible can define what a life of faith and service to God includes.

When asked what influences how they typically make personal decisions, around half (52%) say the Bible is their primary influence. Close to 1 in 5 point to personalities and influencers from social media or the news media (19%) or their own experiences (17%). Fewer say what influences them most is their education, teachers they've had or reading they've done (5%), friends' beliefs (4%) or parents' and family's beliefs (4%).

“Individuals choose what and who they allow to influence their personal decisions,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “Far more evangelicals say only the Bible is capable of defining life than how many actually allow it to define *their* life decisions.”

Evangelicals don't only believe the Bible should impact them personally, they see it as valuable for everyone else and a means to better understand the world. Nine in 10 (92%) say Christians have the responsibility to share truth from God's Word with people holding different views.

Additionally, 93% say it is important to interpret things seen and heard in the world through what Scripture says. Most (56%) always or often test what they see in society against Scripture, including 25% who say they always do so. Another 23% sometimes test what they see with Scripture. Fewer say they do so rarely (9%) or never (7%).

The vast majority believe the Bible speaks to modern issues. Just 13% say the Bible is silent on most of the big questions our society is facing. More than 4 in 5 (83%) disagree.

As a result, 50% of U.S. evangelicals say the Bible is the top influence on how they typically form opinions about solutions to problems in our society. Fewer say they turn first to personalities and influencers (17%), their own experiences (10%) or their political party (10%). Few say they are most influenced by their education (5%), their parents' or family's beliefs (5%) or their friends' beliefs (3%).

Engagement opinions

As they think about taking a biblical influence into broader culture, few evangelicals have thrown in the towel. Around a quarter (24%) say they have given up on the culture and don't try to influence it in any way, but 70% disagree.

Almost all (97%) say God cares how they engage the world around them. Most U.S. evangelicals see that playing out in how they vote, relate to the government and laws and view their job and coworkers.

Thinking about voting, around 1 in 4 (24%) say God is unconcerned with if or how they vote. As they prepare for an election, 81% say they seek to make voting decisions by applying biblical truth to the issues and candidates.

Most evangelicals hold a high view of their work and those they work with. More than 3 in 4 (78%) believe work is a sacred gift from God. Fewer than 2 in 5 (38%) feel the only thing they owe people at their job is hard work, while 55% disagree. Almost 4 in 5 (79%) say they have an obligation to care for the people they work with.

“While few evangelicals doubt God cares how they engage the world around them, more than 1 in 5 don't think this applies to voting,” said McConnell. “This discrepancy could lead to different decisions among this minority of evangelicals.”

Desired engagement vs. actual engagement

U.S. evangelicals express a strong desire to engage with those around them and share their beliefs with others, but they admit that doesn't always happen.

Three in 4 (75%) say they want to speak up when talking with someone who says something that doesn't align with Scripture. Nine in 10 (89%) want to promote biblical truths among people they know. Even more (93%) say they want to demonstrate biblical compassion to those outside their church.

When engaged in a conversation with someone who says something that is not biblical, however, only 9% say they always share a biblically informed view in response. More say they often (23%) or sometimes (45%) do so. Fewer say they rarely (16%) or never (6%) reply with what they believe to be a biblical response.

Similarly, 10% say they always seek opportunities to promote the Bible's perspective on topics knowing they are unpopular. Twice as many say they do so often (20%) and almost four times as many (38%) do so sometimes. Around a quarter (22%) say they rarely seek those opportunities, and 7% never do.

"Promoting biblical truth appears to be much easier for evangelicals when they are among people who agree with them. Far fewer say they regularly give a biblical response in settings where the Bible's position is not popular," said McConnell.

Some evangelicals may be more confident in their engagement efforts if they feel better trained and more equipped. Most (56%) say they are willing to discuss biblical truths with people who disagree, but only 27% say they are equipped and 17% say they are eager. Around 1 in 5 (21%) say they are reluctant, and 10% feel indifferent.

Fewer than 1 in 5 (18%) say they're ready for any opportunity to share what the Bible says, while 35% say they're ready for most opportunities. Around 1 in 3 (32%) say only feel ready to discuss a few truths they know well. One in 10 (9%) admit they're not ready for most opportunities, and 5% aren't ready to share at all.

Still, more than 3 in 4 (78%) say their church prepares them to have conversations with people whose views differ from the Bible. Even more (81%) say their church encourages them to have those conversations. Fewer (59%), however, agree their church intentionally creates environments to discuss differences between our culture's values and the Bible's.

"There are noticeable differences in the large number of evangelicals who feel responsible to share the Bible's views than the number who are ready to do so," said McConnell.

"Churches seek to help evangelicals have conversations with people whose views differ from the Bible, but fewer churches discuss the Bible and the culture's values side-by-side."

For more information, view the [complete report](#).

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Methodology

The study was originated and commissioned by the Institute for Faith & Culture. The online survey of 1,000 American Evangelicals was conducted July 18 – Aug. 2, 2024, using a national pre-recruited panel. Respondents were screened to include those who identified as Protestant/non-denominational and whose church is non-denominational or in a denomination within the evangelical religious tradition. Quotas and slight weights were used to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity, education to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.3%. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

Missions starts at home for newest IMB missionaries

Lottie Moon's home church hosted the International Mission Board's Sept. 25 Sending Celebration. Rob Pocek, senior pastor of First Baptist Church Park Street, Charlottesville, Virginia, told the 57 newly appointed missionaries, their families and friends that he couldn't think of a more appropriate place to send them off to the nations than the place Lottie Moon first heeded God's calling on her life.

"On Dec. 21, 1858, a student came to a revival service here. She was determined to heckle," Pocek said. "Once she heard the gospel, the Holy Spirit did His work, and the woman you know as Lottie Moon was saved and baptized the next day."

Paul Chitwood, IMB president, reminded the more than 500 people in attendance of the young woman who so many years ago rallied Southern Baptists to join together in their giving to support more missionaries, resulting in an offering for international missions named in her honor. She also pleaded with churches to send their young men and women because people were dying without hearing the gospel.

"It's incredible to think how many years later, God is still using that legacy," Chitwood said. "It's a charge to our new missionaries tonight."

For many of the new missionaries, recognizing Lottie's home church is symbolic for where missions began for them, at home. Whether it was talking around the dinner table with parents about "who tells people in far-off lands about Jesus" or working side-by-side with immigrants in a job, God used "home" to prepare their hearts and minds for the Great Pursuit of taking the gospel to the nations. They recounted how church members invested in their lives to help grow and hone the skills and heart they will need for this next step of their journey.

A large Central Asian population in Virginia helped prepare Joe and Laura Pantaleo for their new roles as IMB missionaries in Malta. Laura felt called to work in Central Asia as a single, but God closed the door so she could meet and marry Joe. In their community, she found God brought Central Asia to her. The area is home to one of the largest Central Asian populations in the United States.

"I was able to connect with women and build friendships," she said. "Every week Joe and I went to the home of one family and were able to share the entirety of the gospel."

When their two sons desired to tell others around the world about Jesus, they knew the timing was finally right to pack up their belongings and move to Malta. Joe took his church's youth group from Fincastle Baptist Church, Fincastle, Virginia, to this country, and his heart broke for the people who did not know Jesus as their personal Savior.

A child also helped solidify a calling to missions for Ben and Hope Minter. The couple spent a few months in Colombia as part of the adoption process for their daughter. As they learned to be a family in this international setting, Ben joked that God could send them to live there, and he'd be fine with it.

At the time, international missions wasn't even on the table for the young couple. However, as Hope shared the gospel story over and over with her new daughter in Spanish, she had a thought.

"God did not bless me with two languages so I could only speak with her," she said. "He did it so I can also share the gospel with a greater number of people."

The family looked out over Bogota, Colombia, from the window of the guest house and wondered how many lost people were out there. Ben admitted with a smile that he stopped joking about "staying" because all he could think about was, "How can we share the gospel?" Mercy Hill Church, Greensboro, North Carolina, will send this family of five to Colombia.

Finding a way to share the gospel is one thing Clint Pressley, Southern Baptist Convention president and senior pastor of Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, said made the 57 on stage stand out. He noted how they all spoke with passion about the places they will go and an urgency that the spiritually lost need an opportunity to hear the good news.

Pressley reminded the new missionaries that their home churches and the Southern Baptist Convention will be there to support them in this endeavor.

“Think about the beautiful gospel that’s been put in your heart from hundreds of churches just like this one we stand in tonight,” he said. “We are sending missionaries with knowledge and who feel a sense of urgency to share with those who have not heard the gospel. Go, knowing that you got people back here, at home, who will be supporting you.”

The next Sending Celebration will be Nov. 10 at New Vision Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

To view the corresponding images and links that accompany these stories or to read past stories and issues of the Baptist Beacon, visit BaptistBeacon.net.

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