

ILLINOIS IN SIGHT

Church behind bars

“Going to Greenville is like sitting in your church with a group of ladies for Bible study, or in your home,” says Karen Schemerhorn.

She’s not talking about the quaint Illinois town. “Greenville” is Greenville Federal Prison, where Schemerhorn and others from her church minister to women who are incarcerated.



Bethel Baptist Church in Troy, where Schemerhorn is a member, is one Illinois Baptist church that has discovered the great need in prisons. There are others, all across the state.

In Chicagoland, Broadview Missionary Baptist Church does monthly ministry at a state prison and at Cook County Jail. And in southern Illinois, Pastor Bryce Parks and LivingStone Community Church started an outreach a few years ago at a federal penitentiary in Marion, leading a Bible study in the prison’s boot camp-like annex.

Three months after it started, Parks said, the ministry already had been a tremendous blessing to their church. Initially, they thought it would be an evangelistic outreach, but the monthly Bible study

ministry has been more about encouraging believers inside the prison.

“A lot of them have amazing testimonies of how God brought them to the prison and really showed them a bigger side of who He is,” Parks said in the ministry’s early days.

In Greenville, Schemerhorn was already a leader in her church’s prison ministry when a new need arose: A woman in the Greenville Bible study admitted that she’d had an abortion and never told anyone. She was going to be released soon, and needed care, counseling, and someone to listen.

Schemerhorn was just the right person. A graduate of Bethel’s “Surrendering the Secret” program, she understood well the woman’s pain, and has since taught several classes on abortion recovery inside the prison.

The curriculum she uses is full of Scripture about God’s mercy and his desire for your freedom.

“As you’re freeing yourself and ‘surrendering the secret,’” Schemerhorn said, “you’re filling yourself up with God. And you’re allowing him to fill you, instead of guilt and shame.”

“You’re able to look at him now, when you couldn’t look at his face before.”

For more information on prison ministry opportunities or resources, contact IBSA’s Church Resources Team at (217) 391-3138.

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 19th in our 20-part series. That means almost all 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

BASICS FOR BAPTISTS

- WHO WE ARE
- WHAT WE BELIEVE
- HOW WE SERVE

A series from the *Illinois Baptist* • Vol. 19

Illinois church builds friendships in the Philippines

It took the kids on Cebu Island several days to warm up to the American volunteers who came to their school. The team of workers from Grace Southern Baptist Church in Virden were there to make repairs to a wall and some ceilings damaged in a 2013 typhoon, but they also wanted to get to know the children and their teachers.

“Their big thing was volleyball; they love volleyball,” volunteer Andrea Hammond said of the kids on this island in the Philippines. “And so we would take a little break from our heavy duty work and go play volleyball.”

The shyness abated throughout the week, “and then we all cried the last day,” said Hammond, whose husband, Jimmy, pastors the Virden church.

Her team is one of four mission groups from Illinois who have gone to the Philippines to help rebuild after Typhoon Haiyan. Baptist Global Response, a ministry partner of the International Mission Board, has facilitated the teams from Illinois and many other states to build houses from the ground up and also restore hope in places like To Ong Elementary School.

Every morning when the volunteers arrived, the kids would greet them by taking their hands and bringing them up to their own foreheads. This gesture of respect set the tone for the week, as Hammond and her teammates got to know the kids and their principal, whose last name, fittingly, is “Pastor.”

“She is a Christian woman,” Hammond said, “and so she allowed us to come in and share the gospel, and anything we wanted to share about Jesus. We had an opportunity to share it with the students, as well as the teachers.”



We serve in ... the Pacific Rim

Children at To Ong Elementary School in the Philippines thank volunteers from Grace Southern Baptist Church for helping rebuild their school after a devastating typhoon.

The week ended with a thank-you celebration where the children sang songs and presented the volunteers with gifts—surfboard-shaped pen holders for the men and purses for the women on the team.

The beauty of the island and the graciousness of the people are two things Hammond remembers well, and also the great spiritual need on Cebu.

“They are in need of the Lord, and I think that they are ready to hear the Word, but, you know, there are not enough workers.

“We need more workers in the field.”

—Meredith Flynn

FREEDOM

At the start of his earthly ministry, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth where he grew up and read from the scroll. He declared that he was fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy of a Spirit-led ministry declaring freedom for captives and liberty for the oppressed (Luke 4:16-18). His announcement was immediately rejected by his life-long neighbors and they drove “Joseph’s son” out of town.

Doing the work of Jesus is dangerous even today, proclaiming that prisoners are freed and those bound by sin are unshackled. But that’s what we’re called to do. And every time someone hears the gospel and believes, it happens again. A sinner is set free.

Angels celebrate.

Can an event be more joyful?



mission illinois

Pray for a new church

Location: St. Charles, Kane and DuPage Counties

Focus: Families in this Chicago suburban community

Characteristics: This area is home to a family-oriented culture with more than 10,000 households, 36% of which have children under the age of 18.

Prayer needs: That God would raise up people to reach out to this community, to lead them to Christ and His saving grace.

— From the IBSA Church Planting Team



WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT... RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Read Article 17 of *The Baptist Faith & Message (2000)*, “Religious Liberty,” at IBSA.org/B101.

Picture a seesaw. On one side is the government; in our American context, these are people elected to lead the country, make laws, and enforce them.

On the other end of the seesaw is the church. With a capital “C.” These are believers in Jesus, called to be holy, set apart, and to live by the guidelines set forth in Scripture.

If you’re like me, you’re seeing that seesaw as never being completely even. One side rises and the other sinks. That side scores a victory, and the opposite end comes back to earth. We so often view the concerns of the government and the concerns of the church as being at odds with one another. At its best, the relationship is give-and-take. At worst, it’s all-out disaster.

But *The Baptist Faith & Message* tells a different story. Indeed, both sides have responsibilities. “The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends,” says *The BF&M*. It also has no right to impose penalties or taxes based on religion.

For its part, “The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends.”

In the Scripture passages that accompany Article 17 on Religious Liberty, we see that God’s call to

the Christian to not to win in battle against the government, but to respect those in power, so that they might be won to faith in Christ.

“Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12, HCSB).

And the Apostle Paul warned against a certain kind of flaunting of the liberty found in Christ: “For you were called to be free, brothers; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love” (Galatians 5:13).

Along with establishing a winsome, redemptive influence with elected officials, showing respect, humility and prayerfulness toward them has other benefits: It “silences the ignorance of foolish people” (1 Peter 2:15); leads to a “tranquil and quiet life” (1 Timothy 2:2); and reminds us of God’s ultimate authority (James 4:12).

It’s not always easy though, is it? Consider recent examples of Christians whose religious liberty appeared infringed upon by their government: A Washington florist was sued (and subsequently lost) for refusing to provide floral services for a same-sex wedding.

In Houston, the sermons of pastors who led a campaign against a pro-LGBT city ordinance were subpoenaed. The mayor later withdrew the subpoenas amidst outcry from Christians around the country, but the ordinance was later ap-

proved by the city council.

We don’t see these challenges play out just in the courts or in government meetings. Ever more often, Christians in the spotlight are mocked for their views on marriage, pro-life issues, and a host of other topics we don’t talk about over Thanksgiving dinner.

What, then, is the Christian’s response when things just don’t seem fair? Not to shrink back, the Bible advises, but to respond in the same respectful, loving manner as when there is no obvious conflict.

If we have indeed been set free by Jesus (John 8:36), his Spirit at work in the Christian should allow the tricky balance between conviction and humility. Believers in Christ are called to remember whose eternal kingdom they belong to, while also acknowledging “there is no authority except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God” (Romans 13:1).

Even when that acknowledgement leads to persecution.

“And who will harm you if you are deeply committed to what is good?” Peter asks in his letter to dispersed Christians. “But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:13-15).

Meredith Flynn is managing editor of the Illinois Baptist newspaper.

CONSIDER THIS For personal study or group discussion

- 1 Read Article 17 on Religious Liberty. What is the most difficult part for you to understand or accept? Why?
- 2 Discuss one of the recent religious liberty cases mentioned above, or another you’ve read about the news. How would you react if accused of discrimination because of your religious beliefs?
- 3 Read Philippians 3:20. How can Christians reconcile being citizens in two “kingdoms,” our current home on earth, and our future home in heaven?



Our denomination’s statement of faith is called “The Baptist Faith & Message.” It was updated in 2000 and adopted by elected messengers who attended the SBC’s annual meeting that year. Adopting the BF&M is the voluntary choice of each local church.

100 years of speaking up

1913: The Southern Baptist Social Service Commission is founded.



Early issues:

- Radio broadcast of church services
- Prohibition of alcohol
- Violence in movies

The Commission is later renamed: **Christian Life Commission (1953)** and **Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (1997)**

1946: Formation of Baptist Committee on Public Relations, which includes the SBC

The Roe v. Wade verdict in 1973 finds Southern Baptists “either uninformed or misguided— and subsequently unengaged,” leaders would say 40 years later.

Southern Baptists soon re-found their conservative footing. A strong pro-life stance emerged.

1988: Richard Land begins 25 years as president of the SBC’s ethics entity. Three years later, the SBC parts ways with the BJC over major political differences.

Russell Moore is appointed ERLC President in 2013, bringing a focus on “convictional kindness” and acknowledgement of shifting attitudes that threaten religious liberty.

Major issues:

- Sanctity of human life
- Same-sex marriage
- Religious persecution



—BPNews.net, ERLC.com, SBC LIFE, SBC.net

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

VOICE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

From offices in Washington, D.C., and Nashville, Tenn., the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission serves as the Southern Baptist Convention’s main voice on social, moral and ethical issues.

The entity actually dates back to 1913, when the Social Service Commission was founded to address “various social concerns and causes in a more systematic fashion,” writes historian Stephen Douglas Wilson.

Of course, those concerns and causes have shifted over time. Baptists in the 1920s would probably be shocked to hear that redefining marriage is the current hot topic. Since taking office in 2013, ERLC President Russell Moore has spoken out frequently on behalf of biblical marriage and other positions valued by Baptists and many in the wider Christian world: religious liberty, sexual purity, and racial reconciliation, to name a few.

The ERLC’s mission is focused on local churches—to help them “understand the moral demands of the gospel, apply Christian principles to moral and social problems and questions of public policy, and to promote religious liberty in cooperation with the churches and other Southern Baptist entities.”

On its website, the ERLC publishes issue briefs and church bulletin inserts on topics including marriage, capital punishment, gambling, homosexuality, hunger, and the sanctity of human life.

The agency also works to develop leaders through a leadership network and annual summits designed to assist pastors and others who are navigating social change, and

leading their church through it too. Social media resources—including the *Canon & Culture* blog and Moore’s *Questions & Ethics* podcast—offer real-life counsel on current events and issues.

The ERLC also interacts with legislation and court cases, recently issuing “friend of the court” briefs against a healthcare mandate that would require employers to cover abortion-inducing drugs, and on the value of traditional marriage to families and society.

Underlying everything is a dependence on what Moore calls “convictional kindness.”

“We will stand with conviction, and we’ll contend, as the prophets and apostles did in the public square, against injustice, but we’ll do so with a tone shaped by the Gospel, with a convictional kindness that recognizes that our enemies are not persons of flesh and blood,” he said in his first ERLC report to the Southern Baptist Convention.

“Our enemies are invisible principalities and powers the Scriptures say are in the air around us. We oppose demons; we don’t demonize opponents.”

—With information from Baptist Press and ERLC.com

Think about it:

1. Define religious liberty. Do you have it? Has your freedom ever been infringed upon because of your beliefs?
2. Should Christians take a public stand on issues such as marriage, abortion, and gambling? Why or why not?
3. What do you think “convictional kindness” looks like in your everyday life?