



## Home Safe from Ukraine

A little sister in each arm, 18-year-old Kara Graves leaned forward until the giggling girls in her lap nearly touched the floor with their heads.

"Again!" 8-year-old Elliana demanded as Kara lifted them up to a sitting position on the couch. Bridget, 6, squealed with delight, speaking in Russian.

Watching Bridget play with her siblings on Friday, it looked as if she had spent her entire life growing up in her new Brunswick home. But Bridget, who was born in Ukraine, just got there the day before.

Brizzy, as her adoptive family calls her, was born prematurely via surrogate in Ukraine. She has cerebral palsy and club feet and cannot walk by herself. Brizzy's biological parents decided they did not want her and she ended up in an orphanage.

More than a year ago, Pastor Phil and his wife, Kristie Graves, saw Brizzy's picture on an adoption website and knew she'd be their fifth child.

The adoption took a turn when Russia invaded Ukraine in February. Then in March, when the war was fairly new, the Graves' did not know what would happen. But on April 26, Phil and Kristie flew to Poland, after a judge agreed to hear their case. They crossed the border into Ukraine, finalized the adoption, and brought their daughter home.

A journalist picked them up at the airport in Warsaw and drove them to the border of Ukraine, where the adoption facilitator waited for them on the other side, and bid them farewell, Phil said. The actual trek across the border was not as easy.

"We basically hitchhiked," Phil said.

Polish police helped Phil and Kristie arrange a lift to cross over but even that was a challenge as the police did not speak English and the Graves' do not speak Polish. So



with the help of Google Translate, the police got them a ride with a Red Cross van carrying humanitarian supplies. Phil estimated the van drove them half a mile; just enough to get them across the border and into Ukraine. The Graves' got out and finally met the adoption facilitator.

Traveling by car to Kyiv, Phil and Kristie saw the effects of war with their own eyes. They passed checkpoints, a destroyed Russian tank, and a Mary Kay factory that had taken a hit. But Phil said they did not focus on the danger.

"I think we were running on adrenaline," he said.

They freshened up at the adoption facilitator's residence in Kyiv and prepared to leave for an overnight train to Zaporizhzhia. Then Phil heard an odd sound, like rattling. He thought it was the building's elevator. When they got outside, they learned that missiles just exploded about half a kilometer away. The family pressed on to the train station. Smoke rose in the distance. But none of this stopped them and after a long journey through the night and no sleep, their train arrived in Zaporizhzhia.



Finally, the hearing began. The judge questioned how their family could care for the child.

Pastor Phil is senior pastor at First Baptist Church in Brunswick. Kristie is a respiratory therapist at Johns Hopkins Hospital. They have a large support network, Phil said. This also isn't their first time caring for a child with a disability from a foreign country. They adopted Elliana in 2017 from Armenia. She uses a wheelchair. The end of the hearing, the Graves were able to move forward with taking Brizzy home and on April 28th, 2022, the judge officially finalized the adoption of Brizzy.

Phil and Kristie took their new daughter to a hotel that night. When it was time for bed, Brizzy did not want to sleep alone.

"She actually slept between Kristie and me," Phil said.

It was their first night together as an official family. The next day, the Graveses and Brizzy took a nine-hour bus ride to Warsaw. Phil said the ride was prolonged by the wait at the border. They went through a round of airport-like security checks before entering Poland, according to Phil.

Late at night on May 1, the family arrived at the hotel in Warsaw. They remained there nearly two weeks, until they flew home May 12. The family spent most of that time in between waiting on a doctor's report and Brizzy's bloodwork results, which Phil said had to be completed before they left. While they waited, the family took the chance to be tourists. They went with Brizzy to a river with a little beach, to the playground and out to eat. Kristie says Brizzy eats like a teenage boy.

Brizzy spent her first night in the U.S. sleeping beside Elliana. Brizzy has her own bed in the same room but climbed into Elliana's.

Phil and Kristie also have two sons, Ethan, 15, and Owen, 12 and one more daughter,

Kara who is 18 and attending Messiah University this upcoming semester.

At the Graves household, Elliana cuddled Brizzy as they sat next to a pile of laundry on Kara's bed. Owen lounged in a hammock above them. He ran through the English alphabet. Brizzy repeated each letter successfully, until she got to "H." Brizzy said "G" again. Her siblings laughed. The family is happy to be together. Brizzy is adjusting well and right at home, and that's the blessing in all of this.



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# Prayer Requests

Pray for an exploratory team that will be in WAR, WV over the Memorial Day weekend to meet with the Pastor and leaders of Calvary Baptist Church to formulate a plan for a missions partnership between BRBA and the church in that area. Pray for Pastor Chad and Ashley Hooker as they minister in that location.

Please pray for Pastor Joseph Constance's wife, Vicky as she has been diagnosed with a heart problem.

Pray for Pastor Joe Lindstrom of Third Day Community Church, Jefferson, MD. He has been diagnosed with some serious health problems that will require a long period of treatment, therapies, and surgery. Pray for the church (and Joe's family) as a new wave of Covid-19 variant has been sweeping through the church lately.

Offer a prayer of praise for God safely bringing Brizzy Graves home to America from the war torn country of Ukraine.

Praise the Lord that Pastor Clayton Clark has received a report that he now is cancer free after his surgery. We rejoice with Pleasant Valley Baptist Church in this wonderful report from the doctors!

Pray for the families and the children of Uvalde, Texas school shooting. 19 children were reported dead and 2 teachers. A lot of trauma and grief to work through and our school systems need prayer for wisdom on how to keep our children safe moving forward.

Pray for our government at both the federal and local level; for wisdom, repentance, and true justice to return to these systems that God ultimately instituted.



## DOM Sightings

Our Director of Missions preached in 4 churches April through May and worked exclusively (a 4 week process) with Greenbrier Baptist Church after the resignation of Pastor David Hughes. Multiple options were presented to the church and a plan for the immediate future of the church is being put into place. Pray for Harold Renner (deacon) who will take on the mantle of leadership for the immediate future at Greenbrier.

There were also multiple meetings with the statewide Director of Missions group and BCM/D leaders. Coordination of missions help, from campers and adult leaders at Skycroft camps this summer, were reviewed with Emily Reedy at Skycroft. This should be a great help to many BRBA churches this summer.

The Director of Missions also met with the new Executive Director of BCM/D, Michael Crawford and the liaison Mike Trammel.

# VBS Summer 2022

A list of some of our churches doing VBS that have chosen to advertise!



- **HAGERSTOWN CHURCH**  
They are having a Youth Week July 11-15, and VBS August 8-12

- **ADAMSTOWN COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
Plans to do a one week day camp (which could include VBS) from June 20-27 from 9 AM to noon each day.

- **LAKEVIEW CHURCH**  
Will hold a VBS August 1st - 5th from 8 AM - 3 PM.

- **FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH**  
Will do their VBS on June 27 - July 1st and will be held in the evenings from 6:30 - 8:30 PM.

- **South End Baptist**

Will be using Lifeway Curriculum and hold their VBS from 6-8pm and their Summer Day Camp at Carrollton Park run by the Frederick Rescue Mission during the week of June 20th.

## DISASTER RELIEF

On May 14, 2022, Southern Baptists from across our region attended Disaster Relief Training at Faith Baptist Knoxville, which has been the home of our Disaster Relief Recovery Unit for over 20 years.



The training included:

- \* Introduction to Southern Baptist Disaster Relief
- \* SBDR Administration
- \* Feeding Unit Operations
- \* Recovery Operations

Everyone who completed the training (and gets clearance through a background investigation) will receive credentials and the famous "yellow hat" indicating that they are now certified to operate in active disaster zones. Every year Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers serve countless victims of wildfire, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and other types of disasters -

always sharing the love of Jesus Christ with "hope, healing, and help".

The Blue Ridge DR unit (Recovery 1) has deployed to over twenty disasters since 2002. If you are interested in the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief ministries, contact Director of Missions Bruce Conley, or Al Caho at [ka3dyl@gmail.com](mailto:ka3dyl@gmail.com). **There will be a repeated training in Delaware on June 4th!**

# BCM/D Calendar

1. **Saturday the 4th: Pathways: Prevention & Protection @ Mountain City Church 10am -1:30pm**

This training will equip church leaders and workers, including those who may serve in counseling, administrative, and children's and youth ministries, as well as other areas, with comprehensive insight into creating safety in multiple areas of church life.

2. **Saturday the 4th: Disaster Relief Training @ Grace Baptist Church 9am-4pm**

This training is designed for those interested in becoming Southern Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers. It's also intended for current volunteers

3. **Tuesday the 28th: Lunch with Michael Crawford (New Executive Director) at BCM/D Offices 11:30am - 1pm**

Join Michael Crawford, BCM/D's new executive director, for lunch, a short talk, and Q&A

4. **Wednesday June 8th: Connect Lunches for Children and Youth Ministry Leaders @ Multiple Locations 12pm-2pm**

Connect Lunches! For Children & Youth Ministry Leaders Let us take you to lunch! You deserve it! Kris Buckman - BCM/D

5. **Crossings at Skycroft (formerly ReCharge) July 3-7**

Crossings at Skycroft is a summer camp experience for students who have completed grades 6-12. Bring your students to Crossings and they will experience Christ-centered worship, solid Gospel teaching, intentional church group times, exciting recreation, adventure, missions opportunities and more! The schedule is intensive, fun and focused on challenging youth pastors and their students to grow in Christ. Expect to be challenged, encounter God in a new way, and to leave camp changed! Visit: <https://skycroft.org/student-camp/> for registration information.

# SBC Calendar

## JUNE

### FOCUS ON LOCAL AND STATE MISSIONS AND MINISTRIES

1. 5 Disaster Relief Sunday
2. 11 Crossover Anaheim
3. 12-13 WMU Missions Celebration
4. 14-15 SBC Annual Meeting: Anaheim  
See the following link <https://sbconannualmeeting.net/>
5. 26 Mission:Dignity Sunday

# CAMPING???

Several families in BRBA own campers and Recreational vehicles and would like to form a group of folks from our church who love camping within close distances from BRBA. The group would allow those who enjoy camping to get to know each other better - and build better bridges between our churches.

If you are interested in joining a group like this, please contact DOM Bruce Conley at [bruce@blueridgebaptist.org](mailto:bruce@blueridgebaptist.org) We will start developing an email list for those who may be interested in getting started with a few trips this summer!

## DAVES CORNER:

*aka Free Stuff to help Churches!*



Hi folks, I am Pastor Dave Hays and I manage equipment and vehicles for BRBA. We have a lot of items that have been donated to help our churches in storage and by way of this article every 60 days, we plan on drawing your attention to some of the things that we have that are FREE for your church to use even call your own at NO COST to you!

For JUNE and JULY we want to draw your attention to two things:

### 1) GRILLING OUT

BRBA has a large propane grill that we loan out to churches for events that require a lot of outdoor cooking. You can reserve the use of this large grill by going on the BRBA website, and filling out a request under the "Reserve Equipment" tab.

### 2) BIBLES

We have lots of bibles to give away to any church that has a need! We have pew bibles, kid's bibles, gift bibles, study bibles, and lots more.



Contact me at [Dave@blueridgebaptist.org](mailto:Dave@blueridgebaptist.org) and I'll be happy to make arrangements for you to come to our storage facility in Hagerstown and take a peek at what we have.

# SPOTLIGHT

From New Hope Church Inwood

Pastor Jonathan Beall shared the following:

On Saturday evening, April 23, we had a night of Glow In The Dark Capture The Flag and Other Glow Games for little ones like bowling, coloring, and basketball. After the first CTFlag game we had food around a bonfire and Pastor Anthony shared the gospel. We had an incredible turn out from the neighborhood next to the church and it was a great way to build relationships and share Christ. There were people and glow sticks everywhere. It was incredible. Thank you to anyone who attended.





## ***Sexual Abuse Cover Up in the SBC: From Your Local Missionary's Heart***

By now, many in the BRBA (and around the world) have heard about the news of a completed year-long investigation by Guidepost Solutions about the cover up of sexual abuse within the Southern Baptist Convention over the last few decades. If you have not, I recommend reading the article in Christianity Today, titled: "*Southern Baptists Refused to Act on Abuse, Despite Secret List of Pastors*". There are plenty of other news sources that have run this story, but in my estimation - Christianity Today reports the sad news without bias and with a fair degree of accuracy.

The report cites that, "On a national level, and over the course of the last few decades, many of our leaders and lawyers who represented the SBC chose over and over again to ignore the voices of those who suffered forms of sexual abuse from clergy, with the express purpose of trying to avoid and escape legal liability. These leaders caused real harm to the victims, and brought shame and embarrassment to the cause of Christ, to our family of churches, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, who would absolutely condemn the way those needing help were ignored or turned away by "church leaders".

As a local SBC denominational leader - I am far removed from these national leaders and lawyers. I do not personally know any of them, and usually have to look up their names. My position has little to no influence on the SBC at a national level, but as a person who has supported and loved the SBC since I was 16 years old - I am deeply troubled that these things were done in our name. I have wept more than once over the results of this investigation and I am angered and saddened over the cover ups - deeply regretting the emotional injury done to every single person who reached out to these leaders for help, but were ignored, silenced, or brushed aside in the midst of their pain.

The actions revealed in the report are the polar opposite of everything I have been taught and practiced in my 45 years of ordained service in ministry in SBC churches in the mid-Atlantic region. My prayers this week have been for conviction, repentance and forgiveness for those who perpetrated these awful acts, for healing and exposure of the truth for the victims, and most of all - for clarity on how we can eradicate this terrible sinful pattern from our denomination to insure that NO ONE has to experience anything like this EVER again. I pray that God's Holy Spirit will heal the hearts within our family of churches, and even in my small, remote, and local leadership position - I ask that all who have been harmed can somehow find it in their hearts to forgive us for not addressing their serious injuries in a Christ honoring manner.

There are approximately 47,000 SBC churches in the United States, and our national leaders DO NOT have hierarchical positions on how we function as a denomination. We have had fair warning regarding abuse of power in the SBC nationally for too long and this sexual abuse scandal is but one facet of a much larger problem. We are NOT the Roman Catholic Church. Personally, I think it's time we put the local church, no matter how small, back in the driver's seat of Kingdom work in the SBC.

*Rev. Bruce M. Conley - Director of Missions, BRBA*

Lastly, but not least, the SBC Disaster Relief Celebration was held at Faith Baptist Church in Knoxville on April 24th!



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