

UISBC eNews

MARCH APRIL 2020

Focusing on the Landscape... Across Utah and Idaho

Where do I start on what is happening across our state convention? The method of ministry and worship totally changed the middle of March. If your church hadn't been offering an online experience to your worship, you blazed a trail learning about Facebook Live or YouTube. You have gone from community groups, Bible studies, and Sunday School classes in person to starting online communities for caring for your church membership and attenders using Zoom or other media. If your church didn't have an online giving option, you put one together to receive tithes and offerings online, in the mail, or by drop off at the church. One of my early Zoom national meetings said churches were forced to move from the twentieth century to the twenty-first overnight and even some from nineteenth century.

The global COVID-19 pandemic and earthquakes in both Utah and Idaho seem to have put our lives on hold. Many have lost their jobs or were furloughed; schools closed and went to online classes. Going to the grocery store was a new experience, gloved and masked. No more dining in, instead take out only from your favorite restaurant. Non-essential travel and business were put on hold, and city, county, and state governments said stay at home.

It seems we're all living in a science fiction movie from Hollywood. But this continues to be our current reality with some glimmers of hope for loosening restrictions. People are living in fear and many are thinking about their mortality like we have not seen since 9-11. If we just stayed focused on the news, the almost empty roads, and look at the grocery shelves, we would be overwhelmed with all that is happening. But we have hope as believers in Jesus and we trust him that we are more than conquerors through all of this.

Sunday and Wednesday evenings the internet is full of worship services, preaching, Bible studies, and prayer. The past month of Sundays, I have participated online with 20 different church's worship services across our two states and I can view

UISBC Cooperative Program Giving Report

January/February/March 2020

Cooperative Program giving	
January	\$92,584.89
February	\$50,451.16
March	\$61,911.77
Cooperative Program budget	
	\$61,673.42
Over/Under CP budget	
January	+\$30,911.47
February	-\$11,222.26
March	+\$238.35
State Missions Offering given	
January	\$8,872.19
February	\$9,315.87
March	\$6,470.24

January-March 2020

Cooperative Program giving	
	\$204,947.82
Cooperative Program budget	
	\$185,020.26
Over/Under CP budget	
	+\$19,927.56 (+10.4%)
State Missions Offering	
	\$24,658.30
State Missions Offering 2020 Goal	
	\$95,000

New now cont. on page 2

New now cont...

them 24/7. I have heard the gospel plainly presented numerous times and have heard some great Bible studies, all providing hope for our times. Prayer is happening online in numbers I have not heard in my lifetime and yes, prayer is back in school with all kids home schooling. The gospel is penetrating through front doors into homes that would have never been open to a pastor or believer sharing Jesus. I've seen baptisms online from churches, including one of our church plants, that just brings joy to my soul. I have heard numerous creative ideas our churches are doing and did for Easter. All of this excites me and lets me know the church will never be the same after this quarantine is lifted. A statement I have seen sums this up for me, *"The Church has left the building!"* May we see the next GREAT AWAKENING!

We are now hearing words of what we might expect as we begin to reopen the economy and lift restrictions. It is going to look differently and some areas will open up sooner than others, so please go to our website www.uisbc.org/covid19 for links to two of our partners, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and Georgia Baptist Mission Board, where you can find out more information and questions to ask your church as you prepare for the new landscape across our land. I just finished an article on the four phases for the church over the next year and of what it might look like as we reopen our buildings and begin to welcome folks back... in a social distancing and loving approach. We will never be the same and I pray our ministries will be more effective than ever and many of the new ministry approaches will continue as we seek to get the gospel out to everyone!

Rob Lee

National Day of Prayer

National Day of Prayer May 7th

This year due to events around the world we will not gather in churches or town squares to pray. We are encouraging you to pray throughout the day and encourage others to join with you. Here is an idea of how you can pray:

National Day of Prayer Schedule

9:00 - Pray for your community and neighbors

10:00 - Pray for churches and their impact to share the Gospel

11:00 - Pray for those that are vulnerable and those that have lost loved ones during this time

Noon - Pray for businesses and those that have lost their jobs

1:00 - Pray for teachers, schools, students, and parents

2:00 - Pray for those serving in the military

3:00 - Pray for healthcare workers, first responders, and those in the service industry

4:00 - Pray for city leaders and state officials

5:00 - Pray for our President and national leaders

6:00 - Pray for a movement of God across our country and around the world

7:00 - Join with others across country on your front porch and sing "Amazing Grace"

U & I Praying Together

Pastorless Churches

- Sevier Valley Baptist Church, Richfield, David Payne, interim
- First Baptist Church, Mt. Pleasant, Don Carter and Perry Causey, interims
- Salt Lake Chinese Baptist Church
- Stites Baptist Church
- First Baptist Church, Roy, Dr. John Thomas, interim
- First Baptist Church, Moab
- Central Valley Baptist Church, Cascade
- First Baptist Church, Orofino
- Crossroads Church, Rose Lake
- *Cowboy churches that David Kite pastored in Eastern Idaho: Christ's Country Cowboy Church, Pocatello Cowboy Church and Teton Valley Cowboy Church
- *Layton Hills Baptist Church, starting Mother's Day
*New churches since last eNews

Prayer & Praises

- Pray for Emery and Lillie as they deal with the loss of a family member and several other family members' full recovery after hospital stays related to COVID-19.
- COVID-19 prayers: Pray for our healthcare providers and first responders; Pray for our country, state, and local leaders; Pray for our nation and Christians as we respond to COVID-19; Pray for all pastors and churches as they adapt to ministry online and prepare for post COVID-19 ministry opportunities!
- Continued prayers for David Kite as he is waiting for potential surgery and as he and Sue adjust to a new ministry in Georgia closer to family.
- Pray for our church members and attenders that are dealing with being on furlough and those who have lost their jobs; for the Lord's provision for them and our churches.
- Prayers for Jim Harding as his cancer has returned and having to be isolated for safety.
- Praise the Lord, Jerry Gilman, wife of retired pastor Lu Gilman, had successful cancer surgery - pray for a full and speedy recover.
- Praise the Lord, no significant damage to any of our churches in Idaho after the 6.5 earthquake and Utah's 5.7 earthquake!
- Praise for the fourth year in a row Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention ended the year above budget in Cooperative Program giving and by extension, we will pass on a record amount to the Cooperative Program nationally! Thanks to our churches and members for their faithfulness in giving to advance His kingdom locally, nationally, and worldwide.
- Pray for Clint Henry and family as they grieve the home going of his father.

Your Church is Now a Blank Slate

By Thom S. Rainer

You will never get to return to your church.

Let me be clearer. When you return to gather for worship and fellowship and study, it will not be the same church before the coronavirus pandemic.

The world will never be the same. And neither will your church.

Many, if not most, of our churches are struggling and hurting. Some will not make it. The situation is bleak for many congregations.

But this period is also a time of opportunity. It is a time to rethink your church. It's a time to shed "the way we've always done it" mindset and move into a new and exciting future.

For certain, we don't change our views on the Word of God, the exclusivity of salvation through Christ, or any of the essential doctrines of the faith. But these days are a great time to rethink how you "do church." Here are ten points to consider:

1. What lessons can you learn from the digital world that you can apply anew on the other side of the pandemic? How can you do church differently digitally?
2. How can you re-discover your community? How can you learn fresh their needs? How can you reach them with the gospel? We have a tool called [Know Your Community](#). It's a great place to start.
3. What should your stewardship look like beyond the pandemic? Should you make some radical changes in how your church funds are used?
4. Will COVID-19 cause you to rethink how you use your facilities? Can they be used for a greater gospel purpose?
5. Those who create dissension in your church kill its spirit. Will you be willing to deal with them forthrightly in the future?
6. How will your church connect and relate to other churches? Are new models on the horizon? Should you be a part of a new model?
7. Is the Sunday-morning-only experience for most churchgoers about to die? How should you respond?
8. What changes would you make if you tossed out the old church calendar and started from a blank slate?
9. Read the book of Acts. Read the letters to the early churches. What changes does your church need to make to become a New Testament church?
10. What does church staffing look like with a blank slate? Is it time to shift models?

These are but ten of many starting points for you to consider.

Yes, the pandemic is bad news. But the opportunity to etch a future on a blank slate is good news. From this calamity many stronger, more gospel-focused churches will arise.

There is no reason your church shouldn't be one of them.

Missionary thanks Southern Baptists for support during pandemic

By Hugh Johnson

I woke up confused on Sunday morning. The bedside clock read 6:00 a.m., but my iPhone said 7:00 a.m. I had forgotten it was Sunday. And I had definitely forgotten that in this part of Europe the clocks had "sprung forward" at midnight on March 29.

In previous years my family has relied on the semiannual reminder in church to reset our clocks so as not to be late (or early) for the following Sunday's services. But this year there was no local church service the week before, nor helpful reminders of the time change on the TV news the night before. Coronavirus has consumed the TV headlines just as it has almost every other aspect of daily life. Each day during the global lockdown has seemed like any other. No routine. No rhythm. No normal.

One of life's joys as a missionary is the many opportunities we have to see, almost daily, how faithfully God provides, when our skills, education, professional knowledge and language abilities are inadequate. Although painful, we have been able to count it a blessing to be brought low and we find ourselves thankful. We're thankful to God and we're thankful for the ways He is using you.

As our family and millions of others around the world adjust to many more weeks or months of a new home-based "normal," we need to find innovative ways to connect with family, friends, work colleagues, fellow local believers and ministry contacts. Our circumstances challenge us to look outside our familiar patterns of life and to see opportunities to do things differently. We can let God use this global crisis to stretch and shape us. We can look beyond ourselves to the needs of others. In our weakness and loss of control over our daily lives we can put into practice the words of Philippians 4:19: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

During this pandemic, we are forced to trust God like never before and to live the truth of Paul's words in Philippians 4:11-13: "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Sunday started out in confusion, but quickly became memorable for the right reasons. We see how God is using you—our fellow Southern Baptist believers—to provide exactly the kind of encouragement and practical help that Paul writes about in Philippians 4.

The coronavirus has caused our stateside home church to move to a live webcast format. So, for the first time in our 16 years of field service, we have been able to join our stateside home church for online Sunday morning worship services (evening where we are), complete with a shared Lord's Supper. The familiar faces and voices of these friends give us the spiritual refreshment and encouragement that we so desperately need right now. Like Paul we can say, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly. You were indeed concerned for me" (v.10).

LifeWay Research develops free tool for churches to help plan for reopening

By Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- Pastors and church leaders faced difficult decisions when most ended normal, physical congregational gatherings in March due to the COVID-19 crisis.

As some states begin to lift stay-at-home restrictions, church leaders again face difficult decisions about gathering again.

In addition to being constantly in prayer and listening to government officials and health experts to make the best decisions for their church, Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, said there is another group that leaders must listen to before they start the re-entry process: their congregation.

"It will be impossible for church leaders to please everyone when making decisions around gathering physically again—whenever that may be," said McConnell. "But having congregational feedback can help leaders avoid causing undue stress among potential attendees or making radical changes that most in their congregation find unnecessary."

To help with the process, LifeWay Research has developed and made available a [free survey](#) church leaders can send to everyone in their congregation.

The questionnaire asks about

expectations of when to begin worship services, comfort level in attending large and small groups, precautions that should be made for the entire church and specific ministry areas, and more.

It's designed to help church leaders understand the concerns of everyone in their local congregation, so they can better assess their current situation and make the proper plans before welcoming worshippers and guests back to the building.

LifeWay Research is intentionally releasing the survey as a Word document to allow church leaders to customize it to their congregational needs and terminology.

"We want this to be a tool any church of any size or means can use to gauge the feelings of the congregation and make plans accordingly," said McConnell.

If a church isn't willing or able to take some of the steps asked about in the standard questionnaire, McConnell said those should be removed before being sent to congregants.

For example, it won't be beneficial to ask if people expect a church to set up one-way foot traffic entering and exiting the building if that isn't possible in their location.

"Churches will want to get an idea from

their people about what type of changes they can realistically expect when coming back," said McConnell. "They don't want to set expectations they will not be able to deliver."

Once downloaded, church leaders are free to print the questionnaire and mail it to their congregants, email the Word document, or freely distribute the questionnaire in any other means as needed, according to McConnell.

Once the results have been gathered, he said church leaders can then determine the best course of action for their church with the confidence they know the perspective of their congregation.

"Recognizing what the people of your church want and expect from reentry won't tell you exactly what you should do," said McConnell, "But it will provide additional and important information for church leaders to consider as they think through when and how they will begin physically meeting again."

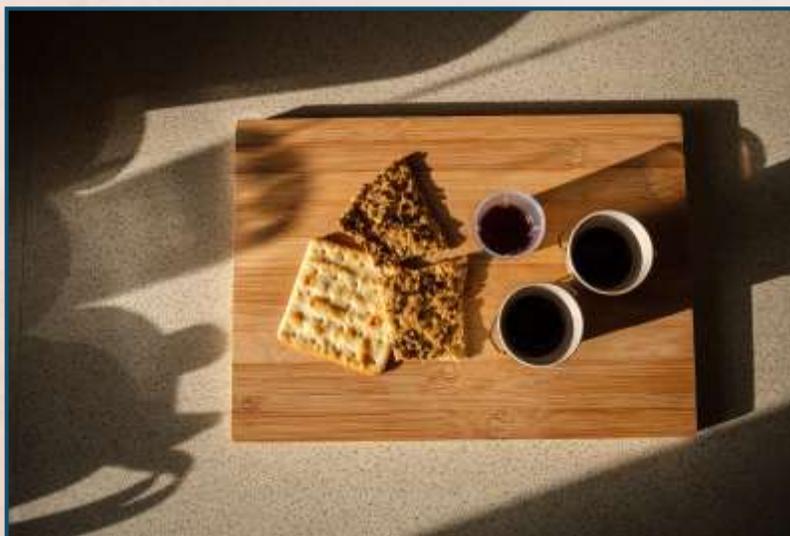
Click here to download the [LifeWay Research COVID-19 Congregational Survey](#).

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

Missionary cont...

And even though your families are also suffering during this time of global fear and uncertainty, you continue to bless us in many practical ways by your generosity of spirit and your sacrificial gifts. Again, Paul's words speak for us: "Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble (v.14)" and "...you sent me help for my needs once and again" (v.16).

Living far from family in troubling times like these, it is reassuring and affirming for missionary families to know that we can say, "I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God" (v.18). And knowing that so many of you are praying for us truly helps us to sense "...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding." (v.7)



To our 15 million fellow believers in more than 47,000 Southern Baptist churches, and from my family to yours, I want to say "thank you!" May these challenging days become an opportunity for each of you to know God's peace as, with thanksgiving, you make your needs known to Him.

All scripture verses from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Hugh Johnson is an IMB writer and photographer in Europe.

IMB workers in Taiwan make evangelism a family activity

By Stella McMillian

Though it seems like the COVID-19 epidemic has brought much of the world to a standstill, God is always at work. Believers everywhere are finding ways to love and serve those around them, including two IMB families in East Asia who recently saw God give their children opportunities to boldly proclaim the gospel.

Taiwan, where they serve, has so far been able to stem the spread of COVID-19 without resorting to quarantines or lockdowns like many other countries. Recently, IMB personnel were able to gather for an evangelism training.

After the training, ten-year-old Holly was ready to practice what she'd learned. Her family headed to a local park alongside the Daltons, another family from the training, to see whom God might place in their path.

Holly had never shared the gospel before, and she felt nervous as her dad, Bill, started a conversation with an elderly man they met. The man seemed kind and he said he'd like to hear what Holly had to share. So she began to explain the gospel.

He soon stopped her and called to his wife, "Come over here! You should hear this!" When his wife joined them, he asked Holly to start from the beginning again.

This time, Holly explained the gospel in full. When she finished, her dad helped her answer their questions. He asked the couple if they'd ever heard what Holly had shared—the truth that they were sinners in need of a Savior, and God had sent His son, Jesus, to be that Savior.

"No. No one's ever shared this with me before," the man responded. "So, what do we do now?"

"You have to put your whole faith in Jesus, and you have to follow Him," Holly responded.

The couple wasn't ready to make a decision, but the man reached out to Bill again several days later. He told Bill that even before they met in the park, he'd felt compelled to consider things he'd brushed aside as a younger man. He was once again thinking about the meaning of life and his eternal destiny. Holly's willingness to boldly share the gospel with him confirmed that he needed to keep seeking truth.

Holly said that even though sharing her faith made her nervous, God taught her he would always help her.

"[God taught me] that Jesus is with you, and that you don't need to be afraid," she said. "We're trying to get more people into God's kingdom, and that's a good thing."



Chiang Kai-shek Memorial, Taiwan Stock photo IMB

Though the man hasn't decided to follow Christ yet, Bill said he was still encouraged to see God open doors.

"It was just simply encouraging to us to see that God was working in the kids and He was working in the city," Bill said. "It was a good reminder that there are people of peace God is preparing."

The Daltons, the family that joined Holly's family in the park, was similarly encouraged to see their children living out their faith.

Eleven-year-old Spencer, their oldest son, partnered with Holly's younger brother Caden for the afternoon. Spencer did most of the talking, while seven-year-old Caden helped by handing out informational cards and always adding "Jesus loves you."

At the training, everyone had been encouraged to try and share the gospel with at least one person. Caden and Spencer set their own goal of sharing with at least five people. Together they shared with ten different people before the day was over. Two made professions of faith.

Jan, Spencer's mom, said she was especially encouraged to see how the time and energy they put into language and cultural acquisition had prepared their kids to take part in ministry.

"They were ready and eager," said Jan. "So often we have this picture in our heads of the type of person we want to share with, but they didn't. If anyone wanted to listen, they would share."

As Christian workers in East Asia, both families appreciate opportunities to minister together with their kids. Specifically, Jan said she has a goal of raising her children to "serve the Lord with joy and gladness" wherever life takes them.

Though serving the Lord certainly looks different than anyone could have expected in this current season, Jan said she was thankful her family continues to have opportunities to love and serve East Asians.

The Great Commission isn't limited by age and can't be disrupted by a global pandemic. No matter what, God will continue to open doors for the gospel to go forth.

*Names changed

Stella McMillian is a contributing writer with IMB.

Ten Pieces of Good News We Are Hearing from Churches During the Pandemic

by **Thom S. Rainer**

We have a continuous feedback loop from church leaders. Through Church Answers, social media, our podcast, and our blog, we read thousands of comments each week. I am encouraged by some of the things I am seeing.

To be clear, I am not making light of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on many lives and on our economy. But in the midst of the challenges, we are hearing some of the ways God is blessing churches. Here are ten of them.

1. Two weeks ago, 15 percent of church leaders thought their churches would close as a consequence of the pandemic. Today, that number is down to 3 percent. There is indeed much more hope.
2. Giving for 78 percent of churches is either the same in the pandemic as before, or it is only slightly down.
3. Church members, for the most part, are enthusiastically adopting digital giving.
4. Church leaders are creatively discovering ways to reach and minister to people who are viewing their streaming services.
5. Because churches can't meet in person, most congregations are not having business meetings, avoiding conflicts they've had in the past.
6. Church members are adopting video conferencing technology with enthusiasm. It will become a key delivery mechanism for churches post COVID-19.
7. The primary beneficiary of the video conferencing technology in churches is small groups. Churches are reporting that some small groups are consistently having 100 percent or more attendance. One church reported that their small group attendance includes more guests than any point in their known history.
8. Pastors are reporting to us their desire to become better preachers. They are seeing the areas where they can improve as they watch the video stream of their services.
9. Churches are becoming much more intentional about finding ways to minister to their community. One pastor told us that the pandemic has been used by God to make him fall more deeply in love with the community his church serves.
10. Church leaders are having financial and stewardship conversations they avoided before the pandemic. They are asking tough but good questions about what really matters.

The pandemic is evil. The God we serve is using this time for His good and His glory.

FIRST PERSON: Vision 2025: A call to reach every person for Jesus Christ

by *Ronnie W. Floyd*

NASHVILLE (BP) -- Vision 2025 is not simply a slogan or rallying cry. It's a path forward to help us reimagine a new future together of reaching the world for Jesus Christ -- every person, every town, every city, every state, and every nation.

We are in one of the most defining moments in our history. For the future of America, the future around the world, and for the sake of our own future as the Southern Baptist Convention, change is imperative.

We find ourselves chasing after the winds of our preferences, our own opinions, our own issues, and our own streams of social media. These are the side streets that keep us off of Main Street, that always leads us to the final words of our Lord Jesus Christ before His grand ascension: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8

I am speaking about a unified Great Commission vision that unites us. Yes, a vision that calls us to reach every person for Jesus Christ in every town, every city, every state, and every nation. This vision, Vision 2025, is composed of five strategic actions that are clear, concise and compelling; but this vision is also specific, measurable, realistic, attainable and timely.

Strategic Action 1: Increase our total number of full-time, fully-funded missionaries by a net gain of 500, giving us 4,200 full-time, fully-funded missionaries through the International Mission Board.

We believe one day in the near future there will be a multitude from every language, people, tribe and nation knowing and worshiping our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every day, 155,252 lost people die. When we are able to increase our total number of full-time, fully-funded missionaries by a net gain of 500 by the year 2025, many of our missionaries will be training churches overseas to send their own missionaries, and God will forward His good news through His people exponentially. Listen friends, this number of 500 additional missionaries by the end of the year 2025 comes directly from the field to our leadership at the International Mission Board.

Strategic Action 2: Add 6,000 new churches to our Southern Baptist family, giving us more than 50,000 churches.

When we imagine together adding 6,000 churches to our Southern Baptist family by the end of the year 2025, we know this means that we need to add 1,200 churches each year to our family. How will we do this?

Our goal of adding 1,200 churches annually will look something like this:

-- 750 new churches planted annually;

-- 50 new campuses identified or added by our multi-site churches annually;

-- 400 new churches affiliating with us annually.

What does all this mean? This means for us to add these new churches annually, we will need more and more church planters who are qualified, identified, and sent out to places where the Gospel has never been before. This means we need our multi-site churches to identify and notify us through our Annual Church Profile of all the campuses that each church has now and will launch in the future. This means hundreds of evangelical churches across the United States who believe like we believe and appreciate how we do missions together may want to become a part of our family called Southern Baptists. Already, more than 300 new churches affiliate with us annually. We believe the opportunity to expand this footprint is great in your region, in your state and all across our entire nation.

Strategic Action 3: Increase our total number of workers in the field through a new emphasis on "calling out the called," and then preparing those who are called out by the Lord.

We believe our missional vision is to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations. This compelling call upon our lives to reach every person for Jesus Christ in every town, every city, every state and every nation should give us absolute confidence that God is calling people right now in every church across this globe to

surrender their lives to full-time Christian ministry. This call may be to serve as a local church pastor, or serve as a scholar and teacher in a seminary or college, or perhaps God is calling masses of people to be missionaries across this globe.

We must return to the Bible and the words of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 9:37-38, "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.'" Jesus' instructions are clear: Pray to the Lord of the harvest and ask Him to send out workers into His harvest. Therefore, we are called to pray and we are told to ask God to send out workers into His harvest!

As the church prays, God calls. As God calls, the church calls out those who are being called. Regardless of the size of the crowd and the size of the church, God is calling people into the ministry of the Gospel. Pastors, educators, evangelists, leaders and missionaries are right now being called out to take the Gospel into places where the Gospel has never been before.

Strategic Action 4: Turn around our ongoing decline in reaching, baptizing, and discipling 12- to 17-year-olds in the prime of their teenage years.

Did you know the baptisms of 12- to 17-year-old students are down 38 percent since the year 2000? Did you know these

baptisms of 12- to 17-year-old students are down by at least 35,000 baptisms since the year 2000? We cannot look the other way. We cannot designate this to be addressed by anyone else. Reaching, baptizing and discipling 12- to 17-year-old students is imperative for the sake of the Gospel. This is our future! It is inexcusable for us to settle with this dismal decline.

Pastors and church leaders: Please look at the last decade of what your church has done in reaching and baptizing and discipling 12- to 17-year-old students. Put these baptisms on a graph to evaluate. Determine that for the next five years, if nothing else in your church grows, this will grow!

Hear me clearly Southern Baptists: If we will focus on this age group and see a turnaround in baptisms for the next five years, we will turn around the entire baptism decline in all the Southern Baptist Convention. We will also see during this same period of time, more teenagers called into the ministry of the Gospel, surrendering their lives to the ministry serving here in one of our local churches, and being sent to serve as a missionary globally.

Strategic Action 5: Increase our annual giving in successive years to reach and surpass \$500 million given through the Cooperative Program to achieve these Great Commission goals.

The Cooperative Program of the Southern

Reach the lost cont. on page 9

Free LifeWay resource equips quarantined families for at-home children's ministry

By Aaron Wilson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Jesus may have said, "Let the little children come to me," but in these strange times, churches are telling kids and their parents to stay at home.

Such is the paradox children's ministries are facing as they seek to introduce kids to Jesus while also practicing social distancing to help curb the spread of the coronavirus.

To help address this challenge, churches around the world are making use of [LifeWay Kids at Home](#), a free discipleship resource that allows families to watch Bible story videos and download activity pages and conversation starters.

"We launched LifeWay Kids at Home as a way of serving churches here in America that we knew needed a short-term solution for helping families facilitate kids worship time at home," said Chuck Peters, LifeWay Kids director of operations. "At that time, I hadn't considered that it might reach a global audience.

"The truth is, families all over the world have been affected by

the COVID-19 crisis. It's thrilling to see how God is using LifeWay Kids at Home in places like Abu Dhabi, Australia, India and Malaysia just as He is in California, Colorado, Texas, New Jersey and Ohio."

Users can access the Kids at Home experience through LifeWay's Digital Pass platform by following these steps:

- Step 1: Go to lifeway.com.
- Step 2: Login or create an account (free).
- Step 3: Click the LifeWay Kids (or Preschool) at Home icon on the main page of Digital Pass.
- Step 4: In the LifeWay Kids at Home interface, download activity pages and conversation guides (button at top right).

New sessions are updated weekly at midnight on Thursday nights so families can have fresh content every weekend.

Aaron Wilson is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

Reopening the Church: 4 Phases for an Orderly Return

By Ken Braddy Jr

Ever since the country learned that states were going to begin reopening businesses and commerce, the church has been elated that it will once again be able to gather together again very soon. Anticipation is high, although concerns remain about just how quickly to get “back to normal.”

I don't know of any church leader who is looking to reopen with a “business as usual” mindset. We could rush in where angels fear to tread, but why? Perhaps we should apply I Corinthians 14:40-43 to our present situation: “Let everything be done decently and in order...since God is not a God of disorder...” While the verses refer to orderliness in the worship service, the *principle* of orderliness in God's house can be applied to the church's return to its facilities.

This is our moment to celebrate our return not just to the campus, *but to one another*. As we return to one another on campus and in our Bible study groups, orderliness and thoughtfulness will win the day. We are shepherds of God's people. As shepherds, one of our chief roles is that of protector. Shepherds in biblical times had to be prepared to defend the flock against predators and thieves. Shepherds were temporary stewards of their master's sheep, and we are no different. As church leaders, we shepherd God's people, and a large part of our role is to protect, to anticipate, and to act on behalf of the sheep entrusted to us by God.

To be orderly and not disorderly, let's think about reopening the church in four phases. What I am about to suggest will not work in every church everywhere. The four phases will make sense in many congregations as-is; others will want and need to tweak them to fit their context. I encourage you to adjust the four phases below to fit your church. Move items from one phase to another. Move some up, others down. But develop a phase-in plan that you and your congregants can accept.

There will be some overlap in the phases below. One phase will prepare the way for the next, but each phase will continue to build on previous ones. Ultimately we will succeed in returning to our church buildings. I believe ultimately we will be a better church. We're already reaching more people online in both worship and in Bible study groups – I hear that from leaders all over the country. We've pivoted quickly as the church, and we are learning

new ways of ministry.

Small churches, large churches, and every size in between are going to look back on this moment in church history and remember these days – they are days of a paradigm shift that we haven't seen before. My mother once told me she could vividly remember what she was doing when she heard that President Kennedy had been assassinated. I can remember what I was doing when I learned the Challenger had exploded on liftoff. I imagine you remember what you were doing when you learned the twin towers had collapsed because of terrorist attacks. We will all remember COVID-19 and how it changed us and our churches.

The four phases below may provide a *loose framework* around which you begin planning for the future. Make these your own. Listen to the leaders at the CDC. Look to the leaders of your state government and follow their directions (states will vary, which requires you adjust your phase-in). Add content. Delete content. Reorganize the phases if you have a better idea. The goal is to “do things decently and in order” and to have a plan that you work as a congregation. Be flexible, and adapt as needed.

Phase 1

Key Focus: Returning to the Church Building

Key Issues in this Phase:

- State leaders will set guidelines; states will be different in their approaches and timelines
- Churches may start with a worship-only strategy for several months
- Limited worship attendance (100 people at a time?) may be mandated by state leaders
- Addition of more worship services to allow for physical distancing may be required
- Children and preschool ministries may be limited by states for a time; parents take children to “big church”
- Older volunteers might be hesitant to return before a vaccine is available
- Doors to the church are propped open to avoid contact with handles
- Restrooms may remain closed? Some states are already advising this.
- Bulletins are not passed out; announcements made via PowerPoint
- Worship centers will be sanitized between services
- A new way of collecting the offering

will have to be considered (boxes placed strategically around the worship center and lobby?)

- Live broadcasts via Facebook Live or other online services continue and are perfected to accommodate those who are not willing to return
- An overflow room for worshipers may be required; when maximum allowed attendance is reached, send people to the overflow room, or ask them to return for the next worship service
- Church leaders will continue to help parents disciple children in the home
- Decisions made about how to safely administer the Lord's Supper, baptisms, and the invitation
- Plan for entering and exiting the building must be developed (one entrance, dismiss by rows?)
- Decide what you will do about weddings, use of facilities by outside groups, etc.
- Bible study groups continue to grow in their use of Zoom or other online meeting tools – they return in the next phase

Phase 2

Key Focus: Groups begin meeting again on campus

Key Issues in this Phase:

- Space...physical distancing may necessitate the starting of new groups so people can practice physical distancing in smaller spaces; new groups may be started on days besides Sunday in order to have space to meet
- Additional hours/options for groups to meet (some churches that are out of space will need to begin a second or third hour of Bible study) should be considered prior to this phase
- Some workers who are older may take a sabbatical for safety
- Classrooms must be sanitized at greater levels than ever before
- Teachers will need new kinds of training to help them learn best practices for sanitizing rooms & children's toys
- Some traditional ministries may take place in alternative ways ([see the article by LifeWay with alternatives for conducting VBS](#))
- Classroom attendance will be limited to allow physical distancing
- If Children's Church is a ministry that was suspended, decisions will be made about how to practice physical distancing when it resumes

Phases cont...

- Adult and student rooms get tech upgrades (wall-mounted flat screen televisions and appropriate cables will allow groups to use Zoom technology to provide a live experience for group members who are not comfortable coming back to the campus); new people can be reached online, too
- Creation of special “online only” groups that can be new front doors to people seeking to connect with the church; recruit new teachers who are tech-savvy and enjoy the challenge of leading a virtual group

Phase 3

Key Focus: Regaining Strength and Ministries

Key Issues:

- People continue to return to worship and Bible study groups; the church continues to have a growing online presence
- Budget preparation and congregational approval of next fiscal budget occurs; some ministries may have to be cut. Churches will wrestle philosophically about what continues and what ceases.
- Fall Festival decision – can the church host this safely?
- Thanksgiving – will the church have a fellowship meal if it has in the past? Could this be too early for such a large gathering of people? Consider canceling.
- Christmas – will there be a need for additional services? Will choirs be able to rehearse in close proximity to present seasonal music, cantatas, etc? How will you prepare families to celebrate Advent and have home worship during December?
- Ministry to struggling families and individuals may increase. Job loss, COVID-19 addictions (alcohol/pornography) may require counseling to help people cope with depression and poor decisions made during the time of physical isolation
- Benevolence ministry may need additional volunteers to meet needs
- New Year’s – hope can be instilled in God’s people/find the brighter tomorrow/cast vision for 2021
- Be open and transparent with the congregation about any budget shortfalls, cuts, and adjustments

Phase 4

Key Focus: Celebration

Key Issues:

- Give people hope
- Look back and celebrate the victories and progress in ministry, outreach, attendance, etc. from May 2020 onward
- Challenge the congregation to remain flexible and open to new ways of “doing church”
- Find God’s hand of deliverance and guidance and celebrate His leadership of the church
- Continue to help moms and dads disciple their children in the home
- Anticipate and plan for summer ministries such as VBS, camps, mission trips, etc. Talk about them as a church family.
- Things will begin to feel like they are getting back to normal
- Celebrate increases in worship and Bible study attendance year-over-year. Help the people see the good that has come from COVID-19

Celebration cont. on page 10

Reach the lost cont...



Baptist Convention is the financial fuel for reaching every person for Jesus Christ in every town, every city, every state and every nation. Built upon the integrity of relationships and in the spirit of cooperation, churches give resources voluntarily through the Cooperative Program in order to reach people for Jesus Christ regionally, statewide, nationally and internationally. We are in the midst of our 95th year of giving through the Cooperative Program.

Listen carefully Southern Baptist leaders: The more monies our 47,500+ churches give through the Cooperative Program, the more we can extend the Gospel message across the United States and throughout the entire world. Sending missionaries is the heart of the Southern Baptist Convention. The more missionaries we can send, the more people we can tell about the saving power of Jesus Christ.

If we are going to send more missionaries, plant more churches, revitalize more churches, replant more churches, equip more pastors, equip more evangelists, equip more scholars and equip more missionaries, then we must prioritize our giving through the Cooperative Program, elevate our giving through the Cooperative Program and accelerate our giving through the Cooperative Program. When we do this, we will experience the greatest years in the history of our 175 years as a convention of churches.

In the year of 2025, we will celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention. It is our dream that in the year 2025, we will see our churches give at least \$500 million through the Cooperative Program.

As a pastor, I saw this time and time again: Dollars follow vision! People give to vision. If the vision is clear, concise and compelling, they will support it financially. While I know this is true as a pastor, I am also believing now that is true denominationally as we collectively call upon our churches to support Vision 2025.

Vision 2025 is a call to return to the heart of who we are and why we exist: missions and evangelism.

Now is the time to pray for and to lead towards this vision of reaching every person for Jesus Christ in every town, every city, every state and every nation.

Reprinted from Baptist Press (www.baptistpress.com), news service of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Digital curriculum helps church groups stay connected while socially distanced

By Aaron Earls

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- As the coronavirus spread across the country and across North Carolina, Dwight Horrell decided to do something he'd never done before in his nearly 50 years of teaching Sunday School—take his class online.

His church, Haw Bluff Baptist Church in Ivanhoe, N.C., had little experience in livestreaming, with pastor Jacob Lewis placing his sermons on Facebook Live.

But with government and medical experts recommending no group gatherings larger than 10 and asking people to stay in their homes, Horrell asked his class to join him for an online version of Sunday School.

Everyone in Horrell's class received an email on how they could prepare and how they could join via Google Hangouts for their weekly discussion of LifeWay Christian Resources' "Bible Studies for Life" lesson.

"To those my age or who feel intimidated in using technology this way, doing this is worth it," said Horrell, 75. "Just because we're not gathering physically doesn't mean group discipleship needs to stop. I don't want to waste this opportunity to bring hope to people in a world of heightened worry and suffering."

Horrell was one of thousands of small group leaders who used digital methods to continue meeting with their classes during the COVID-19 crisis.

Since launching on March 20, more than 3,800 churches and 21,000 individuals have accessed LifeWay's free digital curriculum at Curriculum.LifeWay.com, according to Todd Adkins, director of LifeWay Leadership.

Ronnie Richardson, discipleship pastor at Clarke-Venable Baptist Church in Decatur, Miss., said the platform made it easy to sign up and set up the curriculum for their classes.

"Most people are eager to continue meeting and appreciate the access to the curriculum online," he said. "Any church that is currently meeting online should definitely take the step toward providing their curriculum digitally."

Richardson said the shift to digital was driven primarily by the social distancing guidelines, but it has also provided Clarke-Venable Church the opportunity to try out digital curriculum for future use by some of the teachers in the future.

For Alan Taylor, executive pastor at First Baptist Concord near Knoxville, Tenn., the necessary shift to digital allowed their church to better coordinate groups and curriculum and point them toward a shared goal.

"Since all of our groups had to meet digitally, I thought I could use this opportunity to leverage the digital curriculum to help merge our curriculum into our discipleship pathway," he said.

Taylor said the congregation is working

out some kinks as they've never done church in this way, but "our people are embracing the change and the challenges."

Churches should recognize that groups have never been more important, according to Taylor. "Without the privilege of physically meeting together for worship, being connected to a group of people has become even more needed and even more valued," he said.

In the midst of the shift to digital, Taylor said this remains a relational world. "In these days of social distancing, people still cherish their friends."

He said he spoke with a senior adult woman from his church whose group met online for the first time. "She was ecstatic sharing about their group experience," he said, "and how everyone was so glad to not only talk with one another but to actually see one another. She said, 'We acted like a bunch of teenagers.'"

Horrell has high expectations for his Sunday School class of primarily 40-somethings moving forward and the "Bible Studies for Life" lessons they'll be studying. "This is a time when God has our attention and the subject matter is perfect for what we're all going through," he said.

"I believe the class will be even stronger when this is all over," Horrell said, "and we'll be more grateful for the ability to physically meet together."

Aaron Earls is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

Celebration cont...

- As you can see, these lists are not exhaustive, but representative of things we will all have to decide as we return to the building and reopen the church. I encourage you to copy and paste these lists into a Word document so you can add and delete phases or items within a phase. Use this as a starting point for developing a plan for the way you believe God is leading your church to reopen.

To see a list of **24 questions** the church should be answering now about COVID-19 related issues, [click here to jump to my April 18 blog post](#).

The **Georgia Baptist Convention** has a helpful list of things to consider as you reopen your church. [Click here to jump to their basic guide for returning to your church](#).

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Dwight Horrell of Haw Bluff Baptist Church in Ivanhoe, N.C. teaches his Sunday School class through an online video meeting. | photo by Joy Allmond