

MULTI-HOUSING MINISTRIES REACH 'SPIRITUAL BLACK HOLES'

by Neisha Roberts

TUSCALOOSA, AL (BP) – Fifty-seven percent of Americans live in multihousing communities -- apartment complexes, trailer parks, condo communities and so on, according to figures from the North American Mission Board. In Tuscaloosa, Ala., that number reaches closer to 65 percent, mainly because of the universities in the area, said Eric Boykin, missional strategist for Tuscaloosa Baptist Association since 2013. Since taking on the role in Tuscaloosa, Boykin has seen God open doors for more than 30 multihousing ministries -- something near to his heart since he was raised in Section 8 housing and adopted at age 9.

Across the state of Alabama, Boykin explained, 50 percent of those who live in a regular-sized single family home are connected to some kind of evangelical church. But according to NAMB, only 5 percent of those who live in a multihousing community are connected to a church.

Where the lostness is!

"What that means is ... if you live (in a multihousing community in Alabama) you are 10 times less likely to go to church than if you lived in a home," Boykin said. "That's significant. Especially since 65 percent of our city lives in these kind of communities. They are spiritual black holes. This is where the lostness is." To reach those spiritual black holes of the state Boykin and his team at the association formed a strategy for starting what they call "missional communities," where they strive for "something spiritual" happening in the area. But he's not doing it alone. Boykin has gathered and trained a network of volunteer leaders -- made up of pastors, single people, mothers, students, retirees -- and meets monthly with them in locations across the county where they pray together, share strategies, compare notes and "see what they can do to work on the outreach together."

NAMB also provided Tuscaloosa Association with 25 student missionaries in 2014 to live onsite and work in communities in Tuscaloosa every day to build intentional relationships with the hopes of starting missional communities.

Established communities

Some of the missional communities already established are at Green Village and Wood Village, both trailer parks, as well as Section 8 apartment complexes, The Links & Greens at Tuscaloosa. In January 2015, Boykin helped implement the missional community strategy across 11 metro areas of the state -- including Mobile, Montgomery, Auburn and Huntsville. NAMB and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) have each provided \$25,000 to implement the strategy and fund one part-time missionary in each of the 11 metro locations. Each missionary is a multihousing strategist (MHS) for that area, Boykin explained.

Training up leaders

MHS's are trained at a "Learning Lab" to see how the strategy has been implemented in Tuscaloosa and participate in the monthly network gathering.

The end goal of the strategy is that each one of these missionaries will plant four missional communities in multihousing communities in the year -- or 44 missional communities across the state by the end of the year. In each missional community, leaders teach those who participate in a Bible study or other small group outreach how to study the Bible for themselves, Boykin said. Boykin noted, "We ask three questions: What does the Scripture say? What does it mean? What does it matter? We ask those three questions after studying the Bible together. We want (residents) to be able to do this themselves as opposed to needing a pastor or a Sunday School teacher to come in and lead them. We don't want them to depend on someone outside."

So what's the secret to success in reaching multihousing communities in Tuscaloosa, and now other areas? It takes organization, prioritization and prayer, Boykin said. "First of all we cannot reach people with a program," Boykin said. "These are people. So we do ministry to focus on people by using the acronym PEOPLE:

P -- Pray with fervency.

E -- Engage the culture.

O -- Open the Word.

P -- Prepare key leaders.

L -- Launch sustainable ministries. (Bible studies, kids club, English as a Second Language classes)

E -- Exit with care. "Find the 'Lydia' of the community so they can be equipped and lead the ministry ... building sustainability to the ministry," Boykin said.

Support from NAMB and SBOM has made it possible for Boykin to share this strategy in even more areas across the state, starting with multihousing ministry luncheons -- informational meetings held this spring in Opelika, Gadsden, Dothan, Birmingham, Bessemer, Montgomery, the Shoals area, Mobile, Baldwin County and Huntsville. At the Shoals area luncheon, held April 19 at Highland Park Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, Boykin shared with more than 15 leaders and volunteers about the multihousing community strategy and had Bryant McGee, missions intern at Highland Park Baptist and MHS for the Shoals area, discuss how he's been a part of starting two large missional communities in the past year.

McGee, a junior at the University of North Alabama in Florence, said, "We've been working at Sheffield Homes (a Section 8 area of town) ... and have seen 50 people come to Christ. It's just been awesome." McGee orchestrates a team of volunteers who host a weekly kids club at Sheffield Homes, noting that an average of 43 kids participate in the club. "Multihousing ministry could be anything but our main goal is to make something that will last," McGee said. "I report to Eddy Garner (director of missions for Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association, who then reports to Boykin) and I train people to take up the roles. A lot of my workers are high school and middle school students who are taking on teaching roles, recreation roles and craft roles."

Rick Barnhart, director of SBOM's office of associational missions and church planting, who participated in the luncheon, suggested that church leaders consider planting "persons of peace" into communities they are trying to reach.

Persons of peace

"Be the person of peace and be the instrument in the community to lead," Barnhart said. "Find students ... that want to live the life of Christ out and be missional all around the state. Commission them to be missionaries ... in their apartment complexes." Above all else, when trying to reach multihousing communities, "don't go in there and do a one-time event," Barnhart said, "because you'll ruin the opportunity for folks to come in the future." Boykin noted, "If you're going to make a difference, it's not about the pictures or leaving a gift. It's about loving them and staying there. It's a process. There's a lot of struggle in those communities. There's not going to be a quick fix. We've got to dig deep."

And Highland Park Baptist plans to dig even deeper at Sheffield Homes. Because there's been such a strong foundational relationship, the church plans to open a preschool in the complex in the future. But starting an outreach is not about growing the church, Pastor Brett Pitman said. "Your church exists for the

Kingdom," he said. "Your church was birthed at a certain point and it's going to die at some point. They won't last forever. We've got to do everything we can to advance the Kingdom." And for Boykin, seeing missional communities flourish is "one of the most exciting things to be a part of in ministry," and working with NAMB and SBOM in this one-of-a-kind relationship is "just a win-win-win for everybody."

For more information, contact Eric Boykin at eric@tuscaloosacba.com.

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EVANGELISTIC BLOCK PARTIES: GREATER HOPE DETROIT IN SOUTHWEST WARREN

by Katie Louise Leach

WARREN, MI – The community in the southwest corner of Warren, MI. has a void that only the good news of Jesus Christ can fill. With the absence of churches and few activities available for kids, it seemed as if no one was reaching out to these families or caring for their needs. Lead Church Planter of Greater Hope Detroit, Michael J. Howard II, responded to God's call to change this. In May, Howard and several other partners came together to sponsor an event to bring neighbors together. Howard says, "Our goal is to saturate this community with the Gospel. A community block party could do just that."

For a Saturday afternoon, Shaw Park was filled with Christian music, free refreshments, pizza and cotton candy. Many parents sat in lawn chairs and blankets while their children played in bounce houses and on the basketball courts brought in for the party. The event was made up of a tapestry of visitors, people of different backgrounds and professions, including school officials, truck drivers, doctors, and police officers. Visitors also represented Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and those not connected to any religion.

Greater Hope has reached into the community of Southwest Warren because this is an area most people avoid. Howard says, "The team plans to consistently infuse this community with God's love and hopes to develop a Bible study out of these connections—then, eventually, an established church."

There are six more block parties scheduled leading up to the planned launch service in the fall. "We're seeking to plant inside a local elementary school," Howard explained. With 200 visitors at this first block party, and 30 different families and individuals expressing interest in joining Greater Hope Detroit's work and outreach, Greater Hope Detroit plans to pour into the lives of these families and extend the Gospel.

For more information about Greater Hope Detroit and their upcoming block parties, visit greaterhope313.com or email greaterhope313@gmail.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Louise Leach is a sophomore Early Childhood Education major. She attends Truett-McConnell University in Cleveland, GA., where she also interns at the Communications Department and works as a campus freelance writer. This summer she is working with Greater Hope Detroit out of Warren, MI. and Michael Jerome Howard II, NAMB intern and lead church planter. She is an active member of her home church in Georgia, Cornerstone Baptist Church, where she is involved in children's ministry and the Sunday morning worship team.

SEND UPDATE: SEE WHAT GOD IS DOING IN DETROIT

by Staff

Greater Detroit - Storytellers Church recently celebrated their 2nd anniversary. Along with the celebration they baptized eleven new believers. On Mother's Day, May 8, they moved their Sunday worship service out of its original meeting location in Macomb into a new facility that they will have use of seven days a week. The new site is in Chesterfield, the church's target community. They have also raised \$20,000 of support with a matching gift from a partner in Florida for the build-out of their new worship space. In addition, starting in September, Lead Pastor Bryan Ball says they will be launching a second service time.

The name Storytellers really drives everything the church does. The name is their heart and is a call to evangelism, working to raise people up to share their story in their daily setting (work, school, family, etc) of what God is doing in their life. Ball says, "They may think their story is insignificant, but the church continuously tells their people to trust God to do the impossible with the insignificant." While it may not sound like the best church growth strategy, Storytellers always tells its people to focus on this **FIRST** before inviting someone to church. They want to see people become comfortable with talking about Jesus in everyday life instead of focusing on getting them to church to hear the pastor talk about Jesus. In two and half years, the church has grown from the initial core of 4 people to averaging 120 on Sunday mornings. They average roughly 40 in weekly group attendance, and have baptized 34 people and dedicated 17 children.

Chesterfield is home to 47,000 people with an average age of 38, and an average household income of \$65,000. It is 92% Caucasian with a major portion claiming Catholicism as their "religion." Storytellers is a very solid representation of their community in every way. They have been called a blue collar church. They sought to create a church that would feel inviting to the life-long church, the un-church, the de-church and everyone in between. Most of their people at one point in their lives have had some exposure to church. God has continuously used this church to show people the difference between going to church and pursuing Jesus. Pastor Bryan shared, "We have a lot of people who come in with some type of basic understanding, but in time, they have an "ah-ha" moment while at the church, and a relationship with Jesus begins." "I love the dynamics and the makeup of our church. I love when people say they get excited to come here on Sunday's."

The Gathering in Windsor, ON, celebrated its 2nd birthday in May with more than 380 in attendance and 4 people baptized. At the birthday, The Gathering announced its support for a new church plant in Sarnia, ON, with Cecil and Jayne Cogswell and Warren and Sharon Hessling leading the way. Recently, they also have identified the need to start a new work in Amhurstburg, ON. Wade Hurst has been identified as a potential planter to lead this effort.

The Gathering is located in a renovated warehouse in south Windsor which is the southernmost city in Canada. It is located directly across the river from Detroit, Windsor is part of the Send Detroit vision. The city is one of Canada's major automobile manufacturing centers and is home to the headquarters of FCA Canada. Automotive facilities include the FCA Canada minivan assembly plant, two Ford Motor Company engine plants, and several tool and die and automotive parts manufacturers.

The Gathering, a two year old church planting other churches is remarkable. From its inception, the church has had a heart to become part of a church planting / multiplication movement. Lead pastor, Garth Leno says, "We believe that nothing else will have the impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. One of the best ways to increase the number of Christians in a town is to increase the number of churches."

Church leaders believe church planting helps an existing church the best when the new congregation is voluntarily 'birthed' by an older 'mother' congregation. Pastor Leno says, "Our attitude to new church development is a test of whether our mindset is geared to our own institutional turf, or to the overall health and prosperity of the kingdom of God in the city. We also believe that if we don't birth one or two new churches within the first 5 years of our existence, we will lose the zeal to do so, and it may never happen!"

Southeast Michigan Flood Recovery - The SEND Relief Flood Recovery Unit at Scholfield Elementary School in Warren has met the needs of families affected by the flood of August 2014. This spring saw hundreds of collegiate students come from all over the country to help clean and rebuild homes. The prayer is that many of these students gained a connection to Detroit and that the Lord would lead them to return as church planters. The efforts of the recovery unit is coming to an end. They will no longer be accepting new teams for the rebuild effort. It's last team work day is July 23 and will be closing operations August 31. The Flood Recovery Unit helped clean out 464 homes and has helped to rebuild 30 homes and has given three church planters a great platform for the gospel to be continually shared.

THE 3 C's OF THE CONVENTION: A REFLECTION ON THE 2016 SBC ANNUAL MEETING

by Tony Lynn

FENTON, MI – I heard a dozen people say it while we were at the annual SBC June gathering. “This is like a family reunion,” they said. I believe there may be 3 C’s that motivate Southern Baptists to attend the annual Southern Baptist Convention: causes, connections, and celebrations. It may be a simple list, but I see one of those in just about everyone who attends the June meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

First, let’s look at the “cause.”

It’s obvious each SBC president has a burden on his heart when he takes office. His sermons and comments echo his concern for the nation. His invited guests amplify the president’s emphasis. The intensity on one subject is timely. But even more so, as I walk the halls and meeting rooms of the annual meeting, it is obvious many of the church messengers come being carried by a cause or they arrive at the convention ready to discover and pursue a cause. There are so many worthy pursuits on display being described.

I saw one man having a conversation with another after they had heard Dr. Russell Moore speak. The hipster asked, “Didn’t I tell you that you would love him? He speaks right to the issue. Addressing the culture isn’t hard for Dr. Moore. We have got to get him into our city talking to our pastors. Do you think he will come? Something has to change in our city!” Women were sitting beside a long table displaying dozens of books that the Women’s Missionary Union published. Books from the display were scattered on their 8-foot tablecloth covered table. They traded books feverishly squealing, “You’ve got to look at this one.” A young woman spoke to the older women at the table with a slower, sadder cadence, “We have got to get some of these books to share with the women back home. If I had read things like this I would not have made some of the poor decisions I’ve made. Do you think we can order some now?”

Second, there are those who come for the connections.

Those are easy to see. A woman screams out from one side of a crowded room to the other side, “Betty Lee, is that you? I haven’t seen you in years, girl. You are looking as beautiful as ever. You don’t look like a grandmother to me!” Men connect in a different way. They huddle up outside the convention doorway. They yell out to past friends from college, seminary, or past churches. They invite the next old friend to come join the huddle. As soon as he steps up they take their jabs at him. “Hey man, you look like you put on some weight.” “Are you still at that country club church or did you get a real place of ministry?” No harm is intended. It’s just what guys do to one another.

Those silly connections often ended in spontaneous prayer. Women bowed their heads over their coffee cups on the café table and prayed for a woman who sobbed because her adult daughter was running from God. Men laid their free books on the floor and leaned closer into the huddle with their arms on one

another's shoulders because they learned their absent friend was home preparing for a bone marrow transplant. Those connections seemed to suspend all the crowd's chaos.

Third, there are the celebrations.

I think everyone finds things to cheer about at the convention. The International Mission Board reports growing numbers of salvations among certain people groups. The North American Mission Board unveils focused ways to enter communities with the Gospel. Seminary presidents explain that the number of students coming to their schools for ministry and mission training is increasing. Veterans and active duty military personnel fill the front of the auditorium. Southern Baptists love to clap, say "Amen," and cry over the big wins.

At the start of the convention, veterans and active duty military personnel led the entire convention in the Pledge of Allegiance and the singing of the National Anthem. Everyone stood to his or her feet. Right hands covered hearts. Men and women of youth and age saluted with their hands over their brow. Everyone guessed where each man or woman might have served. All of us were celebrating our freedom to serve the God we love. All of us felt the opportunity before us. All of us understood the treasures and resources that are within reach. Dreams of what might be filled our hearts during the first hour of convention. It was a celebration! 1 Peter 2:16 says, "You are free, yet you are God's slaves, so don't use your freedom as an excuse to do evil," (NLT).

Causes, connections, or celebrations? Come find your desire in Phoenix, AZ at the upcoming annual Southern Baptist Convention on June 13-14, 2017. You can find me. I will be in one of those huddles praying for a friend.

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.

HISPANIC CHURCH BEAMS GOSPEL TO ITS COMMUNITY

by Joe Westbury

SAVANNAH, GA (BP) – A young mother may turn to 94.7 on her radio dial for health tips for herself and her family as well as children's programming. An auto mechanic may listen to the station to hear a two-way discussion of a previous week's sermon or a broadcast on anger management. Radio PESCA, the Spanish word for fish, streams into homes that may never be reached by a knock on the door. Through a variety of ad-free programming, the station seeks to glorify God and direct listeners to a church not too far away -- Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana, or First Hispanic Baptist Church.

The low-watt station is the brainchild of pastor Samuel Rodriguez and others who donate their time to provide programming. It is also just the tip of the iceberg of how Primera Iglesia is thinking outside the box to bring Christ to homes and businesses on the east side of Savannah, Ga. The 24-hour radio station offers a diverse schedule, with each day having a special emphasis. Monday is business, Tuesday is medical information, Wednesday focuses on domestic violence, Thursday on anger management, Friday on a discussion on a previous sermon at the church, and Saturday on children's programming.

"We teach how to start a business, how to prepare for a job interview, and other related topics," Rodriguez said examples of the daily programming. PESCA is an acronym for the objectives of the station: P stands for "Preach the Gospel," E for "Educate God's people," S for "Serve by showing the love of the Lord," C for "Companionship among God's family" through involvement in a local church, and A for "Adore God as He deserves." Rodriguez appreciates a good challenge, with Radio PESCA but one example.

"It was a step of faith from the very beginning," Rodriguez said with a guarded chuckle, not wanting to minimize the seriousness of venturing onto the airwaves. "We knew nothing about operating a radio station but just took a step of faith. We sat down and began researching the Internet for suggestions on what steps we needed to take. As a result of this ministry, God has opened up so many doors for us here in Savannah. "The step of faith was for me, our church and our on-air personalities. None of us had any radio experience but we wanted programming that spoke from the heart to solve everyday problems our listeners may be having. We wanted to share helpful information from a Christian perspective."

Last year the church received an FCC permit for the nonprofit low-watt station. Rodriguez credits two volunteers, Iris Sarria from Peru and Isabel Haring from Honduras, for keeping the programs on schedule. Both are on-air Radio PESCA personalities, while Haring, who had a medical ministry for 15 years in her native country, also serves as station director. Upwards of 10 other people work behind the scenes to make the station a success. The church is active in the community and works in conjunction with the Red Cross, United Way and government agencies to help new and current immigrants assimilate to life in America, thus Radio PESCA carries programming dealing with health issues, immigration advice, employment and food assistance.

The church also hosts the Mexican Consulate from Atlanta each April to process passports and provide Mexican ID cards. The three-day event usually processes upwards of 5,000 residents. "This is another way to show the Hispanic community that we are here to share the love of the Lord with them. We want them to have the joy we have and to know the peace and love of God," Rodriguez said. In addition, the congregation has a food and clothing ministry and its annex is known as the Hispanic Community Center. There are about 25,000 Hispanics in Savannah and Chatham County, with 15,000 in a seven-mile radius of the church.

Rodriguez accepted the pastorate of the struggling mission of Bull Street Baptist Church in 1995 with only eight members. Five years later Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana began meeting at Wilder Memorial Baptist Church. The Hispanic congregation was growing while Wilder was in decline -- signaling the future of both congregations. The mission constituted as a church in 2001 and, Rodriguez said, owes much of its growth to the English as a Second Language classes it provided at Jasper Springs Baptist Church and First Baptist Church of Garden City. Worship and language classes also were held at Emmanuel Baptist Church. "Our English classes are an important part of who we are and why we have grown. There is an incredible need for this ministry and it is a valuable way to bring people into your congregation," he added.

In 2010 Wilder Memorial Baptist Church disbanded and donated its property to Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana. Last year Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana started a mission in Hilton Head, S.C., meeting in a nondenominational church on Sunday evenings with about 10 attendees. The congregation doesn't focus only on missions in the Savannah area but looks to mission trips to nations where its members are from. Trips to Mexico, Nicaragua and Costa Rica are common. Peru is being added this year.

At Radio PESCA, six hours a day are devoted to live programming, the rest is filled with music and short devotionals. The station is broadcast simultaneously on the Internet. What sets the station apart from many traditional religious stations is that it does not focus on preaching or the broadcasting of worship services. "I do not want a preaching station. Instead, on Fridays my program focuses on a two-way discussion between myself and Isabel. She will ask questions that I use to go into a more in-depth

discussion of the previous week's sermon. It's a much more interactive approach to delivering the Gospel," he said.

Rodriguez wants to expand the station's footprint by purchasing equipment that would allow for remote broadcasts from community events and festivals. But for now the station remains the flagship ministry of the growing congregation. "I sometimes do crazy things and take chances to spread the Gospel. You know what they say," Rodriguez said with a grin. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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REDEFINING SUCCESS: GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS

by Kent Bateman

We've all been there. Or even if you haven't, people in your church have. You start coming around a new church, you hear wonderful gospel-saturated sermons on Sundays and then you decide you're ready to join a group. Or, you just start branching out and getting to know people in the church family. And that's when it happens. The veil gets pulled back and you realize that the gospel so persistently proclaimed in sermons hasn't quite made its way into the people. You're met with hypocrisy, apathy, or (most frequently) religiosity and legalism. It's situations like this that often contribute to the age-old adage "I like Jesus, but not the church."

Like it or not, what many people will join or leave a church over is their interaction with the people of the church. And if that's true, our people's ability to articulate the gospel to each other needs to be one of the central ways that we measure the success of our churches.

NOT JUST HEARING, BUT PRACTICING

I love Tim Keller's analogy of ministry as a defective vending machine. Sometimes it's not enough to just drop quarters (read: preaching a sermon) into the machine and hope that the gospel fluency comes out of our people. Sometimes it takes shaking the machine—repetitively and intentionally waking your people up to the reality of the good news—to get gospel fluency to finally come out.

Like it or not, what many people will join or leave a church over is their interaction with the people of the church. Sometimes we as pastors wrongly assume that if our people hear the gospel on a regular basis, that will be enough. But even Jesus repeatedly told us that simply hearing the Good News is not sufficient. Only the person who hears His words and puts them into practice has built a house that will weather the storm (Matthew 7). Unless our people are applying the message of Jesus to their lives in an ongoing way, it's unlikely that the gospel will be the first thing out of their mouths when they speak to others.

HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

So how do we set up systems in our churches where the gospel is not only preached and heard, but internalized, practiced and repeated? Here's a couple things I think can help:

1. Practice "tomorrow morning" sermon applications when possible. When you think through your sermon, help give people language and scenarios to help them with immediate gospel application. So

maybe, instead of just saying “the gospel is good news for your job” (which it is)—instead say this: “so tomorrow morning, when you’re impatient with your employer, remind yourself of how in the gospel, God showed patience and longsuffering for you.” Give people some language around how the gospel is good news for them, not just that the gospel is good news for them. The more you’re able to do this for people through your preaching, the more your people will be able to think that way in their conversations with others.

Unless our people are applying the message of Jesus to their lives in an ongoing way, it’s unlikely that the gospel will be the first thing out of their mouths when they speak to others.

2. Practice gospel fluency in your own life. The more you practice speaking the gospel to others (outside of a sermon), the more you’ll know how to best coach others to do so. With your spouse, your kids, your community, always be thinking “how can I speak the good news to this person in a helpful way?” That will enable you to speak more clearly and realistically to your people about how to do it in their own lives.

These are just a couple of very practical thoughts on the subject. Place sufficient emphasis on arming your congregation with ways to live out their faith in everyday life. Putting these things into practice can help us immensely in our efforts to generate gospel conversations in our church body and community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kent Bateman is a pastor and communications director at Midtown Fellowship in Columbia, SC, and is preparing to plant City Church in Knoxville, TN. He lives in Columbia with his wife Ana and son Whitaker. You can follow him on Twitter at @kentbateman.

‘YEAH, I’LL PRAY FOR YOU’

by Tommy Kiker

FORT WORTH, TX – One opportunity that most believers experience on a fairly consistent basis is to respond in prayer to prayer requests shared by other believers or even those who are not yet believers. A friend, co-worker or fellow church member shares with you by conversation, email, phone call, or even social media a sincere prayer concern and asks if you will join him in prayer over the matter.

How do you respond? I’ve never heard anyone say, “No, I don’t have time for that, but good luck.” Normally, we quickly respond that we will pray and go on about our business. Sometimes we remember the request and pray about it quickly, but I will confess there have been times that I have completely forgotten about the matter and have been unfaithful in my commitment to pray for my brother or sister. In essence, I have lied to someone. I told them I would do something and failed to do it.

I have found a solution to this problem, and I have made it a practice in my life. It is not incredibly complicated, it is nothing new, but it works: When someone asks you to pray about a matter, stop whatever you are doing and pray with them right then. If you are in the store, stop and pray. If you are on campus, stop and pray. If you see it on Twitter or Facebook, stop and pray and then send the individual a private message letting them know you have prayed and will continue to pray for the situation. If you are driving and talking on the cell phone, stop and pray -- but keep your eyes open. It does not have to be a long prayer, but a sincere prayer. It does not have to be the only prayer time, but the beginning of prayer for the situation.

This practice accomplishes two important things through my prayer life:

1. I never lie to anyone when I commit to pray about a matter. I say I will pray, and we pray right then. I never intended to lie before, but it occasionally happened that I would completely forget. My memory lapse made for some humbling moments when my paths crossed with that individual the next time.

2. The second thing this practice accomplished was unexpected: I have found that when I stop and pray, there is a work that takes place in my heart concerning the matter. It seems to me an immediate, quick and genuine prayer in some real way seals that request in my heart and mind. I find myself remembering it often over the next few days, writing it in my journal to pray going forward, and genuinely desiring to follow up with the one who had made the request. Bottom line: I find myself more engaged in the ministry that a specific prayer request always affords. This practice has led many times to further ministry opportunities. Maybe you have already made this a practice. If so, keep it up. If not, why not give it a try? Just commit that if someone asks you to pray about something, you will stop and seek God's face together, remembering the words of Scripture: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

Get ready: If you make this commitment, I believe someone is going to share a prayer need with you soon. What blessings does God have in store in such an opportunity?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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'PASS THE SALT': RACISM CURE RESIDES WITH CHURCH

by Diana Chandler

ST. LOUIS, MO (BP) – Racial reconciliation rests at the doorsteps of the church and can only be achieved through the Gospel in action, a diverse panel of Baptist pastors said during a trailblazing discussion today (June 14) on the opening morning of the 2016 SBC annual meeting in St. Louis. Southern Baptist Convention President Ronnie Floyd convened the panel at 10:52 a.m., historically including National Baptist Convention USA President Jerry Young. The two have collaborated for months to put talk into action and actually achieve racial reconciliation in a racially troubled America.

"Being together here at this significant moment in America where racial disunity is occurring, and few are speaking into this discussion, it is our responsibility as the church of Jesus Christ to resound the power of the Gospel and the unconditional love of Christ for all people into this conversation," Floyd said in introducing the nine-member panel including African American, Hispanic, Anglo, American Indian and Asian pastors of varying ages. "It is our responsibility to have this historic conversation today for our present and for our future," Floyd said of the panel, titled "A National Conversation on Racism in America." He called Young, a chief speaker at the event, a "dear friend."

The conversation has to become a lifestyle, Floyd said. Days before the first anniversary of the June 17, 2015, racially motivated massacre of a pastor and eight church members at the historic Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., the panel also featured in a key speaking role Marshall Blalock, pastor of Charleston's First Baptist Church. All members of the panel expressed a unity of vision and purpose, describing the church as the Light and Salt of the earth, and the only cure on this side of heaven for racism.

As Young put it, "Somebody needs to pass the Salt and turn on the Light." The pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., said racism is a sin problem that can only be solved by the people God has put in place to offer the healing salvation of the Gospel. "The problem in America is a problem with the church being what God called it to be," Young said. "The problem is contaminated salt, concealed light, whereby we do not express the love of Christ nor extend His light." Blalock referenced the "grief and grace" Charleston experienced after 21-year-old white supremacist Dylann Roof slaughtered worshippers after they welcomed him into a Bible study. That experience, Blalock said, helped white Americans understand the true pain of racism.

"For so many years, white people have not really been able to capture and understand the true pain, the true hurt of racism, at least not experientially," Blalock said. "But racially motivated murder hurt all of us. The white community for the first time, in some ways, would experience the depth of the pain; for the first time, beginning to understand, it was our church that was attacked, our people, our brothers and sisters, our neighbor. Our city was made one by grief."

The church needs to ask itself whether it is intentionally practicing segregation, Blalock said, encouraging those present to search their hearts. "Only the Gospel can change hearts. Only the Gospel can eliminate racism," Blalock said. "Sadly, if we allow our own hearts to fall in that trap of racism it takes away from the Good News. As Dr. Young said, it covers and conceals the Light." Blalock realized years ago that he himself had a "segregated" heart, he said, when a black pastor and friend took him through an African American neighborhood and introduced him to individuals he had never taken the time to notice.

"That day my friend walked me through a neighborhood where we stopped and shook hands and visited with people, and for the first time I realized it was me. My own heart was segregated," he told the thousands gathered in the convention hall. "I had no intention of living that way, just like none of you have any animus toward black people. But yet, it's subtle, and I allowed it to sneak into my soul."

To the remaining eight panelists, Floyd posed questions germane to their individual ministries and circumstances. Kenny Petty, senior pastor of The Gate Church in St. Louis, spoke from the vantage point of the racial turmoil that erupted nearly two years ago in Ferguson upon the killing of Michael Brown.

"What was happening then and what was present then was an infection, a historical, a societal infection that was exposed by an incident, like the incident in Charleston, the incident in Florida the killing of Trayvon," Petty said. While healing has occurred, much more is needed, he said. "The infection just didn't stop at the doorstep of the culture, but that infection was also in the church and needed to be exposed," he said. "It's a good thing that we're having sessions like this." H.B. Charles, pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., said racism is rooted in sin. The church is asleep as Jonah was asleep as a storm raged in the sea, Charles said, and "the Lord is trying to wake the church up."

David Um, senior pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Cambridge, Mass., and chaplain at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said the smartest people in the world have invented no cure for racism. "The students I encounter at these elite and intellectual institutions are most certainly not racist. Just ask them. They are the enlightened ones," he said with sarcasm. "They have evolved beyond racial divisions ... or so they assume." But they are "completely blind to their personal biases and bigotries." Um concluded, "You cannot educate away racism because you cannot educate away sin. Sin is the problem. Racism is just another sin."

Former SBC President Fred Luter Jr., pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, also served on the panel. Other panelists were Timmy Chavis, pastor of Bear Swamp Baptist Church, Pembroke, N.C.; Joe Costephens, pastor of First Baptist Church, Ferguson, Mo.; D.A. Horton, pastor of Reach Fellowship, Los Angeles, and Gregg Matte, pastor of First Baptist Church, Houston.

Floyd described the SBC as the most multi-ethnic and multi-lingual denomination in America, with 10,709 of the 51,441 churches and mission churches holding non-Anglo majority memberships. Of almost 1,000 churches planted in America two years ago, 58 percent were non-Anglo, Floyd said.

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 globally.

LET US LOVE AND LEAVE THE CONSEQUENCES TO GOD

by Brian Andrews

RICHMOND, VA – Hope* lived on a farm with her family. Her father had an office job and raised chickens on the side. They had a simple life, but she loved it. When she wasn't studying, she hung out with her girlfriends and went to school parties. For holidays, she would visit her aunts, uncles and grandparents. They would play games and go out together. She dreamed of going to university and becoming a pharmacist.

Then came the war.

She fled Syria with her family. Her 5-year-old brother was shot in the leg and sent to the U.S. with his mother for treatment. She has not seen either of them in more than two years. Her aunts, uncles and grandparents are now scattered in different countries. She has few friends and raises her siblings in place of her mother. Hope is now 18 years old. Her life is now cooking for her family, cleaning the house, doing laundry, and getting her siblings ready for school. Otherwise, she spends her time reading, watching television or on her phone trying to keep up with family and friends from Syria. Her father works with cinder blocks and concrete to provide for the family, but they can barely pay the rent.

This family, like so many others, wants nothing more than a safe place to be together. Their homes have been destroyed, their lives ripped apart. Yet even as they cry out for compassion – with their eyes, their voices, their very existence – others are doing everything they can to provoke us to fear. Brussels. Turkey. Paris. They strike in the places we thought safest. We feel the temptation to paint with broad fearful strokes about these people whom Jesus loves. These are the people I moved overseas to reach, and they now live down the street from many of you. As followers of Jesus, our reality is not one of fearing terrorists or hoping in governments. Our reality is the transforming love of Jesus for the world.

Jesus told us, "And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell" (Matthew 10:28). And what does God require of us? To feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned (Matthew 25:31-46). Let us, therefore, act out of love and leave the consequences in the hands of our Heavenly Father, who sovereignly promises to work all things for good (Romans 8:28). Let us trust Him for that.

(*Name changed)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Andrews is a writer for IMB based in the Middle East.

CROSSOVER ST. LOUIS: HUNDREDS COME TO FAITH IN CHRIST

by Tobin Perry

ST. LOUIS (BP) -- Southern Baptist volunteers reported more than 350 professions of faith in Jesus Christ during Crossover events throughout metro St. Louis this year. One man who made a decision for Christ had been considering suicide just a few days earlier, said Eloy Rodriquez. Rodriquez, a longtime Crossover volunteer, serves as Hispanic pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church in Lutz, Fla. Rodriquez said his team knocked on the door of the man's house and asked if they could pray with him. The man told the team about a friend who was struggling with cancer. As they were preparing to pray, the man then opened up about his own struggles.

"Last Sunday, he closed his eyes while driving," said Rodriquez, who has been bringing teams of volunteers to share Christ during Crossover since 1999. "He was willing to have whatever happen to him, happen -- suicide basically. Then he opened his eyes, he was in the other lane, but there was no one else there. He pulled over and just cried -- not because he was about to kill himself but because he realized he could have killed someone else." Rodriquez then prayed with the man to receive Christ. That was one of more than 50 Gospel conversations that took place through the ministry of Sterling Baptist Church in Fairview Heights, Ill., during the week leading up to its Saturday (June 11) outreach efforts. Sterling Baptist also hosted a block party, a zip line, free food and a soccer tournament.

Southern Baptists have sponsored a week-long evangelistic emphasis in the host city of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1989. The events are sponsored by the local Southern Baptist association and the North American Mission Board. Despite heat above 100 degrees in some locations, hundreds of volunteers from scores of churches participated in Crossover events throughout metro St. Louis on Saturday. At least 22 host churches and event sites were included. Preliminary reports from that day's events were still being collected at deadline. A full report, including an update on the total number of salvations, is expected Tuesday (June 14).

Southern Baptist Convention President Ronnie Floyd said he hopes that through Crossover Southern Baptists will "leave a good testimony and a good experience for those people who don't know the Lord." He also believes that the work done during Crossover will help local churches have a better testimony in their communities. "The most important thing is that we see people come to faith in Christ," Floyd said. Floyd noted that through Crossover outreach activities many local Southern Baptist lay people will get involved in missions and begin to see their communities as mission fields.

Churches like First Baptist Church of Mascoutah, Ill., saw this happen firsthand. The church's students were involved in a variety of outreach activities throughout the week -- including painting several pavilions and foot bridges at a local park. They also shared the Gospel door-to-door throughout the community. "One of the things that came up over and over among the youth this week is, 'We had no idea there were so many lost people in our community,'" said Bonnie Bodiford, a high school Sunday School teacher at FBC Mascoutah. "They said it over and over again, 'I had no idea I could pray with people in my own neighborhood. I had no idea I could share the Gospel with people I work with or go to school with.' Previously, they always thought of missions as going somewhere." Youth and worship pastor Matt Burton noted that one 11-year-old girl who participated in the outreach efforts wouldn't talk to anyone early in the week but by the end was active in sharing her faith and passing out invitations to church. The church ended their week with an evangelistic block party that included games, free food, face-painting and balloon art.

Crossover Saturday also coincided with the launch of Send Relief, a compassion ministry initiative of the North American Mission Board aimed at helping churches deepen their connections with the local community. First Baptist Ferguson, Mo., hosted the debut of Send Relief. The event included the use of a mobile dental clinic and a mobile medical clinic. The units are available for churches to use for their own Send Relief events. Volunteers from Moberly Baptist Church in Longview, Texas, helped a new church

plant in Eureka, Mo., Alive Church, introduce itself to the community. Fifty volunteers from Mobberly Baptist joined 80 volunteers from Alive Church to host a two-day block party at Legion Park in Eureka.

"We're really hoping that in one, three, five years from now, the community of Eureka just kind of wakes up and says 'We're really thankful that Alive Church is a part of our community,'" said Mike Lee, Alive Church's outreach pastor. "Our hope is that we're reaching people, serving the community and ultimately seeing people respond to the Gospel." Jim Breeden, who serves as the teaching pastor at Alive Church and as executive director at the St. Louis Baptist Association, said he hopes that as area churches partner together to proclaim the Gospel during Crossover, it will strengthen their desire to work together. "I hope all of our churches -- nationally, in our state and in our association -- stop and say, 'We're on the same team. We're doing this together,'" Breeden said. "And obviously, I want to see a harvest of souls. I want to see a lot of people come to know Jesus."

In another part of St. Louis Pastor Dan Sigler of North Park Baptist Church in Evansville, Ind., took a team of volunteers from his church to help with a block party and other outreach efforts by Parkway Baptist Church in St. Louis. Sigler said he appreciates the opportunity to serve as part of the larger Southern Baptist family in St. Louis. He said the experience echoes what he has been teaching his church on its role in local, national and global missions. "Our church is more than our little hundred -- we're a part of millions around the world serving Jesus," Sigler said.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tobin Perry writes for the North American Mission Board.

CHILDREN SERVING CHILDREN

by Stan Parker

LANSING, MI – Recently Kenyan missionaries visited Faith Fellowship Baptist Church in Lansing. Wachira and his colleague Irungo, both from Nyahururu had the opportunity to share with the children's Sunday School classes. The children have been learning about the importance of service across the world. As a result of the visit, the children's classes began a project to collect personal hygiene packages for African children.

Missionary Wachira runs three schools in Kenya: a primary school, elementary school, and a high school where these hygiene packages will be distributed. The children of Faith Fellowship's Sunday School assembled more than 200 individual packages including toothpaste, toothbrushes, mouthwash, lotion, and dental floss. In each package the children wrote a handwritten note to the Kenyan students. According to Faith Fellowship's Pastor, Stan Parker, "The project has provided a wonderful opportunity for the children to learn about others living far away who need the love of Jesus." He adds, "The entire experience had laid a foundation of missions in the lives of these children."

Faith Fellowship Church has been supporting Missionary Wachira and his organization PACE Missions (Pan-African Christian Exchange) for twenty years. This fall the church will lead a mission team to Kenya. The team will be working with Wachira in his schools, visiting area prisons, and doing ministry work with the elderly. They are planning to conduct family conferences, and a leadership development conference for the staff at the schools in Nyahururu. Any person interested in going to serve may contact Bailey Krestakos in the church office at (517) 853-9897.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Stan Parker, Faith Fellowship Baptist Church Lansing, MI and Current President of the Michigan African American Fellowship, author of *Meritorious Marriage*.

'SUNBURN TRAILER' OFFERS GOSPEL WITNESS

by Butch Blume

CONWAY, SC (BP) – Headed to the Carolina coast this summer for some sun and surf but also looking for a missions opportunity? Martha Bullard has just the job for you. This summer, as she has for the past seven summers, Bullard, along with volunteers from churches of the Waccamaw Baptist Association, will be manning a "sunburn trailer" in Surfside Beach, S.C.

Volunteers at the trailer dole out free sunscreen, aloe gel and water, and they look for opportunities to share the Gospel with visitors from all over the world. Often, youth groups from churches outside the area will coordinate with Bullard to utilize the trailer as a staging area for their missions activities on the beach. The trailer, normally used for disaster relief operations by Waccamaw Association in Conway has wide panels on both sides that can be raised to create an open-air setting conducive to having relaxed conversations with families on their way from the public parking lot to the beach, Bullard said.

The trailer is open during the summer months from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Saturday, and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Sundays. Over the course of the summer, 50-75 people, many of them senior adults, will help man the trailer, Bullard said. The ministry was started by the Baptist Nursing Fellowship many years ago, and Bullard, herself, spends three or four days a week helping man the trailer. "I'm a people person," said Bullard, a member of First Baptist Church of Surfside Beach, "and I love to tell people about the Lord."

For more information about the sunburn trailer ministry this summer, contact Martha Bullard at 843-995-1320.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Butch Blume is managing editor for The Baptist Courier, the news magazine of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

'EVERY CHURCH CAN' URGED AT SEND LUNCHEON

by Joe Conway

ST. LOUIS, MO (BP) – A capacity audience of 3,000 at The Dome in St. Louis experienced the launch of Send Relief at the 2016 Send Luncheon on Monday, part of the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors' Conference. In keeping with the Send Relief theme -- bringing practical help with lasting hope -- the North American Mission Board (NAMB) presented Plymouth Baptist Church with a Send Relief trailer to augment the compassion ministry the church of 100 already accomplishes to reach the people of Plymouth, Ind. Pastor Clark Harless, his wife Raechelle and their daughter, Kennedy, joined NAMB president Kevin Ezell on stage. Ezell said Harless and his church epitomize what Send Relief can mean for a community. "Every church can do this," Ezell said. "Every pastor can. Clark is an example of a pastor helping his church to engage their community where they are. That is what Send Relief is about,

every church taking its next step on mission. We must be engaging people. We must be having Gospel conversations."

NAMB ambassador and pastor of Hope Church, Las Vegas, Vance Pitman opened the event. Pitman shared his enthusiasm for what the future holds. "I've been around the SBC all my life," Pitman said. "I have never been more excited about being a Southern Baptist than I am now." Pitman introduced a video celebrating this year's 50th anniversary of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief. The audience recognized more than 20 state Disaster Relief leaders and volunteers in attendance. "We are never better than when we work together," Ezell said. "Nothing expresses that more than the cooperation of our state conventions and their leadership in disaster relief. For the five years following the first Send Luncheon, we tried to bring focus to our work. We have gone from 13 percent of our budget devoted to church planting to now more than 53 percent."

But Ezell said church planting is just one part of what NAMB wants to help Southern Baptists accomplish. There are just over 3,000 sending and supporting churches working with church plants in the SBC. "We want to plant churches in Denver. And David (Platt) and the IMB (International Mission Board) want to reach Dubai. We want to plant churches in New York and in Nepal, but we have to start with our neighbors. Churches must be on mission in their own communities. There are so many needs in the shadows of our steeples."

Ezell said NAMB did not invent compassion ministry, it has been part of the church for centuries, but that churches need to continue to push to reach people in the neighborhoods that surround them. Following a video overview, Ezell invited David Melber, NAMB vice president for Send Relief, to the stage. Melber, his team and volunteers from across the nation partnered with First Baptist Ferguson, Mo., to hold the public launch of Send Relief ministry on Crossover Saturday (June 11). "We see hurt and pain on the television every day," Melber said. "There is pain and heartbreak and hopelessness in front of us. How can we live intentionally on mission every day? That is the heart of Send Relief."

Melber highlighted the day of ministry with First Baptist Ferguson and the volunteers, which included Send Relief mobile medical and dental clinics, both on display at the lunch, and available for tours during the SBC. The units are the first in what is hoped will be a fleet, which are available for use by churches, associations and state conventions for Send Relief outreach. Saturday's Send Relief launch included food distribution, a block party and smoke detector installations in the homes surrounding the church. "We saw dozens of professions of faith in Christ," Melber said. "One of the most encouraging things to me was to hear our volunteers talk about how they will engage their communities with Send Relief through their churches when they return home."

Brandon Doyle, a member of the Crosspoint Church planting team in Richmond, Ind., said he was encouraged by the fellowship and sense of community at the luncheon. Crosspoint launched on May 1. "We love the Send Network and NAMB," Doyle said. "That is why we are here. On May 2, the day after our launch, a team member from NAMB called to ask how our launch went and asked how he could pray for us. That is amazing support." Finding connecting points and ideas to lead his youth group to engage their community intrigued Jerusalem Ona most about Send Relief. Ona, from Randolph, N.J., was ready to see how his students would respond. "This was great," Ona said. "It was even better than last year. We want to help our youth to focus on the community and help them meet the needs of the people, not just physical, but spiritual. We are already working to help people recovering from addictions. I think Send Relief can help us lead the youth to engage our community."

The final presentation came when Ezell told the Harless family that through the generosity of private donors and the administration of Cedarville University, Kennedy's remaining tuition expenses, not already covered by her grants and scholarships, will be paid. Clark Harless suffers from multiple sclerosis, and is presently in relapse with the disease. "I may have multiple sclerosis, but it does not have me," Harless said. "Through this Christ has been glorified. It has opened doors for our staff and members to minister. Those opportunities may not have been there had I not faced this." Harless said he is convinced that what

churches experience as a lack of effective ministry "is not from a lack of opportunity, but from a lack of opportunists."

For more information about Send Relief, including reservation of the mobile clinics, visit www.namb.net/SendRelief. To learn more about NAMB and mission opportunities, subscribe to On Mission Today at www.onmissiontoday.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joe Conway writes for the North American Mission Board.

EXPLAINER: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ZIKA

by The ERLC

NASHVILLE, TN – What is Zika?

Zika is a disease caused by the Zika virus, which is spread to people primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito, [says the Centers for Disease Control](#). Only 1 in 5 people infected by the virus show any symptoms, the most common being fever, rash, joint pain and conjunctivitis (red eyes). Adults infected with Zika usually have only mild symptoms that last less than a week. Most people infected don't get sick enough to go to the hospital and very rarely die of Zika. (A rare nervous system disorder that causes temporary paralysis (Guillain-Barre syndrome) may also be linked to the infection, though that has not yet been established.)

If the effect of Zika is so mild, why is there so much concern?

Although Zika is rarely harmful to most adults, it could be dangerous for pregnant women and is suspected of causing birth defects in newborns. The infection of pregnant women by the virus is believed to be the cause of thousands of babies being born with microcephaly. Although no scientific evidence has confirmed a link between the virus and microcephaly, the World Health Organization (WHO) has classified Zika a global public health emergency because of a spike in both Zika and microcephaly cases in Brazil since May 2015.

What is microcephaly?

[Microcephaly](#) is a condition where a baby is born with a small head or the head stops growing after birth. As the WHO notes, microcephaly is usually a rare condition, with one baby in several thousand being born with the birth defect. If this combines with poor brain growth, babies with microcephaly can have developmental disabilities. The WHO says the most reliable way to assess whether a baby has microcephaly is to measure head circumference 24 hours after birth, compare this with WHO growth standards, and continue to measure the rate of head growth in early infancy. The disease currently affects about 25,000 children every year in the United States. There is no specific treatment for microcephaly.

Can a woman transmit Zika virus to her baby during pregnancy or childbirth?

According to the WHO, Zika virus infection close to term could potentially be transmitted during childbirth, although this has not been proven to date. The CDC, however, claims that the Zika virus can be passed from a mother to child during pregnancy.

Can a previous Zika infection cause a woman who later gets pregnant to have a baby with microcephaly?

The CDC says there is no evidence to suggest that Zika virus, after it is cleared from the blood, poses a risk of birth defects for future pregnancies. Zika virus usually remains in the blood of an infected person for about a week.

How is Zika transmitted?

Zika virus is transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito from the *Aedes* genus, mainly *Aedes aegypti* in tropical regions. This is the same mosquito that transmits dengue and yellow fever. As [the New York Times explains](#), only female mosquitoes bite people since they need blood in order to lay eggs. They pick up the virus when they drink the blood of a human. The virus then travels from the mosquito's gut through their circulatory system to their salivary glands and is injected into its next human victim. "Mosquito saliva contains proteins that keeps blood from clotting," The New York Times adds. "When a mosquito bites it first injects saliva so that its prey's blood does not clog its straw-like proboscis." People can transmit the virus to mosquitos even if they themselves do not show symptoms of being infected.

Can the virus be transmitted through sexual intercourse?

Yes. [According to the CDC](#), Zika virus can be spread by a man to his sex partners. Because the virus is present in semen longer than in blood, the virus can be spread when the man has symptoms, before symptoms start and after symptoms resolve.

Can the virus be transmitted through blood transfusion?

Currently, there have not been any confirmed blood transfusion transmission cases in the United States. There have been multiple reports of blood transfusion transmission cases in Brazil, notes the CDC, and during the French Polynesian outbreak, 2.8 percent of blood donors tested positive for Zika and in previous outbreaks, the virus has been found in blood donors.

Is there a vaccine or cure for Zika?

There is currently no vaccine or cure, and even diagnostic testing is difficult. Scientists say that while a vaccine could be ready for testing in two years, it may be another decade for it to be approved by regulators.

What areas have been affected by Zika?

Prior to 2015, Zika virus outbreaks occurred in areas of Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. Since then, it has been reported in Central America, most countries in South America, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and American Samoa. No local mosquito-borne Zika virus disease cases have been reported in U.S. states, but there have been, to date, 591 travel-associated cases (including 11 involving sexual transmission of the virus). There is currently no travel ban to any of the affected countries.

How are these countries responding?

Several countries—including Colombia, Jamaica and Honduras—have urged women to delay having babies. El Salvador even took the controversial step of encouraging women not to get pregnant until 2018. This has been especially contentious since many of these countries have large Roman Catholic populations. "A campaign to delay pregnancy would seem to be an implicit endorsement of birth control,"

[The Washington Post](#) notes. "For a region that is majority Roman Catholic, this presents a potential conflict, as the church has long condemned contraception."

Does the virus pose a threat to the Olympic Games?

Last week the World Health Organization released a statement saying there is "no public health justification" for postponing or canceling the Rio de Janeiro Olympics because of the Zika outbreak. According to WHO, "based on current assessment, cancelling or changing the location of the 2016 Olympics will not significantly alter the international spread of Zika virus."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission is an entity of the Southern Baptist Convention. The ERLC is dedicated to engaging the culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ and speaking to issues in the public square for the protection of religious liberty and human flourishing. Our vision can be summed up in three words: kingdom, culture and mission. For more information, visit ERLC.com.

WRAP-UP: HISTORIC ELECTION & RESOLUTION AT SBC

by David Roach

ST. LOUIS, MO (BP) – The election of Steve Gaines as president on the third ballot and a historic repudiation of the Confederate battle flag were among the highlights of the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 14-15 in St. Louis.

The convention's resolution on the Confederate battle flag capped an emphasis on racial reconciliation throughout the meeting that included the election of a 2017 Committee on Nominations with 25 percent of its members drawn from ethnic minority groups and a panel discussion on "racial unity in America" featuring Jerry Young, president of the historically African American National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.

The unofficial total of 7,321 registered messengers -- up from 5,407 last year -- also devoted an entire session to praying for awakening in America, listened to a panel discussion on "pastors and the church in American politics today" and addressed on multiple occasions whether Baptists should support Muslims' right to build mosques in the United States. When registered guests, exhibitors and others are included, the count of those at the annual meeting was tallied, as of June 15, at 11,581.

Presidential election

On the second ballot, neither Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn., nor North Carolina pastor J.D. Greear obtained a majority, with Gaines receiving 49.96 percent, Greear 47.80 percent and 108 ballots ruled illegal. Messengers would have had to choose for the second time among the same two presidential candidates for what chief parliamentarian Barry McCarty called the first time in SBC history, but Greear withdrew his candidacy and moved that the convention elect Gaines by acclamation. Recording secretary John Yeats said the presidential election has not gone to a third ballot in at least 20 years, the time that Yeats has served as recording secretary.

On the first ballot, Greear led with 44.97 percent of the vote. Louisiana pastor David Crosby was also nominated for president. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., said he decided

to withdraw after praying Tuesday night because Southern Baptists "need to leave St. Louis united." Gaines told the convention "there's no way God's not doing something in all of this."

Racial reconciliation

The Resolutions Committee originally proposed a resolution calling believers "to consider prayerfully whether to limit, or even more so, discontinue its display," but also stating that for some the Confederate battle flag is not "a symbol of hatred, bigotry, and racism." But former SBC President James Merritt moved that the reference to the flag's not being a racist symbol for some be removed and that the convention call believers to "discontinue the display of the Confederate battle flag as a sign of solidarity with the whole Body of Christ, including our African American brothers and sisters."

Messengers adopted Merritt's amendment and the resolution by wide margins after he told the convention support of the flag hinders evangelism among African Americans and said, "Southern Baptists are not a people of any flag. We march under the banner of the cross of Jesus and the grace of God." During a nationally televised prayer service that night, Young, of the NBC USA, said the wall of racism "is already down." Hours before the resolution's adoption, Young told Southern Baptists racism in America stems in part from the church's failure to be salt and light. "Somebody needs to pass the salt and turn on the lights," he said.

Young's comments came during the racial unity panel discussion, which also included a multiethnic array of Southern Baptist leaders. Outgoing SBC President Ronnie Floyd called racism "an assault on the Gospel of Jesus Christ" during his presidential address. He recognized the great great granddaughter of Dred Scott, the slave who was a party to the infamous Supreme Court decision bearing his name. "Any form of racism," Floyd said, "defies the dignity of human life."

Prayer for awakening

The Tuesday night "national call to prayer" featured two hours of prayer for awakening in America and around the world. Brief addresses were delivered by a multid denominational team of leaders, including former SBC President Johnny Hunt, Sen. James Lankford of Oklahoma, California pastor and evangelist Greg Laurie and Young.

Pastors, politics and religious liberty

A Wednesday afternoon panel discussion considered the role of pastors and churches in American politics. The panel featured five pastors and written comments submitted by Liberty Counsel founder and chairman Mat Staver, who was unable to attend. During the panel discussion, Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, said the three most important issues in the 2016 U.S. presidential election are the sanctity of life, religious liberty and the appointment of Supreme Court justices. K. Marshall Williams, pastor of Nazarene Baptist Church in Philadelphia, said believers should also consider "systemic racism and injustice" as well as "the pipeline from school to prison" among African American males.

A resolution adopted by messengers "encouraged Southern Baptists and all followers of Jesus Christ in the United States to participate in the democratic process by voting." On at least three occasions, messengers addressed Muslims' right to build mosques in America.

A motion from the floor asked the convention to remove from their positions Southern Baptist "officers" and "officials" who support Muslims' right to build mosques in America. A separate motion asked the SBC to withdraw its amicus brief in a federal lawsuit involving the Islamic Society of Basking Ridge (N.J.). Both motions were ruled out of order, with the Committee on Order of Business noting the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission signed onto an amicus brief, not the SBC. The International Mission Board also signed the brief.

During the ERLC report, a messenger asked ERLC President Russell Moore how any Southern Baptist can defend the right to build mosques in light of the fact some Muslims are terrorists. Moore responded that part of "what it means to be a Baptist is to support soul freedom for everyone." The Gospel, not government coercion, is the answer to Islam, he said.

Missions and evangelism

Messengers adopted an Executive Committee resolution of appreciation for Wanda Lee, retiring executive director/treasurer of the Woman's Missionary Union. The resolution noted that during Lee's 16-plus years of service, WMU has helped raise nearly a combined \$3 billion for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions - "which constitutes more than one-half of the total amount raised through these two offerings since they began being reported."

IMB President David Platt reported that following a "difficult" reduction this year of more than 1,000 missionaries, "for 2017, we will be operating with a balanced budget with the stage set for a healthy financial future." He thanked Southern Baptists for a record Lottie Moon Offering for 2015-16, which exceeded the previous high mark by more than \$11 million.

North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell said NAMB planted 926 churches last year. Among all NAMB church plants, one person is baptized annually for every 14 church members. In established churches, the ratio is one baptism per 52 members, Ezell said.

Crossover St. Louis, the convention's evangelistic blitz preceding the annual meeting, yielded 556 professions of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, the first increase in three years.

In other news:

-- Messengers granted final approval for Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary to change its name to Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention.

-- A scheduled panel discussion in which all entity heads would have fielded messenger questions together was canceled because the Executive Committee did not approve an SBC bylaw change to allow the panel format for entity questions. Instead, each entity president fielded questions following his report.

-- Messengers made 22 motions, with 12 ruled out of order and 10 referred to entities or committees.

-- Twelve resolutions addressed topics including the June 12 terrorist attack in Orlando, Fla.; "biblical sexuality and the freedom of conscience"; requiring women to register for the military draft; and ministry to refugees.

-- Illinois pastor Doug Munton was elected first vice president without opposition. Missouri pastor Malachi O'Brien was elected second vice president from among two other nominees. Yeats was reelected to a 20th term as recording secretary, and Jim Wells was reelected registration secretary for a 15th term.

-- A Tuesday morning ceremony honored America and its veterans, with an appearance by one of the 2,000 remaining survivors of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. A messenger's motion requested that future SBC online registration forms ask messengers whether they have served in the military and that such service be indicated on messenger badges.

-- Chief parliamentarian McCarty was honored upon the 30th anniversary of his first service to the convention. A former minister in the Stone-Campbell tradition, McCarty joined a Southern Baptist church

by baptism last summer and accepted a position on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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 and on news related to Southern Baptists' concerns nationally and globally.

THE SBC AND OUR FUTURE

by Ronnie Floyd

SPRINGDALE, AR (BP) – The future of Southern Baptist Convention is on my heart this week. Perhaps now, days away from the conclusion of my two-year presidency, my feelings may lean toward being a little nostalgic. What will our future look like? If Jesus tarries His coming, how long will our convention of churches last? Only God knows the answer to these and more questions when we think about our future together.

Who do we want to be in the future?

This should be a concern for all of us, and we should never minimize this issue: Who do we want to be in the future? I recently heard a major political leader say that during the decision-making process, he keeps in mind that "Every step is a forward-moving step." The same is true for the future of our Southern Baptist Convention. Every step we make needs to move us forward. Nothing moves fast in a major government or a convention of churches. Checks and balances are provided at many levels. At times these may appear to bind us, but in reality, they protect us in the long term.

I want to suggest some steps that will always keep us moving forward. Perhaps these steps could be more properly called axioms, which are principles or self-evident truths that are widely accepted among us. Who do we want to be in the future?

1. A Bible-believing Southern Baptist Convention

While this may currently be part of our identity, the reality is that the culture mocks the authority of the Bible in 2016 and beyond. Our pastors and churches are navigating in a world unlike anything we have experienced before. Our leadership with our laypeople and one another is critical in this hour. Whatever step we take in our decision-making, we must always do so believing the Bible is infallible, trustworthy, sufficient and inerrant, progressing toward the goal set before us.

2. A Gospel-advancing Southern Baptist Convention

In this diverse, complex season in American life and in the evangelical world, there really is only one passion that keeps us tied together: Advancing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire nation and world. Our pastors, churches and convention leaders must dig deep and find a way to experience a rebirth of sharing the Gospel personally and a renewal of our priority to evangelize the towns and cities of America and simultaneously extend the Gospel globally. We cannot retreat from this calling, but must renew our commitment to such a point that we act upon it urgently, personally, collectively, cooperatively and aggressively.

3. A Leader-developing Southern Baptist Convention

In order for us to live out Ephesians 4:12, "For the training of the saints in the work of ministry to build up the body of Christ," every member in the body of Christ must be developed to do the work of the ministry in and through the local church. Until our local churches return to our members owning the ministry and personalizing the Great Commission locally, we will not seize this opportunity before us. While our six seminaries are developing just over 20,000 seminary students in their various locations, their robust effort must continue forward for God's glory. This is one of our most encouraging dynamics in Baptist life. This indicates a hope that perhaps God is preparing His called servants to impact our nation and the globe in an unprecedented way.

4. A multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Southern Baptist Convention

Strengthening our commitment to becoming a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual denomination begins in the local churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. In other words, this is a local church issue more than a Southern Baptist Convention issue. The Southern Baptist Convention will mirror our churches. If our churches are going to reach the towns and cities of America with the Gospel, each church must become committed to reach people that comprise their community, including those of unique ethnicity and may speak a language other than English.

The North American Mission Board informed Southern Baptists that 58 percent of the churches planted one year ago are non-white churches. In the past two years, with the appointments I am permitted to make as president of our convention, we are at the highest percentage of appointments of non-white Baptists in our history. Additionally, in last year's National Call to Prayer and with this year's National Conversation on Racial Unity in America, the Southern Baptist Convention is making great strides in this conversation and will continue to do so. But let me remind you, the key is what is happening in our churches.

5. A local church-centered Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention is not centered on our SBC national entities, state conventions, or regional associations; we are to be centered on helping our churches. These entities, conventions and associations exist for one purpose alone: for our churches. Their role is to assist our churches to carry out their God-assigned, God-anointed task of reaching the world for Christ. Otherwise, they have no reason to exist. Southern Baptists are always at our best when our churches are being assisted and equipped, and our pastors are leading not just their churches, but in their beloved Southern Baptist Convention.

6. A Generously-giving Southern Baptist Convention

Southern Baptists have been able to do what we do for one reason alone: Our churches are generous in giving through the Cooperative Program and to our mission offerings. We do not need to minimize what our churches are doing already and have done together historically. While generosity must continue to grow, money usually follows vision and the unity of our fellowship together.

7. A people-loving Southern Baptist Convention

Southern Baptists are not perfect, especially in our testimony together in fellowship, but we must not neglect our need to be a people-loving convention. Right now in these socially uncertain waters in America, we face an ongoing threat of being pulled into an ocean of skepticism, criticism and cynicism toward not just people in America, but even more sadly, one another. Southern Baptists should want to be known for being a people-loving convention, both within our family and outside of our family. Jesus calls us to love one another.

Who we do not want to be?

Daily, we face the ongoing tension between who we want to be in the future versus who we do not want to be in the future. I have encouraged us to make great choices about who we want to be in the future.

Briefly, I want to declare who we do not want to be in the future:

- We do not want to be a convention that questions or denies the Holy Scripture and its ongoing authority until Jesus comes again.
- We do not want to be a convention that minimizes evangelism locally, regionally and nationally, or we will become a convention that does not advance the Gospel globally. If we lose evangelism as our priority, we will soon cease to have a convention.
- We do not want to be a convention that demeans the role of laypersons in our churches and minimizes the ministry of equipping from the local church to the convention level.
- We do not want to be a convention comprised of only Anglo/white churches, or we will soon be dead and irrelevant to our culture.
- We do not want to be a convention centered on ourselves, our structures, and our systems, or we will float away on the seas of selfishness.
- We do not want to be a convention that is comprised of selfish non-giving Christians and self-serving churches or we will cease being able to finance our work together statewide, nationally and internationally.
- We do not want to be a convention that erodes relationships with each other and other evangelicals through constant, ongoing skepticism, un-Christian criticism, and unattractive cynicism.

I call our pastors, churches and convention leaders to a higher life and a greater level of leadership in the times in which we live today. In 2016, we need leaders to rise up as modern men and women of Issachar, "who understood the times and knew what Israel should do." (1 Chronicles 12:32)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ronnie Floyd is president of the Southern Baptist Convention and senior pastor of Cross Church in northwest Arkansas. This column first appeared on Ronnie Floyd's website, www.ronniefloyd.com.

CAFES, CHURCHES, AND COWS

by Tim Patterson

FENTON, MI – This past week at the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Sabrina and I had the privilege of spending time with some dear friends from Colorado. Our meeting reminded me of a trek that we made out West to their great state in order to preach at a Bible conference. The community in which we ministered was located on the eastern side of the Rockies in the plains area. The vast expanse of this ranch and farm area reminded me of the seemingly never-ending flats of West Texas. Mile after mile of this slightly undulating land was covered with the infinitely new fresh green sprouts of the Spring's first crop of wheat. Anything not cultivated for wheat was planted in hay, or was in the process of being prepared for some type of feed grain.

This was ranch and farm country at its best. Trees were almost nonexistent and the old saying that "you could see for a country mile" took on a whole new perspective. In fact, on a clear day a line of sight of more than a hundred miles was not without question. Looking back West at the snow-capped Rockies was a beautiful sight indeed.

This was also big beef and buffalo country. It was strange to these eyes to see hundreds of buffalo grazing the grasses of the plains like they did more than a century ago by the hundreds of thousands. Though the herds are a fraction of the size they were in the pioneer days, the old settlers and Native Americans would be proud to know that some of the old ways have not been forgotten, and have in this case been revived.

The pastor with whom I was working that week had the wonderful privilege of tending his flock of sheep in a rural setting. His church was in one of those small farm/ranch communities that dotted the landscape, and gave people a place to huddle together for comfort and community. As you may or may not know, the rural pastor, no matter how large or small his flock, is called upon to do a myriad of tasks that the city parson would never dream of doing. When harvest time comes the preacher is there to lend a hand with the harvest and pray for a good crop. When the calves need tending, he is called to saddle up and throw a loop or two. If “granny” needs a lift to the doctor, then the pastor is asked to function as the local taxi. The list could go on and on, but for the rural pastor it is all in a day’s work, and these responsibilities bring a great sense of joy and fulfillment to his life.

While we were there my pastor friend, Jim Sheets, more affectionately known in the larger circles of the Southern Baptist Convention as “Cowboy Bob”, was called upon to do a funeral. It was the same day he had promised to help a lady member take her prized Brahma bull and cow to the auction. Her husband was out of town and because of a medical condition it was ill-advised for her to drive any distance on her own, so Jim asked Sabrina and I to take the cows to the auction. As the dutiful guest preacher at this conference, I was at his beck and call for any ministry that he deemed necessary, and this was a necessity.

Early in the morning we were dropped off at the farm, introduced to Reese, the owner, and loaded up for the trip to Brush where the auction would take place. It was about an hour and a half trip across the plains before we pulled into the parking lot of the auction house. My mind went back to the auction barns and stables that I had frequented over 40 years prior with my uncles, and from all appearances things hadn’t changed in the least. When we sauntered into the restaurant all eyes were fixed upon us. Now saunter is what cowboys do when they walk, and I wanted to look the part. Besides, I had watched enough John Wayne movies to have the swagger down pat, and this was my grand opportunity to practice.

We were strangers, and immediately considered an item of discussion and question. I saw the same old men, doing the same thing, wearing the same clothes, smoking the same cigarettes, drinking from the same coffee mugs, being served by the same waitresses, with the same hairdos as I saw forty years earlier. Absolutely nothing was different. It even smelled the same, which immediately triggered some long forgotten memory of decades past. It was as though I had stepped into some time warp out of an old Star Trek television show. These folks were frozen in time and liked it. One could tell that they were comfortable with their surroundings and for sure didn’t want anyone messin’ with them. It was good enough for their great, great grandfathers and it is good enough for them. They were satisfied and secure in their environment. It was as comfortable as a well-worn boot.

That all may be well and good for cattle auctions and cowboy café’s, but when it comes to impacting the world with the Gospel, we as His local and corporate Church must be willing to change with the culture and conditions that we encounter. To refuse to do so will be devastating. Before some of you go ballistic on me, I am not saying we change the Gospel message or compromise the Word of God in the least. The Message must never change, but the means and manner in which we convey the Message must. If we do not, our churches will soon resemble the congregants of a cattle auction café. The same people, doing the same thing, and getting the same results.

When someone or something new saunters in, they will be looked upon with question and contempt. “Who do they think they are coming into our neat little place like that? They don’t look like us or act like

us. We don't want them here." The results will be a nice, comfortable and secure Church Café that will never impact its world for the Kingdom.

Please don't take this as a negative reflection on the Brush Cattle Auction Café. It was a great place, with great food (especially the cinnamon rolls) and some really good people, but it doesn't translate well to the church. The Church should be the Church and the Cattle Auction Cafes should be cafes, and the two should never be confused.

Oh, by the way, we did sell the bull and cow. The bull was sterile and thus Reese only got half of what he would have been worth. Hey! That reminds me of another analogy concerning the church but I'll save it for later.

(I just checked and the Brush Cattle Auction Café' is now closed! I wonder.....)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

SUMMER CHANGES

by Tony Lynn

FENTON, MI – How is your summer going? American summers are made for adventures! Summers are times to reset and reinvent. I saw some of life's greatest changes occur during the hazy days of summer. Elementary school crushes cooled off during summertime. Anna was my first crush when I was in Kindergarten. She had dark wavy hair. She lived only 4 blocks from my home, but back then my parents wouldn't let me cross the streets by myself to visit with Anna. There was no way I was going to ask my mom to walk me to Anna's house. So, when first grade started in September, Anna had lost interest in me.

During eighth grade, I was dumbfounded at how my classmates turned into "men" during the summer. You know what I'm talking about. They grew mustaches overnight. Their voices went deep without cracking. If I remember correctly, when I answered our home telephone during eighth and ninth grade everyone assumed I was my mother by the sound of my voice. It was an agonizing experience for a teenage boy. High school held some of the greatest changes: part-time jobs, driver's training, driving permits, followed by the ever-coveted driver's license. Relationships changed who I was. I moved from crushes, dating, to finding true love. Interactions shaped my view of the world and other people. Summer was a time of change.

Here we are at midsummer. How are your changes going? Is it an adjustment in attitude? Are you focusing on altering some actions in your life? Have you realized that your affections have been misplaced? Is the pursuit of some ambition, within your reach, leaving you empty? Try something bold while you still have the opportunity. Half of the summer still remains. Reset or reinvent yourself. Be intentional. Be specific. Maybe it would be best to take some baby steps by trying to find out what God wants you to do. Here are some summer suggestions:

Go solo. Plan a short interval where you are on your own. Disconnect. Turn off media. Silence social media. Tell your friends and family that you're going to be fine, but you're going off the grid for a few days.

Assure them that you will resurface in 3-5 days. Reflect. Read meaningful words. Talk less. Walk the days slowly in an unusual setting. Rediscover the voice of God again.

Go team. Set-up a new experience with 4-5 friends or family members. Initiate the conversation and suggest, "Let's do something unusual this summer." You don't have to be in control. Facilitate the fun. Often times my best times weren't because of what I did, it was all about who was included in what I was doing. Remodel a run down something for a neighbor. Take part in a cause. Start and finish something within 2-4 days. The achievement will create a new feeling.

Go experimental. Try something new. Ask someone to give you a chance as a volunteer for the remaining weeks of summer. Sweep the sidewalk or floor for a nearby store owner. Mow a neighbor's lawn. Teach a class for someone. Write an article. Take a class. Take someone's task on your shoulders and give them a summer's rest. You might find that you like what you're doing. Don't let routines turn into ruts that rot your life. Summers are times to reset and reinvent.

Go mission. Last month, we kicked off "Send Me Michigan Summer Missions." On this website, you will find a list of churches inviting you to come as a short-term volunteer, ([click here](#)). Look at the opportunities. Look at the places. Look at the need. Select one. Call the contact. Make your plans. Events can change your life.

After you make it through your summer change, and you want to share it with someone, I would be glad to listen. Call me (734) 770-0608 or write me tony@bscm.org. I will celebrate with you. Joshua 1:9 says, "Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go," (NLT).

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.

BAPTISMS ABOUND

by Mike Durbin

It's fun to look at photos and remember the special moments captured by them. I was recently scrolling through my photo stream and rejoiced at the images I captured from baptismal services in Michigan Baptist churches. One photo was taken on the deck of a church planter's home on a cold winter night. There was snow piled on the edges of the deck to make room for the baptistery and steam rising from the water as several people publicly proclaimed their faith in Jesus. Another picture recorded the moment when a church planter baptized the woman who (unknown to either of them at the time) would become his wife. A smile broke out on my face as I looked at the photos from a pastor baptizing his daughters at a lake in Holly.

Every baptism tells a story of someone who has been transformed by Jesus. Baptisms are times of celebration as believers profess their faith. Baptisms are exciting times for churches, families, and especially for those being baptized. They are also one of the ways we measure the advancement of the Gospel. Sadly, baptisms across the SBC are trending downward. In 2014, The Pastors' Task Force on SBC Evangelistic Impact & Declining Baptisms reported, "SBC baptisms reached a plateau in the 1950s, peaked in the 1970s, and have stayed fairly constant since that time. However, the last 6 years show a downward trend in both SBC church membership and baptisms."

What is happening nationally is also happening in Michigan. Baptisms have declined from 1367 in 2011 to 838 in 2015 - a reduction of 529. This trend concerns all of us.

Year	Total Baptisms:	Under 12	12-17	18-29	30 +	Total Members
2011	1367	280	314	713	506	32201
2012	1090	245	218	206	416	31297
2013	934	204	188	168	393	27568
2014	903	196	144	183	364	26612
2015	838	225	170	156	396	27109

While there are many factors involved, let me suggest 4 possible actions your church could consider as you proclaim and live the Gospel:

- 1. Schedule evangelism training.** Take a moment to look at your church calendar and you may discover that it's been a long time since your church had an evangelism training to equip your people. There are many evangelism approaches and training helps available. Go to BSCM.org and click on the Sending header. Take a look at The 3 Circles, Life on Mission resources or the One Verse Evangelism helps. These are highly relational and easily learned approaches to share Christ.
- 2. Take another look at your community.** Communities are changing at a rapid pace opening new opportunities to share the Gospel. One helpful way to look at your community with fresh eyes is to request a free report from The Mapping Center available at the BSCM website. It can help you understand your community and develop strategies to engage the people around your church with the Gospel.
- 3. Lead your church to pray for family and friends.** *Pray 4 Every Home* is a movement of people and churches praying for their neighbors. By signing up as a Praying Neighbor on our BSCM website, you will receive a daily email list of five people in your neighborhood to pray for by name.
- 4. Request an Evangelism Grant to reach out to your community.** Churches can apply for two evangelism grants a year for up to \$5,000 each depending on the strategy and church investment. Consider using a full-time evangelist to hold a revival or other harvest event. The never changing message of Jesus transforms lives! As believers profess their faith in Christ and are baptized, God is glorified, the church is encouraged, and the Gospel is proclaimed.

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.

AROUND THE STATE: CHURCH EVENTS & STAFF CHANGES

FREE WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY

Every Tuesday at 10 am or 6 pm. The ladies will be studying "WAR ROOM," by Stephen Kendrick and Alex Kendrick. You can attend either class. Southfield Road Baptist Church, 14880 Southfield Road,

Allen Park, MI 48101, (313) 381-3979.

FREE YOUTH BASKETBALL

Every Tuesday from 6:30 to 9:30 pm. Southfield Road Baptist Church, 14880 Southfield Road, Allen Park, MI 48101, (313) 381-3979.

WATER FOR FLINT

Southfield Road Baptist Church is collecting water to deliver to the residents of Flint, Michigan. If you would like to donate water, please bring your donation to the church at 14880 Southfield Road, Allen Park, MI 48101. For more information, call (313) 381-3979.

WYANDOTTE STREET ART FAIR

July 13, 14, 15 & 16, 2016, 10 am to 9 pm (Wednesday – Saturday), Biddle Avenue, Wyandotte – Southfield Road Baptist Church of Allen Park will be participating at this event. Please stop by our booth for some rest, water and fellowship.

THE ALLEN FAMILY IN CONCERT

July 31, 2016 at 11 am (Sunday), Free concert here at Southfield Road Baptist Church, 14880 Southfield Road, Allen Park, MI 48101. For more information, call (313) 381-3979.

Since 1991, the Allen Family has traveled internationally. The group was launched onto the Gospel music scene with a first place finish in the 2000 National Quartet Convention Talent Search. Since then, the group has two nominations for Singing News New Mixed Group Of The Year and multiple appearances on the Southern Gospel Top 80 radio charts. Todd, Michelle, Caleb, Gabrielle, Joshua, Jared, Danielle, Abigail, Zachariah, and Christian live in their bus 365 days a year and fill over 275 engagements each year. In October of 2014, their original television pilot, Home Sweet Bus, premiered on TLC. The show is based on their unique lifestyle and follows their travels as they share the Gospel in song. <http://allenministries.com>

35TH ANNUAL ALLEN PARK ARTS & CRAFTS STREET FAIR

August 5-6, 2016, 10 am to 9 pm (Friday & Saturday), Allen Road (at Southfield Road) in Allen Park – Southfield Road Baptist Church of Allen Park will be participating at this event. Please stop by our booth for some rest, water and fellowship.

TENT REVIVAL

You are invited to a Tent Revival at Ainsworth Baptist Church August 19-21, 2016. Thursday and Saturday 7:00-9:00pm – Speaker: Pastor Tim Patterson, Executive Director/Treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Sunday 11:00 AM-12:00 PM – Speaker: Pastor Jeff King. Music performed: August 19th by Justified, August 20th and 21st by various artists. For more information contact Ainsworth Baptist Church at 810-407-6452.

CLASSIFIED ADS**Bi-vocational Music/Worship Leader**

First Baptist Church in Brighton Michigan is seeking a bi-vocational music / worship leader to serve His congregation through the Church's music ministry. We are seeking a leader who is comfortable with and capable of leading a blended style of worship. For information, or to forward a letter of interest / resume, please send all inquiries to info@fcbrighton.com or contact Pastor Dwaine Kaiser at dwaine.kaiser@gmail.com

Band Instrument Repair - Can You Help?

Church Planter, Pastor Ian Minielly, of Catalyst Baptist Church in Ironwood, Michigan needs assistance in repairing band instruments. Recently, Pastor Ian served as a substitute teacher in a local school and saw a bridge-building opportunity in a graveyard of used and broken instruments at the local school. Pastor Ian thought, "Wouldn't it be great if someone could repair this school's instruments in the name of our church? By sharing the love of Christ, it would create a bond between those in the school and our new church start, Catalyst Church!" If you are able to help in this mission effort, please contact Pastor Ian: ian@catalystbaptist.org / (906) 224-1024 / (906) 201-4082 or 707 Plymouth Rd, Wakefield, MI 49968.

Church Van Needed

Charity Baptist Church in Paris, MI needs a van (either donated or sold cheaply) to transport children to and from Sunday School, VBS, and their Wednesday evening program. Please contact Becky McCoy at pandbmccoy@gmail.com or call (231) 349-0922. You may also leave a message on the church phone - (231) 796-7112. Any help you are able to offer would truly be a blessing to Charity Baptist Church and their community.

Computer Repair

Need a trusted and reliable laptop & desktop repair or a basic networking technician in the Detroit Metro area? Golgotha Romanian Baptist Church strongly recommends Victor Sabadus. Contact at (248) 520-0930 or domn100@hotmail.com.

Worship Pastor Needed

Lakeside Community Church is a strong contemporary church in the suburbs north of Detroit. We are seeking a person called to the worship ministry. This will start as a part-time position with the expectation the position will become full-time in the future. We are specifically seeking someone with strong vocal ability, skill in a lead instrument and a passion and skill for leading worship. We currently have multiple vocalists and instrumentalists. Our worship style is fully contemporary using music from Hillsong United, Chris Tomlin, Fee, Lincoln Brewster, and others. Send resume and video/audio link of you leading worship to Ken Render at worshipposition@lakesidechurch.net.

Church Information Packets

The information previously mailed out in the Church Information Packets will now be available online at 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
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ABOUT THE BAPTIST BEACON

The Baptist Beacon is the official newsjournal of the [Baptist State Convention of Michigan \(BSCM\)](#), 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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