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The Cowboy Cafe

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – Several years ago, Sabrina and I made a trek out West to Colorado in order for me to preach at a Bible conference, and also to spend a little time with some dear friends. 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 infancy of new, fresh green sprouts of spring's first crop of wheat. That which was 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, there was a line of sight of more than one hundred miles. Looking back West at the snow-capped Rockies was a beautiful sight indeed.

This was also big beef and buffalo country. It was strange for these eyes to see hundreds of buffalo grazing the grasses of the plains by the thousands, like they did more than a century ago. 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 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 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, then 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.

My pastor friend, Jim Sheets, is more affectionately known in the larger circles of the Southern Baptist Convention as "Cowboy Bob". While we were there, he 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 one 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 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 more than 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 on 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 ago. Absolutely nothing was different. It even smelled the same, which immediately triggered some long-forgotten memories 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 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 surroundings. It was as comfortable as a well-worn boot.

That all may be well and good for cattle auctions and cowboy cafés, 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 while expecting something different. When someone 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. As Paul said, "We must become all things, to all men that we might win some."

Yes, change is difficult. I have heard it said that the only people in a Baptist church that want to be changed are in the nursery, and they usually fuss and cry about it. Oh, by the way, we did

sell the bull and cow. The bull was sterile and thus 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.

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.

Not resurrected, just resuscitated

by Dr. Tony L. Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – We were missionaries in Africa during the 1990's.

The 4x4 Toyota Land Cruiser diesel, washed-out white color, with a wide faded red stripe down the side, was used when given to us as missionaries. We normally travelled with 2 spare-tires when we went into the brush of Africa but our problems with the cruiser were more serious. The head on the engine was blown and the engine would spew water and the radiator would boil over. It was easy to get stranded on the edge of the Sahara desert when daily temperatures were on either side of 100 degrees. Carrying extra water on top of the steel frame built on top of the land cruiser to transport the portable baptistery became essential on every trip.

We put in multiple requests to, Bill, the regional missionary leader asking for funds to replace the old Toyota but we were turned down every year until Bill came to visit us. Bill wanted to visit a remote village area where many former Muslims had accepted Christ and then became our best evangelists among those living within the entire region. We took the old land cruiser when Bill traveled with us.

I drove the cruiser and Bill sat to my right in the passenger seat. The former Muslims from the capital city, now followers of Christ, who I was training in ministry leadership filled the others seats of the land cruiser. We left early in the morning so the temperature was not yet skyrocketing over 100 degrees.

The day in the village went better than planned. Bill got to see the recent converts in action leading worship, preaching, and teaching lessons from the Bible in small groups. Bill saw the intense fellowship between those from the capital city and those in the brush. Bill participated

as we separated through a long time of open prayer before returning to the land cruiser for the long, late afternoon drive back to the capital of Niamey, Niger. However, the temperature had run-up on us during the long day. The worst was yet to come.

During the trip back to the city, the land cruise spewed water from under the hood. The radiator boiled until it emptied itself of moisture. The aroma of something burning filled our nostrils. Bill offered “fatherly-like-advice” as to how to remedy the situation. We rapidly ran out of water from on top of the land cruiser. Now we were pacing our return home so that we could intermittently stop at tiny villages to draw water from their wells to fill the radiator. It was a long afternoon that spilled into the evening as we stopped, let the engine cool, drew water, then filled containers and the radiator over and over again.

As you might expect, the very next morning over breakfast Bill announced that he would give us funds to replace the engine and radiator in the old land cruiser. It was not the promise of something new, just something resuscitated. It has been over twenty-years since I drove that land cruiser sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, and I sometimes wonder if that vehicle is idle buried with the seasonal blowing sands of the Sahara Desert or is that old relic of a land cruiser still on active duty helping someone in Africa.

With Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday upon us and the Passion Week offering us times of reflection, renewal and gratitude for our salvation, I am so glad that Christ did not just replace parts in my life when He became my personal savior. Christ transformed me into something indescribably new. I love the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT) that says, “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” I cannot blame Bill for trying to save money where he could during our missionary days, but I am grateful that our Lord and Savior holds nothing back when extending His salvation to the entire world. Paul continues to write in verse 18, “And God had given us this task of reconciling people to him.” My prayer is that this resurrection celebration season will create gratitude in our hearts and minds, then drive us to “go” so that others can look forward to their own resurrection in Christ after they are reconciled to Christ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

rē'fōkəs (verb)

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – Twelve pastors followed the example of Jesus withdrew from the hustle and bustle of life to rest, reflect, and refocus on what God is doing in our lives and what he is calling us to do. A four member team from Tarrant Baptist Association in Texas led us through a combination of active challenges and spiritual reflection around the theme of the retreat: re:Focus, the Journey of a Lifetime.

re·fo·cus.....rē'fōkəs (verb)

- adjust the focus of (a lens or one's eyes).
- focus (attention or resources) on something new or different.

Pastor Loren Stutzman of Holland Baptist Church shared: “For me the journey was exactly that. The format was such that it forced me to examine not just my ministry, but more importantly my relationship with God. What I realized was that I had backed into my role as a "Senior Pastor" with my eyes firmly focused on the previous pastor and his mistakes, and a determination not to repeat the past. My driving force was a reaction to the past, and I was trying to build a future in the shadow of the past. I came away from the conference with a much clearer vision of being chosen and called by God for such a time as this. God's glory is now my ultimate desire and goal. I thank God for the opportunity to get re-focused.”

Significant discoveries and breakthroughs were experienced during the retreat. Pastor Rod Walker of Harmony Baptist Church shared: “I’m blessed and refreshed!! What a great time of encouragement with fellow Pastors at Bambi Lake. It was a time to regroup and gather ideas and thoughts. My transformational goal is to love my GodMORE!! Thank you BSCM (Pastor Mike Durbin) and the team of Texan friends!

During the retreat, participants were given critical time to spend time alone with God remembering spiritual markers of the past and where God is leading in the future. The focus was on our personal relationship with Christ and hearing from Him. Pastor Jim Stolt of Praise Community Church shares: “It was an incredible experience. I’m already looking forward to next time. Thanks again for inviting me. God really used it in my life to restore me and energize my faith.”

One of the vivid realities of the time was the bonding that took place between the pastors. Most did not know each other before the retreat. They came from different cities across Michigan, but their bond with each other in Christ quickly took over as they listened to one another’s stories and prayed for each other. Many of the moments we shared will never be repeated as we respect one another’s privacy, but deep connection took place as pastors ministered to pastors and were ministered to by pastors.

Jeff King, pastor of Ainsworth Baptist Church captures many of our hearts as he shares “Thank you! Met some wonderful gentlemen, enjoyed some great teaching, and had a refreshing, reflective walk with God. Been awhile since I've done that. God is good!”

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.

Katie and Bambi Lake

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – One of the pleasures in life we get to enjoy, especially here in Michigan, is the change of seasons. Each season is unique and has its own natural beauty for us to enjoy. Nevertheless, the one thing true about every season is that each season does eventually come to an end. Such is true in life and here at Bambi Lake.

Over the last ten years Bambi Lake has enjoyed and greatly benefited from the volunteer work of Katie Nettle. After having spent much time here at Bambi attending retreats and summer camps, Katie began to hear the call of God on her heart to become a full-time volunteer staff member at Bambi Lake. She and her husband Donovan and her son Noah, moved to the camp and began to live full-time on the camp property. Katie immediately became an unforgettable and significant part of the Bambi story. Her amazingly oversized heart for service and helping others has brought many a smile to guests. Her willingness to do whatever it takes to get the job done has been demonstrated many times.

My first witness to this occurred quite soon after I first arrived as the Director at Bambi. We were in the middle of an event, and the drainpipes in the kitchen backed-up and the grease pit began to overflow. Without hesitation, Katie stuck her hand down in the super nasty stuff and began to de-clog it by removing the nastiness. Honestly, I was trying not to hurl my lunch, but Katie was undaunted and did what had to be done in the moment. There have been other moments similar to that such as back-ups in the laundry room, and emergency situations as she life guarded the lakefront. Whatever was necessary Katie has always been willing and ready to jump in and do what it takes. Katie’s love for God has always fueled her love to serve our guests here at Bambi.

After serving God and serving others here at Bambi for the last ten years, Katie will be leaving us at the end of April and venturing into a new season of her life with her family in Alabama. We are super excited for her as she starts this new chapter in her life, but we will miss her infectious laughter, her faithfulness, and her servant heart.

Katie, thank-you for the godly impact you have made on countless teenagers and adults over the last ten years. Thank-you for finishing well - here at Bambi Lake.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mick Schatz serves on the staff of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. He is the State Director of Spiritual Enrichment and Retreats and lives at Bambi Lake.

“What if?”

by Josh Tovey

GRANDVILLE, MI – Easter is the most important Sunday of the year! It’s the day when many people who don’t attend church regularly go to church. When I was a kid, I can remember going out the Saturday before Easter to buy new clothes, because on Easter Sunday everyone dressed up. It was important to look good on Easter, and for some reason wearing a tie equalled “best.” It was the only Sunday I wore a tie as a kid to church. I remember singing songs and people being more excited about being together. I remember hearing more “Amen’s” on that day than any other Sunday the rest of the year. I remember it was very clear who we were worshipping as well. We were all gathered together, dressed in our best, to worship the Resurrected King! Why did we make sure we were in church that day? Why were we dressed in what we thought was our best? Why were we more excited to worship and gather together? Because it was the Superbowl of Sundays’... It was Easter Sunday!

Now, as I am in the process of leading a Church plant, which will be six years old this Easter, I have a different view than I did when I was a kid. We wrestled with these questions when embracing the prompting of the Spirit to plant Redemption Church in Grandville, Michigan. Even though we go all out at Easter... What if what we celebrated on Easter, we celebrated every single time we gathered as a church?

What if Jesus’ resurrection was not just celebrated once a year, but celebrated every week? What if we realized that Jesus is the point of our existence? What if every message brought people into a deeper understanding of all that is ours in Christ? What if we understood that the Gospel is the most profound message the world has ever heard? What if we understood the great depths of the Gospel and had a commitment to never move past it? What if we

recognized that if we move past the Gospel, then our message would turn into moralism? What if we realized that Hell will be full of really good moral people? What if we never told our people what to do without first reminding them of what Jesus has done? What if we were convinced of this important biblical truth-that we would never give a message where Jesus wasn't the point? What if we understood that the person and work of Jesus is the greatest motivation in our obedience to him? What if we understood that God has you where he has you to advance the Gospel through you? What if we embraced the reality that everybody around me has been intentionally placed there by the Lord? What if we understood that everything we do is because Jesus is the point? What if we believed that Jesus changes everything?

How would this change everything? Whether you're reading this right before Easter Sunday, or two weeks after Easter Sunday, know that this coming Sunday is another HUGE opportunity to celebrate the glorious truths of the Gospel, the reality that Jesus is alive, and that HE changes everything! What if we never missed the main point and we realized that Jesus is the main point, and further, realize that Jesus wasn't joking when He said...

John 5:39, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lead Pastor of Redemption Church in Grandville, Michigan. Redemption will be six years old in April 2021. Redemption has been blessed to see God move in mighty ways in their short history. We are currently praying through what God is calling us to do next to reach greater Grand Rapids for Jesus. He and his wife Stephanie have 3 beautiful children.

Leave the Tomb

by Matt Thompson

GRANDVILLE, MI – I'll never forget that Saturday night. It was a night filled with great anticipation. The next day was our first vision cast meeting at the church I was planting. As expected, there were a few last errands to run, so off I went to the store. I did my shopping, got in my car to go home, and then it happened. Smack! Head on. Airbags deployed. Knocked out. Car totaled. Later that night when I finally came to in the ambulance, an officer said, "*Man, you were out of it!*"

As I approach another busy Easter season, I wonder if I will find myself in that same spot. Not in another car accident, but being "out of it", experiencing a head on crash with Easter busyness, only to "wake up" later having missed the celebration. Here is my fear this Easter (or for *any* day), that all I have to *do* would suffocate my joy in what Jesus has *done*.

So what is the remedy for the pastor, parent or person who is gasping for joy amidst the stranglehold of busyness? The answer is not found in remembering all I have to do but in remembering all that Jesus has done. Joy is found as I rehearse the Gospel. May we breathe, over and over, deep breaths of joyful wonder of that first, glorious Easter morning.

Place yourself there, side by side with Mary and Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28). It was over. Jesus died. It was a long, emotional weekend. No tears left to cry. Walk with them broken hearted towards the tomb on that brisk Sunday morning. Weep with them in extreme sadness as you hopelessly approach Jesus' grave.

Stop in disbelief as you see an open tomb and hear the angel's announcement, *"He is not here, He has risen."* Allow this breaking news to make your heartbeat a little faster as your sorrow gives way to a ray of hope! Imagine peering into the tomb, your eyes slowly adjusting to the deep darkness.

Feel the change of temperature as you now enter the damp, dark, cold grave.

Gasp with them in shock at the realization that Jesus' body is gone.

Lean in with them to place your hand on Jesus' folded burial cloth.

Notice that the once dried up tears are beginning to flood your eyes again.

No longer tears of sadness, but ones of hopeful anticipation!

And then it happens. Smack! Head on. Out of nowhere. Instantly you remember His words. No, not the angels words, Jesus' words — *"After three days I will rise."* It clicks! Yes, He *IS* alive! But where!? The angel announces, "Galilee!"

Right now, both Marys' have a choice to make. We all have a choice to make. Do I stay in the tomb or run to Jesus? One option grovels amidst the things of death, and the other runs to embrace the Giver of Life. This is the choice I must make every moment of every day. Do I live in light of the reality of the resurrection or not? Do I run in glad and joyful surrender to my Savior, or do I continue wiping my tears with the useless burial clothes in the grave?

The reality that our Savior is alive, has conquered sin, and left the tomb makes it possible for us to leave the tomb. Like Mary and Mary Magdalene, may we joyfully run to embrace Jesus (Matthew 28:8)! Because Jesus left the grave behind, we must leave the grave behind. This is our new life of joy that is only available through Jesus' resurrection. What a joyous Easter morning!

After my accident, I went home from the hospital with a sore knee, a number of cuts and bruises, and a pretty bad headache. I'll never forget the response of my eight-year-old son that

next morning. He said, “Daddy, looks like God is giving you another day to talk about Jesus!” Instantly, tears filled my eyes and joy filled my heart. My son was right. God has graciously given me another busy day, and another Easter, to joyfully talk about the joy that is only found in Jesus! Will you do the same?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Thompson is a Church planter in West Michigan and a Michigan Church Planting Catalyst with the Send Network. He helped launch Redemption Church Grandville. Matt has been married to his wife Bethany for 14 years and they have three boys: Caden, Brennen and Aaron.

‘Every day more and more come’ as Southern Baptists minister at Texas border

by Jane Rodgers

BROWNSVILLE, TX (BP) – With the current migrant crisis along the U.S.-Mexico border worsening by the day, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) churches and disaster relief volunteers are sharing the love of Christ by ministering to the displaced. Politics and views on immigration aside, for those serving along the border, the issues are humanity and eternity.

For Carlos Navarro, pastor of West Brownsville Baptist Church (Iglesia Bautista West Brownsville), migrant outreach is nothing new. He and his church have ministered to the displaced for decades.

Since the migrant crisis escalated in 2019, West Brownsville’s Golan Ministries has supplied more than 8,200 people seeking U.S. asylum with Bibles, food, clothing and assistance in understanding their legal obligations. More than 3,245 have prayed to receive Christ following simple Gospel presentations.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most of West Brownsville’s migrant ministry occurred on the church campus or across the border, where migrants waited in camps and detention facilities in Matamoros.

Things have changed with both the pandemic and the shifting political climate.

“It’s three times worse than last time,” Navarro told the TEXAN. “We are seeing 200-plus per day in our part of Brownsville. Each day border officials release 200 who head to the bus station and from there go to New York, California, Boston, Florida, Missouri. Not as many stay in Texas.”

They come hungry and often hopeless. Navarro and his volunteers offer hope.

Three times a week, West Brownsville vehicles bring donated backpacks filled with Bibles, socks, underwear, t-shirts (sizes S-XL), shoelaces, towels, packaged snacks, bottled water, Gatorade, toiletries and hygiene kits. New to the gift packs this year are hand sanitizer gel and face masks.

West Brownsville volunteers set up tables at the bus station and distribute items. With masks and other COVID-19 protocols in place, ministry occurs with as much social distancing as possible. Many of West Brownsville's older members are still waiting on vaccinations and are unable to help as in years past. But the ministry gets done.

The SBTC and Send Relief, Southern Baptists' compassion ministry arm, have provided support, according to Scottie Stice, SBTC Disaster Relief director. Corporations, religious organizations and individuals have donated backpacks and towels. Navarro said they can use anything, but clothes larger than XL are not needed.

Until the pandemic, West Brownsville's facilities functioned as a day shelter, with meals, showers and counseling provided at the church. Now, volunteers pick up purchased or donated pre-packaged tacos or pizzas to provide a hot meal for migrants at the bus station awaiting transport north.

"Every day more and more come," Navarro said. "It's bad. Real bad."

Navarro is aware that immigration continues to be a politically sensitive issue on both sides, but he knows the people who come have needs regardless, the deepest of which is Jesus.

Elsewhere along the border, SBTC DR volunteers deployed March 24 to assist the Salvation Army at an immigration release center in Del Rio.

"We're working in support of the Salvation Army's feeding operation," Stice said. "Migrants arrive with little to no resources. A meal as they are released by federal authorities is greatly appreciated. ... Our assignment is to be a blessing wherever we find a need."

A two-person team from Rockwall and Texarkana will serve in Del Rio for the next couple of weeks. The group has been called to serve because the immigration system is overloaded, Stice said.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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First Person: New commitment to a proven channel

by Jeff Iorg

RIVERSIDE, CA (BP) – A few weeks ago, I began writing about changing the channel of our denominational conversation. We are preoccupied with so many pressing issues – political, social, moral, ethical and denominational – that demand attention. It’s hard to ignore the clamor and focus on goals related to our core mission, but we must do so!

Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, along with other SBC entity presidents, is trying to do this. At the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting in Nashville this June, the EC will recommend we fulfill five goals called Vision 2025. This is a concentrated effort to change the channel – to shift our focus from a thousand other things vying for our attention to a few key drivers that will make an eternal difference.

The first of those goals is to “increase full-time, fully-funded missionaries by a net gain of 500, giving us 4,200 full-time, fully-funded missionaries through the International Mission Board.” The second goal is to “add 5,000 new SBC congregations to our Southern Baptist family, giving us over 50,000 congregations.” The third goal is to “increase total workers in the field through a new emphasis on ‘calling out the called’ and then preparing those who are called out by the Lord.” The fourth Vision 2025 goal is “turn around our ongoing decline in reaching, baptizing, and discipling 12- to 17-year-olds in the prime of their teenage years.”

The fifth goal is to “increase our annual giving in successive years and establish a new path of growth that will lead us to reach and surpass \$500 million through the Cooperative Program to achieve these Great Commission goals.” In other words, to make a new commitment to a proven channel of giving.

The president of a non-SBC Bible school once told me, “The only people who don’t appreciate the Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists. Some of them just don’t realize what they have.”

Leaders who are trying to fund mission programs and schools by societal fundraising methods know the pressure and uncertainty it creates. Our system, in spite of its flaws, provides a steady stream of funding for our priorities of sharing the Gospel and training leaders to facilitate its progress.

Commitment to giving through the Cooperative Program has declined over the past decade. In 2019, there were 19,645 churches that did not give anything through the Cooperative Program (up from 11,846 10 years ago). That means 40 percent of Southern Baptist churches did not give anything through the Cooperative Program in 2019. Among the churches that did contribute, their gifts represented 5.29 percent of their undesignated receipts (down from 6.85 percent 10 years ago).

Cooperative Program giving is the fuel that sustains the mission and educational programs of Southern Baptists – both nationally and internationally. There is no more effective or efficient way to fund our global enterprise. Rather than lament its passing as a relic from another era, let's reinvigorate our primary channel of cooperative giving as the primary means to funnel resources to the front lines of accomplishing our strategic goals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Iorg is president of Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention.

6.4.4. Wins Despite COVID

by Dr. Tony L Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – The COVID-year took away a lot. Some items, events, and people taken from us, were more precious than words can express. For those of you suffering the grief of loss, I am sorry. I am praying for you.

I hope to shed light on some unbelievable wins that I saw this past year. These wins cannot remove any deep sorrow, but I hope to remind us that the COVID-year didn't take everything. God did some miraculous things, and I cannot wait to tell you, so you can tell others who will tell others. You get the idea. Here is what I mean.

6 Church Launches

First, no less than six church plants launched during this challenging year: Trails Church, Farmington with Phillip Box; Rhiza Church, Ann Arbor with Tito Diaz; Fresh Start Christian Community Church, Detroit with Robert Lodge; CrossLife Church, Bay City with Mick Schatz; Calvary Church, Port Austin with Michael Goforth; and Grumlaw Hartland became the second campus to Grumlaw Grand Blanc with Shea Prisk. These men and their teams are valiant and they are victorious on the other side of some of the biggest challenges they have ever seen in their lives.

4 Shared Spaces

Second, some established pastors and church leaders, in longtime churches, were secure enough to share their facilities when church planters were shut down due to COVID restrictions in the public buildings they were leasing. I thank God for Bethany Church, Grand Blanc; Westside Church, Flushing; Cedar Street Church, Holt; and Grace Presbyterian, Farmington. The leaders in these four churches are titans because they did not hoard for themselves what

others needed. Ask church planters Eric Stewart, Jason Loewen, Austin Wadlow and Phillip Box what they think of these four established churches and the leaders, and you will understand the depths of their gratitude.

4 Properties Gifted to Church Plants

Third, some established congregations decided to entrust their property, building and funds to church planting teams they've known for a brief time. Four church plants benefited tremendously from the generosity and kingdom vision of four established churches and their loving leaders.

Imagine this reality:

- A collegiate church plant in East Lansing is gifted 7 acres and a building of 20,000 sq. ft. for one dollar.
- An inner-city church plant is given 5 acres and a building of 6600 sq. ft. across the street from West Bloomfield High School for one dollar.
- A Redford church plant set-up a 99-year lease for a building and acreage for a one-time cost of \$1,000 with utilities included.
- A church plant in the southeastern portion of Michigan received back half of the purchase money from the seller after the sale was completed.

Only the Lord can bring about unexpected offers and achievements like these.

As you look back on 2020, I hope you will understand that you are part of these victories. Because you pray, you participate, and you provide provisions by contributing to the annual offering for the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and to the Cooperative Program of Great Commission Baptists you participate in these wins.

If you want to lead your family, small group, or church to give financially to these amazing achievements driven by the Lord, please go to bscm.org/cp, and follow the details on how to give. My wife and I contribute recurring gifts. You may give once or recurring. It is up to you. Best of all, give to these offerings with the members of your local church. Share in the achievement.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

New Mexico preacher says ‘God did it’ throughout ministry of herding others to Jesus

by Scott Barkley

ROY, N.M. (BP) – Pastor Roy Mitchell will never forget that summer in the late 1970s when he got plastered every day.

A young man at the time, Mitchell was a hired hand at a ranch in northeastern New Mexico. Part of his job that summer was to go with the owner’s son and apply plaster to cattle troughs. Before the fiberglass ones more common today, the troughs were made of steel and would develop leaks over time. For the leak to be fixed, the plaster had to be applied all over and not just in the problem areas.

That’s not what Mitchell remembers most about the summer, though.

“My friend was strong in his faith and witnessed to me. At the time my wife was wanting to go to church, but she wouldn’t if I didn’t go with her,” he said. “Eventually I felt bad about her not going to church, so I went.”

Two Sundays later Mitchell prayed for salvation through Christ. He and his wife Karen became regulars and joined a discipleship group. He left the ranch after getting the chance to buy a saddle shop in Tucumcari, 175 miles east of Albuquerque, and began attending First Baptist Church.

Mitchell, now pastor of First Baptist Church in Roy as well as First Baptist Springer, N.M., said he surrendered to a call to preach in 1982. However, he didn’t feel it was confirmed until on a church mission trip to Brazil.

“We split into different teams for evangelism. My pastor and I had been talking about my struggle with the calling, but I became a team leader and preached down there,” he said.

Before then, Mitchell had preached on a couple of Wednesday nights – “When you can do the least amount of damage,” he joked. But the experience in Brazil turned his calling from a struggle to solid. He would continue to work on ranches and build saddles, but also preach the Gospel.

“God took something and did good with it,” he said.

His first church was in Cuervo, N.M.

“If we were all there it was nine of us,” Mitchell recalled. “The town was right on I-40, but not near anything.”

A year later Mitchell accepted a call to be pastor of First Baptist in Floyd. That also placed him closer to Eastern New Mexico University, where he was a student. The university offered religious classes even though it was a state school. Mitchell credited those classes, taught from different denominational perspectives, with strengthening his preaching.

"It was good," he said. "It challenged me to think about my faith."

After another pastorate in Cimarron, Mitchell decided to go back to work on a ranch.

"I could better provide for my family cowboying," he said.

Still, he continued doing pastoral supply and interim work in eastern and northeastern New Mexico for almost 20 years.

Two months before their daughter's wedding, Karen was diagnosed with cancer. She died in 2009 after 33 years of marriage. When Roy was on that mission trip to Brazil where his call to ministry was confirmed, Karen had been pregnant with the couple's first child, Della Luticia, who would be called "Ludy" after Roy's great-grandmother.

Their son Arlyn, born in 1988, died in 2019.

"He was a diabetic and had kidney failure," Mitchell said. "That was fixed and he had 72 days free from it, but then was diagnosed with cancer. He died a week before his 32nd birthday.

"If I did anything right in my life, it's that both of my kids served the Lord and owned their faith."

For the last two decades Mitchell, 68, has managed a ranch 13 miles east of Logan near the Texas line. Until a few weeks ago, he spent the last two-and-a-half years driving 90 minutes – 12 miles on dirt, 50 on pavement – to First Baptist in Roy to preach at the 9 a.m. service. After that, Mitchell would get in his Ford truck and drive another 45 minutes to preach the 11 a.m. service at First Baptist in Springer.

Those days began with leaving by 6:30 a.m. for breakfast at First Roy. After preaching his second sermon, lunch followed with members of First Springer. At 4 p.m. he would arrive home with his wife Susan – a widow until they married 10 years ago and with whom he dotes on multiple grandchildren.

"First Roy was a little bitty church and I had a good ranch job," Mitchell said. "I'd worked for my employer, Rex McCloy, for 20 years. When he hired me, I told him that I preached on Sundays and he said that wasn't a problem. He has supported and prayed for us and was proud of what we were doing."

When members at First Baptist Springer needed a pastor, the idea was floated of Mitchell preaching for both congregations. "The people at First Roy were excited about it and thought it was a great idea," he said.

It's easy to see why. Technically a Texas native, New Mexico is Mitchell's longtime home and he's every bit the cowboy, from the Sam Elliott handlebar mustache to the skill in telling a story. More important, his calling as a pastor is well-noted.

Jeff Ogata and his wife Misty were new attendees at First Springer. Ogata had heard Mitchell preach in the '90s and was eager to hear him again. They hit it off immediately, and Ogata, who had been feeling a call into the ministry, had a mentor.

Ogata watched Mitchell survey the crowd at his son Arlyn's funeral and express how he'd never spoken to a group that large. He talked about his son and shared hilarious stories, sure. But then it became an evangelistic event.

"He looked at everyone and said he was going to preach the Gospel," Ogata remembered. "I looked at my wife and said, 'I want to be like that. That's so cool.'"

Ogata and his wife would remain under Mitchell's preaching, but at First Baptist in Roy after the couple began attending there last year. That summer, Ogata and his wife planted Rayado Creek Family Fellowship, sent out from First Roy.

The Roy church is an aging fellowship. With the Ogatas departure, First Roy was going to lose one of its younger families. Nevertheless, the church sent them out gladly and will even join Ogata's church for Easter services.

"They're our sending church," Ogata said. "It was very important for me to have their blessing."

"We just want to go over there and tell those young people that we support them," Mitchell said. "It wasn't a sacrifice on our part, but the right thing to do."

Like everywhere else, COVID affected Mitchell's ministry. Members of First Springer decided to put off meeting in person, whereas those at First Roy continued gathering. Ogata's church, located on land once owned by Old West figures Kit Carson and Lucien Maxwell, met outside.

Mitchell also joined other pastors in learning how to use Zoom. It wasn't all bad, he said.

"We have around a dozen meeting in person, with another dozen joining us online," he said. "It's been beneficial not only because a lot of our people drive a long way, but also if they have health concerns. One man who lives in California but comes out here occasionally stays in touch with us through Zoom. We have others who join us from the Dallas/Fort Worth area."

Richard Anderson was another connecting online. Not one for church, he had been battling cancer and frankly, didn't care for Mitchell. "He didn't like me," the pastor admitted.

But Anderson's wife Diana did. So, he had little choice but to hear the messages Mitchell delivered over the computer. Those messages talked about a healing Savior who could fix the problem areas. It wasn't a patchwork job either, but one that covered everything, like plaster.

"He ended up getting saved," Mitchell said. "We baptized him a few months before he passed."

Mitchell is the kind of pastor who doesn't think of himself as a shining star. He doesn't have to, because others do that for him. He simply sees himself as a reflection of the Son, someone who God took and did something good.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scott Barkley is national correspondent for Baptist Press.

Family worship isn't always easy. But it's worth it

by Brady Rueter

SPRINGFIELD, IL – It was a typical evening and our family had just finished dinner. Before the kiddos could run off and play, we stayed around the table to do family worship together. The kids—5, 3, and 1—were wiggly and struggling to pay attention. Next came distractions and silly noises. We even had to hit pause to address some disobedience by our 3-year-old.

I don't think it's too big a leap to say your moments of family worship are probably similar to ours, especially if you have young kids. If you are like me, you often feel frustrated and wonder if you're accomplishing anything during those 10 minutes.

I was greatly encouraged when one of my seminary professors, Don Whitney, shared how there was not one single time he finished family worship and thought, "Wow! I really felt the Holy Spirit move during our time together!" Yet, he faithfully taught his children the things of God year after year.

Years later, during his daughter's graduation speech, he was surprised to hear a tear-filled, heartfelt "thank you," as she reflected on the impact those moments of family worship had on her life.

God has sovereignly placed precious little ones in their parents' homes, and has called parents to teach their children about him (Deut. 6:4-7; Ps. 78:1-8). As leaders, we can help them stay the course, despite the chaos that so often accompanies family worship. Remind them:

1. We lead our families in worship first and foremost out of love and obedience to our Father. Our children need to see that God deserves to be worshiped.
2. Let's guard ourselves from letting the chaotic moments distract us from the bigger picture. We have the enormous blessing and responsibility of faithfully sowing the things of God into the hearts of our children through the word, prayer, and song.
3. Parents can't change the hearts of their children. But God can. His word accomplishes more than we ever could (Heb. 4:12). Faithfully proclaim the things of God and faithfully pray the Spirit would transform their hearts.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brady Rueter is a biblical counselor and elder at Delta Church in Springfield, IL. This column originally appeared in the Spring 2020 issue of Resource magazine, available online at [Resource.IBSA.org](https://www.resource.ibsa.org).

Scripture engagement slacked in pandemic, even as Bible sales grew, reports say

by Diana Chandler

PHILADELPHIA, PA (BP) – Americans bought more Bibles in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic spread, industry leaders said, but a major study shows Bible engagement during the pandemic was no greater than the previous year.

Both Lifeway Christian Resources and Thomas Nelson Bibles saw increases in Bible sales, which a Thomas Nelson executive described as an increase seen industry wide.

But the American Bible Society (ABS), in conducting both its annual [State of the Bible research](#) in early 2020 followed by a special COVID-19 study months later, found that Bible engagement slacked after the pandemic began.

“While State of the Bible data show that Scripture engagement was up significantly in January, compared to the same time in 2019,” ABS said in its report, “by June Scripture engagement had fallen to below 2019 levels.”

January’s Scripture engagement of 70.9 million adults, or 27.8 percent, marked the highest level since 2011, ABS said, but by the first week of June, engagement had fallen to 22.6. The decrease means 13.1 million Americans were no longer consistently interacting with Scripture, a change ABS contributed to the “significant pressure” of the COVID-19 crisis. While women were previously more scripturally engaged than men, engagement during the pandemic appeared equal between the two genders.

While industry leaders didn’t reveal the percentage increase in sales, they were up at both Lifeway, which sold [2.5 million Bibles](#) in 2020, and at Thomas Nelson, which said it saw its best sales in eight to 10 years.

Lifeway’s Bible sales remained strong as the pandemic began, indicating a “significant increase” in online sales April through June.

“We believe the growth in Bible sales during those early months of the pandemic was no accident, as people often go to the Bible as a source of hope in times of crisis and uncertainty,” said Lifeway President and CEO Ben Mandrell. “People draw hope from Scripture because in it they see a God who is with us during our suffering. The Bible, as God’s words to us, is a reminder that He doesn’t leave us to walk through difficult times alone. Scripture has a way of bringing hope and healing in times of difficulties.”

The [Tony Evans Study Bible](#) and the She Reads Truth Bible drove sales with the Holy Land Illustrated Bible, the Ancient Faith Study Bible and the CSB Scripture Notebooks seeing strong showings. The Heroes Bible did well during the pandemic, with editions specifically designed for doctors, nurses, emergency medical personnel, military members, firefighters and law enforcement personnel.

Philip Nation, vice president and publisher of Thomas Nelson Bibles, described sales as “one of the best years in many years in terms of the number of Bibles that we’ve seen produced and purchased by what we assume to be a clear mix of established Bible readers and new Bible readers.

“Most Bible publishers have seen an increase in Bible sales just across the board during the pandemic.”

Thomas Nelson is focusing on Bible engagement through its Abide Bible and complementary Abide Bible book journals, Nation said.

“Now we see a greater need in the marketplace for people to have editions of the Bible that focus on personal engagement with the Scripture and not just simply informing them of the scholarship,” Nation said.

ABS conducted its initial 2020 State of the Bible study in January and early February, including 2,010 interviews with adults in all states and Washington, D.C. ABS followed the initial research with a special COVID-19 study May 28-June 10, surveying 3,020 adults from across the nation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

Church members are minority in U.S. for first time, Gallup says

by Diana Chandler

WASHINGTON (BP) – Church members are in the minority for the first time in at least eight decades, with just 47 percent identifying with a congregation, Gallup said in a [poll released today](#) (March 29). The number was 70 percent in 1999.

A growth in adults with no religious preference and lower rates of church membership among people who do have a religion are major trends driving the decline, Gallup said.

Younger generations hold the highest rates of those with no religious preference, including 31 percent of millennials and 33 percent of adult Generation Z (those born in the mid-1990s to the early 2010s). Concurrently, among those who do affiliate with a religion, declines since the turn of the century were highest among younger generations, with the share of millennials declining from 63 percent in 2000 to 50 percent in 2020.

Ed Stetzer, dean of the School of Mission, Ministry, and Leadership at Wheaton College, said the trend for people to drop their loose affiliation to religion will only accelerate.

“Unless we want to be a regional group of Christians who only talk to ourselves,” Stetzer said, “we’ll need to redouble our efforts in evangelism and church planting to engage an increasingly secular context.”

Pastor Larry Anderson, [president of the State Directors of Evangelism](#), said the study has several implications for the church.

“Some people will do what I call ‘date’ your church for years, while never committing to participate in a formal new members’ class, but will be faithful in attending, tithing and even serving,” Anderson said, “and we need to discern how we will count them moving forward.”

Anderson, an executive with the Baptist Resource Network serving Pennsylvania/South Jersey, is based in the Eastern region of the U.S., which Gallup identified as suffering the greatest decline (25 percentage points) since 2000. The South, home to the Bible Belt, suffered the lowest decline, but also saw a 16-point drop in church membership since 2000.

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary apologist Bob Stewart said the task of apologetics has not changed, but the poll results could signify that the means used to communicate the Gospel might need to change. He clarified that he’s not a statistician, and that his comments are more speculative than critical.

“Apologetics is about commending and defending the Gospel; it’s about stating clearly why one believes that Jesus is Lord. To do that, we use evidence and reason, we don’t simply take a picture of where a group of people are on a particular day,” said Stewart, the NOBTS Greer-Heard chair of faith and culture, and director of the Christian apologetics program. “The task of the church hasn’t changed. But these findings may mean that the means by which we communicate the Gospel need to change.”

Both Anderson and Stewart said the data could also reflect generational differences regarding how church membership is valued.

“First the loyalty to one church is not as common as it once was, as millennials and Gen Z will visit several different churches as they feel led,” Anderson said. “Second, the need to join a church and become a member under the authority of a pastor and submit to the ‘processes’ of church culture does not seem to be as appealing of an option to those who can come and go as they please with no pressure.”

Stewart said it’s not news that different generations behave differently.

“My sense is that millennials are very big on community but tend not to value ‘joining’ or ‘membership’ in a formal organizational sense. This doesn’t mean that they don’t value belonging in an organic sense,” Stewart said. “The WW2 generation was largely composed of joiners who valued organization. Baby boomers, on the other hand, were church shoppers who bounced around from one church to another, depending on what their perceived needs were at the moment.”

The numbers may also reflect changes stemming from how people join churches today, Stewart said.

“With previous generations of Baptists the ‘invitation’ or altar call was emphasized; in many of today’s churches, invitations are downplayed,” he said. “That doesn’t mean that evangelism or discipleship is minimized, but the emphasis is no longer as much on joining, which is reflected in membership, as it is on serving and belonging.”

Stewart emphasized the importance of such knowledge as which churches are losing members most, and whether they are evangelical, Baptist, mainline or liberal.

“I do know that ‘none’ (those not affiliated with a religion) does not necessarily mean atheist or irreligious,” he said. “At the end of the day, my advice is: (1) pump the brakes, don’t overreact; (2) investigate, look critically at the entire survey; don’t just read the summary article; (3) critically examine what your church is doing and why; and (4) ask God how you should be about making disciples and commending and defending the Gospel.”

Anderson advised that churches will need to learn how to serve members who don’t attend every Sunday, and “not guilt or shame” those who no longer see attending every week as normal. Churches will need to learn how to serve hybrid members who attend at times in person and at times online, and churches need to shift their focus to equipping and sending.

“We must stop seeing the church as the ending place but the sending place and shift our focus to counting those being equipped and sent out of the building,” he said, “as opposed to how many people we have coming into the building.”

The poll updates a 2019 Gallup analysis that examined the decline in church membership over the past 20 years. Findings are based on responses to a battery of questions Gallup asks Americans twice each year about their religious attitudes. Each three-year period consists of data from more than 6,000 American adults. A summary of the findings is available [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

Polish believer learns real meaning of Easter amidst centuries of tradition

by Kelvin Joseph*

For Mateusz Kowalski*, a Polish believer, Lent and the Easter holiday changed meaning when he gave Christ lordship of his life more than ten years ago.

Kowalski is a member of Biblia i Misja, one of five Baptist churches in Kraków, Poland, a city of 750 thousand. An overwhelming majority of the country identifies with Roman Catholicism.

Poles consider Easter their oldest and most important holiday, with traditions dating back to the 10th century.

The holiday is steeped in famous and beloved Easter traditions, including Easter baskets and decorated eggs. These differ from American traditions in many ways. The eggs, called “pisanki” and symbolizing new life, are dyed more naturally with brown outer onion skin or walnut shells. They are then ornately decorated.

The baskets, called “święconka” baskets, are filled with food, usually signifying the end of the Lenten fast. They’re stocked with things like eggs, bread, sausage (or “kiełbasa”), ham, horseradish, butter and salt.

These baskets are prepared for Holy Saturday—between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Roman Catholic families in Poland take them to church for a blessing which sanctifies the food for the family’s holiday meal. Devout Catholics have refrained from eating meat—especially on Fridays—during the Lenten fast, so the meal blessed by the priest is seen as a traditional way of breaking their fast. These baskets establish the Easter meal as a more holy meal.

Several Eastern European countries share similar Easter basket traditions.

Despite all the Roman Catholic tradition around it, Polish believers see the significance of the holiday and its Polish name “Wielkanoc.”

“Before I got saved Lent and Easter were like a schedule, you know,” said Kowalski. “I knew that it was about Jesus, that He rose from the grave, but before I was saved, I felt this in some way, but it wasn’t in full.”

Kowalski likens this feeling to [2 Corinthians 3:14](#) when Paul describes a veil over the eyes of the Jews that was only taken away through Christ. “I knew everything about the holiday and maybe even in some way I felt it and I knew that it was connected to me, but it was like it was covered and hidden for me.”

He continued, “When for the first time I told Jesus, ‘I give you my life, take over control of my life,’ it was in a Catholic church preparing for Lent and Easter. I remember it was when I was 16, maybe 17. Before, the holiday had been for many years like a process. But when I got saved the holiday definitely changed. Now Easter is like a great time of joy.”

Kowalski and his wife, Kasia, hope that their two boys will grow up knowing these traditions which have been part of Polish life for centuries. But Kowalski sees that his Catholic family takes the traditions more seriously than they should.

Kowalski plans to one day show the traditions to his boys, but he plans to teach them that the blessing of God is in the provision of every meal and that every day in Christ is a joyous celebration of our salvation.

“Every year it’s a great reminder that the salvation I have through Jesus, from God, it’s really special and unique; not everyone has it. When I talk with my friends, they often don’t know what I’m talking about because in Poland, Catholics celebrate differently,” Ola Skowrońska*, a youth leader at the church, added.

For most of Poland, the resurrection of Christ remains a tradition. The beauty and joy are hidden behind layers of tradition that blind their eyes to the true joy to be found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Our prayer is that Poles, and Catholics around the world, would also see the joy to be found in Christ, please pray with us:

- That the schedule, tradition and process, of the Catholic Church would no longer hide how to have a personal relationship with Christ.
- That the small Baptist churches in Kraków, and their members, would be able to use holiday traditions as a means to share Christ with their friends and families.

**Names changed for security*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelvin Joseph* is a contributing writer and photographer for the IMB, serving in Poland.

National WMU introduces Missions Journey: Kids

by WMU Communications

BIRMINGHAM, AL – Beginning this fall, children’s leaders will have a new curriculum option for children’s discipleship that is flexible enough to fit just about any setting.

“Focusing on missions work both here in the U.S. and throughout the world, Missions Journey: Kids will captivate your children’s minds and hearts as they immerse themselves in a new culture each month and learn about the different avenues missionaries use to share the Gospel with the nations,” said Robin McCall, content and marketing manager, national WMU.

Missions Journey: Kids is for any children's group in grades 1–6, including Girls in Action, Royal Ambassadors, or Children in Action missions discipleship groups. With a balanced blend of missions discipleship and Bible study, it can also be used in discipleship classes, children's church, or by Christian schools who wish to add missions discipleship to their existing programming.

"Missions Journey: Kids is a bold step into the future of missions discipleship," said Zachariah Seanor, children's ministry consultant and editor, national WMU. "We are so excited to see how God will use this material to foster a love of missions in the hearts and minds of children for generations to come."

According to McCall, Missions Journey: Kids was created directly in response to requests from churches and missions discipleship leaders throughout the Southern Baptist Convention who asked for more robust Bible study and in-depth mission studies delivered in a simplified format.

"Written with every church in mind, Missions Journey: Kids gives leaders flexibility to create missions discipleship experiences tailored to fit their needs," she said. "Leaders can easily adapt every lesson to fit their context, whether their group is large or small, or if they lead girls, boys, or a coed group."

Every weekly session will include targeted tips for teaching missions study and discipleship, Scripture memory and application, and suggestions for customizing the session. Every monthly unit will also include suggestions for missions projects and bonus activities leaders can choose to meet the unique needs of their children's group.

The Missions Journey: Kids curriculum includes three quarterly pieces:

- [*Missions Journey: Kids Leader*](#) offers comprehensive plans for each session, teaching tips, bonus activities, ideas for earning badges and patches, suggestions for missions projects, and tips to help leaders create engaging experiences for children. It is available in a print or digital format.
- [*Missions Journey: Kids Leader Kit*](#) contains colorful posters, games, and activities to enhance weekly sessions.
- [*Missions Journey: Kids Adventure*](#) is a colorful magazine that will bring missions learning to life for children.

As both a curriculum writer and missions leader, Claudean Boatman said although the new curriculum takes longer to create with so many activities, working on it was more fun and targeted.

"This curriculum puts less stress on the leaders to prepare while at the same time empowering them more to adapt and choose what's best for their groups," she observed. "It's a great balance. Being a part of the inaugural issue of Missions Journey: Kids was fun, challenging, and made me remember why I enjoy writing and teaching missions curriculum."

While the Missions Journey: Kids curriculum replaces the current curriculum for Girls in Action (GA), Royal Ambassadors (RA), and Children in Action (CA), resources for these missions groups will continue.

“Missions Journey: Kids is a one-stop shop for every missions group,” McCall explained. “Each month, leaders will find suggestions for extra activities for GA, RA, and CA, ideas for earning badges and patches, tips for working through individualized achievement plans, and more. We will also continue to create and carry special resources for GA, RA, and CA, including [badges and patches](#), [achievement plans](#), and [identity items](#).”

The premiere edition of Missions Journey: Kids curriculum will release in Fall 2021 (Sep/Oct/Nov) for the church year 2021-22, and fall materials will be in churches by August 2021. Subscriptions are available for order now at wmustore.com or by calling WMU Customer Relations at 1-800-968-7301.

For more information or to download a free sample unit, visit wmu.com/MissionsJourneyKids.

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

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