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## FROM THE STATES: Illinois Baptists, Georgia congregation help struggling churches

by Staff, posted Friday, March 27, 2020 (one month ago)

### Illinois Baptist State Association to help churches during pandemic

By Meredith Flynn

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP) -- The Board of Directors of the Illinois Baptist State Association (IBSA) has affirmed a plan to assist churches that could be forced to stop ministry because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. While pastors and church leaders are dealing with questions about worship services and how to continue ministry under the current shelter-at-home order, the next question for many leaders involves finances. And for a small percentage of churches, the health crisis could threaten their existence.

Meeting via video conference from their homes during a statewide order to shelter in place, the board heard reports from its three committees and IBSA Executive Director Nate Adams. "We're trying to think of everything that we could be and should be doing at this time," Adams said of IBSA's efforts to assist churches during the pandemic.



IBSA is already offering webinars and other online resources for church leaders, including information about online giving options. Adams reported to the board his plan to establish an emergency fund for local churches, and a process for churches to apply for assistance. "We think this is another way we can seek to help churches that maybe have the most disastrous consequences they could face as a result of the pandemic," Adams said.

Adams said the funds will be used to help churches that are unable to pay bills or might be forced to close their doors. The board agreed with his plan to set aside up to \$100,000 for the emergency fund. While it's not intended to cover salaries, the funds could help address a sudden, catastrophic need, such as utility bills or an overdue mortgage payment.

An application process for the emergency fund is expected to be ready by March 31.

The pandemic has had sweeping financial implications across the country and caused a record-high number of unemployment claims. Churches are bracing for decreases in giving as contributors experience financial hardship, and in-person worship services are indefinitely on hold.

Releasing funds from the IBSA Emergency Net Asset Account requires approval only from Adams and board chair Bob Dickerson, but Adams told the board he and Dickerson value the board's affirmation of the plan and the amount. Board members expressed no opposition to the plan.

Administrative Committee chair Bob Dyer said the committee had looked at the plan from both sides -- from the perspective of churches who will need assistance, and the impact that the pandemic will have on IBSA's overall budget.

"However, there is an emergency account that has been created and set aside for some of these purposes," Dyer said. The Emergency Net Asset Account is generally used to make expensive repairs to the IBSA Building in Springfield or at IBSA's camp facilities.

Adams said the current plan is to develop a simple process by which churches can request funds, including documenting needs in writing and demonstrating the disastrous nature of the need. He also plans to invite individuals and churches to contribute to the fund as they are able.

The board also approved a motion that the 2021 IBSA budget be prepared based on a Cooperative Program goal between \$6.2 and \$6.3 million, and a Cooperative Program percentage ratio of 56.5/43.5 (IBSA/Southern Baptist Convention).

The proposed ratio is unchanged from the current ratio, but Adams told the board he and the Resource Development Committee would monitor income and the ongoing global financial situation amid the pandemic, and could bring a contingency budget when the committee meets in August ahead of the full board's meeting in September.

In his report to the board, Adams said IBSA's recent restructuring has positioned the organization to face the new challenges brought on by Coronavirus.

"Nobody was ready for it, and it's going to hit us in ways we couldn't anticipate," he acknowledged.

But he said IBSA's focus on processes, rather than programming, and on church revitalization, gives the Association a new nimbleness as it assists churches

IBSA has pivoted to focus on needs related to the ongoing crisis, he told the board, including a new slate of web content dedicated to helping churches navigate online services, online giving, and other challenges.

For more information and resources, go to [IBSA.org/church-helps](https://www.ibsa.org/church-helps).

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## **Georgia church commits \$1,000/week for struggling churches**

By Scott Barkley

GAINESVILLE, Ga. (BP) -- Zach Williams knows what it's like to be a pastor when the finances are tight. He's had those restless nights of trying to figure out how to meet church expenses. He's heard a treasurer ask him to hold off on cashing his paycheck for a few more days.

"There have been many times that I've had to pray, 'God, if you don't do something, we won't make it,'" Williams told The Christian Index. "And, of course, every single time He's proven Himself faithful."

At a mid-February deacons meeting, the subject turned to church finances. Flat Creek Baptist Church, the group acknowledged, was in good financial shape. In fact, it was better than good. At that point, Williams says he witnessed the most generous statement he's ever heard.

"Our chairman of deacons, Royce Millwood, looked at everyone and said, 'God has been so good to our church. We need to find ways to use this money for His glory and not hoard it for ourselves.'

"He said it, and we moved on," Williams remembers. "But, the memory of it stayed with me."

At that time, news of the coronavirus remained largely in China, although cases had begun appearing in the U.S. Still, it was hard to believe that the illness would squirm into every state of the country and halt day-to-day life as we know it.

And while churches have quickly adapted to online services and ministry while doing their best to adhere to recommendations on social distancing, everyone braces for a pronounced effect on giving.

Williams remembers the impact a hurricane, flood or blizzard could have on church tithes. "It would cripple us," he says. "But you just had to figure out what you were going to do.

"When I heard churches could have their doors closed for eight weeks, I knew there would be some in danger of shutting down. My mind went to Acts 2:44-45 and how the early church gave to all those in need."

He knows pastors sometimes look at other churches as competition, when "they're our brothers and sisters in Christ." He recalled what Millwood, Flat Creek's chairman of deacons, had said, and added:

"God laid it on my heart to come up with a relief program to help these churches in a time of financial stress."

A unanimous vote at the next deacons meeting paved the way. For eight weeks, Flat Creek -- which averages 250 people in Sunday worship -- would provide \$1,000 a week to a church needing temporary relief. Though recipients thus far have been in Georgia, Williams said congregations throughout the country are eligible.

"We've had requests from as far away as Texas and Vermont," he says. "But our initial heart is to help those in Georgia."

Adding that he's "overwhelmed and blessed" that Flat Creek's deacons voted to move ahead on the outreach, Williams stressed that the church is looking for nothing in return.

"This is meant to help churches stay open," he said. "I talked to a pastor yesterday who said that if his church receives this week what they did the previous two Sundays, that would total a Sunday's giving before the coronavirus."

Like other congregations, Flat Creek is finding ways to continue to minister. Wednesday (March 25), Williams conducted a graveside funeral where only immediate family could attend to stay within crowd size recommendations. Before that, youth pastor Caleb Lang conducted a student Bible study over Zoom.

"These are strange times, but I praise God for churches responding to reach as many people as they can in this season," he says. "It's a beautiful thing to watch.

"I was reading in Matthew 16 recently. If the gates of hell can't prevail against the Church, the coronavirus can't either."

Meredith Flynn is content editor for the Illinois Baptist. Scott Barkley is editor of The Christian Index.