



CASTING *a* VISION *for* MISSIONS *can transform your church* *and change the world*

By Tim Yarbrough

More churches are discovering that before they can impact lostness, they must first order their priorities by embracing an Acts 1:8 paradigm of ministry.

"I thought missions was for First Church, Big Somewhere," smiles Chadd Pendergraft, pastor of Splitlog Baptist Church. "It's really not that way at all."

Splitlog is located in the rural community of Goodman, Missouri, which is in extreme southwest Missouri bordered by Oklahoma and Arkansas.

"God sends people all over the world, and I think He equips them very uniquely. Even to the point of their background and the culture they come out of," says Pendergraft of his call to the area. "God has put me in the middle of the redneck culture. For lack of a better term, that's really what I pastor...I pastor a group of rednecks. We don't try to be something we're not. We're just good ol' country folk."

The bottom line, Pendergraft says, is members of Splitlog are all about honoring Christ through Acts 1:8.

"The result I see is in what I call, 'pew impact,'" he says. "It's more than a heart change, it's a change in how people view the church. It's not just a place where I get fed on Sunday. It's not just to scratch my religious itch, but a place where I learn how to impact the kingdom."

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

In the past two years Splitlog—with about 250 in worship attendance—has mobilized nearly 100 of its members on numerous short-term mission trips throughout North America and the world.

The church has adopted an unreached people group in China and has made several trips to the communist country. Splitlog students traveled to Colorado last summer and the church now partners with a ministry in Mexico.

Pendergraft says a turning point in the ministry began on a mission trip he took to the Ukraine in 2001. It was the first time a member of Splitlog had ever participated in a short-term mission trip.

“We looked back in our records. That was the first person our church had sent anywhere—I mean even across the street—in its history.”

When the Acts 1:8 Challenge initiative for Southern Baptist churches was launched, Pendergraft wasted no time signing up.

Splitlog is creative in meeting the needs of the Goodman community. Pendergraft uses what is done locally as a springboard to the congregation’s involvement in its Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

Servant evangelism projects like passing out water during community events has earned Splitlog the nickname, “The Water Church,” says Pendergraft. One of the church’s local ministries has members out canvassing the community—identifying homes with chimneys and making available free firewood to residents.

Pendergraft says it’s all about demonstrating Christ’s love in a practical way.

“Our people’s mindset is not that we’re doing something because we want people to come to our church and tithe,” he says. “We’re doing this because we really want to minister to people, whether they ever come to our church or not.”

Already, Splitlog has had an entire family and six students surrender to full-time missions.

“Acts 1:8 is a hill I’ll die on any day,” he says. “It’s being true to the scriptures. It’s being true to Jesus.”

EMBRACING ACTS 1:8 IN A BIG WAY

For more than 170 years, First Baptist Church, Cumming, Georgia, has been a fixture on the landscape of Forsyth County. No one could accuse the historic church of not being missions-minded. But it wasn’t until

First Baptist made Acts 1:8 a part of its DNA that the church made a God-sized impact on the kingdom.

In one year alone, First Baptist saw its international missions offering triple—in a year when the Atlanta-area church faced a budget shortfall due to cancellation of services because of ice and snow.

All it took was faith and a bit of creativity.

First Baptist pastor, Robert Jolly, and the finance committee launched the church’s first Acts 1:8 Challenge offering campaign by inviting the entire congregation to take an envelope containing a \$1 bill—with a request to pray how God might have them multiply the gift for missions.

“When in need, plant a seed,” says Jolly. “Plant a seed with a plan. With a plan, watch God work.”

By year’s end the church had not only met its Lottie Moon Christmas Offering® for International Missions goal of \$150,000 but had given a total of \$335,000 to missions.

The overwhelming response to the Acts 1:8 Challenge offering allowed the church to generously support recovery work in New Orleans, numerous local missions projects and its church planting partnership in Ethiopia. Giving to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering® for North American Missions increased by more than 30 percent—from \$30,000 to \$40,000.

Lee Weeks, associate pastor of evangelism and missions, said the Acts 1:8 Challenge has been a great way for the church to “contextualize its vision.”

“It put Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth into terms we could understand—local, regional, national and international,” he says. “I don’t think before then the person in the pew thought of missions in that context. Like a lot of churches when they think of missions, they think immediately of international; going overseas, but to put it into the context of community, state, nation and the world...it really opened their eyes.

“It provided synergy, an enthusiasm,” he says, “a sense of direction and purpose for our church.”

Another measurable result has been church growth and a renewed passion for ministry.

“We’ve had more than 100 additions and what we’re hearing from our people is they’re excited to come to a church that’s *on mission*. They want to do something greater than themselves, and they want to be a part of a church that has a global purpose.”

Jolly agrees that Acts 1:8 is a “light bulb” experience for a lot of people. He believes persistence of church leadership throughout the years and a focus on the Acts 1:8 paradigm are producing fruit.

“The leadership of the church goes on mission trips...and talks about missions opportunities,” says Jolly. “We’ve been aggressive in promoting missions offerings and putting a face on those missions offerings so people can see it’s about transforming lives.

“The bottom line is if this church isn’t involved in changed lives, then we don’t need to be in this business.”

GROWING IN ACTS 1:8 FAITH

Pastor David Schorejs (Shore-eyes) of Parkway Baptist Church in Mesa, Arizona, understands what it means to embrace a God-sized vision and watch God work out all the details.

Parkway, a re-start of the former Valley Southern Baptist Church, has grown from 20 to 80 in two years. Its focus: missions.

When Schorejs came to the church, he told members, “It won’t be about us. It’ll be about the lost. Don’t call me as your pastor if you’re not willing to go there.”

They did and the rest, as they say, is history.

Through his leadership, Schorejs models what an Acts 1:8-focused church should look like.

Schorejs wants the church to be intentional about engaging the lost world. He teaches a weekly Bible study in the association’s Baptist ministry center, is involved in a local community development project and serves as a substitute teacher in local schools.

It’s important to Schorejs for Parkway to open its facilities for kingdom work. A Spanish mission church utilizes the facilities for education and fellowship space, and a special education school uses church space regularly. The school specializes in keeping kids out of juvenile detention.

“I try to interact with the kids as much as possible,” he says. “Two have been saved, and one has been baptized through this ministry.”

In addition to supporting the Cooperative Program by giving 8 percent of its undesignated gifts, Parkway regularly sends its members on short-term mission trips.

Numerous times each year the church ministers along the Arizona-Mexico border. This year a team from the church traveled to the Navajo nation in Wyoming and saw two of its members minister in Thailand.

Giving financially and hands-on experiences continue to immerse Parkway in missions beyond the church’s walls.

Explains Schorejs, “It will keep the people understanding that it’s not about Parkway, it’s about the world.”

ABOUT THE ACTS 1:8 CHALLENGE

Officially launched in May 2004, the Acts 1:8 Challenge is a call for SBC churches to move to a new level of missions involvement by cooperating with their local Baptist association, their state convention, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and International Mission Board (IMB).

As part of the Acts 1:8 Challenge, pastors or mission leaders are encouraged to make their formal commitment to implement a church-wide missions strategy by registering their church at www.ActsOne8.com or by calling 1-800 4 ACTS18. Churches accepting the challenge commit to eight “Kingdom-growing” responses as they work to intentionally carry out Acts 1:8: to prepare, learn, pray, give, go, tell, send and multiply.

Churches that register receive the Embracing the Acts 1:8 Challenge Leadership Guide and a CD of promotional resources, which include video clips, sermon outlines, bulletin inserts and brochures.

The ActsOne8.com website is designed to connect volunteers with mission opportunities and resources offered through their local associations, state conventions, NAMB and IMB, as well as provide free downloadable resources and additional versions of the CD material. @

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LEFT: Members from FBC Cumming do clean-up in New Orleans. MIDDLE: Chasity Pendergraft of Splitlog Baptist presents the gospel to a Chinese woman in a rural village. RIGHT: Pastor Chadd Pendergraft visits with a boy and his water buffalo while prayerwalking in the Chinese countryside.

