

Pastor's Annual Report for the year 2013

(adapted from the "State of the Church Address" delivered Sunday morning January 12, 2014, Pastor Brad Brandt)

"In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed.

In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling."

Exodus 15:13

If you've been around WBC very long you know that something happens around here at the start of every year. We take time to take inventory of what the Lord has done in our midst in the past twelve months, and to anticipate what He has in store for us in the next twelve months, should He grant us another year.

I don't believe the Lord is pleased when He works, and we simply take it for granted, for Psalm 103:2 exhorts, "Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." We must not forget His benefits. When He works and blesses, He deserves our praise and thanks.

So the question is, has the Lord worked in our midst in the past year? Indeed, He has! And since He has, it's fitting that we call attention to it, and give Him honor for it.

When I think of how our Great God has been working at WBC, and how we should respond, I find helpful counsel in a verse taken from a song that the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write over 3,400 years ago.

We find this verse in Exodus 15. If you'll look at the context, you'll notice that in Exodus 12, the Lord God rescued two million Hebrew slaves from bondage in Egypt. Then in chapter 13 He led them right into a road block called the Red Sea, and in chapter 14 Pharaoh and the Egyptians came after them and trapped them.

As you may recall, the Israelites responded by crying out to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt (14:11)?" And Moses responded by saying, "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still (14:14)." And the Lord responded by saying, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on (14:15)."

And *move on* they did. The Lord parted the water and allowed His people to walk right through the Red Sea. What happened to the Egyptians? He caused the water to move back into place and covered the army of Pharaoh so that none survived.

So how did God's people respond to that amazing work of God? With a song. That's what we see when we turn to the next chapter, Exodus 15, which begins in verse 1, "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD."

Again, forbid that God should work and His people take it for granted.

We're not going to take time to study the whole song, but to help us appreciate the verse that will receive our attention, I want us to see the flow of the whole song. In Exodus 15:1-21, Moses gives us three reasons why we ought to sing to the Lord.

- I. We ought to sing because of who God is (1-5).
 - A. He is in a class all by Himself (1a).
 - B. He is strong (1b).
 - C. He is personal (2).
 - D. He is a warrior (3-5).
- II. We ought to sing because of what God did (6-12).
 - A. He redeemed His people (6-10).
 - B. He revealed His greatness (11-12).

III. We ought to sing because of what God will do (13-18).

A. He will take care of His people (13-17).

B. He will reign forever (18).

So there's the song. Now here's the verse, Exodus 15:13. "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling."

Our verse is located in that third section of Moses' song, singing because of what God will do. Moses addresses the Lord and calls attention to what He will do, namely, two things.

First, He will *lead* the people He has redeemed. He does not redeem people and then let them go on their own. Rather, He redeems and personally *leads* them.

Second, He will *guide* His redeemed people. Again, He's not a disinterested deity. He is involved, and as the New Testament will show, involved to the point of being incarnational. He has a place He has designed for His people and He personally takes them there.

Where is that place? Moses says, "You will guide them *to your holy dwelling*." Where is that? Where is God's holy dwelling? Moses here seems to have in mind the promised land of Canaan, and specifically, to His sanctuary there. In verse 17 he says, "You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance—the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established."

When the Lord redeems people, His intent is to take them home to dwell with Him. And He always accomplishes what He intends. In the case of redeemed Israel, He led them to His sanctuary in the promised land. But we too are a redeemed people. And where is He taking us? To His holy dwelling. To heaven, when we die. But ultimately to a new heaven and new earth.

Can the redeemed be sure they're make it to the destination? Absolutely. How can they be sure? The answer...because of who He is. Moses calls attention to several of His attributes that make it crystal clear that He will lead and guide His people all the way to His holy dwelling.

One, His *hesed*, His unfailing love. The redeemed can never thwart the purposes of the Redeemer because His love isn't like ours so often is. He loves with an *unfailing* love.

But it's not just His unfailing love that assures us. Two, it's His *strength*. "In your *strength* you will guide them." Moms and dads, you love your kids, but that doesn't mean you can take care of all the challenges they may face. But He can. He is omnipotent. There is no obstacle too big for Him on this journey His redeemed are taking. "In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling."

The New Testament picks up on this redemption theme to depict another rescue effort God performed, the ultimate one. The Lord rescued Israel from a physical bondage in Egypt under a cruel dictator named Pharaoh. But we too have been redeemed, from a spiritual bondage to sin under a cruel dictator named Satan.

And that, of course, is why God redeemed Israel in the first place. He redeemed this nation so that He might send the Redeemer into the world, His own Son, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus came to redeem a people. How did He do it? By living a perfect life, and then by offering that perfect life as a substitutionary, atoning sacrifice on a Roman cross, where He died in the place of every sinner who would repent and trust in Him. On the third day after making this payment, He conquered death, then returned to heaven where He's now preparing a home for His people.

If you want to see Exodus 15:13 in the New Testament, look at Philippians 1:6, “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Now, I want us to think about this song as we consider the state of the church this morning. This is our song. This is our story. *“In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.”*

When Moses wrote this song, the Lord had just redeemed Israel. They’d just been delivered from Egypt, and they were on their way to the promised land.

We too are a redeemed people. We too are on our way somewhere. And we too, like Israel, have reasons to sing and celebrate as we head to our promised home.

So the questions are twofold. One, where did our Redeemer lead us in 2013? And two, where does our Redeemer want to lead us in 2014?

Where did our Redeemer lead us in 2013?

Because of His unfailing love and His strength, He did lead and guide us on this journey to His holy dwelling. Let’s identify and praise Him for four evidences of it.

1. Our Redeemer led us to some provisions.

In Israel’s case, the Redeemer provided manna, quail, and water from a rock. Our Redeemer gave us, in fact, in some cases, *dropped into our laps*, some wonderful provisions this past year.

-He gave us 20 new members. We came into contact with some of these through our church’s counseling ministry, and some through the invitation of a friend, but the majority He just *sent* our way. From our perspective, they just showed up for one of our worship services, but of course, the truth is, He sent them. And those He sent bring with them gifts and experiences tailor made for ministry ventures He’s put right in front of us, specifically, our Community Center. More about that in a moment.

-He gave us General Fund income that was \$20,000 over our budget and \$15,000 over our expenses for the year. In light of the economy, that’s an amazing testimony to our God’s generosity and faithfulness, and also to the faithfulness and generosity of so many in this congregation. Thank you!

-He gave us the means to pay off our YEF loan for some maintenance work we had done a few years ago. That means we are now debt free. Praise be to God!

-He gave us the privilege to obtain 280 padded chairs for \$10 per chair, just a fraction of what they’re worth, which we anticipate using in our auditorium in the near future.

-As we prepared the 2014 GF budget, He gave us the privilege to increase our missions support by around \$3,000 so we could raise the support of several of our missionaries who were under-supported.

-The Lord provided us with the new WBC Community Center. Back in the late Spring, our Township trustees approached us and asked if we would be interested in buying the community building across the street. By using that request, our Redeemer took us on a journey this past year, and caused us to see a tremendous opportunity to make the gospel attractive to our community. In the end, He didn’t just give us a building, but gave us wisdom and understanding and unity as a congregation in launching a new ministry emphasis.

He did give us the building, and debt-free too. Because of the generosity of the Education Fund donor and the reallocation of those funds, and the church’s decision to sell the parsonage, those funds enabled us to buy the \$120,000 facility without

borrowing. And because the previous parsonage utility money is now available for the community center, we didn't have to cut our other important ministries to support this new initiative. What's more, because of our Harvest Offering and surplus from the parsonage sale, we have about \$10,000 in hand for remodeling and start-up expenses.

But what encouraged me most was not how God provided the building. It's the vision our Redeemer granted us as a congregation for how to potentially use that building, and the church family's strong support of that vision. According to its mission statement, the WBC Community Center is a facility/ministry that exists to show in tangible ways that we care about our community, with a view towards communicating the gospel.

-In addition to the building and a vision for its use, the Lord gave us the means to create a new part-time staff position, the WBC Community Center director, and provided a gifted and qualified person for that position, Denise Hurley. Denise will be working directly under Pastor Matt's leadership, whose ministry description was revamped so he can shepherd our various ministry team leaders and help them coordinate their efforts. So much more could be said about the Community Center venture, which is why we're devoting this evening's service to the subject. I want to invite you to come back this evening to hear as Denise, Pastor Matt, and I share about next steps in the WBC CC.

These are just a sampling of the blessings the Lord sent our way in 2013, and for which we give Him thanks this morning. The Lord gives. But our good and wise God doesn't just give. Job said it well, "The Lord gave, *and* the Lord has taken away (Job 1:21)." This too was our experience in 2013.

2. Our Redeemer led us through some losses.

The losses came in various ways. For starters, He took some of our loved ones home to heaven. We said goodbye to Marcella Smith, Lacy Litteral, and Bruce Jelinek.

We also said good-bye in a temporal sense to those the Lord moved from us to other places of service. He took Derek, Alaina, and Colbie Harmon to North Carolina. He took Matt and Laura Clark and their boys to Indiana. He took the Willis family to Texas as a step towards preparing for a potential vocational ministry. He took Dale and Bea Spradlin to Columbus (although we're grateful to have them still with us part time). He gave Michael Dow a bride and took them to northeast Ohio. He took Matt and Abi Fawcett to Indiana.

So altogether, while we saw about 20 new people added to our membership, we watched the Lord take away from us about the same number. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

It's a good reminder of the special ministry the Lord has given this church. He doesn't typically send us people to keep, but to train and send out. We now have dozens and dozens of former members of WBC serving our Savior in churches across some seventeen states.

And, of course, there were other kinds of losses. We saw the loss of good health for some (I think of Kay Collins and her ongoing battle with cancer), and the loss of parents and siblings for others, and the loss of jobs, and so on.

Speaking personally, this was a year of physical challenges in my home, with Sherry's heart attack in March and thyroid cancer and surgery in November. In November I broke my fibula while playing in the WBC annual (and perhaps now no longer annual for me) Turkey Bowl. And then, of course, the migraines continue, and all of this has provided opportunity for us to experience the Lord's sufficiency and the love of this congregation.

When I think of these various losses, it brings to mind the hymn that George Young penned back in 1903.

*In shady, green pastures, so rich and so sweet,
God leads His dear children along;
Where the water's cool flow bathes the weary one's feet,
God leads His dear children along.*

*Sometimes on the mount where the sun shines so bright,
God leads His dear children along;
Sometimes in the valley, in darkest of night,
God leads His dear children along.*

*Though sorrows befall us and evils oppose,
God leads His dear children along;
Through grace we can conquer, defeat all our foes,
God leads His dear children along.*

*Away from the mire, and away from the clay,
God leads His dear children along;
Away up in glory, eternity's day,
God leads His dear children along.*

*Some through the waters, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,
In the night season and all the day long.*

That brings me to a third area into which I saw our Redeemer lead us in 2013. It's actually related to the first two. As He led us into the experience of provisions and loss...

3. *Our Redeemer led us into a deeper expression of community as a church family.*

According to God's Word, church isn't where we *go*. It's who we *are*. Because we're connected to Christ, we're therefore connected to each other. That makes church a 24/7 reality. We are a body, a family, a connected, counter-culture community.

Think of those words. *Connected*—we're bound to each other. *Counter-culture*—we don't belong to this world and culture, but to the Lord and each other, therefore, a *counter-culture*. And a *Community*—we do life, not as individual followers of Jesus, but as a congregation, a community of followers.

I want to hasten to say that this isn't something new at WBC. We've talked about the church as community for years, and I've heard our senior citizens talk about meaningful fellowship they enjoyed in this church fifty years ago.

But as our society has become increasingly fragmented, and we've felt the pull of that isolational approach to life, we've made body life a renewed emphasis. And I'm greatly encouraged by what I consider to be a growing, deeper expression of community that our Lord established for us through His example and atonement.

Let me identify some expressions of community. At the start of the year our pastors, deacons, and their wives spent a lot of extra time together. We went to each

other's homes on a monthly basis. We ate together, opened the Scriptures together, prayed together, and considered ways to help meaningful fellowship become a greater reality at WBC.

We reorganized our deacon care groups, and put deacon care group time on the Sunday evening schedule, at least once, sometimes twice a month. In those groups, sometimes we ate together, sometimes we discussed the Scriptures together, we prayed together, identified needs together, and worked at doing life God's way, *together*, as a *community* of believers.

There were other expressions of community this year. We celebrated weddings together: the Wards in June, the Fawcetts in August, the Dows in September.

We studied God's Word together in our SS classes throughout the year.

We had elective growth groups together in the Spring.

We ministered to missionaries together. This summer we were privileged to have our missionary to Brazil, Erin Wawro, home for a respite, and showered her with our love and care.

We were edified together from the ministry of other missionaries and speakers: including Wayne and Sue Vanderwier in April, Randy and Cindy Richner in June, Gary and Nancy Storm in January and July, the Scioto Hills staff night in July, and Steward Services director, Jim Rickard, in November.

We enjoyed fellowship with a sister church together. In February we went to Pleasant Green Baptist Church in Portsmouth. In October we invited the PGBC family to join us for an evening worship service, with communion, and a fellowship time that followed.

And of course, the reason for this community life isn't self-focused. It's for a purpose beyond us. The reason we need to experience community together is so we can better minister the hope of Christ together to others. By God's grace, we saw that happen, too, ministry teams working together in lots of ways.

What happens every Wednesday evening is a good example. Don and Connie Boggs work with a team of others to serve the Kids Club meal, and then a team of workers, under Scott Bruns' leadership, provide transportation and teach and model Christ for children from our church and the community. Pastor Matt and Bethany and the Youth Team did the same this year with teens.

It always takes a team of people working together to do a ministry well, like our CDT in the winter (which served 40 people from about 15 area churches), and like our on the road CDT in Charleston, WV in the Spring (serving 50 people from a dozen churches). Then there was VBS in July, the CPR class in September, and the Christmas program in December, more examples of what happens when believers come together for ministry.

That brings me to a fourth evidence of how our Redeemer led us in 2013.

4. Our Redeemer led us to step out and trust Him by venturing into new ministry territory.

What I'm referring to here is quite personal. A year and a half ago, you as a congregation graciously gave Sherry and me a sabbatical break. One of the main reasons was to seek rest and medical attention to deal with the chronic migraines. In God's providence, the break did not bring about relief. So the deacons advised me to scale back, which I did.

At the start of this year, however, with the deacons' input, I decided to step out in faith and begin accepting preaching and teaching opportunities the Lord sent our way.

The migraines were still present, but in the presence of doors He seemed to be opening, we decided to trust Him and step out in faith.

As I look back at the past twelve months, I'm amazed at what transpired, all to the glory of our Redeemer. For starters, the migraines continued at the rate of 8 to 15 days a month (about 135 pain affected days in 2013). I continued to seek balance in my life, which the deacons graciously encouraged last year, which meant taking days off for time with my wife and family and for personal refreshment through woodworking.

But what also happened was that God took what seemingly was the remaining, less "productive" time, and multiplied it to bring about what He alone deserves the credit for, the following ministry accomplishments.

For starters, there was the ministry of the Word right here with you, the precious flock over which the Holy Spirit has made me an overseer these past 26 years (Acts 20:28).

On Sunday mornings we continued our journey in the Gospel of John (chapters 11-12). We also engaged in several topical series, such as "Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering," and "A People to Live With in the Crucible of Suffering," "The Armor of God" (Ephesians 6), a mini-series "Who Is My Neighbor?," and a three-part series on Thanksgiving in November.

On Sunday evenings we did a timely study, "A Biblical Response to Homosexuality." We also devoted several weeks to a series in Proverbs, "How to be Wise in Life." We also did a month-long interaction with "Walk His Trail," a DVD series with Steve Saint telling the story of the five missionaries who were killed back in the 50s.

On Wednesday evenings our adult Bible studies included: The Holy Spirit, the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20, Zephaniah, and Christmas Through the Eyes of the Prophets (Jeremiah and Micah).

In addition to feeding you, the Lord opened many doors to feed His sheep from other parts of the fold. Along with a host of other WBC team members He gave me the privilege to teach His Word during our twelve week Monday evening Counseling and Discipleship training class, from January through March.

In March He allowed me to travel to Timisoara, Romania, at the invitation of missionary, Doug Markesbery, to open the Scriptures with brothers and sisters there.

In April and May He privileged our Counseling Team to travel to Charleston, WV for three weekend CDTs.

Also in May Sherry and I traveled to Portland, OR for a weekend of teaching opportunities with NANC.

In July I had the joy of presenting a seminar to the teens at Scioto Hills Revolution.

Also in July Sherry and I traveled to North Dakota where I spoke at Cooperstown Bible Camp's family camp, where our own Chuck Spears and Oliver Thompson serve.

In September the Lord granted strength for a wonderful ministry in Albania, where, at the invitation of missionaries Blair and Sue Alvidrez, Pastor Tim Pasma and I taught three groups of Albanian believers how to use the Scriptures to help people with the problems of life.

In October I was privileged to drive to Alabama and deliver a workshop at the NANC annual conference, "Ministering the Book of Lamentations: Helping People Find Hope When Hope Seems Gone."

In November Sherry and I traveled to Raleigh, NC, where I taught seven sessions at another NANC (now known as ACBC) training event.

As I reflect on last year, it stuns me. The Lord took less time and brought more out of it.

Part of the advancement is due to multiplication. I am not the solo minister of the Word at WBC. The Lord has raised up a team of people who share in the proclamation of the Scriptures. We truly are blessed to have a team of godly men who handled the Word well in feeding the flock throughout the past year, including Scott Bruns, Dave Beam, Jack Branon, Pastor Matt, Matt Fawcett, Aaron Cook, Jason Willis, Gary Storm, and others.

And I must point out that WBC's ministry of the Word isn't limited to what happens here at home. Gary and Nancy Storm ministered the Word in Eastern Europe, Bob Litteral in Papua New Guinea and other countries, the Willis family and Fox Etta Hunt in Brazil, and Tapan and Sandhya Bandyopadhyay in India in November. And to God's glory, our brother Tapan published a book this year which helps Bengali speaking people learn English as an evangelistic tool.

So we too, as did Moses and the Israelites, have reason to sing. In His unfailing love, He led us in 2013 to some provisions, through some losses, to a deepening experience of community, and to step out into some new ministry territory. Now, let's turn to the second question.

Where does our Redeemer want to lead us in 2014?

Let's talk about this from two perspectives, first the personal, and then the congregational. Both are true, you know. The Lord will lead us as redeemed individual people and as a redeemed church in 2014. Where does He want to take us?

Let's talk about this first from the personal perspective. Let me identify some places the Lord may want to take you this year.

Perhaps He wants to take you to the place where you come to know His Son as your personal Lord and Savior. I think about Alfred Smith whose wife, Marcella, went home to heaven last year. Alfred came to church just to please his wife. But then, when he was past his threescore and ten years, God saved him and brought him into His forever family! Does that need to happen in your life? Why not this year? Why not today?

Perhaps you know Christ, but this year the Lord wants you to plug into a faith community called the local church. True, you don't need to join a church to be saved, for salvation is a gift that God gives to those who repent and put their trust in Christ. But you do need to join a Bible-teaching church if you want to experience the kind of life God intends for those He saves. Why not this year?

Perhaps you are a member of this church. That's good. But the Lord wants you to make your local church the strategic priority He intends it to be in the life of those He redeems. How? By putting yourself under the Word in it. By giving sacrificially through it. By serving joyfully through it.

You say, "But it's not a joy to me." Okay, then perhaps He wants you to take a sabbatical and stop running like the Lord can't accomplish His work without you. And perhaps He wants you to seek help to get your soul refreshed.

Perhaps He wants you to get some help for that marriage struggle, or that parenting tension, or that stubborn habit you can't break. The Lord doesn't want you to keep limping along. He's provided you with a church that offers free biblical counseling and people that would love to help you find God's solutions. Why not seek help this year, this *day*?

And where does the Lord want to take us as a church? Obviously, I can't answer that in a definitive way, for I'm not a prophet. But since I do have His Word, and since

the Lord has already put some things in our path and put us on a trajectory, I think we can anticipate some things, two areas of growth.

One, the Lord is leading us to show this community we care, through our current ministries, through the development community center, and through our efforts to love our neighbors. And why? So we can share the reason we care, which is the good news of the One who cared to the utmost, and died for sinners, and conquered death, and offers eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Two, the Lord is leading us to be more intentional about talking to others about Him. *You shall be my witnesses.* That's what Jesus said. I've been convicted recently by those words. I have not been talking much to lost people about Jesus. Have you? Most of us have good relationships with lost people, at work, at school, with our neighbors, etc. We've encouraged that as a church for several years now. This year it's time to get intentional about sharing why we care. Let's make Jesus known this year. Let's pray fervently that He will open up doors for gospel presentations, and then open hearts to receive gospel seed.

I hope you're encouraged as you anticipate 2014. We have reason to be, and here's why... *In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.*