

ILLINOIS IN SIGHT

Sharing God's love with kids and families

Sometimes, little things happen that may seem insignificant, but later, God reveals his plan.

"My Aunt Margie calls them 'God-winks,'" said Carla Donoho of Baptist Children's Home and Family Services. Donoho directs the agency's Angels' Cove Maternity Center, where young moms and moms-to-be are provided with a place to live, counseling, and a host of other resources.

Angels' Cove, located in Mt. Vernon, also provides adoption and foster care services. It's one key part of BCHFS, which offers residential care for kids and operates 10 Pathways counseling offices. BCHFS is headquartered in Carmi.

"We continually witness God's great work through His people," Donoho said. "There are many examples through the years, some just make you smile—others are life changing."

She remembers one evening when the girls at Angels' Cove were working on a project and ran out of the zip-top bags they needed. Just then, a woman rang the doorbell. "Oh, I'm so sorry to stop by so late, but I have been hauling these supplies in my car and I just need to drop them off," she said. Among her donations were several boxes of zip-top bags.

"Our housemother, Dora Riley, watches for these winks," Donoho said. "She always knows when a large food donation comes to An-

gels' Cove, we can expect an increase in referrals."

Four years ago a former housemother, Sherry Johnson, was burdened by the lack of biblical parenting instruction for young moms and dads. A woman named Tena Dawson came by the Angels' Cove office and said God had been leading her to volunteer. When asked what her interests were, she replied, "Well, I just retired as a parenting teacher at the high school."

"Goosebumps ran down my arms as I explained to Tena our dream for the community parenting program," Donoho said. "Four years later, every Tuesday night we have over 100 young moms, dads, children and volunteers who come together for Bible study, parenting classes, and children's classes."

At the foundation of the ministry of Angels' Cove is the desire to introduce Christ and His purpose to each woman, Donoho said. "Many times they come to us wounded and broken. Regardless of their religious background or belief, it doesn't take long before they witness God's faithfulness to them and our program through his provision and his people.

"One wink after another, God reveals his faithfulness to them when they accept and give their lives over to him."

For more information, go to www.BCHFS.com.



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 Sargent. Designed by Kris Kell.

What are you doing on Wednesday nights?

This is the 20th in our 20-part series. That means 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.

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On-the-move family finds mission in the suburbs

Kevin Cannon says he ran from God's call to plant a church for a really long time.

"It's a tremendous responsibility I believe when you plant a church or you become a pastor," he says. "It's more than just preaching on Sunday. You have to be actively involved in people's lives."

Driven by a desire to build authentic relationships, and by a calling that followed him from place to place until the Cannons landed in the Midwest nine years ago, he is now pastor of Perfecting Faith Ministry. The six-year-old church meets every Sunday at the headquarters of the Metro East Baptist Association in Swansea.

Cannon, his wife, Ruth, and their sons Lemuel and Ezra, also make it a practice to invite people to dinner at their home in nearby Fairview Heights. He's trying to change the thinking that pastors are untouchable, or that they don't have issues.

"We're human beings just like them," Cannon says. "And we go through things, and we can work it out together."

The Cannons are no strangers to transition. Ruth was stationed with the U.S. Navy in Guam, Nashville, Tenn., and San Diego before the family moved to the



We serve in ... the Metro East
Kevin Cannon and his family planted

Perfecting Faith Ministry six years ago to reach people in communities on the Illinois side of the St. Louis metro region.

Metro East area almost a decade ago. Kevin was helping with the weekly gospel service at Scott Air Force Base when, "I started getting that tug on my spirit that it was time."

Perfecting Faith eventually launched at a Fairview Heights hotel, in a region where Director of Missions Ronny Carroll estimates 35-40% of people are unchurched.

This summer, with the help of visiting mission teams, the church will launch an outreach campaign that includes door-to-door visits and sports camps for kids.

In preparation for the projects, Cannon recently preached a sermon series on "God, race, and oneness," meant "to prepare the people to make sure they're ready to receive people that do not look like them."

His church is 92% African American, Cannon says, while their community is 76% Caucasian. The sermon series was designed to encourage inclusivity at Perfecting Faith, as they reach out to their neighbors.

"This is about building God's kingdom one life at a time, and the church needs to reflect what God's kingdom looks like."

— Meredith Flynn



Pray for a new church

Location: Beardstown

Focus: Togolese & Congolese people

Characteristics: Many French-speaking people from western Africa have made their way to the U.S., and hundreds are finding a home in rural Illinois.

Pray: That we can respond to their unique needs and demonstrate the gospel through our actions and loving words of encouragement.

— From the IBSA Church Planting Team

CONSIDER YOURSELF... ONE OF THE FAMILY

God's family is growing all the time. But how does it grow? By adoption.

We sometimes talk about "biological growth" in churches. By that, we mean the children of current church families who come to faith in Christ, but technically, there's no biological growth in the Kingdom of God.

"God sent His Son... to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

Every person who becomes part of God's family is adopted in when they profess faith in Christ (John 1:12).

That's why faith-sharing is so important to Southern Baptists. We're all adopted. And if others are to join the family, it will be when they're adopted in, after someone tells them how.



WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT... THE FAMILY

Read Article 18 of *The Baptist Faith & Message (2000)*, at IBSA.org/B101.

The final article of our denomination's statement of faith addresses several hot button issues in our society today, the most obvious being same-sex marriage, gender roles, and abortion.

The positions expressed in this statement summarize what the Church has understood to be the Bible's teaching for the past two millennia. Why are they increasingly controversial, even among some self-identified Christians today? The answer lies in our culture's most cherished, yet often unrecognized, principle.

I recently heard a public radio report piece on China in the 21st century. It quoted the statistic that since the implementation of China's one child policy there have been upwards of 300 million abortions in that country. Staggering! Then it told the heart-wrenching story of one woman who failed to get the proper permits and was forced by the government to have an abortion. The news report's tone was one of moral outrage. And rightfully so.

This got me to thinking: Why is it that the mainstream Western media would never produce a piece with the same indignation at the over 50 million abortions in the U.S. since Roe v. Wade?

From our vantage point we can clearly see the issue with their statism (making the government into a god). But we are completely



blind to the equally evil problem of our individualism (making an idol of me and my own personal rights and preferences). Our present Western culture represents individualism run amok.

This ultimate value of individualism explains why we can legally cite a private right to choose as a legitimate reason to kill. It's no surprise that in an atmosphere of self-protection and self-assertion, concepts such as servant leadership and submission become absurd and offensive. And because we have made personal satisfaction an entitlement, we cannot tolerate any boundaries placed on our sexual expression.

However, the Bible presents a thoroughly different worldview than that of Western individualism. First off, we are created by God and for God (Rom. 11:36). Neither self nor anything else can be elevated to the place of central importance. When that happens things fall apart. Secondly, we were created to be in community, not as isolated individuals (Gen. 2:18). Our behavior affects more than just ourselves. We are accountable to God and others.

God's Word is clear that marriage is supposed to be heterosexual, monogamous, and life-long (see, for example, Matt. 19:3-9). The Bible is clear that men and women are equal in value yet distinct in roles (e.g., 1 Peter 3:1-7). And Scripture teaches that life is valuable and meant to be lived in self-giving to others. This means, among other things, that children are to be seen as a blessing and not a nuisance that inhibits my freedom (e.g., Ps. 127:3).

All these positions must be applied to the complexities of life with grace and sensitivity. In this regard it is encouraging to see Southern Baptists taking the lead in causes such as advocating for adoption. There are further steps we can take to engage a broken world that suffers the devastating effects of divorce, gender confusion, abuse, and other tragic consequences of sin.

And simply holding the line on moral issues is not enough. We must show our culture the absolute beauty of a Christ who did not cling to his rights, but lovingly entered our messy world to redeem his people through self-sacrifice. Jesus is the consummate husband pursuing his bride, the Church. And He brings us into the Father's family as children where we find the eternal love, security, and identity we so desperately ache for. Only divine grace can capture our hearts to worship and obey him, and free us to love others.

Nathan Carter is pastor of Immanuel Baptist in Chicago.

CONSIDER THIS For personal study or group discussion

- 1 What does your church do to strengthen marriages, celebrate children, and at the same time genuinely value singleness as a legitimate calling? How could it do this even better?
- 2 In what ways have you absorbed the individualistic ethos of our culture, even if you consider yourself socially conservative?
- 3 How does the gospel of grace inform the ways that we engage a culture that is antagonistic to the Bible's vision of the family?



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.

A full circle witness

Life change starts with a conversation. That's the idea behind the North American Mission Board's "3 Circles" faith-sharing tool.

The whole idea can be sketched on a napkin or a scrap of paper:

Step 1:

We see brokenness in the world, but also evidence that there's something bigger than us. God's original purpose, or design, for people was to worship him. But sin separates us from him.



Step 2:

Sin leads to brokenness and separation from God, and we look for a way out.



Step 3:

We need a remedy from sin and brokenness. The remedy is Jesus. When we repent from our sin and believe in him, we can be restored to a right relationship with God.



The gospel frees us to pursue God's design for our lives and for the world he created.



Watch training videos on the 3 Circles plan at www.lifeonmissionbook.com.



—info from North American Mission Board

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

PERSONAL EVANGELISM

The youth group from a church I served is planning a reunion this summer. (They were youth in the 1970s, so it's been a while.) They have a Facebook page for the reunion. "Does anyone remember that song we sang about witnesses?" one long-ago youth asked. "What was it called?"

"Witnesses," another gray-haired youth responded.

It was called "Witnesses." I remember the song, because when I was pastor of that church 20 years after those youth had graduated, we were still singing the anthem from the original dog-eared pages because it had become a favorite of the church. It was a musical setting of Acts 1:8:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Witnesses, set to a memorable tune. But more important, it's a remarkable promise from Jesus himself, and a distinctive commitment for evangelicals, including Southern Baptists.

As missionaries in our culture, we are to be witnesses of our faith in Jesus Christ. And we are expected to seek opportunities to share the good news of salvation.

But here's the problem. Our statistics say we don't.

For every person baptized in a Southern Baptist church in 2013, there were 50 members on the roll.

Through the years, we've tried a series of witnessing plans, all designed to encourage regular folks to share their faith with others—because that's how it's supposed to work, right?

We used the Romans Road, the Four Spiritual Laws, and a

variety of tracts involving chairs and bridges.

We held Lay Evangelism Schools in the 1960s and 70s. We embraced Evangelism Explosion in the 1980s and later adapted our own SBC version, called Continuing Witness Training. (I memorized the entire 45-minute presentation, but never once outside the classroom did I get to share all the points and subpoints.)

That was followed by FAITH, an acronym for an evangelism plan tied directly to Sunday school growth. We canvassed our neighborhoods and conducted door-to-door surveys using mission teams and teens and church members.

And now, the latest SBC witnessing plan involves three circles drawn on a napkin. (It's a good one, very simple given the limited space on a napkin. It won't take 45 minutes.)

The purpose of all of this is to get people to do what comes naturally: talk.

Talk about your life before you met Jesus and since you met Jesus.

And all these plans and tracts are simply tools in the toolbox: the Scriptures that explain the plan of salvation. But the greater tool we have is our power source, the Holy Spirit.

Fear may be the reason it takes 50 Southern Baptists to bring one new believer to the baptistry, but all Jesus asks is that we tell the story—his and ours.

—Eric Reed

Think about it:

1. How would you describe your life before you knew Jesus and after?
2. What would you tell someone about God's recent activity in your life?
3. List 3-4 verses you would discuss when talking about salvation.