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SBC DIGEST: Missionary thanks Southern Baptists; Storyline Fellowship calls pastor; Missouri's Baptist Home names president

by Staff, posted Monday, April 06, 2020 (21 days ago)

Missionary thanks Southern Baptists for support during pandemic

By Hugh Johnson*

I woke up confused Sunday morning. The bedside clock read 6 a.m., but my iPhone said 7 a.m. I had forgotten it was Sunday. And I had definitely forgotten that in this part of Europe the clocks had "sprung forward" at midnight on March 29.

In previous years my family has relied on the semiannual reminder in church to reset our clocks so as not to be late (or early) for the following Sunday's services. But this year there was no local church service the week before, nor helpful reminders of the time change on the TV news the night before. Coronavirus has consumed the TV headlines just as it has almost every other aspect of daily life. Each day during the global lockdown has seemed like any other. No routine. No rhythm. No normal.

One of life's joys as a missionary is the many opportunities we have to see, almost daily, how faithfully God provides when our skills, education, professional knowledge and language abilities are inadequate. Although painful, we have been able to count it a blessing to be brought low, and we find ourselves thankful. We're thankful to God and we're thankful for the ways He is using you.

As our family and millions of others around the world adjust to many more weeks or months of a new home-based "normal," we need to find innovative ways to connect with family, friends, work colleagues, fellow local believers and ministry contacts. Our circumstances challenge us to look outside our familiar patterns of life and to see opportunities to do things differently. We can let God use this global crisis to stretch and shape us. We can look beyond ourselves to the needs of others. In our weakness and loss of control over our daily lives we can put into practice the words of Philippians 4:19: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

During this pandemic, we are forced to trust God like never before and to live the truth of Paul's words in Philippians 4:11-13: "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Sunday started out in confusion, but quickly became memorable for the right reasons. We see how God is using you -- our fellow Southern Baptist believers -- to provide exactly the kind of encouragement and practical help that Paul writes about in Philippians 4.

The coronavirus has caused our stateside home church to move to a live webcast format. So, for the first time in our 16 years of field service, we have been able to join our stateside home church for online Sunday morning worship services (evening for us), complete with a shared Lord's Supper. The familiar faces and voices of these friends give us the spiritual refreshment and encouragement that we so desperately need right now. Like Paul we can say, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly. You were indeed concerned for me" (v.10).

And even though your families are also suffering during this time of global fear and uncertainty, you continue to bless us in many practical ways by your generosity of spirit and your sacrificial gifts. Again, Paul's words speak for us: "Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble (v.14)" and "... you sent me help for my needs once and again" (v.16).

Living far from family in troubling times like these, it is reassuring and affirming for missionary families to know that we can say, "I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God" (v.18). And knowing that so many of you are praying for us truly helps us to sense "... the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding." (v.7)

To our 15 million fellow believers in more than 47,000 Southern Baptist churches, and from my family to yours, I want to say "thank you!" May these challenging days become an opportunity for each of you to know God's peace as, with thanksgiving, you make your needs known to Him.

*Name changed.



Storyline Fellowship calls JT English as lead pastor

By Staff

ARVADA, Colo. (BP) -- Storyline Fellowship in Arvada, Colo., called JT English to be the church's new lead pastor Sunday (April 5). Since October 2014, English has served on staff at The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, launching the Village Church Institute discipleship strategy there and serving on the church's executive team. The Village Church Institute was founded in order to ground theological education and discipleship primarily in the local church. Over the past five years, several thousand people have participated.

Storyline, a five-year-old North American Mission Board church plant, had been searching for a new leader since last July, when founding pastor Ben Mandrell became president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources.

The search process took an unusual turn when Colorado churches were encouraged by city officials to begin meeting online only, due to the spreading coronavirus pandemic.

"Even in the midst of that," Storyline elder chairman Jeff Schaffer said, "we never sensed that God was pushing pause on this process."

Storyline quickly transformed the in-person plan for presenting a lead pastor candidate to the church into a virtual experience. Leaders announced English as the candidate as part of online services March 29 and replaced an in-person reception with multiple online gatherings throughout that week for Storyline members.

English recorded his sermon in view of a call at The Village Church, and it was included as a part of Storyline's online worship service April 5. After a member vote that afternoon, members gathered in an online webinar where it was announced that English is the new Lead Pastor.

"I could not be more excited to be the next Lead Pastor of Storyline Fellowship," English said. "Colorado has always been home for my family, and we are thrilled that God would allow us to come home and lead this church. ... God has been so faithful to Storyline over the past five years and I believe he will continue in our next chapter."

Harrison affirmed as president of The Baptist Home

By Becky Barton

IRONTON, Mo. (BP) -- The Baptist Home board of trustees voted unanimously April 3 to confirm Rodney Harrison as The Baptist Home's next president, making him only the seventh president in The Home's 107-year history.

Harrison began serving as the transitional president for The Home in late December in preparation for former president Steven Jones' retirement in January. The historic vote was made by the trustees during their April 3 board meeting, which was held online due to the COVID-19 crisis. The Baptist Home is a Missouri Baptist senior adult residential care ministry with four locations.

Ken Parker, trustee chairman for The Baptist Home and pastor of First Baptist Church, Kearney, Mo., extolled Harrison's "commitment to the Lord, to the church and to Missouri Baptists, and to the ministry of The Baptist Home."

"I'm excited about the future of The Baptist Home," Parker said, "and I think that Dr. Harrison is going to be able to build on the strengths at The Home and is going to help us walk into the future in such a positive way. He is going to do a phenomenal job."

Harrison told The Pathway that he and his wife Julie are "humbled by the opportunity to lead and serve The Baptist Home. Throughout the process, I have clearly sensed the Holy Spirit's direction, and am honored by the stewardship the Board has placed upon me."

"Ours is a Sanctity of Life ministry," he added. "The mission of The Baptist Home is informed by Scripture and articulated in Article XV of the Baptist Faith and Message. Respecting life until natural death is a commitment and purpose that all Baptists can and will affirm. This is our God given purpose, and to this end, please join me in praying for wisdom as I lead this ministry."

Harrison said that, in days to come, The Baptist Home will not only care for residents at the Home's four campuses, but also that it will provide resources to help Missouri Baptist churches minister to senior adults and promote the sanctity of life for people of all ages.



JT English



Rodney Harrison

Harrison encourages Missouri Baptists to take virtual tours of the Baptist Home locations at www.thebaptisthome.org and, after the COVID-19 pandemic ends, to visit The Home's campuses in person.

"Thank you very, very much for your support over the years," Harrison said. "I am thankful to Missouri Baptists for being faithful to us."

Harrison is dean of academic strategy at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, where he has been a professor for 17 years. As a registered nurse since 1983, he also has an extensive background in health care and health care administration.

Harrison studied at Dallas Baptist University, obtaining his bachelor of arts degree in health care administration. He worked on a Master of Divinity in Biblical Languages at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In 1995, Harrison completed his Master of Arts in Christian Education from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. He completed a Doctor of Ministry degree at Gateway Baptist Seminary, while his wife, Julie, began studies on a Master of Arts in Biblical Archaeology, which she completed at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In addition to authoring numerous published books, articles and papers, Harrison has served for 10 years as a consultant, mentor and coach for several academic institutions across the country, including Hannibal-LaGrange University and Missouri Baptist University.

Harrison said he "could not have envisioned how God would use health care training from 40 years ago as a platform for this privilege and stewardship."

He said he initially had no aspiration to pursue the president's position at The Home. However, after only a few weeks as transitional president, he fell in love with the people at each of the four campuses. He said he began to feel God tugging at his heart.

"I feel called to serve at The Baptist Home and believe God has brought me back full circle," he said.

The Harrisons live on a small farm near Holt, Mo., in a log home they restored. He enjoys hunting, fishing, history and motorcycles. They are members of First Baptist Kearney, Mo., and have three children and nine grandchildren who live nearby.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article includes additional reporting from Pathway associate editor Benjamin Hawkins.

Hugh Johnson* is an IMB writer and photographer in Europe. Becky Barton is a writer for The Baptist Home.