

B4101

A series from the *Illinois Baptist* • Vol. 15

BASICS FOR BAPTISTS

● WHO WE ARE ● WHAT WE BELIEVE

● HOW WE SERVE

Missionaries see God work among unchurched

At a typical Bible study in Illinois, said **Rusty Ford**, you get excited if you have the opportunity to share the gospel with *one* person who doesn't yet know Christ.

In Spain, the audience is different. Ford, an International Mission Board missionary, said at a Bible study meeting in Seville, the group included atheists, people from a Catholic background, two women in a same-sex relationship, and a man who had just the week before committed adultery.

"How in the world do you get a group like that to study the Bible?" Ford asked.

"I don't. God does."

Ford was associate pastor of Pontoon Baptist Church in Granite City before he and his family relocated to Spain. The Fords serve in a country where less than one percent of people are evangelical Christians, and there are 9,000 cities without an evangelical church.

That picture is reflected across Europe, where religion is a historical cornerstone, but a very small percentage of the population has a personal relationship with Christ. The IMB estimates nearly 99% of the population in Europe does not know Him.

A few years ago, Europe's spiritual plight caught



We serve in ... Europe
Rusty and Jennifer Ford (with their children Levi, Hudson and Scarlett) are working to establish a new church in a Spanish city that has no evangelical congregation.

the attention of an Illinois couple who visited Italy on their wedding anniversary. Charles and Candi Campbell assemble a small group every month to pray for the country and learn about how they can serve the missionaries there. Italy "obviously has a rich and long religious tradition," blogged Charles, an IBSA church planting director and member of Delta Church in Springfield, "but somewhere along the way that rich heritage has turned into something that looks very different from what is in the Bible."

At best, religion "is simply part of their culture and the average Italian doesn't have an understanding of what a relationship with Jesus Christ looks like.

Knowing this has burdened our hearts for the people of this beautiful land."

God is at work in Europe, Ford told a recent gathering of Illinois Baptists while at home on stateside assignment. The week he arrived in Spain, he met a couple who would become very close with his family. One year later, the couple came to know Christ. Two years later, they're now worship leaders.

"God is faithful to give us best friends in a new area, to save them, and to call them into ministry," Ford said.

"We serve a good God, do we not?"

WHEN GIVING BECOMES LAUGHABLE

"It's time for the offering," the pastor of a church in Pittsburgh told the congregation, and they jumped to their feet and began applauding and cheering. "We don't give until it hurts," he explained later, "we give until it feels good."

The pep rally atmosphere as the offering buckets were passed would attest that's true. In that church, the pastor made much of Paul's admonition to the Corinthians to give "cheerfully." The word comes from the same root as our English word "hilarious." Laughter as a response to giving stands in stark contrast to the faces in most services as the plate goes by.

And consider the tithe, 10% of one's income, compared to the actual church offerings by American evangelicals of 3% of their income.

Southern Baptists still talk about the tithe, but is it just talk?



WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT... STEWARDSHIP

Read Article 13 of *The Baptist Faith & Message (2000)*, “Stewardship,” at IBSA.org/B101.

As newlyweds, my wife, Candi, and I didn’t really discuss whether we would give a portion of our combined income as a tithe. We were already doing it. Both fortunate to have been raised by Christian parents, it was just something we did. And, when you’re young and poor, 10% isn’t much.

For us, a mature understanding of stewardship probably didn’t come until later, when we really began to have a deeper understanding and appreciation for the gospel. Being good stewards of our resources—and not just our money—became an overflow of our relationship with Jesus and what he’s done for us.

“God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him,” *The Baptist Faith & Message* tells us. The Apostle Paul put it this way in Philippians 4:

“I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:12-13, HCSB).

For Paul, his treasure was Jesus. He trusted God’s provision for his

needs—and his soul. When we realize who God is, who we are, and how gracious He’s been to us, the outcome is that we’ll want to give out of the overflow of our relationship with Him.

But so many times, we don’t give because we’re afraid. That God won’t provide, or won’t provide like we want Him to.

At one point in our family’s life when I was serving at a church here in Illinois, we only had one car. It was all we could afford, and we decided we didn’t want to go into debt to pay for a second one. But many times, I needed that second car to do a church-related task. The church had a 15-passenger van sitting in the parking lot, and our pastor suggested I use it when I needed it.

It may not have been my ideal way for God to provide. He didn’t drop a new car in our laps, or give us an extra \$50,000. But He gave us what we needed to get us by in that moment.

“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus,” Paul continues in his letter to the Philippians.

Stewardship would be challenging enough if it were only about money. But Scripture is clear that that’s not the only call to wisely manage our resources.

“Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacri-

fice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1, HCSB).

As we approach our 50’s, good stewardship for my wife and me is even more about time than it is money. Perhaps you’re there too. We don’t have the same energy level we used to have. But the same truth that sustained us during those single-car years sustains us now through a different kind of stewardship challenge: If our foundation is in Jesus, it’s a wellspring that will never run dry. We can’t be afraid to give away our time, energy and talents in ways that align with Scripture.

There may be weeks where we say, “OK, God, I’m up to here. But you’ve opened up a door of opportunity. For that to happen, I need you to sustain me because I’m at capacity. I’m tapped out.”

Then, we go forward, trusting God to sustain us. And if (and when) we fail, we repent and confess and receive God’s grace to be restored and keep moving forward.

It comes down to us having a right understanding of who God is, who we are, and that God has called us to live as generous people. And we can only do that when we truly understand that he’s sovereign, in control of our lives, and, as believers, He is for us.

Charles Campbell is IBSA’s director of church planting in southern Illinois.

CONSIDER THIS For personal study or group discussion

- 1 We often mean money when we talk about stewardship. What other things does the Bible call us to manage well?
- 2 In what area is it most difficult for you to practice good stewardship? What makes it challenging?
- 3 Think of a time when God has provided finances, energy, time, or something else in a way that you didn’t expect. How does His provision then—and at other times—spur you toward better stewardship?

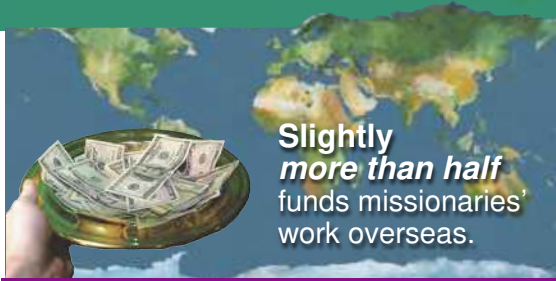


A Plan with a Ripple Effect

Southern Baptists
gave more than

\$186 million through the Cooperative Program in 2013-14.

That money goes to support missions and ministry in Illinois, North America, and around the world.



Slightly more than half funds missionaries' work overseas.

56.75%
of Illinois churches' CP gifts stay in state to:

Start new churches in
322 places they're needed

Provide training for nearly
1,000
IBSA churches



Facilitate missions opportunities here, and to the
ends of
the earth

still
CP WORKS



WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

It wasn't the buzziest issue on the docket for the 1925 Southern Baptist Convention. But the Cooperative Program, first voted on at the Memphis meeting, has stood the test of time, despite an inauspicious beginning.

There were other, more pressing issues jockeying for attention in 1925, writes journalist Todd Starnes, including what Baptists would do about the theory of evolution, and the presentation of the first draft of *The Baptist Faith & Message*.

"The adoption of the Cooperative Program came on the afternoon of May 13 and it didn't generate much debate," Starnes wrote in June 2000 edition of *SBC Life*. "At the time, it was called the Future Program Commission and its report was delivered by the chairman, M.E. Dodd. Many in the auditorium considered the presentation a magnificent committee accomplishment."

The excitement could well have been relief: Here was a new plan to unite Baptists, following the "75 Million Campaign" of 1919. Baptists pledged more than \$92 million in the campaign meant to capitalize on "the spirit of unity and sacrifice manifested during World War One," Starnes noted. But only \$58.6 million was ever collected.

Despite the shortfall, the amount given during the 75 Million Campaign was still 80-90% more than Baptists had given in the first 74 years of the Convention's history. The SBC fell into debt after the failed campaign, but, emboldened by the earlier effort, they pressed forward to create a new plan.

"They had reason to do so with optimism," wrote IBSA Executive Director Nate Adams in another article for *SBC Life*. "The unprecedented cooperative giving from

1919 to 1924 had raised the sights of Southern Baptists, giving them a vision of what autonomous churches could do together for the cause of Christ.

"They had experienced the spiritual blessing that sacrificial giving brings and developed a pattern for ongoing cooperation."

Today, churches that give through the Cooperative Program support the work of more than 4,800 international missionaries, plus 2,300 missionaries and church planters in North America. Through the North American Mission Board, 1,250 student missionaries also are sharing the gospel with people who don't know Christ.

CP also helps train the next generation of pastors, children's leaders, youth ministers, and women's ministry directors. More than 16,000 leaders are preparing for ministry at the SBC's six seminaries, and the Cooperative Program allows them to earn their degree at a lower cost than at other divinity schools.

For the current fiscal year, \$188 million is planned through the CP Allocation Budget to support all those ministries and more. Not bad for a Plan B.

— Meredith Flynn

Think about it:

1. Do you associate tension with cooperation? What are some of the benefits, and some of the challenges, of working with others?
2. Along with missions giving, what are some of the ways your church has cooperated with other churches in your area? What has resulted from those partnerships?
3. Most SBC churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts to missions through the Cooperative Program. What is your church's CP percentage?

ILLINOIS IN SIGHT

Foundation helps Baptists invest in the future

When Dennis Norton's church needed a loan to make much-needed updates to their building, he turned to the Baptist Foundation of Illinois, instead of a local bank. Through BFI's bond program, First Baptist Church in Gibson City was able to quickly fund the improvements. In fact, the church's new parking lot was poured just in time for winter weather.

"People can be missional through the Baptist Foundation, purchasing these bonds," Norton said. "And rather than giving my interest money to a secular entity, I wanted it to stay focused on the Kingdom purpose."

Many Baptist state conventions, like IBSA, have a Foundation that does just that—helping people stay focused on how God would have them steward their resources. BFI's bond program, which started in 2013, is "Baptists helping Baptists" build new church buildings or make substantial improvements on existing facilities, said BFI Executive Director **Doug Morrow**.

The bond program is only one way BFI encourages biblical management of resources. In his role, Morrow speaks in churches across the state about principles of what he calls "life stewardship."

"If we're going to be consistent as Christians, and have a Christian worldview, we've got to have some ethical consistency between what we do in our lifetime, and what we do after death," Morrow has said. Through a tool called the Life



Stewardship Navigator, he encourages Baptists in Illinois toward Christian estate planning, so that they're planning for good stewardship now and in the future.

Along with the bond program and estate planning, BFI assists with church and institutional investing. Morrow also has walked alongside several Illinois churches through capital stewardship campaigns, including one recently completed at First Baptist Church in Columbia.

BFI also helps Illinois Baptists invest in the next generation of leaders through annual educational scholarships. The awards are created when a donor gives to an existing scholarship endowment, or establishes a new one. Last year, the Foundation awarded more than \$76,000 to 39 college and seminary students.

That's money well spent, and plans well made.

For more information about the Baptist Foundation of Illinois, go to baptistfoundationil.org or call (217) 391-3116.

Clip and Share B-101 with

- Pastors
- Church staff
- Discipleship leaders
- Missions leaders
- New members

ABOUT B-101

This is a 20-part study on the basic beliefs and missions of our denomination. It is designed for new believers, new Baptists, and those who want a refresher. Clip it out of the newspaper, fold into a four-page leaflet, and share with the people who would benefit from the information. You might even lead a study. B-101 can be used for:

- **New members classes**
- **Study on missions in Illinois and around the world**
- **Exploration of doctrines in *The Baptist Faith & Message***

Make as many photocopies as you need for study groups, church members, and worship attenders. Or download the PDFs at www.IBSA.org/B101.

Produced by the editors of the *Illinois Baptist*: Eric Reed, Meredith Flynn, Lisa Sergent. Designed by Kris Kell.

Look for B-101 in every issue!

What are you doing on Wednesday nights?

This is the 15th in our 20-part series. That means more than half the essays on *The Baptist Faith & Message* are ready for use in a new members class, small group, or doctrine study. Look online and download the set. We've bundled them for easy printing and distribution.

By the way: If you need copies of *The BF&M (2000)*, they can be downloaded too, or IBSA will provide them for your new study group. LisaSergent@IBSA.org



mission illinois

Pray for a new church

Location: Chatham

Focus: Urban commuter families

Characteristics: Chatham is a community of more than 3,000 people, located just south of Springfield.

Pray: For existing churches to partner to plant more churches in this highly populated area.



— From the IBSA Church Planting Team