



THE
BIBLE METHODIST

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BIBLE METHODIST CONNECTION OF CHURCHES VOLUME 53 | ISSUE 3

WHAT IS THE
CHURCH'S
ROLE IN OUR
SALVATION?

PAGE 3

FROM THE EDITOR



G. Clair Sams
Editor

We continue the focus on Salvation this issue.

Dr. David Fry in collaboration with Dr. Steve Oliver and Dr. R.G. Hutchison wrote this piece. Please, take a couple minutes and read the material. Together with the articles in Issue 1 and 2, we are attempting to give an overview of the redemptive work of God in the life of Believers and the Church.

God's great investment in humanity encircles His creation, interaction and redemption of humanity. God loves and from that deep Divine love rises the plan and interaction between the Trinity and humanity. The Scripture with history, law, prophets, poetry, theology, and gospel all draw attention to Divine Revelation and through that revelation to God's plan to bring forgiveness, healing and eternal life to those who by faith believe Him.

Embrace the cross and the church and know the power of forgiveness, cleansing and fellowship that is administered by the Holy Spirit. The Father planned, the Son gave, and the Spirit executes this great message. May it wrap your heart and life in truth.

In this issue you will get pictorial glimpses of each Regional Conference, their Annual Conference, family camp and youth camp. Take a visual tour through Great Lakes, Heartland, Southern and the Southwest pictorial pages. Celebrate the baptisms shown on the Missions pages. Join in the activity from youth camps, vacation Bible schools and the ministry of local churches.

A couple pages highlight the historic merge between the Mid-America Regional Conference (Provisional) and the Southwest Regional Conference (Provisional). Take a little time to read through the material and join in the celebration of joy as the Conferences embraced and begin working as one team. ■

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EDITOR

Rev. G. Clair Sams
gcsams@biblemethodist.org

SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER

Melba Sams
2235 Cale Switch Rd, Durant, OK 74701
melba_sams@hotmail.com

ART DIRECTOR

Shane Muir
smuir@gbs.edu

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BIBLE METHODIST CONNECTION OF CHURCHES

CONNECTIONAL CHAIRMAN

Dr. Michael Avery
3739 Moorhill Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45241
mavery@gbs.edu

MISSIONS DIRECTOR

Rev. Timothy Keep
4473 Forest Trail, Cincinnati, OH 45224
tbkeep@yahoo.com

GREAT LAKES REGIONAL
CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

Rev. Blake Jones
Box 5, Cedar Lake, MI 48891
bejones@nethawk.com

HEARTLAND REGIONAL
CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

Rev. Chris Cravens
16346 TR 166, Arlington, OH 45813
chrisravens@biblemethodist.org

SOUTHERN REGIONAL
CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

Rev. John Parker
40 Skyview Lane, Pell City, AL 35125
johnparker@juno.com

SOUTHWEST PROVISIONAL
CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

Rev. G. Clair Sams
2235 Cale Switch Rd, Durant, OK 74701
gcsams@biblemethodist.org


BibleMethodist
CONNECTION OF CHURCHES

A black and white photograph of a church service. In the foreground, several hands are raised in prayer, with fingers spread. One hand in the center has a white wristband. The background is dark and out of focus, showing more people and what appears to be a church interior with hanging lights.

WHAT IS THE **CHURCH'S ROLE** IN OUR SALVATION?

BY **DAVID T. FRY, PHD**

Why does the Church matter?

In our modern smorgasbord of Christian gatherings, the local listing of churches reads like a restaurant menu. What are you hungry for? Traditional, contemporary, liturgical, or blended worship? There's probably a local church that caters to your appetite. Do your Sunday plans only allow for an hour of worship? Do you prefer a well-lit sanctuary or a darkened one? Are there other amenities that matter such as the quality of the children's programming, the availability of social gatherings, the quality of coffee, the size of the seats, and so on?



In North America we have the luxury of choosing our worship comforts and preferences. In the meantime, as pastors and church boards design their buildings and programs, they are susceptible to losing sight of the very purpose and design of the Church. Too few people choose a church for things that matter very much. Church, like a country club membership, is more like a luxury than a necessity, an option rather than a requirement. Whatever the Church is for, so people think, it's not for my salvation. *That* is strictly a matter between me and Jesus.

The attitude just described is a far cry from the understanding the Apostles and early church fathers had. Ours is also a different world than Christians in persecuted countries experience today. The Apostles couldn't imagine building a big-box church building based on the prospect that if this thing called "church" fails, we may need to have a marketable building to sell. The "box" to which the Apostles compared the Church was the ark of Noah. Yes, the Apostles understood the Church as the Ark of our salvation. The Apostle Peter writes, "God's patience waiting in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you..." (1 Peter 3:20-21). "Baptism" is the act of the Church in recognizing and welcoming new believers into the Ark. Apart from the Ark, Noah and his family would have been lost. Failure isn't an option; the Church is the ark of our salvation.

Ignatius, Cyprian, Origen, and other apostolic fathers in the 2nd and 3rd centuries also used the imagery of Noah's Ark to refer to the Church because they understood God's purpose for the Church precisely the same as the purpose of Noah's Ark. Let's be clear: it was God who saved Noah and his family, and it is God through his Son who saves us. The Ark is merely the

vessel, but an essential one in God's plan of salvation. God has chosen the Church as the vessel in which we must be to be saved from the wrath to come.

Origen wrote, "If someone from this people wants to be saved, let him come into this house so that he may be able to attain his salvation.... Let no one, then, be persuaded otherwise, nor let anyone deceive himself. Outside of this house, that is, outside the Church, no one is saved; for if anyone should go out of it, he is guilty of his own death" (*Homily 3.5*). Origen is echoing what the Apostle John said in 1 John 2:19, "They went from us, but they were not of us: for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out [left the Church], that it might become plain that they all are not of us."

Ignatius, the spiritual grandson of the Apostle John, wrote in A.D. 110, "If anyone follows a divider out [of the Church], he does not inherit the kingdom of God" (*Letter to the Philadelphians 3*). In A.D. 251, Cyprian famously said, "He cannot have God for his Father who does not have the

Church for his mother" (*The Unity of the Catholic Church 6*). Augustine adds, "Whoever is separated from the Church, by this single sin of being separated from the unity of Christ...shall have no life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (*Letter 141*).

There is a consensus through Christian history that the Church is for our salvation. This consensus, however, has never been more at risk than it is today in the western world. Insofar as a local church, in form and in spirit, resembles a country club or a concert hall, it becomes merely one option in our smorgasbord of social activities.

IS OUR SALVATION MORE THAN A PERSONAL MATTER?

The fact that the Church is the "body of Jesus Christ, the fullness of him" (Eph. 1:22) means that our salvation is not merely a matter of a right relationship between me and Jesus. Of course, that matters. But that is not all that matters and it is not all that is essential to our salvation. The problem with making our relationship with Jesus merely

a private, personal matter was directly addressed by our Savior in John 13:35, "This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Jesus is linking the two great commandments—love God and love your neighbor—into an essential bond. Salvation is not about one or the other; it is about both.

We can tell when people love one another by the unions they form, whether in marriage or in congregations. Love visualized as a body of believers that sticks together in the good times and the bad is the kind of love that characterizes the Church of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26).

In 2016 the Barna Group undertook a study showing that an alarming increase of self-identified orthodox Christians "love Jesus but not the Church." For this population salvation is strictly a private matter. [1] John Wesley had some significant words to say about this:

To separate ourselves from a body of living Christians, with whom we were before united, is a grievous breach of the law of love. It is the nature of love to unite us together;

There is a consensus through Christian history that the Church is for our salvation. This consensus, however, has never been more at risk than it is today in the western world.

and the greater the love, the stricter the union. And while this continues in its strength, nothing can divide those whom love has united. It is only when our love grows cold, that we can think of separating from our brethren. And this is certainly the case with any who willingly separate from their Christian brethren. The pretenses for separation may be innumerable, but want of love is always the real cause; otherwise they would still hold the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.[2]

Many people come and go to and from church meetings much like they would to and from a restaurant, with no regard of when they may return. Love for the Church is light at best. It's more like lust—lust for entertainment, risk-free relationships, and convenient connections. Without a recovery of the truth about the Church's role in our salvation, love for the Church will continue to wane.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN MY SALVATION?

1. The Church is the Covenant Bride of Christ

Salvation is both personal and corporate. We enter into a personal relationship with Christ and are immediately incorporated into the Church as the Bride of Christ. According to Ephesians 5:26 and Revelation 21:9-10, the Church as the Bride of Christ will be saved. Scripture has no concept of a Bride-less or Church-less salvation.

The New Testament is filled with corporate language like this from Ephesians 2:19, "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God," and 1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...," and this from John in Revelation 21:9-10, "'Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out from heaven."

From these Scriptures and more, we can see that the Christians are incorporated as a nation of citizens, a household, and a city which is the object of God's salvation.

2. The Church is our Ark of Salvation

Second, since our salvation is corporate, the Church has the role of being a safety net. Continuing the image of the Ark, the Church provides a safety net in which believers who fall into sin may be saved. Nearly half of the commands in the New Testament descriptive of the life of the Church have to do with keeping from and restoring one another from sin. Both testaments contain measures that can and must be taken when someone within the covenant community sins (cf. Leviticus 6:1-7; Galatians 6:1). These passages show us that a person within the Body of Christ need not be lost though he has sinned when the covenant community extends the means of grace for recovery. There is corporate assurance.

A word should be said concerning 1 Corinthians 10:13. We often consider the way of escape from temptation through the eyes of individualism. We construe it to mean that I can handle every temptation to sin *all by myself*. But this reading overlooks the fact that this passage occurs in the middle of Paul's instructions to the Church regarding their social life together. Very often our only means of escape is the Holy Spirit's use of the Church, that is, by the help and accountability of other believers.

The question of what happens to a believer if he or she sins is one of the most controversial and frequently asked questions in my lifetime. If a believer sins and dies before the next public altar call, does he go to hell? I'm not able to address all of the complexities of this question, but the role of the Church needs to be mentioned. How one defines sin matters and many have focused on that issue. I suggest that no definition of sin is adequate to answer the question without

understanding God's intent for the Church's role in our salvation. If a believer sins, insofar as that person avails themselves of the means of God's grace, ordinarily administered by the Church, he remains a member of the covenant community of God (1 John 2:1, 19; James 5:19-20; Gal. 6:1) and is saved. The Church as God's Ark of Salvation keeps us from a "one-and-done" (or "in-and-out of the boat") theology of sin and the believer. There are, of course, deeper complexities that warrant further attention, but I merely wish to raise awareness that God has provided the Church as a vessel of salvation.

3. The Church is a Guardian

In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus gave guardianship of the Church to the apostles (Cf. Matt. 18:18; John 20:23). The Church, built on the apostles, is charged with handling the keys of the kingdom. The Church exercises the authority of the keys through binding and loosing, that is, by Christians holding one another accountable to right belief. This happens, first, by passing on what the Church received from the Apostles (Col. 2:6-7; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Thess. 2:15). The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of the Gospel (Eph. 1:14) and the Church is the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) through which "the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known" (Eph. 3:10). This can be confusing because it seems like no two churches believe exactly the same way. But don't be discouraged by all the differences; it is the similarities that are essential. Every Bible-believing, Christ-preaching church holds to the core tenets of the faith as given in Scripture and expounded, for example, in the Apostles' Creed. Christians may disagree about many things, but we would die for the same truths. This is the truth we believe in our heart and confess with our mouth (Rom. 10:9). We also confess our happy participation in Christ's death and happy anticipation of Christ's return when we attend the Lord's

According to Ephesians 5:26 and Revelation 21:9-10, the Church as the Bride of Christ will be saved. Scripture has no concept of a Bride-less or Church-less salvation.

Table. Practicing regular communion is Christ's ordained way of keeping the plain Gospel truth at the forefront of our minds—that Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3).

The second exercise of the keys is holding one another accountable to right behavior. In baptism we identify with Christ and signal His total authority in our life. Christ's authority extends to Spirit-led authority in the Church. We testify to our continued fellowship with Christ and the Church by participating in holy communion. Communion is one of the ordinary means of grace practiced by the Church (Acts 2:42). When we gather at the Lord's Table we remind one another of the great supper that is yet to come (Mat. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18; 1 Cor. 11:26). This is why a church member who has fallen into sin and remains unrepentant must not be included at the Table. To do so would give the impression that he will be saved despite his lack of repentance. Admittance and exclusion from the Lord's Table is how the Church shows forth the

seriousness of sanctification and delineates between the saved and the unsaved (1 Cor. 11:26).

We must consider Matthew 16:18-19, 18:15-20, John 20:23 and Galatians 6:1 at this point. What role does the Church have when a church member sins? Spirit-filled, spiritually-mature leaders in a local church are tasked with "binding and loosing" a sinning brother or sister. This means that the Church exercises the keys of the kingdom (Mat. 16:18-19; 18:18) by holding them accountable and offering restoration (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). Restorers are people who come alongside a fallen brother or sister with gentleness (Gal. 6:1) and offer the intensive care needed to overcome sin, even habitual sin. This shepherding role should be exercised often but patiently. Sincere, biblical restoration gives no room for spiritual abuse. The Apostles Paul and Peter are aware of this and address it head-on: "restore him *in a spirit of gentleness*" (Gal. 6:1) and "shepherd the flock... *not domineering* over those in your

charge, but by being examples" (1 Pet. 5:2-3). We must emulate the Good Shepherd in our role as restorers. The Church is God's flock, not ours (1 Pet. 5:2). God saves us, not the Church; but God does not save us without the Church.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the role of the Church is like a bride with whom God enters a marriage covenant. Those who are in the covenant people are saved. Second, the Church is like an ark of salvation, a means of grace from coming destruction. And, finally, the Church is our guardian, an instrument of the Holy Spirit, for our salvation.

Our doctrine of salvation is impoverished when we exclude the Church as the gift of Christ to us through the Spirit. Despite all of its flaws, learn to love the Church as "the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). ■

[1] <https://www.barna.com/research/meet-love-jesus-not-church/>

[2] Sermon LXXV, "On Schism."

WORLD MISSIONS

NEWS UPDATE



Timothy Keep
Missions Director



CAMP MEETING MISSIONS SERVICES

For many years now our family has been participating in each annual conference's missions service. We always enjoy the warm Christian fellowship. We always enjoy it when the Holy Spirit makes us aware of His presence. We always appreciate the kindness and hospitality shown to us and to our missionary team.

This year it was a special privilege to welcome missionary, David Martinez, to the camps for the first time. Thank you, Bro. David for sharing your life and vision with the BMM family. And thank you Brennan and Ivon and children for once again allowing the Spirit of Jesus to speak in and through you. Your vision and passion for discipleship and training is both encouraging and challenging.





SARAH'S TESTIMONY

My name is Sarah. Taking the courses at Ezra Biblical Seminary has blessed my life. When I started my first course, which was New Testament Survey, I was not a Christian.

I attended church but didn't really know the Word. I didn't even read Scripture and was completely lost. I remember that I began attending Ezra because a friend invited me, not because I wanted to.

Thank God that He led me there and began dealing with the sin in my life and opened my eyes so that I might be saved through Christ.

Thank God that I have realized that Scripture is for everyone. We all need to know Him, and that is eternal life, that we know Him and His Son whom He sent to die for our sins. We can have that eternal life now!

CELEBRATING GRACE

As I sit down at my desk to prepare these pages my heart simply wants to praise the Lord! As I've spoken to our BMM missionaries and national leaders, read and listened to testimonies of new converts, and reviewed newsletters and social media posts, the consistent theme has been one of praise! Despite challenging times, more young people and adults are being trained and disciplined today, more new congregations are being planted, and more chapels are being constructed than at any other time in our history. And many new believers are being baptized as well. God is pouring out his grace upon Bible Methodist Missions.

There is no greater joy in missions than the joy of sharing in the new life created by the Gospel. You may have recently noticed that on our fields, especially in the Philippines, we are witnessing an increase in baptisms. We rejoice together in this, because this is what missions is about—the salvation of souls and the transformation of individuals, families, and communities through the Gospel?

On one of my recent, early morning walks I was rejoicing in what the Lord has done, and what he is doing. And as I worshiped, this wonderful old hymn came to my mind. It speaks of the grace of God which every one of us—every missionary, every leader, every pastor, every student and every layperson—is indebted to. It speaks of the grace which has not only saved us and placed us in Christ, but is leading us to victory through one of the most difficult moments in recent history:

*Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
Yonder on Calvary's mount out-poured—
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.*

*Refrain:
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin!*

*Sin and despair, like the sea-waves cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater—yes, grace untold—
Points to the Refuge, the mighty Cross.*

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe!
All who are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?!*

If you support BMM by prayer and support, you have every right to share in our BMM celebration of grace. Let's praise the Lord together! I know that I speak for Rev. Brendel Macadangang, Rev. David Yucaddi, Rev. Rufugio Sanchez, many other devoted church planters, pastors and field leaders, and our dedicated missionaries when I say, "thank you!" Thank you for giving to the Lord. Thank you for seeking first the Kingdom of God. Thank you for praying "Thy Kingdom Come." Let's rejoice together that the Gospel is changing the world one life at a time. ~ *Tim Keep*

GREAT LAKES

REGIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS



Blake Jones
Conference President

ROCK LAKE FAMILY CAMP

What a joy it has been to fellowship with God's people again and enjoy the rich grace of God together. Dr. Daniel Stetler and Dr. James Keaton were our evangelists and spoke pointedly and compassionately to us from God's Word. Tim and Julia Cole lead us in worshipful singing. Eli and Thelma Albring co-ordinated youth activities and services throughout the camp meeting. And, Rev. and Mrs Davis and their family again, for

the fifteenth year, directed the children's ministry—this time with a medical theme. The Holy Spirit ministered to us in unique and tailored ways to meet us at our points of need.

Camp meeting was blessed to have many new babies, lots of children and the finest group of youth people. Please note the picture of them lined up across the front of the tabernacle. Also, note the picture of some of the teens who met and prayed with Bro. Jones prior to his Sunday morning Conference President's message.



Clockwise from top-left: Camp evangelists left to right: David Ward, Dr. James and Sue Keaton, Julie and Tim Cole with children, Dr. Daniel Stetler and Blake Jones; Children's workers Gene and Konor Davis; Some teens praying for Conference President Blake Jones; Youth and children in the tabernacle; Prayer for the teens.

ROCK LAKE YOUTH CAMP

Due to Covid restrictions during the planning process, Youth Camp was modified into a Youth Retreat venue. Rev. Tim Wiford was the guest speaker for the four services. God anointed His servant and the young people's response to the Spirit's ministry was deeply encouraging. The days were marked by hours of pouring rain so some activities were forced inside and others were simply enjoyed in the rain!



HEARTLAND

REGIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS



Chris Cravens
Conference President

YOUTH CAMP 2021

Nearly 200 campers and numbers of support staff met at Beulah Grove for Heartland's Annual Youth Camp. In the first service, outgoing Youth President Michael Mater introduced our new Youth President, Brian Wardlaw. The week was filled with many exciting events. Rev. Mark Cravens served as Evangelist. His challenging messages were well received and numbers

of young people prayed at the altar. The last evening service was crowned with a special sense of God's Presence as young people began to come forward for prayer during the congregational singing. It was such a joy to see so many young people respond to God's call. It takes many people to give of their time to make Youth Camp a success. Special thanks to all the pastors and laymen who gave of their time and talents to minister to our Heartland Youth. And, above all, thanks to God for His faithfulness.



FAMILY CAMP 2021

What a joy to see the Heartland family gather at Beulah Grove after a year's absence. The week started with Annual Conference. The business of the conference went smoothly. The highlight of the conference was the dedication of the new bathhouse adjacent to the Wilcox Tabernacle. The prayer of dedication was given by Rev. Gary Brugger. The project

finished under budget. We are so thankful for all the donated labor and materials. Monday night, Elder Rodger Stearns challenged us with the Conference Sermon. The service concluded with Communion. God blessed a great team of workers which included: Dr. Randall McElwain, Bible teacher; Rev. John Manley, Evangelist; the Stetler Trio, Singers; Mrs. Rebecca Simms, Children's Worker; and Rev. Joey Ratcliff, Youth Evangelist. Special

services included the Conference Extension Service and Missions Service with Rev. Tim Keep, the Muir family and David Martinez. The Heartland family was generous in their giving; funding the camp budget and future projects and a love offering for our Camp Caretaker, Jim and Joy Spear. Most importantly, God's Spirit moved in the services with numbers receiving spiritual help. May God be praised for a week crowned with His Presence.



SOUTHERN

REGIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS



John Parker
Conference President

CAMP MEETING

On June 28-July 4, Dr. Michael Avery and Rev. Darrell Stetler II were our evangelists for camp meeting. Matt and Joy Barnett sang and Pricilla Vernon lead the children's ministry! Christina Black spoke to the ladies in the afternoons. We enjoyed a wonderful camp meeting! What a blessing it was to see so many young families, especially the children and teens. We are doing our best to accommodate and provide enjoyable and spiritually beneficial experiences for them!



YOUTH CAMP

Youth Camp was June 7-11 with Pastor Aaron Wardlaw as Evangelist and Pastor Dwight Crosley and team leading the youth camp. We had a very fruitful and helpful youth camp. Our youth were diligent seekers in response to Pastor Aaron's messages. Pastor Dwight and Lorna made it fun and led the event very effectively.



BLAND, VIRGINIA

Bland Bible Methodist Church, was organized on April 25, 2021, graduating up from a Conference Extension Church. Pastor Brian and Marie Consley and their fine congregation are to be commended for growth and maturity as a Conference church.



SNIDER'S CELEBRATE 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Rev. William and Martha Snider celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary with a reception given by the Stanton Bible Methodist Church and their children. The Sniders are serving as Interim Pastor at Stanton. It was a beautiful reception and was very well attended by friends and family from a variety of states. The Sniders have served in vital roles in the Conference from the earlier days of their marriage until now. We congratulate them on this milestone.



HEDSTROM'S CELEBRATE 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Rev. and Linda Hedstrom celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary July 31. A beautiful reception was provided for the Hedstrom's on Saturday evening of camp meeting by the WMS. Many cards and gifts expressing our love and appreciation for them were given! We thank God for the health they are enjoying in their retirement years in Salem AL. You may send them a card to 313 Lee Road 2049, Salem, AL 36874.



REV. DOUG EADS EARNS MASTER'S DEGREE

Rev. Doug Eads earned his Masters Degree from the God's Bible School & College Graduate Program. The Conference congratulates Conference Vice President on completion of his Master of Arts in Ministry.



THE 3 HEATH BROTHERS

The 3 Heath Brothers presented a concert of Gospel music in the Agan Tabernacle on Sunday evening, June 13, following youth camp. They are a blessing to many these days. What a joy it was to have them here. Both their father and grandfather are Elders in our Conference. We pray that God will continue to use them as many new doors of opportunity for ministry are opened to them.

SOUTHWEST

PROVISIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS



G. Clair Sams
Conference President

CONFERENCE MERGER

It was a beautiful sunny, hot and windy Saturday in Oklahoma City when the merging of the Mid-America and Southwest Conferences took place on June 19, 2021. The hard work of taking care of the details had been hammered out in the previous months by many joint committee meetings. As the delegates came together for this special meeting there was great anticipation and unity which was evident in conversations and actions.

One of the first items of business was the motion that the two conferences merge. Mid-America Conference President, Rev. Darrell Stetler II made the motion for the uniting of the conferences while the Southwest Conference President, Rev. G. Clair Sams seconded the motion. It then passed with a unanimous vote from all of the delegates from both conferences. As the delegates applauded, the Connectional Chairman Dr. Avery

stated, "This is a time to celebrate and applause is in order." A special merging document had been prepared which was then signed by the two previous Conference Presidents, the General Chairman and the secretary for the merging conference. It was followed with a standing celebration of praise to God.

The rest of the session was marked with God's presence and a great degree of cooperation as committees and chairmen were elected. The positions were filled by members of both former conferences. The session concluded with a sacred communion service. There was a

wonderful spirit of harmony as the conference concluded.

It was an honor to share in this historic day. For many, this was a great moment that they relished. On the following Sunday one of the delegates shared with his church in Durant, Oklahoma that next to becoming a Christian, the merging conference had been the greatest event of his life. May God bless this new Southwest Bible Methodist Conference as they join together in promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the western states.

~ Rev. Bob Blankenship



WHEN TWO BECOME ONE

Normally the title of this article is reserved for marriage, but in the life of the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches it has taken on a special meaning since the merger of the Mid-America Conference and the Southwest Conference this past June.

The talk of merger began over 3 years ago while I was in a revival meeting with Steve Snodgrass in Sherman, Texas. Steve shared with me the journey of the Pilgrim Nazarenes and I simply said, "You guys would make good Bible Methodist. Why don't you think about joining?" From that

simply short conversation, multiple meetings have taken place that led to the final merging conference.

I was a part of many of those meetings and the thing that always stood out to me was the remarkable sense of unity among the brethren (even when difficult issues had to be faced) and at times the keen sense of God's presence and blessing on what was happening. In one meeting a very sensitive issue had to be discussed. Good men expressed their opinions and there was significant disagreement. However, I watched and listened as those men held to their views but refused to allow it to become a dividing point. I watched holy love in action.

I was also a part of the meeting that had to nominate the new officers and all the new positions. I was amazed as one side would say, "No, you have the best person so we want you to take the nomination." At other times it would go in the other direction with the other conference deferring. The unity and professionalism was remarkable. There was not an ounce of "grasping or politicking."

When the merging conference came, the whole business session flowed with another remarkable sense of oneness and unity. All who were there left rejoicing that the "two had become one."

~ Dr. Michael Avery

MERGING CONFERENCE REPORT

On Friday, June 18th, the Southwest Conference met for their annual conference, at Calvary Bible Fellowship in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Conference President Clair Sams called the business session to order and the presence of God was felt from the beginning. All reports were given and accepted with a unanimous consent. A spirit of unity prevailed in that afternoon session. The conference business was closed with prayer and there was great anticipation for the event that was to take place on the

following day.

Saturday morning, we gathered with the Mid-American Conference delegation per the guidelines of a previously adopted resolution that would merge our two conferences together. This was done without objection, and we became one! Under the leadership of General Chairman Mike Avery, we settled down to business. Bob and Karen Blankenship executed the secretarial needs of this joint conference with ease and efficiency.

The new Southwest Conference elected Rev. Clair Sams as their conference president and Rev. Darrell E. Stetler as their conference vice president. Mike Covington

was elected as treasurer and Andrew Blankenship as conference secretary. Other positions and committees were elected, and the organization of the conference was set in order.

We will not soon forget the moving Communion service at the close of the Conference. As we blended our hearts and voices in praise to the God we serve, He came and sealed the business of the conference with His sweet presence. We recognize the challenges that face us but lean hard on our God who will help us. May God continue to bless the efforts of the Southwest Conference for His glory and honor.

~ Rev. Stephen Snodgrass



Clockwise from top-left: Mid-America delegates (L-R) Eric Going, Todd Hurst, Eric Hughes, Darrell Stetler II, Dr. and Mrs. Steve Oliver, Jamin Hughes and Kinneth Hurst; Executive Committee (L-R) front row, Andrew Blankenship, G. Clair Sams, Darrell Stetler II, Mike Covington, back row, Mark Russell, Kinneth Hurst, Darrell Underwood, Steve Snodgrass; Dr. Mike Avery, serving as Chairman and Bob Blankenship, serving as Secretary; Fellowship during the meals; Signing the merging conference documents.
Opposite page: Merging conference delegates.

SOUTHWEST

PROVISIONAL CONFERENCE NEWS (CONTINUED)

FAMILY CAMP

There is always an air of excitement that surrounds family camp. It is the gathering together of believers for spiritual renewal and enriching fellowship. For the Southwest conference this year's family camp was a pinnacle point. It was years of prayer, business formality, vision, and divine working of the Holy Spirit coming full circle.

As we gathered together the anticipation was heightened by the number of new things that were

before us, a new location at the Arrowhead Retreat Center on the Brazos River, excitingly gathering together of newly merged churches, developing new committees, and some congregations meeting for the first time.

What was not new was God faithfully working throughout the week through His willing servants. Steve Stetler (Evangelist), Nathan Brown (Bible Study), Larry and Trish Jewett (song evangelists), Eric Going (Youth), and The Davis Family (Children's Workers,) helped those who sat under them grow

in a deeper relationship with God. God orchestrated these moments not just as we sat in services, but through enriching conversations over meals, during meetings, and in the simple fellowship of a conversation be it brief or long.

We walked away from the fast pace week with our newly joined churches creating new friendships, building new mentorships, rejuvenating the tired, inspiring the young, and everyone eager to see what God will continue to have in store for the churches of the Southwest Conference. ~ *Bethany Dill*



YOUTH RETREAT

Pastor Aaron and Melissa Johnson of the Lakewood, Colorado church hosted a youth retreat in the mountains. Youth President Caleb Crouch and some young people from Oklahoma participated. They spent time in Bible study and devotions, fellowship and riding four wheelers.



YOUTH CAMP

Mid Southwest Youth Camp, lead by Caleb Crouch, Jamin Hughes, Eric Hughes, Andrew Blankenship, Michael Moore, and Mark Dill was a special blessing. This year they met at Green Acres in Whitehouse, Texas. Matt Hallam was the speaker, GBS, HSBC and UBC sent groups to participate. A number of young people from as far away as Colorado attended and were blessed by the ministry of Matt as well as the leadership and team leaders.



VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

Treasure Valley Bible Methodist Church held their first Vacation Bible School this year, full steam ahead and all aboard for Jesus. We left the station each evening Tuesday through Friday for adventures, learning, crafts, snacks and games. Scripture memorization was a priority. We had a big celebration on Saturday afternoon with hot dogs and a snow cone machine. There was also a piñata and a water balloon fight. New friends and new contacts were made. Sunday morning, we reviewed all that we had learned. Twenty-two different children attended and heard the good news of the Gospel. The adults were blessed too as they traveled along. God gave us a very helpful crew to complete this journey and we leave the results in His able hands.

REV. TODD HURST ORDINATION

The Mid-America Conference, as one of its final actions, had the privilege of ordaining Rev. Todd Hurst. Connectional Chairman gave the Ordination message, Conference President Darrell Stetler II, Eric Going and Dr. Steve Oliver led the ceremony. The congregation celebrated this milestone in life of Todd Hurst and in the work of the Conference.

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