

Pastor's Annual Report for the year 2012

(adapted from the "State of the Church Address" delivered Sunday morning January 6, 2013, Pastor Brad Brandt)

"As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you."

John 20:21

I want to begin the new year by addressing a subject that I have raised with you each January for the past 25 years. I want us to think about the subject of the church, and specifically, the state of the church. What is the state of the church, specifically the local church known as Wheelersburg Baptist Church, as we head into 2013?

That's an important question to answer, for the church is important to the Lord, so much so that He gave His life to bring it into existence. It follows then that if we love the Lord, the church ought to be very important to us, and we ought to demonstrate that importance by thinking about it and investing our lives in it.

So what is the state of the church at WBC? How are we doing? That's not only an important question to ask, it's a tough question to answer...unless we first clarify our measuring stick. By what standard shall we assess the church? Our own tastes and opinions? "I like the church because it does the things I like." Or, "I don't like it because it doesn't do the things I like." "I like the children's programs, and the teaching is decent, but the music is weak, and there aren't enough potlucks, so I'll give it a C+."

That's *not* how we're going to make our assessment, for the simple reason that the church doesn't belong to us. We have no right to expect the church to meet our arbitrary standard because it doesn't belong to us. It belongs to the Lord.

So the real question then is, what does *the Lord* think of the church, of *this* church? You say, "How can we know?" We can know by looking into His Word and seeing His intent for the church, and then assessing how we're doing in light of His expressed intent.

There's a word that has captured my attention in the past couple of years, and to help us prepare a context for this year's State of the Church address, I want us to think about that word. This word began to impress my soul soon after we started our current sermon series through the Gospel of John back in April 2010. We kept seeing this word all over the place, and its frequency has helped me learn something very significant about Jesus' identity and ours.

Let me read a few examples. Jesus is speaking in each of the following...

John 4:34 "My food is to do the will of him who **sent** me and to finish his work."

John 5:24 "Whoever hears my word and believes him who **sent** me has eternal life."

John 5:30 "I seek not to please myself but him who **sent** me."

John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who **sent** me."

John 7:33 "I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who **sent** me."

John 16:5 "Now I am going to him who **sent** me."

John 17:18 (in his prayer) "As you **sent** me into the world, I have **sent** them into the world."

John 20:21 "Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has **sent** me, I am **sending** you.'"

There's the word. *Sent*. John uses this word "sent" some 55 times in his gospel (and "send" another 6 times), and we hear it come from Jesus' lips again and again. If we want to know the truth concerning how Jesus viewed His identity, we need to give serious attention to this word. If we want to know how Jesus viewed our identity as individuals and as a church, once again, we must give attention to this word.

He is the *sent one*. We are His *sent ones*.

What does the word *sent* indicate about who we are? It indicates, for starters, that we are under *authority*. If we are *sent ones*, then there must be a *sender*, someone who has the appropriate authority to give such a command. That person, of course, is Jesus the Christ. "All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth," He said in Matthew 28:19. "Now go and make disciples." He has the authority. He does the sending. We exist to go where He sends us, to do what He sends us to accomplish.

The word also implies *mission*. The One who does the sending has a mission in mind as He gives His instruction. God the Father did when He sent His Son into the world. And so does Jesus for sending His followers into the world. The Father sent His Son to provide salvation for a lost world. The Son sent His followers to make His salvation known to the lost world. The sending is all about a mission.

Our word also necessitates *movement*. If I send you into the other room to get a bulletin, it necessitates that you move from where you are currently to a different location. You cannot stay put if you're functioning as a sent one. You're going to be moving somewhere, and moving for a purpose as specified by the One sending.

So to help us make our state of the church assessment, I want us to think about two questions. First, we're going to look back and ask, "Where did Jesus send us as a church in 2012?" It follows that if He sent us and we've been obedient, there ought to be evidence of movement that's in line with our mission. And where we see such evidence, we have reason to give Him thanks, for He did the sending and the enabling. And if there happens to be evidence of movement that's inconsistent with our mission, then there's reason for some redirection in the new year.

The second question involves a forward look that asks, "Where is Jesus going to send us as a church in 2013?" Where does He want us to go? What current paths does He want us to maintain? What new paths does He want us to begin to walk in fulfilling our mission?

Looking Back: Where did Jesus send us as a church in 2012?

Again, Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you." Though He's talking in this verse to the first disciples, He didn't stop His sending work with them. Read the book of Acts and you'll see how He sent the first disciples from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and then how He sent them, as well as the next generation of disciples, all the way to Rome and beyond. The sending started in Acts, but it certainly didn't end there.

It's exciting when you stop to think about it. Brothers and sisters, we too are *sent ones* who belong to the *sent one*. The Father sent the Son to provide salvation. The Son is sending us to make His salvation known, locally and worldwide.

So where did Jesus send us as last year? How would you answer that? Where did our journey as a church take us in 2012? It might help us to create some benchmarks. What does it mean to be a *sent one*? What did it mean, first for Jesus, and then for us? Don't miss the connection. Jesus said, "As the Father sent me, I am sending you." There's a parallel. What being sent meant for Jesus reveals what it means for us.

Being sent involves the following benchmarks. One, being sent involves making sacrifices. It did for Jesus, and it will for us, if we're obedient. Two, being sent involves going through difficult experiences. It did for Jesus, and it will for us. Three, being sent involves making a message known to the world. That's what Jesus did, and that's what we're called to do. Four, being sent involves equipping others to be sent. That's what our Savior did, as He recruited and trained a team of sent ones. And that's what we're to do. So let's look back at our year in light of these four benchmarks.

1. Being sent involves making sacrifices.

As the Father sent me, said Jesus. His Father sent Him to make a sacrifice on Calvary's cross, and along the way He made all kinds of other sacrifices, giving up His privacy and comfort and possessions to minister to the hurting, to the glory of His Father.

So I am sending you, says our Master. Granted, His sacrifice alone makes atonement for condemned sinners. Our sacrifices don't do that, but our lesser sacrifices are a way to call attention to His.

Being sent involves making sacrifices, and that's what we see as we look back at 2012. We see sacrifices made in the giving of time and possessions so that so others would come to know Christ.

I saw a brother and a sister come almost every Wednesdays week after week to prepare a meal to feed hungry children and those who serve them in our Wednesday evening children and youth ministry. I saw another brother come on Thursday mornings to sweep the hallways. I saw other brothers and sisters come on Saturdays and throughout the week to clean the church facility. I saw another brother coming to this building to prepare financial reports before he went to his place of employment. I know that other brothers and sisters gave up personal time every week so they could prepare quality Bible studies and Sunday School lessons. A sister stocked our food pantry. A brother arrived a half an hour before every church service to unlock the doors and turn on the lights.

Those are just a few examples of dozens of sacrificial deeds of service that happen every week in this church. Sent ones make sacrifices so others can come to know the Sent One.

And of course, sent ones don't just sacrifice their time. They sacrifice their money too. I'm thankful to announce that, in spite of the economy and to the glory of God, our General Fund income not only exceeded budgeted needs, but was the highest it's ever been at \$206,588! That's because the Lord of the harvest not only sends, but He also provides for the things He wants His sent ones to accomplish along the way.¹

This General Fund income enabled us to do ministries locally, support a quality team of missionaries, care for staffing needs, pay utilities, and maintain the wonderful facilities the Lord has entrusted to us. And it's not just through General Fund income that the Lord has demonstrated His generosity. He provided another \$29,000 designated income in 2012 which included a Harvest Offering to support a new missionary in 2013

¹ Here's a look at the General Fund income in previous years...

2011	\$199,633		
2010	\$198,144		
2009	\$196,506		
2008	\$190,823		
2007	\$189,347		
2006	\$200,565	2005	\$182,015

(\$2,445), Missions special designated income (\$7,518), Sagar Island ministry (\$3,763), and a special Memorial gift (\$3,500).

So being sent involves making sacrifices. It did obviously for the Sent One, and it did for us as His sent ones in 2012.

2. Being sent involves going through difficult experiences.

Think of what it meant for Jesus to be The Sent One. He left the comforts of heaven when His Father sent Him to earth, and when He got here He was placed in a manger and later had no place to lay His head. Ultimately His Father sent Him to endure the most difficult experience imaginable, dying on the cross as a substitute for hell-deserving sinners, and then conquering death itself and providing salvation for every sinner that would repent and receive Him as Savior and Lord.

That's what being sent involved for The Sent One, going through difficult experiences to redeem a condemned world. And it's the same for us. In 2012 our Lord sent us into some difficult places and situations, not so we could provide redemption, for sure, but so we could make the Redeemer known, and know Him better ourselves.

Everyone living in this sin-cursed world goes through difficult experiences, including non-Christians. But since we are *sent ones*, we know the suffering isn't haphazard, but orchestrated by the One sending us to put His sufficiency on display through our weakness.

I know that's what He did in my life personally in 2012, and continues to do so through my ongoing battle with migraines. In the past year the Lord impressed deeply on my heart the truth that pain doesn't just happen. It's part of being a sent one. We enter into what Paul calls "the fellowship of His sufferings" in Philippians 3:10. In Colossians 1:24 Paul says, "I fill up in my own flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."

I can testify that the Lord opened up all kinds of things through the difficulties He's placed in my path, one of which is the lesson that ministry goes both ways. In 2012, something very beautiful happened. A loving church ministered to its minister. You graciously extended to Sherry and me a three month sabbatical break, for the purpose of rest and refreshment, as well as to seek more specialized medical attention. In a very real sense we entered together into the fellowship of suffering. You partnered with us through your love gifts, and many of you, especially our deacons and Pastor Matt and Bethany, assumed additional ministry responsibilities. You even resided the parsonage. And though I've expressed it before, I would say again, "Thank you for your Christ-honoring kindness."

Yet the truth is, many of you were sent into your own difficult experiences in 2012, and from that platform of suffering you too put the grace of Christ on display, as did the church family in the care it provided. I think of the tragic death of Edith McKittrick's grandson in the Spring, and of Jack Branon's heart attack in June, and Ruth Griffin's homegoing in the fall as just three examples of many I could name. As sent ones you resembled The Sent One in your responses to these difficult experiences, through preparing food for funeral meals, or making visits to encourage, or meeting needs in other practical ways.

There's something else that being sent involves. It did for Jesus and it does for us. Not only making sacrifices and going through difficult experiences, but thirdly...

3. Being sent involves making a message known to the world.

Just think of what The Sent One did when He came to planet earth. He spent three years proclaiming a message to the world. Listen what Jesus said to His Father in John 17:8, “For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.”

Don’t miss that. What did Jesus say He did in His ministry? He said He gave His disciples the words His Father had given to Him. That’s what The Sent One did. He didn’t create His message. Rather, He made known the message that was given to Him.

As sent ones, we too have a message to make known to the world, a message that God Himself gave to us. And that’s what happened in the past year. It happened in our Sunday School classes, and in our ministries with children, teens, and adults on Wednesday evenings², and in small group settings, and of course, one on one as we spread the message of Christ to our neighbors, co-workers, fellow students, and beyond. In terms of the corporate ministry of the Word, it happened in two specific weekly events I’d like to highlight; one, our Sunday morning worship service, and two, our Sunday evening service.

First, let me give you a little summary of the message we proclaimed from this pulpit on Sunday mornings (and later posted for the world to hear and read on our website) in 2012. We began the year on Sunday mornings with a sermon “Being People of the Book,” on January 8, and then, “Being People of Prayer,” on January 15. Then we resumed our series, “*Getting to Know Jesus Better: A Journey through the Gospel of John.*” We worked our way through John 9-10 during the winter months. In the spring we did a series called, “Putting Christ on Display in Our Homes,” an exposition of Colossians 3. During the summer months, Dave Dernlan preached nine Sunday mornings, with topical messages on the Lord’s Prayer and Worship. Other topical messages were delivered by Dave Beam, Scott Bruns, and Mark Holeman. In the Fall I preached a series called, “Post Sabbatical Reflections,” on things the Lord taught me during my time away, particularly about how He uses suffering in our lives for His good purposes. That led to another series called, “Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering,” in which I shared with you seven divine promises that have been life-savers to me, which I trust will enable you to honor Christ in your suffering. We finished the year with a mini-series, “The Songs of Christmas,” looking at the songs of Mary, Zechariah, the heavenly host, and Simeon, in Luke 1-2.

But it wasn’t just on Sunday mornings. We made the message known on Sunday evenings too, and utilized a variety of formats to do so. We call our Sunday evening service our “church family service,” because its purpose is to strengthen, not just you and me as individuals, but the congregational life of this body. We do this through some strategic teaching sessions, but also through a variety of other Word-centered presentations designed to strengthen our fellowship.

Let me give you a quick overview of what happened on Sunday evenings, and then give a fuller development of one of the particulars. Here’s the overview:

- Meeting in small groups called “growth groups” (14 times). There were seven weeks of elective Growth Groups in the winter months. In the fall we did a seven week church-wide Growth Group using Kyle Idleman’s *Not a Fan*.
- Watching and discussing video presentations, in addition to growth groups (9 times). In January and February, we spent three weeks watching and discussing a

² *On Wednesday evenings:* We began the year by finishing our inductive study of the book of 1 Corinthians. During the summer Pastor Matt led a series in the book of Philippians. In the Fall we conducted a study called, “Let the Wind Blow: A Look at the Person and Work of God the Holy Spirit.”

video presentation of the Gospel of John. In June we watched “Courageous.” In August we watched an Answers in Genesis series, facilitated by Jason Willis. In September we watched “One Blood, One Race,” with our brothers and sisters from Pleasant Green Baptist Church.

--Listening to sermons (8 times)

--Special presentations: for instance, on Sanctity of Human Life Sunday in January, the CRADLE pregnancy care center team presented their ministry to women in need in Scioto County; also including our Labor Day service, a Youth Night service in September, a surprise 25th anniversary service, and a Children’s Christmas program in December (7 times).

--Listening to missionary presentations (5 times)³

--Prayer services (3 times)

--Home Fellowships (3 times during the summer months)

--Meeting with Pleasant Green Baptist Church (2 times, in May and September)

Now let’s talk about one of the particulars with a little more detail. I’m doing so, in part, because I’ve talked with some people in the past who thought Sunday evening was just an optional repeat of the morning. The truth is, we view our services at WBC as a well-balanced diet. So if you come only to our Sunday morning worship service, you’re missing out on what we consider to be something very helpful to your spiritual growth and health. Specifically, on Sunday evenings, we’re trying to help you move the Word into real life.

Here’s an example. In the winter months we did a special series called “*Ministering Beyond the Walls of the Church.*” It started with two messages by Matt Wilson and Dave Beam, and was followed by weekly testimonies of how God is working through our members to present Christ in the community. Matt shared about the open doors he has while working with athletic teams, and Dave through his role as a business coach. Kristen Wawro shared how the Lord is working through her job as a public school teacher. Dianne Osborne shared about her ministry as a hospice nurse. Joey and Elaine Uhl shared about ministering through foster care. Jason Willis talked about open doors through his work as a chemist. Matt Clark talked about the opportunities God gives him in his work as a game warden, as well as through reaching out to unsaved neighbors. Joy Johnson talked about the ministry the Lord gave her through her bout with cancer. In all, we were reminded that ministry isn’t restricted to what happens inside these walls on Sundays and Wednesdays, but can happen wherever we are, as we seek to make Christ known through our work, our interaction with neighbors, our recreation, and even our suffering.

Brothers and sisters, we are *sent ones*. And being a sent one involves more than just listening to a sermon and singing a few songs on Sunday morning. It involves making sacrifices, and going through divinely orchestrated difficult experiences, and making a message known to the world.

So if we’re really functioning as *sent ones*, you would expect to see evidence of movement from this body. And that’s what we see when we look back at 2012.

³ Missionary speakers throughout the year included: Bob Litteral (missionary to PNG) in January and December, Arnaldo and Michelle Silva (Paraguay) in April, Dave Dernlan in the summer months, Brian Hansen with Gatekeepers in August (during Sunday School), Jim and Rachel Chambers (Zambia) for our missionary conference in October, Blair and Sue Alvidrez serving in Albania (presented their ministry during Sunday School), Paul and Kathy Holtz in December (presented during Sunday School), and Chuck Spears from Cooperstown Bible Camp in December.

Movement. We see Christ sending His people out into the world with the message of His saving love.

Every Wednesday night He sent out some of our brothers, like Matt and Joey and Adam and others, to pick up children on our van so they could come and hear the gospel and see it in action.

He once again sent our missionaries, Gary and Nancy Storm, to do gospel work in Slovakia and Ukraine.

He sent our Pregnancy Care Center team (including Donna, Denise, Patty, Elaine, Kayla, Bea, and Karen) to minister to hurting women in our county. In the past twelve months, the CRADLE team ministered to clients during 274 visits, with 82 gospel presentations, and 101 Bible studies.

In the summer He sent into action a team of workers to provide VBS for children, and raised up Adam and Haleigh to lead this team.

And these are just examples of making Christ known through our *structured* ministries. If we took the time right now, we could hear many testimonies of how the Lord sent the members of this church into the lives of lost people with the message of the gospel, all over this community.

But there's a fourth benchmark that's essential for sent ones.

4. Being sent involves equipping others to be sent.

Frankly, if we don't equip others, the sending will end with us. Once we stop going, the mission stops. That must not happen, and it won't happen as long as we take Jesus' words to heart. He said, "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." What did Jesus do on earth? He didn't just preach and show compassion. He equipped His followers to do the same. He made disciples and taught them how to make disciples.

And He is sending us to do the same. As sent ones, it's our calling to preach and show compassion. But it's also our calling to recruit and train others in His church to do as we do, realizing we won't be here forever.

Did that happen at WBC last year? Indeed. If you want to see a vibrant example of equipping others in the Body of Christ, look at what happens at Scioto Hills Camp on a daily basis. Back in 1965 the Lord used our church and several others in Ohio to raise up the ministry called Scioto Hills Camp. Currently, the Lord is working through 13 permanent staff members and their families who are a part of our church family as they assist the churches in the Tri-State region in fulfilling their mission to make disciples. In 2012 Scioto Hills ministered to nearly 4,500 guests, including 775 campers this past summer, from 120 churches. That's what I call an *equipping* ministry, to the glory of God!

Another example of a ministry that equips the church at large in the Tri-State is our Counseling and Discipleship Training. In 2012, our Biblical Counseling team was privileged to train another 35 individuals from a dozen area churches in our Winter CDT on Monday evenings. In addition, in our three weekend course, the team traveled to Charleston, W. Va. for the third year to train another 40 individuals from more than a dozen churches, including staff members from the Union Mission and The Refuge ministry.

A key word at WBC continues to be *training*, and one of the ways we have trained our members is through the use of internships. This past summer Oliver Thompson participated in a pastoral internship under the leadership of Pastor Matt.

Those are just some examples of the equipping work that happened last year, as the Lord sent us not only to *do* ministries, but also to *equip* others to do the same.

Now let's change our focus. The One who sent us in 2012 isn't finished with His work. *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.* He continues to send His sent ones. So where is He going to send us in 2013?

Looking Ahead: Where is Jesus going to send us as a church in 2013?

I'm not a prophet, but I know where He is sending us. He is going to open up opportunities for us to make sacrifices, to go through difficult experiences, to make a message known to the world, and to equip others. How do I know that? Because that's what He did, as The Sent One, and that's what it means for us to be His *sent ones*. To follow in His steps, to do as He did.

Being sent involves making sacrifices, going through difficult experiences, making a message known to the world, and equipping others to be sent. That was true in 2012, and it will be true in 2013 and until The Sent One returns.

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

In last year's SOC address, I used a couple of words as a challenge for our approach to the new year. One was *radical*. Another was *training*.

By radical I meant being committed to the fundamentals of true, biblical Christianity, and specifically to what David Platt calls *The Radical Plan*.

1. *Pray for the entire world.*
2. *Read through the entire Word.*
3. *Sacrifice your money for a specific purpose.*
4. *Spend your time in another context.*
5. *Commit your life to a multiplying community.*

I want to extend the same challenge as we begin 2013. There's no need to be novel. The call to live as *sent ones* isn't complicated. It's a call to live a *radical* life, a life that puts into practice these fundamentals.

I challenge you this year to pray for the lost world (using Operation World as a guide; see www.operationworld.org), to read through your Bible (pick up a reading guide on the table as you leave; start with the NT if you've never done that), to sacrifice your money for a specific purpose (don't just be a taker of God's good gifts; be a generous giver, like our Savior), to spend time in another ministry context (leave your comfort zone and pour your life into a ministry that's making Christ known to others), and to commit your life to a multiplying community (that is, don't just go to church this year; commit your life to your church family and advancing its mission). *Be a radical Christian in 2013!*

We're going to do some things this year to help you. Of course, there will be ongoing opportunities for worship, edification, and service in our Sunday morning and evening, and Wednesday evening services. But there's a problem, and we want to address that problem.

The problem is that we're living in a fragmented and harsh world. God's solution is the forming of a new people, a connected people, called the church. The church isn't a social club. It doesn't exist for us. It exists for The Sent One who is now sending us as a connected team to work together to reach others who are still isolated in this world.

To facilitate this meaningful connection, we're going to be restructuring our deacon care groups. We're also going to use our Sunday evening services even more strategically to facilitate meaningful fellowship and accountability and partnering for ministry. The goal is to see every member of this church, not only worshipping Christ on Sunday morning, but connected to a smaller care group that will meet on Sunday evenings and care for each other throughout the week. Be watching for details.

The other word I mentioned last year was *training*. A year ago I challenged everyone who was currently doing a ministry in the church to prayerfully identify someone (or more than one) to train to do what you are presently doing. I said, “Don’t just *do* ministry. Equip others to do your ministry.”

I want to renew that challenge again for 2013. If you are teaching a class, give someone else the opportunity to teach a lesson or two, by helping them develop the lesson and then giving feedback afterwards. If you’re visiting shut-ins, take someone with you and show them how to care for the homebound. The same goes if you are working in the nursery, or in the greeting ministry, or doing outreach, ask the Lord to give you someone you can help train for His purposes.

Brothers and sisters, if we don’t train, this church will die with us. But if we remember who we are—we are *sent ones* who belong to *The Sent One*—and if we live in light of who we are, then we’ll both do ministry and train others to do ministry, and the church will bring honor to our Master long after we’re gone.

It’s all a part of our mission, the One our Savior gave us when He said, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”