

ILLINOIS IN SIGHT

How 82,000 were saved

For the people who organize and lead it every year, Vacation Bible School is no vacation. It may be lots of fun, with games and crafts and recreation, but VBS is actually serious business.

That's because more than 82,000 children and teens receive Christ each year through VBS at Southern Baptist churches!

And for thousands of children, VBS is the only exposure to the gospel they have all year.

"I'm a big advocate of bringing the whole church into Bible school," said Sharon Carty, IBSA's VBS team consultant. "It's the single largest evangelistic activity a church does all year. And it needs to be the whole church with full-out one-hundred percent evangelism."

VBS was created in Hopedale, Illinois, (near Peoria) in 1894 by a schoolteacher who wanted something for kids to do during summer break. The first VBS was a month long! The first VBS curriculum was printed in 1922.

Today, 25,000 Southern Baptist churches hold VBS each year—usually for one week.

"It takes lots of hands to put on VBS," Carty said. "The entire church needs to get together for it." Instead of starting with the usual worker recruitment campaign and



Go fish – It's VBS craft time at Hillcrest Baptist Church in Country Club Hills.

training, Carty advises starting with a small group or Sunday school class studying the VBS curriculum. "The adults get excited about VBS and want to help teach it to the kids," Carty said.

Senior adults particularly like lending a hand. Beyond teaching classes, they can paint signs, send invitation cards, and more. The result is a whole congregation sharing Christ.

And it's not just for kids. Many churches have simultaneous Bible study classes for youth and adults during VBS week, inviting siblings and parents of the VBS kids to participate.

For churches that haven't held this annual summertime outreach in a few years, VBS often serves to kick start the church's interest in evangelism for their community. The event once focused mostly on kids leads to outreach for all ages, all year long.

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!

Coming Soon

Resources for B-101

- Leader's guides for study groups
- Self-guided tutorials on SBC missions, Baptist beliefs, distinctives, and the Cooperative Program
- The whole 20-part series will be available for download in time for fall discipleship classes and small groups.

Available soon online at www.IBSA.org/B101.

B-101 **BASICS FOR BAPTISTS**

● WHO WE ARE ● WHAT WE BELIEVE

● HOW WE SERVE

A series from the *Illinois Baptist* • Vol. 8

New church starts with summer outreach

Steve Griswold is one of millions of Christians whose life was changed at Vacation Bible School. What makes his story a little different is his age—Griswold was 56 when God began to lead him to a new phase in his life and ministry.

And it all started with VBS.

The pastor of Crossville Missionary Baptist Church was part of a team that went to host VBS in Cisne, Ill., in the summer of 2013. The Southern Baptist church in the village of 600 had closed its doors a few months earlier, so Greater Wabash Baptist Association organized the summer outreach.

The VBS team worked with 38 kids that week, and Griswold started to envision how a new church could reach out to the family-oriented community, located 40 miles northeast of Mt. Vernon. One year later, he's laying the foundation for a church plant in Cisne. But he's not doing it alone.

"My whole association is supporting me."

Most Southern Baptist churches are affiliated with a local association, or network, of congregations in their region. A native of Fairfield, Ill., Griswold has been involved with Greater Wabash Association for most of his life as a leader, youth worker, and pastor.

Now, he's working with other churches to build a core group of people that will serve as the foundation for a new work in Cisne that's focused on reaching out to young families in the area.

Every Tuesday evening, he and his wife, Rhonda, hold a Bible study at the Cisne Community Center. Other churches in the association send volunteers to serve as "seat fillers" and Bible study attenders, so that people from the community feel comfortable joining the group.



We serve in ... Cisne, Illinois

After volunteering at VBS in Cisne, **Steve and Rhonda Griswold** started a new Bible study group in the southern Illinois village.

Griswold's first few months of church planting have been spent getting to know the community. "We're trying to plant something in Cisne that looks like Cisne," he said.

What worked in the past might not work now in his current context, so he's committed to trying new things to reach families. "I'm trying to be a learner as well as a vision caster."

One year after his first VBS experience in Cisne, Griswold helped host a second—this time, with help from Missouri volunteers. After VBS in the morning, the group did servant evangelism projects in the afternoon, including some painting in the building where they meet on Tuesday nights.

The outreach reflects the thinking behind the new church. Griswold said, "We're here, we're neighbors, we want to be involved, we want to meet needs."

—Meredith Flynn



Pray for a new church

Location: Carlyle, Clinton County

Target: 66% of the population has not been reached with the Gospel.

Characteristics: Located 50 miles east of St. Louis, Carlyle is home to more than 900 families and the state's largest man-made lake.

Pray: Churches would intercede with missional prayer and activity in Carlyle.



— From the IBSA Church Planting Team

CALLED OUT



If someone gets "called out" these days, it often involves finger pointing. "I called him out on his attitude" is the first step in a confrontation. Or it might lead to honest confession and restoration.

The phrase has ancient roots. When Athens practiced pure democracy, a herald would call together all eligible citizens to conduct town business. The gathering was called the "ecclesia" (from two Greek words: ek = out; kaleo = to call). The men were "called out" to govern the city. They were required to step up.

Jesus adapted the term to mean the church. "Upon this rock I will build my church," he told Peter (Matt. 16:18). The rock is Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, and the church is "ecclesia" (pronounced ek-luh-SEE-uh).

Later Peter described Christ's followers as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" who were called "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Jesus called us out.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT... THE CHURCH

Read Article 6 of *The Baptist Faith & Message* (2000) at www.IBSA.org/B101.

I love the church.

There, I said it out loud.

I love the local church where I pastor and I love God's plan and purpose for our churches corporately. The church matters deeply to me, and it ought to matter deeply to you as well.

"Jesus is Just Alright with Me," the Doobie Brothers crooned to my generation. But for many, the idea has become "I like Jesus, I just don't like the church." There is one problem with that mantra. Jesus is the one who formed the church, and He did so for a reason.

The church is the mechanism our Lord has organized and empowered to accomplish His life-changing work in this world. The local church is at the center of God's glorious plan to impact the world with the message of the gospel.

Christians should see the church as something important and valuable. Church attendance and local church involvement are part of our responsibility and privilege. We should see the local church as a gift given by our Lord for our personal benefit and for the benefit of the world.

The Baptist Faith and Message recognizes a New Testament church as "an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers." That is, the church is made up of people and not the building. The



church is made up of followers of Jesus Christ who band together under the authority of Jesus Christ. Sometimes Baptists call the local church the "headquarters" of our denomination. We mean that the local church—and the individual Christian—answers directly to the Lord. We are a "bottom up" denomination, in that we believe the denomination answers to us rather than the other way around.

The BF&M says the members of the local church are "associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel." We note that our association is on the basis of the gospel. We are bound, not by culture or tradition, but by faith. The message of Christ crucified for our sins and raised for our justification is the unifying factor in our voluntary association. We gather and cooperate on the foun-

ation of our faith in Jesus Christ who has saved us.

The conclusion of the *BF&M* section on the church says, "The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation." We recognize that the church is both local and universal. We are the church in my town and in yours. But we are part of something bigger than all of us. We are part of the Body of Christ. We are joined intrinsically to believers in other cultures and other countries by our joint faith in Christ.

The church is a big idea because it is God's idea. Get in on this great work of God—the church!

Doug Munton is pastor of FBC O'Fallon.



CONSIDER THIS For personal study or group discussion

- 1 The author says he loves the church. How do you feel about the church?
- 2 Has your thinking about "the church" changed over the years?
- 3 Sometimes people say, "The church is not God's plan B." What does that mean?
- 4 If the church is the Body, what does that say about every member?

Counting Evangelicals

What percentage of the population is saved?

Numbers vary, depending on if pollsters measure avowed beliefs or actual behaviors. Barna.org bases their numbers on what people do. They measure specific actions related to:



- Jesus as sinless savior
- authority of Bible
- salvation by grace
- commitment to witnessing
- the reality of Satan
- God's activity in history
- His work in the world today

84 million adults in the U.S. call themselves "evangelical" compared to

18 million who qualify under Barna's nine-point filter.

That's 38% of Americans who make the claim, but only 8% whose behavior backs them up.

Southern Baptist experts say

52 million people... in the Midwest are lost.

That's 75%



That's 3 out of 4. —Barna.org, NAMB.org

WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT

HQ AND LOCAL AUTONOMY



"How are things at headquarters?" a denominational employee is asked as he visits a local church.

"I don't know," he replies. "I just got here."

Southern Baptists are of the "free church tradition" valuing the voluntary principle of cooperation while having no organic ties to a state or national government; nor are our churches governed by any higher religious ruling body.

Many congregations around the world feel the heavy hand of the state-run church or higher ecclesiastical powers pushing or pulling them to acquiesce to external pressures. But among Southern Baptist congregations, no bishop or back room boss has the authority to make demands or issue commands.

The local church is at the top of the denominational pyramid in SBC life. The local church is headquarters. We all cooperate together, but our churches are autonomous. They make their own decisions as the people of God, seeking the help of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.

Each local congregation calls its own pastors, deacons, and other leaders. Each church sets its own budget and determines their level of support for missions. Given our loose-knit relationships among churches, it is amazing how money and mission volunteers spring

forth from thousands of local churches and spread God's resources to the ends of the earth.

Beyond the local church, every other layer of SBC life is autonomous. Messengers from local churches are sent to local associations, state conventions, and the SBC annual meeting to set budgets, elect leaders, set priorities, and report their work.

Some wonder how a bumble bee can fly with its super-sized body and pint-size wings, but it does. Likewise, other denominations have studied the Southern Baptist Convention and wondered how it can accomplish so much without a top-down autocratic structure. But it does.

Ideally, the principle of autonomy is held in esteem at every level of SBC life. From the Executive Committee to the mission boards and seminaries, effective leaders encourage, exhort, pray, and plead with each other to work together cooperatively. Those who nurture autonomy's nature are more effective in the long run.

Especially when they remember that in SBC life, everything begins and ends at the door of the local church.

— Ron F. Hale is a pastor in Tennessee and former director of evangelism for IBSA.