

Pastor's Annual Report for the year 2018

(adapted from the "State of the Church Address" delivered Sunday morning, January 20, 2019, Pastor Brad Brandt)

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Matthew 28:19

One of the first influences into my understanding of the church entered my life when I was just a little boy. It came in the form of a nursery rhyme of sorts. It even had hand gestures and went like this.

Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people.

Then came the second part.

Here is the church. Here is the steeple. Open the doors and where's all the people?

It was a fun—I and my buddies used to do it together. It was memorable—five decades later it's still there. And it was not very good theology.

Here is the church, here is the steeple. What's the church? A building with a steeple? That's not even close to what Jesus said, is it? Or what the New Testament teaches. The church is people, and not just any people who happen to come into a building with a steeple on top. The Greek word is *ecclesia* and means assembly, specifically an assembly of people who have come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and made that public through baptism.

See all the people? The people are not inside the church. They *are* the church. If the building burns to the ground, you still have a church. But if you don't have a people who believe in Jesus, what you have is a religious museum and not a church.

But the little rhyme does make an important point. When it comes to church, people are vital. When Jesus' people gather, it's a good thing. When Jesus' people are missing from the assembly, it's not so good. Or is it?

Again, the rhyme doesn't help us. When there are less people in a church building, that may not be a problem at all. It may very well mean that the church is doing precisely what the Lord intends for His church to do.

A few months ago I read a book by Pastor J. D. Greear called *Gaining By Losing*. He talks about three very common views of church: cruise liner, battleship, and aircraft carrier.

Some Christians see church as a **cruise liner**, offering Christian luxuries for the whole family, such as sports, entertainment, childcare services, and business networking. They show up at church asking only, "Can this church improve my religious quality of life? Does it have good family ministry facilities? Does the pastor preach funny, time-conscious messages that meet my felt needs? Do I like the music?"

Other Christians believe their church is more like a **battleship**. The church is made for mission, and its success should be seen in how loudly and dramatically it fights the mission. This is certainly better than the "cruise liner"; however, it implies that it is the church institution that does most of the fighting. The role of the church members is to pay the pastors to find the targets and fire the guns each week as they gather to watch. They see the programs, services, and ministries of the church as the primary instruments of mission.

I would like to suggest a third metaphor for the church: **aircraft carrier**. Like battleships, aircraft carriers engage in battle, but not in the same way. Aircraft carriers equip planes to carry the battle elsewhere. . . . Churches that want to "prevail against the gates of hell" must learn to see themselves like aircraft carriers, not like battleships and

certainly not like cruise liners. Members need to learn to share the gospel, without the help of the pastor, in the community, and start ministries and Bible studies—even churches—in places without them. Churches must become discipleship factories, “sending” agencies that equip their members to take the battle to the enemy.¹

Greear gives us a very helpful word picture. *Aircraft carrier*. An aircraft carrier doesn’t do what a battleship does. It sends planes to go elsewhere in fulfillment of the mission.

Another helpful word picture is *discipleship factory*. He says, “Churches must become discipleship factories.” That of course is consistent with the mission Jesus gave His followers. *Go and make disciples of all nations*.

I want to come back to Jesus’ instruction in a moment. But first, consider the full title of Greear’s book in which he identifies his proposed solution. *Gaining By Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*. Churches gain by losing, by *sending*.

That’s odd. Gain by losing? How can that be? Listen again to Greear.

Study after study shows that most Christians have never even shared their faith—most indicating that somewhere 90 percent of *evangelicals* have never shared their faith with *anyone* outside of their family. (Kind of makes you wonder how we get away with using the name “evangelical”!)

Most churches have a difficult time maintaining their ground, much less storming anything that belongs to Satan. Gates, after all, are defensive ramparts, not offensive weapons. “Prevailing against the gates of hell” does not mean keeping Satan out of our backyards, but plundering *his* kingdom. According to a recent Lifeway Research study, in the next seven years 55,000 churches in the United States will close their doors, and the number of those who attend a church on the weekend in the United States will drop from 17 percent to 14 percent. Only 20 percent of churches in the US are growing, and *only 1 percent is growing by reaching lost people*. So 95 percent of the church growth we celebrate merely shuffles existing Christians around.

Don’t you think these two problems—believers who don’t know how effectively to disciple others, and a gradually shrinking church in the West—have to be related in some way? Yet very few pastors and church leaders see raising up disciple-making leaders as their primary objective. We measure success by size. In so doing, however, we neglect the one thing that can propel the church forward into the next generation ... and to the ends of the earth: Spirit-filled, disciple-making disciples.

I believe we need a fundamental shift in *how we think* about the mission of the church...

Churches that want to “prevail against the gates of hell” must learn to see themselves like aircraft carriers, not like battleships and certainly not like cruise liners. Members need to learn to share the gospel, without the help of the pastor, *in the community*, and start ministries and Bible studies—even churches—in places without them. Churches must become discipleship factories, “sending” agencies that equip their members to take the battle to the enemy.

But to do this, we’re going to need a new metric for success beyond size. We need to start celebrating not just how many people are *coming in*, but how many people are *going out*. ***It’s time that we get excited about how many people we are losing.***²

¹ J. D. Greear, *Gaining By Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*, pp. 27-28. See also <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/church-not-restaurant/>.

² <https://jdgreear.com/blog/the-church-isnt-a-cruise-ship-its-an-aircraft-carrier/>

Let's test that assertion now by turning our attention to the familiar words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Make disciples. Jesus gives a very simple command, but what does it mean? The men who first heard those words knew exactly what it meant. They knew that this is what Jesus did. He made disciples. For three years He had made disciples.

When we look back at Matthew's account, that's what we see. Jesus begins by saying to Simon and Andrew in Matthew 4:19, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." He says something similar to Matthew in Matthew 8:9, "Follow me." Eventually He selects twelve men and invests three years into them, *discipling* them.

How? He lets them see what He's like up close and personal. He eats with them. He travels with them. He teaches them. He trains them. He tells them He's going to die and conquer death, and why, that He has come to give His life as a ransom payment for many (Matthew 20:28).

And that's what He did. Now, following His crucifixion and resurrection, He says to these men that He has disciplined, "Go, make disciples." And they knew what He meant. Go, do with others what I have done with you. That's the mission I'm giving you. You make disciples for Me.

And that's precisely what Matthew, Peter, Andrew, and the rest of Jesus' disciples did. They began making disciples of Jesus, organizing local assemblies of Jesus-followers called churches, and taught those new disciples of Jesus to do the same, who did the same, down through the centuries.

Now here we are in 2019. The same Savior. The same mission. What He did, what others have done, we are to do.

That word *we* is important. It's not I, but we. Jesus is not saying in Matthew 28:19 that what He did, I am to do by myself. He's talking to the eleven. No one follower of Jesus can adequately make a disciple of Jesus. If I try to do it by myself, I end up reproducing a deficient representation of Jesus. It takes the whole body of Christ to make a disciple of Christ, which is why we're off target if we try to substitute a para-church ministry in place of the church.

Disciple-making is the church's mission, the whole church, with all the variety and gifts and perspectives of its various members. Old and young. Rich and poor. Those with speaking gifts and those with serving gifts. Those who have followed Jesus for five decades right alongside those who've been following Him just five days. Jesus's plan is to make disciples through His body, the church, to the ends of the earth.

I hope you appreciate the unique significance of the church. I hope you cherish the local church where the Lord has placed you, for it's through the church that Jesus is fulfilling His mission in the world today.

That's what the State of the Church address is all about. Every year we take a Sunday to stop and reflect on what the Lord is doing at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. How was the mission of making disciples advanced in the past year, and what are we anticipating in the coming year?

Looking Back at the Disciple-Making Efforts of 2018

While every year is important, the year 2018 was quite significant for us since in April we celebrated one hundred forty years of God's faithfulness. It was on Sunday, April 14, 1878, that a group of people met in this community "for divine services," as the minutes state, and

Wheelersburg Baptist Church was born. Pastor I. N. Clark preached from Luke 14:17, and on motion the trustees were instructed “to take the necessary steps to build a church Edifice.” Ten weeks later (on June 29), the church had a business meeting, chaired by John C. Malone, appointed a building committee, and authorized that committee to “complete any arrangements now under consideration towards the building of a church house in Wheelersburg.”

I’ve read the handwritten records myself several times. It’s a story of the Faithful One who said, “I will build my church.” And He did. And He still is.

If we gain by losing, by sending, by giving, then we ought to be able to look back and see evidences of these intentional efforts in the past twelve months. And by God’s grace, that’s what we see. Let’s talk about five examples.

1. We gave money to the Lord, and then gave it away making disciples.

Here are a couple of significant numbers. \$231,897 and \$230,575. The first is general fund income for 2018, the second general fund expenses. Once again, the Lord provided for all our needs through the generosity of His people.³ On top of general fund income was \$32,833 in designated gifts.

So what happened to this money that the Lord entrusted to us in 2018? The short answer is, we lost it. Well, actually, we gave it away as follows:

-\$92,000 in personnel costs (for staff salaries, professional ministry funds, internship, medicare); this money goes to equip disciple-makers. That’s what pastors and the pastoral team is called to do, not merely do ministry but equip the saints to do the disciple-making mission our Lord has given us.

-\$50,000 went into the facilities that we use to make disciples (church building, community center, utilities, office supplies and equipment)

-\$12,000 into disciple-making ministries at home (such as children, youth, VBS, nursery, Kids Club, fellowship, care, and hospitality, technology)

-\$56,300 for making disciples other places, i.e. “missions” (including supporting local disciple-making ministries like CRADLE, regional ministries like Scioto Hills and Union Mission, national ministries like Cedarville University and ACBC, and international disciple-making ministries through our team of 25 missionaries who serve around the world). We’re not a big church, for sure, but think of it this way. In ten years that’s about a half a million dollars going to missions. In twenty years, that’s a million dollars going to missions.

On top of the general fund, we were able to give some special designated gifts, such as our harvest offering gift to Tri-State Bible College for \$3,493; a missionary love gift to Jade Burley for \$1,437 to help with startup costs, \$1,500 to Shepherds, \$900 to the needy camper fund at Scioto Hills, \$435 to the Gideon’s ministry for Bibles, a special gift to CRADLE for \$560, the

³ For comparison purposes, here are some giving and attendance averages from previous years:

2018 - 231,897 (weekly \$4459) – (attendance AM 102, PM 47, Wed PM 38)
2017 - \$234,425 (weekly \$4434) – (attendance AM 109, PM 58, Wed PM 44)
2016 - \$247,509 (weekly \$4828) – (120, 55, 47)
2015 - \$239,625 (weekly 4609) – (127, 60, 59)
2014 - \$228,253 (weekly 4367) – (124, 64, 78)
2013 - 226,507 (weekly 4355) –
2012 - 206,588 (weekly 3973) – (136, 73, 86)
2011 - 199,633 (weekly 3839) – (129, 69, 89)
2010 - 197,900 (weekly 3717) – (121, 61, 70)
2007 – 189,347 (weekly ?) – (129, 61, 74)

kids gave \$594 for this year's VBS offering which went to the Baptist Children's Home, plus several other gifts for ministries at home and around the world.

The Bible says it's more blessed to give than to receive. We experienced the joy of this in a special challenge I gave our five community groups and youth group. I gave each group a \$50 bill with the assignment to show someone in our community that WBC cares because of Christ. Groups added to the amount and blessed the community in some wonderful ways.

2. *We gave away the Word.*

A big part of making disciples is teaching. "Teaching them to obey all things I have commanded you," said Jesus. We love to teach the Bible at WBC. We have a wonderful team of Sunday School teachers who invest hundreds of hours every year preparing quality lessons.

Have you thought about that recently? Take Jack Branon, for instance. Every week he invests a couple of hours or more praying for his class and preparing a Sunday School lesson. So do several others, but I mention Jack because he's been teaching Sunday School for 50+ years. That's a gift of over one hundred hours a year to the Lord and to this church.

We give the Word away in our Wednesday evening Kids club, in VBS, and in our Youth ministry. We taught Jesus-followers from a dozen churches in our winter counseling and discipleship training on Monday evenings, and another ten churches or so in our fall CDT which took place in Winfield, WV.

Every Sunday we give the Word away from this pulpit. On **Sunday mornings** we began the year with a series in the book of Acts that went through the summer. In the fall we began a series "Amazing Grace," pondering several grace-texts in the Bible one per week, such as Ephesians 2:8-10, Titus 2:11-14, and 2 Timothy 1:8-10. On **Sunday evenings**, we did a variety of things, including a series in the book of Titus. On **Wednesday evenings** we did an Old Testament survey, as well as a series on Prayers of Old Testament Saints.

Giving away the Word is indeed a team effort at WBC. I'm grateful for Dave Beam, Scott Bruns, Matt Wilson, and Gary Storm who participated in the pulpit ministry of God's Word last year. I'm also very encouraged by our Preachers in Training ministry that continued for year two on Sunday evenings, with a dozen of our brothers taking us through the book of James in the summer and fall. It's a privilege to see the Lord raising up new expositors of His Word, so we can keep giving it away.

3. *We gave away the gospel by partnering with others who can go where we can't.*

We love missions at WBC and enjoy a privilege unknown to many churches. By God's grace, we are a sending church. That means the Lord has enabled us to send from our own number individuals who are now making Christ known to the nations. We sent Bob Litteral to PNG back in the 60s. In the 2000s we sent Gary and Nancy Storm to do Assisting Christian Camping Globally, and Erin Wawro to be part of church planting efforts in south Brazil. Just this past month, we had a special commissioning service for Jade Burley who tomorrow will fly to the Dominican Republic to begin making disciples with Freedom International.

We also support many other missionaries and ministries and throughout the year we heard from a variety of them. This included Bill Britain (the director of the Baptist Children's Home), and Mandy Arthur (the director of CRADLE). We enjoyed the Scioto Hills summer staff presentation in July. We had a missions Sunday in August, with Blair and Sue Alvidrez (missionaries to Albania), and Todd and Christie Kincaid (working with refugees in Rome, Italy).

In October you sent me to teach church leaders in Braila, Romania with our missionary Dave Dernlan, alongside Romanian pastors Nicu Sotir, Adrian Barzu, and Betuel Vararu.

4. *We gave away our people.*

We are an average size church. According to a study from the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, most American churches now have fewer than 100 in weekend worship attendance, and half of all American churches have a weekend attendance of 80 or less.⁴ Our current membership is 149. Our weekly Sunday morning average attendance for the year was 102 (47 on Sunday evening, and 38 on Wednesday evening). In 2017 the number was 109 (PM 58, Wed PM 44). So our average is down seven people.

Where are they? We currently have nine of our members who live in the area but have stopped attending in the past year. We are in the process of seeking to reach and restore them or, if it's God's purpose, get them plugged into a sister church.

But the reality is, while some just aren't coming consistently, we gave most of them away. In 2018 we sent a church transfer letter for the O'Rourke family who are now making disciples with another church family in Tennessee. Jason, Andrea, and Drew Willis relocated and are serving in a church in Texas. Joey and Elaine Uhl and their four children moved and have plugged into a church in the Dayton area.

That's thirteen people. Then consider that the Lord took home to heaven Nancy Spradlin, Betty Rase, Don Boggs, and Dale Spradlin.

This is our story at WBC. Due to the lack of jobs and so forth, we see people move away. But before they go, it's our privilege to build into their lives and then strengthen the Body elsewhere.

A good example happened when Shane Henry returned to speak for our Labor Day weekend outdoor service. Shane grew up at WBC and later did a pastoral internship with us. Now he's serving as pastor of Sharpsburg Baptist Church in Kentucky.

Does it hurt to give away our people? Yes, but what a privilege to be part of something so much bigger than what's happening here. We're part of disciple-making happening in Wisconsin, through Pastor Darrel and Shellie Schrock. We're connected to Cedarville University, with Aaron Cook serving as Director of Discipleship. We're helping make disciples at Camp Barakel in Michigan through the Pierponts, caring for hurting people through the Spears as they served at World Vision, and more. Many, many others were once right here, growing and serving with us, and now are making Christ known elsewhere.

5. *We gave away time, food, resources, and love.*

It happened on Wednesday evenings when a team of people prepared and served the Kids Club meal. It happened in funeral meals. It happened when the church family went Christmas caroling to local care facilities. It happened when our community center team let folks use our facility for events, and when they served meals, and so forth. It happened when Douglas and others opened the gym on a weekly basis for soccer clinics, which opened another door for sharing the gospel with many young people.

One of the most significant ways this happened was through our community groups' initiative. On Sunday evenings about two-thirds of our church family began meeting in homes on a consistent basis, to discuss and apply the morning message, to get to know and encourage one another, to break bread, and to mobilize ourselves to reach this community. In the fall there

⁴ <https://factsand Trends.net/2016/02/24/majority-of-american-churches-fall-below-100-in-worship-attendance/>

were five groups meeting three times a month in homes. That's a lot of time, food, resources, and love being given away and invested for eternity.

That's what happened this past year. In these ways and many others, we gained by giving. We made disciples by losing, by investing, by sending. That's the state of the church as we close the books on 2018.

Looking ahead to the opportunities for making disciples in 2019

What's coming in 2019? Only the Lord knows the specifics, but of this we can be sure. We're going to see more opportunities to gain by giving.

I want you to be part of answering this question. That's why later today we're going to meet in our community groups and discuss the implications of what you have just heard.

We're going to return to J. D. Greear's observation that there are three very common views of church: cruise liner, battleship, and aircraft carrier. Greear says that *aircraft carrier* is the biblical view. Do you agree? If he is correct, what are some implications for how we function as a church?

Here's something else I want us to discuss. This church exists for the glory of God. That's a given. So from your perspective, what happened at WBC in 2018 that brought our Lord glory? After a time of sharing, we're going to take time to give thanks. Then we're going to ask how can we bring Him even greater glory in 2019? After more sharing, we're going to take time to pray about these opportunities.

I want to finish this message by raising a question that we each ought to be asking ourselves. It's a very personal question.

What do I have that the Lord wants me to give away this year in the task of making disciples in this community and around the world?

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” –Ephesians 3:20-21