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Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

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Fresh Calling: A Midwest tradition spurs unity and evangelism

by Eric Reed

SPRINGFIELD, IL – “The Midwest is all about hard work, blue collar, get it done,” Noah Oldham told the people at his breakout session. “It is to these people you need to be able to cast a vision,” said the planting pastor of August Gate Church in St. Louis and Send City senior planting director for the metro area.

Leaders attending the Midwest Leadership Summit in Springfield came with questions about ministry in the region, and many found answers. Some 850 leaders from 12 states in the region attended the three-day event in Springfield January 18-20. In three worship settings and 70 breakouts, they considered their calling again and took home fresh training for ministry.

“This year was especially inspiring and enlightening to me,” said Michael Nave, pastor of Cornerstone Church in Marion, IL. “I connected and reconnected with a handful of fellow pastors and leaders in a really meaningful way. I don’t think I have ever walked away from MLS so encouraged!”

Some of the focus of the gathering was about fellowship and relationships. Some pastors and church leaders from 9 Baptist state conventions filled the halls and ballrooms at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield IL, juggling conversations and notebooks and busy schedules. The main purpose of the event, as it has been since the 1950s, was equipping leaders for ministry that matches our north central territory.

“Southern Baptist churches in the north have unique challenges and opportunities,” said Nate Adams, Executive Director of the Illinois Baptist State Association and one of the organizers of the event. “And the Midwest Leadership Summit is a unique opportunity to network with other pastors and leaders, and to hear about ministry approaches that are effective in this Midwest context.”

The Summit is a partnership between the nine state conventions, the North American Mission Board, Woman’s Missionary Union, and Guidestone Financial Resources. Leaders attend three plenary sessions, and they may choose six breakout sessions from a list of 70 options featuring experts and practitioners in church leadership, evangelism, missions, and church planting.

For Pastor Nave, one session was especially insightful about the nature of the Midwest. “During Ben Mandrell’s session about preaching to skeptics, he showed a map of the U.S. noting the prevailing religious group (in each region). We SBCers have the SEC region! In other places it is Roman Catholic, L.D.S., and Methodist.

“I found myself really encouraged by our location in the U.S.,” Nave said. “We are not in a region that is completely post-Christian, and we’re sure not in the Bible Belt. Thus, we are able to learn from our brothers and sisters in those regions and create our own hybrid approach!”

Mandrell is the President of Lifeway Christian Resources. He was a featured speaker in one of the three plenary sessions. When he interviewed with the Lifeway trustees two years ago, Mandrell admitted that his Colorado church did not use discipleship materials from the SBC publishing house because the content presumed a level of biblical literacy and church culture that were alien in the West.

The same might be said of the Midwest.

“It’s good to be here, where people drink ‘pop’ and shop at Menards,” the Illinois native told the crowd, who laughed at the regional references. Then he launched into a strong and revealing message.

Mandrell told of his own experiences since taking that Lifeway helm that coincided with the Covid pandemic, continued financial downturns, and the need to reinvent the publisher’s ministry.

“There have been times in the last two years where I have struggled to believe, where I have cried, where I wondered what did I get myself into... where waves of fear overwhelmed me,” Mandrell said. “Anybody who leads in ministry right now has days like that.”

Citing recent Lifeway research, Mandrell said, 66% of pastors say they are struggling to trust God. But he called the leaders to “fierce optimism,” another term for faith. The people of the church are counting on their pastor to exercise bold faith. “The leader, if he is to be stable, must believe that God has the power to reverse a trend, to overcome statistics.”

Mandrell called this faith “the secret sauce” of Old Testament leaders. “Without a fierce optimism, the floor will collapse beneath you,” he said to amens. “Faith is what separates the men from the boys, the big from the little in Christian history.”

Big territory, big challenges

Begun as the North Central States Rally on a triennial basis, the Summit now meets every two years. The state convention partners are Dakota Baptist Convention, Illinois Baptist State Association, State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, Baptist Convention of Iowa, Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists, Baptist State Convention of Michigan, Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, Missouri Baptist Convention, and the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio.

As a regional equipping event focusing on a multi-state region, the Midwest event is unique in Southern Baptist life. It is funded by the state associations and national partners Guidestone

Financial Services, North American Mission Board, and Woman's Missionary Union. Church leaders are invited by their local associations.

"We continually hear both participants and national ministry partners describe the Midwest Leadership Summit as the most helpful and practical church leadership training event they attend," Adams said. "And this has consistently been the case for the past 16 years that I've been participating in the event."

The executive directors of the nine sponsoring state conventions addressed the challenges of ministry in the region at a lunchtime panel discussion. The presentation was wide-ranging, but "outside the pandemic" as instructed by Tim Patterson of Michigan, who moderated the panel.

"The objective of a network of churches is to focus on the common ground that churches have," said Nate Adams of Illinois. "We look for things that unify us and bring us together," Adams said. "Let's not go out into the margins where there isn't so much agreement."

The new convention leader of the Dakotas, Fred McDonald, talked about the distance between SBC churches in his part of the country and a resulting sense of isolation. "Loneliness is an issue in the Dakotas," McDonald said.

"Our churches are very spread out from each other. It creates loneliness among pastors, discouragement, and loneliness among pastors' wives separated from family who live far away." McDonald's observations drew nods of recognition.

God's success stories

"Yes, ministry in the Midwest can be hard," said Kirk Kirkland, planter and pastor of Revive City Church in Cincinnati. "Ministry in the city, ministry in the pandemic. We have moved our location 11 times" in the past two years.

Kirkland described ministry among homeless and addicted people—and seeing God at work in a neighborhood once named the most dangerous in America. The obstacle in that situation is escape. "It's really hard when you start getting job offers," Kirkland said, but urged pastors to stay put. "The gospel is able to break up the hardest of soils," he said. "God can give you the grace of grit."

"I'm indebted to Midwest pastors," Kirkland said, acknowledging the value of comradery. "There was a pastor in Indianapolis who encouraged me, gave me guidance, and sent me back home" to continue the work.

With unity and cooperation, evangelism was the third strand in the leadership cord. David Martinez, a Mexican pastor of 23 years who is now planting Spanish-language churches in Nebraska, charged the leaders to look to the needs of their Samaria, referencing Acts 1:8. "Jesus was committed to reach poor and rich, old and young people, Jews and Gentile,"

Martinez went on to name black and white, Hispanic and Somali and Karin and Burmese. “We need to reach others,” he said. In the Midwest, “we have our Samaria also.”

Yankton, South Dakota church planter Jeffrey Mueller ignited the crowd with his testimony. “We have to be part of the community and not a pocket community,” Mueller said. “Church planters all say ‘We’re gonna be a different church, be part of the community.’ We said it, but we didn’t do it. Our outreach was only to get people to come hear me preach, and I wasn’t any good at preaching,” he said, receiving laughs.

“God said the command was to go to them, not for them to come to you.”

Mueller and his wife returned to their small hometown to plant Restore Church. Today the church has two campuses and four ministry points, including a crisis pregnancy center and an indoor playground serving their financially challenged community. “Our whole life, the community has cried out that there’s not enough free or affordable family fun. Most of the activities are drunken parties with the approval of the community.” Restore Church responded with community services that double as open doors for evangelism.

Mueller said his ministry changed when he took seriously this statement: The pastor should be well acquainted with the smell of the carpet in his office, not from being on his knees, but from having his face on the floor before God.

A few moments later, Mueller was on his face on the platform at the Crowne Plaza. “You might be one special shift away from discouragement to encouragement,” he said. Pastors and church leaders across the ballroom joined him in prayer with their faces on the carpet.

“Where will IMB get missionaries like Jeffrey?” Sandy Wisdom Martin asked after the season of prayer. “They will come from your church... At WMU we want to help your people develop a mission lifestyle.”

The Executive Director-Treasurer of National WMU frequently tells the story of her calling to mission service that was encouraged in her home church in Carbondale, IL. She invited pastors and church leaders to call on WMU for mission support and education.

In the final message, Willie McLaurin, Vice President for Great Commission Relations and Mobilization for the SBC Executive Committee focused on unity in the Southern Baptist Convention.

“We need to get on the same side of the rope and pull together,” McLaurin said after describing his childhood tug-of-war games. He recited a list of differences among Southern Baptists, including theology, ethnicity, and politics. “We don’t need to focus on a donkey or an elephant, we need to focus on the Lamb,” he said as the crowd applauded. “We have one enemy and he is already defeated!”

“We need to get busy getting people off the road to hell and on the way to heaven,” he said. “There is not one problem the church has that soul winning cannot solve.”

McLaurin concluded, “Any way you slice it, we are Great Commission Baptists, because we are better together.”

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Written by Eric Reed with additional reporting by Lisa Misner. Eric Reed is editor of Illinois Baptist Media.

20 IN 10

by Scott Statson

FENTON, MI – When we felt God leading us in the direction of church planting, we knew it wasn’t going to be easy. Hesitantly, we started asking Him to open doors, and it wasn’t long before our prayers were answered.

God blessed us with an amazing facility in the community we were hoping to reach. We set out to help people find and follow Jesus, and we’ve watched as God has done some incredible things.

Just last year we celebrated with 5 individuals who went public with their decision to follow Jesus in baptism, we were able to renovate our facilities after He blessed us with over \$51,000 in special gifts, and we even partnered with other local ministries to throw some massive parties to love our community.

God’s been doing amazing things since we’ve been here and it’s not because of us. If we’re being honest, it feels as though we’ve failed.

I’ve been dreaming about the impact we could have if we just started with Georgetown. God placed us next to this massive apartment complex, Georgetown Park Apartments. They make up roughly 10% of our entire city, and it’s right in our own backyard! 20 buildings full of the people we set out to reach, and we’ve not made an ounce of difference.

Every day moving trucks roll out, and we miss our window of opportunity. For a while, I’ve been dreaming about the day our church would take this opportunity seriously.

Recently, our church made the decision to do just that. We laid all our cards on the table, and went public with our goal. We want to see a small group meeting in all 20 buildings in 10 years. Put simply, 20 in 10.

It seems like an impossible feat to accomplish, but we know He is able. Our church has committed to pray. We're praying that God will use us to accomplish the impossible. We're praying that God will use us to see 20 in 10.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Famed Army Ranger Jeff Struecker calls for thunder from America's pulpits

by Roger Alford, The Christian Index

ATLANTA, GA – The hope of America is in the hands of her pastors, says a former U.S. Army Ranger who rose to fame in the aftermath of the Battle of Mogadishu, an intense 18-hour firefight in Somalia that was chronicled in the book and movie *Black Hawk Down*.

Jeff Struecker spoke Thursday to lawmakers and pastors at the Georgia Baptist Mission Board's annual legislative prayer breakfast at the Capitol complex in Atlanta.

"If there's a hope for the future of Georgia, if there's hope for the future of your city, if there's hope for our country, it will come from the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and only from Him," Struecker said. "So, it is your pulpit, pastor, that will make all the difference."

When he was 18, Struecker, a member of the Ranger Hall of Fame, enlisted in the Army as an infantryman. He finished his service 22 years later as a chaplain. The heavily decorated soldier participated in the invasion of Panama, Operation Desert Storm, and the Battle of Mogadishu. He completed more than a dozen combat tours in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Struecker, now pastor of 2 Cities Church in Columbus, Ga., told the crowd about a return trip he made to Mogadishu 20 years after the 1993 battle.

“What I saw really broke my heart,” he said. “I had high hopes for Somalia. I had hopes that after all the American blood that had been spilled there, that the people of Somalia would have a chance for what we have in the United States, that they would have the opportunity for freedom, because a lot of great men gave their lives for that country.”

Instead, Struecker said he saw a country that was worse off two decades later.

“What I learned returning to Mogadishu a second time is that an ungodly people are an ungovernable people,” he said. “You give men weapons, and you give them the ability to wage war, if there’s nothing inside their heart holding them back, they will kill, destroy and take whatever they want.”

Struecker said he sensed his call to ministry after the Battle of Mogadishu.

“Because I had this rock solid Christian faith, in the middle of this 18-hour firefight, when everyone around us was absolutely convinced we’re all going to die tonight, that there’s no way we’re going to survive, in the middle of this God gave me supernatural peace,” he said. “When I came back from the battle the very next morning, no exaggeration, guys were ... waiting to talk to me and were asking me questions about my faith. And they were saying, ‘Jeff, I saw something in you on those city streets last night. I was listening to your voice on the radio, and when everyone else was totally terrified, you were calm, and I don’t even understand how that’s possible. I don’t know what you have, Jeff, but whatever it is, I want it.’ And I spent the next day telling my buddies about my faith and how Jesus Christ can radically change their life.”

In those moments, Struecker said God made clear to him that he was to go into ministry.

“I have never forgotten this overwhelming sense that God wanted me to do something different than just kick in doors, kill bad guys, and make a country a safe place – that He wanted me to do something that would last for eternity.

“Now, I stand in front of you, and I’m telling you I have great concern for our country. I’m not going to get political. My concern is not for who President Biden is going to pick for the Supreme Court. That worries me. My concern is not about the direction of our country and the polarization of the two political parties and how the news is weaponizing the Democratic and Republican parties against the American people to divide us right down the middle. That worries me. What really concerns me is America is becoming a post-Christian, atheistic, humanistic country, and I can tell you exactly what that looks like. You take it to the full extreme on that scale, and it looks like Mogadishu, Somalia 20 years later ... because an ungodly people are an ungovernable people”

Struecker described himself as a very patriotic person who takes his politics very seriously. “But,” he said, “my hope is not in our government; my hope is in the gospel.”

The Bible makes clear, Struecker said, that the life-changing power of the gospel is what's necessary to be able to live in a good country, amid good people.

"This is what Jesus said in Luke 6:45: 'A good people produce good fruit out of the goodness of their heart.' And then just to make sure his audience doesn't miss it, He says 'an evil people will produce evil fruit because it comes out of an evil heart.' What Jesus is really saying is if you want to live around good people, if you want to live in a good country, it's going to take good hearts and we all know that can't be done by the Supreme Court. The president of the United States, the Georgia state senate and Congress will not be able to pull that one off. That's going to come from your churches. That's going to come from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"In the words of John Adams, our second president: 'When the pulpits thunder, then there's hope for our country. So, my challenge to you, as one of you, as a former member of the U.S. military, and now serving the greatest army ever assembled on planet earth, the army of King Jesus, my challenge to you pastor is to thunder the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ from your pulpits because a good people are a governable people, an ungodly people is an ungovernable people, and an ungovernable people will descend into chaos here in our country like it will anywhere else.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roger Alford is the editor of the Christian Index which was founded in Washington, DC in 1822 by legendary Baptist leader Luther Rice. The Christian Index is the nation's oldest continuously published religious newspaper.

Treasures in the darkness

by Karen Blanchard

CLINTON TOWNSHIP, MI – Have you ever stumbled around a dark room in the middle of the night looking for the light switch? When you first got up, you may have had to get your bearings of where you were. Then as you began to feel your way around the room, you may have started to feel things that are familiar, and it was then you were able to guide yourself to the light.

Often in our lives we are walking in the dark of the circumstances we are facing. It might feel that we are fumbling our way through the dark reaching out our hands just to feel something familiar; something we can grasp and hold onto.

Having been in this pandemic for two years now, we face days that seem uncertain and difficult to navigate. Yet through all the darkness and confusion, we can hold onto the promise that God is always with us. The verses below are a few of my favorites to help remind me of this promise:

It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.” – Deuteronomy 31:8

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” – Joshua 1:9

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. – Isaiah 41:10

I am not sure what you are currently going through, but I do know that you aren't going through it alone. If you are a follower of Christ and have surrendered your life to Him, then you have the Holy Spirit in your heart to guide you and comfort you as you navigate the road ahead.

One thing God has taught me over the last few years is how to shift my mindset when I am facing something difficult. Instead of focusing on what I am missing out on or what isn't going the way I had hoped it to go, I begin to ask the Lord to reveal to me where he is working. I ask him to teach me what he wants me to learn through the situation that he has allowed me to be in. When I begin asking God these questions, he begins to answer.

I remember reading this verse a few years ago and it really resonated with me.

I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name. – Isaiah 45:3.

This verse is a great reminder that there are treasures to be found in the challenging circumstances we go through in life. It is during our sufferings or trials that we face, that God will reveal more of himself to us and teach us things that we would never have learned had we not gone through that difficult situation. Now when things are hard, I try to remember to look for the treasures in the darkness. They are secret riches that are only given when we look past the circumstance and ask God to reveal himself to us.

Next time you are facing hardship, don't forget to look for the hidden treasures. They are there waiting to be found. Once you find them, remember to thank God for them and for allowing you to come to know him in a deeper, more intimate way. These treasures in the darkness are God's way to remind us that he is right there with us in the middle of our trials.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen is married to Scott Blanchard, pastor of Lakepointe Church, and moved from Florida to Michigan in the summer of 2009 to plant Lakepointe Church in Shelby Township. She enjoys mentoring and discipling women and also leads women's life groups through her church. She is

passionate about helping women find their purpose in who God created them to be. She is on staff at Lakepointe Church and loves being part of what God is doing in the Metro Detroit area!

Good people, bad decisions

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – Betty was born and reared in Kiowa, Oklahoma. With striking features, cobalt blue eyes, blonde hair, and a personality that would give angels competition, Betty was the most beautiful girl in the county.

She and her parents lived on a small acreage farm just adjacent to the official city limits. Kiowa being a very small rural community was more like the country than a town. The most prominent features of the town were the feed store, school, and a handful of small churches. Betty's dad worked for the Army Ammunition Depot and raised cattle.

She naturally grew up having a love for animals of all kinds. She had her own quarter horse which she began riding in events at the age of six. They had sheep, chickens, dogs, more cats than could be numbered, pigs, guineas, turkeys, rabbits, and her very favorite animal of all, a raccoon named Rosie.

Every morning before she left for school, she would hurriedly do her chores, and save enough time to play with her favorite furry friend. They would play hide-n-seek and ball if there was enough time. When Betty came home from school Rosie could be heard over all the noises of the farm as she was clamoring to be let out of her cage. As soon as the door was opened, up on the shoulders of her best friend she went. When Betty went about her afternoon work and play, Rosie went too. The two were inseparable. Friends for life.

One day "Doc", the veterinarian, was at the farm tending to one of the horses when he noticed Betty and her friend playing in the barn. He asked Jerry, her father, how long they had owned the raccoon and had she been spayed. He said that she had been in their possession for a couple of years and that the procedure had not been done.

"Doc" then began to explain that at a certain age, female raccoons would go through an enormous change and that in most cases they become violent and will turn on humans. Jerry couldn't believe that Rosie would do such a thing, but "Doc" convinced him that it would happen. He said that the best thing to do would be to release Rosie deep in the woods where she could not return.

After his discussion with "Doc", Betty and her dad had a long talk after supper. When he told her what he wanted to do, she began to cry and weep and "throw a country fit". She was broken-hearted, angry, confused, and defiant. At first her father was adamant about his decision, but after weeks of her moping and grieving he gave in and said she could keep Rosie, but she was to watch carefully for any changes.

Life went on normally for several months with no change at all in Rosie. Then one day Rosie growled at Betty and was very irritable. Betty didn't want to think that anything was wrong and didn't want to tell her dad. Besides, how could her loving, best friend turn against her? Maybe someone else might not be able to handle her, but there was no doubt that Rosie would never turn on her.

One morning, just before she left for school, Betty entered the cage with Rosie and was attacked viciously. Rosie clawed and bit her until she was a bloody mess. The fact is, that Rosie might have killed Betty had it not been for her mother hearing her screams and running to her aid with a garden hoe.

Betty received hundreds of stitches and several operations just to repair some of the damage. Her pain and suffering were unbelievable, but the scars that Rosie left behind were even more so. Night after night Betty would cry herself to sleep saying, "How could this happen to me? I had everything under control. She wasn't supposed to hurt me. She was my friend."

So many of us in life, like Betty, refuse to heed the warnings of the dangers around us. We are convinced that we have everything under control and though others may not have been able to handle it, we can!

A young teenage couple who knows without a doubt that their physical encounters will never get out of control. The upwardly mobile businessman needs a little help through the day so he snorts just a little of that "white powder" to give him a boost, assured he can quit any time. That lonely boy wants to be part of the group so he takes the latest fad drug just to fit in and will stop when he is accepted. (Despite the fact that his family has a long history of addiction.) Or the farmer who knows that he can grow just a little marijuana to help supplement his income and will only do it one season and then stop.

There are so many things in life that appear to be innocent and harmless, so much so that we believe we can control their side effects and negative attributes. We tell ourselves, "Those things won't happen to me. I'm different."

My friends, the fact is that our hearts and minds are a mess, and only He truly knows what is in them. We foolishly think we know our hearts, but alas, we do not! We all must listen and be obedient to the initial promptings of the Holy Spirit and heed the wisdom of those who have gone before us. If we do not, there is a high probability that we will step in stupid!

"The way of the fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel"

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.

From cringing to training

by Dr. Tony L Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – Does your church seem stuck? Do you cringe when someone suggests starting something new knowing you already have too much to do? Do you feel as if you're doing more than you should? Are you worn out and wish there were more dedicated volunteers who could do more in the church?

Pastors and church leaders often feel the previous feelings when the church stopped training up new people of influence. It is a common occurrence. In established churches, the development process gets ignored because the old faithful volunteers did the work for years until they retired, moved away, or died. In new church plants, the first generation of volunteers receive a lot of training whereas the following years of volunteers are expected to catch the training by simply soaking up the examples of the fatigued people they are replacing.

Enjoy the 15-minute Video

Please, take less than 15-minutes to watch this video: [VIDEO TRAINING OTHERS](#) – then return to read the rest of this article. We can help you set-up a free, customized development process for your church, whether it is old or new. The year of 2022 could be one of the strongest years for your church. Training brings unity and focus. Training creates a contagious energy with those around you.

Multiplication Training

This multiplication training has three levels with goals, memory verses, and assignments grouped in modules. The material can be used in-person or on-line. When you gather to discuss the lessons, great spiritual discoveries will happen for everyone. The lesson plans are already created, but will feel relevant to each church. There are video, audio, and reading materials from John Piper, Paul David Tripp, Jenn Wilkin, Tim Keller, D.A. Horton and many more.

Level One

Level 1 is called “Living on Mission.” I describe this as the level where people discover how to feed themselves spiritually. During this portion, your people will learn how to rely on the Lord every day of their lives. They will understand that their consistent growth in the Lord takes more than listening to one sermon per week. There are seven subjects:

1. Spiritual Formation
2. Bible Fluency
3. Spiritual Design
4. Evangelism
5. Understanding the Church
6. Servant Leadership

Level Two

Level 2 is called “Disciple Making.” At this level, people in your church will advance from caring about themselves to caring for the discipleship of others. This is a dramatic shift where these individuals take on a ministry like a shepherd to others which helps relieve their local pastor. The eight competencies under this level are:

1. Self-awareness
2. Communication & Teamwork
3. Understanding Context
4. Spiritual Readiness
5. Making Disciples
6. Multiplying Leaders
7. Church Planting
8. Making a Difference

Level Three

Level 3 is entitled “Church Planting,” but do not let that turn you away. This is the level of study where those in the church are asked to dedicate more of themselves in the local church whether the church is long-established or new. People are looking for ways to meaningfully engage in community. Some older generations, who have retired or semi-retired, could be enlisted to become permanent personnel in a local church. At this level, participants applying

what they previously learned to your local church becomes exciting. They become part of the leadership team overseeing ministries so the pastor can focus on sermon preparation, teaching, and vision casting. The areas of focus are:

1. Emotional Health
2. Confirming Their Calling
3. Family Dynamics
4. Church Planting Models and Strategies
5. Support
6. More . . .

Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

1. Can people start at different levels of training? Yes.
2. How do I know where people should start their training? Let them take the provided survey.
3. What kind of learning styles are incorporated in the training? People will learn by hearing, seeing, and doing. They will interact with the material and one another.
4. Is there a fixed schedule we must follow? No, this development process is accessed online and is flexible to meet the needs of your local church. You are in-charge of the schedule.
5. Will the pastor lead this alone? No, the pastor should guide the enlistment of a coordinator, various coaches, and the participants into small groups or what we often call cohorts. This plan relieves the pastor, it is not meant to overload the pastor.

Next Steps

1. Sign-up to receive your introduction to the training material at [STARTING POINT](#).
2. Fill out [REGISTER MY CHURCH](#) form and click at the bottom of the form.
3. Respond to a follow-up email, sent to the registrant, giving access to training.
4. Meet with influencers in your church and start designing your training.
5. Contact one of Michigan's leaders who can assist you:
6. Ken Nether / KNether@namb.net
7. Tim Shrader / TShrader@namb.net
8. Matt Thompson / MThompson@namb.net

Years of Healthy Leadership

Pastors, if you will set this training up for your congregation and continue the cycle of training each year for the next 3-5 years, you will see a remarkable improvement in your church's impact in the lives of the people you love. You will move from cringing to training to celebrating!

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.

The difference in knowing and loving

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – Diamonds are etched in American culture as a symbol of love. As soon as a man drops to one knee and begins to open a small velvet box, we all know what is about to happen.

I saw that scene played out over and over again during our annual Hallmark Christmas movie binge. Several times I looked at my bride as the familiar scene unfolded - she was smiling every time.

I was reminded recently of one of the most famous diamonds of all - the Hope Diamond. Contrary to its name, the Hope Diamond is known for the supposed curse that it brings. One of its owners, Evalyn Walsh McLean, received the diamond as a gift from her husband. Not long after that, her husband, son and daughter all tragically died. She supposedly would not sell the diamond to keep it from causing suffering to anyone else. It was found in a shoe box under her bed after she died.

Famed jeweler Harry Winston purchased the diamond from her estate, and ultimately donated it to the Smithsonian Institute where it remains to this day. Winston sent the rare diamond with a history going all the way back to the 1600's to the Smithsonian in a box wrapped in brown paper through registered mail. The diamond is currently valued at a whopping \$350 million dollars!

I was intrigued by Winston's generosity so I searched his name on the web and learned that he was called, "the King of Diamonds." His name is even mentioned in the classic musical, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes."

A customer entered Winston's store in New York City to buy a special diamond. One of his salesmen, his most knowledgeable one, waited on the customer. He went to the vault to get the unique diamond the customer sought. The salesman talked about the rarity of this particular diamond, its beautiful clarity, and its many unique characteristics. The customer heard all that the salesman had to say, and decided not to purchase the precious stone.

"As the man was leaving the store, Henry Winston said, 'Excuse me, do you mind if I personally show you the diamond myself?'

The man said, "No, I don't mind. I've come a long way. I'd be willing to look at it one more time." Winston took the diamond out. He didn't talk about clarity and cut. He talked about its beauty, its unique color and the joy of ownership. He talked about the pleasure that this diamond brings to people who see it. Within a few minutes the man was writing out a check for the full value of the diamond.

As he was writing out the check, he said, "Mr. Winston, I am puzzled. That same diamond was shown to me only a few minutes ago. I didn't want it. You showed that diamond to me and something changed. Why am I buying the diamond from you?"

Harry Winston said, "The man who showed you the diamond first is my most knowledgeable salesperson. He understands the color, cut and clarity of diamonds. He knows more about diamonds than anyone in the store, myself included. But I would double his salary if I could just give him something I possess. You see he knows diamonds, but I am in the business because I love diamonds" (Source unknown).

The biggest purchase of my young adult days was the diamond engagement ring I gave to Shar when she agreed to be my bride. I know as much about diamonds today as I did then - hardly anything. The real jewel in my life was not the ring I placed on her finger, but the person who wore it. Happy Valentine's Day Shar!

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.

Words without wisdom

by Coye Bouyer

LANSING, MI – Words have incredible power, sometimes we forget just how much power spoken words can have in and over our lives.

A life-giving tongue creates a positive environment, and even brings joy to a community. However, too often many of us choose conversation that is callous and criticizes as opposed to speech that is selective and soothing.

Proverbs 15:4 says, *“A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit.”*

Here, Solomon is saying that your mouth possesses the power of medicine to bring back the life of its listener. However, just as gentle and soothing speech can rejuvenate and revive, harsh coarse or critical conversation from a manipulative mouth possesses power to crush or even BREAK the morale of its hearer.

A few other Proverbs that deal with the persuasive power found in one’s speech whether it is for good or bad;

“The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver” (10:20). Proverbs 10:31 says, *“the mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, but the perverted tongue will be cut out.”*

One of my personal favorites is Prov. 12:18, *“There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”*

And we must not forget one of the most quoted Proverbs dealing with the tongue, *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit”* (18:21).

This is still a very challenging Proverb to interpret, yet in it, as well as all these other Proverbs, the concept that communication that is callous, cold, and not carefully considered can create a climate of calamity and even cause catastrophe in the mind, heart and/or soul of its hearer.

However, when conversation is carefully considered, a tongue is tamed, and words are spoken with wisdom, they help their hearer, lift their listener, and at times, even serve as medicine to the man or woman to whom they are spoken.

For, *“Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances”* (Prov. 25:11).

So today, as you reflect on the words that are coming out of your mouth, will you choose conversation that is carefully crafted with speech that is seasoned with salt? Or like so many, will you continue using words without wisdom that cut instead of cultivate? The choice is yours.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Coye L. Bouyer is the founding pastor of Kingdom Life Church in Lansing, MI where he has served since March of 2010. Pastor Bouyer recently stepped into the Diversity Ambassador role for the BSCM and firmly believes that he was not only called to Preach the Gospel as part of the process of reconciliation of man to God, but also using any platform as a bridge of reconciliation of man to man, and even more so amongst the brethren. Pastor Bouyer and his lovely wife Keturah (Gen. 25:1) have been married four over 20 years and have four children; Sierra, Seth, Cayla and Coye II.

Destination of renovation

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Over the last few months here at Bambi Lake, we have been diligently working to renovate the inside of the Wilson Building. After 20 years of service-camps, retreats, parties, countless meals, adults and teenagers, it was past time.

It was time for new colors on the walls, new carpet on the floors, and new decor all around. We had been discussing this undertaking for quite some time, and had a good idea of what we wanted the look and feel of the building to be. However, reaching the desired outcome has proven to be quite the journey. I refer to it as the Destination of Renovation.

The motivation to renovate usually comes from the amount of disrepair that exists, or just the simple fact that the building (or whatever you're renovating) should look and function better.

So a vision for what could be was imagined, and we began the journey of what we thought was a reasonable timeline to reach our imagined destination. We soon discovered having a strict timeline for our renovation was like trying to find Bigfoot - pointless!

Unlike building something from the ground up, we encountered multiple pre-existing issues throughout the renovation that had to be corrected before more renovation could be done. The tearing out of the old to replace with new was very time consuming and often physically painful and difficult work.

Readjusting the vision to overcome previous construction flaws added more time and cost. Some of us had to learn new skills to complete the tasks when skilled laborers were not available. The fact of the matter is reaching the Destination of Renovation has been difficult, downright frustrating, and stressful. However, the end result has proven to be beautiful!

I can't help but equate this experience to the renovations Jesus performs in my life (sometimes it seems constant). His desire is to dwell and be at home - be comfortable in my life. He lovingly comes in, and begins to renovate every room in my life where He doesn't feel comfortable. This process can be kinda scary, and the journey painful because I like to overlook my flaws.

I like my stuff and I'm comfortable with my sin - don't mess with it! I have a lot of pre-existing defects, and old glitches that have to be torn out and made new. Ephesians 14:17-19 says that Jesus wants to live in my house, and fill every room with His Love so my life can be rooted and continually grow and be filled with all of Him.

If I'm gonna be filled with all of Him, He's gotta get rid of all of me (selfish junk and pride). I wish the renovation could happen overnight, it won't. It's a process- Jesus is the Master Builder, and the reconstruction happens according to His timeline. So I can trust we will reach the Destination of Renovation and it will be beautiful!

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.

Planting seeds in Detroit; a story of church planting

by David Clark

DETROIT, MI – In 1 Corinthians 3:6 the apostle Paul says “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth”. Church planting within itself is a journey that is not for the faint of heart. There are many highs and lows that come with the work of ministry. As one will soon discover while attempting to plant a healthy church that spreads the gospel and is the hands and feet of Jesus.

We have been on the church planting journey to plant the S.E.E.D. Church (Salvation.Education.Edification.Discipleship) for the past two years. When I first received the vision to plant S.E.E.D Church, I wrestled with so many emotions and questions. Am I ready? Where will we plant? Who will buy into the vision? Who will support us? As I wrestled with the questions, there still remained this unwavering faith and commitment to plant a church that would represent the Kingdom of God.

Over the past year, church planting has been eventful. However, I have been able to see the hand of God present in so many ways. Amidst planting a church in a pandemic, I have been challenged to grow.

In 2020 I joined a multi-contextual apprenticeship through Mile City and the House Church of Detroit. The apprenticeship has been a unique experience. It has provided me with an opportunity to do life with other church planters, and the chance to do ministry in two different contexts.

The benefit of being around other church planters is the gift of encouragement that comes in subtle ways. It has allowed me to take the time to learn, compare, and contrast my church plant with other planters. Through this I have learned new approaches to church planting. Some that are different than I would have originally considered.

With just about anything in life, there have been some of the low moments. We experienced as a church the starting and stopping of in-person gatherings during the rise of Covid. Many people have felt apprehensive of returning to in-person gatherings and found comfort tuning in to online service.

We have stories of people who made commitments to be a part of the work of ministry, but due to unforeseen circumstances were unable to finish them. However, even in the midst of those challenging times we have experienced many celebratory moments.

Last year our church spent time praying for a location and place where we could have our Sunday morning worship services. God answered through a pastor who offered us the use his building. I also joined a discipleship cohort that has equipped our ministry with systems, processes, and culture to help us to make disciples.

This past year our church planted the first of many community gardens at “The House Church”. In September, we had our first vision night, and in December our church partnered with faithful supporters to provide gifts for three families for Christmas.

All of these God moments happened before our official launch. As we strive to stay the course and remain faithful, we are looking forward to the upcoming year and everything God will do through S.E.E.D Church as we prepare to launch in fall 2022.

Perhaps you have been looking for a local church plant with which to partner. You can join S.E.E.D Church in a number of ways. You can agree with us through prayer and you can come alongside us as a resource to help us impact the community around us.

You can contact us by email at theseedchurch313@gmail.com, visit our website www.seedchurch313.com, or follow us on our social media platforms-Facebook: Seed Church Instagram: Seed Church 313.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Clark is the Lead Pastor of S.E.E.D Church in Detroit, Michigan. He attended American Baptist College, and studied at NOBTS. And he enjoys sharing the gospel, traveling, fishing, reading, and playing pool.

SEND Detroit New Year Update - 2022

by Wayne Parker

Even through the struggles and uncertainties that have been brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, we continue to see God's hand at work in Detroit.

New Partners

God has blessed us with new partners. Real Life Church, Stanley, NC has become a new partner for Send Detroit and is giving financial support to 6 church planters over the next 3 years. In October, we hosted a vision tour for leaders from Stonegate Church in Midolitan, TX. We are excited about their partnership with Detroit planters. Our next vision tour is planned for April 4-5, 2022.

Please contact me if you are interested in joining a vision tour of Detroit.

Send Network Assessment

November 8 & 9 we hosted a church planter assessment retreat for 8 couples in the Ohio Valley Region at Merriman Road Baptist Church in Garden City. This was our first in-person assessment in 2 years. It was a blessing to be together for this event and to see these missionaries encouraged in their calling by the best team of assessors around! We saw 3 couples from Michigan, including one couple that is serving in Send Detroit.

Family Care Events

In the last few months we have hosted 2 gatherings for church planting families for fellowship and encouragement. In October, eight families got together to hang out and enjoy Three Cedars Farm. This is an annual event hosted by the family of Pastor Travis Whittaker (Mile City Church) on their family farm including, tractor rides, pumpkin patch, corn maze, petting farm and of course cider and donuts!

In December, Send Detroit planters and wives were able to gather for a special evening of fellowship at The Whitney, an historic mansion in downtown Detroit. This Christmas dinner was a great opportunity to connect with couples and allow them to relax and get to know one another.

Just Launched - Heart and Soul West Bloomfield

We also celebrated a new church launch this December. Pastor Cornelius Roberson led Heart and Soul Community Church (Detroit) to launch a second campus, this one in West Bloomfield in a great location right across the street from West Bloomfield High School. Heart and Soul had received this building as a gift from a previous church and after much work and renovation to get the building and sanctuary ready, December 5 was their first Sunday of gathering for worship service. Rejoice with us and please pray for this new gospel outpost!

Progress in the Pandemic

Reaching Out Church has been able to expand their reach by launching a new church across the border into Windsor, Ontario. Pastor Sameer* continues to lead others in the church to reach their Bangladeshi neighbors with the gospel who are from Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist backgrounds.

(*name changed for security) Several churches who were greatly affected by the pandemic because their meeting spaces were closed have recently found permanent meeting spaces of their own. Mile City Church's South Lyon Campus has a new building just opened in 2022 and Rhiza Church, Ann Arbor moved from a rented facility to a permanent location to nearby Ypsilanti where they were able to begin by hosting Christmas services.

Please Pray

In addition to these mentioned, please pray with us as we seek to reach the Hispanic community of Send Detroit. We have over 320,000 Hispanics and Latinos in Metro Detroit and we have yet to see a new Spanish speaking church in our area. Please pray that God would raise up the leadership needed to help reach this population for Christ. Thank you for your prayers and partnership in the gospel!

Yours in Christ,

Wayne Parker

Send Detroit Missionary

wparker@namb.net

NAMB 2021 emphasis on Hispanic church planting aims to meet growing needs

by Brandon Elrod

Over the course of the next decade, demographic projections estimate that the Hispanic population will increase by 30 percent, up from the 2016 figure of 57 million to 74 million people by 2030. In recognizing these demographic shifts, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) will emphasize Hispanic church planting starting in 2021.

“We are on the path to becoming the largest ethnic group in the United States, even larger than the Anglo population,” said Julio Arriola, executive director of Hispanic relations and mobilization with the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. “Most of these Hispanics don’t have a relationship with Jesus.

The Hispanic population, currently, makes up nearly 20 percent of the entire United States population and is far and away the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S., a fact that led NAMB in recent years to produce Send Network planting resources in the area of assessment, training and coaching for Spanish-speaking church planting missionaries. Send Network also made a Spanish version of its Multiplication Pipeline available.

“We want to be strategic in reaching North America with the hope of the gospel,” said NAMB president Kevin Ezell. “That means that we need to be sure to emphasize Hispanic church planting. The demographic shift that is taking place is incredible, and we must take the gospel to the places where it is needed most.”

Ezell announced the Hispanic focus at a meeting with NAMB’s Board of Trustees October 6.

Arriola, whose role with the Executive Committee is jointly funded by NAMB, serves as a major catalyst for seeing more Hispanic churches launched.

“We have great interest from church planters to plant more Hispanic churches, but we need more missionaries,” Arriola said. “We ought to pray and call out the called. We need to explore all of the different ways to harvest champions for Hispanic church planting in the United States.”

Anglo Southern Baptist churches across North America can help, Arriola said, by opening their eyes to the Hispanic communities found within their own cities, towns and neighborhoods. From there, a team effort within the Southern Baptist ecosystem could lead to flourishing Hispanic ministries and church plants.

“Those churches located in communities with large Hispanic populations should consider opening Spanish-speaking services and starting Hispanic churches,” Arriola said. “Those in the

SBC are here to help and assist in the process through collaboration with NAMB, our seminaries and through the state and regional conventions,” Arriola said.

While emphasizing the need for this focus, Arriola also spoke about the need to conduct these Hispanic ministries with excellence.

“There are no shortcuts to developing a healthy, thriving Hispanic church or service,” Arriola said. “Churches need to make sure those leaders and church planters are well-trained and biblically sound in their beliefs and practice.”

Through the seminaries, Hispanic fellowships within the SBC, through NAMB and through state convention partnerships, there is a pipeline of Hispanic ministers who are ready to serve.

“We are putting together a pool of new leaders and future church planters that will help us reach our goals,” Arriola said. “America has the second highest population of Hispanics in the world behind Mexico. Through all of our Southern Baptist partners and our 3,500 Hispanic, SBC churches, we are seeing leaders prepared and developed for the ministry.”

In reaching both the Hispanic and general populations in North America, Arriola believes Latino culture is a major asset for reaching everyone, not just Hispanics. There is a need beyond simply focusing on Spanish-speaking ministry opportunities.

“We can’t expect Anglo churches to be intentional in reaching Latinos and other ethnic groups if we, Latinos, are only intentional in reaching Hispanics,” Arriola said. “We ought to reach all people from every town, every city and every nation. Our unique Hispanic culture is a great platform to help us reach more people even beyond our own ethnicity.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

Midwest Leadership Summit attendees take home fresh ideas

by Staff

SPRINGFIELD, IL – Leaders attending the Midwest Leadership Summit in Springfield came with questions about ministry in the region, and many found answers. Some 850 leaders from 12 states in the region attended the three-day event in Springfield January 18-20. In three worship

settings and 70 breakouts, they considered their calling again and took home fresh training for ministry.

Pastors and church leaders from 9 Baptist state conventions filled the halls and ballrooms at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield IL. The main purpose of the event, as it has been since the 1950s, was equipping leaders for ministry that matches our north central territory.

Good preaching is necessary to have a healthy church

by Garth Leno

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – John Stott once admitted to being “an impenitent believer in the indispensable necessity of preaching both for evangelism and for the healthy growth of the church.”

At our church we open the Bible, take the main point of a biblical text, make it the main point of a sermon, and apply it to life today with as much enthusiasm and energy that God’s Spirit provides. According to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.” We are committed to sound, biblical doctrine; we are determined to preach the whole Bible without apology or compromise; and we do it with joy.

D. A. Carson has said, “Our aim is to take the sacred text, explain what it means, tie it to other scriptures so people can see the whole a little better, and apply it to life so it bites and heals, instructs and edifies.”

This applies to every pulpit in every church, including the newest church plants. Churches that seek to honor God require good preaching for at least five reasons.

1. Good preaching glorifies God.

That’s obvious, right? Nothing trumps this. God is the goal and the ground and the purpose of all biblical preaching.

“All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.”

(Psalm 86:9)

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

(1 Corinthians 10:31)

We preach to glorify Him, not to increase attendance or raise money or start programs.

In a sermon preached in 2006 at the Together for the Gospel conference, John Piper said, "Preaching is not conversation. Preaching is not discussion. Preaching is not casual talk about religious things. Preaching is not simply teaching. Preaching is the heralding of a message permeated by the sense of God's greatness and majesty and holiness. The topic may be anything under the sun, but it is always brought into the blazing light of God's greatness and majesty in his word."

When we preach the inspired Word of God, God is glorified and all of heaven rejoices, no matter how small or how big your church may be.

2. Good preaching creates a positive first impression.

In his helpful article, Planter, Become a Better Preacher, Yancey Arrington (teaching pastor at Clear Creek Community Church in Houston, Texas) suggests that newcomers will evaluate your church primarily on the basis of the preaching.

Most churches are concerned about first impressions. Are the grounds neat and groomed? Is there any trash on the property? Is there a place for our visitors to park? Is there anyone to show newcomers the way into the building? Do we have good signage? Can people find the restrooms easily? Do we have someone warm and welcoming at the front door to greet people?

So, preaching may be a "first impression" element also. Pay attention to what you say and how you say it every week. We want that first impression to be positive and encouraging because first impressions last a long time.

3. Good preaching announces our theology.

Most church websites contain a page that declares "What We Believe." The pulpit is the most effective place where congregations not only see what the church believes about certain doctrines, but also how they apply those doctrines.

People enter the doors holding all kinds of notions and expectations about what a church is and how a church should act. In the early days of our church planting experience in Windsor, Ontario, one Sunday two couples showed up, seemed to enjoy the service, and waited to speak to me at the back. But our conversation felt more like an attack. "Don't you believe in the Holy Spirit? Why aren't the sign gifts manifested in your services? Do you not believe in speaking in tongues?" They were incredulous.

Consistent biblical exposition will answer those kinds of questions and deal with misinformed expectations in context.

When we preach, we joyfully assert and clarify our theology; we make it as plain and as clear as possible, and disciple them in what we believe, why we believe it, and how we live it out day by day.

4. Good preaching helps us to grow in grace.

David Mathis, the executive editor for DesiringGod.org and pastor at Cities Church, writes, “When we sit attentively under the faithful preaching of the gospel, not only do we forget ourselves and refill our faith, but we are genuinely changed.”

The Apostle Paul urged his young, church planting protégé to preach the word, to be ready in season and out of season. He urged him to “reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience.” Why? Because a time is coming “when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Timothy 4:1-3, ESV).

Sound biblical preaching will help your congregation to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”

(Colossians 1:28)

5. Good preaching allows us to encounter the living Christ.

Faithful, Christ-centered preaching allows people to come face-to-face with Jesus Himself and experience the resurrection power of His gospel. As Martin Luther said, “To preach the gospel is nothing else than Christ’s coming to us or bringing us to him.” Jesus is the only One who can satisfy.

In a day when it seems hip to attack evangelicals and bash denominations, deconstruct the faith of our fathers, and embrace so-called “progressive Christianity,” let’s not waver or neglect the preaching of God’s Word in every church.

For the glory of God, and the good of your people, preach the Word!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Garth Leno lives in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, where he planted The Gathering Church in 2014 with help from Send Network. He holds graduate degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Bethel Theological Seminary and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Grace in the chaos

by Tom Bradley

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – We have been working to plant and grow CrossWinds WestSide in urban Grand Rapids for the past five years. My wife, Merri, and I constantly have seen the beauty and brokenness of our neighborhood. It is everywhere, we are immersed in it, and it is a little crazy at times.

It is a little crazy

The first night in our house when we moved from the suburbs, I remember seeing flashing strobe lights outside my front window. Walking up to the window to take a peek outside, I heard shouting “get down on the ground and stop resisting.” Having been a police chaplain for 20 years, I immediately knew what was happening.

This summer we had a repeat of that event on a Saturday morning. While waking up with coffee, my grandson and I heard shouting outside. We looked out the kitchen window to see someone being arrested in our driveway. “What is going on papa?” my grandson asked. Later, I found out the man actually called the police to turn himself in because of outstanding warrants, but panicked when they arrived and ran. So sad, but that's my neighborhood.

Living in an environment like this has taken a little getting used to. If my wife and I go for a walk at the end of the day, we know what areas to avoid, like the freeway underpasses where homeless people are bedding down for the night. If someone a little erratic approaches us and asks for money, or wants something, we are a little better prepared at being compassionate, but not enabling.

Sometimes it is a little scary and overwhelming, and we are not sure what to do. So often we meet people whose lives are the accumulation of years of chaos and depravity because of what others have done to them, or choices they have made.

In many ways, all of this is so big it is easy to wonder, what can a small church on the West Side do? We know we can't make a difference just ourselves, and there lies the great opportunity to see God work.

Brokenness and the Power of God

A friend of mine told me a few years ago, If you want to see the power of God try something you can't do. Our environment regularly brings us to a deep dependence on God to move, change hearts, and transform lives. In the face of overwhelming darkness, I often see the power and grace of God break through.

Things like; helping find shelter for a homeless family with a newborn on a cold winter night, comforting and counseling a family after their father was murdered, removing an elderly, lonely man from an abusive environment and getting him into safe housing with a loving CrossWinds church family, working with a homeless young man to finish his High School degree and get into college, and talking to a young man miraculously recovering from 17 stab wounds in the neck, who says to me in the hospital, “I think God has a purpose for my life.” I reply, “He does. Let's talk about that.”

In all the chaos of these lives, the constant is the opportunity for gospel conversations, for change, for a new spiritual life, and transformation through the power of Christ. I know its power because I was there once.

Pray for CrossWinds Westside, as we seek to make Jesus known in our neighborhood.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Bradley and Merri are North American Mission Board missionaries in Grand Rapids Michigan. They have been involved in Church Planting for over 25 years. They have 2 children and four grandchildren, and are completing the fourth year of their adventure at CrossWinds West Side. Follow their community on FB at facebook.com/cwindswestside.

100 Michigan pastors and leaders attend the Midwest Leadership Summit

by Jamie Lynn

SPRINGFIELD, IL – More than 100 Michigan pastors and church leaders headed to Springfield the week of Jan. 18-20 for the 2022 Midwest Leadership Summit. The Summit happens every other year and includes 9 Midwest state conventions and 12 states, Dakotas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas/Nebraska, Michigan, Minnesota/Wisconsin, Missouri, and Ohio. The Leadership Summit always drew 850 participants across the Midwest.

This year was not a disappointment. We were thrilled to have so many of our Michigan church leaders and pastors. The schedule was packed full of amazing speakers during the plenary sessions: Shane Pruitt (NAMB), Ben Mandrell (Lifeway), and Willie McLaurin (SBC Executive Committee). The worship team led as the room overflowed with people singing their hearts out in worship to God. The speakers were open, real and vulnerable as they shared the vision for reaching the Midwest (and the world) with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A favorite and relevant part of the plenary session is when the Midwest Practitioners speak. These are men who are doing ministry in the Midwest, share their ideas, and tell what is working, and where they are struggling. We heard from Kirk Kirkland, the pastor at Revive City Church in Cincinnati Ohio, David Martinez, Associate Pastor for Spanish Ministries at Northern Heights Baptist Church in Norfolk, Nebraska and Lead Ethnic Church Planting Catalyst for KNCSB and NAMB, and Jeff Mueller, Church Planter at Restore Church, Yankton, South Dakota. After these practitioners shared, there were many people who came up to encourage and pray over them.

There were 72 Breakout sessions. They fell under categories like: Current Issues, Revitalization, Leadership, Ministry Wives, Hispanic Ministries, Church Planting and Evangelism Discipleship. We had 6 session opportunities to attend the Breakout groups that would most help us in our ministries back at our home churches. The training was top notch and inspirational. To watch and listen to many of the sessions at mwadvance.com.

A special time of camaraderie among the Michigan attenders was had as our pastors and church leaders gathered on Tuesday evening after the session for a time of dessert, fellowship, and prayer. It was encouraging to know that these leaders came to the Summit to grow in their ministry skills and be heartened in their work at their church. Thank you to all the Michigan church leaders that came.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie Lynn is the Communications Director for the BSCM.

Peace during a pandemic

by Dan Russell

SOUTHGATE, MI – To help strengthen the pastors and church families of our Convention as we face this coronavirus crisis, here are some encouraging reminders on how to keep your trust in God during this pandemic.

Choose Faith Over Fear

Let's remember to let faith rule our hearts and not fear. I absolutely believe we should take this pandemic seriously, use precaution and exercise wisdom. At the same time, we can do so while keeping our faith in God.

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

(2 Timothy 2:1-7)

Choose Wisdom Over Worry

While we can still maintain our faith because of our unchanging God, it is still important to exercise wisdom instead of becoming paralyzed by worry. If there is an action you can do to protect yourself, do it. Use wisdom and listen to sound advice.

“So, incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding.”

(Proverbs 2:2)

Choose Prayer Over Panic

Prayer is the exact prescription the [Bible](#) gives us to cure panic. It’s easy to watch the news and overthink all the possible negative outcomes that can take place. All that will do is rob us of the peace God promises us for today. Prayer is powerful and effective and if we are too busy panicking instead of praying, we forfeit our greatest strength.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 4:6-7)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Dan Russell is the Executive Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Southgate, Michigan, a Church Strengtheners for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, and an adjunct professor in the Christian Ministry Department of Spring Arbor University at two campuses in southeastern Michigan. He has 36 years of pastoral experience, including lead pastorates in Missouri, Kansas, and Michigan. He and his wife, JoLinda, live in Brownstown, Michigan, and have three adult children, along with seven grandchildren.

What money can’t buy, what death can’t take

by Dr David L. Thompson

NASHVILLE, TN – What do you really have? No really, I’m not talking about a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. I’m talking about what do you really, really have? Someone wisely said, “All you really have is what money can’t buy and death can’t take!” If that is true, and I

believe that it is with all my heart, then it may benefit you to focus on the things that really matter in life.

I can think of a few things that really matter in life. I have a new hero named Sydney. Sydney Michelle McClaughlin is the fastest woman hurdler in the world in the 400 meter. She ran for the University of Kentucky and then represented the United States of America in the Olympics a few weeks ago. She is not my hero because she ran faster than anyone else, she is my hero because of what she said after she won the gold medal. She said, "What I have in Christ is far greater than this gold medal." Sydney has something money can't buy and death can't take away.

Florida's beloved Coach Bowden got it right—When asked about what he said to his players, he replied "Your dad gum right I preached to those boys. I cared about where they would spend eternity." (Bobby didn't always just say "dad gum") Coach had something money can't buy, and death can't take away. No doubt he helped shape a generation of young men that would go on to become great leaders and Godly husbands and fathers.

Do you have a life? Business and Christian leader, Dennis Phillips says, "A job is what you are hired to do, a career is what you're paid to do, but a life vocation is what you are called to do". You, my dear friend, are called to pursue your purpose in life with incredible passion. That is something that no one can take from you.

I guess you could say Walt Disney had that. Disney believed if you could dream it, you could do it. He never saw the great Disney park with his own physical eyes. Shortly before the grand opening, he passed away. There, on inauguration day, a ticker tape parade ensued which lasted for days it seemed, all in Walt's honor. There, his wife was told by the CEO, "I wish Walt was here to see all this." She replied, "Oh he saw it, that's why it's here".

If you have a dream, be passionate about it because no one can take that from you. I guess what I'm saying is that it is not your relationship to things, but to people that matter now and for all eternity.

While I served as Secretary Treasurer for the pastors conference of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville Tennessee, I had the great privilege to lay hands on my mentor, Adrian Rogers. He had been diagnosed with cancer. I will never forget what he said, "I am in a win-win situation: If I live, I win. If I die, I win!"

That's the way it is for every child of God, only our Heavenly Father's heirs have something that money can't buy, and death can't take away. So, I ask you one more time, what do you really have in life? Don't wait for "Michael" or "Fred" or "Sandy" or some other storm to hit to alter your life.

With God's help, you too can have something money can't buy—and death can never ever take away—A beautiful and passionate life that belongs to Jesus Christ, and a loving relationship with those around you—that will last forever!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. David L. Thompson holds an undergraduate degree from Belmont University in Psychology and Religion, a graduate degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Education, and a doctorate in Counseling and Pastoral Psychology. He has served as a chairman of the Church Planting Group and Executive Committee Chair at the North American Mission Board for 10 years. He has been a Police Chaplain since 1991 and served as a Corporate Chaplain to the Coca Cola Bottling Company in Nashville, Tennessee where he resides with his wife. He has six children and five grandsons.

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