

THE

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BIBLICAL THEOLOGIST

OFFICIAL

OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CHURCHES

RESPONDING TO A
PANDEMIC



From the Editor



We have been through a very interesting time over the past several weeks. In the pages of the paper you will see pictures of pastors and churches which have adjusted to the difficulty and provided meaningful ministry to their people and communities. You will read articles that highlight the pandemic and the privileges of God's presence.

I was moved by the note Kent Stetler wrote in a recent post on Facebook.

To my pastor friends:

Keep encouraged! You've been thrown into a very difficult situation along with every other industry. Everything you've done in the past has been thrown out the door. This is new territory! But from someone that's standing on the sideline, watching what so many of you are doing, I couldn't be more proud!

You are innovative, you are caring, your reach has never been wider, and you are representing Christ so well in the midst of uncertain times!

Keep standing! Keep loving! Keep trying new things to reach your people and community! And keep the faith!

It may not seem like it, and no doubt the devil is fighting you harder than most, but you're making a difference! The Harvest is still being accomplished! You are making much of Jesus!

Know that you are loved and prayed for by so many!

Sincerely,

A grateful member of the Body of Christ!"

What a strong communication of encouragement from a young man who cares about his Pastor, the Church and his family.

Surviving the difficulties are possible but even more important is overcoming. To overcome is to purposely exercise faith in the Lord God. Remember the repeated strain in John's "The Revelation." "To him that overcomes is granted..." May the Lord strengthen each Pastor, Church and Christian to aspire to be over-comers.

May I offer you some information? There is a plethora

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WHAT GOD DOES IN CRISIS

By **Darrell Stetler II**

“In these unprecedented times...”

If I never hear that phrase again, that would be fine with me. If you're like me, your inbox was flooded with companies you had forgotten, reminding you that they still had your email address. They wanted to let you know how they were handling this crisis.

You may not care how “Big Earl’s Rib Palace & Live Bait Station” is handling the pandemic. However, I imagine that you’d be more interested if you received a message from Heaven, giving you specifics on how the Almighty was handling it. I haven’t received any emails from Heaven, but I have noticed a story in the book of Acts that sheds some light on God’s ability to bring good in times of crisis.

1. God allows difficult times to spread the Gospel to new places.

In Acts 11, we read the story: “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen, traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.” (Acts 11:19, NKJV)

The story begins by referring to the worst persecution the church had experienced in its young life. Before Stephen, there were court appearances, threats, beatings and imprisonment... but martyrdom was an entirely new level of pain. The new archnemesis of the church, Saul, was zealous and systematic in his attempt to destroy the early Church. This new threat put immense pressure on

Christians in Jerusalem.

This is the unfortunate truth: Jerusalem had become a comfort zone for Christians. In the first wave of the revival, thousands of people had been saved. All the best churches, all the best preachers, a warm and caring spiritual family, and all the best economic opportunities for Christians; all of these were in Jerusalem! In truth, Jerusalem was becoming more than an incubator of Christianity. It was in danger of becoming a Tower of Babel; a prevention to the spread of God’s Word across the lands.

God, sovereignly, allowing persecution, spread the Gospel-bearing Christians across the ancient world.

Even in times of difficulty, comfort zones are difficult to break. Though



the persecution forced them to spread out, most Christians continued to do things just as they always had. They spread the Gospel, but only to those who looked like them and shared their values. They only preached Jesus to those who already understood the 10 Commandments, already shared their faith in Yahweh, and whose genetics were similar to theirs.

I can't blame them. Things had changed so much, so fast. (A bit like today's world, right?) After all, it was only a few years since Jesus rose, only a few months since their friend and pastor was killed, and mere weeks since they fled for their lives.

The online space has certainly been the most obvious new area of ministry for so many churches and pastors during this time.

Rev. Shirl Rosengreen, pastoring a Native church in Arizona, recently told me, "I think [this pandemic] it has made our people want church more and it has pushed us to try online services, something we wouldn't have done if it wasn't for the virus."

My heart has swelled with gratitude and respect as I've watched pastors preach into a camera, try new avenues of ministry, and reach into corners of the digital world they would never have touched. They've learned new things, broken new ground, and gotten uncomfortable for the sake of the Gospel.

2. God allows difficult times to spur innovation in His Church.

But in the midst of crisis, God brings about the conditions to allow his church to innovate... and some in the Church responded: "But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists [pagan Greeks], preaching the Lord Jesus." (Acts 11:20, NKJV)

I realize that probably none of you gasped when you read that they preached to raw, pagan Greeks. But I guarantee you it earned gasps when other Christians heard about it. And no wonder! I'd argue, this was the largest, most dramatic innovation in the history of the Christian church! It makes innovations like Sunday School, camp meetings or drive-in church pale in comparison.

One of the fascinating things about this story: We don't even know the names of the men! When I get to heaven, I want to meet these guys. These innovative men – so passionate about the Gospel, that they saw the need to spread it across racial lines – are literally the reason you are reading this! I'm not Jewish, and you're probably not either. Neither of us would be believers at all were it not for them. We'd both be lost in our pagan idol worship!

In this time of COVID-19 and all the fear that goes along with it, God's church has innovated. Pastor Zane Hurst in Salina, KS wrote to me with this report: "Multiple people have slowed down and listened while passing by our drive-in services. This social distancing situation has also provided the impetus for our streaming team to greatly improve our live stream offering. Our church was able to

complete a much-needed remodel of the platform during this time. We have posted many weekly messages to our youth group Facebook page and drawn interest from youth who hadn't attended in quite some time."

God never allows difficult times without sending opportunities for the Gospel.

3. God allows difficult times to spark new Gospel results.

"And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord." (Acts 11:21, NKJV)

God honored the work of these innovative men, and they were blessed with a harvest of new souls. It's been this way throughout history.

Robert Raikes saw the illiterate children of Gloucester, and the Sunday School was born.

William Booth saw the drunk & homeless on the streets, and the Salvation Army was born.

John & William McGee saw the need for a joint gathering, larger than churches could hold, and the camp meeting was born.

When God allows persecution or hard times, He sends the opportunity to bring the Gospel of hope to new places, and minister in new ways.

Pastor Darrell Underwood in Clovis, NM sent in this report: "We found out our local children's home lost their milk supply. So we've been delivering milk weekly. Also, we watch over a couple of elderly women who live alone and provide whatever they need."

New openings to serve, new chances to influence. If you see clearly the hand of God in hard times, this is what you'll see Him doing!

4. God allows difficult times to raise new influencers.

"Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord." (Acts 11:22-24, NKJV)

Barnabas was a good man, doing the Lord's work. He'd been faithful in serving as a deacon in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36) and made the introductions between Saul and the apostles (Acts 9:27). In fact, Barnabas was a nickname that meant, "The Encourager." He'd earned the title with his faithful ministry to God's people in better times. But in this time of persecution, God was about to take him to an entirely new level of Kingdom impact and effectiveness.

The church should be forever grateful for those in Jerusalem who had the insight to send out Barnabas. The mindset of the first person on the scene when new and innovative things are happening is absolutely crucial. His encouragement and leadership in Antioch helped to solidify the work that God was doing in hard times.

How do we respond when crisis strikes and conspiracy theories swirl?

I've received multiple phone calls and messages that predicted the invocation of martial law ("within 72 hours") and suggested the government planned this pandemic, and more.

Some may hunker down, speculate about sinister plots, and mourn on social media about the loss of tradition, freedom and values. We might be tempted to speak frequently of the downfall of common sense and Christianity. We might doubt our neighbor, blame our politicians and predict the imminent rise of the antichrist. But I hope that you and I can purpose to be the kind of Christian that sees new opportunities to lead and that sees new people to lend your voice and encouragement. Those Christians come out the other side of crisis with new effectiveness and new levels of influence with God's people.

5. God allows difficult times to forge new partnerships.

"Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." (Acts 11:25-26, NKJV)

Through his spirit-filled walk, Barnabas was enabled to see a potential partnership developing. He recognized that Saul might always be less than trustworthy to Jewish Christians. He also recognized that a Christian with an understanding of the Greek world was needed to capture and grow the Gospel results that were gathering in Antioch. So he set out looking for Saul, which was no easy task in a day before mobile phones. He invested months in forming a partnership that would literally change the course of history.

Saul's ministry in Antioch was nothing short of pow-

erful. A "great many people" (Acts 11:26) were saved and disciplined. Just over a year later, God spoke through the new elder team at Antioch, and called Saul and Barnabas to multiply this church-planting, Gentile-building ministry across the ancient world. Saul took his Greek name, Paul, and the rest is history.

During difficult times, the Church has often seen walls come down between groups, and new partnerships form.

When Wesley was kicked out of the Anglican churches, he formed a partnership to preach the Gospel in the fields.

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was running an illegal seminary in Hitler's Germany, the fellowship and partnerships he found gave us his classic *Life Together*.

If we live a Spirit-filled life, we may find this time of crisis to be no different.

Rev. Eric Going, in Fort Scott, KS shared this anecdote with me: "Ironically, even though we've been quarantined, the churches in our area have connected and unified unlike ever before to my knowledge. The pastors of four local churches came together for an online community Easter service. It was very impactful to our community, and many have expressed a desire to see our churches do more things together in the future."

Conclusion

I'm sure it was a temptation for the early Christians to wallow in the fear and uncertainty that come with hard times. But by the grace of God and the help of the Holy Spirit, they rose to the occasion and allowed the pain to transform them into greater men and women.

There is no crisis, no persecution, no pandemic so severe that God will not redeem it for the glory of his Name and the good of his Church.

Now, will you allow it to transform you & your church? ■

Continued from page 2

of material offering advice during this dilemma but some counsel from trusted advisors who are also Christians is extremely valuable.

You may access information from the following legal entities - listed in no particular order:

Christian Law Association (CLA)

They have an Infectious Disease Outbreak Manual and COVID-19 Suggested Church Reopening Guidelines. You may contact CLA at www.christianlaw.org.

National Center for Life and Liberty (NCLL)

They have a COVID-19 Response Plan for Churches as well as a blog and alert material available on their website. Contact them at www.ncll.org.

The Liberty Council

They have available many resources as well as counsel for churches. Contact them at www.lc.org.

Now, may I offer you some good news? Several churches that have taken the challenge to try something new, like drive-in services, live streaming and publishing prerecorded services and are reporting great responses. One church reports that three new family have been attending the drive-in services and some of those people told the Pastor, "We are planning to continue to attend when services open in the sanctuary."

I know of more than one church that has enjoyed new people attending and some of those people have begun paying tithe, even before they have an opportunity to meet all the people where they are worshipping.

The Prophet Isaiah recorded the Word of the Lord in 43:19, "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert." Oh, what a God we serve! He can do a new thing even when all around it looks like difficulty. Let the Lord do a new thing in your community, in your church and in your home. ■



THE CHURCH AND COVID-19

By **Chris Cravens**

“Pandemic!” Just like that, our world immediately changed. The COVID-19 pandemic happened. The word “pandemic” most of us had never heard used in relation to a health crisis in America. Such a word, synonymous with plague and contagion, is suddenly threatening life in America. While a pandemic of sorts is not new across the world, it is new in our more recent, modern American civilization and it is frightening.

For most of us, this pandemic came out of nowhere. It was sudden, drastic and invasive. And for too many around the world it proved to be deadly. At the time of this writing, nearly 70,000 have died in America and well over 1 million diagnosed. A sweeping total of over 246,000 have died worldwide, with nearly 3.5 million diagnosed. It is no surprise that our world panicked! Our government, along with their health consultants, issued “stay at home” and “social distancing” orders for the general public. Our nation, along with nations around the world, began shutting down.

Within a few hours the traditional routines of our civilization were interrupted and we withdrew into isolation and solitude. Schools, factories, retail stores, restaurants, hospital waiting rooms, funeral parlors, health clinics, “non-essential” businesses, even our churches were asked to close and for weeks remained empty. Holy Week and Resurrection Sunday found all of us sitting at home watching or listening to church online. Only in recent days have we begun to hear of agreement in reopening certain parts of our economy. Even still, we are slow to reintegrate, wrestling with the possibility that we may never fully return to what was normal. What to do about campmeeting, annual conference and youth camp are being critically considered. Yes, these have been unique and challenging moments for all people everywhere.

However, as the world spins in chaos, through it all, I have been blessed to watch the church rise like a sleeping giant to meet the challenges of this day. No, across the board it has not been easy! I have watched our pastors and laymen come to understand the value of investing in, and learning how to use new technology. It has forced us to become aggressive in innovation; awakened us to being more intentional in our financial giving; driven us outside of our walls of familiarity and comfort, and united us with others in the anointed proclamation of the gospel abroad. It has deepened and broadened

the footprint of the gospel in our world! It has reminded us how important the body of Christ is. It has given us new opportunities to lead more intentionally, communicate more broadly, and invest the church more wisely in what is most effective. I believe these are the beginning of some of the greatest days in my lifetime for the local church! I know there is much uncertainty and discomfort, but this I believe; when the church becomes uncomfortable with itself, it becomes unstoppable in its effectiveness!

The most popular scripture in the Bible is Psalm 23. In this Psalm, the Hebrew word *tsal-maw’veth* is translated as “shadow of death,” or more literally, “death shadow.” The Psalmist uses this word in other Psalms to describe despair, darkness, calamity, even the very clutches of death. Job uses this word several times to describe his predicament after God had allowed Satan to destroy his family, finances and health. In the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos, we also find this Hebrew word being used to describe the very lowest, most miserable of places.

The beauty in these passages is not the absence of such horrible places, or moments in life that are best defined as “the valley of the shadow of death,” or of such a dreadful place as what exists beyond the “gates of hades,” as Jesus mentions in his conversation with Simon Peter recorded in the Gospels, but that God’s presence goes with us through the valley. At such defining moments we realize that the glory in these passages is not discovered in the absence of pandemics, pain, persecution, or even sin from our lives; but rather it is the promised glory of God’s transforming grace that again proves greater than all! While we do not wish for difficult, unsettling moments to come, we have discovered that even in the “valley of the shadow of death” we can boldly say; “I will fear no evil for Thou art with me!” In Jesus’ words with Simon Peter, He doesn’t promise there will not be intense, exhausting moments as the church confronts the “gates of hades,” but He did promise at such defining moments; “the gates of hades shall not prevail against it!”

It is true, on earth we will always face a force not friendly to the church and it has certainly taken on many faces since the beginning of time. The Scriptures constantly remind us of the presence of evil and the plight of unredeemed humanity. However, the overarching meta-narrative of Scripture is the

vigilant awareness and supreme authority of God's constant presence and redeeming grace. History also teaches us that evil is no match against grace. Darkness cannot seize the Light! Gates and walls of despair, darkness, and impending doom cannot withstand the claims of the Gospel! All who will hear and make their confession of faith, will experience glorious hope, victorious deliverance, and a transformational relationship with Christ!

This I know; the church is unstoppable! We are comforted by the promise of Jesus that in the worst of times, that even the very "gates of Hell" cannot silence the church. Instead, COVID-19 has forced the church beyond its walls, forced us to take the gospel outside our traditional parameters of comfort. We have watched the church swing to meet this challenge, armed with the authority of the Word and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Our ministers have stood nervously in front of their cameras alone in their studies and empty sanctuaries communicating the Word and preaching the gospel not just to their congregations, but to the world! What a day to be a part of the church whose mission is to spread Scriptural holiness throughout the world!

I cannot wait until we begin to gather physically again. Gathering is biblically fundamental to the activity of the church. We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. I pray that this has awakened us to being active beyond our sanctuary walls. I pray that there will be more of us like those of Issachar; "men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, seasoned troops, equipped for battle with all the weapons of war, to help David with singleness of purpose." I believe God is raising up such men and women among the Bible Methodists who are capable of acknowledging and adjusting to the challenges of our day with the transforming Gospel of Jesus Christ. We certainly don't celebrate pain, rejoice in death, nor embrace isolation; but, we do celebrate a united faith in a God who through His redeemed people, works redemptively in our world no matter the crisis! ■

CONNECTIONAL EVENTS

Easter Sunday Evening Communion

As we approached Holy Week and the celebration of Easter we realized that with the quarantine the churches would not be free to gather and celebrate as we have done historically. So plans were made to call the whole community of Bible Methodists together for Easter Sunday Evening Communion through a video.

Dr. Michael Avery led the celebration with a gracious invitation. The Collingsworth Family joined in by beautifully and sacredly leading the time of singing. Those who watched and participated celebrated the glory of the Lord's life, death and resurrection as the melodies and harmonies of the Collingsworth family blended in a beautiful way.

Dr. Avery presented the Word of the Lord powerfully. He reminded us of the words of the Lord inviting us to remember His life, death and resurrection, by continually returning to the Table of the Lord. Following the message, the invitation in prayer was offered by Rev. Tim Keep and Rev. Richard Miles again read from the Scripture. Together Dr. Avery, Rev. Keep and Rev. Miles lead those who joined from home in receiving and celebrating the Lord's Supper.

You can view this material on the Bible Methodist Connection YouTube channel. Please take a moment to watch and subscribe.

National Day of Prayer

May 7, 2020 was the day America was called to pray as a nation for the Lord's intervention and blessing. Again, because of the quarantine, the Bible Methodist cohesively joined together via a video. Leaders from the Connectional Committee, each Conference President and Lay members of the Conferences led the event. Dr. Avery introduced the event, we enjoyed music by Esther Hilling, Marc and Melody Sankey and Charles Dodd IV. Each Conference President introduced an area of prayer which was followed by prayer time from a variety of people.

This material may also be viewed on the Bible Methodist Connection YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter accounts.

"ONE" Promotional Material

We had planned to roll out a newly designed segment of promotional material from The Bible Methodist Connection for the Inter-Church Holiness Convention in Dayton, Ohio. But, as we all know that event was not held because of the quarantine. We have made the material available on a newly opened Bible Methodist Connection YouTube channel. The material is also highlighted on The Bible Methodist Connection Facebook and Twitter accounts. You may go to any of those social media addresses and enjoy the material.

WORLD MISSIONS

NEWS UPDATE

TIMOTHY KEEP | MISSIONS DIRECTOR



NO ABSTRACT CROSSES

Discipleship is nothing less than taking up one's cross to follow Jesus. But what does the cross look like in the realities of your life and mine? What does the cross feel like for a mom or dad? A spouse? A Christian worker? The cross of Jesus was not an abstract thing. Neither is it abstract for us.

There is a Christian man who is tempted to give up on his marriage. The wounds are deep. The pain is intense. The problems seem too tangled and complicated to unravel. This marriage is no longer satisfying. It seems far easier to just walk away than to stay and work things out.

There is a Christian mother who wants to disown her child. The sorrow of watching him self-destruct, the feelings of rejection and the weariness of worry have taken their toll. Locking the door, as unbearable as that would be, seems easier than keeping it open.

There is a Christian young person who is sorely tempted by lust and is sorely tempted to gratify the desires of the flesh.

There is a Christian pastor who can't wait to "get on down the road;" to put distance between himself and this ungrateful, cannibalistic flock! Never has he felt so mistreated, chewed up and spit out.

There is a Christian missionary who has already started to pack his bags. These people don't want a hand up, just a hand out, he thinks. We've prayed and worked and sacrificed and taught and still the immaturity is so discouraging. We are wasting our time! Let's go serve people who actually want to change!

What do any of these stories have to do with discipleship? I think we are living in a day where Christians are finding it difficult to see the connections between the cross of Jesus and their own cross. But it is especially important when life is most painful to remember what discipleship really is. Discipleship is simply the taking up of one's cross—dying to self—in obedience to Jesus, for the sake of Jesus, expecting full compensation from Jesus. The cross is not an abstract, "spiritual" concept. The cross involves a willing dying to self, in real-life circumstances, for the sake of Christ's redeeming love, fully expecting His generous compensation.

The cross of Jesus involved the suffering of real grief, real despair and real loneliness for the sake of redeeming

love. Our cross will involve these too.

The cross involved the forsaking of real friends, the experience of real betrayal and the endurance of real injustice because of obedience. So will ours.

Jesus made a real request that "this cup pass from me," and so will we. Jesus never wanted to disobey his Father, but he did want obedience to be easier! So will we.

The cross of Jesus involved real tears, real sweat, real wounds, real blood, real pain, real humiliation, real sacrifice and the bearing of real sin of real people for the sake of their—our—redemption. Our cross will feel just as real.

In the cross Jesus laid down his real life, at a real time, in a real place, in the real world. We cannot expect anything less.

This is exactly what Jesus meant when he talked about leaving father and mother and houses and land for his sake. These are real life sacrifice and suffering for His sake. This cross was not abstract but real.

It is entirely possible to be a Christian who talks about the cross, but completely miss it in your life. We need to ask ourselves, what am I expecting the cross to look like? Are you looking for a Garden of Gethsemane? Real wood and spikes? Or, is it possible that what you are enduring right now for the sake of Jesus' name, for the advancement of His Kingdom in your life, family or ministry is the cross?

We run from difficult marriages when the cross becomes abstract. We run from painful relationships when the cross becomes too abstract. We run from challenging circumstances when the cross becomes too abstract.

The cross of Jesus was the narrow pathway to resurrection power and abundant life! By faith, our cross will also yield a full compensation. Those who take hold of this by faith will find it transforming!

God's way of healing our marriages, our homes, our churches and our mission fields is through the cross. Victory comes through the cross. If we won't take up the cross, we will never see the abundant life Jesus promises. If we lay down the cross and walk away, we can only suffer loss.

Full identity with the cross of Jesus will produce a fullness of hope in life's most crushing circumstances. It did for Jesus, and it will for every Christian spouse, parent, pastor and missionary too! ~ *Tim Keep*

Ezra Biblical Seminary Completes Its First Year

On April 18th, we celebrated another completed semester of courses at our training center in San Gabriel, Oaxaca, Mexico. Students taking the Public Speaking course presented their final projects and afterwards we celebrated the accomplishments of this semester's students with chocolate cake, cheesecake and coffee.

It has been exciting to watch students grow in their knowledge of God and share that knowledge with others. We praise God for their growth and hard work; God has been doing great things. It has now been a full year since Ezra Biblical Seminary was started. In these first two semesters, eight courses from Shepherds Global Classroom have been taught,

nineteen different students from local churches have attended, one young lady has consecrated her life to Jesus Christ, and countless prayers have been answered.

God's hand and plan for this training center has been evident and constant. Though we've started small and have had difficult times and discouraging moments, our hearts are full of gratitude! Many of the students have longed for and prayed for an opportunity to study Scripture and prepare for ministry! Pastors have been thankful for being strengthened in their abilities as they serve their churches. Professionals are grateful for a deeper walk with God. This is what God has been doing at Ezra Biblical Seminary.



Crisis Relief Efforts

Our leaders and pastors in the Philippines and Mexico have expressed their sincere appreciation for the rice funds sent to them in the midst of this pandemic. Thus far we have been able to send several thousand dollars to help their families through these crisis times. Thank you for giving to the Lord!

The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward...And whoever gives one of these little ones (disciples) even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward (Matthew 10:41-42, ESV).

Southern Conference Team Visits the Philippines

A work team from the Southern Conference, led once again by Doug and Judy Eads, visited the Philippines in February. Each team member—Doug and Judy, Marty and Faith Hendrickson, Jimmy and Debra Roper, and Terri and Andrea Yielding—was a special blessing to our missionaries and to our Shepherd's College family. We are very grateful for their investment in Bible Methodist Missions.

GREAT LAKES REGIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS

BLAKE JONES | CONFERENCE PRESIDENT



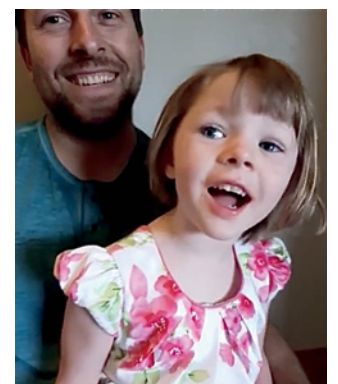
Doing Church in the Great Lakes Conference

The COVID-19 time of physical distancing has produced a wave of media Gospel outreach. Online services, phone-in conference call services, drive-in services, youth Zoom meetings, phone prayer meetings and online children's services have multiplied the listeners and viewers of our worship connection times. Pilgrim Bible Church prepared packets of food, Bible lessons, and activity plans for their Sunday School and Bus Route children and delivered them on Saturdays in a program they called "Ding-Dong-Dash."

Children, youth and families have shared special songs or Bible readings on their church Facebook pages.

At home, children have lined up their teddy bears for online services, sung special songs for their family and sent responses back to their pastors for prizes. The combined Communion Service was a very meaningful and spiritually deepening time as daddies served their families the sacred tokens of commemoration.





HEARTLAND REGIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS

CHRIS CRAVENS | CONFERENCE PRESIDENT



Beulah Grove Update

Progress continues with the Bathhouse Project on the Beulah Grove Campgrounds.

Rough-in plumbing has been installed and inspected. The floor has been poured and inspected. The block has

been laid and now the trusses and roof will be constructed. When that is finished, work will begin on the interior. We thank the Lord for all of the work that has been done and the workers who have done such a great job.



New Pastor Installed at Calvary Bible Methodist Church

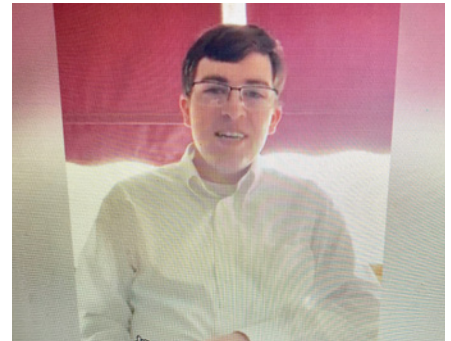
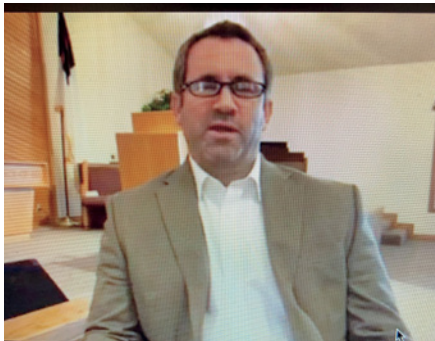
President Chris Cravens presided over the installation of Rev. and Mrs. Mark Potter as pastor of Calvary BMC. Special thanks was shown to Rev. and Mrs. Terry Going for serving several months as Interim Pastor.



Heartland Ministers Respond to COVID-19

When the pandemic hit our nation and churches had to cancel services, Heartland ministers found new and innovative ways to minister to their congregations and broader constituencies. God has blessed those efforts on Facebook, YouTube, live stream and through drive-in services. Care has been given to those who faced needs due

to the virus. Pastors continue to do their pastoral ministries. Remarkably, statistics are showing many more people are being reached with the gospel message than in any previous efforts. This just proves the church is unstoppable even through times of emergency. Below is just a sample of our Heartland pastors ministering faithfully each week.



SOUTHERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS

JOHN PARKER | CONFERENCE PRESIDENT



Easley Bible Methodist Mortgage Burning

The beautiful Church and property in Easley, SC were paid off and the mortgage burned on the 10th Anniversary of the church occupying this new facility! Pastor Jonathan Slagenweit led a debt elimination campaign that enabled the church to pay off around \$850,000.00 in a little over 5 years! It was a great day of Celebration! Congratulations EBMC!



Bible Methodist Christian School

Our Bible Methodist Christian School Junior and Senior High School Quizzing Team took First Place in the Alabama Association of Christian Schools State Competition. We are very proud of them!



CONFERENCE OBITUARIES

Dot Brown

The funeral service for Mary “Dot” Brown, age 88, was held Tuesday, February 18 at 2:00 p.m. at the Pell City Bible Methodist Church. Interment was at St. Clair Memorial Gardens. The family received friends Tuesday, February 18, from noon until 2:00 p.m. at the church. Sister Dot Brown passed away Friday, February 14, 2020. She was preceded in death by her husband, William H. Brown, parents, Ervin and Mary Thompson; brothers, Ervin Thompson, Jr., Michael Thompson; sisters, Grace Bice, Thelma Crump. She is survived by her son, Leslie H. Brown (Debra); daughter, Janeen Brown Pierson (Wayne); grandchildren, Meredith Brown Cas-

tleberry (Dale), Johnathan Brown (Tija), Zachary Pierson; extended family of loving nieces, nephews; a loving church family and a host of special friends. Special thanks to Encompass Home Health/Hospice, and Katrina Straton for her loving care. Family suggests that contributions be made in her memory to: Pell City Bible Methodist Church, 2500 7th Ave. North, Pell City, AL 35125.

Dr. Michael Avery said of her, “Dot Brown was a remarkable Christian woman who possessed such an amazing sense of God’s joyful presence you could see it in her shining face! She was also a gifted Bible Teacher, and effective mentor, a tireless prayer warrior and a powerful influencer for Christ—she will not be easily replaced!





Rev. Gerald Bragg

The Southern Bible Methodist Conference lost a legend and spiritual giant on Monday morning, March 2. Brother Bragg has served our Conference in so many strategic capacities across the years going back into our Wesleyan Methodist days. A man of integrity and spiritual depth who lived sacrificially and gave with total abandon to the Kingdom of God and ministries of the Conference. He and his wonderful wife, Peggy Bragg were key in founding the operation of the Bible Methodist Christian School here on the Campus of the Conference Grounds. His wisdom and decisions enabled us to accomplish things that would have otherwise seemed impossible. His sweet spirit and support for those to whom the reigns of leadership were passed has always been exemplary and gracious. We owe much to the life and legacy of Rev. G. J. Bragg! We honor him and celebrate his life and leadership!



Stella Mae Scarbrough

Stella Mae Morgan Scarbrough passed from this life, Saturday, March

28, 2020. She was born April 29, 1922 to Walter Franklin Morgan and Beulah Melvina Long Morgan. She was preceded in death by her parents, husband, Carson W. Scarborough and siblings, Carl (Edna) Morgan, Otis (Brenda) Morgan, Walter, Jr., (Juanita) Morgan, Francis (Paul) Patterson, Arletta (Gene) Kirby, and Louise (Harold) Jackson. She is survived by her children, Carson (Linda) Scarborough, Carol (Daniel) Roush, and Martha (Edgar) Bryan, ten grandchildren, thirty-six great-grandchildren and five great-great grand children. A private grave side service was held at Clarks Grove Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations maybe made to Scarborough's Scholarship, God's Bible School, 1810 Young Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202.



Harley "Tennie" Smiddy

Harley "Tennie" Smiddy, 76, of Chattanooga, passed away Thursday, March 19, 2020 in a local hospital. Harley was born in Knoxville, Tennessee and worked for Advance Paper Company as a truck driver. He was a member of Temple Bible Methodist Church for 45 years and served as a faithful treasurer for most of those years. He was a friend of the Wesleyan Christian School and supporter of his pastors! He graduated from Central High School in Knoxville, Tennessee and attended Hobe Sound Bible College in Florida. Harley is preceded in death by his daughter, Lori Smiddy Davis; parents Harley and Faye Smiddy; and a brother Larry Smiddy. Survivors include his wife of 51 years, Linda Smiddy; son-in-law, Jerry (Paula)

Davis; grandsons, Sam Allen Davis and Noah Wade Davis; niece, Valerie (Jason) Arnold; nephew Brian Smiddy; beloved aunt, Della Chapman; and several cousins. Pastor Tom Davis and Rev. Carson Scarbrough and Conference President John Parker spoke for the limited memorial service at Temple Bible Methodist Church after a private graveside burial, limited by the COVID-19 Shutdown!



Judy Davis

Judith Zimmerman Davis, 75 of East Ridge, passed away, Tuesday, Friday 25, 2020. She was a native of Pennsylvania before marrying Tom Davis and moving to Jamestown, Tennessee. Bro. Tom was left with 3 small children, ages 5, 3 and 4 months, after the tragic death of his first wife in a car accident. Judy accepted the challenge of becoming mother to those precious children and later had 2 children also. They moved to Chattanooga to become pastors of Temple Bible Methodist Church, where they have lived and served for many years. She is known far and wide for her culinary skills and hosting. She was preceded in death by her parent, Harry and Anna Zimmerman; two brothers, Timothy and Allan Zimmerman; sister, Lois Zimmerman. Survivors are her husband, Rev. Tom Davis; daughters, Regina Gray, Robin Davis, and Lynette Holmbeck; sons, Jerry and Lance David; sisters, Ruth Anne Cox, Julia Mengel, Miriam Boyer, Vickie Zimmerman and Faith Zimmerman; brothers, George, David and Luke Zimmerman; eight grand children; one great-grandchild; several nieces and nephews.

MID-AMERICA PROVISIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS

DARRELL STETLER II | CONFERENCE PRESIDENT



Servant's Heart Chapel – Clovis, New Mexico

Like everyone else, Servant's Heart Chapel has worked to maintain activities in spite of social restrictions. We have primarily used video teleconferencing to meet but have recently taken advantage of government policy changes.

We met for the first time in person since early March, and the ability to do so was very precious to us. While still

banned in NM, we met at Pastor Darrell's home in Texas. Not wanting anyone to get sick, we put in place proper protection procedures. First, we asked anyone who is sick or has come into contact with someone with COVID-19 to stay home for a couple of weeks. Second, we maintained social distancing. Finally, we had plenty of masks and hand sanitizer available.

Our first afternoon together was spent entirely outdoors with a church service, followed by dinner and then Sunday School. God met with us, and it turned out to be the most meaningful and productive Sundays ever for SHC.



Selina, Kansas

On February 21, our congregation took possession of a church building that had come for sale at a reasonable price. We were excited to finally have a place of our own to have services. We were able to have the church ready in time for our Spring Revival which started March 4, with Rev. Steve Stetler. Little did we know that after only a few weeks in our newly purchased building that we would have to abandon having services because of the COVID-19 virus quarantine.

We spent the first few quarantine Sunday's doing online only services. Easter Sunday we began having drive-in services facilitated by our large parking lot. We are thankful for the technology and skills available to make this happen.

One disguised blessing in this was that the church had a massive platform with 6 levels that stretched out almost to the middle of the sanctuary. During this quarantine time while the church was not in use, we have been able to disassemble that old platform and rebuild a smaller, single level, but very adequate platform.

We are excited about what new avenues of ministry God is going to open for us in this new venue.



Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

In Oklahoma City, volunteers built a stage out front and Pastor Darrell Stetler II preached from it each Sunday. Some neighbors—who had never come to church—attended by coming out on their porches to listen.

One brave man climbed onto the church roof to photograph the crowd for Easter Sunday. Overall, attendance went UP during the drive in season.

Bread of Life Food Pantry in OKC showed an increase of 30% in families we served during COVID-19. Volunteers braved the heavy rain & hail on April 22nd to serve 130 families in 2 hours.



SOUTHWEST PROVISIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS

G. CLAIR SAMS | CONFERENCE PRESIDENT



Whitehouse, Texas

Our church has been doing an online service with a phone conference option. Our people have left encouraged and uplifted. Additionally, we have been continuing to reach out to those connected to our church by starting a card ministry; sending encouraging messages to each family. We have also been giving out packets for our Sunday School kids each week with activities and tasks for them to perform since they cannot come to church. For Easter we gave each of our Sunday School kids a Bible with an Easter Basket and their parents and received a Geranium with a note letting them know our church was thinking of them. We also sent Geraniums to every family in the church. Overall, we distributed over 20 baskets and more than 20 flowers to the different families.



Sherman, Texas

Pastor Snodgrass and his IT team, Jered and Amanda Gardner and Mark Russell, have been doing a combination of services. They have done Facebook live, drive-in services, prerecorded services posted on Facebook and YouTube as well as services over the phone on Uber Conference. There have been several people visiting the services, both drive-in and live.



Dallas, Texas (Spanish Church)

The Church has been doing Facebook services each weekend. Pastor and some of his people record early and then post the message. The services have been lively and well attended.



Treasurer Valley – Caldwell, Idaho

Since the coronavirus pandemic began, we've been asking the Lord to teach us new ways to reach people with the Gospel. We have been doing pre-recorded services each Sunday morning. At times I feel like a Seventh Day Adventist (as I record Saturdays), but I do enjoy sitting back with the family and critiquing the message...er...I mean worshipping together. But seriously, a side benefit of this has been confidence building and while watching yourself on camera can be painful at times, it can also be a valuable learning experience.

Our people have rallied behind us in an amazing way, sending in pictures of the services online in their homes. It is humbling to us knowing that of all the hundreds of services they could choose to join, they have chosen us.

We have also posted pre-recorded Sunday School lessons and the kids love that. (Some of the pictures I have attached are of various children enjoying Sunday School or treats we have sent out.) We hid eggs in the yards of all the Sunday School children early Easter morning and inside were items that correlated with the morning lesson. Each family also received a package of PEEPS and my wife wrote on the package "We miss our peeps." This was somewhat exhausting, but the joy it brought them was well worth the effort.

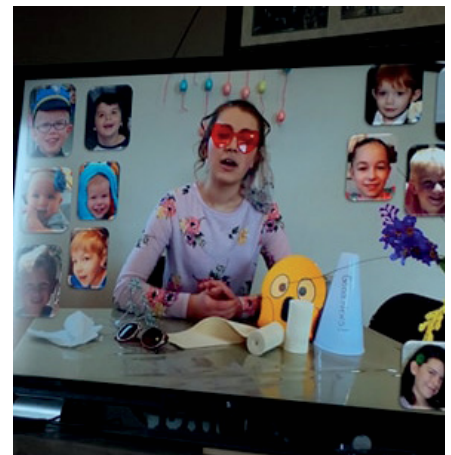
I preached my resurrection message from the top of Lizard Butte (which is a southern Idaho landmark where sunrise services have been held for many years) with the large white cross in the background. This thrilled our people as many of them have memories of Easter sunrise services here in the past.

Some other things we have done are drive-by calls, flowers and home-made goodies on front porches, playing piano and praying at nursing home windows, and weekly cards sent out to our people and others we have heard of who need encouraged. Wednesday evenings we have done different things each week. Sometimes conference call prayer meetings, or group chats. I have asked different ones to submit pre-recorded prayers, Bible readings and study thoughts in an attempt to keep interest.

We have witnessed once again how the enemy can mean something for evil and how God can use it for good. We have had new people from the community join our online services and give us positive feedback and we have seen our contacts become more interested than we previously thought and even join in our Wednesday night get-togethers.

A highlight for us was the online communion service. While I love ministering to my church group as a whole, it was definitely a precious time for me to focus on my own little family for a moment in this most tender and holy sacrament.

Thank God for Salvation full and free and the wonderful privilege of ministering in this day! ~ Pastor Rick Bork



MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND
Bible Methodist Camp

Heartland Conference

Annual Conference: June 22-23
Family Camp: June 23-26

Great Lakes Conference

Annual Conference: July 10-11
Family Camp: July 10-19

Southern Conference

Annual Conference: June 29-30
Family Camp: June 29 - July 5

Southwest Conference

Annual Conference: July 28-29
Family Camp: July 29 - August 2

For more information on these camps, visit biblemethodist.org
or visit the conference Facebook pages

