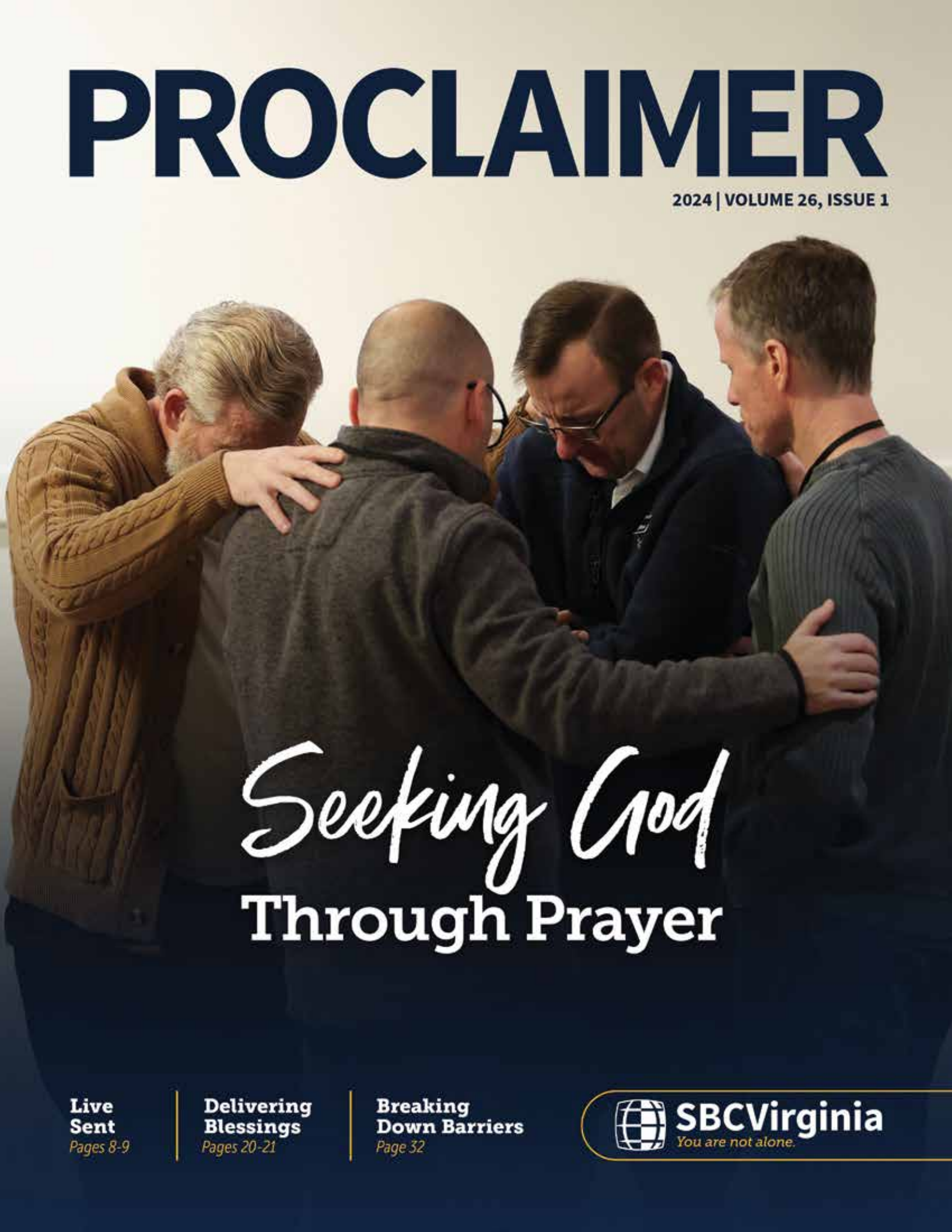


PROCLAIMER

2024 | VOLUME 26, ISSUE 1

A photograph of four men standing in a circle, facing each other with their heads bowed in prayer. The man on the far left is older with grey hair and a beard, wearing a brown cable-knit sweater. The man next to him is balding with glasses, wearing a grey sweater. The man in the center has dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue sweater. The man on the far right has short brown hair, wearing a grey sweater. They are all looking down, and their hands are clasped in front of them.

Seeking God Through Prayer

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Sent**
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**Breaking
Down Barriers**
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SBCVirginia
You are not alone.

PROCLAIMER

Spring 2024 — Issue 1

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Our Southern Baptist Convention is providing Spanish training and statewide events to raise awareness and mobilize Hispanic churches to go to unreached places.

Not just in the event of an EMERGENCY

I remember the first time I flew on an airplane. It was right after graduating from seminary and flying to a pastors' conference. The flight attendant gave the emergency instructions and modeled how to place the oxygen mask on in the event of the loss of cabin pressure. I gave her my full attention! Having flown many times since then, I don't pay the pre-flight instructions much attention anymore.

Many people view PRAYER as an 'emergency oxygen mask.' However, prayer is not an oxygen mask just to be used in times of emergency or crisis. Prayer is more like breathing itself. Prayer is essential. Even though I have been a follower of Jesus for more than forty years, I still need to pay attention to the biblical instruction regarding prayer.

The Apostle Paul prayed often and encouraged believers to pray. He was a person of prayer and called on churches to be people and places of prayer. In his first letter to the Thessalonians, he ends with simply asking them, "Brothers pray for us."

Paul was a leader who believed in prayer. He exhorted, "I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen" (Romans 15:30–33).

Throughout his epistles, Paul reassured others of his prayers. He wrote the Colossians, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9). Paul's praying was ongoing and persistent, characteristic of his praying as a leader (Romans 1:9–10; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:3; and Psalms 1:4).



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Paul prayed for various needs and issues in the lives of others. In Romans 15:5–6, Paul prayed for their unity, and in Romans 15:13, he prayed for God to fill them with joy and peace. In Philippians 1:9–11, Paul prayed for their love to abound. His requests varied from meeting needs and discipleship issues to their relationships.

While Paul prayed for the churches, he also asked them to pray for him. He was not an aloof leader who did not believe he needed prayer but recognized his need for God's help, too (2 Thessalonians 3:1–2).

The bottom line is that prayer is not just for emergency use. Praying is as essential as breathing.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Autry".

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)



Jared Davis

📍 Ohio

Let's pray for Jared Davis. He and his wife, Desiraye, are missionaries and church planters in Ohio. The Davis' are in the people restoration business. Life has beat up some of the folks in Ohio, but Jared and Desiraye are building relationships by meeting practical needs and sharing the gospel.



Harold & Sarah Singer

📍 North Africa

Let's pray for the Singers. Harold and Sarah are reaching farm people in rural areas. They enable families to have milk, butter, and cheese by giving goats to families—a prized gift. As they visit, the Singers also teach hygiene and share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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.

Missionary *Cave*

an essential part of your church's mission

"Serving the Lord in cross-cultural missions is the joy of our lives," a 20-year veteran IMB missionary in Sub-Saharan Africa said. "But hand in hand with the joy can be deep discouragement and loneliness."

Isolation, loneliness, hardship, persecution, and family trials—they're all a major part of life for international missionaries. Far too often, these pressure points leave missionaries not knowing who to turn to or who to trust. The IMB member care team does a great job of shoring up the spiritual and emotional needs of missionaries and teams, but when the darkness seems to close in and the questions of "do we stay or do we go" start to enter the conversation, who will missionaries turn to?

Far too many missionaries are now orphaned from their sending churches on the mission field. This happens for many reasons—from pastoral turnover, the passage of time, or "out of sight, out of mind." Missionaries are faithfully carrying out their task to reach the lost, but often feel forgotten. Pastoral care and church care for our "sent ones" are essential parts every church can and should play in the missionary task.

One first-term missionary, working among the unreached of North Africa said, "When we first arrived to the field, one of the experienced workers told us that going overseas is signing up for a life of loneliness. Sometimes, deep relationships that are close and vulnerable are hard to form with teammates. The thought of going home might look good, or at least easy, especially if there is pressure from grandparents or parents or those who question your decisions. But, having a pastor who cares as much about the sheep sent overseas as the ones he sees every Sunday is game-changing. The pastor is the one who reminds us that we are not alone."

Jeff Ginn, IMB vice president for mobilization, said, "Life on the field among unreached people groups can be hard. There's typically not yet a church among that people group. The life of a missionary can be lonely, and encouragement from home would go a long way to help them endure. We have many





missionaries who can benefit from that type of ministry."

Your church and pastor can help us hold the rope for missionaries around the globe. One long-time missionary said it simply. "Having the support of a pastor in the US has been a blessing and encouragement. Having the personal support of someone we can come to when walking through a difficult time has kept my family on the field and added to our longevity."

Every missionary needs a church. Every missionary needs a pastor. Every missionary needs the care and discipleship that your church can provide. Every church and pastor can be involved in keeping missionaries spiritually and emotionally healthy in the field, reaching the nations. You and your church can encourage, disciple, and care for a missionary.

Pastors can sign up for training on counseling and caring for those sent out and those orphaned in the field. Churches can pray and give and even support ministries like the SBCV in caring for every missionary in training while they are in Virginia and by caring for every Virginia-sent missionary as they go to the nations. The SBC of Virginia is the convention that houses the IMB. The churches of the SBCV are poised to impact the lives of missionaries.

As the missionary in Sub-Saharan Africa said, "A true, consistent, heart connection with the local church in the US breathes life into our ministry and restores peace and joy to our hearts. Thank you for caring. Thank you for connecting. Thank you for walking beside us." ■

“

... with the joy can be deep discouragement and loneliness."

SIMPLE WAYS your church can care for missionaries

1

Connect through the SBCV with a missionary and **build a relationship** of care and prayer. It may turn into a great partnership.

2

Pastors can sign up for **pastoral care training** for missionaries by contacting: missions@sbcv.org.

3

Support missionaries in training near Richmond with **meals and desserts**. For information, contact: missions@sbcv.org.

4

Encourage a college student missionary with a meal, gift card, or an encouraging note.



For more information
contact missions@sbcv.org.



Live Sent

YEC Commission

Hundreds of students from across the SBCV were equipped to “live sent” at the 2024 Youth Evangelism Conference.

Students from more than 60 SBCV churches gathered at **London Bridge Baptist Church** in early January 2024 for the conference (Friday, January 12 through Saturday, January 13).

The event featured interactive games and competitions, a concert by hip-hop artist Tedashii, worship led by the Liberty Worship Collective, and preaching by evangelist Ryan Fontenot.

Fontenot began Friday evening’s session by challenging the students to live their lives on mission for Jesus Christ.

“My hope is that we would leave here tomorrow and that we would live sent,” Fontenot said.

“That we would live our life on mission. That we would realize that we’ve been saved to be sent. That we who have been rescued have been called to rescue others. That we who have been found have now been called to find others.”

Fontenot explained that to live sent, students need to be real, ready, and resilient.

Students must be real with where they are currently with God, be ready to share the Gospel message and be resilient in their walk with Christ.

Fontenot spent Saturday morning’s session showing students how to share the Gospel using four emoji symbols.

The heart (representing God’s love), the division sign (representing sin), the cross, and a question



ns Students

mark (representing the decision a person must make).

Fontenot then challenged students to write down the names of others they knew who needed Jesus.

"I don't want you just to write their name and come up and slap it on a board," Fontenot said.

"As you write those names, I want you to pray for them. God use me to tell James about Jesus. God save James. God, James is lost, and I know it, and you've put him in my life, and he's on my heart, and God, I pray you save James."

Fontenot spent the final session showing students the importance of being resilient while living on mission.

"Coming to Jesus is not the finish line; it's the starting line," Fontenot said. "Living sent is not an option. If you are following Jesus, you are sent by Jesus."

Mike Camire, the student ministry coordinator for the SBCV, closed out the weekend by encouraging students to make a difference for Christ upon returning home.

"We're commissioning you back to your communities, to your homes, and your churches. We don't leave what we've experienced this weekend here. We carry it back with us," Camire said.

"Go and be the shining lights God has called you to be. We're excited to commission you back home. We love that you're here, but

more importantly, we're excited about what will happen when you get back home. The Lord's going to continue to stir. The Lord's going to continue to work." ■

RESOURCE:

Watch the highlight video at:



sbcv.org/yec





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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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Multiplication Beats Addition

Pastor Carlton Burns came to the 2021 SBCV Annual Homecoming with something on his mind. It wasn't the COVID pandemic preeminent on our nation's mind, nor was it the struggles and size of his local church, **Pleasant Grove Baptist Church** in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. Though, there were plenty of concerns, like all SBCV pastors, for Pastor Burns what was on his mind was multiplication.

Pastor Burns has lived in Prince George's County all his life. He loves and serves his community. He is connected to pastors and community leaders throughout his county. With just under one million residents, Prince George's County is the largest and the second most affluent African American county in the U.S., according to the Washington Post. Burns dreams of seeing his entire community transformed by the Gospel.

What is unique about Pastor Burns is his ministry approach. Rather than attempting to build a large regional church through addition, he is equipping a few other men to reach the community through multiplication. His dream

is that Pleasant Grove Baptist Church becomes a church planting "hub."

After two years of investment in two apprentices, this is no longer a mere dream. One apprentice, Marvin Sellman, has recently been endorsed by the North American Mission Board and the SBC of Virginia as a church planter. Sellman's church plant, **My Redeemer Lives Baptist Church**, has plans to launch in the spring of 2024. As this new church begins, dollars and manpower move out of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church. Pastor Burns is not overly worried about this because God has already supplied two new men for training and service in this church planting hub.

Pleasant Grove Baptist shows us that no matter the size of a church, whether big or small, all can make big contributions to God's Kingdom. ■

RESOURCE:

For more information about church planting, visit:



missions@sbcv.org

God's Place Timing

In 2018, Pastor Russell Robertson was the associate pastor of worship and connections at **Onancock Baptist Church** on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. He began to feel a strong calling to a senior pastorate. However, open doors to senior pastor positions were not forthcoming. Pastor Robertson endured disappointment as his search continued for positions and was met with many closed doors. But God was at work!



Across the bay, **Waverly Baptist Church** in Waverly, Virginia, was without a senior pastor. The church had been without a pastor for some time and had seen a decline over the years. Around the corner, Pastor Jim Jones, the retired pastor of Mill Swamp Baptist Church, learned of their need and decided to step in as their interim/bi-vocational pastor. Pastor Jones began his interim pastorate in December 2018 with the desire to bring them to the point when a full-time pastor could take over. Pastor Jones was willing to personally sacrifice for the church to flourish after his pastorate.

The next few years were spent reconciling and rebuilding. Over time, the church saw growth, particularly in its budget. Giving grew to a point where the church could bring on a part-time music pastor in addition to the interim pastor. Waverly Baptist Church was at a point where Pastor Jones was ready to hand over the reins and search for a pastor. That process began in January 2023. There

“*In a world where many churches close their doors, it's refreshing to see the hand of God work overwhelmingly.*”

were several candidates the church pursued, but none progressed to the point of hire.

During this time, Pastor Jones began a partnership with the SBCV's revitalization cohort, which exists to help bolster churches that have experienced decline. A member of the revitalization cohort from the Eastern Shore mentioned to Pastor Jones the possibility of Pastor Robertson being a potential candidate for Waverly Baptist Church. He didn't know that Robertson's resume was already in the hands of the search committee. After five years of disappointment, Pastor Robertson's search officially ended on September 3, 2023. His calling took him to God's place in God's timing.

In a world where many churches close their doors, it's refreshing to see the hand of God work overwhelmingly. Paul says in Colossians 1:29, “*For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*”

Pray that God continues to move in such a way that all you can do is struggle to keep up! ■

REVITALIZATION



A Real Community Partnership

Community service has been in the DNA of the Bedrock Church Network since the beginning. The first **Bedrock Church** was launched in Bedford, a small community between Roanoke and Lynchburg, with community service campaigns that reached businesses and homes across the county.

More recently, one of the founding pastors, Jeremy Minor, was sent out to launch **Bedrock Lynchburg**. This church met in a Lynchburg middle school and used that location to serve the community's needs in the name of Jesus. God blessed the new church with consistent growth and ministry opportunities. Things were going great until COVID caused schools to close their doors, and the church found itself without a place to worship.

Eventually, a YMCA, a mere five-minute drive away, opened its doors and began renting worship space. Pastor Minor approached the YMCA about a long-term lease of the space. A budding relationship eventually grew into a unique and powerful partnership.

YMCA leadership offered Bedrock Lynchburg a unique opportunity to invest in an expansion and remodeling of the YMCA building in return for a zero percent loan for construction and a 30-year fixed rental rate. In addition, the YMCA would be responsible for all the building utilities and maintenance. Bedrock Lynchburg would secure a home base for decades to come.

In the fall of 2023, Bedrock moved into its new home. The building is a beautiful integration of the church and the YMCA. It consists of two types of spaces: those that each organization exclusively uses and those shared by each organization.

By collaborating with a strong community organization such as the YMCA, Bedrock has the opportunity to extend its community service and outreach, fostering a strong sense of unity and collective service and embodying the teachings of love and compassion that are so central to the teachings of Jesus. ■



A Deep Need



In every stage of life, no one wants to feel alone.

This was the heart behind the SBC of Virginia Young Adults Retreat held last fall.

Nearly 75 young adults from more than 10 different SBCV churches gathered at Watermarks Camp in Scottsville for a weekend filled with fellowship, games, worship from Red Letter Society, and biblical teaching from Pastor Adam Long.

The idea for the event started with 27-year-old Hanna Cauthorne, who simply wanted to organize a gathering for the young adults in her church, **Gwathmey Baptist Church** in Ashland.

Cauthorne slowly started inviting young adults from nearby churches. Eventually, Cauthorne partnered with the SBCV to open the event up to young adults across the state.

She viewed the event as meeting a deep need for many young adults.

"God has just been continuously showing me how important it is for young adults to have community and to want to be in that community," Cauthorne said.

"Through the young adults I was around, whether at my church or other groups I was a part of, everyone was genuinely looking for real, solid community.

"I got to watch people form new friendships and relationships, and I got to see people who had fallen away from the church realize how important it was to be in a relationship with the Lord and genuinely want to be around biblical community."

Ethan Callison, collegiate ministry coordinator for the SBCV, said the retreat also provided a chance for SBCV young adult leaders to connect on a deeper level.

Callison remarked, "Relationships must be built between young adults and all other generations so that everyone has a clear picture of what the Church is, and the young adults retreat provided that opportunity. We were able to see young men and women connect from across multiple churches, as well as young adult ministry leaders—and know that they are *Not Alone!*"

Since this retreat, some of these leaders have stayed in touch and partnered to reach young adults more effectively in their area.

Cauthorne praised the SBCV for the partnership and support they provided, as well as the ways they desire to support young adults moving forward.

"They truly came in with resources and support," Cauthorne said. "That was truly a blessing. They gave the green light, and we're set to go in a much bigger way next year, which is truly amazing. We're also looking at opportunities beyond the retreat for what we can do to build community and bring relationships together."

Cauthorne also has young adults making a significant impact in their local church.

"It's just really cool to see how young adults can truly give back to the church by their presence. Being willing to be there is a big thing. Truly getting to see how many young adults are fully all in for the Lord is such a blessing." ■





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God-Sized Impact

In December 2020, a core team from **Impact Church of Fredericksburg** began to meet, pray, and dream about what God could do in the city of Fredericksburg through a new church plant. God would be at work, answering such God-sized prayers, less than three years later.

Before God moved Church Planter Brandon Hembree to launch Impact Church of Fredericksburg, he was told of two challenges the church plant would need to address: the nations are not in Fredericksburg; and that churches, by and large, have been unsuccessful in reaching the campus of the University of Mary Washington (UMW) with the Gospel.

Pastor Hembree met the first challenge after he encountered people from other nations just after moving to the area. But he shared that he challenge of reaching the UMW campus was very real.

Pastor Hembree saw that God opened doors among a growing

Afghanistan refugee population.

People and resources from Impact Church began to raise up to reach the nations in Fredericksburg. Pastor Hembree cast the vision, "Before our church can be multi-ethnic, your life (dining room table) must be."

God is using 20 members of this two-year-old church to build relationships and meet the needs of these Afghan people. Impact Church has had the opportunity to begin an English as a Second Language class, teach computer literacy, and offer supplies at a local apartment complex of mostly Afghan people.

Pastor Hembree is also seeing how God is opening doors for Gospel impact at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg. He stated, "The next wave of spiritual awakening is sitting at local college campuses." Impact Church has faithfully prayer-walked the UMW campus and built relationships with students.



The church now serves as a local campus ministry sponsor, launching a weekly Cru Bible study and guys' and girls' discipleship groups on campus. Since September 2023, twenty-five UMW students have attended Impact Church and now serve in ministries.

Why is Impact Church reaching UMW students? Pastor Hembree responded, "Prayer, yes, but also personal discipleship relationships. These relationships have brought them to Impact."

Praise the Lord for the amazing doors He is opening through the God-sized prayers of His people at Impact Church of Fredericksburg.

Impact Church of Fredericksburg launched in September 2021 with 25 adults and 10 children. In December 2023, the church has grown to 65 adults and 35 children. ■



Delivering Blessings

Quite often, the needs of a community are greater than the ability or the resources of a single congregation.

But, when more than 800 churches partner together through the SBC of Virginia, it is possible to do more together than what can be done alone.

It is the mission of the SBC of Virginia to come alongside local churches so that together, our neighbors and the nations can be reached to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of SBCV's key initiatives is to mobilize churches to engage communities with Christ's love through mission projects. These mission projects provide churches with opportunities to meet the needs of their communities in practical ways.

A variety of mission projects are available through the year, but every September and October the project is Christmas Backpacks. Each year, hundreds of Christmas Backpacks are collected from around the state and at SBCV's Annual Homecoming.

The Christmas Backpacks give churches a chance to minister to their communities by gifting backpacks to school children in

need. But, more than just a backpack is offered because inside each backpack are school supplies, toys, and the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Community outreach events are created, and in supporting this work, the mission's generosity helps prepare the soil to share Jesus with these families.

Two churches in southwest Virginia received Christmas Backpacks. **Park View Baptist Church** in Bluefield ministers to more than 250 students monthly when Graham Intermediate School busses students to and from the church for Bible Release Time. This ministry provides a 45-minute worship service that feels like a mini VBS worship rally with a Bible lesson and worship music.

Last fall, Park View Baptist Church brought back from Annual Homecoming 290 backpacks to distribute during December's Bible Release Time. Pastor Jim Drake said, "What a blessing to hand out these backpacks, a resource we could not afford on our own. What a beautiful example of cooperation."

Grace Fellowship in Haysi received 180 backpacks to hand out at the Haysi Christmas parade. "Receiving the backpacks gives us an opportunity to be out in the community showing people God's love. These backpacks may likely be the only gift these kids will get,



and it is a tremendous blessing to see the smile and joy on their faces,” Pastor Gary Owens said.

He continued, “Through the cooperation and the heartfelt efforts of others, our church has the opportunity to serve, show the love, and share the Good News of Jesus with our community. This is an outreach that the church would be unable to have if it were not for this tremendous resource made available through the SBCV partnership.”

Christmas Backpacks are more than a project; they are a valuable resource enabling churches to minister to their communities. They are an opportunity to mobilize churches to pray, give, and go. They are a gift to those in need and a chance to meet the greatest need through sharing the Gospel. Make plans for your church to participate in this worth-while mission project. ■

RESOURCE:

For information on Christmas Backpacks, contact the Missions Mobilization Team.



missions@sbcv.org



Celebrating NEW LIFE in the Valley



Fishersville Community Church

A strong sending church is one of the most vital ingredients for a successful church plant. According to the North American Mission Board (NAMB), "A Sending Church partners with a new church plant in prayer, participation and/or provision, taking responsibility for the plant until she is self-sustaining, self-governing and self-propagating."

One of the ways a sending church can participate is by having a "Sending Service" to rally support and prayer as the planter is being sent to a new community to plant.

Church planter Chris Smith, who served on staff at his sending church, **Crosslink Community Church** in Harrisonburg, Virginia, was recently sent out to plant **Fishersville Community Church** in Fishersville, Virginia. The sending church rented out the fairgrounds and combined services for what was to be a grand celebration for the new church plant. Lead Pastor Matthew Kirkland wanted his church to see their commitment to planting churches in areas that need new churches.

According to Church Multiplication Pastor Rob Spencer, "We wanted to

pause long enough to celebrate what God was doing in Fishersville, so we all came together for a time of sending and celebration. We wanted to look back on this day as being special. Pastor Matthew's heart and vision to reach the valley through church planting was essential."

Pastor Rob noted that "this celebration service was bigger than just one Sunday, and it was bigger than just us. We wanted everyone to see what God was doing all over the Valley."

As churches across the SBC of Virginia begin to plant more churches, it is anticipated that a movement of sending church celebrations and cultures of multiplication will point to efforts to reach the lost across all of Virginia. ■



Ministering to the world at home

"It was just another day of ministry for Church Planting Pastor Julio Peredo when he received an unexpected call requesting assistance for a migrant family."





Pastor Julio Peredo launched **Fellowship Community Church en Español** on Easter Sunday in the spring of last year. This launch was made possible through a partnership with **Fellowship Community Church** and the SBC of Virginia/Send Network Virginia family.

One morning in early November, Pastor Peredo received a call requesting assistance from a local ministry to assist a family. When he arrived, he met 25 people representing six family units that had come to the city of Salem from Columbia and Venezuela. The group had 13 adults and 12 children, ages 3-13. These families were fleeing from warfare and came to Virginia with little more than the clothing they wore. They were so thankful when a friendly face speaking their heart language arrived to help.

Over the next few days and weeks, Pastor Peredo and FCC en Español ministered to these families and helped meet their practical needs. Through a local ministry connection, they found housing; all lived together in a three-bedroom rental but had no furniture or beds to sleep in. Pastor Peredo helped them find the local grocery store and assisted them in

purchasing food to get them started in their new life in Salem.

The children also needed appropriate clothing and shoes for the time of year in Virginia and to attend school. The church came alongside this family and helped them get the clothes they needed. Bunk beds were built and mattresses were acquired. Within a few days, it was time for the children to be enrolled in the local schools. Pastor Peredo served as their translator to help the adults answer all the questions and complete the necessary paperwork. The need for vaccinations and medical checkups arose during the process, and Pastor Peredo assisted in that process too!

FCC en Español immediately adopted this family into their fellowship. These new friends arrived in Salem, Virginia, just before the Thanksgiving holiday. FCC en Español invited their new friends to a church Thanksgiving dinner and took food to their home afterward.

The families were invited to worship with the FCC en Español congregation on Sundays and have since participated regularly. Pastor Peredo and his new congregation are very thankful for the partnership from

the Anglo FCC campuses (a multi-site church in the Roanoke Valley). When asked about this church-wide support, Pastor Peredo shared that the excitement of serving these new friends started with our lead pastor. "From the moment we communicated this need, our lead pastor, Ken Nienke, reacted with great excitement. We had the church facilities at our disposal and the van to transport the people to their appointments and activities organized by the Spanish church."

One of the most exciting and encouraging aspects of this story is how God placed members of Fellowship Community Church in key places throughout the community, living out their faith as missionaries. Pastor Peredo shared that he encountered teachers, guidance counselors, and even principals who are part of the body at FCC. They were ready to serve and love the children and families through every part of their story. For instance, a school counselor gave Pastor Peredo some gift cards to local grocery stores to share with the families. When he thanked her, she said, "These actually came from Fellowship Community Church as part of their school adoption program!" All Peredo could say was, "Praise God!" ■

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Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in the hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:2 (NASB)

This Grace

When I was young in the faith, I often heard the word "grace" and understood its meaning as "unmerited favor." It is just that. But a deeper dive into what a believer has in grace reveals that it is so much more than unmerited favor.

The apostle Paul says we have obtained an introduction or given access to grace. The favor of grace defined by scripture is this: the merciful kindness by which God exerts His holy influence on a soul.

Wow! How rich is that? By definition, the effects of grace influence a yielded heart towards Christ (Ephesians 2:8). He keeps or protects a yielded heart and insulates it from the devil (John 17:15). He strengthens His child for the earthly journey of transformation and glorification. God's grace enables believers to increase their faith (James 1:2-4) to endure and persevere.

Grace is the ignitor that kindles the fire within a child of God to live out Christ-centered values or "good works" ordained by God (Ephesians 2:10).

A lot of biblical sustenance is available in "this grace" that is lovingly overwhelming and comforting when encountered as a lifestyle.

Are you experiencing grace daily? Is grace active and alive in you (Hebrews 4:12)? Have you been introduced to "this grace?" ■

Love you all!



Milton Harding

Prayer and Care Minister

✉ mharding@sbcv.org

Why Am I Proud to Be Part of the **SBC** of Virginia?

By Tyler Scarlett, Pastor-Teacher of Forest Baptist Church

The title says it all: *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. You may have seen that poem (or best-selling book) by Robert Fulghum. It begins, "Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate-school mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School."

Fulghum proceeds to dig up simple, sage advice from childhood that applies to adulthood. Buried in the middle of it all, there's this shining gem, "When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together."

That's not just great advice for kindergarteners; it's also great advice for Christians. Paul was aware of this. In 1 Corinthians 3:9, he wrote, "For we are God's fellow workers..." The book of Acts shows us how the early church learned to "hold hands and stick together." Cooperation

among Christians is not always easy, but it can be a force for good, both in doing good deeds and sharing the good news.

For that reason, I am grateful that our church is part of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). In our New Members class at **Forest Baptist Church** (FBC), we explain the SBC this way: We are a network of Bible-believing Baptist churches that work together for the Great Commission. The cornerstone of this effort is funneling our finances together through the Cooperative Program. On a regular basis, a percentage of our church offerings (for FBC, it is 12%) is sent to the state convention, which uses a portion of that money within the state for ministry. The state then sends the remaining portion to the national SBC to fund the International Mission Board (IMB), the North American Mission Board (NAMB), our seminaries, and more. We can do more together than we can alone."

We don't hide the fact that we're SBC. We also don't hide the fact that in Virginia, there are two networks of Southern Baptist churches. There is the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV—also known as "Virginia Baptists") and the

Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia (SBCV—also known as Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia).

At Forest Baptist Church, we are proud members of the SBCV. Why is that? Here are four reasons we continue to "hold hands and stick together" with others in the SBC of Virginia.

1. The SBCV is theologically conservative.

In the early 90s, there was a growing concern about the doctrinal trajectory among Virginia Baptists. Particularly, there were theological concerns related to such vital issues as biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and authority. What we believe will impact how we behave. As a church, we want to ensure God's word is read and spread to all our neighbors.

In September 1996, 158 churches across the Commonwealth began the SBCV. Today, more than 830 like-minded churches are cooperating within the SBCV. When originally organized, the leadership wanted to leave no doubt about where we stood doctrinally. Hence, our name says it all: "Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia." Now our network is more commonly known as



Tyler Scarlett



"SBCV," which indicates the Southern Baptist Convention of Virginia. Our state convention affirms, as our church does, the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, which means we are fully supportive of the SBC. That gives us confidence about who we are, what we believe, and how we will reach others for Christ together.

2. The SBCV is focused on evangelism and church planting.

One of the SBCV's core values is church planting. With so many lost people within the Commonwealth, there is a huge opportunity for reaching them right here. Each year, the SBCV allocates millions of dollars for church planting and evangelism efforts to reach our neighbors.

What does this mean? It means millions of dollars to help fund state missionaries and pastors starting churches, including ethnic church plants. The nations are among us, and the SBCV is committed to reaching them all.

3. The SBCV is fiscally responsible.

One of the most impressive aspects of our state convention is how every dollar is carefully designated for ministry, how every penny is accounted

for, and how every budget is balanced. I had the joy of seeing this firsthand, having served on the board of the SBCV for six years. The SBCV operates by the highest standards of financial excellence and integrity.

Furthermore, the SBCV was established and has maintained a 51/49 split with its finances. In other words, for every dollar that comes into the SBCV, 49 cents go to Southern Baptist work in Virginia, while 51 cents is sent to the national SBC effort. Every state convention was originally established under that 50/50 strategy. However, over the past decades, many state conventions have begun keeping more funding within the state, thus shortchanging the IMB, NAMB, and our seminaries. The SBCV has held to this worthwhile priority, and I have no doubt it will continue to do the same.

4. The SBCV has a decentralized organization model.

To talk about a "decentralized organization model" sounds like a bunch of boardroom workflow mumbo-jumbo. But, in all honesty, this is yet another appealing aspect of the SBCV. Rather than maintaining a large, centralized headquarters, the SBCV provides regional staff and resources from the Appalachian

foothills of the western end to the sandy beaches of Newport News.

When it comes to the Great Commission, a missional mindset trumps a bureaucratic one every time.

In a traditional state convention, those closest to the home base benefit the most. Rural churches, or those in a far-off corner of the state, can be overlooked. In contrast, the SBCV has divided Virginia into proportionate areas. Each area has its strategists, resources, gatherings, and support. This organization model allows all the churches, big and small, to be ministered to. It's a great way to bring ministry and the Gospel to the 8.6 million Virginians across our state.

Why am I proud that our church is part of the SBCV? I think the answer is obvious. We are privileged to be a part of a state convention that values what we value. At Forest Baptist Church, we prioritize the Bible, missions, stewardship, and disciple-making ministries. It's easy to see that the SBCV does too.

It's our joy and privilege to "hold hands and stick together" with others in this convention. How about you? ■



Residency Builder

PLANTING CHURCHES AND REACHING PEOPLE

Nearly 30 church leaders from across the Southeast region gathered at **Nansemond River Baptist Church** in Suffolk for a Residency Builder training event. Residency Builder training is aimed at helping church leaders identify and call out future church planters.

Josh Turner, director of church planting at the SBC of Virginia (SBCV), led the group through several interactive teaching sessions. Participants were challenged to think about how God had called them into ministry and how God might call men in their churches to pursue church planting. The next generation of church planters may be sitting in our pews. Some are not even Christians yet. But, we can stand firm in the knowledge that God is faithfully at work reaching and discipling through the local church.

"Churches planting churches." This motto has echoed through the SBCV offices since day one. Doyle Chauncey and other founding

leaders of the SBCV have woven multiplication and Gospel advancement through church planting into its very fabric. They prayed that God would move through our network of churches to support the work of churches planting churches. God continues to answer that prayer.

On Residency Builder training day, church plants (some don't even own property yet) and older, established congregations were in the room. Churches with gray hair, no hair, and dyed hair are planting churches and reaching people.

Will Langford, pastor of **Great Bridge Baptist Church** in Chesapeake, reflected on the event: "As an established church pastor, I was encouraged to see how God continues to work through the ministry of church planting. But I was also challenged and equipped to think about how God could use our church to plant more churches!"

God is using the SBCV's network of established and newly planted churches to send out future church planters. According to The Baptist Faith & Message 2000, "It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations" (Article XI). Church planting plays a critical part in our obedience to the Great Commission.

How is God using your church to identify, train, and send out future church planters? What if God was calling your church to be a multiplying church? SBCV will come alongside local churches and help them train and send church planting teams. Yes, with our founding fathers, we continue to say, "churches planting churches." ■

RESOURCE:

To learn more about Residency Builder Training, contact Josh Turner.

 jturner@sbcv.org

Ministry Wives Are Not Alone

In addition to the heartfelt worship, the passionate preaching, and the joy of connecting with brothers and sisters in the faith, one of the most enjoyable things at the 2023 SBC of Virginia Annual Homecoming is experiencing the unique perspective each year offers.

While beneficial to all women, the breakouts and dinner at **The Heights Baptist Church**, South Chesterfield, ensured that one area was not overlooked: ministry wives.

Whether the wife of a senior pastor, student pastor, worship leader, or other pastoral role, the life of a minister's wife is unique and challenging. The

SBCV Ministry Wives Team wants all pastor wives to know that they are not alone.

Rachel Lovingood, speaker at the women's dinner, encouraged the more than 100 women to strive to serve where God has placed them, and to use their gifts to bless others and point them to Christ.

As the mom of a college football player, Lovingood developed and led a prayer circle that grew from one university to several across the nation. The group was challenged to seek where the Lord would have them lead others to a deeper walk.

Both women's breakout sessions and the women's dinner were inspiring. The music by

Amy Stewart, a pastor's wife, was joyfully God-honoring.

The SBCV Women's Ministry Team is comprised of the Regional Leaders Team, Ministry Support Team, Ministry Wives, and the Hispanic Team.

From large events to smaller gatherings, the Women's Ministry Team strives to equip and inform all women to serve the Lord with joy, passion, and excellence. ■

RESOURCE:

If you have questions about the SBCV Women's Ministry, or if they can serve your church, contact Dolly Mink, team coordinator.



dmink@sbcv.org



Breaking Down BARRIERS

ESL

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Colonial Heights is always looking to see “where God is working and join Him.” Its leadership noticed the Lord bringing people from different cultures and languages into the church and community.

One such multi-generational family began to attend the church. The grandchildren spoke English, their parents spoke broken English, and their grandfather spoke very little English. Even with language barriers, the family regularly attended. This, and other church events, shed light on the growing number of internationals in the church community.

Pastor Joey Anthony shared, “We began to pray to see if the Lord would have us start an English as a Second Language (ESL) ministry, and over and over again, we felt the prompting to move forward.”

As the church prayed and promoted the possibility of starting an ESL ministry, the Lord affirmed His prompting by raising up a husband and wife to lead the ministry. Eventually, teachers and helpers were mobilized and trained through an ESL Basic Workshop resourced through the SBC of Virginia.

Mount Pleasant’s ESL ministry was launched in September 2023, and the response has been overwhelming.

Various levels of English classes are held on Wednesday nights during the church’s mid-week activities. Testimonies abound of how the Lord is working through the new ministry. ESL students attend Wednesday night dinners, bring their families on Sundays, and attend outreach events while teachers initiate Gospel conversations.

The church has welcomed internationals who otherwise may have never entered

the church building. ESL leaders and teachers are encouraged as they see the church take time to interact with the students. Trusting relationships are being built, and church members are being drawn to serve.

After getting to know some students, two church members became part of the ESL ministry team as teachers. An ESL “helper” expressed that God was leading her to move from helping to teaching a class. Increased interest and a growing number of students has prompted the church to host a second ESL Basic Workshop to prepare and train more volunteers.

As the first semester began to wind down, a potluck supper came about when the church canceled mid-week activities due to Thanksgiving. The ESL ministry wanted to maintain their class schedule, so the students were asked to bring a cultural dish to share.

Twelve ESL volunteers and 13 students sat down to a unique Thanksgiving feast. When Pastor Anthony went to bless the international meal, he was greatly impressed by the excitement among families from the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Palestine, Vietnam, China, Honduras, and Nicaragua. He walked away praising the Lord for His great work through the ESL ministry.

What nations have become your neighbors? Would you ask the Lord to open your eyes to see where He may be working and then obediently join Him? ■

Editor’s Note: From multi-lingual evangelism to church planting, the story of Gospel outreach continues on the next page. Please read how MPBC has decided to invest with the main goal to send!



RESOURCE:

The SBCV is here to help you with the next steps. For details, contact Cindi Melvin.

 esl@sbcv.org



Equipping and Preparing: Church Plant Residency

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church in Colonial Heights has always valued raising up leaders from within their congregation. Some of these leaders have been trained to serve in various capacities within their own church ministries. Others who sensed a call to full-time vocational ministry have pursued formal education in preparation for serving in local churches. However, an opportunity to raise up a church planter who was not part of their congregation—to mentor, equip, and send out—was a new endeavor Mount Pleasant happened upon organically.

Mount Pleasant's Senior Pastor Joey Anthony recalls meeting Andrew Cheatham at an SBC of Virginia (SBCV) Christmas Banquet and then again at a pastors' luncheon. This led to a friendship that would find them meeting together weekly in a mentor/mentee relationship. It was here that Pastor Anthony discovered Cheatham's heart for church planting.

At the time, Andrew Cheatham served as student pastor at neighboring **Swift Creek Baptist Church**. Following God's call, Cheatham resigned from the position in pursuit of becoming a church planter. Meanwhile, Mount Pleasant was prayerfully considering becoming a North American Mission Board (NAMB) Church Plant Residency Church. Pastor Anthony said, "And it was only natural for us to think of Cheatham as our first resident."

And so, for the next year, Mount Pleasant Baptist Church poured itself into Cheatham and his family. Pastor Anthony said, "We have given him time and space to grow, learn, and rest. We have allowed and encouraged him to speak and preach at other churches and cast the vision for those congregations to participate in the church planting movement. We have encouraged his development



The Cheathams, from Virginia to Texas | Mount Pleasant Baptist, Residency Church

through conferences, conventions, SBCV church planting workshops, and weekly meetings with our pastoral staff."

Joe Mayes, executive pastor of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, said the church planting residency is not just for the planter but also the local sending church.

"Yes, we were preparing Andrew, but Mount Pleasant was being prepared to plant a church outside our area and state." Pastor Mayes added, "Equipping and preparing to plant a church includes intense reading and studying, discipling, planning, and praying. This is not only a financial commitment but one that shows we're walking side by side in this church planting process. As we pray with and prepare Andrew for planting a church, the Lord has challenged us to have a blank check with our church and lives for the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Cheatham is so grateful for the investment Mount Pleasant has made in him, his family and soon to be church plant. He said, "They have afforded me the opportunity to take advantage of some of the best church planting training resources available.

I have read widely and interacted with incredible leaders and planters. I have attended NAMB gatherings, SBCV church plant training, met with local church planters, listened to the church planting podcasts, participated in a church planting masterclass, and received coaching from seasoned church planters."

Cheatham added, "The church pastoral staff have given me time to ask questions and share my fears and dreams. They have prayed with and for me and affirmed the work God is doing in Irving, Texas. From prayer walking the area to naming the church plant, *Valley Ranch*, they assured me that we are not alone in this endeavor. Our time at Mount Pleasant has reminded us of God's faithfulness, filled us with courage, and prepared us for the next step of obedience."

Mount Pleasant Baptist Church commissioned the Cheathams on March 3rd for their new assignment in Texas. But they are not alone. Pastor Anthony says, "The residency officially continues for six months while the Cheathams are transitioning in the field." ■

Hispanic Churches Involved in INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

Latin America was blessed to receive Southern Baptist missionaries decades ago. These men and women, faithful to their calling, left their homes and arrived in countries where the Catholic religion was practiced and where the indigenous culture was influenced by African traditions and religious practices. God used these missionaries greatly, leaving a legacy of preaching the Gospel, making disciples, and establishing churches.

Immigration from the southern border in the last 40 years has grown considerably; nearly 62 million Spanish-speaking people live in the United States.

Annel Robayna is the Hispanic church mobilization strategist of the International Mission Board (IMB), and he estimates that there are approximately 3,390 Hispanic churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. According to Robayna, spiritual awakening has begun by going beyond their neighborhoods, cities, and states to start new churches in other parts of the world. From these Hispanic churches, 70 missionaries have been sent outside the borders of the United States.

The Spanish-speaking Baptist churches' interest in going on short- or long-term missions is increasingly evident. Robayana said that the Latin Generation Z has expressed their

desire to participate in something more significant. According to their research, this generation of Hispanics is more multicultural than the first generation of immigrants.

God is using the Southern Baptist Convention to provide Spanish training and statewide events such as the Enlace Global from Movilización Hispana, which is led by Pastor Diego Fernandez of **Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva** in Richmond. The purpose of Enlace Global is to raise awareness and mobilize Hispanic churches to commit to going to unreached places in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and a few non-Spanish-speaking ethnicities in Latin America.

Churches that are part of the SBC of Virginia family are already supporting Latino missionaries on those continents, as is the case of **Herndon Bible Church** (Pastor Jorge del Cid), Herndon, and **Iglesia Biblica Gracia Eterna** (Pastor Jose Mazariago) Dumfries in Northern Virginia; they are supporting a missionary of Salvadoran origin in Normandy, France, where he is working to reach refugees arriving from the Middle East and Africa. **Iglesia Bautista Spotswood** in Fredericksburg, Virginia, provides remote coaching to a Latino missionary in Lebanon



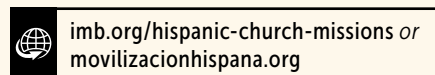
"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19)

each week; the goal is also to equip this missionary to make disciples among refugees because of the war in Syria. **Iglesia Campo Blanco** (Pastor Jefferson Hernandez) in Sterling, Virginia, sends monthly offerings (apart from the Cooperative Program giving) to countries like India and to a missionary helping those displaced by guerrillas and drug cartels in the mountain of Colombia.

Hispanic churches are experiencing accelerated multiplication and rapid growth, and at the same time, a greater understanding of international missions worldwide has been observed. We see a hopeful future for the second and third generations of Hispanics that God is calling to go to the nations like Acts 1:8 says, "In Jerusalem, Judea, and to the ends of the earth." ■

RESOURCE

To learn more about international missions, go to:



Iglesias Hispanas Se Involucran En MISIONES INTERNACIONALES

América Latina tuvo la bendición de recibir, décadas atrás, a misioneros de la Convención Bautista del Sur. Estos hombres y mujeres, fieles a su llamado, dejaron sus hogares llegando a países en los que se practicaba la religión católica cuya cultura indígena tuvo gran influencia a través de sus prácticas religiosas y tradiciones africanas como el vudú y la santería. Dios usó, inmensamente, a estos misioneros que dejaron un legado de predicación efectiva del evangelio, que hicieron discípulos y establecieron nuevas iglesias.

En los últimos 40 años la inmigración, desde la frontera sur ha crecido considerablemente contando con casi 62 millones de personas de habla hispana que ahora viven en Estados Unidos.

Annel Robayna es el estratega de movilización de las Iglesias Hispanas de la Junta de Misión Internacional IMB (International Mission Board). Estima que hay, aproximadamente, 3,390 iglesias hispanas pertenecientes a nuestra Convención Bautista del Sur donde se ha originado un despertar espiritual que ha impactado más allá de sus barrios, ciudades y estados, logrando plantar nuevas iglesias en otras partes del mundo. De estas iglesias hispanas se han enviado 70 misioneros fuera de las fronteras de Estados Unidos.

Es cada vez más evidente el interés que tienen las iglesias bautistas de habla hispana por ir a misiones de corto o largo plazo. Annel dijo que la Generación Latina Z ha expresado su deseo de participar en algo más grande y significativo. Según su investigación esta generación de hispanos

es más multicultural que la primera generación de inmigrantes.

Dios está usando nuestra Convención Bautista del Sur (SBC) para brindar capacitaciones en español y proporcionar eventos a nivel estatal como el Enlace Global de Movilización Hispana dirigido por uno de los pastores hispanos de nuestra convención estatal, Diego Fernández de la **Iglesia Bautista "Vida Nueva"** en Richmond. El propósito de Enlace Global es crear conciencia y movilizar a las iglesias hispanas para que se comprometan seriamente a ir a lugares no alcanzados como Asia, Medio Oriente, África y algunas etnias no hispanohablantes en América Latina.

Las iglesias que forman parte de la gran familia de la Convención Bautista del Sur de Virginia (SBCV) ya están apoyando a misioneros latinos en esos continentes siendo el caso de la **Iglesia Bíblica Herndon** (Pastor Jorge del Cid), Herndon, y la **Iglesia Bíblica Gracia Eterna** (Pastor José Mazariago) Dumfries en el norte de Virginia están apoyando a un misionero de origen salvadoreño en Normandía, Francia, donde está trabajando para llegar a los refugiados que llegan del Medio Oriente y África. La **Iglesia Bautista Spotswood** en Fredericksburg, Virginia también está brindando capacitación remota y semanal a un misionero latino que se encuentra en Líbano, equipándolo para que haga discípulos entre los refugiados debido a la guerra en Siria. La **Iglesia Campo Blanco**, en Sterling, Virginia (Pastor Jefferson Hernandez), envía ofrendas mensuales (adicional



"Id, pues, y haced discípulos a todas las naciones, bautizándolos en el Nombre del Padre, del Hijo y del Espíritu Santo" (Mateo 28:19).

al programa cooperativo) a países como India y a un misionero que está ayudando a los desplazados por guerrillas y carteles de la droga en las montañas de Colombia.

Las iglesias hispanas están experimentando una multiplicación acelerada, un crecimiento rápido; observando, al mismo tiempo, una mayor comprensión de las misiones internacionales alrededor del mundo. Vemos un futuro esperanzador para la segunda y tercera generación de hispanos que Dios está llamando para ir a las naciones como dice Hechos 1:8 "En Jerusalén, Judea y hasta los confines de la tierra". ■

RECURSO

Para obtener más información sobre misiones internacionales, visite:



imb.org/hispanic-church-missions y
movilizacionhispana.org

From the Editor



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KNOW *Prayer* KNOW *Peace*

I was listening to a podcast recently, and the preacher quoted Erma Bombeck. She was a little before my time, but I remember hearing about her. This caught my attention because it was focused on worry.

"I worry about scientists discovering that lettuce has been fattening all along," Bombeck wrote.

Pretty funny! I sure hope that doesn't happen. But this next one made me think.

"Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere," she wrote.

I remember when I was a little boy, my mom told me that the doctor said, after doing whatever childhood tests they do, that I would grow taller than 6 feet. I thought that was cool and started looking forward to that day. Little by little, I grew, but at a certain point, I stopped—short of the predicted height. I kept waiting and wondering and, yes, even worried about it. I thought a growth spurt was bound to come. But it never did.



You know, Jesus mentioned this in the sermon on the mount when, in Matthew 6:27, he said, *“Can any of you add a single cubit to his height by worrying?”* I can personally testify that the answer to that is definitively NO!

Another version reads, *“Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?”* The master teacher, of course, nails the point.

But how can we fight against the all too easy and prevalent sin of worry? If Jesus tells us not to worry as He does a few verses later in Matthew 6:34—*“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”*—there must be something we can employ to stop it.

And there is. The answer is actually found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, which centers around two things: prayer and thanksgiving.

“Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-8).

Did you know a recent National Institutes of Health study (November 2022) entitled, *‘Unpacking the Relationship between Prayer and Anxiety,’* found that just the very **act of prayer** has been found to lead directly to lower heart rate, reduced muscle tension, and slower breathing rate? Isn’t God so good to give us a blessing in the very act

of prayer on top of the answers that come from Him? Not only is it spiritually healthy, but it’s also physically healthy and restoring.

But it doesn’t stop there. When we combine praying with thanksgiving, the true peace—peace that passes understanding—comes along and sets up a guard outside our hearts and minds.

Charles Billingsley, the teaching pastor at **Thomas Road Baptist Church** in Lynchburg, recently preached about this topic. He shared three points that bring this home:

- Anxiety cannot exist where there is gratitude.
- Worry and worship cannot inhabit the same space.
- The more grateful you are—the less anxious you are.

This is the very reason why the SBC of Virginia is focusing on prayer. We know that prayer is not just important; it is essential. And when we pray with thanksgiving, we see God move in our communities, our churches, and in our hearts. Throughout the first two months of 2024, we have held pastor prayer gatherings in every region of Virginia. Hundreds of people have attended these prayer gatherings. We pray hundreds more will come to future prayer meetings.

And we know, by faith, that by making prayer a priority, we will see God move in ways we’ve never seen before. Now, that’s more exciting than even growing to 6-feet tall! ■



MARCH

- 2 & 9** Kids Ministry Conference | (2) *Swift Creek BC, Midlothian* / (9) *Franklin Heights Church, Rocky Mount*
- 8 & 9** Women's Conference with Kelly Minter | *The Heights BC, South Chesterfield*
- 3–10** Week of Prayer for North American Missions & Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
- 9 & 23** Noble Warriors Men's Conference | (9) *Roanoke* / (23) *Richmond*
- 11–14** Enlace Global—Retiro de Misiones | *International Learning Center*
- 16** ICS/IMT Training—Admin & Logistics | *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*
- 17** Church Planting Emphasis Sunday
- 18–20** Evangelism Summit: Advancing the Movement w/ JJ Washington | *Colonial Heights, Fredericksburg, Roanoke*

APRIL

- 6** ICS/IMT Refresher Training | *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*
- 7** Baptism Sunday
- 16–18** Seminary for a Day | *offered regionally*
- 25 & 26** DR Chaplain Training—Assisting Individuals in Crisis | *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*
- 27** ICS/IMT Training—Planning | *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*

MAY

- 2** National Day of Prayer
- 4** Equip Women's Conference | *Kempsville BC, Virginia Beach*
- 11 & 25** Companerismo | (11) *Central* / (25) *Southeast*
- 18** DR Basic, Advanced and Chaplain Training | *Swift Creek BC, Midlothian*
- 31** Worship & Technology Conference | *Liberty University, Lynchburg*

JUNE

- 9–13** Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) | *Indianapolis*
- 10** SBCV Dessert Fellowship at SBC | *Indianapolis*
- 17–21** Student Fusion Mission Camp | *Central*
- 22** ICS/IMT Training—Operations | *Ministry Support Center, Glen Allen*

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