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Church planting and the need for leadership

LINCOLN PARK – Church leaders met in Detroit last year to strategize with the hope of church planting. Between the whiteboard and the table of bagels in the back were men and women praying for churches revitalized, planted, and strengthened in one of America's great cities. Everyone had a longing for more churches advancing the Gospel of Jesus.

And we deeply need to see the Lord move... 3 churches close in the U.S. for every 1 that begins!

The local church is the center of God's work in the world. The church, the gathering of believers in worship who then disperse to evangelize, disciple, and share life, should be the center of every strategy to impact people, and the world, for eternity!

The multiplication of biblically healthy churches committed to the multiplication of biblically healthy disciples is the most important data point we can measure in our community, nation, and world. The church is a big deal to the Lord and a big deal to His people.

What holds the big dreams and deep convictions back? Certainly, the Lord's Arm is not too short, and He can move as He pleases! So, in one sense, nothing is holding this back. In another, the Lord works in our working, and there are challenges. We face thorns and thistles, droughts and fires, in the work of planting churches just like a farmer planting his fields.

What resource is hardest to find? Leadership.

Each ministry had pressing financial needs, shepherding needs, and facility needs. The need for leaders stood out because leaders play a crucial role in meeting each need through God's provision. To raise up or recruit the right leaders we must understand leadership within a biblical framework and identify the core components of a biblical leader. Detroit is unique in many ways, but not in needing leadership.

This gathering in Detroit is a microcosm of a universal challenge: the critical need for effective (biblical) leadership. Wise leadership is a demonstration of God's grace to all people. In many ways, our entire culture is facing a drought of leadership.

The need for leadership is pressing upon industries, ministries, and municipalities across the United States. God's sovereign plan for history is woven into the fabric of human activity. The activity of leaders has a large impact, it creates the seams on the fabric of human history. When leadership is good it brings direction, conviction, and clarity to God's gifts, servants, and plan. When leadership is bad it brings frustration, confusion, depression, and destruction.

When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice;
when the wicked rule, the people groan.

Proverbs 29:2

How should a Christian think of leadership? What is the core of Christian leadership? These questions are worth meditation. I want to instigate your meditation with a working definition of leadership in all settings—leadership that applies God’s common grace to humanity. Then, I’d like to suggest a way that the Spirit of Christ takes this definition forward.

- A common grace definition of leadership: Leadership is expanded responsibility from increasing influence toward greater impact.
- A Christian definition of leadership: Christian leadership is expanded stewardship from increasing investment toward greater glory.

What do you make of these definitions? How do they impact your life? Can you see how God entrusts you with new responsibilities and weights when He also gives you greater influence on others? Are you excited to harness that for God’s glory?

Men become husbands and expand their responsibility (care for their wives) because of a greater/increased influence (leading a home) with the hope of greater impact (fruitful and multiply). Christian men understand their wife is a gift from God and seek to influence their wife for her growth (washing with the Word, cf. Eph 5) toward God’s glory (in creation mandate and great commission).

This Christian definition revises several keywords to clarify the leader’s relationship to God. Leading is a God-given stewardship to be measured by God’s Word. Christian leaders view increasing influence as a trust or investment from God, not merely a result of their efforts. The personal ambitions of a Christian leader take a backseat to his doxological purpose.

None of us can run ahead to solve the big-picture problems without addressing our pixels. Before we plant more churches and change the world, we should evaluate our responsibilities and influence.

What has God entrusted to you now? Are we stewarding the responsibilities God has given as His investment for His glory and the good of others?

Will you pray with me that Detroit will experience a renewal of Christian leaders seeking to increase Gospel impact and pray for greater opportunity in this region?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Doran, Jr. serves as the Lead Pastor of Resurrection Church in Lincoln Park, MI. The church was planted in 2015 and later merged with Friendship Baptist Church, a historic SBC MI church, in 2019. The church joyfully celebrates “Jesus Over Everything” in our new chapter of ministry. David is married to Abigail and has four children Charlie Mae (11), Judah (9), Henry (7), and Levi (5).

George Liele: The world's first Baptist missionary

Editor's note: Feb. 2 is George Liele Church Planting, Evangelism and Missions Sunday in the Southern Baptist Convention.

In 1750, shortly after the end of the Great Awakening in America's British-controlled colonies, Virginia Loyalist Henry Sharp's slave, Nancy, gives birth to George, a son who takes his slave father's name, Liele.

Baby George becomes one of Virginia's 101,000 African slaves, a result of the 1705 Virginia General Assembly Declaration. (1)

Slaves are "real estate" to their Virginia owners, and suffer a life of cruelty and punishment: whipping, branding, severing ears, maiming and hanging. If a slave's "correction" causes death, the master "shall be free of all punishment ... as if such accident never happened." (2)

America's African slave trade proves prosperous during the 1730s and 1740s, a time of spiritual revival encouraged by ministers like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, David Brainerd and others. The movement awakens the colonists' declining lukewarm faith, bringing them face to face with a living, personal Christ and triggering an avalanche of Baptist growth.

Sometime before 1770, Henry Sharp moves George with him to St. George's Parish (later Burke County), Georgia. In 1735, the British prohibit black slavery there, but on Jan. 1, 1750, the House of Commons decides to permit slavery. In fewer than 30 years, Georgia's slave population grows from 500 slaves to 18,000. The slaves' hard work makes the Lowcountry's white plantation owners wealthy. (3)

In Georgia, Sharp becomes a deacon in the Buckhead Creek Baptist Church, a white congregation led by pastor Matthew Moore. He encourages George to attend worship services. During one Sunday service in 1773, God touches the 23-year-old Black man's heart, calling him to Himself and to a life of love and ministry to the other slaves on Master Sharp's plantation. George enthusiastically gives his life to Jesus, and answers His call to Christ's ministry.

"... I requested of my Lord and Master to give me a work, I did not care how mean it was, only to try and see how good I would do it ... I felt such love and joy as my tongue was not able to express." (4)

Pastor Moore baptizes George, accepting him into the church. Sharp's plantation becomes George's new mission field. He teaches the slaves to sing hymns, shares God's Word and explains the Gospel's saving message.

Impressed by George's innate ministry skills, Buckhead Creek Baptist Church licenses him to preach, and Henry Sharp grants his freedom from slavery.

Ministry in Silver Bluff and Savannah

George soon becomes a minister and preacher to slaves in Silver Bluff, South Carolina, south of Augusta, Georgia, forming a 30-member congregation of new African American believers. In December 1773, Liele organizes the First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, the oldest black church in North America. (5) Four of his converts – the Reverend Andrew Bryan, Hannah Bryan, Kate Hogg and Hagar Simpson – form the church’s early membership. (6) When Liele is ordained, he becomes the first ordained African American Baptist preacher in America.

The American Revolutionary War

A few years earlier, on March 22, 1765, Britain passes the Stamp Act, imposing unfair taxes on angry colonists. When British troops land in Boston to enforce the act, their actions result in the 1770 Boston Massacre, a deadly incident that triggers America’s rebellion against Britain. Five years later, on April 19, 1775, the first shots of the Revolutionary War are fired at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. The British free tens of thousands of Black slaves who agree to fight against the colonists.

George’s former owner, Henry Sharp, fights with the British, dying of battle-sustained injuries in 1783. Fortunately, Sharp has given Liele his manumission papers, documentation that saves Liele from long-term imprisonment when Sharp’s children try to re-enslave him. British colonel, Moses Kirkland, helps him after his release from prison, a grateful Liele repaying Kirkland by working for him as an indentured servant. When Colonel Kirkland escapes to Jamaica in 1782-3, George, his wife Hannah, and their four children accompany him. (7)

Life, persecution and ministry in Jamaica

Kirkland and the Liele family land in Kingston, Jamaica, where George discovers a ripe mission field of hundreds of thousands of African slaves working the sugar cane plantations. The slaves suffer with cruel owners, back-breaking work and little food. Thousands are starving to death. (8)

George plants a church, baptizing hundreds of professing converts in a nearby river every three months. He never accepts payment, supporting his family through farming and hauling goods by wagon. For “preaching sedition” and “agitating the slaves,” George is frequently imprisoned by Jamaican authorities, once for three years.

Legacy

By the end of his life, George Liele, referred to as “the Negro slavery’s prophet of deliverance,” has helped found three Baptist churches: First Bryan Baptist Church and First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, and the first Negro Baptist Church in Jamaica. He also has established schools to educate Jamaica’s slaves. (9)

Liele encourages and teaches his new converts to preach the Gospel to the world. Author David Shannon writes: “The Christianity practiced by Liele was not limited to one nation, colony, or ethnic group, but was a faith found and spread through interaction with colonists and national leaders in the Americas and England. In turn, this broad vision of Christianity shaped and spread a variety of Christian experience that became widespread and influential in black, white and integrated congregations in Georgia, South Carolina, Jamaica, Nova Scotia, Sierra Leone and beyond.” (10)

Liele died in 1828 in Kingston, Jamaica, and is buried there in an unmarked grave. The world calls Baptist missionary, William Carey, “the father of the modern missionary movement.” But George Liele leaves America to preach Christ in Jamaica a decade before Carey leaves England to preach in India, earning George Liele the title of “The World’s First Baptist Missionary.”

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

Footnotes:

1. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p268.html>
 2. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p268.html>
 3. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/slavery-colonial-georgia>
 4. <http://westernrecorder.org/2837.article>
 5. The First African Baptist Church’s new building [registered with the National Registry of Historic Places and still an active church] is finished in 1859. Between 1810 and 1850, the church participates in the Underground Railroad, an effort to free enslaved people from bondage. [For more information: <https://gallivantertours.com/savannah/historic-churches/first-african-baptist-church/>]
 6. <https://firstafricanbc.com/history.php>
 7. <https://amazingbibletimeline.com/blog/first-african-baptist-church-in-america-1773-1775/>
 8. In 1814, about 8,000 Baptists live in Jamaica. As a result of Liele’s ministry, by 1832, that number grows to over 20,000 believers. [<https://www.imb.org/2018/06/26/missionaries-you-should-know-george-liele/>]
 9. <http://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/l-m/liele-george-c-1750-1828/>
 10. <https://www.imb.org/2018/06/26/missionaries-you-should-know-george-liele/>
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First Person: God is faithful and just to forgive

Alcoholism has its claws wrapped tightly around the souls of the small town I grew up in, here in the Amazon region of South America. There are very few people whose lives go untouched by the darkness and destruction it brings. Mario, too, was engulfed in the addiction. He spent days out drinking, leaving his wife and six children alone. Without support from the husband and father of the household, they struggled. They were a lost family, and Satan was hard at work to keep it that way.

Amid this darkness shone one light: Mario's mother, Miriam. She was a woman on fire for the Lord. For years, she tried very hard to help her son come to know Jesus, but nothing steered him away from his addiction. In early 2018, my father and a pastor were traveling upriver by boat when a strong storm hit. Little did they know how this random boat stop would change many lives. They stopped at Miriam's farm, and she kindly invited them into her home. As soon as she learned they were both pastors, she talked about how she wanted a church on her property for her family. Her enthusiasm and fervor for the Lord were contagious. After eight months, a church was built. My family and I took our boat to her house every Sunday for Bible study.

Nayli, Mario's wife, and the children went to church every Sunday, but Mario wouldn't. Nayli showed up with bruises and black eyes from Mario getting drunk and beating her. The children became good friends with my siblings and me. Even though we could not understand the situation they were in, the best we could do was love them.

Whether it was the feeling of obligation or conviction, after a couple of months, Mario began to go to church. Slowly but surely, his heart softened. He began to want to go to church, becoming more eager and thirstier for the Word. We saw God working in his soul. Eyes that once glared with darkness and despair now shone with hope. After one year, Mario accepted Christ. A man who lived in sin and alcoholism won't even touch a can of beer now. Mario is living proof that God can make people make 180 degree turns.

Mario is not the only person that was positively affected by his salvation. His wife and children no longer lived in fear of him hurting them. He began to work and provide for his family. Within four years of his salvation, his wife and three eldest children were also led to the Lord. He even baptized his two daughters, who are my friends. Mario broke the chain of alcoholism in his family, giving his children a chance to live life for the Lord.

God used this story to show me that He can use anyone to glorify His kingdom, no matter what sins have been committed. It can be easy to convince ourselves that we have veered too far off and that God can no longer use us. Mario and his testimony show us that no matter how big our sins are, no matter what life we lived before we found Jesus, God still has plans for us. [1 John 1:9](#) says, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all

unrighteousness.” When we repent, no sin is too big for God to cleanse us from, no mistake is too big to be left unforgiven.

The work of the IMB is sustained through faithful giving of Southern Baptists through the [Cooperative Program](#) and the [Lottie Moon Christmas Offering](#)[®].

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Bowles, 16, lives with her family who serves with the IMB in the Amazon region of South America.

My mentor saved me from rookie mistakes

“Daniel, as part of your role at Gospelife Church, you’ll be meeting with Dave as your life mentor,” the executive pastor said. “Take the initiative to connect with him and aim to meet weekly or bi-weekly.”

I walked out of my meeting feeling a mix of confusion and uncertainty. I had just stepped into my youth ministry internship as a single, inexperienced young man, still unsure of my calling. I knew I had signed up to learn the ropes of youth ministry, but the concept of having a mentor was foreign to me. I had never had one before.

What made it more challenging was that Dave, my assigned mentor, wasn’t just any church member. He was a parent who had expressed concerns during my final interview about my readiness to lead as a youth pastor. And now, I had to meet with him regularly as part of my role.

Our meetings began hesitantly. Twice a month, we’d meet at a coffee shop for about an hour. The first few conversations were awkward as we navigated this new dynamic. But as time went on, the walls came down. I started asking questions, lots of them.

Dave didn’t just answer my questions; he walked with me through my journey. He held me accountable in my walk with God, gave me practical advice on training volunteers, and even helped me navigate my relationship with my girlfriend at the time (now my wife!). Over time, our conversations grew deeper, and our meetings became more frequent.

Eventually, I had the privilege of ministering to all of Dave’s children in the student ministry. His family became some of my biggest supporters, cheering me on through every stage of my journey. Now, years later, as I reflect on my ministry and personal growth, I realize how pivotal

Dave's mentorship was in shaping me. His investment in my life helped me develop spiritually, relationally, and practically as a pastor.

This experience has convinced me of one truth: every young student pastor needs a mentor. Here's why:

1. Mentors keep you accountable.

Recently, I had the opportunity to have dinner with Shane Pruitt, a nationally recognized leader in next-gen ministry. I asked him for one piece of advice that I should carry as a young pastor. His response was both blunt and profound: "Don't be stupid."

As he unpacked it, I understood the weight of his words. Ministry is filled with pressures and temptations, and many young pastors fall early in their careers simply because they lack accountability.

This truth hit home for me, especially when I reflected on my relationship with Dave. He didn't just check in casually; he was intentional. Dave texted me regularly, asked the hard questions, and wasn't afraid to lean into uncomfortable conversations. He kept me accountable in my walk with Jesus, my leadership in ministry, and my personal purity.

His consistent presence in my life served as a safeguard. Without someone like Dave to speak into my life, I could have easily made decisions that derailed my ministry. Accountability isn't just a safeguard; it's essential for young pastors to thrive and remain faithful to their calling.

2. Mentors provide wisdom.

One of the most challenging aspects of my role was handling conflicts with parents. While navigating disagreements with students felt manageable, parents were far more intimidating.

During those moments, Dave became my go-to resource. Whether it was a quick text or a phone call, he always made time to listen and offer guidance. His perspective as a parent helped me see situations through their eyes, which was invaluable. He equipped me with tools to have difficult but productive conversations, not just with parents but also with church members.

Over time, his mentorship sharpened my perspective, strengthened my conflict-resolution skills, and helped me lead with greater humility and grace.

3. Mentors will support you.

Dave became one of my biggest supporters. Years after our first awkward meeting, Dave prayed at my wedding, my student pastor installation, and sat on my ordination council to approve my ordination. I had the honor of baptizing his son Jacob and praying at his elder installation. We became not just mentor and mentee, but genuine supporters of each other's journey.

A godly mentor in a young pastor's life is a win that will make all the difference. A mentor who believes in us, challenges us, and cheers us on through every stage of ministry is invaluable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Kim is student ministry pastor for Gospelife Church in Wheaton.

Red Rover, Red Rover, send “Johnny” right over!

FLUSHING – Do you remember the childhood game of Red Rover? This was always one of my favorite games to play. You know, as the chubby, not too fast kid, I struggled to be good at many games, but Red Rover was one game I was pretty good at. Kind of the freight train principle, when you get this big train moving it's hard to stop, lol.

In case you have never played this game, players would stand in a line, holding hands or arms, and then call out, “Red Rover, Red Rover, send “Johnny” right over!” The goal was for the person running to break through the line of players, but it was no easy task. The stronger and more unified the line, the harder it was to break through. When players crossed their arms, it was tougher to break through. When they held hands, it was even more difficult. But when their arms were locked, it was nearly impossible to break the chain.

This game offers a vivid picture of how vital partnership and unity are in ministry. Just as those playing Red Rover form a stronger line when their arms are locked together, Christians also become more effective in ministry when they lock arms in the unity of faith. This biblical principle is not just about physical togetherness but about spiritual partnership in fulfilling God's kingdom purposes.

As a Southern Baptist in Michigan, it's easy to feel isolated. The long distances between churches, the cold winters, and the diverse needs of communities can make it challenging to stay connected. However, in the Kingdom of God, our spiritual connection transcends geography. We must make sure that we are locked together in the unity of faith, supporting and encouraging one another, advancing God's work in the world.

The Power of Partnership

In Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (CSB), we find a powerful illustration of partnership:

“Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.”

This passage underscores the strength that comes from being united with others. The imagery of a “cord of three strands” shows that while one person can be vulnerable, two are better, and three are even stronger. When we lock arms with one another in ministry, we form a spiritual bond that is difficult, if not impossible, to break. Just as a cord of three strands resists being snapped, so too does a ministry partnership built on the foundation of faith and mutual encouragement.

Unity is Essential

The Bible frequently speaks about the importance of unity among believers. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 (CSB), Paul urges the church in Corinth to come together:

“Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.”

In ministry, unity is not just a nice idea; it’s essential. When we lock arms in ministry, it allows us to stand firm against the forces that seek to divide us. The enemy often tries to sow discord and cause division, but when we stand united, we resist those attacks and move forward with strength.

Ephesians 4:3 (CSB) further highlights the importance of unity in ministry:

“Making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

This is an active pursuit. We are called not only to recognize unity, but to actively work to maintain it. The apostle Paul emphasizes that it’s a “bond of peace” that holds us together. As believers in Christ, we are called to keep that bond strong through cooperation and a shared commitment to advancing the gospel.

Encouraging and Serving One Another Makes it Happen

In ministry, it’s crucial that we don’t just work alongside each other, but also encourage and serve one another. Galatians 6:2 (CSB) says,

“Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

The work of ministry can be challenging. There are times when the weight of the task seems too heavy to bear, and it's easy to become discouraged. However, when we lock arms with others in ministry, we can share in those burdens. We can lift one another up when one stumbles and encourage each other when the path gets rough.

As believers, we are called to be a source of encouragement to each other. In Michigan, where physical distances can be vast, this encouragement is vital. Whether through prayer, phone calls, or digital communication, we need to make every effort to stay locked in spiritually. Encouragement is a key ingredient in building a strong, unified ministry.

In Michigan and beyond, distance may present challenges, but partnership is not just helpful—it is essential. As we partner with other churches, ministries, and believers, we expand the reach of God's kingdom.

The Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) is a wonderful example of how partnership can bring about the greater good for the Kingdom of God. We want to help your church take its next step in accelerating Gospel movement. We have many resources already and are working on new ways to walk beside our churches as we start and strengthen churches everywhere for everyone in Michigan and beyond.

As Paul writes in Philippians 1:5 (CSB):

“Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

This partnership in the gospel is what fuels the work of the Kingdom. It's through our combined efforts that we see lives transformed, communities served, and the message of Jesus Christ spread far and wide.

Locking arms together in ministry—whether physically or spiritually—has profound biblical benefits. Just as a cord of three strands is not easily broken, so too is the unity of believers when we lock arms in the mission of Christ. The strength that comes from partnership in ministry allows us to carry each other's burdens, encourage one another, and move forward in fulfilling God's purposes.

The work of the Kingdom is too large for any one person or church to handle alone, and we are called to lock arms together in unity and partnership, not only for our benefit but for the glory of God. Let us continue to partner together in Michigan, encouraging one another, building each other up, and advancing the gospel in unity For His Kingdom and For His Glory!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ed Emmerling is the Executive Director of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM). Ed was privileged to be the pastor of Westside Church Flushing since 2002. Ed and his wife Renéé have 4 children and 5 grandchildren.

Arabic adventures in Michigan

PLYMOUTH – I dove into one of life’s biggest adventures with [Send Network Michigan](#) this past year. There are no flights, passports, or language classes. No furniture is being shipped in cargo containers over an ocean or required visas to enter a country. Yet, I am living life with cross-cultural experiences in ways that shock me and cause me to rise every morning, asking, “What are you going to do today, Lord?”

When asked what I do in my new role, I respond, “I am a Language/Ethnic Church Planting Catalyst with [Send Network](#). I help people move their God-inspired vision toward reality by bringing the right people together. We are a family of churches planting churches everywhere for everyone.” After directing many things in the state for nine years, I now focus with precision on language and ethnic church planting.

I love the unpredictable nature of the work and the miraculous ways in which the Lord brings people from other nations to accomplish his desires. The mood reminds me of my former international mission service in Africa or Europe because I live out modern-day moments that reflect the stories in the Book of Acts. I may be intensely focused on just ten percent of the state’s population now, but I assure you that my spiritual eyes see God’s actions in ways that once went unnoticed.

Through relationships in the state, I explore people groups and experience cultures from across the globe. Two other languages I learned as a missionary with the [International Mission Board](#) (IMB) sometimes help. However, I found that English and, occasionally, Google Translate serves me well enough. Additionally, my thirteen years of cross-cultural experience with the IMB helps me connect with others from East and South Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and Spanish-speaking nations.

Here are some brief examples from the Arabic/English portion of the ministry in the state:

Arabic/English Ministry

1. I witnessed an Egyptian pastor in the state share the Good News of Jesus Christ with hundreds of Muslims, inviting them to trust in Jesus Christ or participate in Bible studies to learn more.
2. I regularly spend time with a married couple who leads an English as a Second Language (ESL) class in Dearborn, MI. The woman is from Jordan, and the husband is from Ohio. I have seen ESL students from 19 nations, primarily Muslim countries, share life inside a church.
3. During 2025, I will support that same married couple while the church building and center from which they work becomes a [Send Relief Affiliate Ministry Center](#). The couple has connections with hundreds of people who do not yet know Jesus Christ but with whom they

have strong ties. This couple would welcome volunteers to help with ESL classes, follow-up, friendships, discipleship, and facility repairs – I can make the introductions if this interests you.

4. An engaged couple who will marry in the summer of 2025 is leading a new English church plant for second-generation, Arabic-language young adults in Troy, MI. Rafi, the church planting groom from Illinois, will finish his first degree in ministry this spring. At the same time, the bride, Genavieve, from Michigan, will continue to use the Lord's sustaining grace to help her guide others toward the Lord through music. Her interpretations can be found at [Genavieve Linkowski](#). You may recognize Genavieve from her earlier appearances in *American Idol* season 16 and 18. Look for her music on your preferred music platform.

5. A man who served as an interpreter for United States troops in the Middle East and his wife, who works with evangelism and discipleship programs broadcast worldwide into Arabic language countries, planted a church in Sterling Heights, MI.

Register, March 8, Sending Lab

Are you interested in learning more? The first step to participating in the Language/Ethnic ministry is simple. Review the information and register for the upcoming [Sending Lab](#), held on Saturday, March 8, in Plymouth, MI. Bring people of influence from your church to join you.

Each person must register for this free event. We will gather on a Saturday to avoid work conflicts. Lunch, snacks, and swag will be provided. In this one-day collaborative experience, you will discover how to:

- Develop a sending vision
- Identify potential church planters
- Develop potential church planters
- Start a church planting residency
- Discover sending church resources and take your next steps
- Information and registration are on this link: [Sending Lab, March 8, Plymouth, MI](#)

Even if you only speak English and/or your church has been an English-speaking community for years, there is a potential partnership at this gathering. Follow the Lord's urging to explore and learn more.

By engaging communities, making disciples, and planting churches, we can reach people worldwide while serving the Lord from the Great Lakes region.

If you are hesitating and have questions, contact me, Tony Lynn, at tlynn@namb.net or 734-770-0608. I am praying for you as you consider this invitation. Jump the barriers. Embrace the possibilities. Let me share how important it is to be part of what the Lord does daily in our world.

Please share this article and news about the March 8 Sending Lab on your social media platforms and with others. Those leading language/ethnic ministries and I would be very grateful.

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.

The Great Confusion

WINDSOR, ONTARIO – Matthew records “The Great Commission” at the end of his gospel (Matthew 28:16-20). They were some of the last words that Jesus spoke to his disciples. After his ascension, when they could no longer see nor hear him, these words were ringing in their ears.

Matthew accomplishes the same feat for us with a stroke of the pen. Long after we have closed the pages of his gospel, we are still mulling over the challenge Jesus left his followers. His last command is our first concern! The finale of Matthew’s masterpiece is the clarion call of the church.

As significant as this proclamation was, it came as no surprise. He had walked, talked and breathed these principles and priorities before their very eyes. It would be impossible to summarize his life more concisely. The great commission is a précis of Jesus’ passion, his purpose, and his preferences.

But learning to understand and living out the great commission demands that we deal with the mystery and mayhem that surrounds it. Years ago, Dr. Dann Spader helped me see that some perplexing perspectives have diluted our understanding of the great commission.

The Great Commission is an exceptional command for super saints

When the Great Commission speaks of disciples making disciples, many Christians breathe a sigh of relief. They think they are ruled out! We think of disciples as people who stand spiritually head and shoulders above the rest of us. We think they are far more dedicated, disciplined, diligent, prayerful, knowledgeable, and much more spiritual than “normal” Christians.

We tend to believe that the Great Commission is aimed at *super-Christians*. When we recognize the weaknesses of our own faith and the inconsistencies of our lifestyle, we often conclude that God could never use us to reach a lost and dying world. But *making* disciples of Jesus is the overflow of delight in *being* disciples of Jesus, and God's grace is sufficient. Perfection is not a prerequisite. His power is perfected in weakness. As we "boast" about our weaknesses, Christ's power resides in us (2 Corinthians 12:9), equipping us to engage the city, make disciples, and plant churches for his glory.

The Great Commission describes an exclusive call to missionary service

The first phrase of the Great Commission is probably responsible for this notion -- "Go and make disciples of all nations." This phrase jumps out and compels us to think of God's global agenda. Acts 1:8 expands on "all nations" by speaking in terms of being his "witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

But notice that fulfilling the Great Commission begins in our Jerusalem – engaging the town or city in which we live. International missions are part of the Great Commission, but it doesn't start there. It begins with a faithful, authentic witness for Jesus right at home, right next door, at the school or in the office – engaging the city.

The Great Commission is a call to evangelism

Yes, it emphasizes evangelism. But not to the exclusion of the other priorities in Jesus' ministry. When we look at Christ's life, we do see the priority and excellence of evangelism, but that emphasis is balanced perfectly by the Great Commandment and a biblical focus on loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

Let's reclaim clarity

In all this confusion we have swindled the Great Commission out of its clout. We have created a situation in which the people of God are confused and unsure how to carry on the work of Christ.

The Great Commission is not an exceptional command meant for super-saints only. It's for you and me - ordinary people who are serving an extraordinary God. It's for every church in our Convention. It's an everyday commission, an everyday gospel opportunity, for engaging the town or city in which we live, making disciples, and planting churches.

It's not an invitation to evangelism only. It's a 360-degree call to balanced disciple-making. The great commission in Matthew 28:16-20 is a mandate to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

Dallas Willard once asked "Since making disciples is the main task of the church, every church ought to be able to answer two questions: What is our plan for making disciples? Is our plan working?"

What is your plan for making disciples?

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.

SEND Detroit Update – January 2025

We have been blessed in Detroit through God's faithfulness to his churches and our city. In the past few months, two new churches have launched and other new churches are reaching important goals of seeing people saved and transformed. The growing churches of Send Detroit are reaching milestones of discipleship, baptisms, leadership development and mission. There is a culture of multiplication where more and more new churches are being planted and new churches are also planting churches. It is an exciting time to witness what God is doing in our city.

From the most recent church planter quarterly reports, we have the following statistics to share.

These numbers represent 17 new church plants for the months of July - September 2024:

- Average weekly worship attendance: 905
- Gospel conversations: 360
- Salvations: 53
- Baptisms: 28
- Intentional discipleship participants: 532
- Cooperative Program giving: \$8,209
- Annie Armstrong giving: \$601
- Participants in missional leader residencies: 7
- Participants in church planting residencies: 9

Mission Church Grand Opening

On December 15, Mission Church (New Hudson, MI), led by Pastor Nick Ford, celebrated a grand opening ceremony for their new facility in the heart of New Hudson. Many from the community and local government were present in a show of support and appreciation for this new church.

Nick Ford has been actively working in the community with his core team since the summer of 2022. In this short time, they have been making a great difference in the community as they and lead the people of Mission Church to “be a force for the gospel and an integral part of the community.”

Praying for New Churches

Send Detroit began in 2013 with a vision to start 72 new churches in Metro Detroit. In the first 10 years of Send Detroit we saw 68 new churches launched as we prayed for God to send out laborers into His harvest. On September 10, 2024 at Mile City Church, we hosted a second Send Detroit Huddle to seek God’s vision for Detroit over the next 10 years. We came together for worship, prayer and intercession for our leaders, churches and the city. Now, our prayer is that God would show us where the next 150 new churches could be planted over the next decade. So far, we have been able to identify 62 communities where a new church could be started.

If you have a recommendation for a future church plant in Send Detroit please let us know! Use the link below to submit your ideas for new churches.

October Assessment Retreat

October 14-15, 2024, Merriman Road Baptist Church and the Send Network assessment team, hosted another well run assessment retreat in Detroit. We saw 9 candidates assessed (8 couples and one single candidate). Our director, Scott Blanchard, and coordinator, Ed Nacci, consistently maintain a high-quality assessment experience for our candidates. Our teams of assessors recommended that 7 candidates were “ready”, one “needed development”, and one was recommended to “re-direct.” For those candidates in the Send Detroit area, we celebrate the newly endorsed church planters, Rafael Bricci (Troy), and Andrew & Brooke York (Ann Arbor).

Send Detroit Christmas Dinner

On December 12, twenty Send Detroit church planting couples joined together for a special Christmas dinner at the historic Whitney mansion in downtown Detroit. We enjoyed the encouragement of great fellowship around tables and a wonderful dinner together.

Prayer Requests

Pray for God’s guidance and provision in the lives of the newly endorsed church planting missionaries, Raphael Bricci and Andrew York, as they begin to labor in the fields that the Lord has led them to. Pray for our other planters laboring also. Please continue in prayer with us that God would show us where and for whom the next 150 churches need to be started in Detroit. Pray also that God would raise up laborers needed for His harvest.

Catch the Vision Tour Dates

Please contact me if you are interested in joining me for a tour of what God is doing through church planting in Detroit. Our next scheduled dates for a Catch the Vision Tour are:

- March 10-12, 2025
- May 5-6, 2025

Yours in Christ,
Wayne Parker
Send Detroit Missionary

Good Morning Coffee Co

WESTLAND – I am the first lady at OneMission church. My husband Antonio Wimberly is the pastor. We are planning to open a coffee shop in our neighborhood as an extension of our ministry, and to support our family.

Our business is Good Morning Coffee Company. A coffee business to allow local people to come enjoy quality drinks and pastries while meeting people that have a familiar face.

- **Opportunity:** Our customer services aim to please our patrons. We pride ourselves in having quality coffee and service with a smile each time someone visits our business.
- **Mission:** Our mission is to connect with the community that we live in by bringing our fellow neighbors together in a positive atmosphere.
- **Market Focus:** Coffee is one of the most consumed beverages in the United States and Worldwide. Revenue for 2023 within the coffee industry has already reached 78.17%, and by 2024-2025 the percentage will be at 83.61% versus only 17.41 % of people drinking at home instant coffee.

Market

Currently in 2023 the Global Coffee market is valued at \$168.5 billion dollars.

- **Target Market:** Our target market for our local patrons will be a great quality coffee roast with reasonable prices for our community. We will not have a large menu with many specialty drinks but we will give our customers a selection of cappuccinos, lattes and a few mochas, but most importantly high quality roasts.
- **Competition:** In the local area that we would mostly serve would be local franchise stores such as Tim Hortons. I believe most people in the area go to these franchise

stores because there is nowhere else close to home to go to. With our coffee trailer being in a convenient location daily our customers can count on us to be there for their coffee needs.

- **Marketing Plan:** Advertising would be an important part of our marketing plan. We will use social media to get the word out regarding our new Coffee trailer business. Facebook ads for the local area radius. Flyer distribution to the neighborhoods and businesses surrounding the area that we will be stationed. Pop up Shops will allow people to become familiar with our new business and give people an opportunity to sample coffee and specialty drinks that we offer.

Management & Operations

- **Key Employees/Principals:** The principals of the business are Antonio and Jessica Wimberly, the owners of the business. We will not start off with any other employees at this time. Antonio and Jessica Wimberly are learning the business of coffee and the art of becoming baristas.
- **Duties and responsibilities:** These include all of the everyday operations related to the operations of the coffee business.
 - **Opening/Closing duties**
 - **Inventory**
 - **Marketing**
 - **Development and management of the operational budget**
 - **Employee tax identification number has been obtained**
- **Operations:** Day to day operations
 - **Pop up events**
 - **Coffee Trailer set up locations**
- **Inventory control:** Inventory will be monitored on a weekly basis
- **Licensing:**
 - Public Health Permit
 - Food sellers' permit/ Food handlers card
 - Vendors license for each city that we plan to conduct business in.
- **Accounting/Record keeping:**
 - **Daily: Closing out Registers or POS**
 - **Weekly or Biweekly: Sales**
 - **Monthly: Expenses (vendors etc.)**
 - **Quarterly: Taxes**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Wimberly is the 1st Lady of One Mission Church in Westland Michigan. Jessica and Pastor Antonio have 4 children, Savanah 18, Antonio II 11, Alexandria 1, and Anthony 7 months. Jessica is the Director of the Children's Ministry, Women's Ministry, and assists with the Media Ministry at One Mission Church. A nurse by profession, loves art and spending lots of time with her family. Outside of family time, she enjoys arts and crafts, writing, fellowship with her church family, and helping seniors in the community.

New training center prepares African missionaries to reach nations

International Mission Board missionaries commissioned a new facility, Lead Global Training Center, in Nairobi, Kenya, on Jan. 26 to prepare Africans to reach the nations. IMB missionaries, along with senior leaders from Richmond, gathered to pray for healthy African churches to send African missionaries and to praise God for the work He is already doing across the continent.

Chad Pumpelly, who serves with the IMB and directs the Lead Global Training Center, shared his hope for the facility.

“I want to look around the room one day and see African missionaries being sent out,” he said.

Pumpelly’s wife, Miriam, added, “Our hope is for African believers to own their part in the Great Commission and for us to equip those who are already called, so they can use their skills for God’s glory throughout the world.”

The dedication included messages from local IMB missionaries and Todd Lafferty, IMB’s executive vice president. During the program, IMB missionaries who gathered spent time praying for the dedication of the facility, the future potential of the people being sent out through the training and the people groups God will reach through them. Daren Davis, who leads IMB’s work in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Lafferty celebrated with a ribbon-cutting and a dedication stone. At the end of the event, everyone spent time worshipping God for all He is doing in Sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.

The goal of the Lead Global facility is to equip churches to engage unreached people groups effectively. IMB missionaries aim to help African Baptist churches reach a point where they can send and support missionaries independently. Historically, missionary support has not been a priority in African church budgets, so the IMB team is working to help churches understand the value of this investment. IMB and Lead Global will work together to help churches fulfill their role in the Great Commission.

Pasifique, a believer from Burundi, is already embracing this mission. Two years ago, he was trained in the components of the missionary task and discovered a passion for sharing the gospel. After completing the training, he and a colleague shared the gospel in a challenging area, resulting in 16 new baptized believers.

Now, he wants to become a trainer himself, so he can equip churches in Burundi and other French-speaking countries in evangelism, discipleship and church planting. He is among the participants who will attend the first Lead Global training this February.

The Lead Global property was originally purchased by the IMB (formerly Foreign Mission Board) in 1980. Since 2019, the site has been used for missions training, while leaders brainstormed and developed its long-term potential. The IMB has long had the vision for “African churches sending African missionaries to the ends of the earth,” said Davis. Lead Global is now a key part of that vision.

By the year 2050, 38% of the world’s professing Christians will be from Sub-Saharan Africa. Lead Global participants hope to collaborate with IMB globalization partners to identify mission fields in need of African workers. The Lead Global team also trains African missionaries to join IMB teams worldwide as Global Missionary Partners. Pumpelly shared, “We want the light of the gospel to reach every dark corner.”

How can you be involved?

Pray

Pray for African churches to fully embrace the vision and commit to supporting missionaries long term.

Pray for those in training and the unreached people they will serve.

Ask God to provide the resources Lead Global needs, including an outdoor pavilion for events and housing for married couples. The lack of space has already resulted in two couples being put on a wait list.

Give

The full cost of each training must be subsidized. You can join the effort by giving here: <https://www.imb.org/give/project/lead-global-team/>.

Go

The Lead Global team needs four more trainers and an operations manager to join them in the work.

The work of the IMB is made possible through generous giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® and the Cooperative Program.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lauren Milewski serves with the IMB in Kenya.

China adoptions eyed anew by Lifeline Children's Services in Trump term

SELMA, Ala. (BP) – On a beach in Thailand in February 2011 as international students, Lauren Jones and Harrison Smith discovered their mutual hope of adopting a child from China. Lauren considered it a dealbreaker in accepting a husband.

Having married in the summer of 2012, the two were living and ministering in Selma, Ala., with five years invested in the process of making their dream of adopting from China a reality when the country ended its intercountry adoption program in August 2024.

Ever since Nov. 1, 2019, the two had prayed and planned to bring home He Hao Ran as their son Benaiah Stanley Smith, who would be a brother to the two daughters the Smiths already had.

“In September 2019 we saw the file for our son for the first time and were granted preapproval for adopting him,” Lauren told Baptist Press. “I still remember packaging our first package we mailed him at the orphanage from within China through the liaison. Our girls sent their favorite snacks, pictures they colored for him and some of their own toys plus a new truck for him.”

They prepared for an extended wait when China suspended intercountry adoptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, but were forced to enter a new era of hope and uncertainty after China announced its latest decision to end the program permanently.

“Throughout these five years of waiting we’ve remained hopeful that God would make a way for us to bring our son home. We’ve endured many challenges and hardships and the truth of Romans 8:28 has become that which we cling to, believing that He is working our adoption journey for His good,” Lauren Smith said. “We’ve lived in five different homes – one of which was in Turkey – and in each home we’ve furnished and decorated a room for Benaiah.

“Sadly that hope is slowly dying after China’s announcement this past September and the continued silence. But we have agreed to remain waiting for a little while longer with hopes if this is God’s plan, He will make a way.”

The Smiths are among nearly 300 families who were in the final stages of bringing their children home from China when the communist country ended the program. While former Secretary of State Antony Blinken advocated for China to allow the families to finalize the adoptions, some are placing new hope in the Trump administration.

Lifeline Children’s Services in Birmingham, Ala., the largest evangelical adoption agency in the U.S., is handling the adoptions for the Smiths and 47 other families impacted by China’s decision. Karla Thrasher, Lifeline’s senior director of international adoptions, never received an

update on the program in the last months of the Biden administration after China ended the program, she told Baptist Press.

“We’re hoping maybe somebody new and fresh will take this on,” Thrasher said. “We all give credence to the new policy out of China. We understand there will be no new adoptions going forward. I don’t think that was unanticipated by the adoption community. But our hope is that the 300 families that were in process when suspension happened would be able to finalize their adoptions.”

Lifeline will urge high-level officials at the Chinese Embassy in Washington and at the U.S. State Department to encourage Trump to use appropriate communication channels to advocate for the 300 families before Chinese government officials, urging completion of the adoptions.

There is some indication that after China announced the end of its intercountry adoption program, a handful of adoptions in the final stages from Italy and Spain were allowed to be finalized, Lifeline said, based on its “resources on the ground in China.” But official finalizations of those adoptions from Italy and Spain were never announced, Lifeline said.

“Our ministry believes children belong in families,” Thrasher said. “We don’t have any plans to close this program until we have information directly from China that this door is closed. But we do keep options before these families” including possibly adopting from the 18 other countries with which Lifeline facilitates intercountry adoptions.

The Smiths have invested about \$40,000 in the adoption of Benaiah, Lauren estimated without complaint. For her and Harrison, what causes them pain is the prospect of losing Benaiah, and the possibility of his growing up without the love of a Christian family or the hope of the Gospel.

As a father, Harrison felt uneasy comparing the stalled adoption to a miscarriage, but said a miscarriage is an apt presentation of his feelings.

“In some ways this feels like a miscarriage but maybe even worse it feels like we lived in the ninth month of a pregnancy for four and a half years and then we lost that baby,” Harrison said, “and then in my understanding of God’s providence a dead baby is with Jesus in heaven today.

“But our unfulfilled pregnancy or unfulfilled adoption is going to end with a little boy that has no home, has no parents, has no mom and dad, no brothers or sisters, has no immediate access to the Gospel from his mom and dad, or his siblings, or his church family, or his aunts or uncles, or grandma and grandpa.”

On their first date, while both Lauren and Harrison shared hopes of adopting from China, Harrison also shared his hope of adopting domestically.

Harrison’s dream of adopting domestically is being realized in Auggie, a Chinese orphan who came to the U.S. through an intercountry adoption in January 2024 that didn’t work out for the

American family, Lauren told Baptist Press. Through Lifeline, the Smiths are in the process of adopting Auggie, 10, from the American family. Lauren was filing paperwork related to the adoption when she spoke with Baptist Press Jan. 24.

Auggie has been in the Smith home since November 2024. He spent his first Christmas in the U.S. there, and played a camel in the Nativity scene at Cornerstone Presbyterian Church where Harrison serves as family discipleship and outreach pastor.

“I look at our son Auggie and I’m just overwhelmed by the Lord’s goodness that He’d bring him to us,” Lauren said, but seeing how much Auggie has already been able to learn about Jesus also emphasizes Benaiah’s loss.

Whatever the outcome, the family will continue praying for Benaiah, Lauren said, and expresses appreciation for Lifeline.

“They’ve been a great support and rock for us,” Lauren said of Lifeline, describing Thrasher as a listening, godly counselor who has encouraged her at the toughest times.

Lifeline is studying ways to help orphans who remain in China without the prospect of adoption, Thrasher said, eyeing such aid as medical facilities, therapy or additional education for orphanage employees. Lifeline last provided services in China in 2019 training social workers, and in other countries has provided life skills training for orphans to equip them for life as adults.

“We’ve really just been trying to figure out how do we impact the lives of the children that will remain in China and not have the opportunity to be adopted,” Thrasher said. “We have several ideas, we’re just looking for ways back in, to be on the ground in China again.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Chandler is Baptist Press’ senior writer.

‘Home Church’ can provide vital relationship to missionaries

Excerpt from “The Church and the Missionary,” [The Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions](#), published by the International Mission Board.

The IMB has always required church endorsement for service overseas. Most missionaries were part of a healthy church where discipleship and accountability shaped their call. Churches committed to pray for their missionaries.

In the last few years, the International Mission Board began initiatives to more closely involve the church and has asked it to play a pivotal role in the preparation and deployment process. Churches are asked to complete an 8-10 week assessment of missionary candidates to help determine his/her readiness for missionary service. This new initiative has helped churches to take a bigger role in supporting their missionary on the field.

Greg and Joanna Hughes are a good example. Their home church helped evaluate and train them in evangelism. The church's DNA was a nations-focused mindset for prayer, giving, short-term trips and partnerships with several personnel on the field. The Hughes were the first long-term unit sent out specifically by their church. This has led to healthy partnership as they are now serving in the Horn of Africa.

"They adopted our people group and have been committed in prayer and short-term trips," Joanna said.

"My biggest encouragement is when individuals reply to our newsletters to ask a question or comment about something specific we shared, or to tell me what they're praying about specifically, or share something God is doing in their life."

Samantha Conners' church has supported them with prayers, care packages and money raised through VBS for special ministry projects. Recently, the church sent their first short-term team to work with the Conners on the field. Samantha hopes to provide more opportunities to partner with them in the future.

Tyrell and Nida Kilkenny in Asia came to the field in 1992. Their pastor was a former IMB missionary.

"Brother Miles Seaborn and his wife Jeannie of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, prepared us by personally talking to us about life on the field, raising a family (we were not yet parents), and prayed over us often," Nida said. They continue to support in prayer and hosting when the Kilkennys are stateside.

The Kilkennys' closest church connection is currently with Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth because they have provided a missionary house for them on stateside assignment. Travis Avenue wants to send a team to join in their ministry to an unreached people group in Asia.

Geoff and Jennifer Bowen were on staff at a large church before coming to the field. A high security placement overseas and a change of pastor have made it difficult to stay as connected as they hoped. The Bowens rely more on individual friends and contacts within the church to be their support rather than the church as a whole.

However, the ongoing connections are a two-way street. Prioritizing these relationships has to be an intentional part of the missionary's ministry as well as a priority of their home church. The Conners send weekly prayer requests and videos several times a year. The Bowens text in real time with their closer contacts. The Hughes talk, via Signal, to members of their church, send monthly newsletters, offer volunteer opportunities and create special resources and videos for special events.

All of the families interviewed spend time in person with their home churches when they are in the states—reconnecting with their home churches to build relationships, give updates, encourage involvement and share how God is at work through their joint effort.

If you or your church want to connect directly with an IMB missionary, please write info@imb.org for information.

This article was first published in the Fall 2024 edition of the [Great Commission Baptist Journal of Missions](#). The journal is available through the IMB.

Some names have been changed for security reasons.

The work of the IMB is made possible through generous giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® and the Cooperative Program.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karen Pearce is an IMB missionary serving among European peoples.

Few pastors bank on prosperity gospel

Few pastors hold or teach beliefs connected to the prosperity gospel. Still, these beliefs are more prevalent among churchgoers.

Many churchgoers say their church connects financial blessings with personal generosity, but most pastors see those ideas as bankrupt.

A Lifeway Research study of U.S. Protestant pastors finds few hold or teach beliefs connected to the prosperity gospel, the theological movement that teaches God wants to make followers materially wealthy and will do so if individuals hold certain beliefs or perform specific actions. A previous [Lifeway Research study](#), however, found these beliefs much more prevalent among churchgoers, including many who said their church teaches these ideas.

“The large differences we see between pastor and churchgoer beliefs related to the prosperity gospel means pastors are often not the source of these beliefs among Protestants,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. “But the gap likely also means pastors are not teaching the reasons for their own convictions on the subject.”

Pastors’ positions and churchgoer confusion

Fewer than 1 in 10 (8%) Protestant pastors believe individuals must do something for God in order to receive material blessings from Him. Nine in 10 (90%) disagree, including 74% who disagree strongly. Few (2%) aren’t sure.

Similarly, fewer than 1 in 5 (18%) say their churches teach that if you give more money to the church and charities, God will bless the giver in return. Around 4 in 5 (79%) disagree, including 62% who disagree strongly. Just 3% aren’t sure.

Pastors are more split on whether God wants people to prosper financially. Still, only 37% agree, 59% disagree, with 31% disagreeing strongly, and 5% aren’t sure.

The widespread disagreement with these beliefs among U.S. Protestant pastors is not shared by those in their pews, however, according to a 2022 Lifeway Research study.

Whatever pastors may believe, many of those regularly attending churches agree with these three beliefs, and that number is growing.

Almost half (45%) of U.S. Protestant churchgoers say to receive material blessings from God they have to do something for God. The percentage that agrees has almost doubled from the 26% who agreed in a [2017 Lifeway Research study](#).

More than half (52%) say their church teaches that if they give more money, God will bless them, up from 38% five years earlier. Additionally, 3 in 4 Protestant churchgoers (76%) say God wants them to prosper financially, an increase from 69% in 2017.

“Nine in 10 pastors describe blessings from God based on grace rather than God owing people a reward for their actions. This is counter-intuitive for many in a culture that focuses on performance,” said McConnell.

Different pulpits, different teachings

While there may be confusion among many churchgoers about what their churches teach, some of the gaps between the average Protestant pastor and the average churchgoer could be traced to congregational differences.

Some pastors are more likely to say their churches teach doctrines related to prosperity gospel theology. In particular, churchgoers at larger congregations may be more likely to hear such teaching.

Protestant pastors of the largest churches, those with 250 or more in worship attendance, are among the least likely to reject the notion that their church teaches that if you give more money, God will bless you in return. Still, 70% disagree that their church promotes that teaching.

Pastors of these large congregations are also the most likely to believe God wants people to prosper financially (52%).

“Americans like orderly, explainable things they can control. It isn’t surprising pastors describing such blessings and prosperity are having broad appeal, though it sounds dangerously close to God existing for people rather than people existing at God’s pleasure,” said McConnell.

African American pastors are among the most likely to agree with each of the following three statements. To receive material blessings from God, we have to do something for God (16%). Our church teaches that if you give more money to the church and charities, God will bless you in return (45%). God wants people to prosper financially (72%).

Denominationally, Pentecostal pastors also more often agree we have to do something for God to receive material blessings from Him (16%), their church teaches God will bless people if they give more (35%) and that God wants people to be financially prosperous (72%).

Younger pastors and those with formal education beyond college are frequently among those most likely to reject the doctrines.

For more information, view the [complete report](#).

Lifeway Research studies can be used and referenced in news articles freely. This news release can also be republished in its entirety on other websites and in other publications without obtaining permission.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aaron is the senior writer at Lifeway Research.

Methodology

The phone survey of 1,003 Protestant pastors was conducted Aug. 8 – Sept. 3, 2024. The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Quotas were

used for church size. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest at the church. Responses were weighted by region and church size to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,003 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.3%. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups. Comparisons are made to a survey of 1,000 pastors conducted by Lifeway Research Aug. 22 – Sept. 16, 2016, using the same methodology.

First-Person: Pastoring in ‘Negative World’

In his new book *Negative World*, Aaron Renn chronicles the changing cultural posture toward Christianity over the last 60 years. Positive World functioned from 1964-1994, such that the church was seen as a good thing for society. Neutral World existed from 1994-2014 and was characterized by a more tolerant posture. It was one of many voices in our pluralistic society and was neither good nor bad.

Negative World started in 2014 and continues into the present, ushered in during the Supreme Court’s decision about gay marriage. This saw a shift in cultural attitudes among many to see the church as a moral evil that must be opposed. How do we pastor and lead in Negative World? Let me make five suggestions:

Get your church polity locked down

A church statement of faith coupled with a church covenant that outlines how you will treat each other is essential in this cultural moment. Why? More and more people will engage with us who do not assume the best of us. Many of these people will look for ways to intentionally hurt the church. If you have inconsistencies in what you affirm you believe or how you, for example, discipline members, this will bite you.

Go hard after young men

As Negative World has been established, younger men are struggling. As a result, there’s an openness and hunger for guidance and direction among young men today more than ever, opening the door for the gospel. The church has largely been more calibrated to women in our marketing and programming over the last 20 years. Continue to love your ladies, but gear up to reach out to guys. Simple things like changing your church logo to look more masculine can help. More than that, make sure the men you hire on your staff or who lead on your elder

teams are model men. Young men are looking for mentors and guides, and they will gravitate to places that have that.

Prepare your leadership community for resistance

If you are outspoken about the truth, at some point you may be canceled. Not only must you be ready to take hard stances, you need to prepare your leadership community for the blowback that will come. What you must not have are leaders who want you to pull back from saying something hard because of the potential blowback. Be bold, but also wisely bring your leaders along. Show them examples of what other churches have walked through in being canceled and talk through how to respond.

Go all in on the Holy Spirit

We have officially reached a point where just “doing church” isn’t gonna do it. In Positive World and Neutral World, so much of church growth was shuffling the deck of Christians in a town. Most of what we were doing in those days was not so much planting a church but planting a worship service and expecting people to show up. I’m not bashing it—in many ways it worked! Healthy churches came out of this model. I believe those days are over. If we are going to see churches planted and grow, we are going to have to pray like crazy, begging God to move. Your leadership community needs to be a burning center of prayer, begging the Spirit to convict, unify, and send.

Call for response in worship

We have a spectrum of pastors in the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, some more reformed and others more revivalistic. One of the easiest ways to tell where you fall on the spectrum is by how you end your worship service. For a number of years, I was uncomfortable with a more deliberate, intentional response time because of abuses I’d seen growing up. I’m over that. I want to help people know how to become a Christian at the end of our services. I want people to have the ability to be prayed over or counseled during worship. Why? Because I believe when the Word is preached, God is speaking and today, people need help sifting what God is doing.

Positive and Neutral World people did not need as much guidance about the basics. Many of them were exposed to Christianity and just needed a nudge. We are now officially reaching people whose grandparents didn’t take them to church. They’ve got no background, and they absolutely need more deliberate, intentional opportunities to get help. A more focused response time can help. Negative World is here. Are you ready? I hope these five things help you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Spencer Plumlee is pastor of First Baptist Mansfield, Texas, and a member of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention’s Young Pastor Network.

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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