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MWBC's 35th annual meeting

'Give a helping hand'

By David Williams

Bloomington, Minn. — With a theme of "Give a Helping Hand," messengers from churches gathered Oct. 26-27 at Southtown Baptist Church in Bloomington, Minn., for the 35th annual meeting of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Chris Reinertson, pastor of the host church, welcomed the messengers by reading Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, a passage that emphasizes the importance of working together and doing life together. Citing more than 200 churches in the MWBC and the 48,000 churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, Reinertson said, "May the MWBC annual meeting remind you that you are not alone."

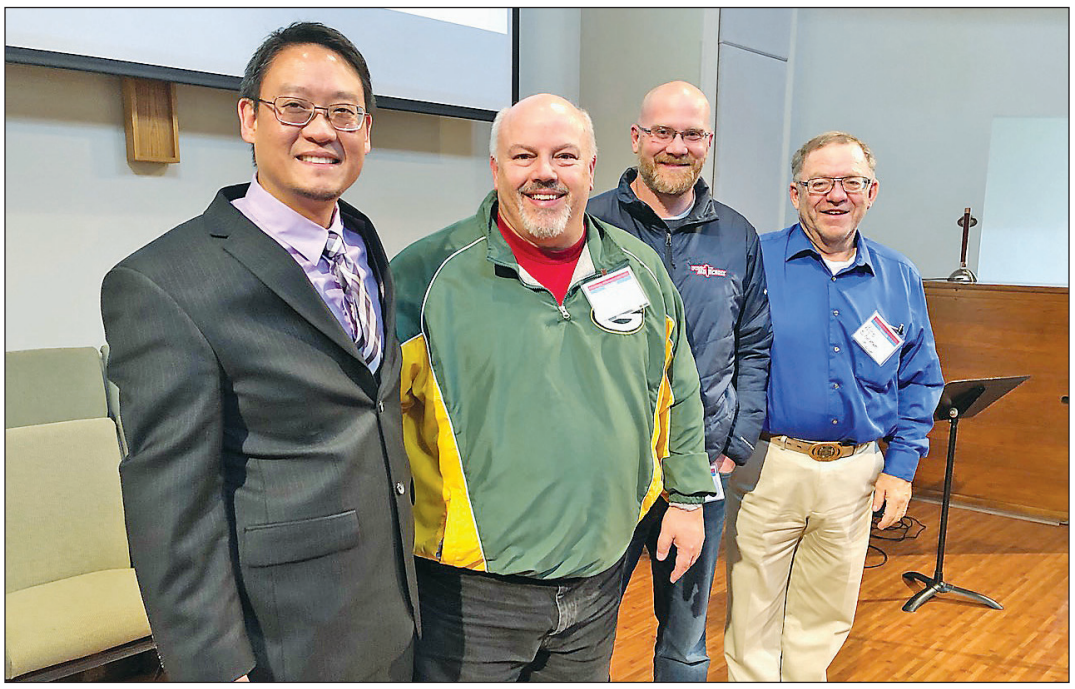
INSIDE: Photos from MWBC's annual meeting. *Pages 6-7.*

The annual meeting registered 70 messengers from 40 of the convention's 204 churches. Including 36 guests, total attendance was 106.

Messengers once again increased the percentage of Cooperative Program gifts forwarded to the SBC, this time from 32 percent to 35 percent. They approved a 2017 budget of $1,459,075, a .7 percent increase over the 2016 budget of $1,448,770.

MWBC anticipates receiving about 37.7 percent of its budget – $550,000 – from the churches through the Cooperative Program. Other sources of income include the North American Mission Board, LifeWay Christian Resources, special missions offerings and interest.

Of the money received through the Cooperative Program, MWBC will forward 35 percent ($192,500) to the Southern Baptist Convention. For several years MWBC has been increasing the percentage forwarded to SBC. The percentage was 32 percent in the current 2018 budget, 22 percent in 2017, 20 percent in 2016, and 17 percent in 2015.



Elected as officers of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention are, left to right: president, Chris Heng, pastor, Twin City Hmong Baptist Church, St. Paul, Minn.; first vice president, Bob Stine, pastor, Midvale Baptist Church, Madison, Wis.; second vice president, Jonathon Woodyard, pastor, Northfield Community Church, Northfield, Minn.; and recording secretary, Wes Shemwell, member, Midvale Baptist Church, Madison, Wis.

New officers elected include president, Chris Heng, pastor, Twin City Hmong Baptist Church, St. Paul, Minn.; first vice president, Bob Stine, pastor, Midvale Baptist Church, Madison, Wis.; and second vice president, Jonathon Woodyard, pastor, Northfield Community Church, Northfield, Minn. Also nominated for second vice president was Paul Springer, Jr., pastor, Northwest Baptist Church, Wautosa, Wis. Woodyard received 19 votes and Springer received 14 votes.

Re-elected were: recording secretary, Wes Shemwell, member, Midvale Baptist Church,

See 'Meeting,' Page 9

Opioid crisis emerges as key W.Va. Baptist ministry

by Ken Walker

SCOTT DEPOT, W.Va. — Soon after West Virginia Baptists passed a resolution in November 2017 urging churches to get involved in addressing the opioid crisis, the state's Upper Ohio Valley Baptist Association started preliminary planning for a Celebrate Recovery group.

After five months of leader training, an interdenominational group of churches in the Moundsville area hosted their first Celebrate Recovery meeting in early September.

Ed Goodman, the association's director of missions, helps lead a men's discussion group on Tuesday evenings and a small men's group on Monday nights. The latter involves participants working their way through Celebrate Recovery's eight biblically-based steps.

"There's a great need here," Goodman said. "When we were doing a community forum, I told people I wasn't involved in Celebrate Recovery to see people set free from addiction. I was involved for the purpose of seeing people come to Christ. Addiction is just a symptom of a deeper sin problem."

INSIDE: Trump signs $6B bill to 'end the scourge' *Page 11*

Bill Henard, executive director of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists, said such reports are becoming more common as the one-year mark approaches.

In the resolution, messengers dedicated themselves to an "active, gospel involvement in the effort to rid West Virginia of drug abuse" by "seeking partnerships with civil, religious, and government groups and agencies to discover effective ways to solve the drug abuse problem in our state, including, but not limited to, the provision of spiritual counseling, the elimination of poverty, the strengthening of families, the restoration of hope, and the sharing of the gospel."

The resolution further stated, "West Virginia has become the epicenter of opioid abuse, suffering from a rate of 33.5 drug overdoses per 100,000 people, compared to a national average of 13.4 deaths."

Fairlawn Baptist Church, which hosted the 2018 annual meeting, recently began working with a Parkersburg-based ministry called High on Hope.

Pastor Jason Spade said members are providing gasoline cards to enable clients to get to rehab appointments and preparing toiletry kits

See 'Crisis,' Page 2

Moving? *See page 4 (1105)*

Crisis

Continued from page 1

for men and women going into treatment.

There have been discussions about Fairlawn hosting a community Bible study for those in recovery, the pastor added.

"We had a High on Hope group come to the church in late September," Spade said. "The testimonies of what God brought them through were amazing. We have a lot of members with family who are having problems, so a lot of people are participating."

Among other efforts statewide Henard mentioned are Immanuel Baptist Church in Princeton working with women in the adult entertainment industry; members of Cross Lanes Baptist developing bonds with inmates at the Charleston Correctional Center; and First Baptist Church in Kenova hosting a Celebrate Recovery meeting.

While a progress report on the opioid response will be presented at the pastors' conference that kicks off the annual meeting, Henard said the effort is in its early stages.

With two new appointees due to join the convention's Christian Life Committee (CLC) at the annual meeting, Henard hopes to see additional progress soon.

"This past year has been a discovery time — how can our churches engage the community?" said Henard, who drafted the resolution with help from Ryan Navy, pastor of the Huntington campus of New Heights Church.

"Ryan has been figuring out ways to do this. We need to provide more strategies. One thing the CLC will be able to look at is how more established churches can address the crisis. The advantage Ryan's church has is the fact his people are young.

Alex, who is in recovery, is baptized by Brent Beckett, left, and Ryan Navy, two of the pastors of New Heights Baptist in Huntington, W.Va., as part of the church's ministry amid the state and city's opiod crisis.

"It's been slow the first year, but as we get information, the ball will roll more. There's hardly a church out there that doesn't have a family member or friend who's been affected by this."

New Heights Church has been a leader in reaching out to people recovering from addiction. A North American Mission Board plant, New Heights launched in 2014 in the neighboring town of Milton.

A year later, Navy and a core group of 20 moved to Huntington to start a second campus. The church gathers at Huntington High School on Sunday mornings and in 15 life groups throughout the week.

Two years after they started, Navy raised a critical issue during a deacons' meeting: Too many people in the congregation looked the same — young white adults from a middle-class background.

"We had a conversation about what we wanted our church to look like," said 27-year-old Navy, who is in his first pastorate. "The week after, we reached out to the director of a recovery program and said we'd love to come serve them. That's what got it going."

At a weekly gathering for participants in the program, New Heights' worship band provided the music, with a meal afterward served by members.

That created relationships that snowballed to the point that participants in seven different recovery programs attend Sunday morning services, Navy said. Three of New Heights' life groups meet in recovery homes.

All this activity helped swell New Heights' average Sunday morning attendance from 110 to 250 during the past year, Navy said, with newcomers spanning a cross-section of the area.

"It isn't just people in recovery, it's people who want to get involved," Navy said. "There are a lot of people in the community who see God moving and want to get involved as well. They've never been in recovery, but they want to bring solutions."

Among the newer members is Alicia Bowman, a care support specialist at Lily's Place, a facility in Huntington offering medical care to infants suffering from neonatal abstinence syndrome because of their mother's drug use.

Although at the time she lived in Charleston, Bowman made the 50-minute drive to Huntington after learning about New Heights through Facebook. After a bad experience previously at a church that she said emphasized rules and regulations instead of Christ's grace, Bowman is glad she found New Heights.

"The first time I went there I got a text two days later from Ryan asking, 'How can I pray for you today?'" Bowman said. "That's never happened at any church I had gone to before. The love he has for his congregation can be felt by every person who walks through the door."

It's that kind of love that will make the difference in people's lives, missions director Goodman said.

"I think West Virginia churches can have a great impact if they see the opioid crisis as a Gospel opportunity and are willing to partner with like-minded, Gospel-centered churches," Goodman said. "The Gospel is the answer. I think we have a unique opportunity. We possess the only answer to the opioid crisis." (BP)

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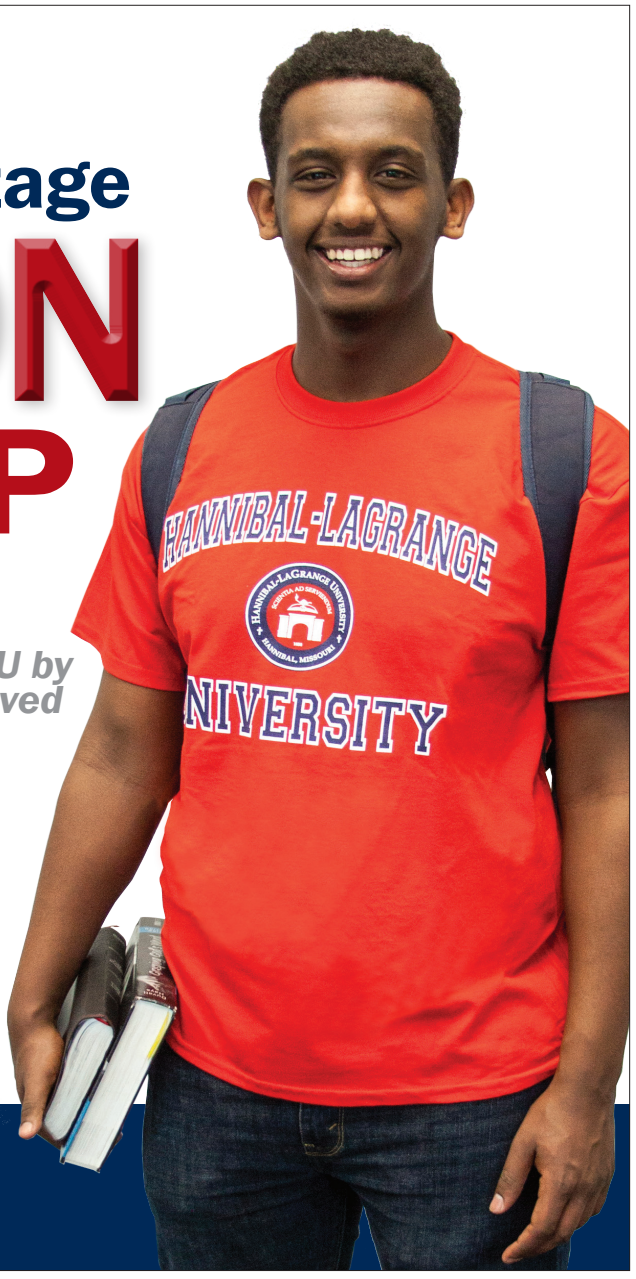

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For Ricky Skaggs, God's plan is personal, perfect

by Laura Erlanson

Above, Country Music Hall of Fame member Garth Brooks inducted his friend Ricky Skaggs into the storied institution during a special ceremony and concert Oct. 21.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — In October 2017, Ricky Skaggs found himself in Texas with nothing to do for a day, after a church canceled his scheduled appearance. He remembered a friend of a friend who lived in the area — someone Skaggs wanted to meet after the man had sent words of encouragement for Skaggs via text to the mutual friend. So, he made a few phone calls, and soon the country and bluegrass music star found himself in a stranger's home in Bertram, Texas.

After a brief exchange of pleasantries, the man said, "The Lord is giving you more fame to glorify His name.... This is the year that you'll go into the Country Music Hall of Fame."

Skaggs wrote the man's words in a notebook and even recorded the conversation on his iPad. The man made the prediction one year to the day before its fulfillment. Skaggs was inducted into the hallowed hall Oct. 21.

"You think that's a coincidence?" Skaggs asked in an interview with Baptist Press. "I don't. God never does anything in coincidences."

A longtime member of First Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., near Nashville, Skaggs believes God wants to be intimately involved in life's details.

"God is such a personal God. He loves the journey in our life, and He wants to walk with us, and He wants us to walk with Him."

Skaggs has seen God at work throughout his five-decade career, but never more than in the past year, when he was also inducted into the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame and the Fiddlers Hall of Fame.

"It's amazing to see what the Lord has done," he said. "God has been showing up and showing off."

From prodigy to prophet

Born in 1954, Skaggs began playing mandolin and singing in churches and stores around his hometown of Cordell, Ky., as a young child. Once when the great Bill Monroe came to town, the Father of Bluegrass Music asked "Little Ricky Skaggs" to join him on stage for a song, put his own mandolin around the youngster's neck and a career was born.

At age 7, Skaggs earned his first paycheck performing on the popular Flatt & Scruggs TV Show. He was playing for a living while still in his teens and was a recognized master of the genre by age 21.

In the late 1970s, Skaggs took the virtuosic musicianship and homespun subject matter found in bluegrass, added some Nashville sensibilities like piano, electric guitar and drums, and took country radio by storm. During the 1980s, he had 12 No. 1 country radio hits, won four Grammy awards and was named the Country Music Association's Entertainer of the Year (1985).

The 1990s and 2000s saw Skaggs start a record label, Skaggs Family Records, form his band Kentucky Thunder and return to his bluegrass roots. On his label, he's received 11 more Grammy awards (for a total of 15) for his own recordings as well as those he's produced.

These days, a concertgoer at a Ricky Skaggs and Kentucky Thunder show is as likely to hear a gospel song or a testimony as one of the artist's many hits. With his long, white hair and broad shoulders, Skaggs gives the impression of a modern-day John the Baptist come to prepare the way of the Lord.

But he's quick to say that he's not a "Christian musician."

"My work on the road is a marketplace ministry. I feel like Paul many times," Skaggs said. "Paul was not making Christian tents. He was a Christian making tents."

Skaggs was baptized at Holiday Heights Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., at age 21.

"I got saved when I was 13," Skaggs recalled. "But I really didn't grow as a Christian." An offhand remark from a relative after his salvation stunted him for some time.

When Skaggs was unable to describe how he felt about being saved, the family member said, "'Well you must not have got saved then, if you don't know how you feel,'" Skaggs recalled. "And that seed of doubt crept into my heart. And it wrestled me for a long time."

For several years, Skaggs said, "I was pretty void of the Word. I didn't have a whole lot to fight with." After struggling to read his family's big King James Version Bible, he was given an NIV translation by a friend. Soon, he wanted to recommit his life to the Lord and be baptized.

A dream realized

In a speech prior to placing a medallion around Skaggs' neck at the Oct. 21 induction ceremony, fellow hall of famer and superstar Garth Brooks recounted how Skaggs came to define country music in the 1980s.

"This was a breath of fresh air for everybody like me...." Brooks said, recounting how Skaggs' music influenced him as a young singer and songwriter.

He closed by declaring the "genius" of Skaggs and speaking directly to his friend on the front row.

"Remember, I'm going to school at Oklahoma State," Brooks told Skaggs. "I'm surrounded by geniuses. I've got PhDs every day for four years of my life.... And not one of them communicated with a 19-year-old boy. Never. But you? You spoke straight to me."

Country Music Hall of Fame Director Kyle Young then presented Skaggs with Bill Monroe's mandolin — the very instrument Skaggs had held almost 60 years earlier as a young child, removed from its glass enclosure in the adjacent museum just for the occasion. Skaggs led the audience in a rendition of "Will the Circle Be Unbroken."

'We have sinned'

Skaggs is not afraid to use his platform to call for prayer, revival and repentance, though his tactics have changed through the years. Early on, music industry insiders weren't sure how to take his outspokenness.

"That was a new paradigm for them," he said. "They were not used to that. They were not ready for that.

"I was like a kid with a butcher knife," he said. "I was young, and I was not mature. And I was letting people know I was saved.... And that they needed to be saved too."

For the last 20 years, having his own record label has allowed Skaggs to do things his way, including becoming involved in groups and events devoted to revival in America.

Skaggs likens modern-day America to the Babylon of Daniel's day and says what's needed is repentance and a return to the Bible.

Daniel, though seemingly blameless, Skaggs said, "humbled himself when he prayed and said, 'We have sinned.' Not them. Not 'they have sinned.' He said, 'We have sinned....' We have got to identify ourselves with the sins of the church....

"If preachers are preaching self-help, and five easy ways that your life can be better, and not preaching the unapologetic Word of God, I'm telling you.... A self-help book did not get me saved. The Word of God is what I heard that convicted my heart. And it still convicts me. It is the plumb line."

Despite the nation's challenges, Skaggs is hopeful for the future.

"God is a perfect God, and He has a plan for America. He hasn't lost His vision for the church. Our greatest days are not behind us. The great cloud of witnesses is praying for us and cheering us on. Wake up, stand up, look up."

(BP)

Ricky Skaggs, a member of First Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., sounded the shofar, a traditional Jewish call to worship, to begin the 2005 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville.

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Could your church use a change?

PERSPECTIVES

Leo Endel

Warning! 40 Days of Prayer could change your church.

This past week I went to Nevada to perform a wedding for my cousin. I love the old mining town that is Tonopah. I love climbing the mountains and taking the next generation of great nieces, nephews, and cousins to places they've never been before.

I admit I don't climb like I used to, and I suck a great bit of air when the elevation is 6,000 feet or more, but the cool mountain air, star-filled skies, and desert flowers always fascinate me.

The old church I belonged to when I was 10 was still going, but it was at a low ebb.

There seemed to be a cloud of discouragement in the congregation – good people who seemed concerned about their church's future. I have sensed the same thing in many of the places I've visited within our own two states.

My extended family, who don't attend church, commented about it.

My aunt was eager for me to visit one of the town bars with a great overview of the city. The "spirit" there was much more upbeat than at my former church. People were friendly to each other and to me, the outsider. They seemed interested in me, and quickly drew me into their circle.

I was struck by the contrast. The Cheers theme song played through my mind: "You want to go where everybody knows your name."

What would an outsider say after visiting your church? Would they sense discouragement or hope?

Would they sense a warm fellowship that really cares about one another? Would they hear laughter? Would they experience love?

Would they be drawn into the conversations and embraced? Would they sense your love for each other?

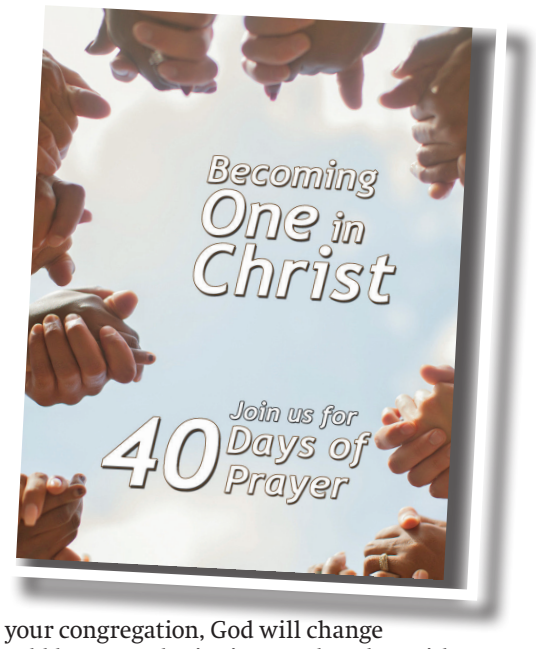
Would they say, "Wow! These people really care about and enjoy each other!"

All churches could stand to see some improvement.

Would you consider praying for a change in your church? This January we are encouraging you to join us for 40 Days of Prayer with an emphasis on the "one another" passages of the New Testament.

The prayer guides were distributed at the annual meeting and more are available to you and your church if you will just contact the MWBC office.

I really believe that if your congregation will join us on a prayerful journey through Scripture that is focused on the fellowship and unity of your congregation, God will change cold hearts and reignite our churches with a fresh movement of the Spirit of God.



Then, when outsiders visit your church, they will experience the supernatural love of the church and be drawn to its source, Jesus (John 17:23).

Leo Endel is executive director of the MWBC.

Fresh Ideas: Love your neighbor as yourself

FRESH IDEAS

Autumn Wall

We all know Jesus' command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and we're good at applying it to the people we go to church with, the people we enjoy being around, the people our kids spend time around.

But do you apply it to your literal neighbors, the people who live next door? Often we get caught up in going to do ministry that we miss the people we pass every day on our own street. Here are fresh ideas to seize those opportunities.

Know Them. Make a grid with nine boxes. Put your family name in the center box to represent your home. Now, fill in the names around your box of the neighbors in each house (next door, in front and behind, etc.). Don't know their names? Be intentional to find out and get to know them. Now that you know them, take time to pray for them by name every week.

Serve Them. Help them carry in a large item when you see they've come home with something new and need a hand. Surprise them by mowing their lawn, edging, shoveling snow from their driveway, clearing ice off their car, buying them a spring hanging plant for their porch.

Pay Attention. Do they have a new baby? Has a relative died? Is a child graduating? Be aware of the unusual seasons of life and take a gift or offer assistance in these challenging times.

Be a Safe Place. Do they have small children? Get to know the family enough that their kids would feel safe coming to your house in an emergency or if they accidentally get locked out.

Invite Them. It's easy to forget to invite these people we see every day into our church family. Invite them to your small group, Sunday worship service or special event happening in your church.

Befriend Them. The best way to get to know your neighbors is to do something with them. Throw a neighborhood cookout in your front or back yard and invite all the neighbors to come hang out. Invite everyone with instructions to "bring a side item to share and we'll provide the meat" invitation card.

Use Holiday Fever. Throw a Christmas open house. An Independence Day party. An Easter egg hunt. A New Year's Day lunch. A Halloween party. A National Pancake Day celebration. Choose your day to celebrate and optimize on the holiday fever to bring people together.

Whatever you do, make it your goal to know your neighbors so you can love them as yourself, just like Jesus commands.

Autumn Wall is an author, speaker, worship leader, pastor's wife and mother of three, living in Indianapolis.

When He comes

REFLECTIONS

Bill Tinsley

Beyond confessions of faith, hymns and sermons, the Second Coming of Christ seems to make little difference. We pursue our educations, work at our careers, raise our families, worry about retirement and prepare for the inevitable: death and taxes. In the meantime, the lives of believers and non-believers often show little marked difference other than church attendance.

But what if He comes today? What if He comes tomorrow?

What if He came yesterday?

No, I am not suggesting you missed the "rapture." But, He did, in fact, come yesterday and He will, in fact, come today. Jesus comes to us every day if we are looking for Him.

He comes in small, imperceptible and unexpected ways. He comes in the interruptions that beg for our attention and threaten to derail our pre-planned agendas.

This is exactly what Jesus taught His disciples before His ascension into Heaven.

Jesus said when He returns, "the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' ... 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me'" (Matt. 25:31-46).

Once He came to me in the person of a young Hispanic employee at Walmart who needed words of encouragement. He came in the form of a Chinese woman named Chiu who was fishing on a pier with her mentally handicapped daughter.

Another time He came in the form of a teen unwed mother who gave birth to a son who died days later. He came in the form of Sultan, Abdelmassa, Saud and Moath, four Muslim students recently arrived from Kuwait. How many times have I missed Him and failed to recognize Him? I don't know. He comes every day in many ways and forms that we are likely to miss if we are too focused on our own agendas.

If we live our lives alert and ready to receive Him every day in the small encounters with the "least of these" we will become salt and light, as Jesus described it. In the process, we will be ready to receive Him in that day when He appears like lightning from the east to west. We might even hear Him say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Bill Tinsley is a former executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention. Appearing in various local newspapers around the country, his column "reflects" on current events and life experiences from a faith perspective.

Answering the call when disaster strikes

Fall is such a wonderful time of the year ... but this year it has been an active season for disasters.

In Wisconsin the rains seem to have never let up. At the end of August, we responded to flooding in Reedsburg, LaValle, Ironton, and Rock Springs communities.

Our incident management, mud out, assessors, and feeding teams – along with teams from Illinois, Tennessee, and Texas – responded, completing 56 jobs.

In addition, we touched many individuals in these communities with the love of Christ. Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention church members, thank you for praying and going to help others in need after this disaster.

Just as what happened in October 2017 when Hurricane Harvey struck the Texas coast, this October we have destruction from two major disasters – Hurricane Florence in the Carolinas and Hurricane Michael in Florida and Georgia.

We are responding with feeding, mud out and chainsaw teams.

Pray for these teams plus others that are planning to go.

The loss of property and life is tremendous. It is hard for us to look at the destruction caused by these storms, wondering how we can be of help.

Let me suggest a few ways we can make a difference.

First, pray. All of us can pray for the victims of these disasters, first responders, and our disaster relief team leaders and volunteers responding from all over the country.

Second, if you are already trained, as soon as you receive an email alert on a disaster, let us know that you can respond. Then get ready to go.

Third, if you are not already trained, then get trained as soon as possible.

When there is a major disaster, that is the most difficult time for MWBC to provide training because of our active involvement in responding to the disaster.

So, don't wait for the disaster to come. Train between the disasters.

There will be training in both Wisconsin and Minnesota next year. Make time for training so you will be prepared to go provide help, healing, and the hope of Christ.

MINISTRY

Dave Wedekind

Dave Wedekind is ministry catalyst for the MWBC.

What legacy will we leave?

Recently I was blessed to represent the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention at a Global Missions Conference in San Antonio.

It's always great telling others about our wonderful churches and people here in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

While in San Antonio I was able to preach in the church I planted in San Antonio 28 years ago.

It warmed my heart to see not only members from those days, but also new faces.

The challenge I gave to them was taken from Acts 11:19-30, giving lessons from the Church at Antioch.

One of the lessons was that, when the hand of the Lord is upon His people, His people mature and reflect the Lord. Antioch is where His followers were first called "Christians."

This early church in Antioch did not have a long history of discipleship or the New Testament.

What they did have was a burning love for the Lord Jesus.

As they were discipled by Barnabas and Saul, they matured and reflected the life of the Lord within them.

This was such a part of their daily life, that all those around them took note of these people who followed the Lord Jesus Christ.

MINISTRY

Steve Dyess

Some historians believe that for them to be called Christians was a term of derision. Others believe that so many people saw this as the overwhelming passion of theirs, that it was merely a way of describing them.

Wouldn't it be wonderful that whenever the folks of whatever community our churches are located, they don't necessarily associate it with a location, but rather a passion for the Lord?

As we look back over the history of each of our churches, many wonderful stories of the hand of the Lord could be told. But, our Lord is not finished with us.

The church at Antioch lived as we do, with the common everyday occurrences. Some were more momentous than others, but their legacy is that they were first called Christians there.

What will be the legacy of your church in the coming years? What will be the enduring labor of your church for all of eternity?

Steve Dyess is state missions catalyst for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Structure of the church

Does a church design its structure or discover it?

In other words, should church leadership decide how to organize their church and what ministries to prioritize? Or should the make-up of the church determine its organization and priorities?

Church leaders face the challenge of leading the churches they serve with intentionality and a stewardship of their influence in their communities. This challenge causes leaders to ask: "What exactly and how specifically are we to obey the Great Commission in our community?"

Much leadership material recommends aligning the church strategically with its mission, vision, and values. This line of thinking suggests that the church's organization is something that can be determined and implemented.

A close reading of 1 Corinthians 12, however, reveals a repeated concept regarding the church: God is the one who decides what the church will be like.

Verse 6 (CSB) says "the same God produces each gift in each person." Verse 11 says that "one and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills." Verse 18 tells us that "God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted." Verse 24 declares that "God has put the body together." Verse 28 says, "God has appointed these in the church." This chapter repeatedly suggests that God has put people in the body of the church with a unique combination of gifts to express His will in a community.

Which is it? Do we determine or discover a church's organization and priorities? Allow me to suggest another possibility. The church is God's and God clearly places gifted people together in a congregation. The role of church leadership is to discover those gifts and lead the body to meaningfully fulfill her ministry. Church leaders do not determine the giftedness; however, they do develop the giftedness.

Scripture repeatedly affirms the command that believers are to grow in Christlike maturity. Whatever giftedness existing in the body at a point in time alerts the church leader to God's will for the church. The leaders can discern from that starting point a direction for the church's organization and development.

LEADERSHIP

Clint Calvert

Church leaders can always learn sound principles of organizational development and strategic planning. The mistake is in treating the church like any other organization. Since God builds the church, the church leader discovers and develops God's good gifts.

Clint Calvert is church leadership catalyst for the MWBC.

Fall is harvest time

As I drive through Minnesota and Wisconsin the last weeks of September and early October, I have been observing the harvest in progress.

Some fields have corn and soy beans still standing.

Some fields have combines and pickers in them, actively addressing the harvest. In some fields, the harvest is complete, and some of these have been disked and are ready for the next growing season.

Similarly, I have observed the spiritual harvest in progress in our states. Some churches are actively and effectively engaged in the harvest of souls.

Some churches are passively involved. Others are distracted from spreading the good news of Jesus Christ.

Some congregations seem oblivious to the mission given to the church.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible uses a farming metaphor: John 4:35 says "Don't you say, 'There are still four more months, and then comes the harvest'? Listen to what I'm telling you: Open your eyes and look at the fields, because they are ready for harvest."

We can also be challenged by Matthew 9:36-38: "When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.'"

And in a parable of a large banquet in Matthew 9, a challenge is verbalized to "go out to the roads and country lanes and compel the people to come in, so that my house will be full."

The spiritual harvest in Wisconsin and Minnesota needs laborers willing to do whatever it takes to communicate the love of God in a way that people can hear and understand.

The task will require time, compassion, prayer, and a sensitivity to the leading of God's Holy Spirit to address the diversity of the inhabitants in the upper Midwest.

The job will require an ability to see where God is at work and a willingness to join Him in it. The mission will entail the challenge to reach out into our communities to reach people different from ourselves.

PLANTING

Steve Melvin

The activity will stretch God's people and the local church, often beyond their comfort zone.

The assignment will take a work of God through the people of God to address the call of God to accomplish the plan of God in our two-state region.

My prayer is that the harvest will take place, not only in the fields of corn and soy beans, but also in our church fields.

Steve Melvin is the MWBC church starting catalyst.

Minnesota Wisconsin Baptist

Above, disaster relief volunteers Flo and Jim Kruse of St. Cloud encourage all M-W Baptists to get training now "because when the disaster comes you don't have time to get trained."

Right, Mike Fahey, retired pastor of Roseville (Minn.) Baptist Church, said, "Each of us is called to bear witness of Christ. It is the one thing, the only thing, we have to offer the world, and it is the one thing the world needs."

Above, Leo Endel, MWBC executive director, prays over pastors after delivering a message on the bibli encouraged churches to support their pastors and follow their leadership. Below left, Chris Phillips, yo the Oct. 12-14 Called Out youth conference in Wisconsin Dells had 146 in attendance. Below right, Cha shares with messengers how Builders for Christ helped construct the new facility at Jacob's Well in Ea not counting members of Jacob's Well. He said that through the past 25 years as many as 500-600 M- projects in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

"I'm not retired; I'm recycled," says Betty Lynn Cadle, long-time Minnesota-Wisconsin Woman's Missionary Union executive director who left the position 13 years ago and moved to South Carolina. She now ministers to seniors at her assisted living center, continues to travel and promote missions.

Pastor of Jacob's Well in Eau Claire, Wis., Paul Berthiaume tells pastors the measure of their preaching should be "lives being changed, lost being found, people being baptized."

Right, the three biggest problems we face in our culture today are perversion, prejudice and privilege, says Jackie Hill, MWBC president and pastor of Roseville (Minn.) Baptist Church. "There is only one solution," he said, "and His name is Jesus."

Don Delich, pastor of Bethel Baptist in Sunfish Lake, Minn., shares a devotional on "The Value of Trials" from James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 1:6-7, and Romans 5:3-5.
He said that trials are always unexpected, always purposeful, and always a blessing. He illustrated those points with a personal experience. During a baptismal service in August, Delich received a call that his house was on fire. "We don't welcome trials," he said, "but if we have trials, we are to realize that God sends them to us so that we might grow strong and develop character."

Far right, Jonathan Lemaster, pastor of Eagles Nest Baptist Church in Breezy Point, Minn., encourages M-W Baptists to participate in the June 22-28 Hands of Hope event to help River of Life Church in Portage, Wis.

cal role of the pastor. He spoke about pressures pastors face and uth pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Reedsburg, Wis., reports that arles Dunning, member of Valley Baptist Church in Appleton, Wis., u Claire, Wis. The volunteers included about 120 M-W Baptists, -W Baptists have volunteered with Builders for Christ, mostly on

Top left, Jerry Mugg was honored for more than two decades of service on the executive board of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Foundation. Top right, Ashley Choua of Rochester (Minn.) Hmong Baptist Church served as a disaster relief volunteer in Liberty, Texas, after Hurricane Harvey. "Be ready because you don't know when the next disaster relief will come," she said. Bricks purchased by M-W Woman's Missionary Union will be laid at the National WMU Building in Birmingham, Ala. to honor Leo Endel, left, MWBC executive director; Betty Lynn Cadle, center, retired M-W WMU executive director; right, Mycie Vue, founder of M-W Hmong WMU; and Jeanne Wedekind, MWBC disaster relief co-director, not pictured.

MWBC's church leadership catalyst, Clint Calvert shares discipleship resources that M-W Baptists could use as they seek to "think and act and be like Jesus."

When we live by faith in obedience to what God calls us to do, "you find that you are now a supernatural people in a supernatural church," says David Sundeen, dean of online studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

WMU Leadership Training **'Unshakable pursuit'**

The Sept. 21-22 Minnesota-Wisconsin Woman's Missionary Union leadership training in Milwaukee followed the WMU's annual theme of "Unshakable Pursuit; Chasing the God Who Chases Us."

Angel Vang of First Hmong Baptist Church in Coon Rapids, Minn., said the weekend left the attendees full of hope.

"People from all different walks of their faith and life were gathered together by the Holy Spirit," she said. "Women from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Mississippi were all present; what a beautiful melting pot of cultures and languages."

Brown Deer (Wis.) Church and Grace Point Church of Milwaukee hosted a Friday evening meal that was followed by intimate testimonies, fun activities, and fellowship.

"It allowed old friends a chance to catch up as well as new friends a chance to get connected with new sisters in Christ," Vang said. "Everyone was reminded to stay focused and spread the love of Jesus."

The leadership training took place at Layton Avenue Baptist Church in Greenfield, Wis., on Saturday after a delicious lunch prepared by their members. Grace Point Church band kicked off the main session with powerful praise and worship in the sanctuary.

After the main session, women attended breakout sessions led by WMU leaders from Jackson, Miss. They chose three sessions from the following:

1. WMU For You – Cindy Townsend and Beth Fike
2. Crafting His Way – Betty Kinchen
3. Leadership Team Building / Personalities / Etc. – Mitzi Norris
4. Praying for Missions – Karen Crowe
5. My Missions Story / Discipleship – Lori Spikes and Libby Walden
6. WMU Ministries, BNF; Pure Water, Pure Love; CWJC/CMJC; World Crafts; Project Help – Lori Spikes and Libby Walden

Minnesota-Wisconsin Woman's Missionary Union leaders gather to pray over WMU leaders who came from Jackson, Miss. to train them.

"The leaders did a great job applying God's message of Unshakable Pursuit to each topic," Vang said. "These leaders didn't just teach a class; they shared their passion with emerging WMU leaders. Their words oozed with God's love and warmed the hearts of all that heard it."

Everyone was encouraged to continue to seek the glory of God and many felt the call to lead others, she said.

"The opportunity to experience God's love in action that weekend was such a blessing," she said. "I've learned that even if you do not know what God's calling is for you or if you're just too afraid to try, God is patient and His grace is sufficient. I didn't feel ready to serve but God doesn't need you to be fully ready and fully certain; He needs His people to be willing to 'just go.'"

The training ended with dinner prepared by the Hispanic church.

"Everything that took place that weekend — meals, hosts, praise and worship, and teachers — were all examples of God's love through the service of His believers," Vang said. "God's glory was shown through all who contributed their time and resources to the training. As long as we are obedient, He will be able to use us for his glory. So, go on, live unshaken and chase after the God that chases you."

OBITUARY: **Rev. Byron Epps. 88**

Cookeville, Tenn. — Byron Epps, founding pastor of Valley Baptist Church in Appleton, Wis., and former director of missions of Lakeland Baptist Association, died Sept. 3, 2018, in Cookeville, Tenn. He was 88.

Services were Sept. 9 at Dyer Funeral Home in Cookeville, with Rev. Scott McKinney officiating. Burial took place at Foster Cemetery in Sweetwater, Tenn.

Epps was born May 9, 1930, in Panola County, Mississippi and was the eighth of nine children born to the late Samuel Edward and Jennie Ruth Duke Epps.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his wife of 63 years, Albertine "Tine" Kyker Epps; five sisters, Ella Ruth Young, Evelyn Epps, Jewell Harwood, Mildred Baird Boston, and Maxine Bowd; and three brothers, Ed Epps, James David "JD" Epps and Clifford Epps.

Epps was a minister of the gospel ordained Dec. 31, 1950, by the Pilgrims Rest Baptist Church, Batesville, Miss. After high school, he studied at Union University, Jackson, Tenn., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas.

He was founding pastor of two churches – Valley Baptist Church, Appleton, Wis., in 1962, and West Des Moines Baptist Church, West Des Moines, Iowa in 1974.

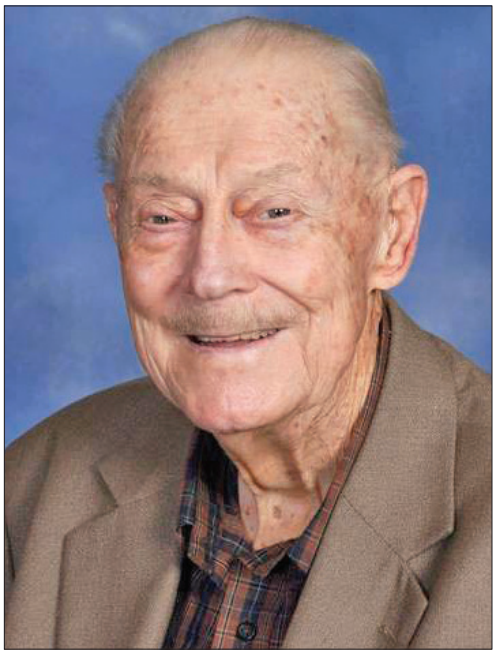
In addition, he served as pastor or associate pastor of nine churches.

In 1988, he and Tine were commissioned as missionaries of the Metropolitan Missions Department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and he became director of missions of Lakeland Baptist Association until his retirement in 1996.

After retirement, he did a transitional interim pastorate at Midvale Baptist Church, Madison, Wis., for two years before returning to Tennessee where he pastored University Heights Baptist Church in Cookeville for three years.

Missions was Epps' passion and he continued to be involved until his death, remaining active at First Baptist Church, Cookeville, where he had previously served 10 years.

Survivors include his children, Emily Varela (David) of Gainesboro, Tenn., David Epps of Prescott, Ariz., and Karen Miller (Bob) of Huntsville, Texas; and grandchildren, Armando, Briana, Victor, Isabel, Rebeka, Moshe, Natanyah, and Giliyah Varela of Gainesboro; Rochelle and Keaton Epps of Cortez, Colo.; and Dima and Desirae Miller of Huntsville.



Rev. Byron Epps

Minnesota Wisconsin Baptist Convention Cooperative Program Receipts YTD 2018

January-September Received $433,592.16
January-September Budget $408,000.00
Over Budget 2018 ..... $25,592.16

COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

CP - Cooperative Program

Name ..... CP

BAY LAKES BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Amherst, Amherst Bible Church $400.00
Appleton, Appleton Hmong $3,928.50
Appleton, Hmong Baptist Mission $638.22
Appleton, Valley $32,413.09
Ashland, Eagle Wings Fellowship $50.00
Black Creek, Community Bible $4,081.00
Clintonville, First Baptist Church $1,740.65
Green Bay, Bethel $1,000.00
Green Bay, Graceway Fellowship $4,922.64
Green Bay, Highland Crest $56,022.26
Manitowoc, New Beginnings $612.25
Neenah, Living Vine Church $1,216.85
Sheboygan, Mapledale Baptist $3,022.70
Tilleda, Bethany Baptist Church $1,561.00
Waupaca, Fellowship Baptist $1,430.30
BLBA TOTAL $113,039.46

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION

Janesville, Resonate Church $3,305.96
La Crosse, New Hope $350.00
La Crosse, Three Rivers Fellows $1,385.40
Madison, Campus Community $800.00
Madison, Casa De Oracion $73.00
Madison, East Madison Baptist $4,595.00
Madison, Hope In Christ Assembly $1,921.04
Madison, Midvale Baptist Church $7,539.63
Madison, Red Village $5,000.00
Madison, Sovereign Joy Baptist $2,371.21
Muscoda, Blue River Valley $964.41
Platteville, Rolling Hills $3,115.86
Portage, River of Life $1,857.55
Reedsburg, Trinity Baptist Church $12,750.02
Sparta, Gospel Baptist Church $2,837.21
Sun Prairie, United Hmong $1,336.51
Whitehall, Mision Bautista Hispana $398.62
WI Dells, Rock of Hope $3,133.52
WI Rapids, Church at Wazeecha $2,640.48
WI Rapids, First Baptist Church $400.00
SWBA TOTAL $56,775.42

LAKELAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Bassett, Westosha Baptist Church $1,321.00
Franklin, Emmaus Fellowship $600.00
Greenfield, Layton Avenue Baptist $11,017.17
Kenosha, Fellowship Baptist $18,311.69
Kenosha, Missio Dei Fellowship $6,252.00
Kenosha, Parkside Baptist Church $5,477.30
Milwaukee, Ephesians Baptist $1,348.00
Milwaukee, Ethnos Church $1,918.42
Milwaukee, Grace Point Community $230.04
Milwaukee, Iglesia Bautista Nueva $310.00
Milwaukee, Korean Baptist Church $900.00
Milwaukee, Mercy Memorial $700.00
Milwaukee, Monumental Baptist $2,608.00
Milwaukee, Mt Horeb Baptist $450.00
Milwaukee, Mt Pilgrim Miss. $1,500.00
Milwaukee, Northwest Baptist $11,304.42
Pewaukee, Crossroads Church $3,468.05
Pl. Prairie, Pleasant Prairie $5,623.04
Racine, Hope Commnuity Church $5,160.90
Racine, Immanuel $6,287.30
LBA TOTAL $84,787.33

TWIN CITIES METRO ASSOCIATION

Amery, First Baptist $10,800.00
Bloomington, Southtown Baptist $8,281.83
Brooklyn Park, Ebenezer Community $300.00
Brooklyn Park, North Center Baptist $4,150.51
Brooklyn Park,Vietnamese Baptist $540.00
Burnsville, Church of the Way $400.00
Burnsville, Crystal Lake Road $1,485.15
Burnsville, Richfield Bible Church $2,700.00
Coon Rapids, First Hmong $2,250.00
Eden Prairie, Hope of Nations Fellowship $208.75
Edina, Grace in the City $1,759.38
Elk River, Glory of Christ $1,235.00
Fridley, Good News Hmong $250.00
Maple Grove, Northwood Community $1,500.03
Maple Grove, Unlock Church $3,698.79
Minneapolis, All Peoples Church $108.00
Minneapolis, Grace in the City $485.20
Minneapolis, Gracepoint Minneapolis $900.00
Minneapolis, Jacob's Well $1,849.29
Minneapolis, Risen Church $2,586.81
Monticello, First Baptist Church $687.46
New Prague, Calvary Church $16,667.46
Northfield, Northfield Community $10,045.32
Oakdale, Eternal Life Hmong $1,812.00
Oakdale, Gospel Hmong $473.88
Roseville, Iglesia Bautista Nueva $300.00
Roseville, Roseville Baptist Church $4,000.00
Shakopee, River South Bible Church $4,135.44
St. Paul, Followers Of Christ Hmong $2,806.00
St. Paul, Hmong Hope Community $250.00
St. Paul, Hope of Nations Gospel $409.30
St. Paul, Iglesia Hispana Betel $650.00
St. Paul, Kang Nam Korean Church $400.00
St. Paul, Salt City Church $10,522.59
St. Paul, Twin City Hmong $1,400.00
Sunfish Lake, Bethel Baptist Church $4,800.00
TCMBA TOTAL $104,848.19

NORTHWOODS BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Badger, Badger Baptist Church $516.59
Brainerd, Ch on the Wise Rd $2,097.00
Breezy Point, Eagles Nest $3,304.40
Cambridge, Cross Pointe Church $2,250.00
Crookston, Prairie Community $5,918.44
Ely, Berean Baptist $560.00
Grand Rapids, Calvary Pines $2,028.23
Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids $104.64
Hill City, Hill City Baptist Church $400.00
Rice Lake, Hope Baptist Church $3,666.00
Roseau, Immanuel Baptist Church $2,061.43
Superior, Lake Point Church $387.92
Thief River Falls, Cornerstone $850.00
Warroad, Westside Baptist $213.95
NWBA TOTAL $24,358.60

PIONEER/WESTERN ASSOCIATIONS

Austin, Primera Iglesia Bautista $1,930.43
Austin, Austin Baptist Church $662.40
Chester, Chester Woods Community $1,347.76
Mankato, Hope Baptist Church $1,524.68
Marshall, Radiant Life Church $2,874.67
Red Wing, Hiawatha Valley Baptist $1,070.30
Rochester, Emmanuel Baptist $15,071.95
Rochester, Joyful Hope Baptist $135.00
Rochester, Redemption City $4,167.99
Rochester, Rochester Hmong $1,635.00
Sartell, Park Fellowship $4,139.64
Viola, Viola Bible Church $2,176.30
Willmar, Grace Baptist Church $75.00
Winona, Cornerstone Community $4,178.51
PWBA TOTAL $40,989.63

OTHER

Eau Claire, Jacob's Well $6,300.00
Eau Claire, One in Christ Church $2,493.53
OTHER TOTAL $8,793.53

MWBC TOTAL CP RECEIPTS $433,592.16

NOTE: No giving has been received from MWBC-affiliated churches not listed above.

Meeting

Continued from page 1

Madison, Wis.; and assistant recording secretary, Jim Gress, member, Southtown Baptist Church, Bloomington, Minn.

Two staff changes were announced at the annual meeting:

* The 2019 budget includes a new intercultural catalyst staff position, currently filled by Na Herr. The new position is largely funded by the elimination of an administrative assistant position and Herr is also assuming that position's responsibilities.

* Steve Melvin, MWBC church starting catalyst, announced he is retiring from the position, funded by the North American Mission Board, at the end of 2018 after serving for 33 and a half years. Although he will no longer be employed by NAMB, Melvin said he will continue to work with MWBC in church planting and other areas. "I'll be able to focus on my three interests," he said, adding that they are "church planting, sky diving, and grandchildren."

In other action, messengers:

* Received a 40-day prayer guide written by MWBC leaders and were urged to use it beginning Jan. 1, 2019. The booklet is entitled "Becoming One in Christ" and focuses on the "supernatural unity that only Christ can bring" to the church, a unity which "demonstrates the truth of the gospel."

* Gave special recognition to Jerry Mugg who has served on the board of directors for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Foundation since its beginning in 1997 through 2018. Mugg is resigning from the board when his term expires this year.

* Heard reports from Southern Baptist entities including LifeWay Christian Resources, the North American Mission Board, the SBC Executive Committee, GuideStone Financial Resources, and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

* Received an update on a five-year partnership established at last year's annual meeting with the Missouri Baptist Convention. Rick Hedger, multiplying churches catalyst for the MOBC, said already 25 teams have come to help MWBC churches and others stand ready, usually responding to requests within two or three weeks.

* Learned of an invitation from Builders for Christ to form a "C Team," a Midwest regional team based in M-W.

The invitation was relayed by Charles Dunning, member of Valley Baptist Church in Appleton, Wis., that has worked with Builders for Christ for 25 years.

Dunning explained that Builders for Christ currently has an "A Team" which builds very large projects (such as the chapel at Midwestern Seminary) and a "B Team" which builds primarily in the Southeast.

The new Midwest Builders for Christ "C Team" is a designation newly offered to MWBC to form a Midwest regional team doing the work of Builders for Christ. "BFC's ministry has continued to expand, and because of their service in M-W we have accumulated a sizable group of volunteers who could form a new team," he said.

Next year's annual meeting will be Oct. 25-26, 2019, at Highland Crest Baptist Church in Green Bay, Wis.

Pastors see economic turnaround in 2018

by Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The economic recovery appears to have reached the offering plate, according to a new study released Nov. 7.

Today, 8 in 10 Protestant pastors (79 percent) say the total offerings at their church this year are at or above last year's levels, including 42 percent who say this year is ahead of last year. Few pastors (15 percent) say giving is not keeping pace with last year. This latest survey from LifeWay Research was conducted Aug. 29 to Sept. 11.

Those positive giving numbers have followed the economic upturn, noted Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

"The increases in offerings so many churches are experiencing coincide with what most economists refer to as 'full employment,' as well as increased wage growth in 2018," McConnell said.

"Inflation has allowed Social Security recipients – likely some of the most faithful donors in many churches – to receive cost of living increases above 2 percent for two years in a row."

Some pastors are more likely to say their offerings have increased than others. Those with churches of 100 or more attendees (49 percent) are more likely to say their 2018 offerings are ahead of 2017 compared to smaller churches (36 percent).

African American pastors (42 percent) are most likely to say their offerings are below last year.

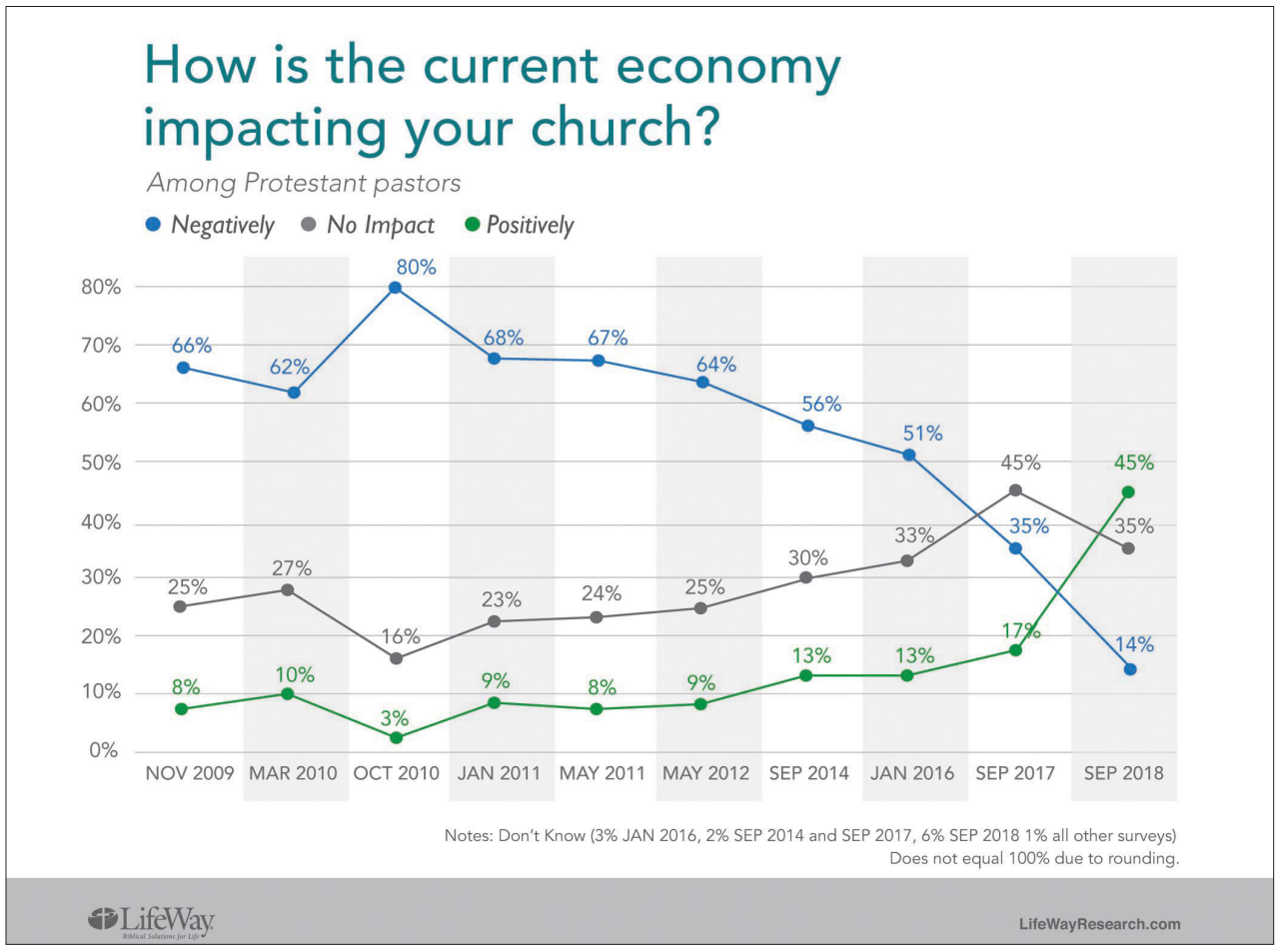
Half of Pentecostals (54 percent) and Baptists (50 percent) say they are collecting more than 2017, while fewer Presbyterian/Reformed (34 percent), Lutheran (33 percent) and Methodist (31 percent) pastors say the same.

Those churches who are seeing an increase may not want to bank on its continuing, McConnell said. "This could be short-lived as wage growth adjusted for inflation has been about zero in recent months."

In the meantime, however, most pastors are meeting their budget so far this year.

Seventy-seven percent of pastors say their church's 2018 offerings have been at least what they budgeted, including 29 percent who say they've exceeded their budget. About 2 in 10 (19 percent) say giving is lower than budgeted.

Meeting budgets and bringing in additional money may grant some struggling churches additional time and opportunity to recover, McConnell said.



Economy perception

The increase in giving has buoyed pastors' perceptions of the economy. For the first time since LifeWay Research began asking pastors economic questions in 2009, more pastors say the economy is having a positive rather than a negative impact on their church.

Today, 45 percent of pastors see the economy as benefiting their church, while 35 percent say it is having no impact.

In 2010 amid the Great Recession, 80 percent of pastors said the economy was negatively affecting their church. That number has been falling steadily since then.

Last year, 35 percent said the economy had a negative impact. This year, that number fell by more than half to 14 percent.

The shift in pastors' attitudes about the economic impact on their congregation is long overdue, McConnell said.

"Most trackable forces in the economy have been positive for several years. Pastors' perceptions are finally catching up to the economic reality," he said.

However, some pastors are more likely than others to see the benefits for their congregation.

Half of pastors of churches with more than 100 in attendance say the economy is positively impacting their congregation, compared to 40 percent of pastors of churches with fewer than 100 attendees.

African American pastors are nearly three times as likely as white pastors to say the economy is impacting their church negatively (36 percent vs. 13 percent).

More than half of Pentecostals (64 percent) and Baptists (54 percent) say they see the economy impacting their church positively, while around a third of Lutherans (38 percent), Presbyterian/Reformed (35 percent) and Methodists (31 percent) agree.

And pastors do not foresee the recent tax reform changing things for their church. Half (49 percent) say they do not expect it to impact their congregation. A quarter (26 percent) believe it will have a positive influence, while 12 percent say they expect it to have a negative impact.

"The full impact of the tax reform on church giving will not be known until 2018 is complete," McConnell said, "but pastors are optimistic it will not hurt their church's finances."

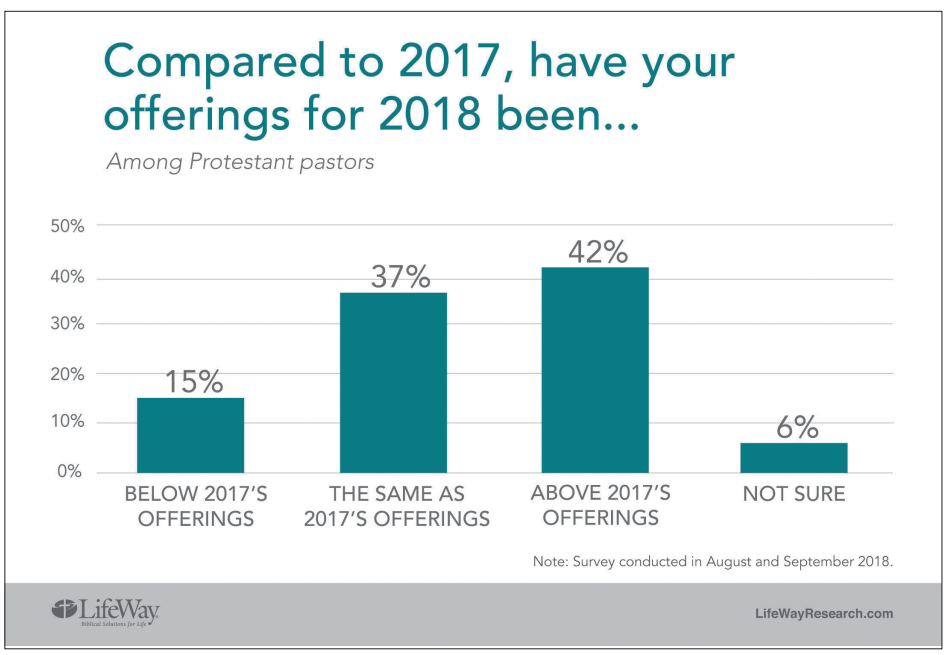
Methodology

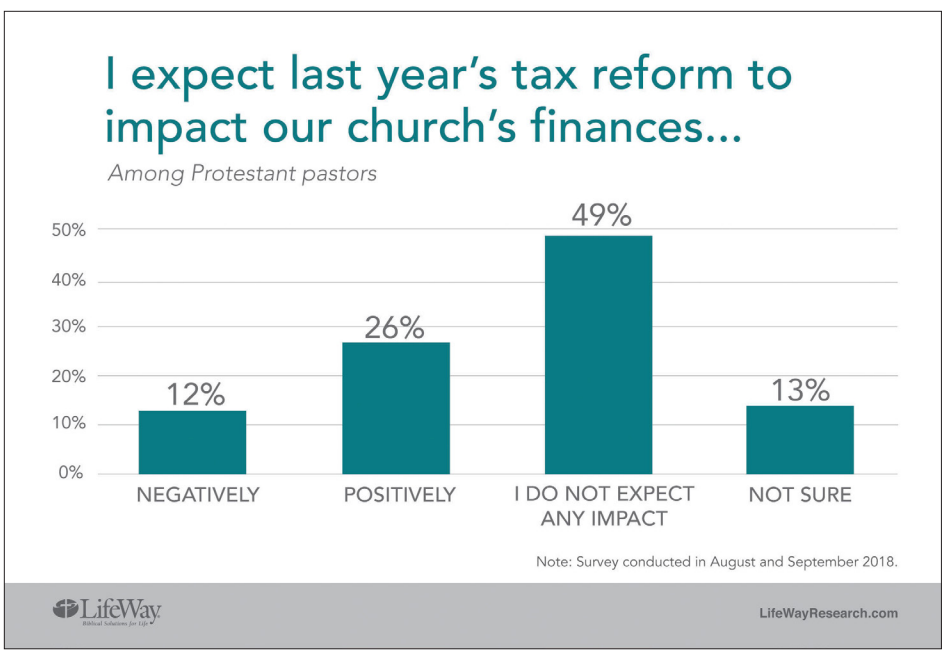
The phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors was conducted Aug. 29 to Sept. 11.

The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Quotas were used for church size. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called. Responses were weighted by region to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.2 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.

Comparisons are also made to telephone surveys conducted in Nov. 5-12, 2009; March 1-9, 2010; Oct. 7-14, 2010; Jan. 17-27, 2011; May 18-25, 2011; May 23-31, 2012; Sept. 11-18, 2014; Jan. 8-22, 2016; and Aug. 30-Sept. 18, 2017 using the same methodology.

LifeWay Research is an evangelical research firm that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches. (BP)





50 years of movie ratings in the spotlight

by Lynde Langdon/WORLD

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) has celebrated the 50th birthday of the movie rating scale, which started as an attempt to ward off censors and became a part of the collective consciousness of U.S. moviegoers. The organization released survey results showing that 91 percent of American parents were familiar or very familiar with the G, PG, PG-13, R, and NC-17 classification system, and 95 percent thought it was helpful.

"We could point to many factors behind the ratings' success," MPAA CEO Charles Rivkin wrote in an open letter. "But the clearest one of all comes directly from its founding mission: to maintain the trust and confidence of American parents."

The MPAA proposed the system in part to quell calls for government censorship of movies. Before 1968, the MPAA issued a set of censor-friendly guidelines for all films. The rules forbade things like blasphemy, obscenity, nudity, and sympathetic portrayals of criminals.

But the code was hard to maintain as societal tolerance of immorality increased, so MPAA founder Jack Valenti came up with the rating system, which took the pressure off filmmakers to produce family-friendly content and put the responsibility on moviegoers to police what they watched.

By basing the rating scale entirely on whether the content was age-appropriate for children, the MPAA set a new norm that, as conservative filmmaker David Stidham put it, "morality is only for people under 10."

"If you are 18 or over, or if you have no children, the rating system has no meaning for you," Valenti, who died in 2007, once wrote on the MPAA website.

While the rating system is almost universally known, it's not universally loved by parents. On the MPAA parent survey, 84 percent of respondents said the ratings were accurate, but only 71 percent thought every movie they saw in the past year was rated appropriately.

A 2011 study of movie ratings over the years found some evidence of "ratings creep," with PG-13 movies becoming increasingly violent. The same ratings creep was not observed with sexual content, though graphic sex scenes and nudity were the top concerns parents had with PG-13 movies -- after overuse of the F-word -- the MPAA survey found.

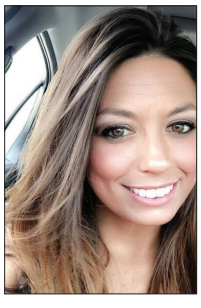
The somewhat arbitrary nature of the ratings also contributes to parents' frustration. PG movies can have "some profanity and some depictions of violence or brief nudity" but no depictions of drug use, according to MPAA rules. PG-13 movies are only supposed to have one instance of "harsher sexually derived words." But since the 1980s, numerous films in that category have sneaked in more than one F-bomb, and the word even appeared in the PG movie "Big" in 1988.

The MPAA noted that in the past 50 years, about 58 percent of movies received an R rating. But that statistic belies the box office dominance of PG-13 movies. Since 2011, PG-13 movies have accounted for 12 or more of the top 25 U.S. films by ticket sales each year. (BP)

Opioids: Trump signs $6B bill to 'end the scourge'

by Art Toalston

Bill Henard, executive director of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists, said, "There's hardly a church out there that doesn't have a family member or friend who's been effected by this." The past year has been a discovery time for churches to engage the community, he said.



Alicia Bowman is a care support specialist at Lily's Place, a facility in Huntington, W.Va., offering medical care to infants suffering from neonatal abstinence syndrome because of their mother's drug use.

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A bipartisan bill to fight the opioid crisis was signed by President Trump on Oct. 24. Trump stated that the bill provides $6 billion in new funding "to end the scourge of drug addiction in America."

"We are going to end it, or we are going to at least make an extremely big dent in this terrible, terrible problem," Trump said in a signing ceremony attended by federal officials, members of Congress and law enforcement personnel in the White House East Wing.

The bill, titled SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act, or SUPPORT Act, was introduced in the House on June 13 and received final congressional approval Oct. 3, having received votes of 396-14 in the House and 99-1 in the Senate.

Nearly 48,000 people died last year from overdoses involving opioids, according to WORLD Magazine, which noted that U.S. drug overdose deaths may be leveling off, although Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar has said it's too soon to declare victory.

The SUPPORT Act covers not only opioids but also any kind of substance abuse, WORLD reported. It will add treatment options and involve the U.S. Postal Service in screening overseas packages for fentanyl, a synthetic form of opioids largely being shipped from China.

Russell Moore, president of Southern Baptists' Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said he hopes the SUPPORT Act is "a first step in a committed national effort to combat the opioid addiction plague. Churches and families and communities across the country are being torn apart by this crushing problem.

"Every elected official should be concentrating on ways to break the pattern of addiction and to help those who are in its grip," Moore said.

The bill included several provisions advanced by West Virginia legislators, The Herald-Dispatch in Huntington reported.

Among them:

— Jessie's Law, a measure "to ensure doctors are provided with details of a patient's previous substance abuse history if consent to share the information is provided by the patient," as described in the HIPPA Journal, which focuses on "compliance with state and federal regulations governing the use, storage and disclosure of Protected Health Information (PHI) and Personally Identifiable Information (PII)."

— CRIB Act, which will help open more centers like Huntington's Lily's Place, which specializes in care for infants suffering from neonatal abuse syndrome.

U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., who attended the White House signing, noted in an Oct. 24 statement, "For West Virginia, this law will more than double the state's opioid funding because of a provision I secured to prioritize states like ours."

Capito said the bill "also addresses more than just addiction; it also focuses on families, prevention, education and life after recovery. I'm so proud of the work that went into this bipartisan legislation, and I'm eager to see how it changes lives for the better."

After its final passage in the Senate on Oct. 3, Capito had stated, "Our state understands far too well how this crisis is tearing apart families and communities, but our experience has also helped inform efforts to fight back. We have discovered what is working, what is not, and, perhaps most importantly, that the ripple effects go far beyond those struggling with addiction."

U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., said in a release, the bill is "a shining example of what we can achieve when we work together in regular order, and I will continue to fight to ensure West Virginia is getting our fair share of funding to fight this epidemic." (BP)

People & Places

Fredrick named AMS

Clintonville, Wis. – At the Oct. 13 annual meeting of Bay Lakes Baptist Association at First Baptist, Clintonville, Wis., Guy Fredrick was called to serve as the associational missions strategist (a new name for the director of missions position).

It is a bivocational position and Fredrick will continue to serve as pastor of Mapledale Baptist in Sheboygan, Wis.

Hess ordained and installed

Clintonville, Wis. – Eric Hess was ordained Oct. 13 to the gospel ministry and installed as pastor of First Baptist, Clintonville, Wis.

Rick Schulze, pastor of Graceway Fellowship in Green Bay, preached the ordination message.

Rocke ordained

Black Creek, Wis. – Levi Rocke, pastor of Community Bible Church in Black Creek, Wis., was ordained to the gospel ministry on Oct. 7.

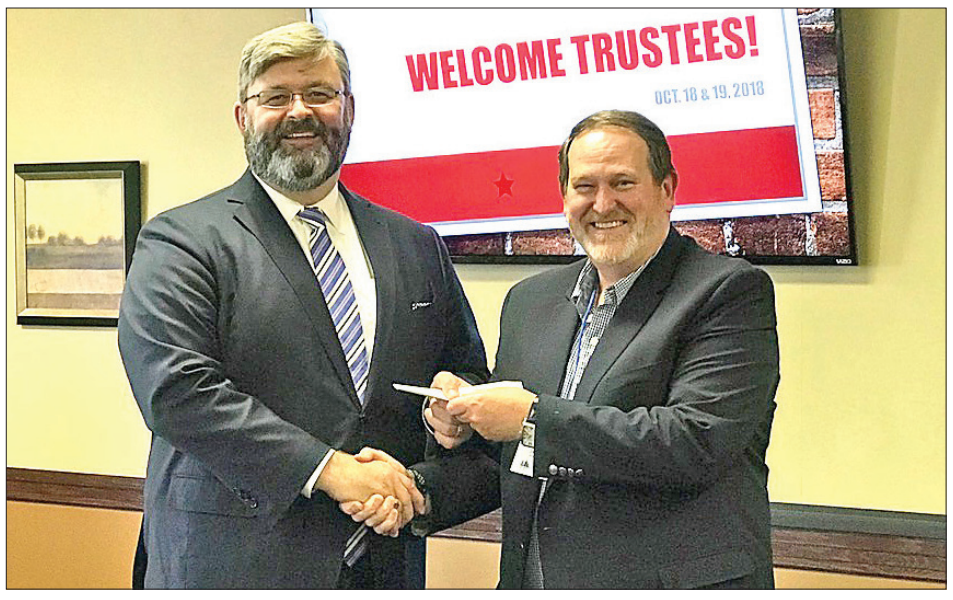
NAMB mag features MWBC church

Minneapolis – Grace in the City Church, Minneapolis, was featured in a recent issue of the North American Mission Board's On Mission magazine. The feature article was titled, "Finding God in a coffee shop." John Steger is pastor.

Star Tribune profiles metal church

Minneapolis – "Heavy metal pastor's Minneapolis church attracts 'headbangers for the Lord,'" reads the headline of a Star Tribune feature article about the Metal Church of Minneapolis. Jacob Rock is pastor.

Leo Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, welcomes those attending the M-W Woman's Missionary Union annual meeting, prior to the MWBC annual meeting. He distributed the new 40-day prayer guide to them. Elected officers of M-W WMU were Cindy Vang, president, Gwendolyn Sutton, vice president, and Tia Underbakke, secretary.



SCHOLARSHIP FUNDED

Leo Endel, right, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, presents Anthony Allen, president of Hannibal-LaGrange University, a check from MWBC to provide $500 per semester scholarships to M-W Baptist students attending that university, the closest Southern Baptist university to MWBC.

CALENDAR

MWBC events are in bold print. To include your event, email to davidwilliams@compuserve.com

NOVEMBER
22-23 Thanksgiving Holiday - **MWBC Office Closed**

DECEMBER
2-9 Week of Prayer and Mission Study for International Missions/Lottie Moon Christmas Offering
24-Jan.1 Christmas/New Year's Holiday - **MWBC Office Closed**

FEBRUARY
7-9 Pastors and Wives Retreat, Green Lake (Wis.) Conference Center

MARCH
3-10 Week of Prayer and Mission Study for North American Missions/Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
15-16 Empower Conference, Green Lake (Wis.) Conference Center

APRIL
19 Good Friday - **MWBC Office Closed**
26 **MWBC Executive Board Meeting, Rochester, Minn.**
30 **MWBC Lottie Moon Offering Cutoff**

MAY
3-4 Regional Disaster Relief Training, Wisconsin
17-18 New Pastor Orientation, Rochester, Minn.
27 Memorial Day Observed - **MWBC Office Closed**

JUNE
9-10 SBC WMU Missions Celebration and Annual Meeting, Birmingham, Ala.
11-12 Southern Baptist Convention, Birmingham, Ala.
30 **MWBC Annie Armstrong Offering Cutoff**

JULY
4-5 Independence Day Holiday - **MWBC Office Closed**

AUGUST
23-24 **MWBC Church Planter Forum, Minneapolis**

SEPTEMBER
1-30 Season of Prayer for State Missions
2 Labor Day - **MWBC Office Closed**
13-14 **MWBC Executive Board, Rochester, Minn.**
27-28 Pastors' Conference, Rochester, Minn.

OCTOBER
4-5 Regional Disaster Relief Training, Minnesota
TBA Called Out Youth Conference
25-26 **MWBC Annual Meeting, Highland Crest, Green Bay, Wis.**

NOVEMBER
28-29 Thanksgiving Holiday - **MWBC Office Closed**

DECEMBER
1-8 Week of Prayer and Mission Study for International Missions/Lottie Moon Christmas Offering
24-Jan.1 Christmas/New Year's Holiday - **MWBC Office Closed**