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Telling the story
of Michigan Baptists

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“I left a part of my heart in Africa”

ZAMBIA – *(A team of women from Arkansas, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri and Virginia worked with ongoing ministries and caught a vision of how their own Southern Baptist churches can develop a closer partnership with the IMB. Sabrina Patterson, wife to Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) Exec-Dir Tim Patterson, was part of this mission trip. Here are some of her posts from Facebook and her thoughts since returning.)*

“To be honest, I wasn't real sure what to expect. We knew we were going to be ministering to various groups of people, but we kept hearing...be flexible and be ready for anything, including singing. I am a planner and I can be flexible to some extent as long as I have an idea of what might be expected of me.”

“Our first day in Zambia was ministering to the area pastor's wives. We were there to encourage them in the walk where God had called them, but as usual, they were just as encouraging to us. Once again, we saw the Holy Spirit at work with who He paired us up with. One of the pastor's wives had recently had a miscarriage and the one so divinely put with her had had a miscarriage herself.

God was able to minister to that sweet Pastor Wife through another Pastor Wife that lived halfway across the World. The Pastor Wife that was divinely appointed for me to pray with was a wife struggling with retirement coming up and all that goes with that. I was able to walk with her through her fears as I had those very fears and God had shown himself faithful over and over in my life. We not only cried and prayed with these pastor wives, but we also laughed with them which can mean just as much as crying with someone. I always say, "laughter is medicine for the soul."

“One of the joys and highlights of this trip for me was seeing the Holy Spirit work in each and every woman that went on this trip. He knit us all together for a showing of His power instead of anything we could have planned for. I know for me, as I am sure everyone else will testify to the same, when I opened my mouth to speak about Jesus' love for each of them and how He loved them so much He made a way for them to spend eternity with Him, it wasn't me speaking and I felt His presence every time.”

“We did much more than these few things I touched on. We ate fantastic foods, met remarkable people from every walk of life, saw wild African animals and I even rode in an Airlight aircraft, which was basically a Motorcycle with wings and a small engine on the back, but my take away from this IMB Vision Trip is how well our missionaries are doing ministry all over the world because of everyday people like You cooperating together in our giving to Missions. I know you hear this all the time, but *We are better together* and that definitely includes our supporting missions through the IMB and NAMB.”

“I want to convey to you the great sacrifice that each family gives when they choose to share the gospel in another country. I want to encourage each of you to continue supporting these families through your prayers and through your support to the Cooperative Program. Every time you give, you are allowing a family to live among other people groups without financial worries, you are also giving to have Bibles placed in the hands of many who would never have a Bible, and you are supporting Bible training for the pastors. Most of all, what you're giving is bringing people to know Christ because someone is living among them telling them about His wonderful saving Grace. Thank You Michigan Baptists for all you do to further the Kingdom.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sabrina is the wife of Tim Patterson, Executive Director of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. My greatest accomplishment is being the mother of my two sons, Micah and Aaron, and the mother in law to my two daughters in law and the proud Grammie/GeeGee to my five grandgirls. My heart's desire in ministry is to see women of all ages fall in love with spending time with God and His Word.

Biblical math and a broken heart

HUDSONVILLE – The way the Bible does math doesn't make sense! How does 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish feed more than 5,000 people? There is 1 God in 3 persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How does $3 = 1$. How does the Sacrifice of 1 (Jesus) pay for the sins of billions of people? These mysterious math equations don't make sense, and yet they are true. One of the Bible's math equations that has been haunting me lately is “how does 1 man marry 1 woman and the 2 become 1”.

The Bible says, ['This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.](#) Mark 10:7-9

Marriage is a mystery. It is a mystery that I got to live in. On August 19, 2006 I had a tiny diamond ring from James Avery Jewelers in my hand. I had a heart full of joy and a head fully ignorant of the mystery I was stepping into when I asked Kathryn to marry me.

I can with full confidence say the mystery of 2 becoming 1 is true. In every high and every low (*marriage is not for the faint of heart*) we learned, we grew, we challenged each other, we loved each other, we protected each other. Our lives were intertwined. We were inseparable. That is until death did us part...

I was talking with my therapist the other day, (*Therapy has been clutch for my family in this journey*) and this thought came out of left field. It was like something in my mind turned on a light in a dark room. It caught me off guard... I AM GLAD THAT KAT IS NOT ON THIS SIDE OF DEATH. I'M GLAD SHE IS NOT LIVING AS A WIDOW.

This thought overwhelmed me because I remember holding her hand in the hospital telling her how sorry I was that she had cancer. I told her how much I wish that I could take the sickness away and carry it so she didn't have to. I told her I'd give anything to switch places with her. but here I am on this side of death. I can't imagine my sweet wife having to navigate this treacherous journey. I am so grateful that the life that Kathryn knew was the one where we were always together. She lived and died in the mystery of $1 + 1 = 1$.

Today was one of those days. It's been 18 years since I placed that ring on your hand. It's been 4 months since you breathed your last and I let go of your hand. Today, one of your babies went to freshman orientation and two of your boys met their teachers. This all feels wrong without you. I wake up each day half a man. It was you and me and we were 1, but now you're gone. Half of me has been taken. Kat, I'm broken, I'm doing my best, but I'm not whole anymore. I'm grateful that I am the one walking this broken heart journey and not you.

For my friends reading this, I don't write this for your pity, and I don't write this to pull at your emotions. I write as a way to process and if it helps you on your journey through this life I simply give God thanks. This is life is not easy, nor should it be. We see the brokenness all around us, and yet there is beauty all around us. I got love and was loved by a beautiful woman. I see her in her children and her imprint is everywhere. Yes, cancer is brutal. Death is a thief, those horrible things shouldn't exist and **one day they won't**.

The Bible says, ['I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:3-5](#)

So my friends, lift your head up. Let the tears roll because one day they won't.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luke is the Executive Pastor of Gatherings at Chapel Pointe. With a conviction to serve local churches, Luke draws on his 19 years of ministry experience to help churches and church leaders accomplish their vision. Over his time in ministry, Luke has served four local churches in a variety of roles. He has led student and family ministries in rural, urban, and suburban contexts. With a passion for church leadership, Luke pursued a Masters in Christian Leadership from Dallas Theological Seminary. He loves outdoor adventures with his four children.

Surrendering the school year to the Lord

SHELBY TOWNSHIP – The beginning of a new school year always brings so many new possibilities. As a child, I loved shopping for new clothes and supplies before a new school year. There is something special about beginning fresh and new!

Now as a parent some of those feelings have stayed the same, but anxiety also tries to creep in. If I am not careful, I can let fear and worry begin to fill my mind with the “what ifs” to come. God is so good to meet me in this place, always reminding me that He loves my kids more than I ever could! He has a good plan and purpose for them that can’t be thwarted (Job 42:2).

So, I choose at the beginning of the school year to place my children in His hands, because there is no better place for them to be. I invite you to pray this prayer over your children as they begin the 2024-2025 school year.

Father God,

I thank you for your goodness to my family. Thank you for the time of rest and fun over the summer that we were able to enjoy. Thank you for the memories that were made and the adventures that we experienced.

As we begin a new year, Lord, I am reminded that your Word says that you go before all things and that you hold all things together. So, Lord, as we enter this new school year, I am choosing to place my children into your hands. You have promised to go before them and be with them through everything they encounter this school year. You often remind me how much you love them and that you have a good plan and purpose for them. Lord, right now I recognize that they are your children and place them into your sovereign hands. I pray that whenever fear tries to creep into my heart this school year, that you remind me of this moment - the moment I surrendered them to you.

God, I pray for my children to be a light in their community. I pray that they will be strengthened in their faith this year, and out of that relationship with you, they learn how to navigate the circumstances that come their way. I pray that when confronted with situations where they need to choose right from wrong, that your voice will be the loudest in their hearts and minds. God, I pray that your Holy Spirit will lead and direct them this year.

I pray for peace of mind, clarity of thought, and diminished distractions in their lives this year. I pray they work hard, do their best, and do it all for your glory, knowing that you are the one who gives them the intellect to achieve greatness and the ambition to succeed.

Lord, I pray for a community of friends and teachers who will help build my kids up and speak life to them. I pray for friends who will be encouragers and friends who will support them. I pray for teachers who will not only be focused on their jobs, but will also inspire and challenge them to be the best they can be. I pray for teachers who make my children feel seen and cared for.

Finally, I pray for protection against the evil one. No doubt he will be ready to throw his fiery darts this year. God, I pray for my children to stand firm in their relationship with you so that no matter what the enemy comes against them with, they can battle the attacks because they are rooted and grounded in you.

I thank you in advance for the ways you will grow my children and myself this year. Help us to trust you on the hard days and seek your face when we grow weary. I pray these verses over them today,

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” – Numbers 6: 24-26, NIV

God, I surrender my kids to you this school year.

Amen

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen is married to Scott Blanchard, pastor of Lakepointe Church, and moved from Florida to Michigan in the summer of 2009 to plant Lakepointe Church in Shelby Township. She enjoys mentoring and discipling women and also leads women’s life groups through her church. She is passionate about helping women find their purpose in who God created them to be. She is on staff at Lakepointe Church and loves being part of what God is doing in the Metro Detroit area!

Women discover missional living is ‘better together’

Michelle Chitwood tilted her head as she slowly looked around the courtyard. The wife of the International Mission Board president wanted to take in every aspect of this pastors’ wives tea in Lusaka, Zambia.

At one table, four heads bowed in prayer. A few hours ago, these women — from Michigan, Missouri and Zambia — were strangers, but now they clasped hands and poured their hearts out to God about the trials of planting new churches in their communities. Two tables over, an

IMB missionary and pastors' wives from Zambia and Michigan mourned over a miscarriage. Another table of older women giggled as their prayers morphed into humorous ministry mishaps during their collective 90 years of service.

These interactions summed up the reason Chitwood and Lynette Ezell, wife of the North American Mission Board's president, co-hosted a short-term mission trip to Zambia for Baptist state executive wives and NAMB missionaries.

"We really are better together," Chitwood said, pointing to the many similarities between ministries despite thousands of miles that normally separate the women. "Spiritual lostness is the greatest problem in North America. It's the greatest problem in Zambia. It's the greatest problem among all the nations.

"When we work together, I think it brings unity," Chitwood said about partnering with NAMB. She explained how being with people in another culture and building relationships will help U.S. churches strengthen their commitment to missions.

"This makes you more aware of lostness and a better advocate for our missionaries," Chitwood said.

The team from Arkansas, Georgia, Michigan, Missouri and Virginia worked with ongoing ministries and caught a vision of how their own Southern Baptist churches can develop a closer partnership with the IMB.

For Tara Fowler, Missouri Baptist executive director's wife, working alongside both IMB missionaries and Zambian believers made her excited. She used skills learned as an elementary school principal to lead children in games, teach Bible stories and speak at a Parent Teacher Association meeting.

"This trip has shown me a side of missionary life that I've never seen before," Fowler said.

She experienced most of the components of the missionary task — entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, leadership development and exit to partnership — in just one week. These six tasks are part of the biblical work of every IMB missionary who introduces the gospel to a people group and then continues to work among them until a healthy church of local believers is ready to carry on the Great Commission task.

The team of women worked with a Zambian church member who used soccer to create gospel access within a community living around the edges of the city trash heaps. They shared the gospel in a hospital ward with someone who had never heard of God's mercy. They discipled teachers and parents. They empowered a young Zambian pastor and his church in reaching their impoverished community through Christ-centered compassion projects. They even

witnessed an aspect of “exit to partnership” when the IMB handed over the property title of the local Baptist seminary to the Zambian Baptist Fellowship.

This wide array of ministries was a perfect introduction to the IMB for Mollie Diaz and Marisa Roberson. As NAMB missionaries with their husbands in Michigan, their attention is focused stateside starting churches. This trip allowed them to see how small churches like their own play a role in reaching the nations.

“I knew of the IMB before, but now the blinders have been removed and I see the impact,” Roberson said about the experience. “I see the teen boy staying out of trouble and learning about God on the soccer field. I see a group of Zambian church women praying with the sick in a hospital. Most importantly, I see where my church has a role in all of it.”

Through giving to the [Cooperative Program](#), [Lottie Moon Christmas Offering®](#) and [Annie Armstrong Easter Offering®](#), churches provide financial means for the gospel to spread all around the world. Through sending missionaries and going on short-term mission trips, churches provide the feet for this message to travel and take root. And as Diaz and Roberson pointed out, through churches partnering and praying for each other — like those in Michigan and Zambia — God’s work is accomplished.

This vision was exactly what Ezell hoped the women who are focused on work in the U.S. would discover when they rolled up their sleeves and worked side-by-side with IMB missionaries.

“We need one another to get the gospel to all the nations,” Ezell said, explaining her passion for both mission agencies. “Southern Baptist churches have a heart for the lost, no matter where they are — next door, another state or country. The Lord calls us to work together.”

Prior to spending time and praying for each family in various wards of the children’s hospital, IMB missionary Jane Thompson helps organize practical supplies and gifts to distribute. IMB Photo

See how you can partner with IMB missionaries at www.imb.org/go.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sue Sprenkle writes for the IMB.

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Fingerprints

PLYMOUTH – As Sabrina and I have been going through our belongings and trying to determine what we will keep and what we will discard during our transition, we have discovered that we collected way too many antiques. This does not include Sabrina or me! We would be considered more like legacy items or invaluable heirlooms.

In our younger years, antiquing was a pastime and hobby we greatly enjoyed. Many times, we would get away for a weekend and while we were out and about, we would begin checking out junk stores, secondhand shops and antique malls for some special treasure that we just could not live without.

The determining factors as to whether an item was a treasure was very simple. It must be something we liked, it must be restorable, and it had to be inexpensive. Oh, yea. It couldn't cost very much either! LOL.

We didn't necessarily need the item because after I restored them, we usually gave them to family or friends. This time-consuming process kept me off the streets at night and out of Sabrina's way. She tells me the house is decidedly cleaner when I am absent, and she likes a clean house, thus my absence is appreciated.

On one particular outing we found a 1930 Duncan Phife style mahogany drop leaf table with two extension leafs and four chairs. It was in pretty rough shape, but we liked it and it was cheap so it met our purchasing requirements. The latter is always the deciding factor. The only problem was we were in our car. Even though our car had a big back seat and a mafia-sized trunk, there was no way we were going to maneuver the furniture in such a way that it would fit into either compartment.

But as God would have it (you see if I bring God into the equation, it provides me grounds for justification if I need it later) our friends were camping nearby, and they had their pick-up truck with them. So we gave them a call, and they graciously picked it up for us and even delivered it to our home. They are really good friends!

Once we got the items home and checked them out a little more closely we decided to restore them for our oldest son and his wife. They didn't need them anytime soon so that gave me plenty of working days to do what needed to be done.

I began taking the table apart in preparation for the stripping process and removing all of the hardware. When I removed the legs and bracing from the underside, it revealed a unique feature. For the past 90 plus years these pieces of wood had been hiding the red stained fingerprints of the maker of this furniture.

There were about ten or twelve different imprints covering this previously veiled area of wood, and from the size and appearance of the prints, the carpenter did not seem to be a very large man.

As I looked at the prints, my mind began to wonder what kind of individual this fellow might have been. It was evident that he was a fine craftsman and disciplined in his art. For furniture built today to last more than 20 years is a major accomplishment, and this had been around more than four times that long and was still in good condition.

I would imagine that if I continued to inspect the pieces more closely that they would have revealed more and more marks of their maker. A cut here and a small indentation there. There could possibly have been some initials or even a signature hidden in some crevice or under a strip of molding. Standing back and looking at it as a whole it was obvious that a master craftsman conceived, designed and built this table. It didn't just happen.

It amazes me that some of mankind can look at his fellow human beings and not see the fingerprints of his Maker in them, yet we can pull apart a simple wooden structure and see the signs of intelligent design throughout.

I believe if we look closely enough at the smallest of molecules to the grandest of universes, we would see the fingerprints of the Maker marking them all. In fact, I believe that if you were to pull back the veil that covers your soul you could see the indelibly red stained fingerprints of your Maker. And if I were a betting man (I'm a Baptist, so that's doubtful) I would bet that He has probably carved His initials in your heart.

All we need to do is look. His prints are there. And by the way, He is pretty handy at RESTORING His creation. Even old antiques like me.

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.

Wanted: Bi-vocational church planters/pastors

PLYMOUTH – I am on the search for disciplined, driven, disciples of Jesus Christ who believe that starting a new church is the next challenge for their lives. Are you one of them? Are you

searching for that next level of performance in your life where working with a team of people would bring a spiritual-electricity to each day? I want to hear from you. Call or text me at (734) 770-0608, or email me at tlynn@namb.net.

During the 1980s, I was a fulltime student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky pursuing my Master of Divinity Degree and a full-time pastor in Sonora, Kentucky. I was surrounded by central Kentucky pastors who were appliance repairmen, crop farmers, funeral home workers, and agricultural insurance salesmen. All of us were bi-vocational; I had school and ministry, they had local jobs and ministry. My time of fellowship with some of my brothers leading churches was spent behind noisy tractors helping them gather crops on a Friday so they could spend more time on Saturday putting the finishing touches on their sermon or making pastoral visits to members of their churches.

What are the advantages of becoming a bi-vocational church planter/pastor, now? I can name four.

Access and Influence

For centuries, bi-vocational church planters/pastors have trended and made gigantic impacts in ministry. In Acts 18:1-4, we learn that Paul left Athens at the same time, a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, left Rome. All three ended up in Corinth, and it was there that as friends the three became coworkers in the local market and in ministry making and repairing tents. Using your imagination, you can just see Paul, Aquila, or Priscilla pulling out their tent repair kits patching holes while visiting with a family, and sharing the stories of a risen Savior named Jesus Christ. Many local, respected bi-vocational ministers receive access and influence in local people's lives. He is the first one they think of in times of need, and during times of deep questions. Local people think of the spiritual people, in their daily lives, who they know the best when they are looking for spiritual answers. Access and influence are powerful.

Resources and Reach

Ministers hundreds of years ago in North America, may have had access to a few written books plus their personal Bibles. However today, church planters and pastors can access classes, conferences, and curriculum from a laptop without abandoning their local community! Sermons and lessons can be written, edited, and archived by the local church planter/pastor as an ever-growing personal library. Classes, certificates, diplomas, and degrees of all kinds can be accessed through anyone's personal home-office. Subjects like theology, history, counseling, Greek, and practical ministry training are a click away. And with the use of AI, Google Translate, and audio readers a minister's message can be shared in different languages and on a variety of platforms. The unbelievable resources enrich a church leader's preparation while extending his platform nationwide, or even globally through his writings, his audio trail, and even videos posted for worldwide consumption.

Communities and Collaborations

Every social media platform, organization, school, profession, and ministry has online communities and gatherings where various levels of collaborations take place 24/7 through posts, chats, online rooms, including international, encrypted, secure apps that can be downloaded to a person's smartphone or laptop. It has never been easier to have targeted conversations and enthusiastic partnerships on a project than it is today!

While pursuing two post-graduate degrees and working in ministry, my education and my partnerships with other ministers did not start until I drove miles away from my local community to a central site to learn from professors, and to make plans with other ministers away from my church field. Rest assured, I believe like you, that there is a deeper synergy that takes place face-to-face, but being able to sprinkle into my schedule online meetings in between those face-to-face gatherings helps all of us make better progress, and to hold one another accountable.

Identification and Invitation

Reflect on this big item. Local people will more easily identify with a respected, local bi-vocational church planter/pastors who mix in with their day to day lives and who are worthy of their trust. That makes it more probable for the Lord to invite others to join the local army of redeemed people seeking the salvation and spiritual growth of their own neighbors.

The Old Testament stories and the New Testament stories actually describe the interaction between the Lord and day-to-day people much more than they describe men and their wives living out lives entirely supported by one local congregation.

Just reflect on the names. Adam and Eve were told to care for the world. That was a big job! Abraham and Sarah became nomads moving from one address to another. Joseph of the Old Testament was entrusted with household, prison, and national welfare care at the spiteful whims of others and what seemed like a life-out-of-control, but it was Joseph who said to some of his family members at a pinnacle moment, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good," (Genesis 50:20).

In the New Testament, the Lord made use of the lives and testimonies of a physician, tax collectors, fishermen, business leaders, teachers, and a jailer! Locals more easily see themselves in the sterling reflections of admirable church planters/pastors and their wives who appear to experience life just as they do, but with one major additional component. The locals will ask themselves, "Why shouldn't I try to live out that daily faith I see in the local pastor and his wife?"

Remember there are four advantages to becoming a bi-vocational church planter/pastor today. The question is, when are you going to contact me to explore that option for your life?

- Access and influence
- Resources and reach
- Communities and collaborations
- Identification and invitation

There are many places and many people groups throughout Michigan looking, waiting, and hoping for someone like you to serve in their community. Feel free to reach out to me for a no-obligation conversation over the phone, through an email, over a coffee, or during a meal. I am ready for you. Are you ready for what the Lord wants to do with your life? Call or text me at (734) 770-0608.

If you need more private research time and reflection, please let me direct you to tremendous resources at the following site: [Bivocational/Covocational Church Planting/Pastoring](#) – my trusted friend Dr. Brad Brisco is the curator of a lot of resources for those involved in living out ministry leadership in their local community. You can also find him on Facebook and X with links to ministry resources.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Tony L. Lynn is the Send Network Director for Michigan and the Language/Ethnic Church Planting Catalyst. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as a lead pastor in Michigan churches and as an international missionary, along with his wife Jamie, in the Niger Republic, France, and Canada.

Building a legacy

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – *Legacy* is a weighty word.

The best definition the online dictionary gives for *legacy* is “the long-lasting impact of particular events, actions, etc. that took place in the past, or of a person’s life.”

The impact I’m most concerned about is what others will believe about Jesus because of my life. As a follower of Jesus, I want to spend time effectively because leaving a legacy of faith is paramount. I want others to see my faith in action, so they’ll remember Jesus long after I’m gone, and the primary target or bullseye, of course, is my own family.

Discipling my children is still on my radar, even though they are married with kids of their own. This long-term, resolute investment in them has also granted me abundant opportunity to spend quality time with my grandchildren too. Last summer I started “Summer Dates with

Grandpa.” I took three of our granddaughters on a date for a full day. I carefully crafted each date to coincide with the special interests of each girl.

For example, the eldest loves animals so I took her to the zoo, we had lunch together, and we made a trip to the Bulk Barn to buy candy (one of her dad’s favorite stops when he was a kid).

The second in line is a Highland Dancer, so I set up a ballroom dance lesson and we both learned to waltz. We practiced and practiced, and laughed till our sides were sore, then we had lunch, I took her to see one of her favorite movies, and finally, we stopped at the Bulk Barn on the way home.

Granddaughter number three enjoys arts and crafts. We found a ceramics shop where we fashioned a heart-shaped jewelry box that she painted and fired. We also visited the local Art Gallery, enjoyed lunch at a chic restaurant where the wait staff made a big fuss over her, and (guess what?) we stopped at the now-famous Bulk Barn!

However, the most important moments in each of those “Summer Dates with Grandpa” were spent talking about Jesus, his love for us, and how we must draw closer to him. In the spirit of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, God gave me gracious openings to add to the spiritual legacy building in them. We talked about Jesus when we ate, when we walked, when we worked with clay, when we admired art, and after we watched the movie. We quoted Scripture verses we each had memorized. All for Jesus!

Building a spiritual legacy takes time, effort and intentionality. It is one of the most important investments we can make in the lives of our loved ones and those we meet along the way. The apostle Paul urged Timothy to set an example “in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). How are you doing that in your family?

I think of Joshua leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, Paul writing from jail to tell others about Jesus, Billy Graham preaching to millions, and my own mother-in-law Marg, who lived a life of integrity, laughter, and quiet humility. The legacy they left inspires me to think about what kind of heritage I want to leave.

Dads bring essential momentum to their home. The importance of a father can be seen physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and relationally in a family. As a grandfather, part of my role is to support my son and son-in-law as they bring momentum to their homes and their families. “Summer Dates” is part of the plan. I do what I do as a grandfather *to help them* father their families with more effectiveness.

With all my heart I believe fathers and grandfathers can add much to the spiritual heritage of godliness. Their strength can be powerful, their words can be fueling and inspirational, hugs from a dad or grandpa can be deeply comforting, their smiles can instill joy and confidence, their guidance can be life-changing and foundational, their correction can be life-saving and life-

giving, and adventures with dad can be exciting and memorable. As a grandfather I am trying to reinforce all of that, and more.

Men, your impact matters. Let's build legacies that make much of Jesus and the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Garth Leno is the Pastor/Planter Care Specialist with the BSCM. He serves in a similar role with the Canadian National Baptist Convention, and he is the founding pastor of The Gathering Church in Windsor, Ontario, a church he planted with his wife, Patty, and a few of their friends.

A prayer for the school year

PLYMOUTH – Dear Lord of All,

My heart is pulled to pray for all the children that are headed back to school for the new year. God, you know each one of them by name. You know their anxieties and worries about returning to school. Maybe they are feeling scared about not being smart enough for the next grade, not making friends, having a difficult teacher, or not wearing the right cool clothes. God, Psalm 16:8 assures us that you are always with us, so we won't be shaken because you are right beside us. I believe your promise and want our children to cling to your Word for their foundation.

The greatest thing we want for our children is for them to accept you as Lord and Savior of their life. Understanding who they are in Jesus Christ, makes all the other decisions fall into place. Gaining confidence in being a child of God and made in His image answers many questions that the world is throwing at them. Please God, guard their hearts and minds in you.

For the young Christian children that are going back to class, I pray for them to show beautiful fruits in their reactions, words, kindness to others, attention to their studies and homework, and godly control over their attitudes. Father, your Word in Galatians 5:22-23 explains what the Holy Spirit living in us produces (knowing that He comes with our salvation). Help these results of loving and spending time with you show through in the way we love others, find joy, exude peace, give patience, share kindness and goodness even in difficult situations, they way we're faithful, and are always gentle, and use self-control when we're tempted not to. Let your Spirit lead our children in the way that honors You, Holy God.

Help our children be serious about learning and disciplined to do their homework, but let them also find time to play, laugh, and have great conversations with other kids. Let them be friendly and make friends easily. Guard their hearts from the hurts that will most likely come their way. Show them how to wisely choose their friends and activities. Lead our children to believe Proverbs 13:20 that tells them to walk with the wise and become wise; but being companions of fools will experience harm.

Lord, help us as parents of school age children, to take the time necessary at the end of the day to encourage our children in their homework and to listen to their stories of the day at school. Spirit, lead us to ask questions and point them to you in response to how to handle tough situations and relationships.

Let this school year be one of spiritual growth for our children as well as book knowledge. Thank you, God, for loving us and showing compassion for our children. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jamie works as Executive Assistant for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Her greatest joy is serving Jesus Christ. Her husband, Tony, their three children, and nine grandchildren are gifts from God that fill Jamie's life to overflowing. Mentoring young women in the Lord is a ministry of delight. Jamie and her family served 13 years with the IMB international mission work in Niger Republic, West Africa, and Paris, France.

A school prayer

***Editor's note:** Anna has been treated for cancer this year. Pray for her to recover from surgery and the effects of chemo. Her latest tests showed that all the cancer has been killed and her lymph nodes are clear. Praise God! She continues to serve God as a pastor's wife at Grace Church Holt, Michigan. Here is her prayer for her children as they go back to school.*

HOLT – Father, thank You for these children that You have entrusted to me. As they prepare to return to school, would You prepare the kids and their teachers for this school year, that they would work well together and encourage each other through the year. I pray that they will continue to grow in and be known for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Let their friendships be glorifying to You - whether they are mutually encouraging Christian friendships or ones where they can share the hope of salvation. Please remind them that You go with them, before them, beside them, and behind them. Would you also remind me that You love them more than I ever could and that Your plans are for their good and Your Glory.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Carter is a church planter wife who lives in Holt with her husband and their four teenagers (yes, her hands are full, and she is tired!). They're starting their 6th year in Holt schools and are involved in all the activities. She and Matt are celebrating 20 years of marriage and ministry in September.

10 findings about church and revitalization

It's no secret that many churches—if not the majority—in North America need revitalization. Here are some summary findings of churches I have worked with and studied over the last several years:

1. **Churches got where they are honestly.** That is to say, the church over the years slid in the wrong direction. I have never seen a church that intentionally decided to move toward death.
2. **Even dying churches can come to life again.** I've seen it happen under the right leadership with the right vision. These churches are pictures of the resurrection power of the gospel.
3. **The longer the decline has been, the harder it is to turn the church around.** The ship that's sailed in the wrong direction for a long time takes a while to turn around.
4. **Revitalization occurs best when a leadership team is at the helm.** Revitalization is hard work, and a united team of leaders is more likely to stay faithful through the work than a lone ranger leader is.
5. **The primary leader must be a person of faith.** That person must have eyes of faith, seeing the church for what it could be rather than what it is. He must believe that God can, and will, change the church.
6. **Revitalization often starts with one area of the church rather than the whole church.** Revitalization might begin with simple things like painting the walls, training a few small group leaders, or updating the church bulletin. The big changes are easier when built on successful small changes.
7. **COVID has made revitalization even more difficult.** It's tough to keep the momentum moving forward when we're just trying to get back to where we were pre-COVID. The work is even more wearisome.

8. **Leaders must exhibit “patient persistence.”** They can’t push too quickly, but nor can they necessarily wait long to propose change.
9. **Revitalization sometimes requires a re-start.** That’s often painful to long-term members, but it’s necessary. It might mean a new church name, a new service time, and/or new leadership.
10. **Not every pastor is equipped to lead a revitalization effort.** That’s not a slam against any pastor; it’s simply a recognition that revitalization requires a unique skill set and passion.

If you’ve worked in church revitalization, what have you learned?

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First-Person: From surviving to thriving – 3 tips for Christian college students

There are many excellent articles and books written with the goal of helping Christian students survive the temptations of college life. This is important, because a recent study by Lifeway Research found that two-thirds (66 percent) of American young adults who attended a Protestant church regularly for at least a year as a teenager say they also dropped out for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22.

Surviving is not enough though. In my 20 years discipling college students, I have found that casting a vision for thriving spiritually and transforming your campus is far more compelling than surviving. With that in mind, here are three tips I wish someone would have shared with me when I started college.

1. Pick your friends, pick your future

The most important piece of advice that I can give you is to choose wisely who will be your closest friends. Unfortunately, most students develop their closest friendships with those who happen to be the most convenient. 1 Corinthians 15:33 gives sobering advice, “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’” (ESV). It may be easy to justify doing life with less than godly people if you have similar interests or if you connect with them on a relational level. Don’t be deceived; if Christ is not the top priority in their lives, they will not push you toward Christlikeness. “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Proverbs 13:20, ESV).

That is why it is so crucial that you make plugging into a healthy collegiate ministry your top priority. Good college ministries will often host a flurry of social events the first month to help welcome new students. Make attending those events a top priority even if the particular event doesn't spark your interest. At these events, you are likely to connect with peers who are genuinely pursuing Christ. Look for fellow believers who will take God and the Word seriously and lock arms with them.

In addition to a college ministry, joining a solid local church is essential for your spiritual life and development. Plug in deeply to a church in your college town.

2. Have fun but act like an adult

Welcome to adulthood; now it's time act like an adult. Don't hear me wrong; I am a huge fan of having plenty of fun during this season of life. Especially the first few months, invest plenty of relational time with solid Christian friends who will draw you closer to Jesus. But at a certain point, staying up until 3 a.m. playing video games with your Christian friends no longer counts as "fellowship."

I find myself often telling the young men that I disciple this: "Be a serious person. Not only will this help you become who God wants you to be, it will make you more attractive to a godly woman! Just sayin'." If you are going to grow into the person that God has called you to be, you will need to learn to embrace a life of discipline. [Discipline is not legalism.](#) Godly discipline is motivated by the grace of God in Christ and puts you in the path of God's power.

Three of the most important areas of discipline that college students need to develop are *sleep*, *studies* and *spiritual* disciplines. *Sleep* because I am convinced that a contributing factor toward many of the mental health issues and sinful habits students develop are partially due to unwise choices when it comes to sleep patterns. *Studies* because if you are a college student, part of your stewardship is to be diligent in this area. And *spiritual* disciplines because college is a great time to learn how to feed yourself. Don't let anything distract you from spending unhurried time alone with God daily.

3. Your mission starts now

Sadly, many students see college as a waiting room where they can mess around, and the choices they make don't really matter. Nothing could be further from the truth. The real world starts now. Right here, right now, you have an unprecedented chance to not just get an education but to grow deep roots in your walk with Christ and to make an eternal impact by reaching people for Christ.

Your time in college could be one of the best opportunities you ever have for personal evangelism and discipleship. Don't waste it! The best person to reach a college student with the

gospel is another student. They are waiting for YOU to invite them into the grand story of redemption that can transform their lives.

Think through the groups of people on campus that you are naturally a part of or could easily connect with. How could God use those existing networks of relationships to spread the love of Christ through you? Focusing your relational energy on caring, serving and sharing the Gospel with a group of people who are already in community with each other can create a multiplication effect, making it easier for you to reach more people, foster community and make disciples.

What “people group” on campus is God calling you to engage with the gospel during your time in college? Use this [Personal Ministry Impact Worksheet](#) to help craft your strategy for reaching your peers with the gospel. Don’t wait until summer to go on a mission trip. [Every day can be a mission trip](#) if you learn to live with intentionality and bold faith. I sincerely believe that God has providentially placed you where you are to love lost people all around you. Not all opportunities are created equal. Don’t waste your time as an insider on one of the most strategic mission fields on earth – the college campus!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Worcester serves as National Collegiate Director at the North American Mission Board.

Mexico Protestants march against forced displacement, church burning

OAXACA, MEXICO (BP) – The last Protestants in an indigenous Mexican community where Catholicism is the only religion allowed were forced from their homes Aug. 6, their lone church set ablaze, CSW reported Aug. 22 ahead of Protestant protests in the street.

Members of the Protestant Interdenominational Christian Church (ICIAR) and their supporters were expected to protest in the main square of Mexico City and in the city of Oaxaca Aug. 22, CSW said, calling out serious religious freedom violations in the community of San Isidro Arenal in San Juan Lalana Municipality, Oaxaca State.

There, members of the ICIAR have been subjected to discrimination, violence and arbitrary detention since November 2023 and face imminent forced displacement from their homes due to their religious beliefs, CSW said. Previous protests were held in Oaxaca Aug. 19.

“We stand with those who are raising their voices today across Mexico in support of freedom of religion or belief for all,” CSW’s Head of Advocacy Anna Lee Stangl said in a press release. “It is imperative that the governments of the San Juan Lalana Municipality and Oaxaca State, and at the federal level, take urgent action to uphold the Mexican Constitution and ensure that freedom of religion or belief is a right enjoyed by all, regardless of where they live or their ethno-linguistic identity.”

Oaxaca is just 2 miles from Hidalgo, where Baptist worshipers in several indigenous villages have endured [similar persecution](#), driven from their homes and churches unless they observe Catholic customs and rites, or convert to Catholicism. In Oaxaca, persecution escalation Aug. 6 when a large mob of 300 men dispossessed the last remaining religious minority families their lands and livestock, destroyed their crops and burned their church, CSW said.

On Aug. 16, when pastors Moisés Sarmiento Alavés and Esdrás Ojeda Jiménez and two other men went to the community to attend a legal proceeding announced by the Oaxaca State Prosecutor’s Office, the proceedings never occurred and the men were instead attacked by a mob.

“They were stripped, beaten, arbitrarily detained for over six hours, and forced to sign a document which they did not have the opportunity to read,” CSW wrote in the press release. “The four men were ultimately freed by the police later that same day.”

Porfirio Flores, an attorney and representative of the Fellowship of Pastors, told CSW that “greater attention must be paid to the issue of religious freedom in Oaxaca. A fundamental change is needed regarding the problems arising from civil and religious charges within internal normative systems, while respecting the secular state.”

The persecution of Protestants in indigenous Catholic communities stems from a 1993 community accord mandating Roman Catholicism as the only religion permitted in San Isidro Arenal, a system allowed under the Law on Uses and Customs. However, religious freedom is guaranteed in Mexico’s constitution.

“The volatile situation in San Isidro Arenal is yet another example of how the government’s failure to intervene at the early stages of cases of religious intolerance and its neglect of education around freedom of religion or belief has led local authorities to believe that they can enforce religious adherence and practice and commit criminal acts against those who believe differently with impunity,” Stangl said. “Concrete steps must be taken now to protect the members of the religious minority in San Isidro Arenal, and those who are responsible for crimes committed against them must be held to account for their actions.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

WMU's Sybil Bentley Dove Award helps mother of three continue nursing journey

BIRMINGHAM, AL (SBC WMU) – Giselle Gonzalez-Rivera said she wondered if she was crazy going back to school in her late 30s with three young children.

But she found a group that encouraged her — Moving Forward Chattanooga, a Christian Women's Job Corps site — and in April she finished her licensed practical nurse certificate at Chattanooga State Community College.

“Christian Women's Job Corps encouraged and supported me so much,” she said of the group, which helps women with skills for life and work. “They saw the potential in me that I had not seen.”

Beth Ray, site coordinator for Moving Forward Chattanooga, said Gonzalez-Rivera “gives God glory for the whole process.”

“Giselle is a blessing to anyone she meets. She always has a smile and a kind word,” Ray said. “She's a super sweet person with a sweet family, and she's grown in her faith.”

When Gonzalez-Rivera came to Moving Forward Chattanooga, she began working on six weeks of personal development, which included communication and financial management. She also took an inventory to help her identify careers that interested her, and site leaders helped her find educational resources and funding for school.

Ray said in Gonzalez-Rivera's early days there, she was shy and reserved, but she “has really blossomed since.”

Several weeks after finishing her licensed practical nurse certificate in April, Gonzalez-Rivera was named the recipient of the Sybil Bentley Dove Award, which Woman's Missionary Union gives annually to a recipient who desires to improve herself through the acquisition of skills or academic pursuits that will lead to self-reliant living or to give assistance and nurture to the development of her children.

This summer, Gonzalez-Rivera started the bridge program to start classes this fall at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to become a registered nurse. She said the award came at the perfect time.

“It has helped me so much,” she said. “When they gave me the award, I said, ‘Thank you Lord, this is all you — you saw how much I was in need.’”

Gonzalez-Rivera said she's always had a heart to help others and knew that was her purpose in life.

"It is never too late to accomplish your purpose in life — some of us just move a little slower than others, and that is totally normal," she said. "We are afraid of the outcome instead of trusting our Savior."

Gonzalez-Rivera said she has learned to teach her three girls that with God, there are no limits to what they can do.

"We can reach the sky if we trust the Lord and He will guide us," she said.

To learn more about Christian Women's Job Corps, visit wmu.com/jobcorps. Christian Women's and Men's Job Corps are compassion ministries of WMU. Through more than 100 sites across the US, CWJC/CMJC seeks to equip women and men for life and employment in a Christian context.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Thornton is a writer for The Alabama Baptist.

New Illinois abortion laws could be trouble for churches, ministries

SPRINGFIELD, IL (BP) – The Illinois General Assembly continues to find new ways to further enshrine abortion into law. Within the last month, Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed one bill requiring insurance companies to provide full coverage for abortions and another making abortions a protected human rights issue. The actions came just ahead of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago where the party emphasized its commitment to "reproductive rights" and a mobile Planned Parenthood unit performed vasectomies and provided abortion services nearby.

The Birth Equity Act requires both private and Medicaid insurance in the state to cover the cost of abortion procedures without requiring any copays or deductibles. The coverage also includes medication abortions. Meanwhile, [House Bill 4867](#) (HB 4867) amended the state's Human Rights Act to "prohibit discrimination based on reproductive health decisions," according to a [media release](#) from the governor's office.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, pro-choice Illinois lawmakers have promoted abortion access in the state which saw nearly 91,000 abortions reported in the calendar year 2023 – a 60 percent increase over 2022.

“Forcing people or organizations to violate their religious beliefs is unconstitutional and has no place in our society,” said Greg Baylor, Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) senior counsel. “We are disappointed to see this dangerous legislation signed into law, as it plainly violates the First Amendment freedoms of pro-life employers in Illinois.”

Kevin Carrothers is executive director of the state's Baptist Children's Home and Family Services (BCHFS) based in Carmi, Ill., which includes Angels' Cove Residential Maternity Home and GraceHaven Pregnancy Resource Clinic, both in Mt. Vernon, Ill. Carrothers is also a former practicing attorney. He expressed his disappointment that the bill contained “no religious exemptions.”

“It's certainly a whole new dynamic,” Carrothers said. “It impacts all of us. It is going to impact churches.”

The bill's definition of reproductive health decisions includes “healthcare related to the continuation or termination of pregnancy. ...” By including “termination of pregnancy” in the definition, employers such as churches, crisis pregnancy care centers and religious schools will be required to hire staff who do not support their pro-life views.

Carrothers pointed out the gray areas of the law within the definition, as there are many disagreements even within the pro-life community. “Whatever that issue is whether its abortion, contraception, or artificial reproductive technologies, there are various points of view on that,” he said.

Other reproductive health decisions cited in HB 4867 also include “birth control, fertility or sterilization care, miscarriage management care, assisted reproductive technologies such as in-vitro fertilization, and prenatal, intranatal, and postnatal care.”

Ultimately, Carrothers said, “They've lumped a lot of things together that may or may not be consistent with each other. How you define reproductive health may not be how I define reproductive health.”

The ADF's Baylor stated, “Many organizations, including religious and mission-driven entities, maintain their unique character through their personnel choices. These employers advance their missions and communicate their messages by hiring and retaining people who wholeheartedly support and share the organization's mission and message.” He said, “HB 4867 destroys that essential freedom.”

High profile abortion state

Illinois has become among the highest profile abortion states in the nation. Even last week Planned Parenthood Great Rivers (PPGR), representing the St. Louis region and southern Illinois, sent a mobile abortion unit to Chicago for two days and stationed it within a few blocks of the United Center, where the Democratic National Convention was held. PPGR reported eight medication abortions and nine vasectomies were provided at no cost.

In late June, the neighboring state of Iowa enacted a six-week abortion ban. Illinois' other neighboring states – Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee – have strict bans against abortion.

Since the ruling known as *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* – or as it is commonly called, the *Dobbs* decision – gave individual states the freedom to pass their own laws regarding abortion access, Pritzker and Democrat representatives in the General Assembly have pledged to make the state an abortion safe haven. The latest statistics from the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute bear that out.

Women from at least 16 states traveled to Illinois to undergo an abortion last year. The states with the highest number of women receiving abortions were Missouri – 8,710, Tennessee – 7,120, Indiana – 5,420, Wisconsin – 5,240, Mississippi – 2,060, Arkansas – 2,040, Kentucky – 1,850 and Texas – 1,570.

Illinois State Attorney General Kwame Raoul lauded the bill's signing and praised the state as a "safe haven" for abortion and gender-altering procedures. "I am committed to using the authority of my office to continue to defend against legal challenges to our laws that preserve Illinois as an oasis of reproductive health care," Raoul said.

Raoul lost a court case last year, when a federal judge blocked a law that would have allowed him to fine pregnancy resource centers up to \$50,000 per incident for speech deemed deceptive regarding abortion in a counseling setting.

Barring a legal challenge to HB 4867, Carrothers wondered if the state would be quick to defend the rights of a pro-life organization after the law is enacted. Carrothers said, "We should expect it to be equally applied. Are abortion clinics going to be forced to hire people with pro-life views?"

Pro-choice state legislators have introduced 248 abortion-related actions since 2023. Guttmacher rates Illinois' abortion policies as "protective" along with 10 other states.

HB 4867, which was signed Aug. 7, goes into effect on Jan. 1, 2025.

The Birth Equity Act, signed on June 29, is an amended version of [House Bill 5142](#). It will also require insurance companies to cover such services as doula, lactation consultants and

midwives. The act will go into effect on Jan. 1, 2026, except for the Medicare and doula services which are set to begin on Jan. 1, 2025.

ADF is a ministry partner of the Illinois Baptist State Association.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Misner is communications director for the Illinois Baptist State Association. This report was provided by the Illinois Baptist newspaper.

From prison cell to pulpit: Louisiana Baptist pastor named ‘Replanter of the Year’

MARRERO, LA (BP) – When Troy Gause sat in the small, one-person suicide watch cell – with no windows or light from the outside world – at Plaquemines Parish Detention Center, he never could have imagined one day being a pastor of a thriving church.

While the distance between Plaquemines Parish Detention Center and Cross Community Church in suburban New Orleans is only about 60 miles, it can seem like so much more.

For Gause, it took a U-turn to get there. That U-turn didn’t just change his life; it defined the Gospel work that became the hallmark of his ministry as a Louisiana pastor.

During its 2024 Replant Summit, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) recognized his ministry by naming Gause “Replanter of the Year.” The event featured sessions with Mark Clifton, NAMB’s national director of replant; JJ Washington, NAMB’s national director of personal evangelism; and Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, as well as a night of worship with songwriter Matt Papa.

Although Gause wasn’t suicidal when he entered that cell, the extended isolation and harsh conditions eventually wore him down. The trauma from the events leading to his imprisonment for drug possession had left him partially paralyzed, pushing him to his breaking point.

In that cell, Gause began a profound conversation with God that would forever change his life and the lives of lost people throughout greater New Orleans. Though saved as a teenager, he had drifted far from his faith. Now, Gause cried out to the Lord, recounting everything he’d tried for fulfillment only to hear God say, “You haven’t tried me.”

That's when Gause responded: "God, here you go. Take this broken life." And in that cell, he promised to never again turn away from Him.

Gause kept that promise. While working on a search and rescue team following Hurricane Katrina, he met a strong believer named Lawrence Jacques, who disciplined him. A street evangelist, Jacques took him under his wing and introduced him to sharing Jesus on the streets of the Big Easy, where Gause met person after person who needed the U-turn he had found.

Over the next few years, Gause attended and graduated from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He started Church Without Walls, engaging people on the New Orleans streets and connecting them to local churches. With the encouragement of several mentors, including seminary professor Peter Charpentier, Gause started Cross Culture Church in 2017.

"We started with just eight people in my living room," Gause said. "I didn't know how or where it would go, but I knew God had a plan, and I was ready to follow wherever He led."

Cross Culture Church grew but struggled to find a regular location to meet. In 2021, everything changed when a friend introduced Gause to the pastor of Ames Boulevard Baptist Church in Marrero, an aging congregation in need of lawn care help. Gause began taking care of the lawn for free just to help the church out. As his friendship with the church's pastor blossomed, the two eventually decided to merge their churches, providing a young core of people for Ames Boulevard and a building for Cross Culture.

"When the opportunity came to merge with Ames Boulevard, it was clear that God was opening a door," Gause said. "We didn't just combine two congregations – we created a new church family, one that reflects the diversity and love of our community."

On April 30, 2023, the two congregations came together to form Cross Community Church at Ames, with Gause serving as the lead elder. From the outset, the replanted church embraced a rich diversity, uniting people of all ages and backgrounds – young and old, Black and white – who were serving Jesus together as one unified congregation.

Cross Community Church started a number of new ministries to reach its neighbors, including a mentoring ministry for young boys and new small groups. In about 16 months, the new church has grown from 40 to nearly 100.

One of those new families included Leon and Javon Every, a couple that had been together for more than 35 years and had five children but had never married. Late last year, the couple were married at the church. Since becoming a part of the church, seven family members have been baptized and joined the church.

Ames Boulevard's pastor baptized Terry Borque just after the church's merger, and she says Cross Community has made a big difference in her life. While in the hospital fighting sepsis

earlier this year, Gause's ministry helped encourage her. Borque had been a lifetime church attender but not in a congregation that faithfully taught Scripture.

"I wasn't being fed a whole meal. I was just getting parts of it, and that wasn't enough for me," Borque said. "But Pastor Troy teaches directly from the Bible, and that's something I missed."

Lane Corley, the director of Send Network Louisiana, has been a longtime friend and supporter of Gause. Last year his team played a part in 22 church mergers throughout the state, providing either training or funding for them.

"I think there was something special about these two churches coming together – the Anglo and African American communities worshiping and serving together," Corely said. "It had an immediate impact [on the surrounding community], creating the welcoming environment that Ames Boulevard had been seeking to foster. It was truly remarkable."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tobin Perry has written professionally for churches and Christian organizations for more than 20 years. He has served as a writer and editor on the staffs of Saddleback Church and the North American Mission Board. He has also served as a local church pastor in Southern Indiana and a two-year missionary for the International Mission Board. He is a graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism (B.A. '98) and Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div. '07). Today Tobin operates New Creations Editorial Services, which provides content that helps Christian organizations engage and equip their audiences. For more information, visit www.tobinperry.com.

St. Louis Baptist association seeks 'the welfare of the city'

ST. LOUIS, MO (BP) – Darren Casper believes in missions. As the executive director of the St. Louis Metro Baptist Association (often called STL Metro), he leads a staff of eight full and part-time missionaries. Their task is to equip churches to reach out with the gospel to the city of more than 300,000 people and a little more than 2 million people living on the Missouri side of the greater St. Louis metro area.

Casper led the association to sell its office building in Bridgeton a few years ago. Those funds are being rerouted into ministry, especially efforts to bolster church planting.

The director said when he came on board five years ago, he wasn't looking for a centralized organization to manage. He preferred to have his staff work remotely from their homes and be mobile and accessible to the churches and leaders in the metro area.

Most of the staff have other roles with affiliated ministries, serving bivocationally with the association.

The association's mission statement says it is all about "Connecting churches to develop leaders and deploy them for mission because lostness is the greatest problem in our city."

An example of that is Pastor Mike Hubbard, who serves Genesis Church in Eureka, Mo. He's been at the church since he planted it 18 years ago. In addition to his pastoral role, he just took on the role of director of church planting for STL Metro.

Hubbard said he likes to draw a circle around the metro area with I-270 and I-255 as the boundaries. Inside that circle are millions of lost people. "I want to help plant as many churches inside that ring as possible," he said.

There are 11 new church starts in process in the city, and Hubbard's goal is to see several more in the near future.

"We have a pipeline developed that will help train church planters," he said. There are four centers for church planting already organized and running at various levels.

Hubbard listed a few examples of churches getting started in communities around Metro St. Louis, including Soma Church in St. Charles and Storyline Church in the South City neighborhood. The churches have been intentional about reaching their neighbors, hosting events like back-to-school rallies and giveaways, movies in the park, senior adult outreaches and campus ministry.

Casper also emphasized that the association is interested in reaching people for Christ through education. Leaders are working to establish a Christian high school called City Christian Academy on the campus of Tower Grove Baptist Church.

"Like Jeremiah 29 teaches, we seek the welfare of the city," Casper said. The association is putting \$2 million into the new school, which expands on the ministry of the private elementary and junior high school already established at Tower Grove.

The association also operates benevolent ministries as well as ministry to new immigrants and refugees. People from Afghanistan, Syria, Bosnia and other nations are coming to America, and St. Louis is often one of their first landing spots. STL Metro staffer Rachel Hart works with a ministry called Good Neighbor Initiative to welcome these people and help them get established in the community, find places to live, food to eat, furniture and essential goods like clothing and school supplies.

Team members in the association work with men's ministries, ethnic ministries including outreach to Bosnian immigrants, pastor cohorts and other leadership development initiatives. Casper invites people to get in touch with them to help with mission projects, lend support for new church starts and to pray for them.

St. Louis has a lot of people and a lot of lost people. Together with the 90 or so churches and 11 church plants in process, associational leaders are trying to reach their city for Christ.

This article originally appeared in [The Pathway](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Nations is a husband and father to two children. He is the associational mission strategist for the Sandy Creek Baptist Association in Murrayville, Illinois. He also is a contributing writer for the The Pathway, the news journal of the Missouri Baptist Convention. He also contributes to the Illinois Baptist, Springfield, Illinois and The Baptist Paper, Birmingham, Alabama. He is an occasional contract appraisal reader for LifeWay Christian Resources and he is the author of "Why Not Me: You Could Be A Bivocational Pastor" (Lulu Press, 2019). He occasionally contributes articles for Baptist Press, several Sunday school and church growth magazines for LifeWay Christian Resources and he was the publications editor for The Iowa Baptist, the news journal of the Baptist Convention of Iowa.

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

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