

PROCLAIMER

2025 | VOLUME 27, ISSUE 1

“

Declare His Glory
among the nations,
His wondrous works
among all peoples.”

1 Chronicles 16:24 (CSB)

Pastor vision trips are held throughout the year in various mission fields. This picture is of a recent vision trip to Spain. For information on upcoming trips, email missions@sbcv.org.

**Having
Kingdom Impact**

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Sized Goal**

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and Revitalized**

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SBCVirginia
You are not alone.

PROCLAIMER

Spring 2025 — Issue 1

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The SBC of Virginia is a fellowship of Southern Baptist Convention churches cooperating to assist local congregations in their task of fulfilling the Great Commission as commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ.

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The Great Commission Is Not Some Small Suggestion

Several of the articles in this edition of the *Proclaimer* highlight how the Lord is at work through His churches to accomplish His mission of making disciples. The SBCV's mission is to come alongside local churches advancing the Gospel together to reach our neighbor and the nations. The New Testament gives us several "Great Commission" passages of Scripture that teach us about our God-given mission to make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28:18–20 — The Authority. We should keep in mind verse 18 when we are quoting the "Great Commission" from Matthew's Gospel. "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'" (Matthew 28:18). When we face pressures, feel fearful, or come up against opposition, let's remember that we reach out to our neighbors and the nations in the name of Jesus.

Mark 16:15 — The Objective. Christ's followers are commanded to proclaim the Gospel to all creation. The SBCV is blessed to come alongside local churches as you share Christ with various generations, various people groups, and in various counties, cities, and countries. One of the ways we want to help you impact your local mission field is through our BLESS strategy. Check out www.sbcv.org/bless/.

Luke 24:45–49 — The Message. The Scripture tells us, "Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins

should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.'"

John 20:21 — The Method. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). You are not alone! The SBCV can come alongside your church as you are sent and as you send. We assist churches planting churches, equip in evangelism, and mobilize for missions. Contact your SBCV regional strategist for more information.

Acts 1:8 — The Power. We know and must never forget that we do not serve in our strength or power. Jesus promised, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We have numerous opportunities in the months ahead for you to join with others in prayer and encouragement. Also, consider praying for those on mission by using our 52 Sundays resource, available at sbcv.org/52sundays.

Keep pressing on!

Your brother in Christ,

Brian Autry

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)



Wolfgang & Athena Rivers

📍 Central Asia

Wolfgang and Athena Rivers serve in a country where a missionary presence is difficult. Despite being surrounded by countries that are hostile to the Gospel, they seek to strengthen and bless the local saints. Wolfgang coordinates pastor gatherings to encourage and refresh those who come from all across the country, while Athena hosts a homeschool co-op for the children of missionary families.



Peter & Ruby Ng

📍 Taiwan

The Ngs work with refugees who have settled in Taiwan. Many of these refugees, especially the women, have lived through unspeakable horrors. When Ruby talks to them, she sees herself. Having fled Vietnam during the war, she spent two years in a refugee camp where missionaries told her about Jesus Christ. When God called Ruby and her husband Peter to overseas service, they went to Taiwan to work with Vietnamese refugees.

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.



HAVING KINGDOM IMPACT

Three years ago, **Red Lane Baptist Church** in central Powhatan County embraced the BLESS initiative, an outreach and evangelism resource introduced to SBC of Virginia churches at its Annual Homecoming. The initiative encouraged churches and their congregations to adopt their neighbors, commit to daily prayer, care for them regularly, share the Gospel when opportunities arise, and lead others to become disciples of Jesus.



Adrienne Fountain and her family

Senior Pastor James Taylor explained, “The BLESS strategy fits perfectly with our mission to reach both our neighbors and the nations with the Gospel.” He added, “While some may commit to missions abroad, we often overlook those closest to us.”

One elder and his wife began praying for their neighbors by name every morning. As they prayed, they felt led to show acts of kindness, like delivering Easter baskets filled with treats for the children and their parents, along with an invitation to church. Later, they followed up with Christmas

“I didn’t know that my neighbors were praying for us.”

baked goods and a card that simply read, “We are blessed to live in this community. We want to be good neighbors and would be honored to pray for any needs you might have. Feel free to call or text us anytime.”

Fast forward two years, and their neighbors—the Fountain family, along with a grandmother—began attending the church. After the church staff followed up with a visit, they discovered the Fountains lived in the same cul-de-sac as the elder and his wife. A few months later, Adrienne Fountain and her mother joined the church’s connection class with the intent to become members.

Through the class, Adrienne realized that, although she had been attending church, she had never publicly made a profession of faith in Jesus.

During a worship service a few weeks later, at the pastor’s invitation, Adrienne and her mother made the decision to follow Jesus and publicly commit to the church. Soon after, Adrienne was baptized, symbolizing her faith and new walk with the Lord.

Today, Adrienne Fountain and her mother, Becky Tucker, are a part of Red Lane’s first home small groups. Interestingly, this group meets weekly in the home of the elder and his wife. When Adrienne learned about the BLESS ministry, she said, “I didn’t know that my neighbors were praying for us.”

The beauty of the BLESS initiative is that it encourages believers to follow Jesus’ example. It starts with prayer for neighbors, followed by listening to them, sharing meals, serving them in times of need, and ultimately, sharing the Gospel. These practices have a powerful Kingdom impact—and it all begins with prayer. ■

RESOURCE:

If you would like to know more about the BLESS app, visit:



sbcv.org/BLESS



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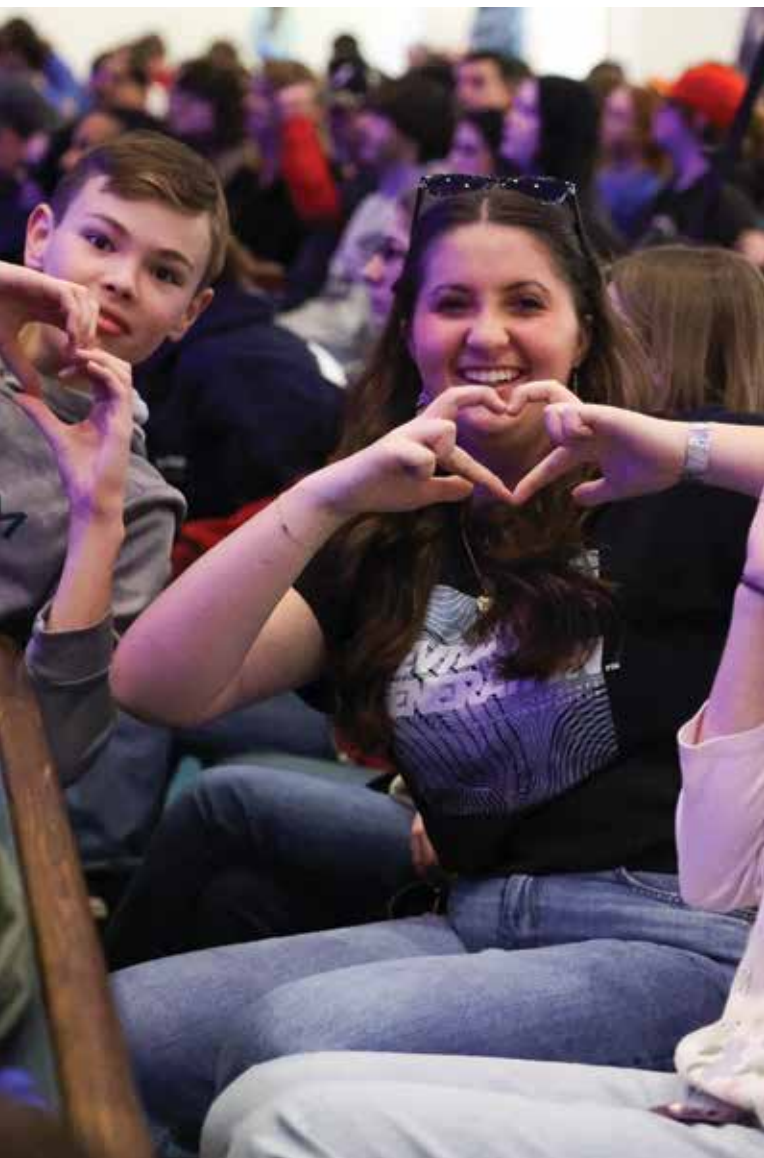
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LASTING IMPACT: living for Jesus



The annual Youth Evangelism Conference (YEC) took place once again at **London Bridge Baptist Church** in Virginia Beach, VA. This year, over 1,200 students from 65 churches across the Commonwealth gathered to worship, learn about the Gospel, and be inspired to share it with boldness and confidence.

Pastor Mark Turner, a former student pastor at **Nansemond River Baptist Church** in Suffolk, VA was the featured speaker. He is a church planter in West Philadelphia, PA, and speaks at Fuge Camps during the summer. Pastor Mark's messages were biblically sound, relevant, and focused on the Gospel. He spoke on the invitation to follow Jesus from Matthew 11:28-30, the vision of lostness from Matthew 9:35-38, and the mission of the Gospel from Matthew 28:16-20.

The Museum, a talented worship team from Atlanta, GA, led the students into God's presence and guided them to the throne of Jesus in praise. This contemporary Christian music band serves at their home church by leading worship every month. They also lead worship at several summer camps.

YEC opened with the Skit Guys, who kicked off Friday night with humor, but the fun didn't stop there! On Saturday afternoon, students got to unwind at a huge silent disco party.

Pastor Justin Beville, the student and young adult pastor at **Franklin Heights Church** in Rocky Mount, VA, shared, "My students really enjoyed worshiping and studying God's Word with students from across the Commonwealth. It encouraged them to see so many others striving to live for Jesus."



Pastor Mark Turner
Speaker



The Museum
Worship Leaders



The Skit Guys
Special Guests

Throughout the conference, many decisions were made for Christ. One church brought 25 students and six of them made decisions to follow Christ. Pastor Wayne Lowe, senior pastor at **Second Chance Baptist Church** in Petersburg, shared that four students from his group dedicated their lives to Christ. Pastor Doug Echols, senior pastor at **Bethel Baptist Church** in Yorktown, spoke about a student who realized the importance of being obedient to Christ and committed to baptism. Praise the Lord for the work He did during the conference and for the lives He touched.

“... great encouragement to my students, many of whom were facing difficult seasons.”

YEC is more than just a weekend—it’s an opportunity for student ministries to come together, encourage one another, and be challenged to live out their faith. Each year, YEC serves as a catalytic ministry opportunity for churches as they begin a new year with Jesus-centered student and young adult ministries.

Pastor Justin Beville reflected, “Each year, YEC lays intentional groundwork through the speaker, musicians, and event staff that helps students and leaders grow in their faith. This year, YEC provided great encouragement to my students, many of whom were facing difficult seasons. They left confident in the truth that Jesus loves them and is for them. One parent even sent me a video a couple of days later—her students were still singing the worship songs from the weekend. That’s the lasting impact of YEC.” ■



The Unexplainable

God has used the ministry of **Spotswood Baptist Church** (SBC) for more than sixty years to make an eternal impact on the city of Fredericksburg and the world for Jesus Christ. Over the past seven years, Spotswood has sent over one hundred key leaders to plant two churches. The church has also partnered with the SBC of Virginia to plant **Iglesia Bautista Spotswood, Grace Vietnamese Baptist Church, Spotswood Chinese Christian Church**, and **Spotswood Deaf Church**, all of which meet on their campus. These church plants have reached the area's growing, unreached language populations.

God has unexplainably brought new growth to the church.

Yet, in 2020, COVID-19 proved to be a crucible moment in the life of Spotswood. Dr. Dan Cook, executive and educational pastor at Spotswood, stated, "Our staff and church saw COVID not as an obstacle but as an opportunity for God to move beyond human comprehension as we sought to replant the church and reach the community." Since COVID, the Lord has moved at Spotswood, raising up prayer warriors and opening a prayer house on the campus. God has unexplainably brought new growth to the church. Cook explains, "Ninety percent of the new growth has been new, immature believers who are multi-ethnic and multi-generational." Almost every Sunday in 2024, Spotswood has celebrated new believers going public with their faith through baptism.

On October 20, 2024, Spotswood celebrated National Baptism Sunday in their morning service. Dr. Drew Landry, senior pastor at Spotswood, preached a



"If you can explain what God is doing in your church, you are not praying enough."



prepared to be baptized. Through the moving of the Holy Spirit in the service and the faith and obedience of the baptism candidates, their family members and others decided to follow Jesus in baptism. God manifested His presence as 60 new believers of all ages were baptized: 8 from the Hispanic and Chinese churches, and 52 from Spotswood. This was a memorable Lord's Day.

Pastor Dan stated, "The baptisms have been a big win, but the greater blessing is seeing the new believers being disciplined by the church. The Lord is using weekly connect groups, growth groups, and life groups to disciple these new believers. New leaders are being trained and used by God to grow His Kingdom through His church." Cook was quick to say that this is not a Spotswood story, but a God story. He remarked, "God's people are simply seeking to be in a position of blessability, dependability, and desperation to see what only God can do." Pastor Dan concluded his remarks by stating, "If you can explain what God is doing in your church, you are not praying enough." ■





The JOY of Friendship

When Michelle Keller's husband, Justin Keller, senior pastor at **Covesville Baptist Church**, joined the SBC of Virginia, Michelle was eager to meet other ministry wives.

Her husband suggested Michelle attend the Ministry Wives retreat at Camp Eagle in the Roanoke Valley on October 18-19, 2024. Over 60 ministry wives from across the state gathered for fellowship, encouragement, and teaching from Jani Ortland, a pastor's wife, speaker, and author.

At first, Michelle was nervous because she didn't know anyone attending the retreat. As the retreat date approached, she made it a matter of prayer, asking the Lord to lead her to a friend. In the welcoming environment filled with opportunities for social interaction, activities, meals, encouragement, teaching, and prayer, Michelle found an answer to her prayer. She

met Rachel Bramblet, the ministry wife of senior pastor Philip Bramblet from

Furnace Creek Baptist Church.

"I was specifically praying to the Lord that I would find a friend. So there, at the retreat, I met Rachel, and we clicked immediately. We went to the bonfire, sang, prayed for one another, and roasted marshmallows. It was such a delight to my soul!" Michelle recalled.

To their joy, this new friendship wasn't just for the weekend. "Rachel and I have continued to encourage each other and stay in touch. We couldn't wait to see each other again at SBCV's Annual Homecoming. I know Rachel and I are going to be friends for a long time. I'm so thankful to have another lady who understands what it's like to be married to a pastor," Michelle shared.

They reunited at Annual Homecoming, where they introduced their husbands, Justin and Philip.

The moment was special for both the women and their husbands, as the pastors had heard so much about their friendship before meeting. They could see the joy this newfound friendship brought their wives.

Michelle and Rachel are both looking forward to more opportunities to gather with other ministry wives. Encouraged by the retreat, Michelle is excited to participate in future events that foster connections and growth.

Join the growing movement to equip ministry wives with encouragement, resources, prayer, and a strong community of support. Remember, you are not alone! ■

RESOURCE:

If you are not yet part of the Ministry Wives community, and would like to connect with your regional Ministry Wives representative, contact:



women@sbcv.org

Two are better than one
because they have a GOOD REWARD
for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can
lift him up;
but PITY THE ONE who
falls without another to lift him up.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10



BRYAN DRAKE

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Finding Comfort and Hope After *Helene*

Seven nationally recognized trails pass through Damascus, VA, making it a popular recreational destination for tens of thousands of visitors annually. Unfortunately, Hurricane Helene, which traveled 500 miles from the coast of Florida to the mountains of Southwest Virginia, left many beloved small mountain towns unrecognizable. The storm's fierce winds downed trees, while deadly floods washed out everything in their path.

In Damascus, bikers typically shuttle up Whitetop Mountain to ride the Virginia Creeper Trail, winding down through Green Cove and Taylors Valley, before returning to town for lunch. But on this particular September day, the floodwaters were no longer part of a scenic ride—they were rushing down the mountain, washing away everything in their path. Many residents found their homes filled with mud and debris or completely washed away.

Recreation was no longer the focus in Damascus. People were coming to help—to rescue, relieve, and meet the immediate needs of those affected. Individuals and groups, both religious and non-religious, mobilized to support the

“Many residents found their homes filled with mud and debris or completely *washed away*. ”

community. Among our SBC of Virginia family, the response was no different. We saw a surge in Disaster Relief (DR) training sign-ups, with record numbers of people eager to serve. Pastor Chris Myers, his wife Kathy, and four members from **Beacon Light Missionary Baptist Church** in St. Charles, Virginia, were among those who received online DR training.

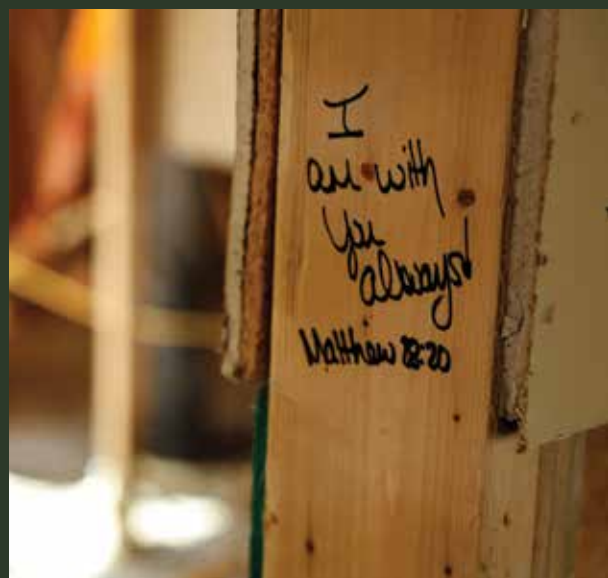
The mission of Disaster Relief is to come alongside local churches to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ while meeting the needs of our neighbors. At the SBC of Virginia, our goal isn't just to provide physical aid, but to equip, resource, and mobilize churches to share the Gospel as we meet physical and spiritual needs. Disaster Relief is challenging, often dirty work with long hours. Yet, it provides a unique opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus, sharing His Good News with those who are hurting.

While many SBCV members deployed to southwest Virginia, for Chris and Kathy, it was an answer to prayer. “We’ve been praying for our church to no longer be the mission, but to become the missionary,” Kathy shared. They served on a two-week deployment based at **Fellowship Baptist Church** just outside Damascus. While the Beacon Light team worked on-site, they had the opportunity to engage in Gospel conversations, which led to a mother and her son professing Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

The aftermath of Hurricane Helene is still evident, and the need is still great. But we know that the power of Christ is greater, and the call to serve is still urgent. As Jesus said in Luke 10:2, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (NKJV).

Helene has left plenty of opportu-

nities for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus. The question is, how is the Lord calling you and your church to respond? Are you ready to step in when a disaster strikes? Or perhaps God is calling you to be part of the rebuilding efforts—bringing help and hope long after the immediate crisis has passed? ■



Partnership Energizes

ETHIOPIAN CHURCH

When Abera Tessema came to the U.S. from Ethiopia in the 1980s, he was an atheist and a communist. Like the Apostle Paul, he encountered Jesus and was radically transformed by the Gospel, despite describing himself as the “worst person.” This formerly “worst person” grew in his faith and eventually became a pastor, founding **Amanuel Ethiopian Evangelical Church (AEEC)** in Alexandria, VA, in 1993.

AEEC has been a thriving church for many years, growing to over 400 members and owning a building on a prominent property in Alexandria. However, Pastor Abera acknowledges

that while the church had great passion, it was not fully pursuing its God-given vision. For years, the church failed to share the Gospel outside its ethnic community. Though AEEC had dreamed of planting another church since 2009, no steps had been taken until a turning point in 2023.

In the summer of 2023, Pastor Abera and Youth Pastor Amanuel (Mannie) attended a training session at the SBC of Virginia Ministry Support Center for Ethiopian and Eritrean pastors. Over the course of two days, as Fisseha Tesfaye, Church Planting Associate, led the training on discipleship, church planting, and SBCV partnership, God began stirring something deep within their hearts. On the drive home, Mannie couldn't shake the words of the Ethiopian eunuch from Acts 8:36: “What would keep me from being baptized?” But this time, God changed the question in his heart: “What's keeping me from church planting?”

Less than six months later, AEEC decided to apply for partnership with the SBCV. Mannie Bekele attended a church planting assessment retreat and was endorsed as a Send Network Virginia church planter to begin planting

Remnant Church, a church focused on reaching second-generation people from various nations.

In less than a year after the SBCV training, AEEC sent another church planter, Berhanu Abebe, for assessment. He, too, was approved by Send Network Virginia to plant a church in Dumfries, Virginia. The new **Dumfries Ethiopian Church** will partner with Pillar Church in Dumfries, sharing facilities and resources.

Pastor Abera reflects, “For 30 years, we only focused on one church, so now we have to get busy planting many churches.” While planting two churches in under two years might seem like enough work for most churches, AEEC is already praying and preparing for two more church plants in the near future.

Recently, Remnant Church celebrated its first baptisms of non-Ethiopian candidates, marking a significant milestone in the church's outreach efforts.

The Power of Partnership

Pastors Abera, Amanuel, and Berhanu all credit the SBCV partnership for giving them new energy, direction, resources, and training to help them fulfill their church's vision. Left alone, they fear these ideas for church planting would have remained just dreams, never becoming reality. But that didn't happen because **they are not alone!** ■



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A LIFE ON MISSION:

From Central America to Europe to North America

EL Salvador is the smallest country in Central America; to put it into perspective, Virginia is five times larger than El Salvador. In the late 1970s, civil war broke out, one of the bloodiest conflicts in the region. Between 1979 and 1992, more than 75,000 people were killed, and thousands went missing.

Rubén was born in El Salvador and was educated in a Catholic school. After graduating high school, he joined the military academy in 1979. There, he was being trained to kill anyone suspected of being a communist. But God had a different plan for Rubén. In April 1981, a stranger handed him an evangelistic tract, and as he read it, he felt convicted. Just before graduation, he decided to change his career path and began studying at Evangelical University, where he heard the Gospel for the first time in the chapel. There, Rubén accepted Jesus as his personal Savior and later joined a Baptist church, where he was baptized on October 18, 1981.

In May 1984, Rubén was sent to plant a church in the eastern part of the country, where he served as pastor for nine years. In 1985, he married Dalila, and together, they were blessed with three children. They later moved to the western part of the country, where they planted another church and established a Bible Institute.

But God had yet another plan for Rubén and his family. He called them to become missionaries outside of El



But God had yet another plan for Rubén and his family. He called them to become MISSIONARIES outside of El Salvador.”

Salvador. In 1994, Rubén traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, for mission training, with their ultimate destination set for Europe.

Romania was recovering from its own civil war, and Rubén and his family arrived in 1995, joining Hope Baptist Church in Braşov. There, they helped organize and develop the Bible Seminary. In 2000, they planted a Baptist church in Braşov, and since then, Rubén has been training and equipping pastors from other churches. When the Russia-Ukraine war broke out in 2022, thousands of Ukrainian refugees fled to the Romanian border to escape the conflict. Rubén and Dalila presented the Gospel and served in the refugee camp for several weeks.

One day, Rubén received a call from his daughter, who shared the news that their permanent residency application had been approved. Their new destination: America. The letter from the U.S. Embassy detailed that Rubén and Dalila needed to appear for an interview, as their daughter had applied for their permanent residency years earlier.

Rubén and Dalila now live in the Lynchburg area, where they've witnessed a significant spiritual need in the Hispanic community. After sharing this burden with a pastor friend, he informed them about SBCV's church planting process. In November 2024, Rubén and Dalila successfully completed the church planter assessment at SBCV's offices. Thanks to their prayers and the financial support from *Vision Virginia* and the Cooperative Program, Rubén and Dalila know **they are not alone.** ■




top: Rubén Gonzales preaching at church plant in Romania
middle: Dalila Gonzales with Romania children
bottom: helping Ukrainian refugees

A Summer in Miami


“

Through GenSend, we served alongside 10 church plants throughout Miami, each at different stages of ministry.”

 GenSend

Summer missionaries are sent across North America each year through GenSend, a North American Mission Board (NAMB) program that places college students on missions. Elizabeth Montgomery interned with her home church, **Franklin Heights Church**, and served for eight weeks with church planters in Miami, Florida.

Elizabeth shared, “This summer, I desired to intern with my church through the SBC of Virginia (SBCV) and GenSend because I wanted to grow in my walk with the Lord and further explore long-term missions.” With a sense of calling and an opportunity before her, Elizabeth left home to experience a new culture and share the Gospel with a team of GenSend missionaries. “Through GenSend, we served alongside 10 church plants throughout Miami, each at different stages of ministry—some more established, and others just a few months old. Spending eight weeks in the Coconut Grove neighborhood of Miami allowed us to build relationships with people in the community: business owners, residents, and others. Most importantly, it gave us the chance to share the Good News and hear Gospel stories from local believers.”



Elizabeth's testimony is a powerful example of God working in the hearts of young people.

This ministry opportunity didn't happen in a vacuum. Franklin Heights Church, with the support of the SBCV, sent Elizabeth to serve, grow, mature, and pursue her calling. Justin Beville, pastor of students and young adults at Franklin Heights is also a product of the SBCV's summer internship program, having served several summers with his home church, **Old Powhatan Baptist Church** (Powhatan).

Beville shared, "The SBCV provided me with three opportunities to intern. It was a great experience and it was rewarding to now be on the other side, helping Elizabeth navigate her calling to missions. The SBCV truly wants you to feel supported—whether you're serving in a local church in Virginia or partnering with a church in Miami. I simply asked, 'How can we do this through the SBCV and our local church?' Through the SBCV and Vision Virginia, Franklin Heights was able to provide a paid internship for Elizabeth. We didn't want finances to be a barrier, so our church also covered the GenSend fee, removing any obstacles to sending her."

This partnership is bearing fruit, both in Elizabeth's life and in the ministry in Miami. At the end of her summer, she shared, "Franklin

Heights paved the way for me to be sent this summer. They supported me with prayer and financially, allowing me to go. Even though I was hundreds of miles away, I stayed connected to my local church. I met weekly with Pastor Justin via FaceTime. Through these conversations, we celebrated wins, and he helped me navigate life on mission. I had 30 Gospel conversations and made local connections that the churches there will be able to follow up on."

Pastor Justin is now praying that more students will be called to serve through GenSend and that a pipeline of missionaries will be formed through Franklin Heights' student ministry. His prayer is that Elizabeth's journey is just the beginning—and that it will inspire many others to be called and sent out.

Senior pastor, Stan Parris, put it well, "I'm grateful for our partnership with the SBCV and GenSend, which provides open doors for our church to fulfill the Great Commission. Elizabeth's testimony is a powerful example of God working in the hearts of young people, inspiring them to serve with passion and purpose. Pastor Justin's leadership and mentoring have been instrumental in guiding our young adults as they fulfill their calling from the Lord." ■



Argentina Vision Tour

God-Sized Goal

FAITHFULNESS
TO THE NATIONS
in Fancy Gap, Virginia

For three weeks every year, **Sky View Missionary Baptist Church** sets its sights on a God-sized goal—one that, according to conventional wisdom, no church in Fancy Gap, Virginia, should be able to meet. But with a heart for missions and a clear focus on global outreach, Pastor Wendell Horton and the people of Sky View give above and beyond to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

It wasn't always this way. When Pastor Wendell became pastor of his home church in 1995, Cooperative Program giving was \$4,129, and giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering was just \$100. So, what led to the dramatic growth in missions giving—\$76,457 to the Cooperative Program and \$63,414 to Lottie Moon in 2024? And what drives the church to push for even greater contributions in 2025?

Pastor Wendell and Associate Pastor Gary Horton say the transformation began when God called an International Mission Board (IMB) missionary out of their community. While the church and its pastor had always had a passion for missions, it was through the efforts of that missionary's mother, a member of Sky View, that the church developed a deeper passion for supporting missionaries. What was once an offering primarily focused on the Women's Missionary Union

(WMU) and women's ministry soon became a central priority for the entire church.

When asked what has fueled the growth in missions giving over the past 30 years, the pastors shared, "Every week, we share something to celebrate through Southern Baptist work around the globe. And we know that if you're giving to the Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon, it doesn't matter the size of your church; you are a part of all of it."

Pastor Gary adds that partnering with the SBCV has been instrumental in taking the church's missions giving and involvement to the next level. Through the SBCV, Sky View has led over 25 mission trips to Puerto Rico, served with Southern Cross in Thailand, worked with refugees in Greece, and most recently, started a new partnership in Argentina. "Missions education and opportunities through the SBCV have helped us get more involved in God's global mission," Pastor Gary said. Pastor Wendell agrees, noting, "There is no way to put a value on our partnership with the SBCV."



Mission trip to San Juan, Puerto Rico. (IMB photo)

Several factors have contributed to Sky View's success in missions giving and leadership. Longevity in pastoral ministry plays a significant role, as does intentional vision and leadership that consistently prioritizes missions. When faced with the challenges of ministry or church growth, Pastor Wendell always sets a clear vision. "If we are going to build, we are going to raise our Cooperative Program giving. We don't want to take on any initiatives that will cause us to fall behind in missions."

When the pastors have a vision for the nations, when the congregation

develops a heart for the nations, and when a partnership with the SBCV provides the "why" and the "how" for engaging with the nations, the possibilities become limitless. No matter the size or location of the church, the impact can be significant. Both pastors agree, "Missions is why we are Southern Baptist. This is who we are." We pray, give, go, and send to reach the nations. ■

GROWING Missions Giving

1. **GIVE** the congregation **something to celebrate** from what God is doing through the IMB and SBCV every week.
2. **ADOPT** a missionary and/or an unreached, unengaged people group.
3. **PUT** the mission first!



For more information on how your church can grow your missions giving, contact missions@sbcv.org



A man washes his face outside in a refugee camp in Lesbos, Greece. The majority of the refugees are from Syria and Afghanistan. (IMB photo)

Refresh

WOMEN'S CONFERENCE



GUEST SPEAKER
MARY WILEY

APRIL 12—POWHATAN
Red Lane Baptist Church

OCTOBER 18—BRISTOL
North Bristol Baptist Church

sbcv.org/refresh

E2kids

Rocky Mount
Aug. 22
7-9 PM

Bristol
Aug. 23
1-3 PM

Fredericksburg
Sept. 5
7-9 PM

Norfolk
Sept. 6
1-3 PM

Encourage and equip kids' leaders to reach and teach children

Find an event near you at sbcv.org/E2Kids

PROVIDED BY
SBCV kids

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YEC
Renovados
Annual Homecoming

Scan the QR code to find the video library.



sbcv.org/videos



Inspired to Bless Others

Long-term pastoral faithfulness can lead to ministry effectiveness. When biblical faithfulness is modeled by the pastor, it becomes a way of life for the church members. This is the story of **Bethel Baptist Church** in Salem and its pastor, Hilton Jeffries.

Pastor Jeffries, a pastor's son, has led Bethel Baptist for more than 17 years. When he arrived, the church was quite different. His commitment to biblical inerrancy and conservative doctrinal beliefs proved controversial for some. However, through steady leadership and consistent biblical preaching, Pastor Jeffries made a lasting impact. Over time, he looked for opportunities to make a difference in the community, and his strategic patience yielded a congregation that is now eager to bless their neighbors.

Pastor Jeffries summed up his journey: "I have found the saying to be true that you often underestimate what can be done over a decade, while overestimating what can be done in a couple of years."

Many pastors find themselves in situations of church turnaround and revitalization. Key principles apply in such situations, and one of the most important is exercising strategic patience. Patience is vital, but it's not about waiting passively—it's about waiting with wisdom and being ready to act when the right opportunities arise. Pastor Jeffries shared, "It takes time to build relationships and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Bethel Baptist saw exciting things happen in 2024; these things include:

- Nearly 40 baptisms
- Church members actively leading their friends to faith in Christ
- Outreach to local schools, in partnership with other churches, providing backpacks and shoes for over one hundred children
- A pastoral staff member entering local police chaplaincy after years of ministering to the city's police force, thus transitioning to bi-vocational ministry

Regular outreach ministries at Bethel Baptist include:

- A monthly "First Responders Luncheon," where the Gospel is shared with local first responders
- Grief Share, which continues to impact local families
- Soccer skills camps that reach several students
- Connect groups that regularly reach into the community
- Impact Salem, an annual event where the church's regular worship service "hits the streets" for community outreach
- Partnerships with the local homeless ministry

Pastor Hilton Jeffries rejoiced in the church's partnerships, saying, "the SBCV has been a great partner. We know that we are not alone as we minister. The resources and relationships through our SBCV family have proven invaluable. We want to be a blessing to many different people, and our network allows us to do that." ■

Where Are All the *Volunteers?*

Is your children's ministry facing challenges?



How can you grow your team of volunteers?

Is your children's ministry facing challenges like combined graded classes, part-time leaders, or volunteer burnout? Many ministries wonder, "Where are the willing volunteers to fill the teachers' chairs in children's ministry?"

You may be praying for the harvest, but are you preparing your fields?

Donnie Slade with Kidz Blitz Ministries works with volunteers every week. He shared, "Volunteers are what help our ministry work," when asked about his success with building a strong volunteer team. He then offered ten practical ways to grow your volunteers and help accomplish your ministry's mission.

1. Each One, Ask One.

One of the easiest ways to grow your ministry team is by having your current volunteers invite a friend to serve alongside them. This helps develop the bond of friendship while expanding the team.

2. Host a Ministry Fair.

Showcase the opportunities in children's ministry with a fun, pressure-free ministry fair. Let people know the positive impact serving in children's ministry can have—not just on the kids but also on the volunteers' spiritual growth.

3. Take Care of Your Current Volunteers.

Show appreciation to your current volunteers with thank-you notes, small gifts, a listening ear, and the resources they need to succeed. Word will get out that you care about those who serve.

4. Cast the Vision.

Children's ministry leaders are volunteers who create safe, clean environments where parents can worship without worry. They don't just serve juice and crackers—they nurture children spiritually so they can hear about Jesus. Julie Ford, a long-standing teacher at **First Baptist Norfolk**, shared, "Serving as a fifth-grade leader, I see the wonder of biblical growth and how the kids, even at such a young age, recognize their worth and how God can use them."

5. Ask. Ask. Ask.

Don't be afraid to ask for volunteers in everyday conversations. Keep an eye out for individuals with the gifts to serve. Remember, students can be some of the best children's workers while learning the value of Christian service.

6. Don't Seem Desperate.

No one wants to serve out of obligation or guilt. Trust in God's provision and invite people to serve from the abundance He's given them. Marty Ford at First Baptist Norfolk says, "We are required by God to utilize our skills and abilities for His glory. We are blessed knowing we're being obedient in ministry."

7. Host a Volunteer Appreciation Event.

A volunteer appreciation event honors your current leaders and sends a message to potential volunteers: "If you serve, you will be appreciated. Your service matters."

8. Take Someone with You.

Include someone in your ministry errands. Time spent together

can help foster a mentorship relationship, turning them into future leaders.

9. Get Organized.

Evaluate your organizational processes to ensure you're prepared to welcome new volunteers when God sends them your way. A well-organized ministry is attractive to those considering serving.

10. Make Serving Fun.

Show others the joy of serving children. Enthusiasm is contagious, and it's key to attracting and retaining volunteers. A joyful, vibrant ministry will inspire others to get involved. ■



Give volunteers a boost!

Partnering Discount

Kidz Blitz is a ministry partner with SBCV Kids. For a Kidz Blitz event, with a partnering discount for your church, contact Donnie Slade at kidzblitz.com.

Watch an event give you a *volunteering boost!*



Inspire

A word of hope, support, and encouragement

“

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” John 15:8

Proof of Ownership

I am concerned with many who verbally confess Christ but are really pretending. These are the ones who have a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Timothy 3:5)—those who live religiously but not reverently. As it relates to the deeds that should mark the difference between who our God is, Jesus spoke directly to a group of religious leaders who, despite their outward righteousness, refused to repent and receive the righteousness provided by Christ. He said to them, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44).

Those who truly belong to God do His desires. Those who belong to the devil do his desires. Some of Jesus’ most penetrating words were about the “hypocrites”—those who weren’t willing to come to Him and were stumbling blocks to others who were seeking the truth.

Once sealed as heirs (Ephesians 1:13), we are empowered to do “good works” that were prepared for us beforehand. The fruit that marks us as belonging to God is that of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). When believers

remain in a “branch-vine” relationship with Christ, they will “bear much fruit,” revealing to whom they belong—and who owns them.

Genuine, Christlike living is our “proof of ownership” because God displays the fruit of the Spirit through His sons and daughters. True believers glorify the One who purchased the right for us to call Him, “Abba Father.”

The question we must ask ourselves is, “Who owns you?” ■

Love you all!



Milton Harding

Prayer and Care Minister

✉ mharding@sbcv.org

MINISTRY & EVENTS

You are
not alone.

2025

APRIL

March 31-Apr 2
D.C. Metro Vision Tour
2
Virginia March for Life
5
DR & Rebuild Unit Leader, *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*
5
Known and Loved Women's Event, *River Oak Church, Chesapeake*
5
Crear Una Cultura De Evangelismo, *Iglesia Bautista del Camino, Norfolk*
8
Seminary for a Day, *Jerusalem BC, Fairfax Station*
12
Refresh Women's Conference, *Red Lane Baptist, Powhatan*
20
Easter
24-25
DR Chaplain Training—Assisting Individuals in Crisis, *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*
26
Disaster Relief: ICS/IMT Planning, *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*
29
Seminary for a Day, *Bedrock Church, Roanoke*

MAY

1
National Day of Prayer
3
DR Basic, Chaplain and Advanced Training, *Thomas Road BC, Lynchburg*
5-6
Executive Board Meeting
11
Foster Care Awareness Sunday
17
DR Basic, Chaplain and Advanced Training, *Southeast*
17
SEND Residency Lab Espanol, *Spotswood BC, Fredericksburg*
30
Worship & Technology Conference, *Liberty University, Lynchburg*

JUNE

9
Dessert Fellowship, *Dallas*
9-12
Southern Baptist Convention, *Dallas*
16-20
Student Fusion Camp, *Mount Pleasant BC, Colonial Heights*
21
Disaster Relief: ICS/IMT Operations, *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*
22-24
Chinese Ministry Leader and Spouse Fellowship, *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*

JULY

17-19
Family Fusion Camp, *Fox Hill Road BC, Hampton*



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To see details and updates on these events and more, scan this QR code or visit sbcv.org/calendar.

Stay up to date by using the online calendar on our website, sbcv.org.



@sbcvirginia

Church Planter Assessments

More Than A CHURCH PLANTING EXPERIENCE

In partnership, the SBC of Virginia and Send Network are committed to giving church planters the best chance for success in planting healthy churches. Church planting candidates gather in Richmond for a two-day assessment retreat twice a year. In 2024, the retreat served 15 church planters at **Movement Church** in Richmond, Virginia. These assessment retreats accomplish several important objectives and have made a significant impact on church planting in Virginia over the past few years.

1. Providing a Holistic Assessment of the Planter and His Wife

Beginning with the online pre-assessment, the Send Network Virginia representative guides the candidate through various areas of evaluation. This relationship between the candidate and the representative helps the planter and

his wife build confidence as they prepare for the two-day retreat. The online assessment can take up to two months for the candidate and his wife to complete, ensuring a thorough process before the retreat.

2. Equipping the Sending Church Representative with Key Next Steps

The assessment process evaluates the church planters and offers breakout sessions that allow sending church representatives to build relationships with one another. These sessions provide valuable insights and best practices for planting a healthy church. On the first night of the retreat, the sending church representatives and Send Network staff enjoy a meal together, discussing the retreat and fostering long-lasting relationships. Many sending church pastors leave equipped with the knowledge and tools to help their church planters succeed.

3. Providing a Snapshot for Guests to Experience the Send Network Process

The two-day retreat allows guests to “have a seat at the table.” This allows potential planters and pastors to catch a vision for church planting and learn from other pastors about how to develop leaders for future church plants. Pastors with potential church planters can attend to observe the assessment process, gaining valuable insights they can apply to local residency programs. Residencies are the primary training ground for future church planters.

4. Involving SBCV Pastors and Planters in the Send Network Process

The assessment team consists of SBCV pastors and leaders who have sacrificially invested their time and energy to be trained for this role. These leaders are

provided a deeper understanding of the church planting process, strengthening their commitment to the Send Network and the SBCV. Additionally, the SBCV provides hotel accommodations for planters who travel to Richmond for the assessment. SBCV staff members who work in regions where church planting is taking place often attend the retreat to build relationships with sending church pastors and planters.

The church planting assessment experience goes beyond simple evaluation. The retreat fosters partnerships between pastors and planters, cultivating a sending culture throughout Virginia. As more churches are planted across the state, it is essential that church planters know **they are not alone.** ■

RESOURCE:

For more information about church planting, visit:



churchplanting@sbcv.org



RENAMED and REVITALIZED

Crossway Church Put the *Cross*
At the Center of Its Identity



When **Crossway Church** in Virginia Beach opened its newly remodeled campus in July 2024, it represented much more than just a renovated building.

Ron Jones, the lead pastor of Crossway Church, said the campus transformation symbolized the end of a long journey that completely changed the church.

Formerly known as Atlantic Shores Baptist Church, the newly renamed Crossway Church underwent a revitalization process that Jones said has transformed the church from the inside out.

"The impact of our renovated building has exceeded everybody's expectations," Jones shared. "Virtually everyone who comes in comments on the new space, saying what a wonderful addition it is to the church. We've seen countless new people walking through the



doors, many coming to faith in Christ, and new faces are joining the church every week."

One of the key changes was the church's decision to change its name, which Jones said was part of communicating a new identity. A major landmark on the property is a large cross tower, nearly 50 feet tall.

"We decided to place the cross of Jesus Christ at the center of our identity, and it's how we introduce ourselves to people," he explained.

When Jones became pastor of what was then Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in 2015, the church was recovering from a difficult season. The church began taking steps toward revitalization.

"There wasn't a laid-out revitalization strategy for the next ten years or anything," Jones recalled. "We simply started working toward becoming a healthier church, and we talked a lot about that over the last few years. We've now gone from hurting to healthy. Looking back, we've revitalized nearly every aspect of the church."

The final step for the church was to address their "worn-down and failing" facilities.

Crossway had developed a two-year plan to

complete the necessary renovations, but the COVID-19 pandemic struck in the middle of the campaign, temporarily halting the project.

When the effects of the pandemic began to slow two years later, the church found that the cost of building supplies had skyrocketed.

After a few months of recalibrating their budget, the church went through 18 months of being "shoehorned" into a smaller space while construction continued.

Jones described the experience as feeling like "a gorilla was sitting on our chest," but he emphasized that the results were worth it.

He credited the leadership of the SBCV for ensuring they never felt "alone" throughout the entire process.

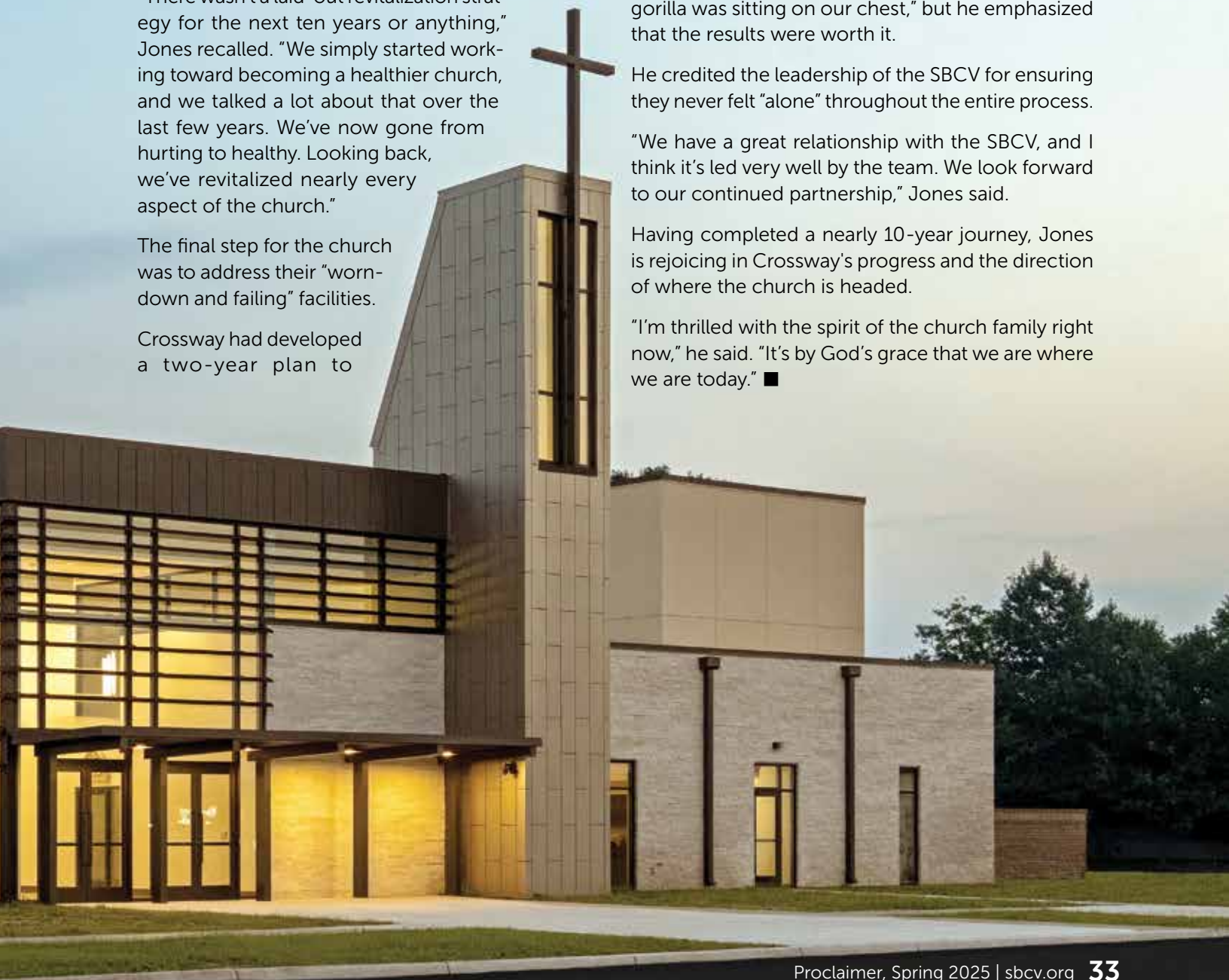
"We have a great relationship with the SBCV, and I think it's led very well by the team. We look forward to our continued partnership," Jones said.

Having completed a nearly 10-year journey, Jones is rejoicing in Crossway's progress and the direction of where the church is headed.

"I'm thrilled with the spirit of the church family right now," he said. "It's by God's grace that we are where we are today." ■



Pastor Jones



Brandon Pickett

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facebook.com/brandon.pickett

Philippians 4:10, 14

¹⁰ How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn't have the chance to help me. ¹⁴ Even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty.

Thank You

This editorial is a little different than most you've read in the Proclaimer. Most are not as personal or in the first person. I try to write the editorial with more of a look at what we've just been through or experienced as this fellowship of churches. Most of the other articles are more story based with inspiration, education, and motivation. We love sharing stories of what God has done in and through the churches of the SBCV to reach their mission field. We love sharing how churches are revitalized, God's people are discipled and sent on mission, and baptism waters are stirred.

But when you and I (and our families) are going through hard personal times, it's so good to be reminded that all the talk of the "SBCV family" and "not being alone" is not just a nice slogan. It's true. I've heard you say this—and I've witnessed it so many times. But we personally would not have known this kind of care if we hadn't gone through a recent tragedy.

Some of you may know what our family has been going through since November 5th of last year. Thank you for holding us up in prayer since then. We didn't have any idea what that one day was going to hold. Isn't that how it always is? What starts as a normal day doesn't end that way.

The biggest thing that morning was election day. Also, my wife, Wendy, was traveling to visit one of our children at college in Texas. But later

that day, our world was turned upside down. We received word that our daughter-in-law had passed away—suddenly and tragically. She had been going through mental health struggles for some time, but the struggles had escalated into a crisis. In an instant—everything changed. Our 27-year-old son was now a widower. Many of you understand the grief of losing someone close to you because you have reached out to me with incredibly kind and caring phone calls, text messages, and social media notes. On behalf of Wendy, our son, Andrew, and the rest of our family ... thank you so much for rallying around us in prayer and care.

Even though we are still going through the after effects of this, we are so thankful for the love of the Lord and His healing. This journey has opened our eyes even more to the seriousness of mental health—something so many are going through, whether personally or within their families.

In the midst of it all, we are thankful for each one of you who held us up in prayer and continue to lift us up to our Good Father. God bless you richly in His love.

Your Brother in Christ,

Brandon

MISSION PROJECTS | 2025

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." EPHESIANS 2:10



FOR FAMILIES APR - MAY
Family Advocacy Ministry



FOR CHILDREN SEPT - OCT
Christmas Backpacks



FOR NEIGHBORS JUN - AUG
Hunger Services



FOR MISSIONARIES NOV - DEC
Missionary Care

What are we **for** as followers of Christ? **MISSION PROJECTS** provide opportunities for families, small groups, and churches to engage their community and serve others **for** the glory of God.

sbcv.org/missionprojects



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.

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FUSION MISSION CAMPS 2025

OVERFLOW

*"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may **OVERFLOW** with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13 CSB*

STUDENTS
JUNE 16-20
CHESTERFIELD COUNTY

FAMILIES
JULY 17-19
BUCKROE BEACH



Fusion offers mission-oriented camp experiences for students and families to engage in mission work in Virginia.

SBCV.ORG/FUSION