

HONORING THOSE WHO HELPED YOU BECOME A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

by Bruce M. Conley, Director of Missions

There were so many people who helped to shape my life over the years, and were instrumental in helping to lead me to Christ and then mature me in the Christian faith. Recently I had the opportunity to pay tribute to one of those great men posthumously – Rev. W. Lawrence Pruitt. Rev. Pruitt (“Larry”) and his wife “Lula Mae” were from the south, but answered the call to the pastorate at First Baptist Church of Mt. Rainier, MD from 1971 – 1981. They resided in nearby Hyattsville, MD for many years, and in his retirement he served many churches in the Prince George’s Baptist Association as an Interim Pastor, and pulpit supply preacher. It was then that I really got to know Rev. Pruitt – as he served in my church for quite a length of time while we sought a new pastor.



Larry would always start his sermons with a poem, and then a joke – to set the congregation at ease. His poem went like this:

*“Smile awhile, and while you smile,
there are other smiles,
And soon there are miles and miles of smiles,
And life’s worthwhile - because you smiled.”*

... and then the corny joke of the week would come. People loved Rev. Pruitt. He was a gentle caring man who shared the love of Christ with great abandon and passion. He was also an artist of sorts – like many evangelists of an earlier era, he learned how to do chalk art on a black canvas with a black light to depict many bible scenes and teachings, bringing the biblical stories to life.

Rev. Pruitt had 1 son, Ron – who like me became a police officer. We stayed in touch over the years, and not long ago Ron told me that he still had his Dad’s library boxed up in his home, and had never been able to bring himself to give or throw them away. His wife however increasingly urged him to dispose of all of those books on Christian theology and the like. I’ve been offered other pastor’s libraries – but this one was special. How could I find a fitting home for Rev. Pruitt’s lifelong knowledge base of Christian thought and sermons, in a day and age when people would rather use a Kindle instead of a book?

Then it came to me. In June, I made connection with Pastor Stefan Carr at the BRUCE OUTREACH CENTER in Westernport, MD. Their church bought an old High School, and guess what they have in their adopted building?? A LIBRARY with a bunch of empty shelves! I loaded my truck with 24+ boxes of the most precious library of Christian thought known to man – and donated them to what will eventually become a free library to believers and seekers alike at a Southern Baptist church in our State Convention.

There was a bonus box marked for me in the bunch. I am now the proud owner of many of Rev. Pruitt’s sermons, including the “miles and miles of smiles” poem and numerous jokes. I can’t wait to delve into the mass of memories, and re-live the days of my youth listening to the truth of the Gospel from my good friend who is now celebrating in eternity with his wife and our Lord Jesus Christ – the Redeemer of mankind.

Whom do you have fond memories of – who helped to shape you into the Christian you are today? Better yet – who are YOU investing in ... so that they will one day have fond memories of how you helped them to find and mature in Christ?

The choice to be a blessing is yours. It won’t happen by accident! Strive to be intentional in your influence.

A MIGHTY FORTRESS ~ Devotional

The Corona virus pandemic has now taken the lives of over 137,000 people in our country – and infected over 3.8 million. If you had asked any of us 6 months ago what our focus would be on today – we would have never guessed that we'd be in the middle of a massive pandemic that has taken over 600,000 lives world-wide.

One of the great pastors and theologians of the Reformation – Martin Luther (if he were here) would probably give us much hope – as he went through similar circumstances in Wittenberg, Germany in the 1500's, during one of the worst pandemics this world has ever experienced. It was during this time that he penned the words to his majestic hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."



Martin Luther survived the most fatal pandemic recorded in human history — the Bubonic Plague. He not only survived, but his experience inspired one of the greatest hymns in Christian history.

The plague first hit Europe in the 14th century and killed an estimated 60% of the population. It was highly contagious as it was transmitted through the air and also by fleas. The plague killed its victims in a horrific manner, leading to the name "The Black Death." Doctors and priests were often the first ones to die, so most people faced this terrifying ordeal without a doctor to treat them and without a Priest to administer the last rites.

For over 300 years there were outbreaks of the disease, including the summer of 1527 in Wittenberg. The entire university left town - with most professors and their families fleeing the city ... but Martin Luther refused to leave. He felt God was calling him to minister to those dying of the plague. He was ready to do battle with the Prince of Darkness himself.

Luther knew all too well the deadly power of this cruel enemy. Two of his brothers died in the pandemic. In spite of the fact that his wife, Katie, was pregnant, Luther turned his home into a hospital to care for the sick and dying. Writing to others about the danger of this mortal ill, Luther said that if you truly love your neighbor, you will self-quarantine to stop the spread of the disease.

The personal strain of living in this world that was "devil filled" threatened to undo Luther. He was slipping into depression, an ancient foe that Luther battled his entire life. But he found great strength and solace in the word of God, especially Psalm 46. "*God is our fortress and our strength, an ever-present help in time of trouble.*"

Struggling with depression, Luther knew that in his own strength he could not prevail. He put his hope and trust in the one who is our refuge and strength. In the midst of a global pandemic as he battled his own personal demons, Luther wrote the enduring words that have lifted millions of hearts throughout the centuries. "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing!"

Definition of bulwark

a solid wall-like structure raised for defense

When you look carefully at the words of this powerful hymn, you can see many references to the devastating pandemic experienced by Luther:

"Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still: his kingdom is forever."

As we find ourselves struggling with a flood of mortal ills known as COVID-19, let us find courage and resolve in the words of the great Reformer: (verse 3)

***And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.***

It is Christ who will win this battle.

Prayer Request

How can we pray for you?

* Safe travels and prosperous health for David and Tunnea Burt in their new journey into Semi-Retirement.

* Rev. Thom Smith (FBC Hagerstown) still needs a liver transplant (see live donor need in this edition)

* DOM Bruce Conley wife, Linda - who has been diagnosed with a terminal disease

* The many churches that are doing their best to balance ministry and health safety for their congregations

* Marisol Lindstrom's (Third Day Church) mom and family as the mom is struggling with Alzheimer's disease. Marisol's sister is finding it increasingly difficult to be her mom's caretaker.

* The nightly protests and anarchy in many of our American cities. Pray that peace would prevail, and God would reveal himself.

* Our nation and leaders (protests, riots, etc.)

FROM THE ASSOCIATIONAL TREASURER



BRBA stands in awe of what God has provided the association during these challenging times in 2020. In conjunction with regular church offerings, the BRBA was the recipient of PPP funds, a grant from MD/DE and other love offering funds from individuals and churches. With these funds BRBA has been able to continue assisting six church plants as well as purchase and supply essential personal protection equipment to churches in need. We give praise to our Father God for all that He has provided so we can faithfully continue His work.

Does your church have a set of **HANDBELLS** or **HANDCHIMES** that you are not currently using? Do you think you could loan them out to BRBA for a while?

If so, please contact Bruce Conley bruce@blueridgebaptist.org.



BRBA received over 200 NEW donated items from Lifeway! These items are **FREE** for you and your church to grow your library. We are currently working on a list that will be linked on our website. This will allow for churches to request inventoried items available on a first come first serve bases. The inventory consists of items ranging from Bibles, Bible Studies, Group Studies, Children's Books, Teen Studies, DVD's, CD's, Individual Readings, etc...

BRBA is grateful for the donated items and hope your church will be able to utilize the wonderful items!

CentriKid Summer Camps 2021

Only session left open August 2 - 5



SKYCROFT
CONFERENCE CENTER

Churches transferring 2020 deposits to register for a 2021 session should do so by contacting Skycroft at skycroft@skycroft.org or by calling 800-536-6759.



Reminder of the Pastor's Breakfast ZOOM fellowships are held the **1st Wednesday** of **AUGUST** and **SEPTEMBER**. ZOOM invites will go out 2 days before each one.

The **Frederick Rescue Mission** is in need of the following items to hand out to our community:

*Deodorant *Hand wipes * Razors *Adult socks
*Small hand sanitizers *Toothbrushes*Small toothpaste

If you can help, please bring donations to our side door at 419 W. South Street from 8am-3pm. **THANK YOU!**

**Items
Needed!**

IN THE CHURCHES

North Valley Church God has been at work on North Valley Church (NVC) for a very long time. In September of 2019, Myersville Baptist Church voted to ask me to be the next pastor. At the vote, there were about six remaining members of Myersville Baptist. In November, Summit Trace Church sent five others, my wife, and myself to restart Myersville. After a few weeks, we decided the best course forward was to replant Myersville Baptist to become North Valley Church. We were small (average attendance of 11). For the next few months, we did a small group format on Sunday morning.



Then, COVID-19 hit. Like every other church we scrambled to figure out how to create an online presence. We videotaped a sermon and began meeting in multiple online small groups. Despite these unfavorable conditions, God had something in mind. People became interested in North Valley, and we brought on a few key people,



including Grant and Maddie Cregger. As the restriction on church meetings relaxed, we decided to launch our Sunday services. It was more like a launch than a reopening since North Valley had never led its own Sunday service. On June 7th, we opened to the public for Sunday services. We had 48 people attend, 18 of which were kids.

The following week, we went into the 60s in attendance and are still there. We quickly realized that to not exceed our 50% capacity limit, we needed to open our kid's ministry. Much effort went into renovating the space we had for the kids and on Sunday, July 12th, NVKids opened up.

Over the course of the shutdown of several months, God blessed North Valley and we quintupled in size. It has been a shock and has forced us to review our strategy for 2020, improve our ministry structures, and prioritize renovating the building. We have had the help of many partners who have provided prayer, partnership, and provision to help get to where God wants us to be. I know that not every church has fared



COVID-19 very well, and I have had good friends lose their ministry positions as a results. I am careful to count my blessings and continue to be faithful to the role He has called North Valley to. I also pray for all of my brothers and sisters who are leading churches in these unprecedented times. May God guide and bless you all.

Dan Housam, Lead Pastor

First Baptist Church Hagerstown Thom Smith is hoping to find a LIVER donor to save his life from Liver Cancer. He has shared with the community the following information. Due to COVID -19, it has lessened his chances of gaining a donor and has left him with three options. Option 1: the family of a deceased loved one designates him as the receiver. Option 2: a living donor with TYPE O Blood, either positive or negative, between ages of 18-60 in good health, with no current substance abuse, no cancer and not overweight. Option 2 means the donor would agree to donate about half of their liver to Thom. Option 3: a donor with Hep C could donate because Hep C can now be cured. The procedure would take place in adjacent surgical room at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He asks for your prayers to fulfill one of the options above. Should it become Option 1 due to an unexpected death, he asks that you pray for the donor's salvation before they die and comfort for their family.



ORGAN DONATION
A GIFT FOR LIFE

Surrender Church located in Hancock, MD has closed their doors permanently. BRBA will be doing inventory of the items left behind and will send out to the association for those in need.

Hagerstown Church (a mission we support) had to move from Pangborn Elementary because of COVID restrictions --- and they are in a new temporary worship space.

Northstar Church has to exit their school - and they are now meeting at Ceresville Mansion on Sundays.

BRBA's Annual Meeting will be streamed through the internet this year on **October 12, 2020** (Columbus Day). This will allow you to stream from home, office computer or cell phone. Due to Coronavirus concerns, we felt this was the best option to hold our meeting for our association members. Everyone's safety is our top concern and having this option available, allows participation from the comfort of your home. We are still planning specific details for the event. Please check your email for updated information and documents for the meeting. If you are on a committee, you will be contacted individually about presenting your report for the meeting.



PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)



BRBA still has supplies of **FREE** PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) for your church. Should you find the need for additional supplies, please email Karen at karen@blueridgebaptist.org and we will do our best to provide as we can. As long as we are able, we will replace stock as needed.

- * Individual Hand Sanitizers
- * 4-ply Surgical Masks
- * No contact thermometers (*church cost \$70.00*)
- * Face Shields
- * KN95 Masks
- * Gloves

The BRBA team stands ready to assist you with any needs you may have during this season of our ministry lives!



Due to the global crisis, ALL EVENTS on the BRBA Calendar are postponed until further notice!

Farewell to Former Director of Missions

On July 26th First Baptist Church in Thurmont bid a fond farewell to the former BRBA Director of Missions, Dave Burt and his wife. There are probably very few people in the Blue Ridge Baptist Association of churches who do not know the name Dave Burt. Dave served as our Associational Director of Missions from 1998 - 2007. Prior to that he was Minister of Education and Youth at Faith Baptist in Knoxville, MD. Following his service as DOM - he worked as a Church Support Specialist with Lifeway Christian Resources, serving churches in 5 states in the northeast. While working full time for Lifeway, Burt also served as a Intentional Interim Pastor at Adamstown Community Church in 2014, Myersville Baptist Church in 2011, and has co-pastored at First Baptist Thurmont since December 2014.

Dave has such a gift and desire to help churches and the people he encounters. Those who meet him instantly feel very comfortable with him. His calm and loving demeanor and experience have helped countless churches over the years. *"My heartbeat is for helping churches to thrive in their local context and setting. I also have a huge passion for church planting."* he said in a recent interview. Burt worked closely over the years with the assessment process for Church Planters in the Baptist Convention of MD/DE.

First Baptist Thurmont gave Dave and his wife Tunnea a hearty send off on Sunday, July 26th with an outdoor lunch fellowship after worship. Lots of folks came to express their love and thanks to the Burts for their tireless service to our local churches. *"We're semi-retiring to Little Rock, Arkansas now where I will again be working with churches as an Intentional Interim Pastor. We'll also be much closer to our grandchildren and plan to spend a lot of time with family again."* The State Convention in Arkansas has told Burt that there is a great need there for experienced and trained Interim Pastors there.

We will very much miss Dave and Tunnea but we wish them well in their next adventures in serving our amazing God!



BRBA Concession Trailer

BRBA is excited to announce our **Concession Trailer** is completed with renovations. We would like to thank the following volunteers on this project: Pastor Clayton Clark and Ron Pitts (Pleasant Valley); Al Caho, Steve Caho, and Paul Gates (Faith Baptist Church) and non-Baptist friend Zeke Zarrella.

The Concession Trailer was designed to facilitate serving pre packaged drinks and food items as well as allowing simple snack foods like popcorn, shaved ice, cotton candy, etc to be prepared on site. The trailer has a full floor and ceiling, lighting, self-contained three sink sanitation with handwashing station (with hot water), and fully cleanable work surfaces. It is also equipped with an 12 volt fridge/freezer, 30 Amp electric start generator that can operate while in transit utilizing power from the towing vehicles electrical connection.

The trailer meets all health department regulations for outside food service. We are in the final stages of being licensed and approved by the local Health Dept. for use in our area. Should your church wish to utilize this trailer, please contact BRBA Dave Hayes dave@blueridgebaptist.org to place your reservation.



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