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## Illinois church stretches its impact with CP despite Coronavirus

by Karen L. Willoughby, posted Friday, April 03, 2020 (24 days ago)

NOBLE, Ill. (BP) -- Picture an old-style, white, wooden structure with a bell tower capped by a steeple, set in the middle of corn fields, alongside a cemetery. The church looks to be far from the coronavirus and yet is as affected by it as any church in America.

But the people at Freedom Baptist Church, organized by 10 people in 1852 who wanted freedom to worship according to God's Word in what was then a heavily Roman Catholic area, are not discouraged.

Since at least 1980, the 50-75 people who gather for Sunday morning worship have allowed their annual giving to missions through the Cooperative Program to dip below 10 percent of undesignated offerings only four times.

The Cooperative Program is the way Southern Baptists work together in fulfilling the Great Commission in state conventions, across North America and throughout the world.

"Being a smaller church we recognize the importance of churches gathering together," said Rob Windes, Freedom Baptist's pastor. "The money we give to missions through the Cooperative Program is multiplied by some 47,000 other churches, and as a result, we can accomplish more together than we can separately.

"The wealth of opportunities for training the state convention provides for us is an example of that," Windes said. "We're a small church in a small association of seven churches. The VBS and leadership training we receive, the invaluable Midwest Leadership Summit, and the liaison with the state convention who tells us what training and resources are available are an invaluable benefit to us. We couldn't do all that on our own."



The members of Freedom Baptist Church in Noble, Ill., have allowed their Cooperative Program giving to dip below 10 percent only four times in 40 years. Submitted photo



Pastor Rob Windes and his wife Darla came to Freedom Baptist Church in 2015. Submitted photo

Freedom Baptist's total missions giving comes to 52.4 percent of the church's offerings, including 15 percent through the Cooperative Program, 5 percent to the Olney Baptist Association, and special offerings for the International Mission Board, North American Mission Board and Baptist work in Illinois, as well as direct support of Illinois ministries and of missionaries in Argentina.

Freedom Baptist is located about four miles outside of Noble, a village of about 650 people in southeastern Illinois. Sunday morning worship services were suspended in mid-March because of the coronavirus, and though internet capability in the county is too thin to stream services, every service already was recorded, edited and posted on the church's website, [freedomchurch1852.com](http://freedomchurch1852.com).

"We believe in the sovereign God over all things, Romans 8:28," Windes said. "Yes, we're separate physically but we're still together as a church. Even though we're going through difficult times I believe He is helping the church to grow, the members to grow. I'm hoping this pandemic will help people across the nation open their eyes and turn to God."

While primarily an older congregation, there are some younger families. But Windes said church members are calling each other, making sure no one feels cut off from their church family during this time of enforced isolation.

"We don't know how long the present situation with the coronavirus will continue, but if it extends further than a couple of weeks it is going to affect our giving, at least for the short term," Windes said March 18. "We have to trust God. Even in the worst of circumstances He's still in control. Some people ask, 'How can we trust in Him when we can't trust in Walmart, the state government or the national government?'"

"Because ultimately it comes down to Him asking, 'Will you trust me?' We say 'Yes!' In the rest of the world Christians have always suffered. When things are good we have a tendency to not rely on God as much. But God says, 'Trust me.' Even when things look out of control, you can trust God. He's in control."

Windes said the church family knows that. He expects any shortfall will be made up once the church restarts its Sunday morning services, Wednesday evening Bible studies and Sunday evening classes.

Freedom Baptist has a well-established commitment to God, the Cooperative Program, and "determination to spread the Gospel not only in our community but to be 'the little church that could' and have a global impact," Windes said. "Even though we're now isolated because of the virus from the community, we have been and are still working to be engaged in the community."

The church's six-person outreach committee and Sunday School classes plan local outreach events regularly, including prayer walks in Noble, movie nights at the local park, spaghetti dinners delivered to homes, and more.

"We try to share Christ with everyone in everything we do," Windes said. "On prayer walks we ask them if they want us to pray for them and try to demonstrate God's love to them."

Freedom Baptist sent a team of six in late February on its first international mission trip since Windes became pastor in 2015. They served for seven days in Cordoba, Argentina, teaching English to children and adults, capped on the last day by a Gospel presentation. They also led VBS for the children of missionaries living in the area and did some construction work, including cleaning and painting a church facility.

The church sends a team of women once a year to Chicago, four hours north, to minister with an organization that distributes food and does street evangelism. Members and other individuals supported by Freedom have gone on mission in India, Africa, Haiti and other places.

"To really know the church, you have to know the people, and Freedom has the most loving and friendliest people around," Windes said. "Not because of ourselves but because of the love that has been shown to us by our great God and Savior Jesus Christ."



Delivering spaghetti dinners to people in the community is one of the ministries of Freedom Baptist Church. Submitted photo

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Karen L. Willoughby is a national correspondent with Baptist Press -- bpnews.net -- online news service of the Southern Baptist Convention.