

# THE BIBLE METHODIST

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FLOURISHING IN

*Holiness*



# FROM THE EDITOR

TRAVIS J. JOHNSON

Few words in the Christian vocabulary carry more weight, and more misunderstanding, than *holiness*. For many, it has become associated with restriction rather than renewal, rule-keeping rather than transformation. Yet at the heart of our Bible Methodist heritage is the conviction that holiness is not a burden to bear, but a life to enter; a life marked by freedom, fullness, and fellowship with God.

In this issue, we are pleased to introduce an article by Matt O'Reilly, a voice within the Global Methodist Church. Though from a different branch of the Methodist family, O'Reilly stands alongside us in a shared commitment to the proclamation of biblical holiness. Like our own movement, the Global Methodist Church has expressed a renewed desire to preserve and propagate what John Wesley called "scriptural holiness."

What makes this article especially valuable is its pastoral and theological clarity. O'Reilly addresses a real challenge of our day: the tendency to reduce holiness to a system of external rules. In doing so, he calls us back to a thoroughly biblical vision—one that understands holiness as participation in God's character, the embodiment of perfect love, and ultimately, the pathway to true human flourishing. This emphasis resonates deeply with our own calling. We have long contended that holiness is not merely separation from sin, but consecration unto God; not merely avoidance, but abundance. It is the renewal of the image of God in the soul, lived out in love toward God and neighbor.

At the same time, O'Reilly's framing invites us to consider how we communicate this truth to a generation that often hears "holiness" through the lens of legalism. His work challenges us not to abandon the language, but to reclaim and rightly explain it and to show that God's call to holiness is, in fact, His call to our highest good.

It is our prayer that this article will both affirm and sharpen our understanding, helping us to more faithfully proclaim, and more fully embody, the beauty and joy of a holy life.

## THE BIBLE METHODIST

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THE BIBLE METHODIST

# REFRAMING *Holiness*

HUMAN FLOURISHING, NOT LEGALISTIC RULE-KEEPING



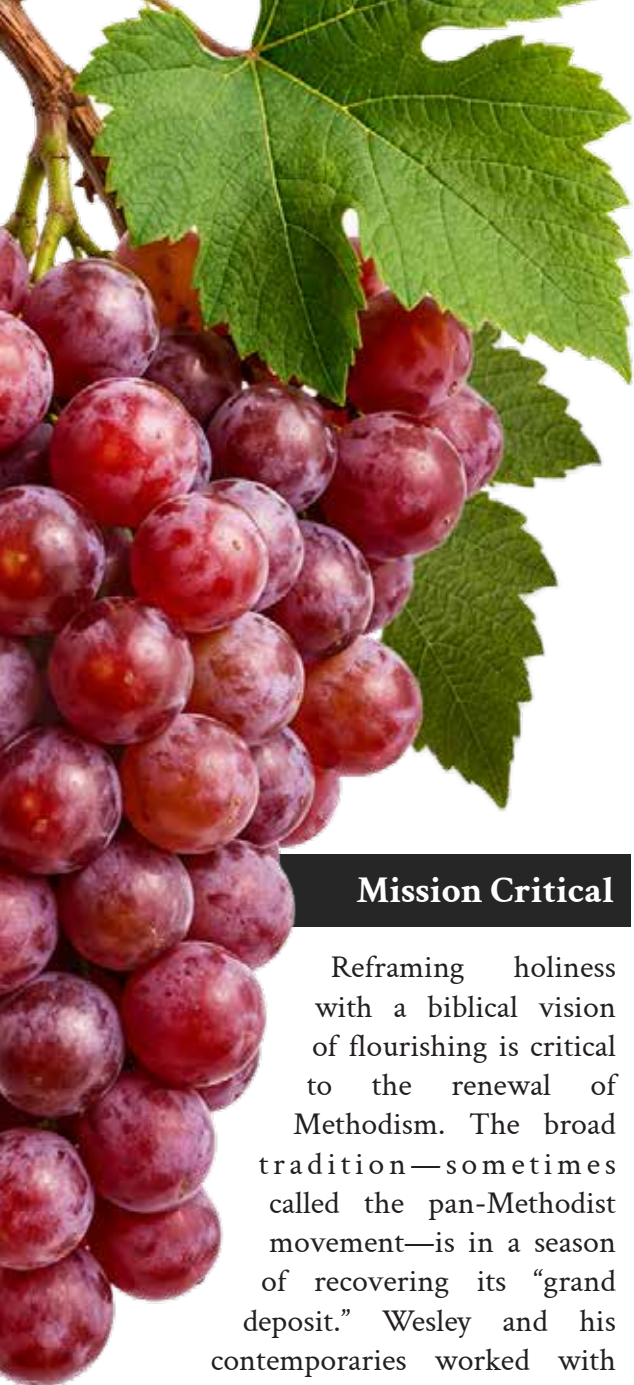
*by Matt O'Reilly*

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One of the problems with the word *holiness* is the baggage. When people hear you talk about holiness, their minds tend to think of it within a framework of legalism. If you want to be holy, here are the rules. Keep the rules, and you'll be holy. Break them, and you're not. And often, the rules are written to their advantage, not yours. In the holiness-as-legalism

framework, God is a cosmic killjoy—always looking for opportunities to catch and condemn the rule-breakers. This is a problem because the Bible doesn't frame holiness in terms of legalism. No, across the pages of Scripture, holiness is about freedom and flourishing. It's time to reframe holiness.





## Mission Critical

Reframing holiness with a biblical vision of flourishing is critical to the renewal of Methodism. The broad tradition—sometimes called the pan-Methodist movement—is in a season of recovering its “grand deposit.” Wesley and his contemporaries worked with the conviction that God had raised them up “to spread scriptural holiness.” And we thankfully live and work in a period where there is significant renewed interest in the classical Wesleyan understanding of holiness. As evidence, the denomination of which I am a part has included that original language of spreading scriptural holiness in its mission statement. That move signified a clear and explicit intent to align our new denomination with the

classical and evangelical Wesleyan tradition. I’m grateful for that.

Nevertheless, we also live with the consequences of a mainline Methodism that de-emphasized doctrine in favor of a social gospel. That means that many, many people who find themselves in the midst of this renewal are not deeply familiar with biblical and classical Wesleyan teaching on holiness. That is, holiness as flourishing, not legalism. As the Global Methodist Church was discerning whether to include “scriptural holiness” language in its mission statement, one worry was that our congregations simply weren’t familiar with the language of holiness. And when they were, they tended to think of it in that legalistic framework. How can we build a mission statement around lack of knowledge and understanding? Well, now that we’ve included the language of holiness in our mission statement, we have to shepherd people into a deeply biblical vision of holiness. That means we deconstruct holiness as legalism and reconstruct holiness as flourishing.

## Toward a Theology of Holiness as Flourishing

That said, here are three ways of speaking that reframe holiness away from legalism and toward wholeness.

### 1. Holiness as Participation in God’s Character

One of the first things we learn about holiness in the Bible is

that *holy* is the word for God’s character. Once God delivers the Hebrew people from captivity in Egypt, his holiness is at the forefront of their formation. What does it mean for God to be holy? Well, it means he’s not like all the false gods they encountered in Egypt. And it means he is always and consistently does what’s right. God’s holiness is that aspect of his character whereby he always does what he *ought* to do.

What’s particularly striking is that God intends to share that with his people. Read Leviticus 19. You’ll repeatedly hear that God is holy. It’s a refrain that recurs again and again. But the point of that text and others like it isn’t simply to highlight God’s holiness; the point is to begin shepherding the people of God into *sharing* God’s character—his holiness. God is holy, we are told, and that means his people must be holy, too. And if God’s holiness is that aspect of his character whereby he consistently does what he ought to do, then sharing his holiness with his people means they become the kind of people who consistently do what they ought to do. They do what’s right. And they do what’s right in relation to others—God and neighbor. So holiness isn’t about keeping a list of arbitrary rules. Instead, holiness is about participating in the life and character of the triune God. And if there’s anything we can say about the shared life of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, it’s that they flourish in unity and in relation to one another. Holiness is about our participation in that flourishing – the flourishing that characterizes the Trinity.

## 2. Holiness as Perfect Love

Another way of reframing holiness as flourishing is to talk about it in terms of perfect love. John Wesley was quick to do this, and we should be, too. What does it mean to be holy? It means we embody the two great commands of Jesus—love God with your whole self and love your neighbor as yourself.

If holiness is about legalistic rule-keeping, then the focus is on us and all our shortcomings. It's about our performance and particularly about our *poor* performance. It's about all the ways we don't measure up. The focus is on the modification of our behavior. It should be clear. The focus is on us. But if we frame holiness in terms of Jesus' command to love God and neighbor (and enemy!), then the focus shifts from self to other. The heart is turned outward. The invitation is to embody the self-denial and selflessness that Jesus calls for when he calls each disciple to "take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Perfect love is other-oriented love. Jesus came to bring his love to perfection in us (1 John 4:17-19).

## 3. Holiness as Happiness

If you spend much time looking at books on human flourishing, you're going to run into the question of happiness. What's striking is that John Wesley frequently linked happiness—*true happiness*—with holiness. Not only that, he sees this as a way of framing the overall biblical

narrative and our experience of salvation.

Reflecting on the transgression of Adam and Eve, Wesley puts it this way in his sermon on "The New Birth": "So had he [Adam] lost both the knowledge and the love of God, without which the image of God could not subsist. Of this, therefore, he was deprived at the same time, and became unholy as well as unhappy." The solution to this loss of both holiness and happiness, comes through the new birth: "except he be born again, none can be happy even in this world. For it is not possible, in the nature of things, that a man should be happy who is not holy." "You must be born again; otherwise it is not possible you should be inwardly holy; and without inward as well as outward holiness, you cannot be happy, even in this world, much less in the world to come."

For Wesley, happiness and holiness not only belong together, they are central to the work of God in us through Christ and the Spirit. These are only a handful of instances. There are plenty more. Religion in its truest and purest expression is about consistent holiness and, therefore, consistent happiness. If we follow Wesley's lead, it could help us shift perceptions about holiness from legalism to wholeness that is happiness.

### God's Best for Us

I've lately found myself saying that you

can summarize the whole Bible as the story of a holy God preparing for himself a holy people. If we want people to recognize that such language is good for them, then we need to recognize that they may very well have some holiness baggage if they think holiness is all about legalism. We may not like it, but we have to deal with it. Across the Bible and across our theological heritage, holiness is about happiness and wholeness.

Holiness is about flourishing. It's our job to offer that vision to the church and to the world.

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Theology Project.*



**Dr. Matt O'Reilly** is a Wesleyan pastor, theologian, and author who serves as Lead Pastor of Christ Church Birmingham in Alabama and Director of Research at Wesley Biblical Seminary, where he also teaches New Testament and pastoral ministry. A Senior Fellow of the Center for Pastor Theologians and a two-time recipient of the John Stott Award for Pastoral Engagement, O'Reilly is widely recognized for his work on holiness, sanctification, and Wesleyan theology. He is the author of several books, including *Free to Be Holy: A Biblical Theology of Sanctification, Paul and the Resurrected Body*, and *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, and editor of *Reconstructing Methodism: Crucial Issues Facing the Global Methodist Church*.



# WORLD MISSIONS

R. G. HUTCHISON, MISSIONS DIRECTOR

NEWS UPDATE

## Africa85 Training Seminar in Ethiopia

In March, Dr. Hutchison joined Dr. Randall McElwain (Director of Global Training for Shepherds Global Classroom) and BMM missionary Maricka Herrero in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for a training seminar with pastors and leaders associated with the Ethiopian Council of Gospel Believers Churches. This is an organization representing more than 3,000 member ministries and church denominations as well as more than 70 Bible colleges and seminaries. Many of the people undergoing the training are themselves teachers in Bible schools or seminaries, or actively pastoring. Maricka Herrero and Dr. Randall McElwain do an outstanding job of introducing the curriculum and showing how to use it. The focus is on training trainers (2 Tim. 2:2). Evangelical Christianity has grown in Ethiopia from just 1% in 1991 to an estimated 30% of the population at present. This kind of rapid growth highlights the need for biblical and theological training to keep pace for the health and maturity of the church in countries such as this one.



## Summer Missions Services with the Slavens Family!

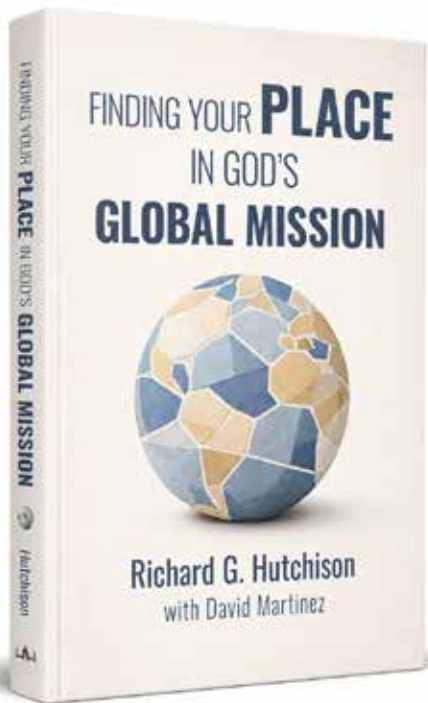
This summer we are looking forward to having Tim and Rebekah Slavens and their family coming to each of our Regional Camp Meetings! They will be speaking in the missions services and providing updates on their journey through language school. You won't want to miss it!





## Philippines Quadrennial General Conference

In April, the Philippine Bible Methodist Church held their quadrennial General Conference. Their duly-elected National Executive Board (pictured L to R) is: Emelson Galarpez (lay member), Pastor Jayson Panaga (treasurer), Rev. Jefferson Lucena (secretary and Bible college administrator), Lilia Castro (lay member), Delma Macadangdang (book keeper), Rev. Brendel Macadangdang (national overseer), Rev. Bienvenido “Jhun” Bunuan, Jr. (assistant national overseer & Joshua conference overseer), Rev. Romulo Gallato (Joseph conference overseer), Rev. Manuel Balido (Jabez conference overseer), and Rev. Lauro Mitchell Forto III (Jehoshaphat conference overseer).



## New Book Release!

Do you have a place in God’s global mission? From the opening pages of Scripture to the spread of the gospel across the world today, God has been at work redeeming people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. But where do you fit into that story?

In *Finding Your Place in God’s Global Mission*, Richard G. Hutchison, with David Martinez, offers a clear, practical, and biblically grounded guide to help every believer discover their role in God’s redemptive plan. Tracing God’s mission throughout Scripture and into the present day, this book equips individuals and churches to move beyond awareness into meaningful participation.

Whether you are a pastor, a missions leader, part of a small group, or simply a follower of Christ seeking direction, this resource will:

- Clarify God’s heart for the nations
- Inspire a deeper commitment to discipleship
- Help you identify your personal role in global missions
- Equip your church to engage as a sending community

God’s mission is not reserved for a few — it is the calling of every believer. The question is not if you have a place... but where? This book provides twelve chapters along with discussion questions and study guides, which can be used as lesson material for your local church’s monthly missions service, or for a full quarter of lessons for a Sunday School class or small group meeting.

Copies will be available this summer during General Conference (June 2-4) at the Rock Lake Campground in Vestaburg, Michigan, and during the missions rallies at each of the Regional Camp Meetings. Also, watch our Facebook page and newsletters for more information on placing orders for more copies.



# GREAT LAKES

DAVID WARD, PRESIDENT

## CONFERENCE NEWS

### Great Lakes Convention

Our reimagined Great Lakes Convention in March at Cedar Springs has been a tremendous blessing. The attendance has been up and more churches are involved.



On Wednesday evening, Rev. Blake Jones challenged the congregation to follow Jesus' example with the woman at the well by sharing the hope of the gospel with marginalized and hurting people.



On Thursday evening, Rev. Nathaniel Tucker shared practical ways God is helping the congregation in Port Huron make a difference in their community and challenged attendees to find practical ways to reach their respective mission fields in their communities.



On Friday evening, Rev. David Ward challenged the young people to pick up the mantle of those who have impacted their lives by choosing to be actively involved in making a difference for those who will follow them.

Following the Friday night Youth Rally, attendees enjoyed an open gym with lots of fun, food and fellowship.



### Connectional Representation

The Connectional has been well represented in various events this spring.

In early February, the Conference Presidents traveled to Hobe Sound.

Wednesday night featured a reception for camp attendees from each of the regional conferences.

On Thursday morning, the team sponsored a breakfast with ministerial students. Since Conference President Doug Eads was traveling in the Philippines, Rev. Logan Sankey represented the Southern Conference. We were also joined by Rev. Darrel Stetler from the Southwest Conference.



On Thursday evening, all the conference teams interacted with college students at the Ministry Forum.

In mid-February, each regional conference was well represented at the God's Bible School Job Fair. On this occasion, Rev. Deron Fourman, Rev. Brian Wardlaw, Rev. Steve Greshem and Lauryn Lavy represented the Heartland Conference.

In April, the Connectional Team provided a warm and welcoming spot at the IH Convention in Gatlinburg, TN. It was a delight to interact with our Bible Methodist family and many others during those busy times.

## Annual Connectional Meetings

In February, the Franklin Bible Methodist Church provided a warm and comfortable setting for the connectional committees' annual meetings.

The Missions Committee met on Tuesday evening.

*Pictured from left to right are: David Ward, James Shiery, Doug Derscheid, Mike Pennellatore, Chris Hilling, Aaron Johnson, Bob Pickett, Chris Cravens, RG Hutchison, Deron Fourman, Blake Jones, Dewey Murray, Doug Eads, Richard Miles, Bob Blankenship, Mike Covington, David Armstrong, Chelle Durr, Wayne Fleming*

The full Connectional Committee met on Wednesday morning and afternoon.

*Pictured from left to right are: Aaron Johnson, Blake Jones, Deron Fourman, Viola Durr, RG Hutchison, Chris Cravens, Chelle Durr, Doug Eads, David Fogleman, David Ward.*



**IHC in Gatlinburg, TN**

Left to right: Doug & Judy Eads, Chris & Julie Cravens, Blake & Saundy Jones, RG Hutchison, Aaron & Melissa Johnson, David & Ruth Ward.



# HEARTLAND

CHRIS CRAVENS, PRESIDENT

## CONFERENCE NEWS

### Around the Conference

Fairmont WV Bible Methodist Church celebrates their 60th anniversary with present pastor, Rev. Wesley Grissom and his wife Jenny, former pastors Rev. Deron Fourman and his wife Kim, Rev. Gary Brugger and his wife Martha, Conference President Cravens and his wife Julie, and General Chairman Blake Jones and his wife Saundy in attendance.

New addition to the Snack Shack at Beulah Grove.



President Cravens caught up with one our legends, Bennie Durr, Sr.



Auburn Bible Methodist Church celebrated 20 years under the leadership of Steve and Melissa Gresham. The reception was held in their newly constructed fellowship hall.



God is blessing Tim and Cherie Byer as they pastor the Zanesville Bible Methodist Church. Here is a picture of their church choir.





Heartland Conference was well represented at the Ministry Fair at GBSC. Pictured from left to right are conference administrative assistant Lauryn Lavy and pastors Steve Gresham (Auburn), Deron Fourman (Port Clinton), and Brian Wardlaw (Franklin).



Pictures from the IHC in Gatlinburg, TN. Pictured from left to right are Southern Conference President Doug Eads, Heartland Conference President Chris Cravens, Zane Darland, media and graphics designer for the Connection and *The Bible Methodist*, Southwest Conference President Aaron Johnson, and Great Lakes Conference President David Ward.



At their recent business meeting, Mark and Tammy Potter received a three-year recall to the Greenfield Bible Methodist Church.



Longtime Heartland Conference member Garen Wolfe leads the singing at the convention.



John and Anita Burroughs received a three-year recall at Beach City Bible Methodist Church.



The Conference President and Julie with the family of conference elder Doug and Amy Wiseman.



# SOUTHERN

DOUG EADS, PRESIDENT

## CONFERENCE NEWS

Easter season is a great time to connect with the community. Pastor Mark Stetler has a great way of getting those eggs out for all the kids to “hunt.” The little ones at Golden Grove praying with their pastor, Leonard Collins.

It is always good to see former Conference President Walter Hedstrom. His influence and impact on the Conference is so far reaching. Only eternity will reveal all that he accomplished.

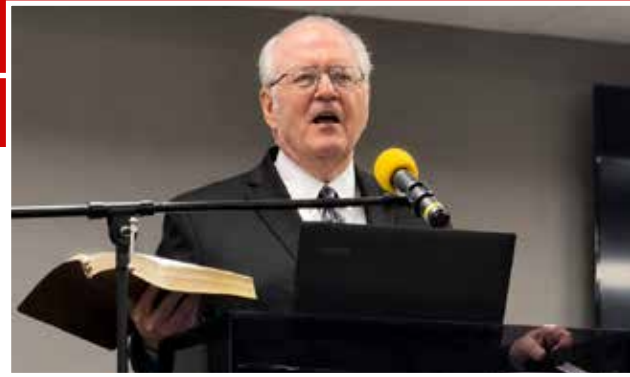


Telling ministerial students at GBS about opportunities to serve in Southern Conference. Dwight Crosley, Cale Manley, and Logan Sankey made the trip to the Hilltop with the Conference President.



Going into all the world can be a unique experience sometimes. The Talladega Nascar race is only a 15-minute drive from our Campground. The Talladega Bible Methodist Church partnered with Gospel Publishing Missions to hand out thousands of books with the message of the gospel. It is a new adventure with the opportunity for future ministry.





The Ministerial is always a highlight of the year. This year, Dr. Allan Brown led four sessions on how to properly offer a lament to God. Rob Cravens shared insights on how to listen well, drawn from his many years as a hospice chaplain. We are encouraged that attendance continues to grow, that the Ministerial remains a family event, and that the fellowship is especially sweet during and after each session.



The Southern Conference is launching a new initiative called Missions-Minded Teens. In April, a missions convention was held for teenagers with a heart for missions. Dr. R. G. Hutchison spoke to the group about answering God's call, and Landon Paulus did an excellent job sharing about his recent mission trip to the Philippines. The teens sampled international foods, explored artifacts from around the world, and were challenged in their hearts to go and serve.



# SOUTHWEST

AARON JOHNSON, PRESIDENT

## CONFERENCE NEWS

From March 26–28, the pastors and elders of the Southwest Conference gathered at the Prothro Conference and Retreat Center on the shores of Lake Texoma for our annual ministerial retreat. The focus of the retreat was church planting and revitalization. Dr. Kester Young served as our guest speaker, and the Spirit used him to enrich both our hearts and minds as we seek to reach the unchurched.



Wesleyan Bible Church in Lakewood, Colorado hosted an Easter Egg Hunt. The entire neighborhood was invited, and the event was well attended.

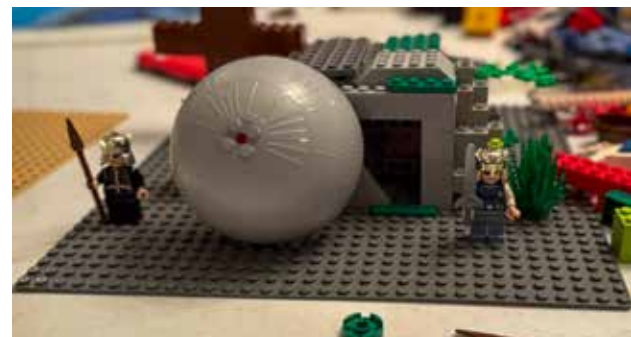




In April, Whitehouse Bible Methodist Church hosted a Lego Bible Story Night. Four teams had a great time building Lego dioramas depicting significant biblical events—Noah’s ark, the Exodus, Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, and the Ascension.



This spring, we hosted our first revival services at Grants Bible Methodist Church. President Aaron Johnson delivered engaging and challenging messages. Friends from other holiness churches and missions joined us in worship. Pictured are two singing groups from Rincon Marquez Holiness Mission.



# THE BIBLE METHODIST

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# SUMMER CAMP & CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

## Bible Methodist Connection General Conference

June 2-4, 2026 • ROCK LAKE, Vestaburg, MI (Great Lakes Conference)

### Great Lakes

### Heartland

### Southern

### Southwest

**July 9-19**

ROCK LAKE

*Vestaburg, MI*

**June 22-28**

BEULAH GROVE

*Mendon, OH*

**June 29-July 5**

EDEN

*Pell City, AL*

**July 28-Aug. 2**

ARROWHEAD

*Cleburne, TX*

Rev. Chris Cravens

*Evangelist*

Dr. Mark Bird

*Bible Teacher*

Joel Byer Family

*Song Evangelists*

Mark Langstaff

*Youth Speaker*

Gene & Angie Davis

*Children's Workers*

Rev. Deron Fourman

*Evangelist*

Dr. Phil Brown

*Bible Teacher*

The Castles

*Song Evangelists*

Rev. Matt Hallman

*Youth Speaker*

Becky Sims

*Children's Worker*

Rev. Curtis Going

*Evangelist*

Rev. John Parker

*Evangelist*

Matt & Joy Barnett

*Song Evangelists*

Rev. Michael Evans

*Youth Speaker*

Priscilla Vernon

*Children's Worker*

Dr. Mike Avery

*Evangelist*

Dr. Randall McElwain

*Evangelist*

Johnathan Glick Family

*Song Evangelists*

Eric Hughes Family

*Youth Director*

Brian & Mikayla Betts

*Children's Workers*

### Youth Camp

June 22-26

Rev. Paul Stetler

### Youth Camp

July 20-24

Rev. Matt Hallman

### Youth Camp

June 8-12

Rev. Gabe Norris