



DECEMBER / JANUARY 2021

MERRY CHRISTMAS

HAPPY NEW YEAR

From Your BRBA Staff



Bruce Conley



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We had hoped to do a LIVE pastor's + leaders breakfast together in December for the holidays; however, with the rise in COVID numbers, we decided to err on the side of safety and caution. Plan for a **Christmas Fellowship for pastors and church leaders** on **ZOOM** on **WEDNESDAY, December 9th at 9 AM**. The meeting access will be emailed out. If you are not currently on the email list for pastor's breakfasts, then please contact karen@blueridgebaptist.org to be added.

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM YOUR DOM

COVID-19 has taken so many things from us during 2020. Many of us have lost friends and loved ones. Jobs ended and financial fears set in for individuals, families, and businesses alike. Events were canceled, and travel became a risky endeavor. Schools and churches closed for a time, and scrambled to make major adjustments to use the internet to connect with others.

Trying to manage your life during a global pandemic takes a huge toll on your spirit. As I have talked with and helped pastors and church leaders this year, the one common theme I hear is this: "The weight and responsibility of all of this has left me exhausted." To each person I have counseled with, I have challenged them to consider these actions that might help ...

1. Give People Around You an Extra Measure of Grace

People around you are experiencing stress and worry like never before. It can cause them to act in ways that they normally never would, and say things that they would not normally say. Position yourself to be a giver of God's grace and mercy. Help to calm their fears, and exercise patience and forbearance.

Ephesians 4:29 challenges us well when it says: *"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."*

We may never agree on whether to wear masks in certain settings, or how to best fight an unseen enemy that travels through the air. Just don't let division happen between you and others around you because of those differences of opinion. Trust your leaders, and live and love in a manner that will honor Christ!

2. Set Aside Your Desire for Things to Return to "Normal"

Normal is a word used to describe life when it is in a comfortable routine. Familiar patterns make life easy. We would all rather stick to our "normal" way of doing things. COVID came into our lives like a flash flood. It interrupted our comfortable routines. It takes time for us to get to a point where we could accept a new "normal".

New routines can help us to prepare for difficult days and situations out of our control. Be encouraged by Isaiah 43:19 which says: *"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."*

Massive change that is forced on us can make us feel like we're lost in the wilderness. But be encouraged that in this COVID-19 onslaught, God has a plan and a purpose for us all. He is literally clearing a path in this wilderness for us all!

3. Embrace the Sometimes Slower Pace of Life

Coronavirus has put us all into a global "time-out". Suddenly we found ourselves with a lot of extra time on our hands, because many of our daily routines were slowed or stopped. It took some degree of planning to even go to the grocery store or order food.

Quarantine actually helped us to slow down and be more present to the everyday ordinary moments ... those moments that we often take for granted. Families actually had the time to leisurely walk through the neighborhood. Bicycle sales skyrocketed. Home repair projects rose dramatically, with the local stores often running out of supplies, lumber and decking materials. People caught up on reading, bible study, and we actually began to have unhurried conversation with friends and family.

I challenge you to welcome the new pace of life that God has set before us, and let go of hurry. 1 Samuel 12:16 tells us: *"Now then, stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes!"*

4. Trust God's Plan

From God's view, NOTHING is uncertain. He knows everything and He's always prepared. As we move into 2021, COVID will still be a reality. Hopefully a vaccination will soon be available. Let's continue to trust our God just as the scriptures ask us to do in Hebrews 12:1-2 when it says *"... let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."*

In other words, don't let COVID-19 hinder you from passionately following the purpose and plan that God has in store for you!! For the follower of Christ, confidence is found only in Jesus our Lord. As we look to Him our confidence grows, despite our circumstances.

May God richly bless you, your church, and your family through the holidays and transition into a New Year.

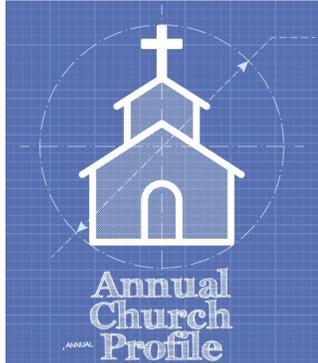
Blessings,
Rev. Bruce M Conley, DOM

Newsletter Update

It's time for BRBA to re-brand our newsletter and give it a fresh title and look. The current generation knows nothing about dialing 411 for information. Our newsletter has now changed from "**Your 411**" to "**The Blue Ridge Pulse...the news journal for churches in the Blue Ridge Baptist Association.**"



Time's coming to **SUBMIT** your Annual Church Profile (ACP)



Your church's story is as unique as the people in it, but all churches who follow Christ should have one thing in common — they seek to share the Word of God to a dying world, preaching the Gospel, baptizing and making disciples.

The Annual Church Profile (ACP) is a way to keep track of your story, the attendance, confessions of faith, baptisms, leadership, discipleship and other pertinent information. The ACP is comparable to a family portrait or a report card for your church — not something to be judged by, but a snapshot in a moment in time that captures measurable information about your church's successes, challenges, plateaus, growth, plans, and leaders. (<https://bcm.org/2020/01/2020-acp-your-church-has-a-story/>)

BRBA Staff, Karen and Joi will be in contact with your church office regarding the filling of your church's ACP. This **communication will start taking place in January 2021**. Please keep an eye out for any emails or mailing communications regarding this IMPORTANT information.

We are planning to do things a little differently this year by helping you complete the information and submitting it for you.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Karen in email through karen@blueridgebaptist.org.

Prayer Request

How can we pray for you?

* Pray for Pastor Todd Heishman and his family and Valley Baptist Church in Jefferson, MD. Pastor Heishman has resigned from his position as pastor. He recently had medical test results that revealed a number of masses growing on and near his liver and pancreas. Biopsies are now being examined. Pray for the doctors and specialists that will be helping Todd with his next steps.

* Pray for the Smith family after the loss of Rev. Thom Smith to cancer a few weeks ago. A memorial service for Pastor Thom will be delayed until Spring 2021 due to COVID-19. Pray also for the church family at First Baptist of Hagerstown, as they begin to develop a plan for the immediate future for the church. Retired Pastor and church member Bill Miller is serving as Interim Pastor now through the end of 2020 at least.

* Pray for Randy Williams (former store manager at Lifeway in Hagerstown) who is going through chemotherapy treatments for cancer.

* Pray for Linda Conley, estranged wife of DOM Bruce Conley - as she has been diagnosed with ALS.

IN THE CHURCHES

IN NEED: Valley Baptist Church in Jefferson, MD needs some volunteers to help with children's Sunday School classes for a few months as they reorganize. If someone in your church is interested in helping this sister church, please call Shirley Hale at (301) 473-8350 for more information. Rev. Larry Nelson has stepped back in to serve as pastor for the immediate future, since their pastor resigned with health concerns.

FREE: Third Day Community Church has 30 chairs to give away. Should your church be interested, please contact Pastor Joe Lindstrom 301-328-7451.



On November 7th, the BRBA Disaster Relief Teams did training on chainsaw recovery work while helping to down trees at Skycroft Conference Center! Basic chainsaw training took place at Skycroft Conference Center which is operated by the Southern Baptist Church. Volunteers from around Maryland and West Virginia took place in basic chainsaw training, safety, maintenance and operations associated with chainsaws during a disaster relief effort. Approximately 10 individuals were trained and given practical experience. Other volunteers, to include experienced chainsaw operators, took down dead trees from around the facility that were endangering buildings. This training will ensure that the Southern

Baptist Disaster Relief will be prepared to assist others in need during a natural or man-made disaster. Special thanks goes out to Edelen Tree Experts of Knoxville, Maryland for supporting our efforts and helping with trees which were beyond our skills and abilities for extraction. We are always looking for a few good men and women!



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