

The West Virginia Baptist Newsletter

February—March 2024

Will You Hold the Rope?



A baptism at Parchment Valley



Youth praying together at Camp Cowen



Two of our Missionary Interns

Five years ago, we began asking you to **“hold the rope”** for the ministries of the West Virginia Baptist Convention. The rope holder illustration comes from a question William Carey asked before he left for India as a missionary in 1793. Likening his journey to India to a rescue mission into a deep, dark well, he asked the members of his Baptist association if they would hold the other end of the rope. Those individuals and churches pledged their commitment, and Carey spent the next 41 years of his life planting churches, translating Scripture and introducing Christ into a culture that was void of any gospel hope.

Five years ago, many of you accepted that invitation. At the time, ministries were flourishing but the financial support wasn't there to support them. With reserves basically depleted, the plea was made at the 2019 WVBC Annual Meeting for churches to promote the Mountain State Mission Offering and for individuals to commit as Rope Holders. Thanks to the generosity of hundreds, the reserves are now back to a healthy level and we have even been able to expand several of our ministries.

However, we are now back to a place where the question needs to be asked: **“Will you hold the rope?”** The question is not being asked purely for financial reasons. Rather, it is being asked for cultural, moral and spiritual reasons.

If William Carey thought India in 1793 was dark, how would he describe our culture today? What was once a flourishing Christian nation is now marked by a rapid decline in Christ followers, and one in which nearly 4000 churches permanently close their doors every year. At the very same time, burnout among leaders is on the rise, the number of mental health issues is on the rise and the number of kids needing to be raised by grandparents (often as a result of their parents' drug use) is on the rise.

We live in a broken society, a “deep, dark well,” and as people are left scrambling for any sense of stability and community they can find, the Church is the only entity left that has any answers for eternal hope.

Our theme this year is **“Intentionally Engaging Communities for Christ.”** We have used this theme for the last three years. In year one, we focused on “intentionally,” recognizing that nothing happens in life, or in ministry, without intentionality. In year two, we focused on “communities,” and we asked you to identify the communities that you were already a part of that needed to know about Jesus. This year, we focus on “engaging,” with the goal being to equip each other to actually serve the communities we have identified. Many of our training events and workshop offerings have been built around these emphases.

In this newsletter, you will read about some of the ministries our Executive Board has prioritized. The Discipleship Commission is focused on mental health, Biblical grandparenting and protecting our children. The Leadership Commission is focused on mentoring, internship opportunities and expanding the number of educational opportunities. The Outreach Commission is focused on church planting, church renewal and evangelism. And the Stewardship Commission is focused on global missions – both serving the internationals living among us and serving those in the deepest, darkest parts of our planet. All of these focuses are developed from the theme of “Intentionally Engaging Communities for Christ.”

So the question to you is this: Will you hold the rope?

(Details of how you can “hold the rope” are located on the next page of this newsletter.)

The West Virginia Baptist Convention is a family of churches committed to reaching all generations for Jesus Christ both here and abroad by equipping one another to be healthy, growing and unified in Christ and for Christ.

Doing Christ's Work Together

by Mike Sisson, Executive Minister

A Prayer for a Vision

While there is no real difference between January 1 and any other day, still there is something about a “new year” that causes us to consider our next steps in life. The world is full of chaos and distractions all trying to pull us in different directions and all the while calling our attention away from Jesus Christ and His ultimate plan for our lives. It is little wonder that the author of the book of Hebrews would encourage readers to, “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1b -2). Notice the progression to free ourselves from hinderances and entanglements and then fix our focus on Jesus. The oft quoted verse from the book of Proverbs, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (29:18) reminds us to be ever aware of our focus on the Lord’s purpose and seek His guidance. As Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message* translation, “If people can’t see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves.”

The reality is God loves us and He has a perfect will and plan for our lives. This truth is eloquently stated by the late Catherine Marshall, wife of the well-known minister and chaplain of the United States Senate, Peter Marshall:

“I learned that because God loves us so much, He often guides us by planting His own lovely dream in the barren soil of a human heart. When the dream has matured, and the time for its fulfillment is ripe, to our astonishment and delight, we find that God’s will has become our will, and our will, God’s.”

As the psalmist wrote, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). When we are walking in step with the Lord His desires do indeed become our desires. I encourage you to examine your life goals. Are they built upon the vision God has for your life? Do they inform your decisions and your actions? Can you pray with all sincerity the prayer Catherine Marshall prayed when she was confronted with the path of her future?

“Father, once I had such big dreams, so much anticipation of the future. Now no shimmering horizon beckons me; my days are lack-lustre. I see so little of lasting value in the daily round. Where is Your plan for my life? You have told us that without vision, we men perish. So, Father in heaven, knowing that I can ask in confidence for what is Your expressed will to give me, I ask You to deposit in my mind and heart that particular dream, the special vision You have for my life. And along with the dream, will You give me whatever graces, patience, and stamina it takes to see the dream through to fruition? I sense this may involve adventures I have not bargained for. But I want to trust You enough to follow even if You lead along new paths. I admit to liking some of my ruts. But I know that habit patterns that seem like cozy nests from the inside, from Your vantage point may be prison cells. Lord, if You have to break down any prisons of mine before I can see the stars and catch the vision, then, Lord, begin the process now. In joyous expectation, Amen.”

Blessings,
Mike



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How to Hold the Rope

Option 1: Hold the rope as an individual by committing \$20 (or more) per month in support of the WVBC.

Option 2: Hold the rope as a church by supporting the WVBC in your budget and/or collecting the **Mountain State Mission Offering**.

Option 3: Leave a Legacy Gift to the WVBC and help support these ministries for years to come.

To learn more, contact **Todd McClure** at todd@wvbc.org



2023 Impact Report

Doing Christ's Work Together

The **West Virginia Baptist Convention** is a family of churches committed to reaching all generations for Jesus Christ both here and abroad by equipping one another to be healthy, growing and unified in Christ and for Christ.

Education

\$250,000+ distributed for continuing education by the **Bowen Charitable Trust**

69 students took classes and **6** students graduated from the **Bobby Wood School of Christian Studies**

40 individuals received scholarships from the **WV Baptist Education Society**

34 students in MDiv program, **9** students in DMin program, **5** students graduated from **West Virginia's Palmer Theological Seminary**

13 girls received scholarships from the **WV American Baptist Women's Ministries**

3 boys received scholarships from the **WV American Baptist Men**

PARCHMENT VALLEY

381 events hosted
87 individuals accepted Christ
1 new Whippoorwill Covered Campfire
145 youth and leaders from **5** states completed **40** projects at **Brothers' Keeper**

CAMP COWEN

1,576 campers last summer
374 adult volunteers
70 youth accepted Christ
\$685K donated in 2023 for the **\$1.5M Sunny Day Activity Center**

BAPTIST CAMPUS MINISTRY

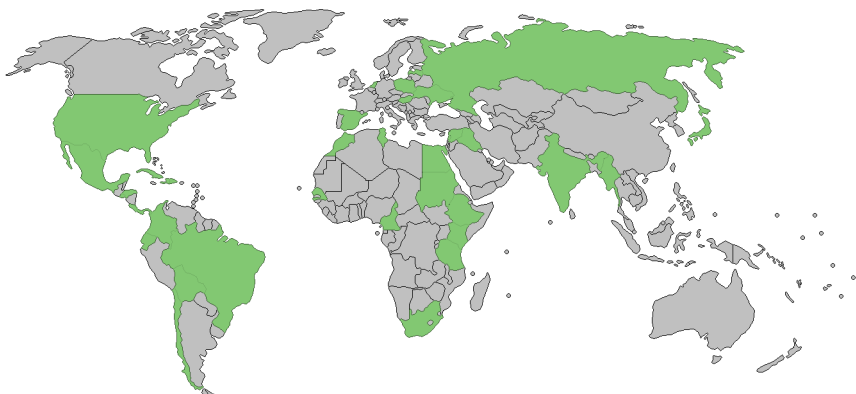
300+ students being discipled each week
90 students and leaders at Fall Retreat
8 university campuses
2400 international students are studying in WV, representing **110** countries

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

15 pastors participated in the **Mentoring for Pastoral Excellence** program
10 young adults served as **Ministry Interns**
5 new pastors serving a WVBC church

Financial Support

United Mission:	\$384,954	* 65% supports WVBC
America for Christ Offering:	\$60,824	* 29% supports WVBC
Mountain State Mission Offering:	\$332,636	* 100% supports WVBC
Budgeted WVBC Support:	\$292,164	* 100% supports WVBC
Total Mission Support (All Offerings):	\$2,747,191	



Global Missions

\$445,973 given to support global missions
36 countries impacted by WVBC support
29 individuals received assistance from the **Fulks Mission Trip Scholarship**
25 missionaries supported by churches
15 individuals trained to lead short-term
1 **Missionary Intern** in 2023

WVBC Executive Board Approves Plans for 2024

On Saturday, January 6th, the WVBC Executive Board met at Parchment Valley Conference Center to review and approve the ministry plans for 2024. Continuing the theme from last year, the focus remains on “Intentionally Engaging Communities for Christ,” with a special emphasis on “engaging.”

At our first Executive Board meeting of the year, WVBC President Erich Reggi opened with a devotion, and then each of the four commissions separated into their own meetings to discuss their plans for carrying out the theme. Following the commission meetings, the Executive Board once again gathered to report on the commission meetings and to approve the 2024 budget. That budget was passed unanimously.



Members of the 2024 WVBC Executive Board



Erich Reggi and Jill Narraway sign contracts for the Sunny Day Activity Center.

Immediately following the meetings, Erich and Jill Narraway met to sign contracts to officially begin the construction of the Sunny Day Activity Center at Camp Cowen. Per the contract, preparatory work will begin in April and May, pausing during the summer camping season. Construction will resume on August 12th with a completion date of mid-November. We are excited to see how God continues to provide for this exciting new facility!

CAMP COWEN

2024 STAFF OPPORTUNITIES



Are you or someone you know a driven, engaged Christ-follower looking for opportunities to serve the Lord this summer?

Camp Cowen is hiring!

APPLY NOW and learn more at campcowen.org/staff

SUMMER STAFF



- Must be 18 or older
- Full-summer schedule (with optional vacation week)
- \$325 per week
- \$100 bonus at end of contract
- Free room & board
- All positions available

INTERNS



- Must be 16 or older
- Flexible 2- to 6-week schedules
- \$275 per week
- Free room & board
- Positions available:
 - Kitchen & dishroom
 - Maintenance
 - Lifeguards**

**certification required

National Men's Prayer Breakfast

We are excited to see the men in our WVBC family coming together for another year to fellowship and pray with one another. The National Men's Prayer Breakfast is always an important day for the **American Baptist Men (ABMen)** of our state. It is a day when men from all around the state invite other men from their association to gather with them for prayer and Bible study, while enjoying a breakfast together.

This year's prayer breakfast will take place on Saturday, February 24th. To the right, you will find a list of confirmed locations. Other locations will be added to our website once they are confirmed. You will be able to view the entire list and download resources for the breakfast at www.wvbc.org.

This year's prayer breakfast offering will once again support the **ABMen's Scholarship Fund**. In 2023, the fund provided financial aid to three young men in our WVBC family. You can make a donation to this offering at your association's breakfast or by giving online through the WVBC website and choosing "ABMen's Prayer Breakfast Offering."

If your church would like more information about the National Men's Prayer Breakfast or is interested in hosting a breakfast on this date, contact Tracie Emerick at temerick@wvbc.org.

- Broad Run Baptist Church (Broad Run Association)
- Petersburg First Baptist Church (Eastern Association)
- Long Run Baptist Church (Elk Valley Association)
- Bethesda Baptist Church (Fairmont Association)
- Fayetteville Baptist Church (Fayette Association)
- Hopewell Baptist Church (Good Hope Association)
- Pleasant Grove Baptist Church (Goshen Association)
- Mt. Jackson Baptist Church (Greenbrier/Raleigh Association)
- Harrisville Baptist Church (Harrisville Association)
- Quinwood First Baptist Church (Hopewell Association)
- Nutter Fort First Baptist Church (Judson Association)
- Calvary Baptist Church (Kanawha Valley Association)
- Weirton Heights Memorial Baptist (Panhandle Association)
- Cook Memorial Baptist Church (Rockcastle Association)
- Hurricane First Baptist Church (Teays Valley Association)
- Main Street Baptist Church (Teays Valley Association)

Camp Cowen 2024

Camps

APRIL 5-7 Women's Camp	JUNE 30-JULY 6 Junior 2 (grades 5-6)
APRIL 19-20 Senior Day (2024 graduates)	JULY 7-13 Junior High 2 (grades 7-9)
MAY 10-11 Summer Kickoff (grades 6-12)	JULY 14-20 High School 2 (grades 9-'24 grads)
JUNE 7-9 Younger Midler (grades 2-4)	JULY 26-29 Family Camp
JUNE 9-15 Junior High 1 (grades 7-9)	JULY 30-AUG. 2 Older Midler (grades 3-5)
JUNE 16-22 Junior 1 (grades 5-6)	AUG. 2-4 AB Men and Boys Camp
JUNE 23-29 High School 1 (grades 9-'24 grads)	AUG. 9-10 Camp Global

Other Dates

MARCH 1 Staff Applications Due	MARCH 15-16 Staff Interviews	APRIL 19 Wear Your Camp Shirt Day
APRIL 21 Cowen Sunday	APRIL 26-27 AB Men's Work Party	JUNE 3-6 Young Leader Training

*camp dates subject to change

**Camp Cowen 2024
registration opens
February 26th!**

**For more information, visit
campcowen.org.**

Discipleship Commission

MENTAL HEALTH

GRANDPARENTING MATTERS

REDUCING THE RISK



One in five adults, and one in ten children and adolescents, are affected by a mental health issue. This year, we continue to offer trainings and workshops to help our churches and leadership better engage mental health and those it affects with the hope that we have in Jesus.

Upcoming trainings include: De-Escalation & Right Response, safeTALK (suicide awareness), and Mental Health First Aid for Adults. We also have a Bible Study on Mental Health, written by two Licensed Professional Counselors from the WVBC.

One of the greatest joys of growing older is becoming a grandparent! Grandparents have an important spiritual role to play. Scripture says grandparents are called to a greater level of influence.: *“Teach them to your children and to their children after them” (Deuteronomy 4:9).*

Provided by the *Legacy Coalition*, our **Grandparenting Matters** resource will provide you with inspiration, ideas and tools to help realize your potential to grandparent successfully. We also have seminar resources that we can provide.

No child should ever experience the trauma of sexual abuse—and certainly never in a church or ministry setting. Sadly, there are hundreds of allegations made each year over incidents of child abuse in faith communities. In fact, churches, by virtue of their open, welcoming nature, often attract predators looking for a low-resistance environment where they can prey on children.

The WVBC is available to offer the **Reducing the Risk** training to help keep kids safe in your ministry.

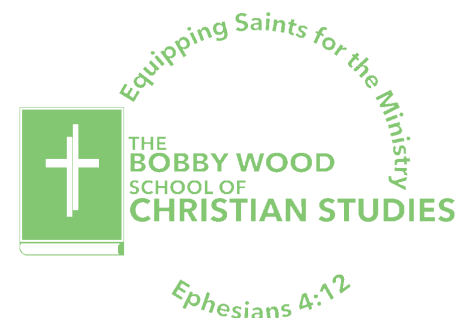
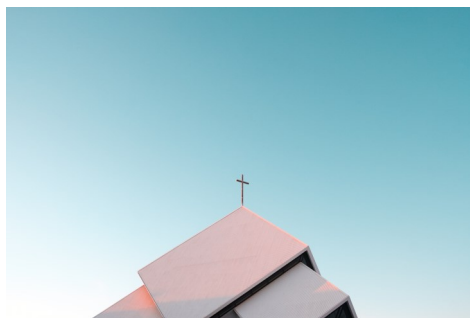
To learn more about any of the above ministries, contact Koreen Villers at villers@wvbc.org.

Leadership Commission

PASTORAL MENTORING

MINISTRY INTERNSHIPS

SCHOOL OF CHRISTIAN STUDIES



Offered in partnership with Renew Transformational Strategies, the **Mentoring for Pastoral Excellence Program** inspires, encourages, supports and strengthens networks between experienced pastor mentors and gifted younger pastor leaders in our WVBC churches

This program is available and encouraged for all young pastors who are serving within our WVBC family.

The **Ministry Internship Program** provides individuals with the opportunity to explore their long-term calling to ministry by giving them an opportunity to serve within our family of churches and placing them under the guidance of a mentor for a summer-long internship.

Internship opportunities include pastoral ministry, youth ministry, worship ministry, technology or intercultural ministry.

The **Bobby Wood School of Christian Studies (BWSCS)** has once again expanded the number of in-person locations. In addition to in-person courses, online courses are also available and students can seek to graduate in one of several different tracks.

BWSCS courses are open to anyone. The Pastoral Ministry track is also a pathway for ordination and ongoing seminary training.

To learn more about any of the above ministries, contact Mark McCloy at mccloy@wvbc.org.

Outreach Commission

NEW CHURCH PLANTING



In 2021, we formed a partnership with **Stadia Church Planting** to further enhance and accelerate our ability to plant new churches in West Virginia. A major benefit of this partnership is the Church Planter Assessment Center (CPAC), where experienced assessors evaluate planters' strengths, gifts, experiences and other criteria to identify opportunities for growth. In addition to CPAC, Stadia also provides numerous other training opportunities and support to help ensure the church plant is successful. Since 2003, 1300+ churches have started with Stadia's support.

CHURCH HEALTH CHECK-UP



Offered in partnership with **Renew Transformational Strategies (RTS)**, we partner with you to explore areas where your church can improve its organizational health in the areas of spiritual growth, outward focus, congregation relationships, mission and vision, lay leadership, openness to change, facility and finances and administrative structure. Once the assessment is complete, RTS will pray, discuss and discern with our team to generate a report for your church with suggestions of areas that you may want to address.

DINNER CHURCH



Question: How can you reach and engage the seemingly unreachable with the gospel?
Answer: Over dinner.

Dinner Church can transform your outreach, evangelism and discipleship efforts by becoming "mealtime missionaries."

The Outreach Commission is offering two separate Dinner Church Trainings:

- Feb. 3 at the Annual Training Event
- Mar. 15-16 at South Parkersburg Baptist

Come to either or both events to learn more.

To learn more about any of the above ministries, contact David Hulme at hulme@wvbc.org.

Stewardship Commission

MISSIONARY INTERNSHIPS



The **Missionary Internship Program** was designed to help young adults explore a long-term calling to missions by providing them with a three- to six-week customized internship alongside one of our global partners.

In addition to the internship, individuals receive six months of training in mission education, support raising, culture, security and other relevant topics.

MISSION TRIP LEADER TRAINING



The **Short-Term Mission Trip Leader Training** takes around two hours to complete and is available for those interested in leading a mission trip. The training is required for those seeking to lead a WVBC-endorsed mission trip.

The training includes details on recruiting your team, creating a budget, raising support, travel and security tips, helping your team debrief and much, much more.

LEGACY GIVING



Many churches and ministries across our WVBC family have benefitted tremendously from **Legacy Gifts**. A legacy gift is a gift in your last will and testament that comes in the form of property, cash or a percentage of your estate.

We are available to meet with your church to help promote this form of giving. We are also available to help manage these gifts on your church's behalf.

To learn more about any of the above ministries, contact Todd McClure at todd@wvbc.org.

An Invitation to the Dinner Church Weekend



How can my church more effectively reach and engage my community for Christ? How can my church reach and engage people with the gospel who probably will never attend a Sunday service? I hear those questions all the time. Well, now I have an answer.

It's called **Dinner Church**. Dinner Church isn't some new gimmick or program. It's not some unproven idea we're asking you to try. Rather, Dinner Church is how many everyday congregations around the country are already multiplying new faith communities.

Whether your church is sold on the Dinner Church idea, wants to know more about it or just wants to learn some proven methods to reach and engage others, we want to invite you to an important Dinner Church Weekend, March 15-16. Our sessions will be led by Verlon and Melodee Fosner, who have planted numerous Dinner Churches.

Dinner Church Weekend Details

Location: South Parkersburg Baptist Church

Friday, March 15, 10:30 AM–4:30 PM: Dinner Church Encounter
Explore the power of the historic Jesus Table approach.

Saturday, March 16, 9:30 AM–3:30 PM: Dinner Church Launch
Develop your Dinner Church launch strategy. Designed so that you and your church can leave with an actionable plan in hand.

Rates for WVBC members:

Friday - \$15.00 per person

Saturday - \$10.00 per person

Both days - \$20.00 per person

* Price includes lunch and dinner on Friday and lunch on Saturday.

Register at: dinnerchurch.com/dcww or by scanning the QR code to the right
Be sure to scroll down for WVBC rates

Overnight accommodations are available at local hotels. Microtel in Mineral Wells is offering a special rate of \$69.44. Call (304)-596-8787 and mention "WVBC".



If you have questions or want more information, please contact David Hulme at (304) 669-3436 or hulme@wvbc.org.

Dinner Church Collective West Virginia Baptist Convention

Dinner Church Weekend

An Effective, Affordable, & Contextual Approach to Starting Church

March 15-16 | Parkersburg, WV

Register at dinnerchurch.com/dcww

Russian Baptists Need Special Prayers

Written by David Bess
Vice Chairman, WVBC/Russia Mission Partnership

In February 2022, Russia invaded the neighboring nation of Ukraine. Since that time until the present, the bloody war has continued month after month. Despite strong economic sanctions and massive military aid to Ukraine, President Putin is relentless in his quest to make Ukraine part of the Russian homeland.

Our Russian Baptist friends usually share nothing via email or electronic chat about their convictions on the war in general or President Putin in particular. Communications are monitored, and serious consequences could result if they make remarks that are unresponsive of Moscow.

Rev. Yuriy Sipko, however, is an exception. As the former president of the Russian Baptist Union and former vice-president of the Baptist World Alliance, he has a large platform from which to share his views. He repeatedly has spoken out against the moral evils of the war. He's now considered a criminal by the Russian government and an enemy of the state. He's fled the country and is safe abroad, but his family is still at risk. Because of his outspoken stance against the war as a leader of Russian Baptists, all Russian Baptists are now at increased risk. Even though their political opinions vary, they all are Baptists, just as Yuriy Sipko is Baptist. Long before the war, Baptists were viewed with skepticism by the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church. Now their reputation has grown worse. As recent events have shown, prominent Russians who are critical of President Putin do not fare well.

What can we do as West Virginia Baptists to help our Russian Baptist brothers and sisters?

First, we can pray for God's protection. We can ask our sovereign, all-powerful God to watch over our spiritual family

members. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Second, we can pray for God's provision. Due to financial sanctions, official channels are now closed for the WVBC and International Ministries to send funds for relief. God, however, can make a way when there is no way. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."

Third, we can pray for God's boldness. Russian Baptists are no strangers to obeying God rather than men. During the Communist era, when preaching the Gospel was illegal, godly men would be arrested and imprisoned for pastoring churches. When a pastor was taken, another bold believer would take his place. We should pray now that these saints have the perseverance to stand for the Lord as their Biblical convictions dictate. Proverbs 28:1 says, "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."

Finally, we can pray for God's peace. We can pray that President Putin ceases to wage war. We can pray that the deep divide between the Russian and Ukrainian people would heal. We can pray that all the other nations of the world work toward peace. Isaiah 9:6 says of our Lord Jesus, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Will you join me in making prayer for Russian Baptists a top priority? Will you pray for them regularly as individuals and as churches? As James 5:16b says, "...The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."



SENIOR HIGH CONVENTION

February 23-25 FBC Shinnston

by God in God for God

CREATED

WITH SPEAKER BRYAN MARVEL
AND WORSHIP BY KYLE HUFFMAN

\$40 per person*
a late fee of \$10 per person will be charged for registrations after Feb 9

Shirts available online and at event.

Learn more or register at wvbc.org



Spring Children's Rally

For children currently in grades K-5, 6th grade is optional.

Saturday, March 2, 2024

At Parchment Valley in the Greenlee Activities Center



TELL HIS STORY

Cost: \$14 (\$26 after February 13)

Register Online at www.wvbc.org

Artificial Intelligence in Ministry: A Look into the Future

Hosted by Pastors4Pastors



March 1, 2024 5:30—8:00 PM

Parchment Valley Conference Center (Dining Hall)

Worship: Sam Gasaway Guest Speaker: Trent Eastman

Cost: \$15 (\$20 for non-P4P members)

Join us as we explore how AI can enhance ministry, from Bible study to sermon preparation.

Register online at wvbc.org

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

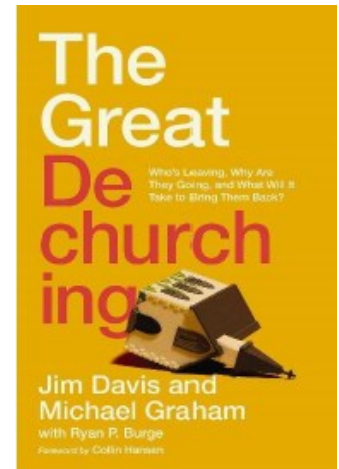
PASTORS4PASTORS BOOK CLUB

Attend, Learn, Share, Grow Together

All pastoral staff are invited to join us in reading *The Great Dechurching*. We will also gather on the following Fridays at noon to fellowship and discuss the various parts of the book:

- Apr 26 at Page Baptist
- Aug 23 at Glenville FBC
- Oct 25 at Oakwood Baptist

* Snacks will be provided



To allow us to plan for snacks, please let P4P President, Anthony Pratt, know you are planning on joining us. anthony_pratt@hotmail.com or (304) 382-3600

2024 ANNUAL BIBLE CONFERENCE

Saturday, March 2, 2024

Parchment Valley Conference Center

A STUDY OF 2 SAMUEL, FEATURING DR. TRENT EASTMAN



Register online at:
wvbc.org



Weirton Christian Center Welcomes the New Year

Written by Kim Weaver
Director, Weirton Christian Center



The enjoying Weirton Christian Center's CHRISTmas program.

Weirton Christian Center had a great year in 2023, and 2024 is off to a great start. Although we did not become a county preschool, God has provided the funding for us to add another three-year old class, for a total of 40 preschoolers. We already have a waiting list for next school year. The CHRISTmas program was proof that they are getting to know Jesus as well as their letters and numbers.

- The afterschool program has 80 children registered, and we have a really good group of class leaders right now.
- The Leadership Program, sponsored by Cleveland Cliffs, is giving our middle school and high school students what they need to build good life and work skills.
- Our kids are blessed with piano and dance lessons with the help of generous donors.
- Our Signs of Hope group is performing again. This group was a great witness to the public during the city's recognition of Children's Grief Awareness Day in November.
- We were promoting our Never Alone Kids program, which is a support group for grieving children and their families. Please pray that we have a big group for our next session. They may even start a group at the local elementary school.

We truly appreciate all the churches who have put us in their mission budgets and think of us at Christmas and on a regular basis! There is not a lot of funding that is consistent for us - and I am totally amazed at how God uses His people to keep us going after 106 years! Transportation and feeding our preschoolers breakfast and lunch are our biggest areas of concern. With no billable services and 18 people on the payroll, it takes faithful supporters like our WV Baptist family to help us do what we do - and make a difference in the lives of so many children. Many thanks to all of you for your prayers, friendship and support in so many ways!



AMERICA FOR CHRIST OFFERING 2024

GRACE upon GRACE

Resources available at: <https://abhms.org/volunteer-opportunities/give/where/afc/>

Northwest Area News

by **Mark McCloy**, Northwest Area Minister

Celebrating the Season of Giving

The year is new and the future is bright as we think upon the promises of God and all God will do through His people. We have just celebrated the season of giving, and many have found the blessing of helping and serving others.



Good Hope Association mission team prepares to leave for Kentucky.

In mid-November, the Good Hope Association organized a mission trip to Kentucky to help repair homes damaged by storms. Ladies from the association also made quilts to send as a sign of support and love to them.

Churches across the state collected shoeboxes to provide Christmas presents and a gospel message for underprivileged children around the world. Several churches collected funds for project Bolivian Christmas-child to do the same. Not forgetting those here at home, churches collected socks, hats and gloves; packed shoeboxes, bought toys and a variety of other special surprises for the children ministered to at our Weirton Christian Center. People helped the Hope Center and its residents battle addictions by showing them love through Bible teaching, Christmas gifts, worshipping together and time. Churches celebrated with one another through Christmas dinners and programs, cantatas and plays, celebrations and song.

Thankfully, “God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world, through Him, might be saved” (John 3:17). Indeed, He did not just send His Son, He gave His Son. God bless us, every one.

Southwest Area News

by **Evan Arkell**, Southwest Area Minister

Planting Gospel Seeds During Advent

I have recently found myself asking: “How did it become 2024 already?” As the days continue to fly by one-by-one, we continually move a day closer to our Lord’s return.

Many churches celebrated the traditions of Advent throughout December, both looking back at the birth of Christ and looking forward to His return. The celebrations of the Christmas season were too numerous to mention all of them, but I know there were many churches that reached out to their communities in different ways.

One of those was Genesis Fellowship in South Charleston, who hosted their Bethlehem Experience in early December, complete with live animals, including a camel, which I know was a part of several churches’ nativities around the state, as well. The Bethlehem Experience had booths set up with different kinds of shops, such as a scribe booth, a tannery booth, an artist booth, a toy shop booth, as well as some opportunities for visitors to pet their live sheep and camel. Of course, there was also a place for baby Jesus along with Mary and Joseph.

I also want to thank all of the churches who assisted the less fortunate in our area during the Christmas season. Many meals, clothes, toys, etc., were given. Many relationships were formed, and many gospel seeds were planted in the lives of the recipients – all in the name of Christ. I can’t even begin to guess how many thousands of Operation Christmas Child boxes were gathered across the Southwest Region. Thank each of you for all that you do!



Pastor Rick and Tammy Pursley at Genesis Fellowship's Bethlehem Experience

Northeast Area News

by David Hulme, Northeast Area Minister

New Pavilion at Flemington Baptist



Construction of the outdoor pavilion at Flemington Baptist Church.

It might be winter, but the Lord has blessed Flemington Baptist Church (Union Association) with a new outdoor pavilion. Pastor Garry Whitescarver and the church have big plans to use their new pavilion for both outreach and fellowship. Outdoor worship opportunities, gospel sings, picnics and youth activities are just a few of the ways the church plans to utilize this new blessing.

Elkins FBC Hosts "A Night in Bethlehem"

Over 1000 people from Elkins and the surrounding area attended Elkins First Baptist Church's dramatic and interactive "A Night in Bethlehem." The event was an opportunity for all ages to experience a live nativity, a marketplace with interactive crafts, live animals (including a camel) and events surrounding the birth of Christ. Pastor Brett Rinehart posted how great it was watching over 50 volunteers joyfully coming together to make it all happen.



Visitors enjoy "A Night in Bethlehem" at Elkins First Baptist Church.

Southeast Area News

by Jon Villers, Southeast Area Minister

My Travel Log for December

I am so thankful to see God's Kingdom at work!!

Dec. 5 - Thanks for the Facebook invitation to join the caroling crew of the Birch River Baptist Church on Sunday afternoon! I had such a good time with Pastor Chris Tatum and their church family!! We finished the caroling tour at the local fire house and even got to sing to Santa and Mrs. Claus!



Birch River Baptist on their Hayride Christmas Caroling event.

Dec. 9 - Thankful to experience an amazing Christmas Cantata at Gassaway Baptist Church under the direction of Bronlynn Morlan.

Dec. 10 - At the top (summit) of Bradshaw Mountain, in McDowell County, I found a lighthouse on the hill that has only known two pastors in their 53-year history! Pastor Gene Addair and his wife Kim, along with the entire congregation of Summit Missionary Baptist Church, welcomed me for morning worship.

Dec. 17 - Thank you, Pastor Steve and Susan Martin of Millbrook Baptist Church for such gracious hospitality on short notice! I only asked to come the day before and my name was in the bulletin! Such a welcoming church! It was also a great privilege to present a mission certificate to Springdale First Baptist Church on Sunday afternoon. Our prayers are with them as Pastor Jack Cole finished eight years of faithful service behind the pulpit on December 31st.

Dec. 24 - I celebrated with and presented mission certificates to the Monroe County Churches of Sweet Springs Baptist and Peterstown Baptist on Sunday morning.

Dec. 31 - My son, Caleb Villers, the associate pastor of youth at Summersville Baptist, led their two morning services on a day they called Family Sunday. Caleb invited me to team preach and titled the message "He's Here, Now What?" The Youth Praise Team let me join in, and it was a wonderful time to respond to Jesus's arrival with worship and adoration!

THERESA FAYE ALLISON, 92, of Hurricane, died on November 15, 2023. She was a member of Judson Baptist Church, where she served as pianist, Sunday School teacher, Bible School superintendent and president of their America Baptist Women,

ELEANOR LEE MASON BONNELL, 88, of Mattoon, IL, died on November 26, 2023. She served alongside her husband, who pastored several American Baptist Churches over the last few decades. She was a current member of Simpson Creek Baptist Church.

PAUL E. "JAYR" BYRD, JR., 68, of Clarksburg, died on November 7, 2023. He served as pastor of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Brownton, WV, for ten years.

LUSTER OREL DOUGHTY, 87, of Dunbar, died on November 16, 2023. He was a member of Dunbar First Baptist Church, where he served in many roles, including deacon.

EARL IVEN FETTY, 96, of Ona, died on December 2, 2023. He was a member of Beulah Ann Missionary Baptist Church, where he served as a trustee, assistant choir director and Sunday School teacher.

FRIEDA MERLE GEORGE, 93, of Cross Lanes, died on November 26, 2023. She was a member of Dunbar First Baptist Church, served as clerk for the Kanawha Valley Association and was a camp director for 16 years at Camp Cowen.

DANIEL EUGENE JOHNSON, 74, of Glenville, died on December 29, 2023. He was a member of Glenville First Baptist Church, where he served as a deacon, trustee, financial secretary and Sunday School teacher.

CATHERINE S. "CATHY" KALAR, 68, of Elkins, died on December 30, 2023. She was a member of Elkins First Baptist Church, where she served on many boards, played piano and taught Sunday School.

INA KELBY LANE, 96, of Stephenson, died on November 7, 2023. She was a member of Spruce Grove Missionary Baptist Church, where she served as the church clerk.

BETTY JANE LYALL, 95, of Chapmanville, died on October 31, 2023. She was a member of Logan First Baptist Church and previously served on the Board of Mission for the WVBC.

BARBARA ANN MASON, 87, of Parkersburg, died on November 28, 2023. She was a member of Parkersburg Baptist Temple, where she served as a Sunday School superintendent, was a member of the choir and worked in the food pantry. She was also active with the American Baptist Women's Ministries in the Parkersburg Association.

RONALD H. MULINEX, 80, of Mineral Wells, died on December 25, 2023. He was a member of South Parkersburg Baptist Church, where he served as a Sunday School teacher and a member of the choir.

RUTH HELEN (FIELDS) PASKO, 96, of Parkersburg, died on November 1, 2023. She was a member of Parkersburg First Baptist Church.

DELBERT I. "BUTCH" SHEPHERD, 76, of Cottageville, died on December 21, 2023. He was a charter member of Parchment Valley Baptist Church, where he served as a deacon and Sunday School teacher. He later joined Hopewell Baptist Church, where he also served as a Sunday School teacher.

JOHNNY MARLIN SITES, 83, of Petersburg, died on November 27, 2023. He was a member of North Mill Creek Baptist Church, where he served as an honorary deacon, trustee and Sunday School teacher.

VIRGINIA "RUTH" SOLE, 89, of Saint Marys, died on December 12, 2023. She was a member of South Parkersburg Baptist Church, where she sang in the choir and served on several different committees.

JOHN THOMAS STEELE, 93, died on November 15, 2023. He previously served as pastor of Mannington First Baptist Church and then Moundsville Baptist Church. He also served as president of the WV Baptist Ministers Council and on the WVBC Executive Board.

CLIFFORD "BUDDY" HANSFORD SUTHERLAND, 90, of Nitro, died on November 8, 2023. He previously served as with Baptist Campus Ministry at West Virginia University and also pastored Salem First Baptist Church, Clendenin First Baptist Church and Nitro First Baptist Church.

LOUANNA JEAN WEIR, 95, of Beckley, died on December 12, 2023. She was a member of Beckley First Baptist Church, where she served as a deaconess and was a member of the Women's Circle.

Leadership Updates

Ethan Starcher to Crab Orchard Baptist Church as associate pastor 9/6/2023

John Massey to Sunday Road Baptist Church as interim pastor 10/1/2023

Michael Cool to Holly River Baptist Church as pastor 10/15/2023

Patrick Huffman to Crab Orchard Baptist Church as youth director 10/25/2023

Shane Picha to Crab Orchard Baptist Church as youth director 10/25/2023

Terry Golden to Rainelle First Baptist Church as interim pastor 11/19/2023

Scott Whetzel to Romney First Baptist Church as pastor 12/3/2023

February 2024

FEBRUARY 1 – The ministry of Albright Baptist Church; Joe Lamm, pastor (Goshen Association)
FEBRUARY 2 – The ministry of Quiet Dell Baptist Church; Edward Carpenter, pastor (Fairmont Association)
FEBRUARY 3 – The Annual Training Event happening today at Parchment Valley
FEBRUARY 4 – The ministry of Reynoldsville Baptist Church; Jon Hayes, pastor (Judson Association)
FEBRUARY 5 – Trent Eastman, member of the WVBC Leadership Commission
FEBRUARY 6 – The ministry of North Mill Creek Baptist Church (Eastern Association)
FEBRUARY 7 – Ruth Vindas, International Ministries Global Servant to Costa Rica
FEBRUARY 8 – Kayla Starcher, Student Ministries and Mission Support Assistant, WVBC
FEBRUARY 9 – The ministry of Madison Baptist Church; Jim Butcher, pastor (Coal River Association)
FEBRUARY 10 – Dee Wanner, WV American Baptist Women's Ministries' president and member of the WVBC Outreach Commission
FEBRUARY 11 – The ministry of Buckhannon First Baptist Church; David Smith, pastor (Broad Run Association)
FEBRUARY 12 – The ministry of Kanawha City Baptist Church; Don Toler, pastor (Kanawha Valley Association)
FEBRUARY 13 – The ministry of Smithville Baptist Church (Harrisville Association)
FEBRUARY 14 – Jae Stockton, International Ministries Global Servant to Mexico
FEBRUARY 15 – Eliberto Juarez, International Ministries Global Servant to El Salvador
FEBRUARY 16 – Tan Coats, International Ministries Global Servant to Myanmar and Thailand
FEBRUARY 17 – The ministry of Layland Baptist Church (Hopewell Association)
FEBRUARY 18 – The ministry of Providence Baptist Church (Elk Valley Association)
FEBRUARY 19 – Sandy Foster Currey, chair of the WVBC Discipleship Commission
FEBRUARY 20 – The ministry of Helen Baptist Church; Danny Lusk, pastor (Greenbrier-Raleigh Association)
FEBRUARY 21 – Ricardo Mayol-Bracero, International Ministries Global Servant to Guatemala
FEBRUARY 22 – The ministry of Calvary Baptist Church; Greg Swisher, pastor (Fayette Association)
FEBRUARY 23 – Senior High Convention happening this weekend at Shinnston First Baptist Church and the AB Men's Prayer Breakfasts happening around the state
FEBRUARY 24 – Mike Sisson, Executive Minister, WVBC
FEBRUARY 25 – Marijane Kiley, vice chair of the WVBC Stewardship Commission
FEBRUARY 26 – The ministry of Reedy Baptist Church; Bill Stewart, pastor (Good Hope Association)
FEBRUARY 27 – Rebecca Mann, International Ministries Global Servant to Thailand
FEBRUARY 28 – The ministry of Fifth Avenue Baptist Church (Guyandotte Association)
FEBRUARY 29 – Barbara Bolick, International Ministries Global Servant to Chile

March 2024

MARCH 1 – The ministry of Goshen Baptist Church; Daniel Meadows, pastor (Goshen Association)
MARCH 2 – Annual Bible Conference and the Spring Children's Rally happening at Parchment Valley
MARCH 3 – David Parajon, International Ministries Global Servant to Nicaragua
MARCH 4 – Taku Longkumer, International Ministries Global Servant to South and East Asia
MARCH 5 – The ministry of Mount Vernon Baptist Church; Roger Fontaine, pastor (Broad Run Association)
MARCH 6 – The ministry of Little Capon Baptist Church; Tony Baker, pastor (Eastern Association)
MARCH 7 – The ministry of New Martinsville First Baptist Church; Jeff Musgrave, pastor (Panhandle Association)
MARCH 8 – The ministry of Oakwood Baptist Church; David Moutz, pastor (Kanawha Valley Association)
MARCH 9 – The ministry of Tabor's Creek Baptist Church; Denny Brown, pastor (Twelve Pole Association)
MARCH 10 – The ministry of Oak Hill Baptist Church; Samuel Blaylock, pastor (Fayette Association)
MARCH 11 – The ministry of Union Baptist Church; Christopher Stanley, pastor (Union Association)
MARCH 12 – Josh Smith, member of the WVBC Leadership Commission
MARCH 13 – The ministry of West Point Baptist Church; Ron Miller, pastor (Greenbrier-Raleigh Association)
MARCH 14 – The ministry of Auburn Baptist Church; Harry Drake, pastor (Harrisville Association)
MARCH 15 – The ministry of Poca Baptist Church; Thomas Moore, pastor (Teays Valley Association)
MARCH 16 – The ministry of Sutton Baptist Church; Eric Thomas, pastor (Elk Valley Association)
MARCH 17 – The ministry of Burnsville First Baptist Church; Roland Ramsey, pastor (Little Kanawha Association)
MARCH 18 – Tim Long, International Ministries Global Servant to Mexico
MARCH 19 – Rick Gutierrez, International Ministries Global Servant to South Africa
MARCH 20 – Mayra Giovanetti, International Ministries Global Servant to Iberoamerica and the Caribbean
MARCH 21 – The ministry of Mallory Baptist Church; Jim Saunders, pastor (Logan-Mingo Association)
MARCH 22 – The ministry of Rockcastle Baptist Church; Silas Mullins, pastor (Rockcastle Association)
MARCH 23 – Robert Bates, member of the WVBC Discipleship Commission
MARCH 24 – The ministry of Milhoan Ridge Baptist Church; Lester Morgan, pastor (Good Hope Association)
MARCH 25 – The ministry of Sarepta Baptist Church; Denise Humphries, pastor (Parkersburg Association)
MARCH 26 – The ministry of Union Baptist Church of Crossroads; Jacob Thompson, pastor (Fairmont Association)
MARCH 27 – Ethan Starcher, chair of the WVBC Outreach Commission
MARCH 28 – The ministry of Zoar Baptist Church; Chris Venoy, pastor (Guyandotte Association)
MARCH 29 – The ministry of Summersville Baptist Church; Dana Gatewood, pastor (Hopewell Association)
MARCH 30 – The ministry of Nutter Fort First Baptist Church; Ronald Owens, interim pastor (Judson Association)
MARCH 31 – Chad Mugrage, second vice president of the WVBC and member of the WVBC Stewardship Commission

West Virginia Baptist Convention staff and missionaries listed are on the occasion of their birthday.

Upcoming Events

FEBRUARY

- February 3**
Annual Training Event
 Parchment Valley Conference Center
- February 20**
Bobby Wood School of Christian Studies: Old Testament II (B-02)
 Various locations
- February 23-25**
Senior High Convention
 Shinnston First Baptist Church
- February 24**
AB Men Prayer Breakfasts
 Various locations

MARCH

- March 1**
Pastor4Pastors Event
 Parchment Valley Conference Center
- March 2**
Annual Bible Conference
 Parchment Valley Conference Center
- March 2**
Spring Children's Rally
 Parchment Valley Conference Center
- March 15**
Bobby Wood School of Christian Studies: Theology II (T-02)
 Online
- March 15**
Bobby Wood School of Christian Studies: Intro to Missions (Mod-03)
 Online
- March 15-16**
Dinner Church Weekend
 South Parkersburg Baptist Church

APRIL

- April 5-7**
Women's Camp
 Camp Cowen
- April 12-13**
AB Men Work Party
 Parchment Valley Conference Center
- April 19-20**
Senior Day
 Camp Cowen
- April 20**
Bobby Wood School of Christian Studies: Weddings and Funerals (E-05)
 Parchment Valley Conference Center
- April 21**
Camp Cowen Sunday
- April 26**
Pastors4Pastors Book Study
 Page Baptist Church
- April 26-27**
AB Men Work Party
 Camp Cowen

MAY

- May 3**
WVBC Executive Committee Meeting
 Parchment Valley Conference Center
- May 4**
WVBC Executive Board and Commission Meetings
 Parchment Valley Conference Center
- May 6-8**
Spring Golden'eers Retreat
 Parchment Valley Conference Center

Newsletter Submissions

Send submissions for *The West Virginia Baptist* to: thewvbaptist@wvbc.org or mail submissions to the West Virginia Baptist Convention, Attention: Todd McClure, P.O. Box 1019, Parkersburg, West Virginia, 26102. If you are submitting text, send typed copy only. We also accept hard copy and digital photos of 300 dpi (dots per inch). Please include a caption for your photo and your name and address if you want your photo returned.

Deadline for submission is the 3rd of odd numbered months.

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SUNNY DAY ACTIVITY CENTER
 — at Cowen —

\$1,500,000
goal

\$1,210,000
current amount raised



Thanks to the generous support of our WVBC churches and individuals, we have raised nearly \$110,000 since the campaign for the Sunny Day Activity Center at Camp Cowen was relaunched in October. From the bottom of our hearts:

Thank you!

We have raised over 80% of our \$1,500,000 goal, but there's still more work to be done!

If you're interested in giving to the Sunny Day Activity Center, scan the QR code above or visit campcowen.org/sunny-day-center/



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