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Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

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Empty holes

by Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – In the early years of our marriage and ministry, Sabrina and I lived in the hamlet of Marathon, Texas at the edge of the Big Bend National Park. I worked in a small church as the associate pastor, which really meant that I was the personal slave of the pastor. It really was a great learning experience that I will value for the rest of my life.

One of the perks of that ministry assignment was that I had the opportunity to travel that region quite extensively. While driving those roads, the beauty and expanse of the vistas that were afforded me were almost incomprehensible. Jagged peaks and desert valleys filled my view from one horizon to the other. There awaited me around every turn visual delights and windows of wonder into God's great creation that those who have visited this part of our country will fully understand.

In my first year there, I was taken in by the enormity of it all, but as I spent more time in the area I began to take notice of the small and more intricate beauties of the landscape. The small reptiles and the tiny rodents that dotted the desert floors were amazing, as were the various cacti and flowering plants. The rocks, sand, and variations in strata seemed to have been painted by some great imaginative artist.

Something I began to notice as I traveled were mounds of rock and dirt at the base of mountains, knolls, and outcroppings. Their shapes and colors betrayed their manmade genesis and were somewhat out of place with their surroundings. I later discovered that these mounds of rocks and dirt were the results of men digging for gold ore in those desert hills. As I began to purposefully look for and observe these variations, it was obvious that hundreds of them could be seen across the landscape.

Some were located high in the crevasses of lofty peaks while others were more easily accessible at the base of foothills. Their locations seemed to have little to do with logic or reason and did not seem to follow any pattern. At one time this region boasted some profitable silver and quicksilver mines, and I have been told that very few true producing gold mines ever existed.

Pioneers, adventurers, and travelers from across the globe came to this barren region of West Texas to find their fortunes and build the empires that obviously, only existed in their minds. With all their worldly possessions in a few bags and bundles, they left the comforts of cities, towns, and villages to live the solitary life of a prospector. The future would hold unbelievable loneliness and isolation, and conditions that would make even the residents of Hades happy to live in the abyss. It was a hard life, yet untold numbers of men gambled their livelihoods and very lives for the almost nonexistent chance at riches.

Today, I see person after person doing the same thing as those wishful prospectors of the past. They leave all that is good and right to stake a claim on nothing more than a fantasy that has

about as much substance as the dreams that produced them. Instead of building their lives on that which is real and lasting, they scurry about poking holes in barren soils that offer nothing but misery. And just like the abandoned mines and shafts of the Big Bend of Texas, this present life is pocked with the desperate diggings of disappointed men. All they have to show for their efforts are empty holes.

It has been my experience, and now my conviction, that fulfillment, happiness, and peace are found much closer to home and it is unnecessary to traipse across the barrens of this world to possess them. In fact, those wonderful states of being can only be found in one's heart. Not the muscular pump that delivers life-giving blood to our bodies, but the inner Soul and Spirit of the human being. And here is the good part, all of this peace and fulfillment is a free gift. Peace, fulfillment, and complete satisfaction are ours for the asking. All He asks for in return is our hopeless and hapless lives. It sounds like a good trade to me. Besides, it is my understanding that when we get to heaven they use gold instead of asphalt to pave the streets. What a deal!

Stop digging and start believing. Empty holes or *full-filled* hearts? It's your choice.

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (*John 14:27*)

"My fruit *is* better than gold, yes, than fine gold, And my revenue than choice." (*Proverbs 8:19*)

"There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother. Yet *there is* no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches. *But he never asks*, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" This also *is* vanity and a grave misfortune. (*Ecclesiastes 4:8*)

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.

Kindergarten–adults

by Tony Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – "Plays well with others," marked with an "S," made my parents smile in 1964. The "S" stood for "Satisfactory." The report card, from my kindergarten teacher, meant that with other classmates I shared, took turns, and helped others in the classroom. My newly

expanded community for the next years of my life was Stalker Elementary School in Flint. I easily recall those sweet years of expanded relationships and new rules.

White milk and chocolate milk crates were poised on angles so that we could help ourselves to the tiny half-pint cartons. The aroma of Dutch windmill cookies is still fresh in my mind. Nap times meant each child retrieved his or her own colorful woven rag-rug to rest on the cool tile floor, while the teacher relaxed at her desk yet watching us and gently hushing us when we whispered to one another. In addition to eating and sleeping, I did learn some things.

Today, I enjoy working with adults for whom I would mark an “S” when it comes to “plays well with others.” I like over-achieving kindergarten-adults. Two such outstanding, generous pastors are Matt Carter of Cedar Street Church in Holt and Ed Emmerling of Westside Baptist Church in Flushing. These men led their established churches to share their structures, resources, and energy to benefit two new church plants in Michigan.

Matt Carter and Cedar Street Church “played well” with The Commons Church in East Lansing which is led by church planter and pastor, Austin Wadlow. The Commons Church is only seventeen months old. During these past COVID months, when restrictions hindered The Commons Church from meeting in-person, it was Cedar Street Church who flung their doors wide-open to The Commons Church. When Carter was thanked for assisting Wadlow, Carter replied, “No thanks necessary. We love helping the new church. It’s nothing more than what we’re called to do. Our congregation wants to be on mission with God.”

Recent breaking news is that The Commons has been gifted a free, 5-acre piece of property with a 20,000 square foot building because a smaller congregation wants to unite with the mission of The Commons Church. Matt Carter and Cedar Street Church helped The Commons Church continue their momentum of praying, gathering and worshiping which led to a breakthrough in church planting.

Ed Emmerling and Westside Baptist Church “played well” with Union Flint Church in Flint Township which is led by church planter and pastor, Jason Loewen. Union Flint Church launched during February 2021. It’s a newborn church plant. The collaboration between Emmerling and Loewen is startling when you see that the established church is on the north side of the Flint River and the new church plant is on the south side of the river, minutes away from one another.

Some established pastors might see the church plant as a threat, but not so with Emmerling or Westside Church. Emmerling said, “I’ve reached a stage in my life where I don’t care who gets credit, I just want to see people saved.”

Westside Baptist Church gathers on Sundays while Union Flint Church gathers on Thursday evenings. The common facilities are shared while the outreach to the surrounding community is doubling due to the heroic partnership of two pastors and two congregations. The mutual

respect and support between Emmerling and Loewen is evident to anyone who watches their interaction.

The background for the word “kindergarten” is interesting. It comes from the German language and literally means, “a children’s garden” or more precisely “a garden of children.” Can you see the beautiful picture those words create in the imagination? Diversity. Differing colors, heights, aromas, shapes, formations. Each one flowering or blooming at their correct time. Gardens of spiritual children can be similar. The pastors of these four churches are partners, and they are harmoniously tending to gardens of children for the Lord. Would you join me in praying that God will give us more kindergarten-adults who would receive an “S” when it comes to “plays well with others” on their report cards?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Be the Church

by Mike Durbin

PLYMOUTH, MI – A small group of pastors from across Michigan gathered at Chapel Pointe Church in Hudsonville. Months of pandemic separation were quickly shaken off as they caught up with old friends and made new ones. They were drawn together by the compelling vision of ***“Be The Church: Healthy leaders strengthening and starting churches to advance a gospel movement.”***

“Be The Church” was born out of Chapel Pointe’s prayer to see the spiritual leaders of today and tomorrow equipped through authentic leadership development, to foster relationships that weather any storm, and discover the massive impact they can make in churches and communities for the kingdom of God.

Tim Patterson, Executive Director of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM), quickly recognized a kindred spirit when he met Chapel Pointe’s Pastor, Joel Wayne. Both men are driven by the passion to advance God’s Kingdom by strengthening existing churches and starting new ones.

Patterson says, “When churches and pastors come together for the advancement of the Kingdom and for mutual encouragement and benefit, we then have the Spirit empowered opportunity to truly Be The Church.”

Biblical leadership presentations and engaging round table discussions filled the encounter. Questions were energetically discussed like:

“What is the one thing we should be learning from you and your church?”

“What does your church get most distracted by?”

“If we were to start over today, what would we continue doing? What would we stop doing?”

“What are you learning? Who are you learning it from?”

The lively table and large group discussion vividly demonstrated that great ministry is happening in churches of all sizes all over Michigan, that there is much we can learn from each other, and that we are better together.

“The '**Be The Church**' encounter was well worth the trip. It was insightful in its practical approach and inspirational in its outlook and vision. Pastor Wayne and his staff were wonderful hosts, and I would strongly encourage any Pastor to be a part of this ministry initiative” (*Billy Walker, Calvary Baptist*).

“I am highly excited about a greater collaboration of churches for the further advancement of the Gospel, more fruitful Kingdom work, and brighter ways to be the light of Christ to our dark world. “**Be The Church**” is an extraordinarily providential channel in the hands of the Lord in these days through which the work of many churches can flow with exceptional effectiveness” (*Jerome Taylor, Eastgate Baptist*).

Biblical Leadership Traits

- Be honest and have Biblical relationships with other leaders. Mature leaders invite accountability. Focus on Christ.
- Be “helpable”—let other people help you. Labor together. “If you’re doing it alone, it’s by your own choice.”
- Recruit and invest in the spiritually motivated (Ephesians 3:20-21)
- Surround yourself with leaders who can do what you’re asking better than you, not ones who are just like you.
- Evaluate Desire vs. Design. Are we doing what we desire to do? Or are we doing what we are designed for?

- Pursue Biblical Metrics: Have people share stories of transformation; How many does your church have in small groups? Are they multiplying themselves? How long does it take before someone is serving in your church? How many and who are we sending out?

Pastor Ed Emmerling of Westside Church captured the potential of the movement: **“Be the Church”** will bring churches and leaders together in a way that we have not seen in our lifetime. Partnering, in the trenches to punch holes in the darkness of Michigan. It will raise up leaders to a new level and in turn launch our churches into greater impact than we have ever dreamed or even thought to pray for.”

For more information, visit BeTheChurch.org.

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.

Be contagious

by Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI – Now, I realize “CONTAGIOUS” is a dreaded word right now however, for the Christian it should be a way of life.

Have you ever met someone for the first time and you just knew they were a Christian, and their witness made you want to be a better Christian? Maybe you know someone who, no matter how many rotten tomatoes this life throws at them, they just make more ketchup. It’s contagious! Hang around them long enough and you learn how to make ketchup too. It’s contagious!

There have been several prominent friends in my past who have infected my life with theirs. To me they seemed so tuned in to God there seemed to be a telephone line connecting them directly to heaven - as if they were constantly talking and listening to God.

Sometimes I feel like I’m trying to talk with God via Zoom with two hundred other people on the chat, and everyone is talking at once. I digress, but my point is they have impacted, inspired, and infected my life with their relationship with God.

In Scripture, in the book of John we see an amazing encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. Jesus was sitting by a well when she came to draw water from it. After much questioning and conversation, Jesus reveals to her who He is, who she is, and what she believes. What happens next is amazing...

"So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' They went out of the town and were coming to him... Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony..." (*John 4:28-30,39*).

She was infected, and she was contagious. Who Jesus is and what He did for her was just too great to keep to herself - she had to tell everyone. Contagious!

As Christians, as the church, we should feel the same compulsion. Who Jesus is and what He did for us is just too great for us to keep to ourselves. Our contagious infection gives Life. Our infection does not make people sick or put them in the hospital, it brings Hope, Love, Joy, abundant Grace and Mercy. Our contagious faith - Jesus - is the cure for sin and all of its diseases.

In a world suffering from a pandemic of pride, selfishness and greed, Jesus is the 100% effective vaccination. As Believers this is our call, this is our mission: infect our neighbors with the love of Christ, the only cure for this world - be contagious!

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.

A tale of two streets

by Tom Bradley

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – As an urban church planting pastor on the northwest side of Grand Rapids, Michigan, I am immersed in an environment that reflects two constant realities — beauty and brokenness.

To some degree, we all see this. Suburban or urban, our world is immersed in the throes of the Fall; however, in my previous years of suburban pastoral experience, the stark realities were

just never quite as blatant. Brokenness is always present in our world, but it was better camouflaged in the suburbs.

In my urban neighborhood, brokenness is in my face, every day. In my 30-plus years as a pastor in the suburbs, I never had someone arrested on my two-foot front lawn, had someone go through my trash for recyclable material, and never had someone accost my wife while she planted flowers in the yard.

This is one way to look at my street. But that's not the whole story, because with the gospel, the same street can take on a very different flavor.

Our neighborhood during the pandemic

Last summer, distress was particularly heightened in my neighborhood because of the COVID-19 pandemic. People increasingly looked to substances to manage stress, and the drug activity dramatically increased. One house on my street seemed like a fast-food drive-through—minus the food. Cars pulled up, the window rolled down and money and goods exchanged. I would look out the window and say to my wife, Merri, “Well, at least business is booming for somebody during the pandemic.”

With the increased drug activity also came increased chaos, angry shouting and threats. Nonetheless we sought to love our neighbors in Jesus' name, prayed with them and cared for them as opportunities came up. Sometimes it was doing something simple like running a hose or an extension cord next door when their utilities were shut off.

Honestly, it was also awkward at times, and we often felt out of place, not knowing what to do. But wherever we confront spiritual darkness—in the suburbs or the city—we have a choice, and as people who believe the kingdom of God is forcefully advancing, that choice is clear. We choose to press into the discomfort, the awkwardness, that some may come to know Him.

Neighborhood block party

When Merri and I began the journey of starting CrossWinds West Side three years ago, we committed ourselves to being agents of change, to confront the darkness and proclaim the good news about Jesus with whatever abilities we have.

During the stressful pandemic summer many in my neighborhood were feeling isolated, cut off, fearful and depressed. So, we decided to throw a block party. It was a little unusual during the pandemic to throw a party, but our city was starting to realize the stress of social isolation and celebrated our desire to get people together, while respecting social distancing.

I went around the neighborhood and shared our plans to throw a block party for everyone and got signatures from most of the neighbors to shut down the street. One of my neighbors — admittedly little rough around the edges — told me, “This is a good thing. Let me know if

someone doesn't want to sign your sheet, and I'll take care of it." I thanked him but didn't take him up on the offer.

The city then gave us a permit to shut down our street for two hours and even brought out barricades the day of the event. Our CrossWinds team came out with food and helped run games for the kids.

Merri and I were nervous about whether or not our neighbors would come out, but slowly they did.

From across the street, Luiz and her family dragged a large propane grill to the side of the street and made delicious pupusas, a thick flatbread common in El Salvador and Honduras. Others started coming with food and chairs and the party began.

So, for a couple of hours my street — the neighborhood — came together. Some greet me on the street now as *pastor*. Another neighbor from one of the dealer houses broke down in tears and asked if I could pray for them. Another neighbor asked me last week if I do weddings — their daughter and boyfriend, who share two kids, want to talk to me about it.

Relationships are being built, and conversations about the gospel are starting. This is the same street, but in some ways, it's also becoming a different street. May it continue to become a road leading many families to know Jesus as Lord.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom and Merri Bradley planted CrossWinds West Side in Grand Rapids, Michigan three years ago. If you would like to learn more or receive their newsletter feel free to contact them at pastortom@windschurch.net.

The Pandemic Pastor Relief Fund

by Jamie Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – The Pandemic Pastor Relief Fund has been able to help many Pastors in Michigan who were struggling during this difficult last year. The 2020 State Mission Offering was generously given by the Michigan churches and 100% was set aside to help pastors.

There were 19 requests received for the fund and a total of \$36,000 has been given so far. Here are some of the reasons for the requests:

- An up north pastor, his wife and daughter all 3 contracted COVID
- A co-vocational pastor's wife lost her job due to extended quarantine
- A pastor's wife lost her job due to restaurants being closed
- A pastor hasn't been supported in months due to the church not meeting in-person
- A pastor's wife lost her job due to COVID and the church loss of income due to quarantine.
- Reduction of income from the church and financial support due to quarantine
- Bi-vocational pastor out of work due to shut-down. Family is struggling.
- Loss of income from church due to pandemic quarantine. The pastor is now seeking outside work.
- A Pastor of an older congregation who hasn't had in-person church and has difficulty with online services, struggling with chronic health conditions.
- A church has been barely making it financially through last year and now the pastor has developed major health issues.
- Bi-vocational pastor and wife lost their outside jobs due to quarantine shutdown.
- Medical bills and surgery costs with loss of income in the church due to the pandemic.
- Pastor wife lost her job that supports her husband and has mounting medical bills.
- Loss of income from the church and discovered stage 4 liver cancer.

The pastors and their families that have received these relief help have been so grateful. Many have sent a thank-you note filled with gratefulness and words of thankfulness. They expressed how having a convention of churches surrounding them kept them from feeling alone and overwhelmed in their situation.

One pastor expressed his gratitude in this way:

"I can't tell you how much this means to me. The last few months have been a real test. I lost my mom in December to COVID. My wife was diagnosed with lyme disease. In 2021 I have had unexplained pain in all of my major joints. When my wife damaged the car and house backing out of the garage, it was all I could take. I never expected to receive a gift like this. You have been a huge blessing and encouragement to me. Thank you so much. Hopefully I will get an opportunity to repay the blessing. Please let everyone know."

These relief checks would never have happened if it weren't for Michigan churches generously giving to the Frances Brown State Mission Offering last year. Many of our Michigan churches

have done well through the difficult time, but there are others who have struggled. It is a wonderful moment to see how Michigan churches have stepped in to help other their sister churches that needed a little help this year.

This is a huge thank you to all who gave to the State Mission Offering – Pandemic Pastor Relief Fund. You are helping so many Michigan Pastors and their families.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie M. Lynn, I'm married to a God warrior, have 3 wonderful married children and 9 super grandkids. I love working at the BSCM office to help the churches in the Great Lakes area to thrive, serve God by drawing others to Him and to love their communities.

Small group, big call

by Carl N. Miller

HARVEY, MI – Our church is small, just 22 members, but the heart of our people is meeting the needs of others.

But no matter the size of the congregation, there are many things you can all do to serve God, one another, and your community. Harvey Baptist Church is entirely lay-led, unpaid volunteers from the worship team, to audio visual workers, leaders in every area, maintenance and janitorial staff, office and kitchen workers, and pastor.

2020 was a challenging year for individuals and churches everywhere. We closed for a month, spending one of those Sunday's cutting and piling wood for a family with medical issues. Many of our ladies provided meals for families with various needs.

But soon our people began asking if we could not meet since we had plenty of room to social distance. So, while many larger churches were still closed, we began to meet every Sunday. Yes, we still have some families who continue to self-isolate, but most feel the need to worship our Lord together.

Many give to our Dollar-A-Week account where we encourage those who can, to put a dollar or more a week into a jar. This money has helped pay rent for a lady hospitalized, bought food for many, aided in medical expenses, paid some dental and medical bills, and provided a variety of ministries. In 2019 we gave out \$1,721 and in 2020 an amazing \$6,328.

We have collected money in baby bottles for the local Care Clinic with \$1,236 raised in 2020. This helps meet the needs of pregnant moms, counseling, etc. We are actively involved in helping the Gideons provide Bibles for local hotels and other ministries. In 2019 we provided \$2,035 and in 2020 it reached \$2,435.

In 2019, we packed 172 Christmas shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse, and this past year we had 106.

We provide a Thanksgiving Meal to those in our community every year around Thanksgiving. We usually have 75 people attend. Of course, we had to change plans this year and only serve those we have immediate contact with. Tables were set up where families sat together, and our Hostess, Sonja Hiller, arranged 3 servers to keep everyone safe. We had a much smaller group of about 30 but the fellowship was invaluable.

In early December for the last several years, we have had a Kid's Christmas Shopping Day. Up to 50 kids can sign up. Our people purchase gifts during the year, or give money for gifts so each child can bring a list of 8 family members they want to shop for. A shopper is assigned to each child, and areas are set up to wrap the gifts. The kids are served pizza and juice and have a place for crafts and games. There is absolutely NO charge.

Obviously, this was a challenge this year, but kids have had so many disappointments that we felt we had to work something out. So, we extended our shopping hours to last from noon to 4:00. This allowed us to have kids come by family every half hour. No food or games were provided. We cut our workers down from 32 to 8 (and they worked hard!). Each worker took a child shopping and wrapped their gifts. We were able to provide for 27 children.

Our congregation is small. And like so many Michigan churches, the challenges have been big. But that has not stopped our call to serve our community and to be a witness for Jesus Christ.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carl N. Miller has served as volunteer pastor of Harvey Baptist Church in Harvey, Michigan in the beautiful Upper Peninsula since 2013. He is married to Leafa Miller who is a wonderful partner in the ministry. He loves the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and the church's location on the south side of beautiful Marquette.

Our Reasonable Faith

by Chad Wells

That Coming Generations Would Know the Lord & His Work

"All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel." (Judges 2:10 NASB)

BATTLE CREEK, MI – Last year, my oldest son turned eighteen. The scope and scale of change we've experienced through his lifetime is mind boggling. Some of what his generation accepts as normative had not even occurred to us just 25 years ago.

With the world and all its voices constantly available at their fingertips, this generation has been exposed to ideas and ideologies that contradict the truth we hold dear.

How will our churches rise to the occasion? Will we intentionally convey the gospel to our children & their generation? Will we lovingly listen and answer the questions that arise from the influence of an increasingly hostile society? Will we prepare ourselves to give the reason for the hope we've found?

Our Reasonable Faith is a conference designed to equip people from the pew and the pastorate as we strive to see rising generations know the Lord and His work.

Join us as Tim McGrew equips us to engage in conversations without casualties while offering clear answers to the most common questions and objections to Christianity. Andy Giessman will offer his insights into ministry to those in the rising generation gleaned from experience on the university campus. Lydia McGrew will be pointing out the consistency of the gospels regarding the personality of Jesus. Tom McCuddy will encourage us to reconnect apologetics with discipleship to help believers be better prepared to engage those around us.

The South Central Baptist Association is blessed to once again partner with the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) to offer this conference. Join us at Faith Baptist Church in Battle Creek from 8:30am to 4pm on Saturday, March 13th. A catered lunch will be provided which is worth the price of admission, just \$15 if you pre-register. Come as a group expecting to be encouraged and equipped for such a time as this. Share the promotional video available on the registration page:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/our-reasonable-faith-tickets-124269534523>

Anticipating that his ministry would soon come to a violent end, Paul writes to Timothy imploring him to faithfully pass on the truth by instructing reliable men who would also be able

to do the same. We must also prayerfully and intentionally pass on the truth once and for all delivered to the saints that coming generations would know the Lord and His work.

To register, visit bscm.org/register.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Wells is in his sixteenth year as the pastor of First Baptist Church of Portage. He also serves as the Associational Mission Strategist for the South Central Baptist Association. He & his wife Angela are blessed with five children.

Greer pivots to local association

by Dr. Tony L Lynn

PLYMOUTH, MI – Darren Greer, after eleven years of service with the North American Mission Board (NAMB), resigned January 2021. Greer’s career with NAMB started on January 20, 2010. This month, Greer pivoted from his former role with NAMB, as a church planting catalyst, to an increased role as the associational missionary strategist for [Northwest Baptist Association](#) in Michigan.

Greer’s early life was in Lebanon, Missouri. During the 1980’s, he pursued a university degree in criminal justice administration, and subsequently experienced a call to Christian ministry while assisting as a teammate with a church plant in Branson, Missouri. Greer recalled, “During those days, church planting teams were given a double-wide trailer and a pat-on-the-back when they started new churches. We’ve come a long way compared to the support, training, coaching, and encouragement we give now.”

During the eighties, Greer devoted himself to ministry by attending Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and by serving in ministry roles as minister of education and youth. It was during those same years that Greer explored Michigan, first as a summer missionary then he later returned to Michigan to serve the Lord in various ministry roles by permanently moving to Michigan in 1987.

With the Lord’s help, Greer has faithfully made it through other transitions in his life. His first wife passed away three-months after giving birth to their son Cameron. His second wife, Sharon Fishell-Greer and he married in October 2010. Sharon was the state convention’s elected president of the Woman’s Missionary Union for five years and the first woman in state convention history to serve in the roles of second and first vice-president. Both Greer and

Sharon, will continue to serve the Lord as partners in the ministry with each of their distinct callings and gifts. They have set up their home in Kalkaska, Michigan.

When asked what he enjoyed while serving with NAMB and the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) as a church planting catalyst, Greer replied, "I loved seeing what God did across the entire state with men like Josh Tovey of [Redemption Church](#), Grandville and David Hiser of [Antrim Community Church](#), Bellaire and many others. God never ceases to amaze me at what he does and how he does it."

Greer was asked what he is looking forward to doing in his role as an associational missionary strategist. His voice displayed his excitement when he said, "I am looking forward to working at a closer level with the churches in the association. I want to discover places where we can plant new churches with NAMB. I want to continue, with joy, my more than thirty years of service in the northwest region of the lower peninsula of the state."

State Director of Missions, Tony Lynn, said of Greer's former service and new transition, "Greer has always and will always be a friend to all of Michigan's Great Commission Baptists regardless of the role he serves. Greer's desire to see the Good News of Christ advance, disciples trained, churches strengthened, and churches planted is evident by the humble manner in which Greer serves others. I was blessed to have worked closely with Greer which allowed me to appreciate him even more as a brother in the ministry."

[Northwest Baptist Association](#) consists of ten churches, of which three were planted or replanted within the past five years. The churches are located in Bellaire, Frankfort, Traverse City, Cadillac, Lake City, Alanson, Cheboygan and Kingsley. If you're interested in discovering ways in which you can partner with Darren Greer and [Northwest Baptist Association](#) you can write to Greer at GreerDarren@hotmail.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

Shahid & Maroofa Kamal: Sharing A Living God

DELTA, BRITISH COLUMBIA – **Shahid Kamal’s God is a living God—One who answers prayer. Shahid and his wife, Maroofa, spend their lives introducing Him to the more than 300,000 South Asians who call the Greater Vancouver area home.**

“Hindus have many visible gods, and Sikhs have many gurus,” said Shahid, who planted South Asian Community Church in Surrey, part of metro Vancouver. “In the midst of this complex situation, we are trying to help them to know, believe and receive Jesus Christ.”

And over and over again, the Kamals see that transformation happens through prayer.

“Our prayer ministry is one of the successful connecting points,” Shahid said. “Many came to our church for the very first time for prayer. They have specific prayer requests. And, praise God, God answered them and showed them that He’s a living God.”

Prayer Requests

- For the church’s prayer ministry to continue to open doors for the gospel.
- For South Asians in Surrey to be drawn toward Jesus.

For more information about the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and Week of Prayer for North American Missions, visit www.AnnieArmstrong.com.

Are we spiritually obese?

by Rick Marcus

CLIO, MI – There is something about food, it’s enjoyable, satisfying, comforting and nostalgic. It connects people, cultures, families, friends, and brings people together. Many of our celebrations and traditions are surrounded by specialty foods... Cake for Birthdays, Turkey for Thanksgiving, Candy for Easter, Valentines, Halloween and Paczki’s for Fat Tuesday. The list keeps going. If there’s a tradition, there is a food.

We all have a favorite and we all need it to live... but sometimes we live for it. The joke has been for years that we as Baptists have taken this food thing to the next level... with a good ole pot-luck.

Food also creates problems, with the fact that it is necessary for life, food can easily become an addiction. If we are honest food has become an acceptable addiction and with that acceptance and the necessity, it's a very hard addiction to step away from. A good thing has become too much of a good thing.

I personally know this struggle and the freedom God can bring from this sin. I could go deeper with this, but I want to look at food more on the spiritual side as the church.

Scripture many times compares food and the Word of God. We read this in passages such as:

'Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart, for I bear your name, LORD God of Armies.' (*Jeremiah 15:16*)

"How sweet Your word is to my taste — sweeter than honey in my mouth." (*Psalms 119:103*)

"...nourished by the words of the faith and the good teaching that you have followed." (*1 Timothy 4:6b*)

Church, with the comparison of food and God's Word, I want to ask us a few things.

How is our food consumption? Are we in the Word, allowing it to nourish us?

Has the Word become tradition? We consume it as we gather together and we consume it on our own, but is consumption as far as it goes?

Do we take in more and more of the Word, but do nothing with it? Does it produce little to no energy, do we consume and then sit actionless?

Are we spiritually obese?

Of course, the Word is to be consumed. However, we are to do something with it. We should be fed by the word, propelled and energized to take action.

"But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." (*James 1:22*)

Church, may we not be spiritually obese, but fit in Jesus! May we not be known for our potlucks and knowledge about food, but may Jesus be made known by a church that is taking action in response to His Word.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick Marcus is Pastor of City Church in Clio, where he serves alongside his wife Rachel and their 4 kids. City Church is 1 of 3 Re-plants in the BSCM. God is at work in Re-planting Churches all over North America through your NAMB support.

For more info about Re-Planting please reach out to [Tony Lynn](#).

Face Lift and Faith Lift

by Jim Stolt

PLYMOUTH, MI – One of the most difficult things to do in an established church is to bring about significant change. But God, (I love those words!) has changed us as a church, revived us and has enabled us to completely change our focus. All of it started at a Midwest Advance Summit Meeting in 2018. We were without a pastor and I was the Youth Pastor trying to keep everything going. God worked in my heart during those sessions and began to open my eyes to the fact that we as a church were going about everything the wrong way. We were trying so hard to get people to come to us when what we needed to do was focus on sending our people out of our walls and into our community. I shared what I had learned with the elders, and we began to pray through how we could change.

At the same time, our church was actively searching for a pastor. Though numerous people asked me to consider taking the position, I really wasn't interested because I was loving youth ministry and was still in seminary. In due time, God worked on my heart, I quit running from Him and I submitted my resume. The search team was ecstatic, stating that that was what they had been praying for the entire time. That following May, I was elected as the new pastor.

Over the next year, the elders and I began to roll out a plan called *Faith Lift* to completely change the structure of the church and its purpose. Some of it had been developed in theory but we moved it into reality. We changed the name of the church from Praise Baptist to Praise Community to reflect that we were there to bless the community and make a difference in it. We also reworked our branding by creating a new website, creating a logo and starting intentional social media interaction. We restructured our church into 7 branches so that every ministry fell under a branch and had leadership over it. We became much more outreach focused, and worked hard to develop ways to bless our community and to get into neighborhoods.

At the same time, we also started a *Face Lift* which would bring our foyer and sanctuary out of a 1970's vibe and into a more modern feel. We decided to use a good percentage of our savings from the sale of property to make significant changes to move forward instead of using it to stay at the same place.

During the most intensive point of construction, we concluded services for a month and instead held workshops on spiritual gifts and how to use them. Our goal was to have every person take a spiritual gift inventory test, and then help them to get plugged in to a ministry.

We had a grand reopening on November 3, 2019 and were up and running as Praise Community Church for a few months before COVID-19 hit. Since then we have rolled with the punches and have focused on our online presence and connecting through social media. Like every other church, we are looking for ways to connect with our community while dealing with the restrictions and apprehensions that come with COVID.

God has been so faithful during all of the change and throughout the pandemic. The people of the church have been so supportive throughout the entire process and have remained flexible making it all possible and exciting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Stolt has been in full-time ministry for twenty years in youth ministry, music ministry and pastoral ministry. He has been the Senior Pastor at Praise for almost three years. He and his wife, Karyn, have been married for 23 years and have two children, Jacob (19) and Sarah (17).

“You Do You, Let Jesus Do Jesus”

by Rob Freshour

HIGHLAND, MI – I turn 60 this year. Crazy! I read a report years ago suggesting if a person reaches age 60, they are expected to live another 22 years on average. I may graduate to glory by the time I am 82. The first six decades evaporated like misty breath in Michigan winter. None of us knows how many days we have left here. We do know the rest of our lives starts now. How can I make the rest of my life the best of my life?

The best way I know to make a difference is to invest in other people. I look around these days and see much to distract us and discourage us. Maybe I can deposit a word of hope here, a little ray of sunlight and blue sky in this grey season.

These days, I shepherd a delightful Michigan church who for two years prior to COVID-19 averaged 60 people in attendance. Midway through February 2021, we are seeing 29 people per Sunday. (We suspended in-person gatherings for most of 2020.)

Most days, I am thrilled to do what I do now. Some days, however, I slip into the muck of what Priscilla Shirer calls “comparative righteousness,” a deceitful and dangerous substitute for truth. Our foe delights in trapping us with wrong metrics and lesser motives for dubious pursuits of questionable success.

We pastors are especially susceptible to the allure of numbers. Almost six out of ten churches today average less than 100 people in Sunday worship. This number has been expanding for more than a decade now. According to a 2015 study, less than 20 percent of these churches have “high spiritual vitality.” Depressing, right?

Numbers can be our friend. They can also trick us. Sam Rainer reminds us that churches of 25, 50, and 100 are common. If we pastor a smaller church, we may feel less significant than larger churches. Larger churches are the exception, not the norm. What we see or think we see with our physical eyes cannot compare to what is actually true, what is happening in the spiritual realm, the real world.

Some simple reminders keep me hopeful. First, healthy church growth ONLY accompanies healthy personal growth in the leadership. Church growth that does not is risky and perilous to the leader, the church, and the community. (Think RZIM as a reference.)

Jesus tells us He will build His church (Matthew 16:18). We are invited to partner with Him to populate Heaven with our friends, our family, our neighbors, and the nations. My advice: You do you, and let Jesus do Jesus. By the way, “you do you” for a Christ-follower is always letting Jesus do Jesus.

Jesus did attract large numbers; however, He shepherded a small group. At most, the size of His congregation was 70 or 72 people (Luke 10). His shepherding style was to make disciples whom He then charged to do what He did – make disciples. We cannot make disciples from the pulpit, no matter how large an audience we draw.

Jesus does compare us to other disciples. As with Peter, when the Lord deals with us, He calls us to love Him and to follow Him. He is not in the habit of talking to us about someone else’s story (John 21:20-22).

Everybody needs Jesus. Not everybody thinks they need Jesus, but most will wonder at some point. Live your life in such a way that when the people who know you wonder if they need Jesus, they will think of you and decide you might be able to help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Freshour came to Michigan in 2002 to join the BSCM-Church Growth Ministries Team. In 2006, Rob went to pastor one of our Michigan churches. Today he pastors the Highland Community Church in Highland, MI.

Sharing all good things

by Chad Wells

"The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.
(*Galatians 6:6 NASB*)

PORTAGE, MI – Allow me to candidly plead with you for the sake of your pastor. It has been a difficult year, and he could use your encouragement. Are you willing to share all good things? Galatians 6:6, *Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches*, is often cited when discussing pastoral compensation, but our focus is on a different application of the text. This verse gives a simple command to the individual believer who is being instructed in the word: share all good things. Spirit-powered obedience to this command will bless both your pastor and the church.

The root of the words translated *taught/teaches* in this text refers to personal, ongoing instruction by word of mouth. Teaching like this assumes relationship and repetition. Being taught the word is more than a weekly information dump. Ongoing, accountable relationships allow content to be applied directly in the context of life. By sharing all good things, the believer engages with the teacher in a way that reinforces the impact of the word and brings glory to God.

Christian content is instantly available in a variety of media formats, but growth and accountability depend on additional relational proximity. The production values of the megachurch livestream may greatly exceed the Radio Shack hodgepodge your church cobbled together. The skills demonstrated by past heroes of proclamation and modern celebrity preachers may easily outpace your pastor. Consume what you will (with discernment), but remember they are not charged to give an account for you.

The reality of pastoral responsibility weighs heavily, and even good under-shepherds struggle with how to minister more proactively. We long to celebrate God's power at work in the lives of those we serve, but we are more often confronted with crisis or complaints. Walking with people through difficulty and desperation is a privilege, but discipleship also takes place whenever believers share all good things. What a blessing it is to hear how the Lord has used our humble service for His glory and your benefit.

Those who rightly divide the word of truth are encouraged to hear how those being taught are growing in the Lord. Let your pastor specifically know how the Lord impacts your life through the teaching of the word. You could text, send a letter, mail a card, place a phone call, write an email, zoom, or make an appointment for a face-to-face conversation. Is there a good thing? Share it.

As we yearn for Christian fellowship free from covid-inspired restrictions and reticence, let us be diligent to share all good things with our pastors. A year of having decreased opportunities

for interaction and proximity makes this task even more urgent. Virtual worship services deliver content, but curtail communication, connection, and accountability. If you must worship remotely, please remember to stay connected by sharing all good things. Your pastor will thank you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Wells is in his 16th year as the pastor of First Baptist Church of Portage. He also serves as the Associational Mission Strategist for the South Central Baptist Association. He & his wife Angela are blessed with five children.

Pandemic division causing pastors to leave ministry, pastoral mentor says

by Diana Chandler

LOUISVILLE, KY (BP) – Brian Croft jokes that masks are the new “color of the carpet argument” in churches, with similarly poor outcomes. Pastors are resigning from the stress “kind of in a way I’ve never really seen.”

The founder of [Practical Shepherding](#) transitioned from fulltime pastoring to lead the shepherding outreach fulltime in January, pulled by a need for coaching and counseling that has steadily increased among pastors over the past decade.

Then came COVID-19.

“I know of pastors who are quitting just over the stress of this issue and what it’s causing in their churches, and I know churches splitting over whether you should wear a mask or not,” Croft said. “COVID has impacted every pastor to some degree. Usually it has brought more challenges and more difficulty.”

Pastors are pulled by conflicting views among congregants over whether to mask or not to mask, whether to meet in person or virtually, or whether social distancing is even necessary. A divisive political year has compounded the issues, Croft said.

“Once masks and no masks got politicized, and once masks and no masks became about what’s right and what’s wrong, instead of about what is an individual’s conscience on the matter, then that’s where these unnecessary divisions started setting in, in a really unhealthy way,” Croft

said. “That’s pretty much what’s happening all over the place. ... And this is global too. I work with pastors all over the world.”

Though Croft is not a statistician and does not have hard numbers, he counsels and coaches hundreds of pastors through Practical Shepherding. He is also an adjunct professor and senior fellow for the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Lifeway Research, [describing pastors as resilient](#), said about 250 pastors are known to leave the ministry each month, as opposed to a “prevailing myth” that the number is 1500 to 1700.

Croft is eager to see what statistics will indicate once the pandemic ceases.

“There are pastors in Africa, there are pastors in Scotland and England, there are pastors in Brazil. I mean there are pastors everywhere who are having to wade through these waters of just disagreement around should the church gather or not,” Croft said, “because it’s not just an opinion about your mask or no mask, it’s politicized, it’s wrapped up in fear for a lot of people, or frustration over the people who are in fear. So people are not really wired and prone to just love one another where they are.

“These divisions have just kind of imploded some churches.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

Michigan Campers on Mission busy at work

by Cindy Truesdail

Michigan Campers on Mission (MI COM) is busy! Praise the Lord! We are continuing work on the Faith Fellowship Housing Project in Lansing. It has been cold and even drafty in the house, but insulation is getting put in now and things are moving along. It will be a joyous day when we see the deserving families move in and feel the comfort of a home.

Ladies gathered at Heritage Baptist Church in Grand Blanc for a sewing event and have made 26 fleece blankets, 18 hooded towels, and 20 bears to be donated to foster and refugee children in Michigan. Some are still making these items in their homes, desiring to minister to these children. What a blessed day we had together as we worked and fellowshiped together.

MI COM focuses on mission projects in the State of Michigan. We are a fellowship of Christian campers who desire to use camping interests and skills in the furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus and to assist churches of similar faith in planning projects to improve and support camps and churches. Many mission opportunities are available for us to be a part of, such as: campground ministries; construction projects; maintenance and lawn work; sewing projects; helping small churches hold Vacation Bible School; minister to and supply help to individuals, and families in their times of need; provide needs for foster and refugee children; and much more.

Whether you are a tent camper, an RVer, or a trailer camper; a seasonal camper, a weekend camper, or a full-timer; a retired couple, young family or single individual; there is a role for you as a part of the COM family. A COM member does not have to have a camper, many projects we work with, such as Bambi Lake Baptist Retreat Center, offer rooms for the workers.

We are praising God as we welcome new members to Michigan Campers on Mission. We have very few requirements for membership: that the person loves the Lord and is born again, that they want to be on mission for Him and wish to help. There is no fee to join and you are not asked to do what you are not able to do when on a work project. If you would like to become a member, to www.michigancampersonmission.org and sign up.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick and Cindy Truesdail have been married for 27 years. Together they have 5 children and 14 grandchildren. During their early years together, they worked as leaders of a Single Adult Ministry. Rick is a Licensed Professional Counselor and a licensed SBC minister. He served as Associate Pastor with a Spanish-speaking church in Flint for 10 years and Cindy served as the Pastoral Assistant. They are currently active members at Heritage Baptist Church, Grand Blanc, and are eager to work with Campers on Mission in their retirement.

How can your congregation help young women develop a heart for missions?

by Trennis Henderson

KNOXVILLE, TN – How can your church start a missions group like Love World to help young women develop a heart for missions?

Kim Cruse, a former International Mission Board collegiate church planter in the Philippines, insists the need is urgent. “If you can put missions into the DNA of a new believer or of a young

believer early on in their Christian life, they will always see missions as important,” she emphasized.

Cruse, who began serving last year as Tennessee WMU’s missions discipleship specialist, poses the tough, thought-provoking question: “Where are the future IMB missionaries going to come from and where are the future mission supporters going to come from if we're not able to engage and connect and get these younger women involved in missions?”

“This has been a burden of WMU for many years,” she said, “so I love what has happened at Wallace” Memorial Baptist Church in Knoxville. Missions leaders there launched Love World in 2019 to reach and involve women from age 25 to 40 in missions discipleship and support.

The response has been noteworthy. In addition to listening to missionary guest speakers and praying for missionaries, Love World participants are involved in such hands-on missions projects as hosting a monthly fellowship brunch for international moms and partnering with Welcome House Knoxville to serve refugee families.

Those ministries are particularly fitting since Wallace Memorial is named in honor of Dr. Bill Wallace, a revered Southern Baptist medical missionary and martyr who served in China for 17 years until his death in a Chinese communist prison in 1951. Seven decades later, Wallace Memorial and Love World echo Wallace’s commitment to global missions service.

“God put missions on my heart many years ago,” noted Kimberly Poore, a Love World team member. “As a mother of young children, it's not easy just to pick up and go somewhere, but there's so many opportunities locally that we are able to reach internationals.

“God has opened that door for me to be able to do that even within our church,” she added. “He just opened the doors to the international moms group. Our kids are playing together and creating friendships and just loving on one another.”

Love World’s quarterly gatherings “have given us the opportunity to be educated and to share mission opportunities within our area and also within the world that we can be a part of,” Poore shared. “A wonderful aspect of our Love World is just gathering together, praying for missionaries together and bringing awareness to the different mission opportunities within our world.”

Cruse said in her conversations with other WMU leaders, “I frequently refer them back to Wallace’s Love World group. This is a group that has found a way that's working, that younger women are responding.

“Every time they gather, they have 20 to 30 young women that are getting more and more involved,” she pointed out. “They're inviting their friends and some of them are really being engaged with missions for the first time.”

Love World's ultimate goal, Cruse concluded, "is really to draw the hearts of these young women into God's purpose of making His glory known around the earth and giving them opportunities to experience that firsthand."

To learn more about engaging young women in missions, contact Kim Cruse at kcruse@tnbaptist.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trennis Henderson is the national correspondent for WMU (Woman's Missionary Union). A Baptist journalist for more than 35 years, Henderson is a former editor of the Western Recorder of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and the Arkansas Baptist News state convention newsjournal.

Love World and Welcome House impact Knoxville and world for Christ

by Trennis Henderson

KNOXVILLE, TN – How can the crisis of an Iraqi refugee family's house fire help churches engage young women in missions involvement amid their busy 21st century lives?

Several congregations in the Knoxville area are discovering the answer through hands-on interaction with such ministry groups as Love World, Welcome House Knoxville and Knoxville Internationals Network.

Kimberly Poore is a member of the Love World team at Wallace Memorial Baptist Church in Knoxville. The missions group, which launched in 2019, is geared toward young women ages 25 to 40. She said the leadership team seeks "to educate and also provide mission opportunities for other Wallace women within our church."

Love World's missions focus includes ministering alongside Welcome House Knoxville, a nonprofit ministry that provides temporary housing for immigrant and refugee families in the Knoxville area.

The ministry's primary aim is "building long-term relationships through short-term housing," according to welcomehouseknoxville.org. Providing "safe and loving space for individuals and families in transition to permanent housing" allows volunteers "to share the love of Jesus through the ministries of hospitality and friendship."

Cindy Hood, the founder and director of Welcome House, noted that long-term housing often is difficult to find for many refugees, especially for larger families and single women with children.

After visiting a similar refugee ministry model while on a family vacation in North Carolina, Hood said she returned home with a burden to partner with Bridge Refugee Services, Knoxville's local refugee resettlement agency. Following discussion with leaders at Central Baptist Church of Bearden and Knoxville Internationals Network (KIN), she began working to establish Welcome House Knoxville as a nonprofit ministry.

Renting an unused missionary guest house from a local church, Welcome House officially opened in 2019 to provide short-term housing for refugees or other internationals. The ministry also recruited Sunny Ikojoh, who came to the U.S. as an international student, to serve as the minister of hospitality for guest families.

Meeting needs in times of crisis

Since opening Welcome House's doors, "we've had several single moms, mostly from Africa, with toddlers," Hood said. Most recently, they hosted the refugee family of seven from Iraq whose rental home was destroyed last summer in a house fire.

Volunteers from Welcome House, Love World and KIN all came together to help meet that family's urgent need in the midst of crisis.

"At supper time, they were cooking. The mom stepped out of the kitchen and when she came back in the kitchen was on fire," Hood recounted. "It was too much for them to put out themselves and so they just really escaped with what they were wearing. They had a few trash bags of just some things they grabbed, but most things they lost in the fire."

After the family spent a sleepless night in a local business where the father works, KIN's director put them in contact with Welcome House and "they were able to spend their second night at Welcome House," Hood said. "We put out on our Facebook page what their story was and we had churches, individuals give through our website and we were able to give them gift cards. A volunteer took them shopping to buy clothing, shoes, personal necessities."

The Iraqi father "asked me several times, 'Is this safe? Will this be safe for my family?'" she recalled. "I assured him that yes, it was going to be very safe and that Sunny would be taking care of them – and he has.

"We are a ministry that wants to show the love of Jesus through Christian hospitality," Hood emphasized. "However, we don't require that someone is a Christian to live in the house. But we also are very willing to tell them why we're helping them. ... I feel like the best I can do is be the hands and feet of Christ in a very practical way.

“When I got the call about the Iraqi family, they needed to move in the next day,” Hood said. “So I got in contact with Kimberly Poore and she made a couple of phone calls and she and another woman were able to meet me and my family – my husband and daughter – and Sunny at the house and we just went through and cleaned the house super quick.”

When refugees or other international guests move into Welcome House, “I want it to feel like you're at a friend's house and you can relax,” Hood said. “There's food in the refrigerator, there's clean towels, clean sheets. You don't have to really think about taking care of yourself for a few hours or a few days. You can just exhale.”

Equipping and educating volunteers

Jani Whaley, executive director of Knoxville Internationals Network, said her group's goal “is to reach the internationals through the churches by equipping and educating church members and small groups so that relationships can be built and the gospel message can be given.”

With a database of 300 volunteers, she said KIN often helps “find volunteers for the Welcome House as far as cleaning and getting supplies.”

Recalling the night of the house fire, Whaley said the Iraqi family had been living “just down the street from where I live personally. I saw the fire trucks; I saw the fire and I didn't even realize that there was a refugee family that lived in that house. It was just a few hours later I got a call stating a refugee's house just burned down and there's five children involved.”

As a former short-term missionary to the Middle East, Whaley said, “I have a heart for all internationals, but there's something special about those Middle Eastern people that just really tugs at my heartstrings.”

After connecting with the family's teenage daughter who speaks English, “I went over there within the hour and met the family and talked to the father and met all the children and developed a friendship right then and there,” Whaley said. The next day, “I went over to their house personally and loaded them up in my car and just picked through the rubble of their house. We took them to the Welcome House and got them situated.”

Doing life alongside refugee families

In his role as minister of hospitality, Ikojoh stepped in to assist the displaced family with day-to-day adjustments. “When that incident happened, we saw the love of Christ,” he recalled. “We don't get to choose where we shine the light. The light is meant for everywhere, taking away all darkness all around.”

Ikojoh, who grew up in Nigeria, came to the United States in 2015 to attend seminary. After working with refugee families during a volunteer mission trip, “I fell in love with that. I felt a deep sense that God was calling me into this ministry.

“I cannot fully understand what a refugee experiences. I can't even fully understand what it means to be a refugee,” he acknowledged. “But being an international student, I can identify that truly they do go through a cultural shock.”

“When we intentionally engage our international neighbors and make them feel at home, then we have been the light of Christ,” Ikojoh affirmed. “We just listen and pay attention and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we respond to these needs. I think the goal is to do life alongside these people.”

In her leadership role with Love World, Poore helps coordinate the group’s quarterly gatherings in members’ homes. Activities range from hosting missionary speakers to providing a monthly fellowship brunch for international moms.

When Cindy Hood shared about Welcome House at one of the gatherings, “I felt the Lord really just putting that on my heart to be involved,” Poore said.

While she and other Love World volunteers have served the Iraqi family and other refugees by helping clean Welcome House and provide other needed resources, Poore said she hasn’t personally met the house’s international guests. But that doesn’t diminish her enthusiasm for her behind-the-scenes ministry opportunities. “We know their story,” she pointed out, “so we feel connected to them in that way.

“Being a part of this is important to me because God calls us to be disciples, make disciples of all nations,” Poore added. “He also calls us to unite together, to bear one another's burdens.”

That powerful truth is making a practical impact for refugee families who call Welcome House Knoxville their temporary home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trennis Henderson is the national correspondent for WMU (Woman’s Missionary Union). A Baptist journalist for more than 35 years, Henderson is a former editor of the Western Recorder of the Kentucky Baptist Convention and the Arkansas Baptist News state convention newsjournal.

Floyd, Greear Stare Down Division at EC Meeting

by Scott Barkley

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – At the first in-person SBC Executive Committee meeting in more than a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SBC President J.D. Greear and SBC EC President and CEO Ronnie Floyd called for Southern Baptists to re-engage with a call to take the Gospel to the nations.

EC members also voted to disfellowship four churches cited in the Credentials Committee report, accepted amendments to the mission and ministry statement of Lifeway Christian Resources and received a report from the [ERLC Task Force](#), established at [last February's meeting](#).

Greear, whose term as president extended to a third year due to the pandemic-related cancellation of the 2020 SBC Annual Meeting, set the tone with his Monday evening (Feb. 22) president's address, in which he [addressed "demonic" sources of division](#) that threaten to hinder the SBC's cooperative mission of getting the Gospel to the nations.

COVID-19 didn't cause the disunity that has escalated largely through social media over the last year, he said, but uncovered it. Pointing back to the SBC's rejection of the "leaven of the liberals" through the Conservative Resurgence, Greear called on Southern Baptists to reject the "leaven of the Pharisees" by refusing to be swayed by a vocal minority choosing to major on secondary issues.

"The problem is that many of our divisions are based on 90 percent misunderstandings, distortions and often outright lies. And it has grieved me more than you can imagine," he said.

SBC EC President Ronnie Floyd's reintroduction of Vision 2025 began with a parallel of Greear's address, warning of ["a sound of war in the camp."](#) For Southern Baptists to gain traction for evangelism, he claimed, they must "lead the way in helping create a Bible-based, Christ-centered and Spirit-controlled culture in the SBC."

Floyd laid out five action steps for accomplishing that purpose.

1. Increase full-time, fully-funded International Mission Board missionaries by a net gain of 500, bringing that total to 4,200.
2. Add 5,000 new Southern Baptist congregations through church plants, replants, new campuses and new church affiliations, bringing the total to more than 50,000.
3. Increase the total number of church ministry staff and volunteers through a new training emphasis – "calling out the called."

4. Reverse the ongoing decline in reaching, baptizing and discipling 12- to 17-year-olds.
5. Increase annual giving through the Cooperative Program to surpass \$500 million by 2025.

“We must begin to take this vision everywhere and listen to pastors, churches, associational mission strategists, state convention leaders and national entities about how each one of us can own this vision personally and in ministry collectively,” he said. “We must do this because this is our greater cause. Together, we can do this to the glory of God.”

Vision 2025 received its initial launch at the February 2020 Executive Committee meeting, just prior to the coronavirus shutdown. The initiative’s relaunch will be aided [by a \\$5 million pledge](#) by the North American Mission Board over the next four years to support student evangelism nationwide. Johnny Hunt, NAMB vice president of evangelism and leadership, made the announcement during Floyd’s address.

“This \$5 million is on top of and separate from the \$4.5 million in evangelism that already is being used in funds distributed by NAMB to non-South state conventions starting Oct. 1, 2021,” Hunt said. “So that’s nearly \$1.2 million more than the funds available to non-South states this year.”

EC Chairman Rolland Slade led fellow members, their spouses and guests in signing a large pledge board to pray for and promote Vision 2025.

Executive Committee members began their Tuesday (Feb. 23) plenary session in executive session to discuss the Credentials Committee’s report and four churches it determined to be out of alignment with Southern Baptist polity. EC members voted to disfellowship the following churches:

- St. Matthews Baptist Church of Louisville, Ky., due to “adopted membership and leadership standards affirm[ing] homosexual behavior.”
- Antioch Baptist Church in Sevierville, Tenn., due to knowingly employing a pastor convicted of statutory rape.
- Towne View Baptist Church in Kennesaw, Ga., due to its membership and leadership adopting standards affirming homosexual behavior.
- West Side Baptist Church in Sharpsville, Pa., due to knowingly employing a pastor who is a registered sex offender.

Slade announced the EC’s decision after emerging from executive session, before other business matters were considered.

In other business, EC members voted Pastor Ron Edwards of First Baptist Church in Hamilton, Wash., to fill the Northwest vacancy for the Committee on Nominations. The most recent Annual Church Profile report shows that First Baptist contributes 12 percent of its budget through the Cooperative Program. EC members also voted for Don Currence to replace Kathy Litton as SBC Registration secretary. Litton resigned last month after her husband Ed announced his willingness to be nominated for SBC president. Another vacancy on the Credentials Committee was tabled until the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting in June.

No vote was required for the ERLC Task Force report received by the Executive Committee. During a question-and-answer period, EC member Richard Wilburn read into the record a letter by Stephen Stallard, lead pastor of Mosaic Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., in support of the ERLC and calling for a repudiation of the report. EC member Rod Martin noted what he described as positive accomplishments of the ERLC, but asked whether the entity might no longer be useful to Southern Baptists, considering the divisiveness of the subject matters it regularly deals with.

On Tuesday afternoon, EC members also voted to forward to messengers at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting a motion put forward by the Committee on Convention Missions and Ministry to amend the mission and ministry statement of Lifeway Christian Resources. If the new guidelines are approved by messengers, Lifeway will move away from collegiate ministry responsibilities to an emphasis on next generation ministry, particularly Vacation Bible School and camps. Expansions of ministry include publication of books and Bibles as well as statistical and research materials for churches.

The amendments stipulate that Lifeway would no longer be responsible for operation of conference centers, Lifeway Christian stores, assistance to Christian schools or homeschool ministries, church architecture consultation and services or assistance in capital fundraising. Lifeway trustees [approved the amendments last month](#).

“These ministry assignment amendments reflect a renewed focus for Lifeway on serving the local church and its leaders,” Lifeway President Ben Mandrell said. “We believe by serving the local church with laser focus, we will continue the reputation of being a trustworthy source for life-changing resources to assist believers as they take the Gospel to all people and make disciples.”

The Committee on Missions and Ministry [announced the formation of a task force](#) to be named by Chairman Rob Showers at a later date to study polity issues that arose when the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustee board suspended two of its members who were being investigated by the SWBTS board for misconduct.

In a report to EC members, Showers said the SWBTS trustee situation “revealed a need for clarity for all of our entities and institutions to deal with trustee misconduct.”

“... We need a clear path for our entities that will best serve the sole membership interests of the Southern Baptist Convention and the important needs of our valued entities and institutions in such a situation,” he said.

The next Executive Committee meeting is slated for June 14 in Nashville preceding the SBC annual meeting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EXPLAINER: What is the Equality Act?

by ERLC Staff

WASHINGTON, D.C.(BP) – This week, the U.S. House of Representatives is scheduled for a floor vote on a controversial bill titled the [Equality Act](#). This legislation, filed as H.R. 5, seeks to expand the definition of “sex” to include “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” (SOGI) and would revise every title of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to add these categories as new protected classes in the federal code. Last Congress, the Equality Act [passed](#) in the House, but the bill died in the Senate.

The ERLC affirms the full dignity of every human being. At the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, the messengers [passed a resolution](#) to “reaffirm the sacredness and full dignity and worthiness of respect and Christian love for every single human being, without any reservation.” But the Equality Act does not advance the cause of human dignity.

If passed, H.R. 5 would punish faith-based charities for their core religious beliefs about human dignity and marriage and would undermine decades of civil rights protections for women and girls. Also alarming is the fact that House leadership is expected to bring these sweeping changes to the Civil Rights Act to the floor for a vote without holding a single committee hearing, debate or amendment process.

What does this bill mean for religious liberty?

This bill would substantially undermine religious liberty protections in the United States. America has long been a place where people with different views and beliefs have lived at peace alongside each other. Though America has not perfectly lived up to this ideal of a shared nation, it was central to our founding as persecuted religious minorities sought safe harbor in this land. Though cleverly named, the Equality Act is out of step with that American ideal.

Equality cannot be achieved while eliminating other basic, fundamental freedoms. Of particular note, the bill would essentially gut the 1993 [Religious Freedom Restoration Act](#) (RFRA), a bill which passed with broad bipartisan support and was signed by President Clinton.

By undermining RFRA, H.R. 5 would force faith-based child welfare organizations to abandon their deeply held religious beliefs or be shut down by the state. The state-forced closures of such agencies is especially detrimental at a time when multiple crises – including the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing opioid epidemic – have led to increases in the number of children in need of services.

What does the bill mean for women and girls?

Most strikingly, H.R. 5 undermines decades of hard fought civil rights protections for women and girls. Single gender spaces, such as locker rooms or shelters, would no longer be protected by law. This departure from a legal understanding of gender as male and female makes women and girls vulnerable to biological males being in their private spaces. For example, shelters for those women and girls escaping domestic abuse or homelessness would be forced to house biological men who identify as female. This legislation disregards the privacy and safety concerns women rightly have about sharing sleeping quarters and intimate facilities with the opposite sex.

Another example of the harm this legislation poses to women and girls is in athletics and academics. Since 1972, Title IX has advanced women’s sports and scholarship in remarkable ways. If enacted, the Equality Act would threaten female competition as both areas would then be open to biological males as well.

Are there pro-life concerns in the Equality Act?

Yes. The Equality Act would be the most pro-abortion bill ever passed by Congress. H.R. 5 would redefine the term “sex” to also include “pregnancy, childbirth, or a related medical condition.” This language would roll back federal law that protects the consciences of pro-life nurses and physicians who object to participating in abortions because of their deeply held religious or moral beliefs. These conscience protections carry decades of bipartisan consensus – a consensus that no person should be compelled to participate in an act they believe to be gravely immoral. H.R. 5 would also jeopardize the longstanding [Hyde Amendment](#) that protects federal taxpayer dollars from funding abortion. There is nothing equalizing about forcing Americans to fund abortion through taxpayer dollars.

How has the ERLC been involved?

The ERLC has worked tirelessly to defeat this bill. We have partnered with a broad coalition of more than 85 faith-based nonprofits, religious entities, and institutions of higher education to highlight the dangers of H.R. 5. We have raised these concerns with members of Congress and the administration through coalition letters and countless meetings with members,

administration officials, and their staff. We have also engaged in public advocacy against the bill by producing a suite of resources to inform Christians and the broader public about the pernicious threat of H.R. 5.

What's next?

Unfortunately, we expect the bill to pass the House of Representatives this week, although with a narrower margin than the last Congress. However, 60 votes are required to overcome the filibuster in the Senate, which would bring the bill to a vote. In its current form, H.R. 5 would likely fall short of this threshold.

The ERLC will continue promoting and defending the human dignity and religious liberty of all people on Capitol Hill, before the courts, and in the public square.

As Russell Moore, president of the ERLC often notes, “A government that can pave over the consciences of some can steamroll over dissent everywhere.” The ERLC will continue to highlight how the Equality Act erodes fundamental freedoms and undermines the ability of Americans of diverse beliefs to work together for the common good.

Greear decries division, repudiates pharisaical spirit in SBC EC address

by Timothy Cokes

NASHVILLE, TN (BP) – Saying the global pandemic didn’t cause the crisis in the Southern Baptist Convention, but revealed “a deeper, more insidious crisis,” SBC President J.D. Greear challenged members of the SBC Executive Committee to “repudiate” a pharisaical spirit and unite for the sake of the Gospel.

“The last year has revealed areas of weakness in our beloved convention of churches,” Greear said Monday (Feb. 22), during the president’s address to the EC at the Grand Hyatt Hotel.

“Fissures and failures and fleshly idolatries. COVID didn’t produce these crises. It only exposed them.”

Greear, senior pastor of The Summit Church in the Raleigh-Durham, N.C., area, continued as SBC president for a third year because of the cancellation of the 2020 SBC Annual Meeting. He said his desire as president was never to change the SBC’s doctrine or mission.

“The change we needed was cultural,” Greear said. “Gospel doctrine and Gospel mission without Gospel culture is sterile, weak and even, according to Scripture, deadly.”

But he decried division, which he said comes from a small but vocal minority, because it hinders the SBC’s cooperative mission of getting the Gospel to the nations. He described false accusations as “demonic.”

Greear said the Pharisees possessed correct doctrinal beliefs, but resisted the ministry of Jesus more than any other group because “they were more concerned with preserving the purity of the nation than they were bringing in the outsider.”

Noting the convention’s success, during the Conservative Resurgence, of repudiating “the leaven of the liberals,” he asked: “Are we now going to repudiate the leaven of the Pharisees?”

“Do we ... need reform? Absolutely,” Greear said. “Is doctrine important? Of course. These are not idle words; this is our life. Is eternal vigilance the price of doctrinal integrity? Of course. Should we ever forget the painful battles won on our behalf in the 1980s and 1990s? Oh, may it never be.

“The problem is that many of our divisions are based on 90 percent misunderstandings, distortions and often outright lies. And it has grieved me more than you can imagine.” Greear cited charges hurled against him and other SBC leaders of drifting leftward, either theologically or politically, as examples.

He said the controversy over Critical Race Theory has become a significant obstacle to cooperation.

The issue has been a lightning rod since the adoption of Resolution 9 at the 2019 SBC Annual Meeting, with heated debate playing out largely on social media. Last November, the Council of Seminary Presidents [issued a statement](#) declaring Critical Race theory and any other form of Critical Theory as “incompatible” with the Baptist Faith and Message.

Greear affirmed the seminary presidents’ statement, which [drew a response](#) from various ethnic groups and leaders, but said he understands how the issue has contributed to heightened racial tensions within the SBC.

“Let me state clearly,” Greear said. “CRT is an important discussion, and I’m all for robust theological discussion about it. For something as important as ‘what biblical justice looks like,’ we need careful, robust, Bibles-open-on-our-knees discussion. But we should mourn when closet racists and neo-Confederates feel more at home in our churches than do many of our people of color.”

In calling for unity, Greear said he would not water down doctrine.

“I’m not talking about communicating ambiguity on things the Scriptures speak clearly on – the sanctity of life and marriage, the sinfulness of homosexuality – these are things that faithful Christians cannot disagree on and our consciences are captive in these to the Word of God.”

But he asked: “Do we want to be a Gospel people or a Southern culture people? Which is the more important part of our name, Southern or Baptist? Are the Scriptures sufficient in laying out for us the non-negotiables for fellowship? If so, why do we have a set of secondary criteria, a hedge about the law, that we use to determine who is in and who is out?”

Heading into the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting, scheduled for June 15-16 in Nashville, Greear asked Baptists to consider committing to being a Great Commission Baptist, committing to being a “Gospel Above All” leader and committing to being people of truth and integrity. He said the convention’s ultimate goal is becoming a Gospel people with churches that engage people of all different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities.

Citing Acts 15, when the early church was divided over whether Gentile believers should adopt Jewish religious practices including circumcision, Greear noted James’ judgment that Gentiles should avoid sexual immorality and to avoid food polluted by idols and the meat of animals that had died by strangulation. He quoted James’ reasoning from Acts 15:19: “We ought not make it hard for Gentiles who are coming to God.”

“Brothers and sisters, I wish I could write some version of that statement over the door of every Southern Baptist church in America,” Greear said. “We ought not make it hard for Democrats to come to Jesus. We shouldn’t make it hard for Republicans to come to Jesus. Or Blacks. Or Latinos. Or northerners. Or southerners.

“At the end of the day, if we’re a people who puts the Gospel above all ... our Gospel is too precious and our mission is too urgent to let anything stand in our way.”

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