



## September 2023

### Church Press Newsletter

Dear Julie,

Moving closer to the first day of Autumn on our annual calendars, in Maryland we find ourselves back in to our regular routines, with summer vacations behind us, fall sports seasons on our fields and television, and the return of the educational school year for our students.

Back-to-Church Sunday at St. Matthew in Bel Air, Maryland, is an exciting day as we usher in new small group topics and the start of our Confirmation and Sunday School programs for a new year. We encourage you to check out the various materials we offer to foster faith growth in your small groups. Our website will be updated shortly - we're working behind the scenes on a fresh look and will be adding new resources for today's churches and families. We invite you to grow with us and welcome any feedback or questions you may have!

[Visit Our Website](#)

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## Stack of Stuff

### **On why pastors and church workers do what we do...**

"There's a broken heart in every pew." Cecil Randall

### **On the Great Commission...**

"My job as a Christian is not to get people to heaven when they die, it's to get heaven to people while they're alive." D.R. Silva

### **For a chuckle...**

What did Daniel ask his real estate agent for?

A house without a den.

### **A reminder to share with our congregations...**

"I've read the last page of the Bible. It's all going to turn out right." Billy Graham

### **On reaching young families...**

"In the race to a child's heart, the first one there wins." George Barna

"Let the children come to Me and don't hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to them." Jesus

### **On remembering to take a time out for ourselves...**

"We can be tired, weary and emotionally distraught, but after spending time alone with God, we find that He injects into our bodies energy, power and strength." Charles F. Stanley

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Before diving into the first article for this month's newsletter, I want to share a story about the VBS experience at St. Matthew just a month ago. Like most churches, we select a curriculum for our program each year. Recently, we've enjoyed the messages and themes of [Think Orange](#), but we never follow the curriculum completely. Instead, we modify it to fit our community and participants - most of whom are not church-goers. In the 15 years I (Julie) have been leading our VBS ministry, it's become increasingly "normal" that many of the families who send their children to VBS do not attend church - not just St. Matthew - but any church on a consistent basis. Children, for the most part, do not really understand Jesus on a basic level and the importance of accepting Him as their Lord and Savior, so we did something a lot different this year.

We only had 3 days to share our VBS program this year due to crazy weather that quite unexpectedly affected our area, but as all of us know...a lot can happen in 3 days. (And, yes, that is a nod to our Savior.)

With the theme of "Ready, Set, Move...Follow Jesus Here, There, & Everywhere", we decided to turn down some of the additional daily teachings and really focus on Jesus - His presence at the beginning of the world-His birth-His friends-His death and resurrection - and our response. Yes, we shared a few of the New Testament stories within the curriculum, but ultimately, each night, we focused on Matthew 16:13-20, Peter's Confession of Jesus as the Christ. We shared Peter's actions and response to Jesus, we talked about everything Jesus did for us through interactive skits with myself, another adult leader, some teen helpers, and our Associate Pastor. Through songs, games, small group activities, and crafts, we continued to remind the kids that Jesus came for them and on the final night, we invited each participant, volunteer, and family member to individually confess and proclaim Jesus as their personal Savior. Pastor Dave blessed each individual as they came forward with their proclamation and I gave each person a small stone cross as a reminder. Children stared at us in awe of this gift; parents were moved; and a few volunteers (me, too) had tears in our eyes as we saw the earnest acceptance of Jesus in all of the children who came for a blessing. Prior to this end-of-program blessing, we shared this send-off event with the team and invited them to also confess individually and proclaim Jesus as their Savior, Lord, and Messiah.

Friends, I know we stand together in church on Sunday confessing the words of the Creeds and the Lord's Prayer, but there is something more and deeply moving about individual confession and proclamation of Jesus as Lord. If you have not invited your congregation, your youth, small groups, or neighbors to proclaim this individually, I would ask that you pray for the Spirit to move you to do so.

Yes, my eyes were open to this after spending three days (there it is again!) with Pastor Ginkel, and, no, I don't think it's by happenstance. We are called to share the love of Christ to expand God's Kingdom. It's awkward, sure; and messy, and a little intimidating at times, but it's beyond worth it to see the acceptance and hearing even an 8-year-old child exclaim his confession of Jesus as his Savior, as he and others marvel at the blessing.

Consider the ways you can move outside of the 'norm' of a program, a service, outreach to invite others to to know our Lord. And when you create a new opportunity, be sure to share it with me so we can share it with others *...and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*" Hebrews 10:24-25

--Julie

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## **Warning: Churches Talk About Everything But Evangelism** by Tom Ranier

The issue may be the biggest surprise of my ministry.

On the one hand, I am surprised at the decline of evangelism in most churches. But that is not the biggest surprise. The issue that perplexes and surprises me the most is that very few church leaders and members are even acknowledging the death of evangelism in their congregations and denominations.

As but one denominational example, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, measures evangelistic effectiveness by baptisms. Annual baptisms have declined from a peak of 445,725 in 1972 to 180,177 in 2022, a 60% decline! But when the 2022 statistical report was released, many of the comments noted that baptisms had increased 16% from the previous year. While that is true, we cannot use 2021 as a valid comparison year because churches were still regathering from the pandemic.

Likewise, it is becoming increasingly common [\[read more...\]](#)

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## Christians Don't Share Faith With Unchurched Friends

by Aaron Earls

Most unchurched Americans say they have multiple Christian friends, but those friends haven't shared with them how or why they should follow Christ.

In a 2016 study of 2,000 unchurched Americans, Lifeway Research found an openness to religious conversations, especially with Christian friends and family. Yet, few unchurched individuals say they've ever had someone explain how a person becomes a Christian—despite many unchurched Americans saying they're Christian themselves.

### Unchurched Christians

Compared to the U.S. population as a whole, the unchurched are predictably less Christian and more nonreligious. Yet most of the unchurched still identify as Christian.

[\[read more ...\]](#)

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## What You Need to Know About Volunteers

by Tony Morgan



Helping people use their spiritual gifts and their wiring to serve others should be a core part of every discipleship path—just like Bible teaching and connecting with other believers in a group or class. After all, if we're not helping people engage the mission as part of the body of Christ, we're not helping people become more like Jesus. However, many churches still struggle to engage their church in this key area.

In this guide, we'll outline several common barriers to volunteer engagement, offer tips for increasing volunteer engagement, and explain how to build healthy volunteer teams.

**Common Barriers to Volunteer Engagement** [\[read more...\]](#)

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## Raising Up a New Bible Study Leader

By Lynn H Pryor

For years, I felt like I spent half my time driving my two sons to where they wanted to go. I'm a good dad, which means I really didn't mind, but it wouldn't hurt my feelings if they were able to take themselves places at times.

One of my favorite memories was driving with my 15-year-old son, pulling into a large empty parking lot, and tossing him the car keys. "Here. You drive."

You lead a small group Bible study because you enjoy it. God's gifted you. You enjoy opening God's Word with others. You enjoy the interaction and discussion. You enjoy seeing life change.

But you're not the only one. There are likely others in your groups whom God has gifted and would enjoy the experience of leading others in discussion and spiritual transformation. They just don't know it yet.

Be on the lookout for new leaders—right there in your group. [\[read more ...\]](#)

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## On Small Group Conversations

A relatively quick video for lively small group discussions. Even if we have years of experience, it's always good to have affirmation or gain a new insight from another leader ... Check out this 5-minute encourager from Bill Search and maybe share with your small group leaders! [\[read more...\]](#) (Additional tips and insights for small group leaders are included in the link!)

## On a life of prayer and Jesus Calling

As you've likely heard, on August 31, Sarah Young, author of the best-selling devotional, *Jesus Calling*, passed away. Young's devotionals have brought peace and comfort to many throughout the year and came from her own struggles and longing to see Jesus in the midst of her days.

Young's devotionals have a unique place for Christians (and even non-Christians who face life-altering situations), and they underscore the value and importance of daily prayer to more easily hear the Word of God come alive through Scripture and time spent alone with Him.

Christianity Today shared more... [\[read more...\]](#)

## For Your Ears (to grow in understanding)

I came across a podcast recently that is well worth listening to. It provides good information about the mental health - for ministry workers, families, and understanding our youth.

A little more about The Glass House here from from Ben and Lynley Mandrell: As ministry leaders we know the order of priorities are God, family, church, but we also know that's not how it always works. Too often our priorities are distorted due to us living outside of our means with our energy, time, and gifts. Overworking ourselves inevitably leads to affecting the overall mental, emotional, and spiritual health of our family.

The podcast is Episode 76, and their guest is Dr. Heidi Warner who challenges us to redefine success, grow in the knowledge of our boundaries, and to ask our family the hard questions. This episode is packed with wisdom and practical resources you can use as

you strive to honor God with your priorities.

I listened to it through Apple podcast, but here's the link to all of the available ways you can listen along: [\[read more...\]](#)



## Monday Encouragement

***“We have spoken honestly with you, and our hearts are open to you.”***

2 Corinthians 6:11 (NLT)

The apostle Paul was one of the greatest leaders of all time.

Part of what made him such a great leader was his consistent demonstration of vulnerability.

In one of his letters, Paul said, *“We have spoken honestly with you, and our hearts are open to you”* (2 Corinthians 6:11 NLT).

Having an “open heart” means being vulnerable—in the way you talk, act, share, and feel. Being vulnerable in ministry can be scary. But to be an effective leader like Paul, you need to learn to be vulnerable.

Here are some practical steps you can take as a leader to become more vulnerable and authentic: [\[read more...\]](#)

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### A final important postscript:

**As we are updating the website, we understand that it is 'glitching' from time-to-time and will not allow orders to be placed online. PLEASE, do not hesitate to email your order ([info@churchpress.com](mailto:info@churchpress.com)) or call us: 443-771-6431. We are happy to take your orders either way and would love to hear from you!**

**Have a blessed week serving the Lord and His people!**

**NOW SEND THIS NEWSLETTER ON TO A FRIEND**

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