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Re-Envision: The 2019 State Mission Offering

By Staff

Michigan Baptist churches are starting to promote the Frances Brown State Mission Offering which is happening September 8-15. The goal for this year's offering is \$100,000. The mission offering is taken every year to fund special mission projects in the areas of starting, strengthening, and sending churches in the state of Michigan.

This year's theme for the offering is "Re-Envision". Tim Patterson, Executive-Director of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM), explains, "When we talk about re-envision, we're not talking about something new. The vision that God has given has not changed. That vision is to reach Michigan for the gospel."

There are five areas of focus where the offering will be used this year; starting, strengthening, women's ministry, disaster relief and the Bambi Lake Conference Center. Women's ministry and disaster relief play a big role in helping to send Michigan Baptist churches on mission both in the state and around the world. The Bambi Lake Conference Center supports all three areas of starting, strengthening, and sending by giving church pastors, leaders and lay people a place to train and recharge.

The BSCM is providing a wealth of resources to help Michigan churches promote the special offering. Churches can find posters, flyers, and bulletin inserts to share with their members the areas of need, and how they can support the offering. The state convention is also providing three videos for download. Two of the videos tell the stories of Michigan churches who had gone into decline, but then made a comeback. The third video is an overview of the offering explaining the (Re-Envision" theme and the areas of impact. Finally, there is a podcast story sharing the ups and downs of a Michigan church over 50 years of its life. The podcast is an excellent story to share by social media.

Go to <https://www.bscm.org/smo> for resources and more information.

God Is in the Business of Longshots

By Staff

Houghton - Houghton Baptist Church is the northernmost church in the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM). It sits on Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula of the state. Even for Michigan, the winters can be hard here. David Whitaker who has pastored Houghton Baptist for 9 years says the story of his ministry and the church is a longshot, but he adds, "I think God is in the business of longshots."

Whitaker says Houghton can be a lonely place to serve. The church is a long way from other BSCM churches, and it is a more than a ten hour drive from the state convention offices. But that has not prevented state staff from supporting Houghton Baptist and its pastor. Due in part to the gifts of Michigan Baptists to the Frances Brown State Mission Offering, staff like BSCM State Director of Evangelism, Mike Durbin, can make the drive to be there. Durbin says, "We are able to encourage pastors across our state, north and south, east and west, and your gifts make that possible."

After six years of few professions of faith and baptisms, Whitaker led his church through a difficult transition, and beginning three years ago, things began to change. To learn about that change, finish the story at bscm.org/smo.

A Strong Seed in Grand Rapids

By Aaron Tanap

Grand Rapids - The vision to start a Filipino-American work for church started with the inspiration from Arnold and Cora Villanueva in 2016. They were members of Philippine International Baptist Church located in Taylor. Arnold and Cora moved to Grand Rapids to start a Tim Horton's franchise.

In October of 2016, Aaron and Nancy Tanap visited the Villanueva's at their Tim Horton's store in Kentwood/Grand Rapids. The Tanaps wanted to visit, pray and encourage them. There are a lot of challenges in starting your own business. It was at that visit, Arnold and Cora shared their desire to start a Filipino-American church in their new location. They felt that they needed help from a mentor and/or pastor in starting the new church start. Even with the challenges in starting a franchise, that didn't prevent them from pursuing the desire God placed in their hearts to start a church that focused on Filipino/Americans.

The Tanaps were excited about their vision, and told Alex and Cora that they would share their desires with our church leaders and meet with them again soon. The Tanaps committed to pray, and over the next few months, kept in touch. They all were committing this to the Lord. Arnold and Cora started doing the groundwork, and began telling people about the possibility of a new Filipino-American church start. Because of their Tim Horton business, they found that they had the opportunity to meet people and connect with them.

Six months later, the Tanaps took the next step, and went through the North American Mission Board (NAMB) Church Planting Assessment process. Aaron worked with Dr. Tony Lynn, (Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) State Director of Missions, Mike Durbin, BSCM State Director of Evangelism, and Dan Ghramm, his assigned Church Planting Catalyst.

The Bethlehem Baptist Church of Belleville, which Aaron helped start in 1999, and is currently pastoring, approved and allowed him to also help in the Grand Rapids new church work. The next 6 months, the Tanaps began to go to Grand Rapids every other Friday to help Arnold and Cora in laying the groundwork for a new church start. A year later, Aaron and Nancy were approved by the BSCM and North American Mission Board (NAMB) as a Church Planter. Their situation is unique in that they do not live in Grand Rapids, only go there twice-a-month, Arnold (mentee) has a full-time job, instead of Arnold being the Church Planter, Aaron functions as Church Planter even though he

still pastors in Belleville. In spite of the uniqueness of the situation, the work has begun and continues presently.

The new church start hasn't launched yet, but over the spring and summer, with much prayer and efforts, there are 15-24 regularly attending our Bible Study groups. So far, 4 have accepted Christ as personal Lord and Savior. The core group has met many couples, and most of the Filipino wives are married to Caucasian-Americans. They have expanded from meeting as a group at Arnold and Cora's residence to now meeting in 3 home locations.

Aaron says, "During the year and a half of work here, we've seen exciting things! The people come and are eager to learn the Word of God." They are teaching "Firm Foundations, from Creation to Christ. A few of the husbands are showing interest, and starting to come to the Bible studies. There are challenges as the enemy continually tries to hinder the work. But Aaron says that the Lord is greater than our enemy and that He is always with us.

Due to the unique situation of pastoring while trying to help lead a new church start, the Tanaps feel that the work would reach its full potential more quickly if there was a church leader who would have more time to lead the groups and live and work in Grand Rapids. They have committed to pray for that person. Until then, they continue to do the work, and trust and depend upon God because this is His work. It is a strong seed planted in Grand Rapids area and in the Lord's time, a robust, vibrant group of believers will be established for God's glory and honor until His return.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron Tanap and his wife, Nancy, have 3 children, Chrissy, Ivan, and Jourdane. They have 4 grandchildren. Aaron and Nancy live in Canton, Michigan where he has served as Pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Belleville since 1999. The Tanaps also planted two churches in the Philippines. They are currently serving as Church Planters to help a new Filipino/American work in Grand Rapids.

Who's Pastoring the Pastors?

By Staff

Middlebelt - "We prayed that God would take us off the sidelines and put us in the game, and that was like a crazy prayer." That's how Carmen Johnson describes the decision she and her husband Larry made to go into ministry. Before the Johnson's even moved to Louisville to go to Southern Seminary, the trials began.

They experienced the loss of parents, their daughter had to undergo a series of surgeries, and Carmen began battling health issues. Larry says, "I just wondered, 'God, what's going on? What's going on?'"

Three years ago, Larry was called to Middlebelt Baptist Church back in Michigan when the church had begun to experience a downturn. Since then, the church has begun to turnaround, and to see young people return. But despite the blessings at the church, there have still been personal trials as Carmen's physical challenges have continued.

Ministering to Michigan pastors is an important way that the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) helps strengthen churches. BSCM State Director of Evangelism, Mike Durbin, says, " Sometimes people think that because pastors are pastors, life doesn't happen to them, but it does."

When you give to the Frances Brown State Mission Offering, you are helping our BSCM staff minister to our Michigan pastors and churches. To hear more about the Middlebelt story go to bscm.org/smo.

Appetite

By Tim Patterson

PLYMOUTH, MI – We had been collecting “coke” bottles for most of the day. Both of us had gone from house to house, and asked our neighbors if they had any lying around that they did not want. Some folks were very kind and generous while others just directed us back to the street from whence we came.

There was one particular gentleman on “Avenue D” that had what seemed to be an inordinate passion for Dr. Pepper. He also knew that periodically Ricky Burrows and I would be coming by asking for pop bottle donations to our very worthy causes. We always had a cause and as far as we were concerned, collecting enough money for the movies or for a box of “bee-bee’s” was as admirable as any foundation raising money for orphan children.

On this particular day we had decided that we needed food supplies for our “fort”. It wasn’t much of a fort, just a few scraps of tin and some construction wire covered with a tarp that I borrowed from Dad’s shed. Yet we knew full well that any army must be well fed in order to do battle with Indians, Nazi’s or motorcycle gangs. (There were thousands of them in our town!)

After several hours of collecting we made our way to the local “Pick-Pac” convenience store, traded in our bottles and purchased the needed provisions. We bought the largest jar of peanut butter that we could find and a loaf of bread. Now, of course, we didn’t buy the expensive Jif but some store brand that had about an inch of oil floating on top. This didn’t deter us, but merely gave us the opportunity to play in the pasty brown concoction until the oil was well mixed.

It was about 4:00 p.m. when we finally made it back to the fort and that is when the feasting began. One after the other, Ricky and I ingested sandwich after sandwich. I think I ate four or five myself. When we could eat no more, all we could do was lay there like a couple of old hound dogs that just gorged themselves on fresh road kill. We were full and miserable.

About that time, I heard my Dad’s familiar whistle and I knew it was time for supper. I slowly, but obediently, got up and headed for home.

When I walked in the back door, there spread out over the kitchen bar was a feast fit for a king. It was payday and Mom had prepared my favorite meal. Fried shrimp, french-fries and all the fixings. I could not believe my eyes or my lack of appetite. I

could not eat one bite of food. In fact, the smell even made me a bit nauseous. The infamous “spoiled appetite” had overcome me.

I cannot tell you the number of times I have heard people say, “I just didn’t get anything out of the worship service today. The preaching was boring, the music was dead, and no one talked to me.”

The problem is that the majority of those who voice that complaint came to church with a “spoiled appetite” for the things of God. All week long they have filled their spiritual stomachs with the food of the world, and when they come to God’s house to be fed, they can’t “stomach” it. In fact, it is distasteful to them.m(**Of course, the problem does not lie with them or their lack of discipline but with the boring pastor and the rest of those Christians**)

Friends, when we have developed a taste for the things of the world and fill our lives with them, no wonder we cannot grow spiritually and do not have a desire for His Word. That is why so many of those who claim to be Christians today are spiritually malnourished and dying a slow spiritual death. Please consider carefully that with which you feed your soul. It may taste good, but it could very well spoil your appetite.

She Flinched at My Words

By Tony Lynn

The church planter's wife flinched as my words left my mouth. All I said was, "These next few days our goal is to help you make new friends." I did not observe her protest at the moment. I even thought I was mindful of every person's needs when I added to the opening announcement, "I know retreats like this are made for extroverts; but, we want the introverts in the group to find other introverts and enjoy their small, corner conversations. Everyone needs friends." Unknowingly, I had thrown a church planter's wife into a conflict within minutes of the retreat's beginnings without knowing my fault.

In that same room as the woman was recoiling in emotional pain and regretting the retreat, I spoke loudly over the clamor of two-dozen ministers' children playing with toys and carrying on childlike conversations. "My name is Aiden what's your name?" "This is my sister; she is seven years old. How old are you?" "I want to go swimming. Do you know how to swim?" There was no stopping the children from interacting with one another. They were making friends without any pushing or guiding.

During two consecutive years, I have arranged a summer retreat for church planters, bi-vocational pastors, their families and their teammates. It is difficult to find the correct recipe that will please everyone, all the time. There are too many factors to consider: introverts vs. extroverts, individual time vs. teambuilding, married ministers vs. single ministers, inspirational speakers vs. practical break-out groups, athletes vs. gamers, and recreation vs. education. Some factors satisfy retreat-comers and other retreat-comers cringe at the same offerings. I concluded I can offer a buffet of experiences then let each person decide for themselves. Our [Bambi Lake Baptist Retreat and Conference Center](#) in Roscommon, Michigan led by Mick Schatz offers plenty of choices to please every individual choice:

- o Canoeing, kayaking, boating or paddle boats
- o Fishing, swimming, or the waterslide
- o Beach volleyball, putt-putt golf or gaga ball
- o Hotel rooms, rustic sites or the newest cabins
- o Steak night: sirloin, ribeye, or one of each
- o Monastic solitude, teambuilding, or inspirational worship

Throughout the three-day retreat, unaware of one person's initial, stressful reaction to the retreat schedule, I made observations. A network of church planters from the westside of Michigan were having fun with one another and their children. They were

building team. One wife and mother from Canada and another from the westside of Michigan became friends as they led the beach volleyball teams using their respective team training. I particularly loved the moment when one parent said, "I am thankful for how everyone is looking out for one another and helping them with the children. Thanks to all of you for helping my wife with our youngest when I am not around. You're helping her to relax."

Two inspirational speakers, the North America Mission Board's (NAMB) John Mark Clifton and Ziglar Legacy Speaker Toni Cooper, challenged and inspired the adults during a couple hours of conversations. Their profound impact continues well after the retreat is over. People are encouraged. New goals are created, and action plans are set into motion. Disheartened individuals find bold, renewed faith. Ministries are led with hope and anticipation.

A particular, yet unproven problem was uncovered during this recent retreat. A pastor's wife said to me, "Tony, did you know I checked with three wives, last week, to see if they were coming to the retreat and they said they didn't know anything about it?" A light went on inside my head illuminating a prior suspicion. I replied to her, "I thought so! When I sent out promotions about the retreat to planters/pastors I wrote, "You know if your wife was receiving this letter that without question you would be attending the retreat. Wives/mothers know families need to get away and refresh themselves during the summer." I was thrilled when my new informant said, "I can help you with that. I will gather the email addresses for the wives, and we can promote the 2020 retreat through the wives, too. That will definitely increase the benefit of the retreat for more people!"

I want to offer one final word before I finish this article and start planning for the 2020 Church Planter, Bi-Vocational Pastor, Family and Teammate Summer Retreat. On the closing day of the retreat, the wincing wife and mother who I mentioned at the beginning of the article confessed her initial, emotional reaction to me. She explained that upon her arrival to camp she was looking for isolated family time with her three children and husband; but to her delightful surprise she made new friends and she was grateful she opened herself up to new relationships. She left renewed and encouraged.

Would you like to attend the 2020 Church Planter, Bi-Vocational Pastor, Family and Teammate Summer Retreat? If so, send an email to Andrew@bscm.org asking to be placed on the promotional list. As I am writing, we are arranging specific dates with the Bambi Lake Retreat Team for the retreat. Some of this year's participants, during 2020's retreat, are going to come early or remain late and vacation with their new friends next year. Please, take part. We do this for you because we love you.

Baptism Sunday

By Mike Durbin

Plymouth - Southern Baptist churches across the nation will celebrate the saving work of Christ on **Baptism Sunday**, September 8. Joy will fill our churches as new believers publicly profess their faith in Christ in the waters of baptism. The national **Baptism Sunday** highlights the renewed emphasis on evangelism in our Convention and is a cause for celebration.

Many Michigan Baptist churches are already taking advantage of the **Who's Your One?** initiative from the North American Mission Board (NAMB). **Who's Your One?** focuses on praying for and sharing the Gospel with the one person in our lives who we most want to come to Christ. NAMB provides Bulletin Inserts, Prayer Guides, Book Markers, Posters, Social Media helps and an Implementation Guide - all for free!

A new resource has just been added to **Who's Your One**. It's a 40-day Devotional Guide that your church can use. It has come out just in time to use as we approach **Baptism Sunday**, September 8. You can download a free copy by going to BSCM.org and clicking on the yellow quicklink, **Who's Your One?** For those who use the YouVersion Bible app, you can access the Devotional Guide (as well as the Prayer Guide) to use with your daily Bible reading plan.

J.D. Greear, President of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), and Johnny Hunt, Senior Vice President of Evangelism at the NAMB, have also produced a series of videos to answer frequently asked questions about baptism services. You can watch the videos on the **Who's Your One** social media channels.

Who's Your One? provides churches with a wealth of resources to share the Gospel. Below are simple suggestions your church can consider as you plan an evangelism strategy.

BAPTIZE 5%. Set a church goal to baptize 5% of your church's average worship attendance every year. A yearly baptism goal helps the church prioritize evangelism in every believer's life. A church baptism goal is SMART - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely. The old adage is still true: "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time." (Zig Ziegler)

SHARE 4. Challenge every believer to intentionally share the story of how he or she came to faith in Christ 4 times this year (once every quarter).

ENGAGE 3. Engage your community through a threefold evangelistic strategy: 1. Attractional events like block parties, back to school emphases, or VBS. 2. Missional projects that bless your community and make it better in the name of Jesus. 3. Relational opportunities for believers to invite their family and friends to experience Biblical community and hear the Gospel.

EQUIP 2. Schedule evangelism training twice a year to equip believers to share the Gospel.

WHO'S YOUR 1? Who's the one person in your life who you most want to come to Christ? Commit to pray and share the Gospel with that person this year. There's a wealth of resources at BSCM.org. Just click on the yellow **Who's Your One?** quick link.

You Can Make a Difference

By Mick Schatz

ROSCOMMON, MI - Can one person make a difference? Back in the early 90's when I was an intern on staff with a church in Florida (my birthplace), I met regularly with Associate Pastors who would speak into my life and mentor me. During this time, I also became engaged to my forever sweetheart (now 23 years married). In one of our weekly meetings one of my pastor friends shared this statement with me - "What's more important, your rights or the relationship". Wow, what a thought, especially as I was about to be a husband! That one statement has replayed itself in my mind continuously over the years of marriage and ministry.

A constant guide and reminder that people are more important than my personal selfish agenda. I have discovered in 20 plus years of ministry that it is easy to get consumed with numbers, programming, outcomes, budgets and forget that God's heart is for people therefore so should mine. Amazingly, that one statement has replayed itself in my mind on many occasions to keep my perspective correctly focused. So, the answer is yes! One person can make a difference.

It's easy to believe you are insignificant in the grand scheme of things. However, please understand you were created by God for a specific purpose and impact in this life in this world and God does not scheme. God is not playing games with us. This is real life with eternity in the balance. God has placed you right where you are to impact those around you with the love and life of Christ.

Nevertheless, in case you still doubt your significance, and the impact you can have on the world, let me give you a few of my favorite examples:

- Moses - speech impediment yet led a nation to freedom
- Gideon - Led an army of 300 to defeat an army of thousands
- David - Sheep herder who defeated a giant
- Mary - Young virgin who believed by faith she was to give birth to Jesus (the son of God)
- Saul - Killed Christians yet called by God to be Paul and be a missionary
- George Washington - Led a country to freedom over tyranny
- Winston Churchill - Leader of Great Britain during World War Two
- Bill Gates - Founder of Microsoft
- Steve Jobs - Transformed the music industry
- Rosa Parks - campaigned and fought against segregation and racism

- Neil Armstrong - walked on the moon

Obviously, this list is just some of my favorites and it could go on and on. History is packed full of people who impacted their community and the world. God uses folks of all shapes and sizes to achieve His purposes. Your shape and your size are included in His plans.

This article is simply a reminder to you and me of how important our witness is in this hopeless culture. It's a reminder of the "Power of One". That's one person (you/me) impacting one other person who impacts another person and so on and so on. May we not be content with living our lives just for our own glory and satisfaction - let's live every day with a Kingdom mindset, on a Kingdom mission for Kingdom glory!

27 New Churches in Michigan

By Tony Lynn

Let me introduce you, briefly, to some fantastic people planting churches around you. During the last three years, twenty-seven new churches were launched in SENDNetworkMichigan.com and SEND Detroit.

One of our church planters has wavy hair and a deep southern-accent when he speaks. He loves to watch entertainment-wrestling, and when he preaches his southern expressions fill the sermon, “Grinnin’ like a possum eatin’ a sweet tater.” I am glad the Lord called he, his wife and two little ones to plant a new church in Waterford.

Another church planter and his wife who have outstanding careers in business and incredibly courteous children answered the call to plant a new church in Redford. This husband and wife team display a love and respect for one another that is notable. I do not know how they manage their time and energy with so much going on in their lives, but they do, and they do it well. They are planting a church, raising a family, and succeeding in their careers all at the same time.

Kalamazoo has one of the most eligible bachelors in Michigan leading a church planting team on the campus of Western Michigan University. His primary passion is seeing others come to know and grow in Jesus Christ. When I watch the ease with which he meets and interacts with people, I am impressed. His sincere compassion for everyone is seen as he talks to a crowd of people one-at-a-time making each person feel valued.

It was said of a church planter in Traverse City, “He has made more friends and created more networks within a few months than I have though I have lived in this region for decades. He draws people.” My response was, “I am so glad God redeployed this couple to Michigan rather than letting them retire into oblivion.” Many around the beautiful bays of the north are going to hear about Christ because this couple is on mission.

If you can locate these following cities on a map, you will see where the Lord planted twenty-seven new churches these past three years!

Zeeland, Detroit, Wyoming, Grand Rapids, Redford, Petoskey, Kalamazoo, Saginaw, Clawson, Mount Clemons, Farmington Hills, Ypsilanti, Windsor, Grand Blanc, Wyandotte, Alanson, Plymouth, Westland, Waterford, South Lyon, Clio, Traverse City, Grand Rapids, Fenton

Would you like to know the names of the twenty-seven newest churches?

Hope Church, Refuge Church, New Life Church Detroit, CrossWinds Community Church Godfrey Lee, CrossWinds Community Church Westside, The Commonwealth of Faith, True North Community Church, H2O Church, The Valley Church, Church at Clawson, The Journey Church, Crossover Church, City Church Clio, Life Giver Church, Grumlaw Church, Heart & Soul Community Church, New Found Hope Community Church, Restoring Hope Church, Lake Life Church, Mile City Church, One Mission Church, Transformation Church, Mile City Church South Lyon, City Church Ypsilanti, Cornerstone Fellowship, Redemption Church Grand Rapids, The Way Church

Would you like to personally meet some of our church planters, their wives and hear their stories? You can if you will register and attend the upcoming Church Equipping Conference 2019 on September 28, 2019 at Cornerstone Baptist Church at 17017 East Twelve Mile Road, Roseville, Michigan 48066.

Please, prepare now. Make a list of influential people. Bring them with you for a day of inspiration from 8:30 to 4:00. I will host a “speed dating” time with church planters and their wives. Register as early as you can a place for yourself and 10-20 from your church at <https://www.bscm.org/register> - they will thank you for inviting them.

A cord of three strands

By Michael L. Ritchie DC

"We are going to do tug of war!" belts out Ray Howell, founding servant of Kicking Bear Camps, "Boys against the girls!" This was a special year at Roscommon's Centershot/Kicking Bear camp, because Ray Howell was bringing his joyful exuberance to Bambi Lake Camp in Roscommon, MI and Aaron Scheer was bringing his Genesis "Wordless Bow" to share its special story with the camps participants. This would be the fifth year that Roscommon Baptist had sponsored the event supported by the two organizations. "The camp has become much more fun since Kicking Bear Camps have joined us," says Michael Ritchie, the event's organizer and board member of Centershot Ministries. "Ray has been commissioned by God to be a big brother to all these kids and they just love being with him."

The two day camp included: 3-D archery, archery tag, tomahawk throwing, crossbow shooting, swimming, Tug of war, minnows and sharks, relay races of all kinds, a marshmallow fight with 50 bags of marshmallows, and culminating in Aaron sharing the gospel message by using the Genesis "Wordless bow". Fireworks ended the busy day with lights out at 11 pm. Saturday started off early with breakfast and a NASP/Centershot outdoor tournament. Lunch and awards followed the tourney and a baptism was planned for those who were saved through the ministry of the word.

"We are seeing a clear pattern around the country: revival is happening in churches, communities and families through the sport of archery. Kicking Bear draws families in, the vehicle is the Genesis bow and Centershot Ministries encourages families into discipleship at the local church level," says Centershot Ministries Director Aaron Scheer. Ray Howell agrees. "Like Moses delivered the people of Israel with a shepherd's staff, God is doing the same thing with a bow and arrow."

The Tug of war began between the boys and the girls with the boys narrowly beating the girls in 2 straight matches. "You know, we had one of our ropes let loose one time, there were so many kids pulling in opposite directions" Ray told Ritchie. "Now we have a 2-5/8" ropes 100 foot long just to make sure it never happens again." The world is pulling families apart these days and it is up to God's church to bring them together. The three-fold cord the Holy Spirit used this weekend was Kicking Bear Camps, the Genesis Bow and a Centershot Church that has made Christ the target of their lives. The commitment cards after the evening message showed that 12 young people gave their hearts to Jesus and 11 rededicated their lives to him. Five young people and a grandmother committed to baptism.

"One woman that brought her daughter and grandson to the camp told me that Eli (grandson) went home and told his mom he got saved and baptized. He had the biggest smile on his face" said Ritchie. Ritchie had the privilege of baptizing Grandma and

grandson the next day at Roscommon Baptist Church's morning service. "Jo-Jo, her daughter, also wants to be baptized in two weeks so that her friend can be there." Kicking Bear's motto is "Put a bow in the hands of a kid and win them and their family to the Lord."

A mentor, a bow, a kid and the Lord is a cord not easily broken!

The Bible says in **Ecclesiastes 4:12**

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A **cord** of three **strands** is not quickly broken

I would personally like to thank the BSCM and the staff for supporting us in our events. At Roscommon Baptist we do our best as a small church to fulfill the great commission. We think a great commission church is a church that supports the Cooperative Program, and our state and mission offerings. As a cord of many strands the body of Christ is stronger and more able to see the world won for Him!

Training Prevented the Church's Death

By Tony Lynn

Plymouth - You can thank my mother and father for my earliest training. Without my parents' perseverance I might still be wearing diapers, eating with my fingers and crawling on my hands and knees to get to that lunch meeting with you. I can just see you stooping down to shake my dirty hands crusted with floor grime. Yuck!

I do not remember one thing about those training moments in my life, and yet I am grateful I went through them. The effort of others improved my future. Training is sometimes practical and at other times it is inspirational. Both are vital elements to quality training. One moment, an infant is guided with a mother's gentle touch on how to hold the spoon and at another moment a cheering grandmother stands four-feet away from her precious grandbaby with outstretched hands saying, "Come on honey. You can do it. Walk to your grandma. You can do it." Everyone needs to build competency,⁰ and all of us could do with more commitment.

It is time for you to [register](#) specific church members for the September 28, [2019 Church Equipping Conference](#). With pen and paper in hand, write down the names of those who influence others in a positive way in the church. Call them, invite them, ask them to save this one Saturday for the Lord and register them this week. Plan on sharing an early breakfast and commute together on that September Saturday. You will be glad you did. One Saturday could be the first step to revitalizing the church.

Back during the late 1980's, an associational missionary strategist encouraged me to consider becoming the pastor of a small church in Michigan. He cast an image that caught my attention. With his hands shaking an imaginary set of keys in front of my eyes he said, "Tony, there is a wonderful tiny group of people who are ready to hand me the keys to the church building if they cannot find the right pastor to lead them to grow. I think you can help them turn the church around."

By God's intervention I became the pastor of that tiny church. It was a loving fellowship. The people were friendly, but we desperately needed training. Preschool leaders were simply babysitters. Children's leaders brought crafts, cakes, and crayons spending only a few brief minutes with an open Bible. The youth ministry was a free for all discussion time while the adult Bible class was an hour-long lecture. No one meant any harm because they did not know any better. I remembered the wisdom of a professor who warned us in seminary class, "Poorly equipped Sunday School or Bible study teachers

can empty a church classroom faster than the best outreach or evangelism can fill a church.”

As I look around in the region, I see two things that concern me. First, I see individual pastors who appear to be pulling on a stubborn rope, by themselves, trying to tug their respective churches forward into better spiritual health with no progress. Second, I see men and women in churches who have the compulsion to do more for the Lord and His Kingdom, but they just do not know how to help. No one is instructing them. They have the heart; they just lack the know-how. This church equipping conference could be the first step to correcting both challenges. Pastors and church members need to spend more time discussing, identifying and designing solutions that will take the church into better spiritual health.

In the second and third year of leadership at that tiny church, I was entrusted with training people who would train others in the local area. I wanted to share the blessing of training, so I called the other local pastors asking them to recommend members of their churches. To my surprise, they did not recommend anyone, not one person. Required to fill a list of people who would be trained to then train others, I selected people exclusively from my church. It seemed selfish but I was not going to fail at the first phase. The state convention provided the high-quality training at low or no-cost.

Can you imagine what happened? Within one year's time of starting the training that tiny church became healthier and started growing as healthy churches do. Before you knew it, the congregation each month was on-the-average baptizing two new people who professed faith in Christ and receiving two new members by transfer of a church letter. Training people within that tiny church saved it from dying! What is equally exciting was that the pastors who earlier did not want to recommend church members for training were now pleading with me to train the people within their congregations so they could experience good spiritual health and growth. We did so and that period of time in that local association became a time of growth and strength.

I hope to see you on September 28, at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Roseville, Michigan with 10-20 people commuting with you. That Saturday's travel time is when inspirational dreams will take root in the heart of influential church members who will then influence the church toward good health. Consequently, the pastor will find others tugging on the rope with him and good people will know **why** we do what we do (commitment) and **how** to do what we do (competency). See you on that Saturday in September.

FIRST-PERSON: Does church membership matter?

By J.D. Greear

RALEIGH-DURHAM, N.C. (BP) -- There was a time when the question of church membership was not much of a question at all. Jump back a generation or two, and nearly every church in the country had a roster of members.

Now the question, however, is much more persistent. Many contemporary churches have membership but don't place much emphasis on it. Others don't have membership at all, encouraging their people to get involved and engaged without a more formal process.

So should believers join their local church?

When you look at Scripture, you won't find the word "membership." But that's not much of an argument against membership, since the word "Trinity" isn't in the Bible either. The concept is.

The core concept of membership is having a covenant community where you belong. We see that evidenced in multiple places in Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul mentions a case of removing someone from the body of believers, which implies a formal category. In Acts 6, the believers have an election, again implying an "in/out" category. And in 1 Timothy 5:3–16, we see a clear teaching on how to handle widows in the church. In that latter passage, there's even language of creating a roster so the leaders would be able to care for these women well.

The New Testament writers never say, "You need to become a member of the local church." But every letter in the New Testament assumes that believers are an active part of a local church gathering.

We see this in the how the writers give instruction on submission to church authority, how believers ought to handle sin within the church, and the elders' responsibility to shepherd the flock under their care (1 Corinthians 5, Hebrews 13:17, Acts 20:28). If we are to take these commands seriously, we have to be joined to a local body to know who our leaders are.

In my experience, many people resist joining the church because they approach the church with a consumer mindset. They don't want to belong. They don't want expectations placed on them. They want to receive something. It may be a good something -- biblical teaching, for instance -- but the overall approach is consumeristic.

I'm not always opposed to consumer relationships. They're fine if you're talking about fast food. But apply that kind of thinking to relationships like your marriage or your children, and you will create major problems.

The church is not a consumer relationship. The church is a family. And families are committed to each other.

The biblical metaphor that shows this most clearly is that of being "one body" (1 Corinthians 12). Can you imagine your physical body with "non-committed" body members? What good is a hand if it's not actually connected to the rest of you?

It's just as silly for Christians to think they can follow Christ without engaging in the life of the local church body. How do you use your gifts and experience the gifts of others if not in the local community? How do you fulfill the "one another" commands of Scripture unless you are, well, with one another?

Generally, though, when I encounter someone who is reluctant to join a church, the issues aren't predominantly theological or ideological. They're usually more a combination of preference and personal history. Those of us in ministry should be sensitive to that, but we can also help disciple our people by letting them know that it is a categorically good thing for them to become members.

For instance, I frequently have conversations like this with college students. They are plugged into their college ministry, relatively involved in church, and just don't see much need to join.

But rather than bashing them with guilt ("Jesus died so you could join His church! Don't spurn His sacrifice!"), I try to remind them that the local church is a tremendous gift. In the local church, college students can find multi-dimensional discipleship and be led by elders whose very role is to shepherd them. In the local church, college students can practice love and service in ways that set them up for a lifetime of faithfulness.

If you're hesitant to join a local church because it's full of imperfect people, you'll be waiting a long time.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said there are three stages of growth when it comes to Christians engaging in the church. The first is disgust at the sins of others. The second is disgust at your own sin. On their own, those first two stages push us away from the church.

But the third stage is where we recognize that we can re-enter the church as an instrument in the hands of the Redeemer -- a Redeemer who has, in fact, redeemed us from being the self-righteous Pharisee committed to judging everyone else.

Don't wait for the perfect church. It simply doesn't exist. And if it did, the moment you joined it, it wouldn't be perfect anymore.

Instead, find a church with good biblical preaching, that emphasizes community and practices accountability, and that propels you into ministry. Then join in with everything you've got.

Praise in the Park Event - 2019

By Stan Parker

Lansing - The Praise in the Park Block Party was again an exciting evangelistic event, sponsored by Faith Fellowship Baptist Church (FFBC). It was held at Walsh Park in Lansing this July. It was preceded by a Holy Ghost Tent Revival the night before the block party. There were many rededications and new souls brought to Christ.

Faith Fellowship partnered with community businesses, local churches and the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) to make this outreach event a success. This partnership included financial contributions, equipment rental, and support to setup and breakdown event activities. Over the weekend 247 people attended, 22 made professions of faith, and another 7 made life rededications.

In addition to the Gospel message presented by Pastor Stan Parker, this event engaged participants with gospel music entertainment. It included The Church of Elohim, Spoken Praise, Worship Without Words, and Kings Highway group. Each group/performer ministered a soulful praise to God that created a spiritual atmosphere and relayed a positive gospel message to the community.

The Praise in the Park Block Party also provided a Community Resource Fair. The resources offered focused on health screenings, health care sign-up, and children's summer activity opportunities. The participating groups were The Board of Water & Light, Church of Greater Lansing Network, The Ingham County Fair, The Lansing Police Dept., The Lansing NAACP, and The Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.-Theta Rho Zeta, Lansing Graduate Chapter. The Zetas provided Health Screenings, Human Trafficking information and Health & Wellness information to the attendees.

There were also prizes and games. The adults were blessed with a variety of gift cards and CD's. Two of the children in attendance received new bikes. All of the children also participated in various games and activities, including bowling, bean bag toss, basketball, face-painting, hula-hooping, tic-tac-toe, and a bounce house.

FFBC glorified God by engaging the community, and demonstrating the love of Christ. This engagement and display of love resulted in the adding of souls to the Kingdom of God. Some of the children who attended the Block Party also attended Vacation Bible School the following week at FFBC, with the potential of also attending Sunday School in the future to continue their growth in Jesus Christ.

Pastor Stan Parker says, "We want to give a very special "thank you" to the Baptist State Convention of Michigan for partnering with us to make this event possible. Your steadfast support continually overwhelms us! For more information about FFBC events please contact us at 517-853-9897 or faithfellowshiplansing@hotmail.com.

Not all stories end happily, but Gospel prevails

by Lonnie Wilkey/Baptist and Reflector

HERMITAGE, Tenn. (BP) -- Clayton Gangji would have been 16 years old on June 6.

Yet, more than two years ago, Clayton was killed by gunfire at the age of 14 after being involved in a robbery involving stolen cars.

But as always, God can use evil for His good.

When Clayton was a young boy he lived in the same neighborhood as Vicki Hulsey, childhood specialist for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

Hulsey, a member of Hermitage Hills Baptist Church in Hermitage, Tenn., began conducting a Backyard Kids Club about 11 years ago in her neighborhood to reach children who might not attend church.

Clayton began attending the backyard club at Hulsey's house and soon developed a close friendship with her. He returned year after year and eventually made a profession of faith.

That profession of faith is what Hulsey and Clayton's grandfather, Rick Short, find hope in, two years after Clayton's tragic and untimely death.

It's also the reason Hulsey is such a strong advocate for Backyard Kids Clubs, which take the Gospel outside the church doors into the neighborhoods.

Statistics reveal that the majority of people who accept Christ do so before age 18, Hulsey noted, citing Barna Research that indicates adults age 19 and over have just a 6 percent probability of becoming Christians. She added that a survey from the International Bible Society indicates that 83 percent of all Christians make commitments to Jesus Christ between the ages of 4 and 14.

Clayton is a prime example "of why it is so important to reach children with the Gospel," she noted. "What if he had not been reached?"

Clayton was the product of a broken home and though he moved in with his grandparents -- Rick and Jo Ann Short -- at the age of 5, he was scarred by what he

was forced to witness. Though he lived with his grandparents, he maintained contact with his mother and father and did not always encounter positive influences.

When he entered middle school, Clayton was around older kids who also negatively impacted his life, Rick Short said. As a result, Clayton was arrested and spent time in juvenile detention shortly before he was killed.

"He was influenced by the wrong people and we weren't successful in turning him around," his grandfather said.

As one would expect, Short wonders what might have been.

"My wife and I think about what we could have done differently," he acknowledged.

Short said he finds hope in knowing that Clayton was involved in church and Backyard Kids Club and that he had professed faith in Christ. He said Clayton played a role in helping him turn his life around.

Short noted he had drifted from God and that he drank too much.

"In 2010, Clayton told me, 'Pop, you aren't the same when you drink.' That changed me," Short said. He immediately stopped. "I told Clayton he was the reason I quit drinking."

By all accounts, Clayton was a good kid with a passionate heart who always looked out for younger kids and those who might not have been the most athletic.

Hulsey was one of the speakers at Clayton's funeral two years ago.

"I'll never forget that day in 2015 when Clayton spotted me after church. He gave me his usual bear hug and then excitedly told me that he had accepted Jesus as His Savior. He wanted to follow Jesus and to be like Him," she recalled.

At the funeral Hulsey acknowledged that "Clayton wasn't perfect and I have no doubt that he made some bad choices. I also know that I'm not perfect and neither is any person in this room. But I do believe this. Just like He did with Clayton, Jesus sees who you really are. He knows your heart. He knows your worth, and He loves you no matter what."

She reminded his friends that though Clayton died, "God can bring about His purposes not only through Clayton's life, but also through his death."

And, in the two years since Clayton's death, Hulsey has found that to be true.

"I have had the opportunity many times to share his story across the state as I share about the importance of reaching outside the walls of the church," she said.

She once shared the story at a Weekday Early Education Conference sponsored by the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

"One of the preschool teachers in attendance accepted Christ. She and her husband have since been baptized," Hulsey said.

She has had numerous people tell her that Clayton's story has inspired them to reach the children in their community.

"His story has motivated people to share the Gospel all across Tennessee," Hulsey said.

"His story captivates people," she noted. "God is still fulfilling His purpose for Clayton through his death."

Clayton's tragic death definitely has inspired his grandfather to continue to be involved in church and especially Backyard Kids Club.

"I'm committed to doing everything I can to make a difference in my other grandchildren's lives and other children in the community so they don't go down the path that Clayton went," Short said.

He urges "all parents and grandparents to action to watch for warning signs" and to take an active role in young lives to draw them to God and set the example to try to prevent other tragedies of young lives lost.

Closing the Back Door

How would you answer the following question?

The Bible is...

- A.** A credible, historical document, accurately depicting its people, places and events.
- B.** Somewhat credible in that the core story is true, but some parts have been added.
- C.** Not a credible document, in that it has been added to many times over the years.

Most church people I have met would probably choose answer A, although they may be hard pressed to defend this answer. Most were raised to believe the Bible is true, and good Christians don't ask hard questions.

I have found that many church people would choose answer B; they see the Bible is God's Word but it is not really a historical document. Rather, it is viewed more as a "religious" document in that the core concepts are true, but not the details of the Bible. They have some doubts about how something that old and hand copied over the years could possibly be viewed as accurate and true.

Many people outside of the church would choose answer C; the Bible is just a religious book with good, moral concepts. Presenting the Bible as a historical document would be ludicrous to them because of its age and supposedly suspect transmission process.

What they do, and don't know

How would your **youth** answer this question? I can shed some light on this question. Every semester for the past seven years, I have asked that question (and many more) to my students at Shorter University. Every Shorter student must take Bible classes: Old Testament Survey and New Testament Survey. The number of students I have surveyed over the years has been about 1,600.

At the beginning of these courses each student takes a Pretest on the Bible. The Pretest is a 30-question Bible literacy quiz, which shows what the students know (and don't know!) about the Bible. There are two parts to the Pretest. One part asks questions which are specific to either the Old or New Testament, depending on the course. For example, one question in the New Testament Pretest asks who wrote the Gospels. There is also a second part made up of six apologetic questions that have been carefully woven into both Pretests. The same three questions on the Bible is in both Pretests (one such question is #1 seen above). The other questions are on God and Jesus.

Why do I use a Pretest? There are two reasons:

1. **Entry Level Knowledge** – a good teacher desires to know what the student's knowledge about the subject is as they begin the class. One effective way to discover this is by using a Pretest. A Pretest reveals not only the entry knowledge of the student, but also gaps in their knowledge or even misconceptions. This information guides the teacher in what to cover and address in class.
2. **Exit Level Knowledge** – how can we know if a student has truly learned in class? By testing the student's knowledge about the subject as they finish the class. To accomplish this, I use a Posttest as the last quiz for the class. The Posttest has the same questions as the Pretest. By comparing the student's Pretest scores and Posttest scores, a teacher can easily see what the student has learned and if the teacher was successful in teaching.

As I have analyzed the Pretests/Posttests over the years, I have made two surprising discoveries:

1. The Bible knowledge Pretest scores are consistently very low. In fact, the average Pretest class score was 33 out of 100 points, meaning they only got about one-third of the questions right.
2. Based on these results, I have identified three different groups of students. I classify them as follows:
 - **Uncompromising** – these students are passionate Christians raised in the church, active Christians while at school, and excited to be in a Bible survey class.
 - **Unchurched** – these students are passionate pagans who know or care very little for the Bible and did not want to take a Bible class.
 - **Unsure** – these students were raised in Christianity but are now unsure of their faith. Christianity was their parent's religion, but now that they were away and on their own, they are not sure the Christian faith is theirs. This group had a lot of questions or doubts about God, Jesus, or the Bible.

Where they land

The groups of students were identified based on five demographic questions that were included in each Pretest:

1. When you were a child, in what religion were you raised, if any? Options: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, and other/nothing.

2. Growing up, how many years were you raised in a religion, if any? Options: 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-15, or 16-18.
3. What religion do you practice now, if any? Options: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, and other/nothing.
4. How important is religion in your life currently? Options: very important, important, somewhat important, I'll get around to it someday, not important, and unsure.
5. In reference to the Bible, I struggle believing ... Options: that it is the Word of God (inspiration), that the Bible does not contain errors (inerrancy), that the story of the creation in Genesis is true, that a man named Jesus actually existed, and nothing.

The students I classified as **Uncompromising** answered question #1) "raised in Christianity;" question #2) 11-18 years; question #3) "practice Christianity;" and question #4) their Christian religion was "very important" or "important" to their lives currently.

The students I classified as **Unchurched** answered question #1) "Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism," or "other/nothing;" question #2) 0-18 years (if raised in a pagan religion); question #3) practice "Judaism, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism," or "nothing;" and question #4) their religion is "not important" to their lives currently.

The students I classified as **Unsure** answered question #1) "raised in Christianity;" question #2) 11-18 years; question #3) "practice Christianity;" but they answered question #4) their Christian religion is "somewhat important," "I'll get around to it someday," or "unsure" to their lives currently.

So how did each group score on the Pretest? In the next article I will reveal the surprising results. I will also give suggestions as to what parents and the church can do to move their teen from the Unsure group to the Uncompromising.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randy Douglass (Ed.D., D. Min.) is associate professor of Christian Studies at Shorter University and is in his eighth year there. Prior to that, he pastored multiple churches and was on staff in two church plants. He taught at Charleston Southern University in Charleston, South Carolina and was professor of pastoral theology at Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina. He has co-authored two books with the late Dr. Norman Geisler – "Bringing Your Faith to Work: Answers for Break-Room Skeptics" by Baker Books, 2005; and "Integrity at Work" by Baker Books, 2007.

'Thank you,' Greear tells black church assembly

by Diana Chandler

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP) -- As the annual Black Church Leadership and Family Conference opened to perhaps 1,000 attendees at Ridgecrest, N.C., Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear was in the number.

"I want you to hear from me, who has the privilege of serving in this capacity as president, I want you to hear, 'Thank you,' and I want you to know that your sacrifices, and your prayers and your faith, have not been in vain, that God is using them," Greear told the predominantly African American audience on the event's opening night July 22.

"And with our humility, and with our continued posture of repentance, we believe that even greater days are ahead," Greear said, "because God doesn't move in His church unless He intends to impact the world in the future."

Greear, who has demonstrated diversity in his appointments to SBC committees, attended the urban ministry event with his wife Veronica and about 10 other members and staff from The Summit Church he leads in the Raleigh-Durham area.

"By God's grace, He is moving in His church, and He is showing us that ... to be a reflection of His glory, we need to reflect the diversity of our communities, but we also need to proclaim the diversity of the coming Kingdom, and that is what gives glory to Jesus," Greear said. "You, brothers and sisters," he told conference attendees, "you have believed that, and you have prayed for that, for a long, long time. I think in recent days we have seen a new movement of God's Spirit in continuing to move us toward that."

Intentional diversity, Greear said, is not about charity, but about truth.

"It is really a recognition that we need the wisdom that God has put into your community to go into the days ahead," Greear said. "God has written a very unique story in your churches, in your lives. That is a wisdom that He intends to use sovereignly as we continue to proclaim the Gospel to our nation. It is something you are doing not as a service to the Lord Jesus, not only to Him, but also as a service to your brothers and sisters of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Ken Weathersby, SBC Executive Committee vice president for convention advancement, introduced Greear as a friend who has led The Summit Church to be used by God in a "tremendous way."

"The church is drawing through sending out folks. That sounds strange," Weathersby said. "But God has called Dr. Greear to raise up leaders and send them out. And yet as he sends leaders out all over the country and around the world, God continues to multiply The Summit Church. The Lord grows the ministry by giving away."

The Southern Baptist Cooperative Program of funding missions empowers all churches to be involved in sending missionaries and planting churches, Weathersby said, introducing an informational video on the Southern Baptist "Who's Your One?" evangelistic emphasis.

Who's Your One? and keeping the Gospel paramount have been among Greear's top concerns during his presidency, now in its second year. The Gospel holds together the diversity of God's Kingdom, Greear told the gathering that also included Southern Baptist entity representatives.

"God has given us a privilege to serve, to stand together, to come together around the Gospel being above all, for the purposes of the Great Commission," Greear said. "As I look around this room I see not only a very important part of the present of the Southern Baptist Convention, but even more so I'm overwhelmed by this being the picture of our future."

"We know brothers and sisters what God's Word says about the church, that it's a group of people that come together not around skin color, or not around past cultural heritage, certainly not around political affiliation," he said. "We come together united in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

More than 60 percent of all Southern Baptist churches planted last year were planted with leaders of color. Nearly 20 percent of Southern Baptists are people of color, Greear said.

Greear asked conference attendees to pray that Southern Baptists remain focused on the Gospel as the United States enters a national election season, which presents challenges based on political differences.

"Southern Baptist churches are not always or ever at their best during seasons like this one. I want you to pray with me that God would allow this to be a season where we really do keep the Gospel above all," Greear said. "What I do know is this, salvation did not come riding in on the wings of Air Force One. That great Savior sitting on the throne of God one day is not going to be an elephant, and He's not going to be a donkey. He's going to be a lamb that was slain since the foundation of the world. Him we preach, Him we proclaim."

Separating the church from the Gospel separates us from the power of God, Greear said, referencing 1 Corinthians 15, where the apostle Paul describes the Gospel as most important.

The leadership conference, nearing its 30th year, is not exclusively for blacks, conference convener Mark Croston has said. The gathering is designed also for parents of black children, church leaders who want to reach black communities around them, and leaders of churches desiring to become more multicultural, said Croston, national director of black church partnerships with LifeWay Christian Resources.

"To All Generations! Faithfulness, Forgiveness, Favor Forever" is the conference theme, with nightly worship, daily group Bible exposition, expanded breakout sessions, gender-specific events and recreational activities. LifeWay's Centrifuge Camp for grades 7-12 runs concurrently for conference families.

On the border: 'Urgent need' to show Christ's love

by Diana Chandler

TIJUANA, Mexico (BP) -- The two adult sisters risked their lives in a months-long journey from Cameroon in Central Africa to Tijuana, Mexico. Southern Baptist pastor Marshal Ausberry was surprised to see them at the Southern U.S. border seeking asylum in America.

"It's just not people from Central America and South America that are coming," Ausberry, first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told Baptist Press following his trip last week to the border. "There are people from Africa and Haiti that have migrated to Mexico in attempts to come through the border to the United States."

Ausberry met the immigrants at a Baptist church in Mexico as he was on a fact-finding mission on border ministry with Todd Unzicker, an associate pastor at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, N.C. The Christian sisters fled persecution in Cameroon.

"That was just one story, and there are thousands of those kinds of stories," said Ausberry, senior pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax Station, Va. "I kind of see it as a modern-day diaspora, that God is shifting the population around for His purposes. When people are willing to endure such great hardships to come to the United States from Mexico for their personal safety, it just moves your heart.

"We don't get into the politics of it, but as believers in Christ Jesus, we're burdened to do that basic level of care," Ausberry told BP. "We still need to show them that human dignity of food, clothing and shelter, that care ... as they go through the political process of getting asylum and access to the United States and Mexico."

SBC President and The Summit Church senior pastor J.D. Greear asked Ausberry, Unzicker and SBC second vice president Noe Garcia to make the trip, but Garcia was unable to make the trip and needed to remain home where he pastors North Phoenix Baptist Church.

July 16-18 in Tijuana, Ausberry and Unzicker met with leaders of the National Baptist Convention of Mexico, Baptist pastors, Southern Baptist pastors from California and Southern Baptist workers in Mexico to learn about ministry to those caught in the crisis on the border.

"As Pastor J.D. says, most of us are not called or competent to make policy decisions on the border, but we are commanded by Jesus to love our neighbors and those who are hurting," Unzicker told BP. "And this, what is a crisis, I think could actually be an absolute win for the Kingdom.

"Nobody could doubt that God is moving the nations all around the globe right now, in ways that history has not seen before," Unzicker said. "We were able to go and share the Gospel with people who literally had nothing."

The sisters from Cameroon were staying and serving at a church while awaiting an immigration hearing in the U.S., Ausberry said.

"They really have the joy of Christ in them," he said, and prefer their current situation to Cameroon. "Their love for Christ, their hopefulness, is just tremendous. It touched our hearts, and we're thankful for the church opening their doors to give them a place to stay, a place to serve while they're waiting to go to the hearing to continue their path to seeking asylum."

Ausberry and Unzicker visited five sites where aid is being administered. Baptist churches there do much with few resources, the two said. At one church, about 30 immigrants were housed on cots stacked to the ceiling. Churches were feeding, clothing and ministering to those who had fled home with nothing.

"One pastor had such a burden," Unzicker said, that he asked his leadership for permission to house immigrants in the church's Sunday School classrooms. "His leadership team said OK you can make room for five people, so he went out and brought back 30. And so they made bunks that just went all the way up to the ceiling.

"It's happening all along (the border) from Brownsville (Texas) to Tijuana," Unzicker said. "We want to catalyze that, and see all Southern Baptist entities and churches working together for one cause."

Greear will use information gathered on the trip to Mexico to formulate ideas for ministry through Southern Baptists and partners, Unzicker and Ausberry said. Greear could not make the trip, as he was in Asia in July meeting with 51 missionaries from The Summit Church serving in Thailand and Malaysia.

Ausberry noted there is "an urgent need here to show the love of Christ, and it's in real terms of food, shelter, clothing, a bath, a bed, just basic needs you and I take for granted.

"I use the phrase, it's almost like we're making bricks without straw. They do what they can," he said.

Ausberry and Unzicker described the situation as an optimum opportunity tangibly to show the love of Christ.

"The nations are coming to our front doorstep," Unzicker said. "We want to certainly welcome them with arms that are full of blankets and food, and most importantly the love of Jesus."

Boats, buses, trains & bikes: Gospel modes of travel

by IMB Staff

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) -- Whether "metro surfing" in one of the world's megacities or bumping along dirt roads, a missionary's daily commute can look -- and feel and smell -- very different from typical transportation in America.

Sometimes it's eyes squeezed shut and a prayer on your lips as your bus careens down the road. Sometimes it's like a real-life video game, dodging obstacles on a motorbike. And sometimes it's just a normal car ride -- on the left side of the road.

Here are various ways around the world that missionaries get around.

Boats

Christian missionaries have used boats since the days of the apostle Paul. Boats remain an essential method of transportation among coastal peoples, refugees and the peoples of the Amazon and other remote regions.

In the Amazon, a missionary may journey by boat into the interior of Brazil, Peru and Ecuador. Riverboats facilitate trade and maintain communication between villages and cities. One journey can last three days; some last three weeks. Nevertheless, it "is the only mode of transportation to further the Gospel," a missionary in Brazil said.

Elsewhere, an IMB missionary may take a 13-hour boat ride across the historic Lake Tanganyika in Africa. In Hong Kong and other parts of East Asia, ferries extend the reach of public transportation, making more destinations accessible to missionaries.

Metros

Light rail, designed to make travel within a metropolitan context more efficient, is commonplace in commutes for missionaries in the world's megacities.

The Cairo metro system, for example, sprawls across the city, delivering an estimated 4 million passengers per day over three different lines and nearly 50 miles of train track, both above ground and below.

Metros, like Cairo's, are usually crowded, so riding the metro can be an exercise in letting go of personal space. New urbanites often learn metro skills such as "metro

surfing" -- riding the sway of the metro like a surfer rides a wave. "Sometimes," one missionary said, "I just laugh along with a complete stranger, hands stuck to our sides, since there is nowhere else to go, and ride the ebb and flow of the metro car."

Trains

In some locations, people spend days on a train, such as this one originating at the Hua Lomphong Railway Station in Bangkok, Thailand, to reach their destination. As missionaries roll across the countryside, children play with newfound friends, people swap stories and the conductor sells ice cream.

In India, the railroad brought during British colonization remains one of the country's most efficient modes of transportation. However, because railcars often are overfull, passengers have been hurt or even smothered.

Cars

During the rainy season in eastern Myanmar and in other countries, roads are marred by potholes and ruts, and they're even more treacherous during monsoon season.

"Some villages are completely inaccessible for months at a time without a four-wheel-drive vehicle," a missionary in Southeast Asia said.

Driving on the left side of the road is a new skill that missionaries must master in a number of countries. Cars are popular among the middle and upper class in South Asia. In India, it's common for businessmen to have personal drivers to transport them to and from the office.

Buses

Many Hong Kong locals, for example, choose to use the intricate bus system, but it can be quite difficult for travelers unfamiliar with the system's many routes.

Until recently, owning a car was too expensive for most East Asians. For the lower and middle classes, buses remain affordable and accessible. Even now, though the middle class has begun to buy cars, existing infrastructure does not allow for the increase in traffic.

Matatus

In Ghana, 12- to 24-passenger vans are called trotros, or matatus in various other countries. These long rides in close quarters -- though said to be not as crowded or dangerous as they once were -- can be great times for sharing the Gospel, a missionary in West Africa noted.

In Nairobi, Kenya, matatus are brightly colored buses or vans operated by private owners, or saccos, taking passengers in and out of the bustling business district. The price is fixed, so saccos advertise their rides with unique decorations.

A missionary in Kenya once saw a matatu with John Elway's picture on the wall -- a tribute to the 1980s Denver Broncos. A wild matatu ride is "definitely a cultural experience," he said.

Trucks

Passengers perch on a truck as it rumbles down a North African road. Some missionaries serve where seatbelts are only a formality, and riding in the back of a truck with 14 new acquaintances is an acceptable mode of transportation.

Motorbikes

In Tehran, Iran, it is not uncommon for a family to ride together on a motorcycle as a versatile and inexpensive means of transportation.

In Jakarta, Indonesia, it's estimated there are 15 million motorbikes compared to 5 million cars.

According to a worker in South Asia, motorbike drivers "go anywhere on the road they want: sidewalks, ditches, in between cars," interacting with an ever-changing flow of traffic.

A worker in Southeast Asia confessed, "Seeing multiple people on a scooter at once always makes me smile. Although, 'the bikes' are very dangerous. You learn to pray a lot when you drive in Asia."

One missionary recalls driving on a one-way street when a motorbike carrying fresh poultry came from the opposite direction, causing a crash and hurling 30 chickens into the air.

Bicycles

A father riding a bicycle with his two daughters through the streets of Amsterdam reflects the Europeans' outlook toward biking as a way to be environmentally conscious, maintain a healthy lifestyle and save money.

Missionaries in Europe say that as a result of biking, they've had conversations with other cyclists and, as one put it, "there has almost always been a chance to talk about our faith." And they often have the challenge of learning to balance groceries and/or kids as they ride through some of the foremost biking cities in the world.

In Mumbai, India, you can find dabbawalas transporting dabbas, or "lunchboxes," via bicycle for breakfast, lunch and dinner. For some dabbawalas, transporting food is a spiritual journey rooted in Hinduism.

Rickshaws

While a rickshaw seems to have been designed for children, it's simply a tricycle made to carry passengers of any age, such as this rickshaw in Jakarta, Indonesia, where the driver waits for his next customer.

One missionary recalls the day he tested the quality of seat padding in several rickshaws. Within no time, all of the rickshaw drivers were trying to convince him their rickshaw had the best seat padding.

In South Asia, rickshaws, which are called "autos," are motorbikes within a metal shell. These are the taxis of the region, and missionaries have found that while drivers wait for customers they're often open to conversation.

Animals

Some missionaries work with people who use more lively (and ornery) forms of transport. Donkey carts can still be found in the villages of Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and Europe.

These boys, aboard a donkey cart, are headed to draw water from a well in northern Ghana where most houses do not have running water, and people rely on wells for clean water.

Donkey carts can roll along dirt roads riddled with ruts. "It's not very comfy riding in the cart," a missionary admitted, "but that's probably due to the poor engineering of the cart, not the donkey's fault."

In Chad, camels are a main form of transportation, capable of surviving with little water and food, making them a great choice in rugged, dry terrain, even if they do spit sometimes.

In the Bible

Jesus met people along the roads He traveled: His disciples on the way to Emmaus and the Samaritan woman are two examples. May we pray expectantly that God will place people in the seat next to us, so that they, too, will encounter Jesus along the road.

"Whenever I have prayed that prayer honestly in South Asia or elsewhere," a missionary said, "I cannot think of a time when it was not answered."

College students see lives change through GenSend

by Brandon Elrod

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP) -- A group of students in Calgary had the opportunity to share their faith with another student and saw him come to Christ. The next week, another team of students, 3,400 miles away in Puerto Rico, led a grandmother to Christ. In New York City, an unexpected subway detour led a student to a gospel conversation with a Muslim man.

All summer long, students participating in Send Relief's GenSend program have been living "on mission" in 19 cities across North America by serving with North American Mission Board (NAMB) missionaries.

"We teach students how to live their lives on mission in a different context by putting them alongside church planting and compassion ministry missionaries," said Steve Turner, senior director of next generation mobilization with NAMB's Send Relief ministry.

"We teach a set of principles that are transferable," he noted, "no matter where they go."

The GenSend team in Calgary stayed in summer lodging at a local university and had the opportunity to interact with other college students living there, including the one who gave his life to Christ.

"He spoke to us about everything that he was struggling with and told us that he needed Jesus," reported Carly Hale, a member of Cross Church in Fayetteville, Ark., on behalf of her team. "We were able to pray with him and lead him to the Lord."

In Puerto Rico, part of their GenSend team worked with a local church plant's Vacation Bible School (VBS). As parents and guardians dropped off their children, the college students were able to share the Gospel with the adults. There, a grandmother who had grown up in and around the church heard the Gospel for the first time.

"After a lengthy chat, she confessed her need for Christ," said Itamar Elizalde of the Puerto Rico GenSend team.

"Later, the grandmother admitted that she went to the VBS so her grandchildren could be entertained," Elizalde said, "but she understood that the Lord had a deeper purpose."

As GenSend students live in their cities over the summer, their intentional focus to share the Gospel with their neighbors leads them to cross generational, ethnic and religious boundaries.

Several teams reported encounters with members of other faiths -- including Baha'i, Mormonism and Hinduism -- where they had to engage in respectful dialogue to defend and share their faith.

When a recent blackout in New York City led GenSend student Bruno Telma to take a different subway train, he wound up sharing the Gospel with a man who was asking for money.

"I asked him if I could pray for him," Telma said. "Then I started telling him about Jesus, and he told me he was a Muslim, but he really wanted to respond. So, he accepted Christ right there."

Katherine Hafley of Bush Memorial Baptist Church in Troy, Ala., and a student at Troy University described her anxiety ahead of going door to door to invite people to a sports camp hosted by a Washington, D.C., church plant. She realized she needed the Holy Spirit's help to have the courage and overcome a fear of rejection.

"Between the group of four people, we had about five gospel conversations and one profession of faith. And that's just the fruit we saw that day," Hafley said. Several kids from the neighborhood signed up for the sports camp and one person started attending the church regularly.

"The work ... reminds me that we have no idea what God can do through our faithful action," said Joel Whitson, a student at Spurgeon College at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary who has been serving in Chicago this summer.

"We simply need to listen, act and watch as God grows the kingdom one soul at a time," he noted.

During their summer in the city, the students are encouraged to learn the city's routines by visiting coffee shops, hosting activities at public parks and finding the hubs where residents are building community.

Turner calls this "exegeting the culture."

"We teach them to find people of peace," Turner said. "We teach them to really find the places of community where you can hang out, meet people and build relationships."

Part of reading their community led GenSend participants to take note of the needs affecting their cities. GenSend introduces students to Send Relief's compassion ministry efforts -- and to how these efforts help in making gospel conversations easier as students and churches seek to meet needs with the goal of seeing lives changed through the power of the Gospel.

For example, GenSend students continued to help citizens in Puerto Rico rebuild after the devastating hurricane in 2017.

Across North America, GenSend encouraged students to meet needs through Send Relief ministry centers and through their local church plants.

For ways the church can get more involved in meeting needs in the community, visit sendrelief.org for ministry guides and other helpful resources.

Pew: Christian, Muslim persecution most widespread

by Diana Chandler

WASHINGTON (BP) -- Christians and Muslims are persecuted in more countries than any other religious group, Pew Research Center said in a decade-long study showing high levels of persecution in 42 percent of countries studied.

Christians and Muslims, the largest and most widespread globally of any group, experienced government and/or social religious persecution in 143 and 140 countries respectively, Pew said in the latest installment of its study on religious restrictions around the world. But persecution levels varied among countries.

Study results released Monday (July 15) cover government restrictions and social hostilities based on religion from 2007–2017.

Christians and Muslims suffered the most harassment in the Middle East-North Africa region, the study confirms, while the Asia-Pacific region showed the second highest levels of Christian persecution. Europe came in second in persecution of Muslims.

Christians were persecuted in all 20 countries in the Middle East-North Africa region, in 73 percent of European countries, and in 60 percent of countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas.

"The latest data shows that 52 governments -- including some in very populous countries like China, Indonesia and Russia -- impose either 'high' or 'very high' levels of restrictions on religion, up from 40 in 2007," Pew said in a press release. "And the number of countries where people are experiencing the highest levels of social hostilities involving religion has risen from 39 to 56 over the course of the study."

While persecution levels have varied within the course of the 10 years the annual report has been compiled, the 10th anniversary of the study allowed Pew to document trends among 198 countries in distinct categories of government restrictions, termed the Government Restrictions Index or GRI, and social restrictions, tracked on a Social Hostilities Index or SHI.

Comprising both the GRI and the SHI, 83 countries or 42 percent of those studied experienced high or very high levels of overall restrictions on religion, Pew said. The percentage is just below a 10-year peak of 43 percent in 2012.

"As in previous years, most countries continue to have low to moderate levels of overall religious restrictions in 2017," Pew said in its press release.

In general, Christians were persecuted in 143 countries in 2017, compared to 107 in 2007. Muslims were persecuted in 140 countries in 2017, compared to 96 in 2007; Jews, 87 countries compared to 51; Others, encompassing such faiths as Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Baha'i, 50 compared to 33; folk religions, 38 up from 24; Hindus, 23 compared to 21; and Buddhists, 19 up from 10. The unaffiliated were persecuted in 23 countries in 2017, Pew said, compared to 3 in 2012, the earliest year the group was studied.

Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus experienced more widespread government harassment, while Jews were among those suffering more social harassment.

Government restrictions

In 2017, about a quarter of countries studied, 26 percent, showed "high" or "very high" levels of government restrictions including laws, policies and governmental actions restricting religious beliefs and practices, down from 28 percent in 2016 but up from 20 percent in 2007.

On a GRI index of 1-10, countries registering highest in persecution are China (8.9), Iran (8.4), Malaysia and Syria (8.3), Maldives (8.2), Russia (8.1), Algeria, Egypt and Uzbekistan (8.0), Indonesia and Turkmenistan (7.9), Saudi Arabia (7.8), Eritrea and Vietnam (7.6), and Tajikistan (7.5).

The GRI comprises 20 measures of restrictions including government favoritism of religious groups, highest in the Middle East; government laws and policies restricting religious freedom, which increased globally but remains highest in the Middle East; government limits on activities of religious groups and individuals, which has doubled in Europe but remains highest in the Middle East; and government harassment of religious groups, which has increased in every region since 2007.

Social hostilities

Countries with "high" or "very high" levels of social hostilities involving religion, including acts of religious hostility by private individuals, organizations or societal groups, registered at 28 percent in 2017, short of a 10-year peak of 33 percent in 2012. Sixty-six countries in 2017 rose on the SHI scale, while 75 countries fell.

Countries ranking highest in 2017 on the SRI scale of 1-10 are India (9.5), Syria (9.0), Iraq (8.8), Egypt (8.5), Nigeria (8.1), Central African Republic and Pakistan (7.7), Israel (7.3), Bangladesh (7.2), Germany, Libya, Somalia and Ukraine (7.1), and Palestinian territories (7.0).

The SHI measures religiously hostile acts based on 13 parameters grouped into categories including hostilities related to religious norms, which rose more in the Americas, Europe and sub-Saharan Africa; interreligious tension and violence, which declined most in the Americas; religious violence by organized groups, highest in the Middle East; and individual and social group harassment, which rose most substantially in the Americas.

Pew terms harassment as an offense against a religious group or person due to their religious identity, and can include being physically coerced or singled out to make life or religious practice more difficult. Harassment ranges from verbal or written acts to physical violence and killings.

Study results are available at

<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/07/15/a-closer-look-at-how-religious-restrictions-have-risen-around-the-world/>.