

PROCLAIMER

2023 | VOLUME 25, ISSUE 1 • Telling the stories of Vision Virginia



**The Heart of Bi-Vocational
Church Revitalization**

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**Safe Zone
for Life**

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SBCVirginia

You are not alone.

PROCLAIMER

Spring 2023 — Issue 1

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Doomscrolling or Practicing the Presence of God

At the SBCV Annual Homecoming, one of our preachers cautioned us to beware of “doomscrolling.” I did a little research on this concept. According to Merriam-Webster, doomscrolling (or doomsurfing) refers to the tendency to continue to surf or scroll through bad news even though that news is saddening, disheartening, or depressing.

WebMD describes some reasons we may doomscroll:

- We feel upset about something in the news, so we look for information that confirms how we feel.
- While searching for positive or upbeat news, we get caught up in a sea of negative stories.
- We try to stay on top of the news so much that our minds go into autopilot mode, and we start scrolling out of habit.
- We feel down, so we spend more time online than usual to try to lift our mood. (In reality, this could make us feel worse in the long term.)

Instead of doomscrolling, we need to practice the presence of God. The Bible teaches us to draw near to God (James 4:8), seek the face of God (1 Chronicles 16:11), and experience the peace of God (Philippians 4:7).

God’s Word teaches us that we can have the peace of God and that we have the presence of the God of peace. Philippians 4:7 is a promise of peace. It promises that God’s peace will guard the heart and mind of the believer who prays instead





of worrying. Philippians 4:9 is also a promise of peace. It promises that the God of peace Himself will be with the believer.

How can we enjoy the presence of the God of peace? Philippians 4:8-9 teaches three principles that will help us live with assurance that God is with us.

1. **Feed our minds with godly concepts.** Philippians 4:8 (ESV) says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”
2. **Follow the example of godly companions.** Philippians 4:9 says, “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” The premise of the command in verse 9 is that we need to follow the example of godly companions.
3. **Fortify our lives with godly conduct.** Verse 9 commands us to practice these things. Instead of doomscrolling, we need to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:7). Instead of worrying, we can be praying (Philippians 4:6).

As you read this edition of the *Proclaimer*, we hope you will see God’s gracious presence is with us as we keep pressing on as God’s people. The Lord is with us!

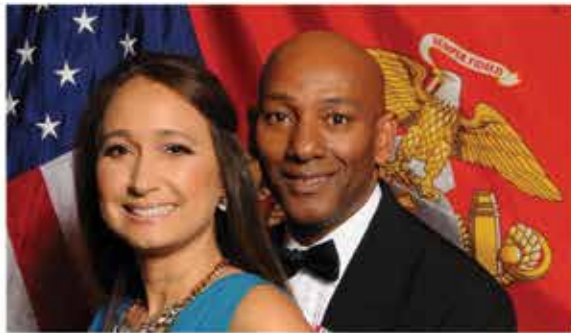


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PRAY FOR MISSIONARIES

around the globe

"Then Jesus came near and said to them, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'" Matthew 28:18-20 (HCSB)



Samuel Ravelo

📍 Chaplain

Let's pray for Chaplain Samuel Ravelo, who holds the rank of commander in the U.S. Navy. He is our missionary to the military and oftentimes spends many months aboard a ship. He leads worship services, but also provides counseling and other helps to our Navy men and women. Let's pray for him — wherever he may be.



Roy & Vilmarie Vidal

📍 Puerto Rico

Let's pray for two of our missionaries in Puerto Rico. They are Roy and Vilmarie Vidal, and they have planted a new church in the city of Villalba, in a mountainous area on the island's south side. The church has been helping rebuild hurricane-damaged homes and telling locals about Christ. Let's pray for Roy and Vilmarie!

52
SUNDAYS

Each missionary highlighted in 52 Sundays is supported by your church's giving through the Cooperative Program. Find more missionaries to pray for by visiting sbcv.org/52sundays.



Virginia is now an “abortion destination”. Planned Parenthood is sending their “clients” here because abortion is still legal up to the very moment of birth. There are multiple sites that are classified as “destination cities.”

In an age increasingly hostile towards saving lives in the womb, SBCV churches continue to stand with and for the unborn. Article XVIII of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 reflects the biblical truth: “Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord.”

On November 15, during the SBCV Annual Homecoming in Roanoke, SBCV churches presented Care Net Peninsula Executive Director Ryan Holloway with a \$25,000 donation. Care Net Peninsula serves women facing unplanned pregnancies throughout Southeast Virginia. According to Care Net’s website (cnpenninsula.org), 3,000

women on the Peninsula will have unplanned pregnancies this year. Half of those will end in abortion...but they don’t have to!

Holloway shared, “In a post-Roe world, it’s more important than ever for the local church to care for women facing unplanned pregnancies. It’s an honor to partner with the SBCV to build a permanent place to care for local moms in Newport News.”

Southern Baptists have worked to protect the unborn through legislation, financial support, volunteer hours, and many other ways. In the past year, SBCV churches partnered with the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) to provide a mobile ultrasound machine in Albermarle County and one in Warrenton, VA. The support for Care Net Peninsula will enable the organization to serve 400 more women per year as they move

into a new location; such support and partnership flow from theological convictions.

Their theological convictions are affirmed by the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, which states: “All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. [...] We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love” (Baptist Faith and Message 2000, Article XV).

We sing with the psalmist, “I will praise You because I am remarkably and wondrously made” (Psalm 139:14, CSB), and we rejoice in helping support a culture of life in Virginia. ■

Brandon Pickett (left) and Jeff Mingee (right) pray over Care Net Peninsula Executive Director Ryan Holloway (center) after just presenting him with a check from SBCV churches for Care Net Peninsula.



SMALL GROUP TOUR with KEN BRADY

Breakthrough: Creating a New
Scorecard for Sunday School and
Small Group Ministry Success

May 23-25
9:30 AM - 2:00 PM

Three Locations
across Virginia

sbcv.org/sgtour

?

If you happened to die *today*,
do you know if you will go
to heaven?

God says you must be born again.
The Bible gives us a simple plan of salvation.

Admit that you're
a sinner who
needs to be saved.
"For all have sinned
and fall short of the
glory of God."
(Romans 3:23)

Believe that Jesus died for
you and rose again. "If you will
confess with your mouth the
Lord Jesus and believe in your
heart that God has raised Him
from the dead, you will be
saved." (Romans 10:9)

Commit to accepting Jesus as your Savior and
Lord. "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall
be saved." (Romans 10:13)

Claim His gift of salvation. Believe, and you will be
saved. All that's left for you to do is to receive Jesus
into your heart as your personal Lord and Savior. If
that is your sincere desire, then talk to God from your
heart. Contact us today to let us know your decision
and any questions you have: info@sbcv.org.



MAY 9



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Back on His Feet

NOT ALONE TESTIMONY



Originally posted August 18, 2022, in Baptist Press—updated and modified for the Proclaimer.

FINCASTLE, Va. (BP) – When Pastor Kevin Cummings stood to preach his sermon on Sunday, August 14, 2022, it was no ordinary feat for him. It was his first time preaching while standing since he experienced a catastrophic leg injury after being hit by an SUV in January.

Cummings, the senior pastor at Fincastle Baptist Church (near Roanoke), was helping his son and daughter-in-law

told him the breaks he endured were the worst they could be. Cummings and his wife stayed in Arkansas for about a month due to the surgeries and the immediate rehab. Through the incredibly painful experience, Cummings said he has never been more thankful for the support from the family of God.

God's goodness became a recurring theme throughout Kevin Cummings' recovery from a shattered leg. His physical therapist posted reminders above his therapy table.

"It was hard staying there in Arkansas for over 30 days, but we never felt alone," Cummings said. "It was humbling to see and hear from people across the country." The family received thousands of texts from all over, offering prayers and support. SBC of

Virginia staff assisted the church with immediate needs. Fincastle Baptist members prayed and supported Cummings as they awaited his return. They would later even build a ramp for him to come onto the platform to preach in a wheelchair.

"We know we're never alone as Christians because of our relationship with God, but we're also part of God's family, the Church," Cummings said. "I've never been more grateful to be a part of the family of God, especially the SBCV family."

Once Cummings was out of the hospital and back in Virginia, a long road of recovery awaited him. He would slowly move from a wheelchair to a walker, to crutches, to a cane, and eventually to walking on his own feet. The recovery process usually involves some form of physical therapy every day, whether through home exercises or guided by a therapist. Known for his passion and creative evangelism methods, Cummings used his time in physical therapy to have spiritual conversations. He invited his physical therapist, who



is not a Christian, to listen to a Sunday service in March, during which he spoke about what he has learned spiritually through the accident.

In the sermon, Cummings said the phrase he kept repeating during this difficult season: "God is good all the time, and all the time God is good." After watching the service, his physical therapist posted that phrase on the ceiling for Cummings to view as he did his therapy exercises.

Cummings said his main takeaway from the accident had been a reminder of God's goodness. He advises others going through hard times to focus on their hearts and not their circumstances.

"In life, things happen around us, things happen to us, but the only thing that truly matters is what happens within us," Cummings said. "I can't control what happens to me, including freak things, but I can always control my response."

"My prayer has been what Paul said in Philippians 1:12, that what has happened to me will serve to advance the Gospel. That's been my prayer all along, and if I have a relationship with Jesus, I know He will ultimately heal my hurts because one day I will be with Him in Heaven." ■

About the Author: Timothy Cokes is a Baptist Press staff writer.

"things happen to us, but the only thing that truly matters is what happens within us."

relocate to Little Rock, AR. On an early Tuesday morning, Cummings and his son met at the apartment complex to begin unloading belongings into the apartment they were renting. Standing behind the U-Haul trailer, an SUV struck Cummings from behind, pinning him between the back of the trailer and the vehicle. It is still unknown why the SUV driver hit him.

Cummings said he knew one or both legs broke as he collapsed and began to scream in pain. Even during this traumatic moment, his instinct was to praise through the pain. "It was the most pain I've ever felt in my life," Cummings said. "When I fell to the ground, I just keep saying over and over again, 'God is good all the time, and all the time God is good.' I kept repeating that over and over as I waited for the ambulance to come for what seemed like a long time but was really only a few minutes."

After multiple surgeries, Cummings' leg now has two plates and 21 screws permanently placed. The incisions left him with 50 stitches. He described his leg immediately after the accident as looking like a jigsaw puzzle. Doctors



Say Yes!

“How have you seen God working in your life this week?”

In the summer of 2021, Pastor Dan Ellis and the 2022 Vision Team from **Rileyville Baptist Church** (RBC) in Luray, VA, sought the Lord for a one-year goal. Coming out of the pandemic, they felt the congregation was languishing. Pastor Ellis explained, “We had not experienced division or disunity through the pandemic, but we also were not experiencing the joy of Christ either.”

Steps of Faith

As the team prayed, they believed God wanted RBC to take steps of faith in obedience to His Word. They knew those steps of faith would be personal, as people looked to see where God was working and got involved. Steps of faith

would also be planned, as the church offered opportunities for outreach and missions for the following year.

The challenge was knowing how to measure these steps of faith. “The only way we could measure was through testimonies,” Ellis recalled. “Because our mission statement is ‘Helping People in the Valley Say Yes to Jesus,’ we decided to call these testimonies *Yes Stories*. By saying yes to Jesus, we don’t mean saying yes to Him for the first time

(justification), but saying yes to Him for the 500th time (sanctification).”

A Goal and Plan

The vision team set a goal of 52 unique *Yes Stories* by members who would share in weekly Sunday worship gatherings.

The plan was for God’s people to brag about God for how He came through when they obeyed Him despite their fear. They needed to know there was a blessing in saying yes to Jesus.

At all elder, deacon, prayer, and life group gatherings, this question was asked: "How have you seen God working in your life this week?" This question laid the groundwork for RBC to focus on what God was doing in and through His people rather than on what had been going wrong.

Pastor Ellis and the Vision Team believed that if they saw how God was working in His people, they could prayerfully discern their next steps as a church in following Him.

Ellis testified, "We never got desperate about having a *Yes Story* for Sunday. Some came a few days before the needed Sunday, but most of the time, we had half a dozen lined up in a row."

Guidelines for a *Yes Story*

The guidelines for a *Yes Story* were: Be Audible, Be Brief, and Be Christ-Centered.

Here are a few *Yes Story* examples:

- A woman saying yes to praying for her mother, who had abandoned her for drugs when she was just a child
- People saying yes to new ministry assignments that were scary (student ministry, children's ministry, senior ministry, leading the building and grounds team, etc.)
- People sharing from the baptism how they said yes to Jesus and made Him the Lord of their lives
- Someone saying yes to going on a mission trip to Puerto Rico or the Middle East and sharing how God worked

- Others trusted God to sustain them as a caregiver and found strength in the Lord and their church family

Transformation

Yes Stories brought transformation at RBC. "I think what is celebrated was repeated," said Pastor Ellis. "This allowed us to celebrate saying yes to Jesus, causing more and more people to want to say yes. *The Yes Stories* did more than we expected. They allowed our church to get to know each other deeper and more personally, and it reminded many that they were not alone in their fears and struggles. What started to move us towards a discipleship culture where we expected to hear God speak

moved us personally as we responded to him in faith and obedience. God used these testimonies to move us from focusing on negative things to focusing on the positive of what God is doing. He wants us to be involved."

At the end of 12 months, Rileyville Baptist Church had shared over 60 unique *Yes Stories*. The *Yes Stories* were so encouraging, the church decided to make them a part of their culture as a church. They will still share at least one *Yes Story* each month. ■

RESOURCE:

For more information, contact Dan Ellis:



RECENT IMPACT OF *Yes Stories*

Sharon Liott, an RBC member who shared a *Yes Story* last year, recently passed away. She had said yes to starting a senior adult ministry called Tabitha's Ministry of Hope. Sharon's passing was sudden and unexpected, but her funeral service was like none other. Many remembrances had the same theme: Sharon's life illustrated the beauty and blessedness of continually saying yes to Jesus. Through her simple obedience, God brought transformation to her, her church, and her community. Her last yes was creating a team of people to help her with Tabitha's Ministry. Sharon's pastors encouraged her to build a team so she would not do ministry alone, and she did. Because she said yes to building this team (just a few months before her death), Tabitha's Ministry continues.

The day before her funeral, 10 people came together to pack 150 care packages for funeral homes in our community. The Wednesday before Christmas, this team and 20+ others went caroling and shared the Gospel of Christ.

There is always a blessing to saying yes to Jesus.

“Put Me First”

“He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

2 Corinthians 1:4 (HCSB)

Harry Martin of **Radford Baptist Church** in Moneta, VA is no stranger to affliction. He once had a back injury so severe, it was nearly impossible to walk. It became so intense, he believed a wheelchair would be his fate.

By God’s grace, that would not be so. The Lord miraculously relieved Harry’s pain and provided him with the ability to walk unassisted.

Harry later encountered another challenging season when his wife suffered a major heart attack. COVID restrictions at the hospital prevented Harry from staying by her side, and he could only speak with and pray for his bride on the phone. After a six-week battle, the Lord took Harry’s wife to her eternal home.

For months, Harry grieved and received comfort only the Lord could provide.

Eventually, Harry felt God calling him to serve as a Disaster Relief chaplain. He asked God, “How can I serve You now? My wife is gone.” God gave him a specific answer: “Trust Me. Put Me first.”

Harry did just that. He focused on the Lord and completed the necessary training to deploy as an assistant chaplain.

When Hurricane Ian struck the coast of Florida in 2022, his training was put to use. The devastation sent SBCV Disaster Relief volunteers to Venice, FL, and Harry was part of the team to help families rebuild.

“God told me, ‘I will always give you the strength to do what I want you to do.’” Harry said, “I knew God had a specific person for me to talk to.”

The team found a home that needed a temporary roof and other necessities. The homeowner, Bill, shared with the volunteers that his wife and two pets had died within the previous 12 months and that the hurricane had made his home uninhabitable.

At that moment, Harry knew his purpose. He could sense that Bill was completely overwhelmed and in utter despair. Bill opened up about his affliction. Harry listened for a long time and

shared, “I know how you are feeling. I lost my wife two years ago.”

Bill locked eyes with Harry and said, “You really understand, don’t you? I can see it in your eyes.” Harry shared the simple truth of the Gospel, focusing primarily on the free gift of God in Jesus from Romans 6:23. Harry knew the Holy Spirit was talking through him.

Harry asked, “Bill, would you like to know for sure that you are going to heaven?” Bill said he would and prayed to receive Jesus. He let out a deep breath, dropped his head, stood up, pointed toward heaven, and exclaimed, “Well, praise God!”

Bill left the room to boldly tell the volunteers and neighbors what had happened. It was evident for anyone to see. He was a new man.

God comforted Harry at that moment, “See, you can serve without your wife.” Not only did God work in Bill’s life that day, but He worked in Harry’s life, too. ■



God gave him a specific answer: "Trust Me. Put Me first."

RESOURCE:

Join Harry and other volunteers to help families in need. Get trained in Disaster Relief so you can go on the next call.

For more information on Disaster Relief, visit:



sbcv.org/dr



[#IWearYellow](https://twitter.com/sbcv_dr)

left to right: Bill Rosen stands with Harry Martin as they both share in the joy of Bill receiving Jesus as his Savior.

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The Supremacy of Christ
in Student Ministry



March 21, 2023

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM



**SBC of Virginia Ministry
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Glen Allen

Featuring

Richard Ross & George Siler

Reserve your spot today!

sbcv.org/roundtable

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Find out where other churches are going and
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UPCOMING MISSION TRIPS

Location	Dates
Buenos Aires, Argentina	3/26 - 3/31
Bangkok, Thailand	5/12 - 5/20
Nairobi, Kenya	5/28 - 6/3
Tokyo, Japan	6/9 - 6/14
Marseille, France	7/3 - 7/14
Athens, Greece	9/8 - 9/16
North Africa (Hispanic Pastors)	10/9 - 10/16
North Africa	10/25 - 11/1
Puerto Rico	11/27 - 11/30



A Journey With God

Hearing God Through Cancer Treatment

Susan Parris, wife of SBC of Virginia's current president, Stan Parris, and author of *Cancer Mom: Hearing God in an Unknown Journey*, shares in her book her journey after a cancer diagnosis, including the clinical trial that led to a life-saving treatment for many women, herself included.

"Many women and their families took significant risks to participate in the clinical trial," Parris explained. Susan received Herceptin six months before surgery and six months after surgery. Prior to the clinical trial, Herceptin was only given to metastatic patients for 12 months. However, in 2006, Parris' trial became the standard treatment for all women diagnosed with Her2NU-positive breast cancer.

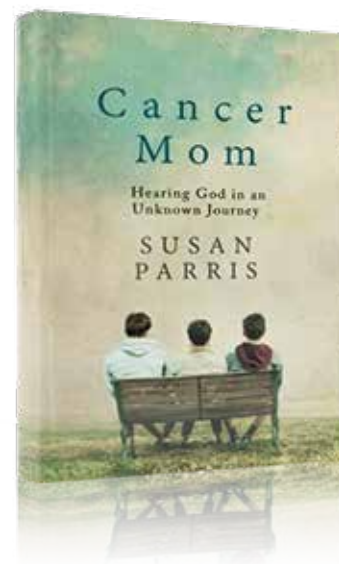
Susan Parris spoke at the women's ministry dinner at SBCV's Annual Homecoming, where she shared her cancer journey and gave her book to those in attendance. Bre Neudeck was in attendance. Through Parris' story and book, Neudeck realized the clinical trial in which Parris participated was the same treatment approved for her type of cancer.

Neudeck was diagnosed with stage two Her2NU cancer in 2007, just a year after Parris' medical treatment was approved. Thanks to that trial, Neudeck had a lumpectomy and 12 months of Herceptin during chemo and radiation.

"It is a gift to be able to say thank you to one of the many women who participated in that trial, which dramatically changed the outcome of my cancer,"

Neudeck shared. "I praise God for my healing, but the story of how the drug even got to trial is a miracle. Meeting one of the women who participated in that trial is an honor." ■

.....
Bre Neudeck serves as the women's ministry director and worship ministry administrative assistant at Swift Creek Baptist Church in Midlothian, VA. She also serves on SBCV's Women's Ministry Team.



RESOURCE:

Look for an interview with Susan Parris and Bre Neudeck in SBCV's Not Alone Podcast.

 sbcv.org/podcast



Above: Kristianne Stewart (left) and Susan Parris (right)—Check out the incredible work that Kristianne Stewart and Compassion That Compels are doing for women battling cancer, go to compassionthatcompels.org.

Left: Susan and Stan Parris at the 2022 SBCV Annual Homecoming



Spreading the Gospel through Shoeboxes



Kingsland Baptist Church (KBC) has been spreading the Gospel through shoeboxes for eight years. Located in North Chesterfield, VA, Kingsland Baptist Church serves as one of the over 4,000 US drop-off locations for Operation Christmas Child. The church began serving in this role in 2015.

Operation Christmas Child, a branch of Samaritan's Purse, collects shoeboxes filled with fun toys, school supplies, and hygiene items. These shoeboxes are delivered to children worldwide to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way. For many of these children, the gift-filled shoebox is the first present they have ever received. Every shoebox is an

left: Anne Sewastynowicz serves at the Kingsland Baptist Church drop-off location.



Left to right: Cathy Mitchell, Heather Capel, and Dan Capel

opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the children, their parents, and other family members.

Throughout the year, Kingsland Baptist members donate items for the shoeboxes. In early November, AWANA members and other volunteers gather to put the gifts in shoeboxes. Operation Christmas Child (OCC) calls such events packing parties. The completed boxes are added to the overall total collected.

In 2015, KBC collected 708 boxes. In 2021, they collected 2,170—more than triple since their first year as a drop-off location.

During National Collection Week (November 14-21, 2022), KBC utilized approximately 20 short-term volunteers and several year-round volunteers. KBC member Patti Mitts coordinates many of the drop-off details for the church. Joanie Chauncey (also a KBC member) previously served in that role but accepted the position of area coordinator for OCC Richmond West in 2021.

“I love volunteering at the KBC drop-off because it serves as a place to see donors I haven’t seen in a year,” said Chauncey. “I also see the diversity of donors from



Roy Robinson collected boxes at the Kingsland Baptist drop-off location where they are then processed for Operation Christmas Child.

all nations and walks of life. Donors pray in their heart language, a beautiful reminder that the shoeboxes are going to the ends of the earth. Watching children bring in their boxes and pray over them is heartwarming. I am so thankful God is using me to help move the shoeboxes to their final destination where children will hear the Good News of Jesus.”

Because KBC is the only drop-off location in the area that stays open late on the last Monday of National Collection Week, the church often receives last-minute shoeboxes. One year, a group of ladies from Maryland traveling home on Interstate 95 from an event saw that the KBC location was still open, so they detoured to deliver their shoeboxes. Others have come from miles away to give a single shoebox.

Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child, the world’s largest Christmas project of its kind, has collected and delivered more than 188 million shoebox gifts to children in more than 170 countries and territories.

In 2021, Operation Christmas Child collected enough shoeboxes to reach another 10.5 million children in countries like Ukraine, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Peru, the Philippines, and Rwanda—over 170 countries total. More than 9.7 million shoeboxes were collected worldwide in 2021, with more than 9.1 million collected in the US. Final figures for 2022 have yet to be released.

In addition to millions of shoebox packers, a network of more than 15,000 volunteers (9,000 US; 6,000 worldwide) serve to carry out the project year-round. ■

The *Heart* of Bi-Vocational Church Revitalization

A new believer exudes joy over being baptized at New River Fellowship as church members watch. Jordan Secrist serves as the church's bi-vocational pastor.



Jordan Secrist has served as the pastor of **New River Fellowship** in Christiansburg, VA, for the last year and a half. Even though the church had experienced turbulent seasons, Pastor Secrist and his wife, Abigail, were attracted to the heart of the members who remained.

When engaging in the process of church revitalization, there are many things to be done, and it's usually ideal if the pastor can make church ministry his full-time job. However, many churches in Virginia are increasingly finding they cannot afford a full-time pastor. Bi-vocational pastoral ministry is becoming a more common and accepted norm.

In fact, many churches are seeing church revitalization take place through bi-vocational ministry. Pastor Secrist explained, "Every leader at New River Fellowship is bi-vocational, along with every member." He points out that it is common for everyone in the church to have multiple priorities, such as a job, family obligations, community activities, etc. Secrist sees this not as a weakness but as an advantage for everyday Gospel revival.

The methodology of bi-vocational revitalization may look different than some traditional approaches. Secrist initially talked with leaders about following a typical path of revitalization, which would fill the calendar with activities, plan new programs, and start new initiatives to try to attract new members. However, initial feedback revealed that this approach left leaders and members alike feeling overwhelmed when they considered their obligations outside of church ministry. Furthermore, since the church had experienced a difficult time, many still needed to heal and recover from past difficulties.

Secrist, instead, refocused the church revitalization strategy on the spiritual health and well-being of those within the church. The church was led through a time of reckoning with its own spiritual life. Secrist exclaimed, "We've seen those with testimonies of trauma, abuse, and addiction find a home to worship a God who reconciles brokenness to His image."

The move from task-based to heart-based revitalization is doing the more profound work of revitalizing hearts. This helps the church become spiritually ready to minister to others. God has already shown New River Fellowship the

fruit of this work. Pastor Secrist's favorite examples include seeing a Hindu family come to know the Lord; seeing dramatic heart changes regarding church growth; and reaching the local community among long-time members.

Pastor Secrist finds joy in balancing bi-vocational ministry. He says it has caused him to recognize his limitations and rely more on God.

Likewise, New River Fellowship is relying more on God and deepening its dependence on Him. ■

Church members at New River Fellowship come together to share a dinner in celebration of the Christmas holidays.





The Legacy of Clint Clifton

Many perceive a legacy in terms of wealth, status, or a name. However, an eternal perspective views a legacy through the lens of serving the Lord and ministering to others. **CLINT CLIFTON** had such a legacy. He invested his life, resources, and knowledge in raising up church planters and leaders.

Clint Clifton was the founder of **Pillar Church of Dumfries** and served with the North American Mission Board as the senior director of Resource and Research Strategy for Washington, DC. On January 12, 2023, Clint went to his eternal home after dying in a plane crash in Georgia. On this side of eternity, it can feel like his life was cut short, but he left an indelible imprint on the lives of hundreds and even thousands of men and women.

Raúl Santamaría, SBCV's Hispanic church planting strategist and a close friend of Clint, shared that it was Clint who introduced him to the SBC of Virginia. Raúl already had pastoral and leadership experience, but Clint gave him the tools to plant churches and multiply leaders with an organized system.

Together, they visited Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and El Salvador, teaching others about church planting. Raúl remembers how "Clint loved the Church and believed in the Church." He taught Raúl that "churches plant churches, not organizations."

Raúl shared, "He taught me that God had given His Church the power to accomplish His will by preaching the Gospel."

Raúl introduced other church planters to Clint Clifton, like José Mazariego, who worked with Clint at Pillar Church of Dumfries. "I am grateful for everything Clint did for me, my family, and my church," José shared. "He did not have to do it, and he did

it anyways. Clint believed in people enough to invest in them."

Giovanny Ortiz, church planter of **Iglesia Biblica Bautista Emanuel** of Leesburg, shared that Clint spent a year with him, mentoring him on church planting three hours a week through New City Network. "Many things Clint taught me have been practical. He was a busy man, but he would continue to contact us. He was a determined leader who believed the sky is the limit and that if we have the Holy Spirit, we can do anything God is leading us to do."

"Clint would see a church planter in any person willing to follow Jesus and committed to evangelism," shared Jefferson Hernandez, church planter of **Iglesia Biblica Campo Blanco** in Potomac Falls. "I met Clint at SBCV's Homecoming some years ago. At that time, I was considering and praying about what God wanted me to do in ministry. When Clint and I started talking, he encouraged me to plant a healthy church that would influence other churches to teach them about church planting."

When Jefferson's church grew, and he had many questions, Clint met with him and used a napkin to draw a diagram, teaching the importance of prayer and developing leaders and systems. Clint used his ministry example and, in the end, he crossed out his name, saying, "When we do this, I (Clint) am no longer needed to run these ministries, and I can move on to the next thing God has for me." This napkin is a treasure for Jefferson, reminding him of those moments when Clint invested in him and others.

When Clint entered eternity, he heard those words we all strive for: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Clint is undoubtedly rejoicing in the time and resources he invested in others to grow in and serve Jesus. ■



Clint Clifton with his wife, Jennifer, standing beside Pillar Church of Dumfries



As a young man and new believer in Christ, Clint Clifton was a part of a contemporary musical group called Sound Doctrine.



Clint leading worship through the musical group, Sound Doctrine



Jefferson Hernandez's cherished napkin from a lunch meeting with Clint



Clint Clifton and Colby Garman, cofounders of the Praetorian Project

Ten Languages

POLYGLOSSIA: Enabling Communication in 10 Different Languages

The diversity of the SBC of Virginia has grown over the last several years. In fact, 25% of the homes in Virginia speak a language other than English, and over 1,000,000 Spanish-speaking people live in Virginia. This growth trend has resulted in the need for and the planting of more churches in Virginia that speak a language other than English. We praise God for bringing the nations right to our doorstep.

The SBCV recently held a church plant training event in Glen Allen where 10 different languages were represented: Amharic, Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, Swahili, Nepali, Creole, English, Spanish, and American Sign Language. How do you communicate effectively with such a diverse crowd?

A technology called Polyglossia was the solution and enabled effective communication simultaneously in 10 different languages. Two church leaders from an SBCV church plant, Hope Valley Church (HVC) in Christiansburg, VA, created and developed Polyglossia.

Heath Kouns, the administrative pastor at Hope Valley, explains: "Polyglossia is a real-time, AI-based transcription and translation service. It was born to meet a real need we faced when planting a new church in Christiansburg. We had a member who was Deaf and would only attend on the weekends when his wife was not working as a nurse. We did not have anyone else to interpret for him, but we wanted to make our service more inclusive so that he could worship every week. The Lord gave us the background and skills needed to create a solution. Our first version of this solution delivered only transcribed text to a tablet that he could read. Later,

when a hearing-impaired person started attending, we only had to hand him another tablet.

A couple years later, we discussed with a friend and pastor the issue he was facing connecting with Ukrainian refugees who had started attending his church. By adding the [audio] translation to the streamed text, we could dramatically improve the understanding of the sermon while making the refugees feel loved and valued."

At the SBCV church plant training, participants were instructed to scan a QR code that would immediately pull up the translation software on their smartphones. They were able to choose which language they desired. While the presentations were done in English, people of nine different languages watched in real-time as the text was translated into their heart language. Planters noted how seeing the nations represented in one room was such a blessing! ■



Ten different languages were represented at a church plant training event in Glen Allen.



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GROUND FLOOR: Children's Ministry Training

Danielle Whitley, **Centreville Baptist Church's** children's director, grew up as a missionary kid, and her passion for children's ministry started early. When she was a teenager, she led the children's ministry at her father's church. Early on, she began writing children's curriculum and outreach strategies because she saw the life-changing impact of Gospel-centered teaching.

"Kids are like sponges! They are soaking in so much of the world around them and forming their worldview and basic beliefs about God," Whitley explained.

"Barna studies indicate that a child's basic moral foundation has already been formed by the time a child is nine years old. What an amazing opportunity for a children's ministry to reach people during those influential years."

"Rather than waiting until kids have already formed their worldview," Whitley continued, "the children's ministry can invest in these precious little ones; and instead of having to undo years of the enemy's deception and hardening to the things of God, the children's ministry seeks to lay a solid foundation in the hearts and minds of our kids. We desire to anchor them in the truth."

Whitley graduated from Liberty University and received degrees in Family and Child Development and

"Kids are like sponges! They are soaking in so much of the world around them and forming their worldview and basic beliefs about God."

Biblical Studies. She then attended Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, receiving her master's degree in Children's Ministry. After graduation, she joined the leadership staff at a multi-site church. There, she helped start the children's ministry at several campuses from the ground up. She saw how God had used her past experiences to build the framework and knowledge of basic steps needed to lay the foundation for the ministry. This led to helping other church plants.

Danielle and her husband, James, created a non-profit called *Solid Foundation Kids* to help train, equip, and advise churches and church plants about laying a solid foundation for their children's ministry.

Whitley partnered with an organization called *New City Church Planting* to create

a seminar, "10 Steps to Developing Your Children's Ministry." She has taught this seminar in person to over 70 church planters and children's directors. She is now partnering with NAMB and the SEND Network to produce and film the training. The "10 Steps" seminar is for church plants, children's ministries, and churches seeking a fresh start and a Gospel-centered vision to reach children for Christ.

In the seminar, Danielle Whitley gives practical advice for creating a strong foundation and clear steps for starting and developing a children's ministry. She shares her passion for children's ministry and the biblical perspective a children's ministry should have. You can find the "10 Steps" seminar online at: tinyurl.com/Whitley-10Steps. ■



Solid Foundation Kids was founded by children's ministry leaders Danielle and James Whitley to help churches establish or maximize their children's ministries.



Women from across the Hampton Roads area gathered at London Bridge Baptist Church for the Priscilla Shirer live simulcast.

Growing In Their Walk

Women gathered across Virginia in each of the six SBC of Virginia regions for a Priscilla Shirer simulcast. The live simulcast, produced by Lifeway and Going Beyond Ministries, was made available to by the SBC of Virginia at no cost to the participants. The following churches hosted the all-day event: **Calvary Road Baptist Church** in Alexandria; **London Bridge Baptist Church** in Virginia Beach; **Parkway Baptist Church** in Moseley; **Hyland Heights Baptist Church** in Rustburg; **Villa Heights Baptist Church** in Roanoke; and **First Baptist Church of Damascus** in Damascus.

London Bridge Baptist Church also served as the host for the conference for SBCV's Hispanic Women's Ministry, Ministerio de Mujeres. The conference was translated into Spanish using the SBCV's translation equipment.

Over 800 women joined together across the Commonwealth to worship the Lord, study His Word, and fellowship with each other. According to the women's events team at Lifeway, the SBC of Virginia Women's Ministry

was the first to host a simulcast for free in multiple locations.

Coordinating multiple events in various locations was a challenge. SBCV staff members Donna Paulk, Dolly Mink, and Allison Hagenseker worked with each host church to ensure the churches were equipped. Food, water, educational materials, and technology for a live-stream event were needed.

SBCV Women's Ministry regional leaders were available on site at each location to meet with local women's ministry leaders from partner churches during the afternoon break. There, the women were informed about upcoming

events and opportunities in their own regions, and they were able to connect with the regional leaders and each other.

Priscilla Shirer and Anthony Evans Jr. (worship leader for Going Beyond Ministries events) were committed to teaching the Bible to women and watching them grow in their walk with God. Women were welcomed, loved, and fed (physically and spiritually) in the name of Jesus. Multiple decisions were made that impacted the lives of women and their families.

The SBCV is committed to ensuring that churches are not alone, which was evident with this simulcast event. ■

Parkway Baptist Church participated in hosting the Priscilla Shirer live simulcast for women.



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Foster Care

AWARENESS SUNDAY

A Call to Pray Together on May 14

While we celebrate mothers on Mothers Day, let's also remember the children who are without a mother or unable to be with theirs. Join other churches as we pray together for children in Foster Care and ask the Lord to show us how to help.

Download resources *to share* with your church at

sbcv.org/fostercare sunday

Safe Zone for

Life

“

We are ground zero... I'm hoping this council sees how important this really is—life or death.”



As the birthplace of country music and the home of Bristol International Speedway, the city of Bristol is known for many things. It's a border town where the Virginia and Tennessee state lines meet right in the center of State Street, and you can actually stand in two states at once. Towering above State Street is a sign that boldly bears the city motto, "A Good Place to Live."

Since the overturn of *Roe vs. Wade* through the Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs vs. Jackson*, neighboring states Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia enacted laws banning most abortions. Now abortion centers are looking at Bristol, VA, to protect their profits.

Bristol is targeted to be an abortion tourist destination. For instance, an abortion center in Bristol, TN—owned by the same operator whose abortion center was at the heart of the *Dobbs* case—relocated to the Virginia side of the twin city so it can continue to operate.

That abortion center is "one too many," and "the [Bristol] City Council has full authority to stop other abortion clinics from coming here," said Bristol City Councilman Kevin Wingard. Josh Hetzler, legislative counsel for The Family Foundation of Virginia, confirmed that authority. "The Bristol city charter, state law, and the Virginia Supreme Court all support the right of localities to pass such ordinances," he shared during public comments.

Our ministry partners at The Family Foundation of Virginia have led the way for not just SBC of Virginia churches but for all churches, ministry leaders, and business leaders of all backgrounds to come together in this pro-life stance.

"We are ground zero," Wingard said. "I'm hoping this council sees how important this really is—life or death."

Those words, and the 200 people who showed up for a rally before the October Bristol City Council meeting hosted by The Family Foundation, helped embolden the entire five-member

council. The council voted unanimously to move toward approving a zoning ordinance that would prohibit further abortion centers within the city limits. Bristol, VA was thereby made a safe zone for life.

This vote means that the city council is directing the city planning commission to create a zoning plan that would exclude elective abortion facilities.

Bristol now joins other localities like Russell, Tazewell, and Washington Counties to pass or consider a resolution affirming their desire to protect all human life within their borders. Taking a stand for life is consistent with Bristol's motto—"A Good Place to Live."

At the rally, Family Foundation President Victoria Cobb emphasized, "Every abortion is a failure of a community to adequately support a woman who finds herself in an unplanned pregnancy. Bristol residents are simply telling the city council they are a community ready to handle the needs of their own neighbors in these situations. They would rather not be exploited by the abortion industry."

Let's stand together in prayer as Bristol awaits the city planning commission's next steps. Let's also support foster care, adoptive families, and Pathways Pregnancy Resource Center in Bristol so they know they are not alone in making Bristol a safe zone for life.



(left) Before a city council vote, 200 people rallied in support of prohibiting further abortion clinics within the Bristol city limits.



“

Backpacks...showing the
love of Christ to children
and their families

Making a Difference

A Merry Little Christmas Event

With its *Merry Little Christmas* event, Impact Church was determined to reach out during Christmas, display God's love, and affect its community through the gift of backpacks.

This past fall, SBC of Virginia churches purchased, filled, and donated over 2,000 backpacks for SBCV's Christmas Backpacks Mission Project. The project seeks to provide filled backpacks to churches serving in needy areas and to church plants for outreach ministry. Each backpack can help provide for a child and show the love of Christ to the child and his/her family. But in a sea of backpacks, it may be easy to wonder,

Will this one backpack I gave make a difference?

Impact Church in Chantilly, VA was determined to reach out during Christmas, display God's love, and affect its community. Through the generosity of SBCV churches, Impact received 80 backpacks to use in ministry. These backpacks and other donations enabled the church to work alongside Fairfax County police and local churches to bless over 150 people (69 students) through their *Merry Little Christmas* event. "It was an opportunity," said Pastor Terry Kim, "to connect and encourage one another and to show the community we are here to serve, especially in a post-COVID context."

Families who came to the event could take pictures with Santa, play Christmas games, "adopt" a beanie baby doll, and paint their faces. Gifts were available to choose from for the children and their parents!

Encouraged by the results of the event, Impact Church wanted to do more. They purchased additional gifts and took assembled backpacks to three SBCV international church plants: **Fullness of Christ Church** (Ethiopian), **Arabic Church** of Chantilly, and **Iglesia Biblica Bautista Emanuel** of Leesburg

(Hispanic). This multiplied their outreach to 200 more families.

Did your backpack make a difference? Of course! Some of the stories will never be known, but the initial 80 backpacks Impact Church received have multiplied the ministry to reach over 350 people!



...When we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God...As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words! 2 Corinthians 9:11-15 (NLT)

Multiplicación CATALÍTICA

La mayoría de los plantadores de iglesias y pastores comienzan su ministerio con la idea divina de convertirse en un ministerio multiplicador. Ya sea que se conviertan en un ministerio que multiplica discípulos o multiplica iglesias. Todo líder quiere que el miembro de la congregación ame a Dios, ame su palabra y, al menos, invite a otros a seguir a Jesús. Sin embargo, esta no es la realidad de todos los ministerios o iglesias a medida que pasa el tiempo.

Muchas iglesias se bloquean, declinan o el ministerio pierde fuerza. La respuesta a este problema está en la descripción del problema en sí. Necesitamos más líderes, por lo tanto tiene que haber una multiplicación de liderazgo.

La multiplicación del liderazgo es una necesidad en cada iglesia, independientemente de su tamaño, idioma o cultura. Cuando se trata de llegar a la comunidad hispana, los pastores discipulan a una comunidad

diversa. La mayoría de la población hispana tiene un trasfondo católico y otros no tienen una base bíblica sólida para convertirse en líderes.

El año pasado SBC Virginia se asoció con el Centro de Capacitación Bíblica para Pastores y líderes (BTCP) para capacitar a un grupo de pastores para que puedan desarrollar estos centros de capacitación en sus propias áreas. Diecisiete pastores hispanos asistieron a la capacitación de BTCP, que es completamente en español.





Esto les permite ir y capacitar a otros líderes y miembros de la iglesia en las regiones. Oramos para que este sea el nacimiento de futuros plantadores de iglesias y pastores.

El pastor Julio Ruiz es el pastor principal de la **Iglesia Bautista Ambiente de Gracia** en Fairfax, VA. El pastor Julio ha estado entrenando a miembros de su congregación desde el 2008 con el plan de estudios de BTCP. Ha habido al menos tres grupos que ya se graduaron de su centro de formación. “Estamos emocionados por lo que Dios ha hecho. De nuestros graduados, tenemos dos nuevos maestros para el centro de capacitación, tenemos una misionera en Cúcuta, Colombia, y el pastor Cristhian Serrano es pastor asistente tanto en nuestra congregación como en la **Iglesia Bautista de Jerusalén**”. La iglesia tiene un sistema de discipulado completo, con cursos básicos e intermedios y BTCP se considera su discipulado académico. “Este plan de estudios proporcionará a cualquier pastor un crecimiento integral en el discipulado para su iglesia. Tenemos nuevos asistentes que no han sido discipulados o equipados antes de venir a nuestra iglesia; creemos que es nuestra responsabilidad ayudarlos a crecer espiritualmente en todas las áreas de sus vidas”.

El pastor Diego Fernández, pastor principal de la **Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva** en el área de Richmond, ha estado usando BTCP desde 2018. Ya

tenían un grupo que se graduó y hay un nuevo grupo a punto de terminar este año. De su primer grupo, Vida Nueva tiene veinte nuevos líderes de grupos pequeños, quince líderes de áreas de ministerio y dos plantadores de iglesias. “Pusimos en marcha el centro de formación porque vimos la gran necesidad de equipar a nuestra gente. Este es un trabajo duro, pero es necesario si queremos que nuestra gente esté lista para el ministerio”. El pastor Diego compartió que cinco de los graduados transfirieron sus créditos a la Universidad Bautista de Luisiana para terminar una licenciatura. “Este ha sido un comienzo para que algunos completen sus estudios académicos”. El Seminario Bautista de Southwestern acepta los créditos académicos de Luisiana Baptist University para que continúen una maestría en español, y continuar después con doctorados en otros Seminarios Bautistas.

Ambos pastores compartieron que el primer grupo puede ser el más difícil y, debido a la falta de otros maestros capacitados, los pastores pueden terminar haciendo la mayor parte del trabajo sobre de sus deberes pastorales. Una solución a esto es trabajar en asociación con otras iglesias en el área. El pastor Julio se reunirá con otros pastores en el norte de Virginia para juntos coordinar un centro de capacitación para esa zona. El pastor Diego también está en conversaciones con otros pastores en el área de Richmond para trabajar juntos

y multiplicar discípulos capacitados para esa área.

Estamos agradecidos por los resultados que ya estamos viendo y el crecimiento potencial que estos centros de capacitación pueden traer. Oramos para que pronto comiencen los centros de capacitación en Norfolk, el área suroeste, y para fortalecer la asociación de iglesias que capacitan a los discípulos en el norte de Virginia y Richmond. ¡Estamos seguros de que este es un paso para cumplir la visión de glorificar a Dios mediante el desarrollo de iglesias saludables que se multiplican! ■



Catalytic MULTIPLICATION

Most church planters and pastors start their ministry with the desire to become a multiplying ministry, multiplying disciples and/or churches. Every church leader wants their church members to love God, love His Word, and at least invite others to follow Him. However, this is not every ministry or church's reality as time passes. Many churches get stuck, and

the ministry declines or slows down. The answer to this problem is leadership multiplication.

Leadership multiplication is needed in every church, regardless of its size, language, or culture. When reaching the Hispanic community, pastors disciple a community of diverse backgrounds. Most of the Hispanic population have a Catholic background, and others do

not have a solid biblical foundation from which to develop leaders.

Last year, SBC of Virginia partnered with the Bible Training Center for Pastors (BTCP) and ministry leaders to train a group of pastors to develop training centers in their areas. Seventeen Hispanic pastors attended BTCP's training, which was entirely in Spanish. This training allows these pastors to





go and train other leaders and church members in their regions. We pray this will lead to the birth of future church planters and pastors.

Pastor Julio Ruiz is the senior pastor at **Iglesia Bautista Ambiente de Gracia** in Fairfax, VA. He has been training members of his congregation since 2008 with BTCP's curriculum. There have been at least three groups graduating out of his training center. "We are excited about what God has done," shared Ruiz. "Out of our graduates, we have two new teachers for the training center; a missionary in Cucuta, Colombia; and Pastor Cristhian Serrano, an assistant pastor both at our congregation and **Jerusalem Baptist Church** (Fairfax Station)."

The church has a discipleship system with basic and intermediate tracks, and BTCP is considered the academic discipleship track. "This curriculum will provide any pastor with integral discipleship growth," Ruiz explained. "We have new attendees who have not been discipled or equipped before coming to our church. We believe it is our responsibility to help them grow spiritually in every area of their lives."

Pastor Diego Fernandez, the senior pastor at **Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva** in the Richmond area, has been using BTCP since 2018. He shared, "We started the training center because we saw the

great need to equip our people. This is hard work, but it is needed if we want our people to be ready for ministry." One group has already graduated, and a new group is about to finish this year. Out of the first group, Vida Nueva has 20 new small group leaders, 15 leaders of ministry areas, and 2 church planters.

Five graduates transferred their credits to Louisiana Baptist University (LBU) to finish a bachelor's degree. "This has been a start for some to complete their academic studies," Fernandez explained. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary accepts LBU's bachelor's degree to continue a Master of Christian Ministries entirely in Spanish and, after that, a Doctorate of Ministry, also in Spanish.

Both pastors shared that the first group can be the hardest and, due to the lack of other trained teachers, pastors can

end up doing most of the work on top of their pastoral duties. A solution to this is to work with other churches in the area. Pastor Ruiz will meet with other pastors in Northern Virginia to coordinate a training center for that area. Pastor Fernandez is also in conversations with other pastors in the Richmond area to work together and multiply trained disciples for that area

We are thankful for the results we are already seeing and the potential growth these training centers can bring. We are praying soon to start training centers in Norfolk and in the Southwest Region and to strengthen the association of churches training disciples in Northern Virginia and Richmond. We are confident this is a step to fulfilling the God-given vision of developing healthy churches that multiply! ■



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CALENDAR 2023

To see up-to-date details on these events and future gatherings, visit sbcv.org/calendar.

MARCH

- 2-3 Church Planter Assessment Retreat, The Heights BC, Colonial Heights
- 4 Kids Ministry Conference, Swift Creek BC, Midlothian
- 11 Kids Ministry Conference, Fellowship CC, Salem
- 13-16 Seminary for a Day, multiple locations
- 17-18 Disaster Relief ICS/IMT Training, SBC of Virginia Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen
- 18 Equip Women's Conference, North Roanoke BC, Roanoke
- 21 Student Ministry Leaders' Roundtable, SBC of Virginia Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen
- 23 Media Workshop, LibertyLive.Church, Hampton
- 25 IMB Together for the Nations Conference, Hyland Heights BC, Rustburg
- 26-31 Pastor Mission Vision Tour, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 28-30 Prayer Summit Tour, Multiple Locations

APRIL

- 1 Disaster Relief ICS/IMT Refresher, SBC of Virginia Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen
- 1 Equip Women's Conference, Spotswood BC, Fredericksburg
- 9 Easter Sunday
- 15 Entrenamiento de Ministerios de Niños (Norte), Primera Iglesia Bautista Woodbridge
- 17-18 Churches Planting Churches Catch the Vision Tour, Richmond Metro
- 21-22 North Region Pastors, Staff, and Wives Retreat, Cacapon Resort State Park Lodge, Berkeley Springs, WV
- 24-25 Churches Planting Churches Catch the Vision Tour, Washington, DC
- 27-28 Disaster Relief Chaplain Training (Assisting Individuals in Crisis), SBC of Virginia Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen

MAY

- 9 Pastors' Leadership Summit with Jeff Iorg, Staples Mill Road BC, Glen Allen
- 12-20 Send Relief Serve Tour, Bangkok, Thailand
- 13 Compañerismo Hombres y Mujeres, Área Richmond
- 13 Foster Care Awareness Sunday
- 20 Compañerismo Hombres y Mujeres, Norte
- 20 Disaster Relief Basic & Advanced Trainings
- 23-25 Small Group Tour with Ken Braddy
- 27 Compañerismo Hombres y Mujeres, Sudeste
- 28-6/3 Send Relief Serve Tour, Nairobi, Kenya

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Editor's Letter

Even there

What an amazing start to 2023! You don't have to be paying much attention to current events to notice how God is moving and working all around us. From working with refugees in war-torn Ukraine to a revival that started at Asbury University and has spread to multiple college campuses and beyond! But we know through Scripture that no matter where we go, He is there! In Psalm 139, David is going through all the places and areas that he can go but where God still is there. In his own thoughts and even before he was born—there was God. One of the verses and phrases I've really been meditating on is verse 10 where he writes, *"even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me"* (CSB). No matter whether it is day or night, high or low, east or west—**even there**.

God has shown up in so many ways already in 2023. Just a few weeks into the new year, an amazing event, Youth Evangelism Conference (YEC), happened at London Bridge Baptist Church in Virginia Beach. Over 880 students and leaders came to hear God's Word spoken and preached through the music, an illusionist, and a guest speaker (Shane Pruitt). The Holy Spirit stirred the hearts of those listening, and we saw 50 salvations, 18 rededications, 8 callings into ministry, and 22 other decisions.

Not long after that, I was able to represent SBCV churches at the Warrenton Pregnancy Center for a very special dedication service. Because of your generosity through the *Vision Virginia* offering, we partnered with Psalm 139 ministry/ERLC to give \$25,000 for a new ultrasound unit. We received multiple thank-yous and reminders of the hundreds and even thousands of lives that could be impacted by this one gift.

Then in February, thousands came from around the Commonwealth to Richmond for much more than a march around the Virginia State Capitol. The Virginia March for Life started with a special breakfast for pastors, followed by a time to meet and talk with legislators about these important issues. Multiple speakers, including Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares, shared their heart and passion for life at a rally just outside the capitol. Then everyone



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present, including Governor Youngkin, marched together to show the media and the General Assembly that the work God is doing in each of us started when "He knit [us] together in [our mothers' wombs]" (Psalm 139:13).

I don't know where your "even there" is today. You could be in the middle of a crisis or celebrating an amazing moment. You may be debating where God has you now or patiently waiting for what He has for you next. Remember, wherever you are, He is there. And if you keep reading down the page in Psalm 139, you will see an amazing truth that makes His "even there" all the more special. David writes in verse 17, "God, how precious your thoughts are to me; how vast their sum is!" So, as we continue to serve Him this year, let's remember: not only is He with you in middle of family, work, and ministry, but His thoughts are precious, abundant, and about you—"even there." ■





SBCVirginia

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