

Superintendent's Report 2020

"Call to me and I will answer and show you great and unsearchable things you do not know." Jeremiah 33:3

It seems like it was a long time ago that we were gathering at Kingdom City in Houston for the 2019 Midsouth Reunion/Annual Meeting. How our world has changed in these past few months. Words and phrases like "pandemic, sheltering in place, quarantine, isolation, social distancing" have become part of our regular vocabulary. We could not have predicted what we have recently experienced. Here's another phrase to add to our lexicon: "CALL TO ME"...the theme of our 2020 Midsouth Reunion/Annual Meeting. The phrase is from from Jeremiah 33:3 where the Lord says "Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and unsearchable things you do not know." God gave this challenge/promise to Israel after he led them into 70 years of exile. It was true then and it's true today...even for a world that is emerging from what may seem like a contemporary exile caused by an invisible virus.

Actually, Jeremiah 33:3 could be a good description of the ongoing prayer of the Midsouth Conference. We look where the Lord is already at work and seek to join Him. We can see it throughout the Midsouth Conference since our last Midsouth Reunion/Annual Meeting last year. Here's a brief review:

Midsouth Covenant churches continue to flourish. Our churches are ethnically, geographically, economically and stylistically diverse. The past year has been like previous years...Midsouth Covenant churches doing excellent ministry as they live out being the Body of Christ in their cities in our five-state mission field. The Midsouth Conference has remarkably gifted and godly pastors. This has been particularly evident these past few months as our churches have had to quickly pivot to go online during this "sheltering in place" season. Though aggregate regular worship attendance increased in Midsouth churches in the last year, it's been amazing to see the significant increase of people "attending" Midsouth churches during this online season. Thousands more people are "visiting" Midsouth Covenant churches because of our online hospitality. It's been fun and heartening to "visit" all our Midsouth churches almost every weekend during this sheltering season. Figuring out how to welcome all these new digital visitors, innovating how to integrate online ministry with in-person ministry, learning how can we adjust our buildings to the new realities from this pandemic are all challenges and opportunities before us.

Did I say we have excellent pastors in the Midsouth? Though I could give a shout out to every Midsouth pastor, I went to mention a few in this report. Thanks to Ted Law and his team for leading the Midsouth Ministerium, expanding and deepening our pastoral connection and community. Thanks to former ECC president, Gary and Nancy Walter, who spoke at our Fall 2019 Midsouth Pastors Retreat. Thanks to Paul Lessard, an original Bandwagon member that was a part of the initial ECC outreach in Texas back in the 1980's. Last year Paul served as Interim Pastor at Sonoma Springs Covenant Church in Las Cruces, NM until Michael Poindexter (Shelly) became lead pastor @

SSCC. Welcome to Mike and Shelly. Paul moved on to become the Executive Minister of Start and Strengthen Churches for the ECC. Thanks to Pastor David Chambers (Jessie), who concluded his ministry @ Hope Community Evangelical Covenant Church in Houston last June. Doug Stevens is presently serving as a Pastoral Mentor @ Hope. Last year we grieved the death of Pastor Rick Larson, former pastor of Hope Covenant Church and one of the early leaders in the Midsouth region. We thank the Lord for Rick's friendship and leadership. We pray for wife Linda and family.

Church Planting continues to be a missional priority for the Midsouth Conference. We have three current projects, led by three gifted church planters: Esperanza Covenant Church in Houston, TX (Pastor Henry Burbano and Olga Burbano); The Well Covenant Church in Tulsa, OK (Pastor Denise and Gary McKinney); Highpoint Covenant Church in Leesville & Ft. Polk, LA (Pastor Darrick and Tonia Gutting). Reports from each of these church planters are included on the reunion resource page. Every church in the Midsouth Conference has been a church plant. Churches planting churches is our mission strategy.

Our Midsouth Camp had its largest attendance ever in 2019. Great thanks to Executive Director Dale Lusk and the entire Midsouth Camp leadership team. Great thanks to the Midsouth Camp Board and the leadership of Chair Dan Almquist. The Midsouth Camp report is included on the reunion resource page.

I often say that being a conference superintendent in the ECC is like being an "athletic director" at a college or university. Many teams/many coaches...many churches/many pastors. Distinct sports/all important...distinct churches/all essential. Different teams/committed to victory...different churches/committed to the same mission: *"to partner with Evangelical Covenant Church to obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission of Jesus Christ by starting, strengthening and networking healthy missional Covenant churches in the five-state region of OK, TX, AR, LA, NM."*

The Midsouth Conference is a team sport. As is often said, we are far better together. Thanks again to our Midsouth pastors and other leaders in our Midsouth Covenant churches. Thanks for all those leaders who serve as ambassadors for Christ beyond their local church in order to bless the Midsouth, the ECC and literally people all over the world. Thanks to Dave Olson, and Rodney Sawyer for helping serve our shared Midsouth mission. Thanks to our Committee on Ministerial Standing, led by Dr. Willie Peterson. Special thanks to our Midsouth Conference Board and the leadership of Chair Phil Mallory. Thanks to Midsouth Administrator, Kim Kelley, who helps us all get better. Finally, deep and joyful thanks to Dixie for another year of graceful, courageous, wise servant leadership. It is said that adversity not only shapes character...it also reveals character. This past year, especially these past few months, have both shaped and revealed the character of Midsouth Conference churches and pastors. To God be the Glory! It's a privilege and honor to serve you and serve with you...

In Christ...