



2017 Mississippi Connecting People to Jesus Report

(Trip dates: July 7 - July 14, 2017)

Report completed July 28, 2017

This year God allowed us to see our labors of love from previous years come to bear through the nine Senior Pastor's collaborating with us, through the participants at the basketball tournament functioning as a caring community, a significant increase in church based volunteers, and more support from local and county leaders. Here are a few highlight from the 2017 trip.

A. **The Spiritual Gatekeepers United.**

God raised up nine local Pastor's to collaborate with us.

Seven local Pastor's agreed to change their church calendars to hold VBS during the same week (7/7 -7/14/17).

One local Pastor, agreed to open his church up for the youth and young adult ministry R.I.S.E (**Reach, Inspire, Succeed, Educate**).

At our annual Pastor's debriefing meeting on 7/12/17, the Pastor's agreed to hold VBS on 6/25-6/29/18, for next year. Surely God was pleased with the unity, support, and comradery of the local Pastors. Praise Him!

B. **Vacation Bible School (VBS).**

VBS was held at eight different locations throughout Holmes County (seven churches and Leawood apartments).

1. Four churches held VBS during the day.
2. Three churches held VBS during the evening.
3. The total daily average attendance for VBS at the eight locations was 205 people.
4. All 22 children prayed the prayer of salvation at Leawood apartments.
5. This year UMI, donated VBS curriculum for 500 VBS students.
6. We now have all seven churches already equipped with 2018 curriculum and excited about 2018.
7. The Lockman Foundation also donated 500 New American Standard Bibles for distribution.
8. Greater Nazareth (24), Good Samaritan (25), Pine Grove (20), Mt. Olive (6), Good Hope (35), Holy Pentecostal (31), Mt. Calvary (42), Leawood Apartments (22), R.I.S.E. (33), Seniors Served (35).

C. **The Youth and Young Adult** development ministry (R.I.S.E.).

This ministry was held during the day at the historic St. Paul C.O.G.I.C. in Lexington.

1. This year there was a record attendance of 33 youth. Praise the Lord.



2. Another praise is the youth from Tchula and Lexington mixed well together. The tension between the groups was a stronghold we saw God break last year (we transported youth from Tchula each day).

D. The Basketball Tournament.

1. Monday – Wednesday the basketball tournament was held with a high attendance of over 200 people.
2. On the first night, at least 15 to 20 people raised their hands to be assured that they were going to heaven, and then we prayed the prayer for salvation.
3. On the rest of the nights, at least 10 people prayed the prayer of salvation for the first time (approximate decisions for Christ over 40 to 50 people).

E. The Concert & Prize Giveaways.

1. This year gospel artist Ruth Davis traveled with us and ministered during the Thursday evening concert along with the choir from Good Hope Baptist Church in Milestone, MS.
2. God blessed us with the resources to give away:
 - a. Two 48” smart TV’s
 - b. Nine tablets
 - c. Two Barbeque grills with a bag of charcoal
 - d. Two scientific calculators for students taking geometry in the fall of 2017
 - e. Three sport watches
 - f. One basketball from the tournament
 - g. One CD player
 - h. Two \$25 gift cards and two cards to buy applications on smart devices.
3. The winning teams won a cash prize (adults \$40.00 each, youth \$20.00 each, and children \$10.00 each). The children saw God hand in this and testified how God provides for them each day. One little boy jumped for joy several times when he won a tablet. The people in the gymnasium were all thrilled to see his joy. When you don’t have much, and you are told no, and live in an oppressive environment, getting something from a loving source brings out the spirit of thanksgiving.

F. Accommodations.

1. Our host Pastor over the last nine years is currently a County Supervisor in Holmes County and mentioned our coming to Bishop William Matthews (Head of International Mission for the Church of God in Christ). The Church of God in Christ is currently renovating Saints Academy (a 500 acre plus facility with a school, dorms, lake, etc.), and invited our team the opportunity to lodge there. Our thirty-two member team had plenty of room and we were together. Keeping our team together makes us more efficient and builds a much stronger team.



2. St. Paul C.O.G.I.C, which is next door, opened their kitchen for our cook team to prepare breakfast each morning, and their gym for our team to exercise. Praise Him!

G. Increased Local Church Partnerships.

God increased the number of participating churches to sixteen. Six churches came from California, and one church from Florida. Praise Him!

Mt. Zion Church of Ontario, Ontario, CA
St. Paul Baptist Church, Sacramento, CA
Southern Baptist Church, Los Angeles, CA
Baldwin Hills Baptist Church, Los Angeles, CA
Ecclesia Christian Fellowship, San Bernardino, CA
Faith Inspirational Church, Compton, CA
Park View Christian Life Center, Kissimmee, FL
Good Samaritan Ecumenical Church, Tchula, MS
Zion City Baptist Church, Goodman, MS
Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, Tchula, MS
Good Hope Baptist, Tchula, MS
Holiness Pentecostal, Tchula, MS
Greater Nazareth Baptist Church, Tchula MS
Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Lexington, MS
Pine Grove Baptist Church, Lexington, MS
St. Paul Church of God in Christ, Lexington, MS

Four additional Mississippi based churches committed to join us for VBS 2018. Praise the Lord (Pastor's Wesley, Garner, Scott, and Dean are committed).

H. Community Development.

1. Our community development team met with the new Mayor of Lexington, the new Mayor of Tchula, and the new Principal at S.V. Marshall Middle School, Bishop William Matthews, and the Police Chief of Tchula. Those meeting involved discussing current challenges and vision sharing to improve the communities in Holmes County.
2. We also met with a local Pastor to work on strategic planning for his local congregation, and visited most of the VBS sites.
3. Community leaders invited to address the community each night at the Basketball tournament. This is one of the largest gatherings for community leaders to address the community. Our purpose is to help the community get to know their leaders, and give the local leaders an opportunity to share their vision for the community and connect with the community.
 - a. The County Supervisors spoke on Monday night.
 - b. Elder William Dean spoke on behalf of the local Pastors.
 - c. The Mayor of Tchula spoke on Tuesday night.



- d. The Mayor of Lexington spoke on Wednesday night.
 - e. The Holmes County Sheriff spoke on Wednesday night (he gave a powerful message on why residents should stay out of the criminal justice system).
 - f. The local Pastors were introduced as the leaders of our partnering churches. This connects the people without a church family to Pastor's they who are committed to this growing movement of God's people in Holmes County.
4. Local churches provided key VBS leaders and teachers at each location. This put us in an authentic partnership role. Instead of the traditional "we know what we are doing, watch us and follow us" mentality, we provided technical assistance, materials, and extra hands. Two churches needed leadership and we were happy to help. We provide the full team at Leawood apartments.
 5. Bonita Streeter, a resident of Holmes County, is a local member of our team each year. Bonita shared what we do together each year, and a local resident was so moved she provided fish, baked cakes, and provided fruit for our team one night after the basketball tournament.
 6. We see God pulling the community in Holmes County together around this nine-year-old mission's effort. Praise Him!

I. Economic Development.

To our great delight, the restaurant that our renovation team helped nine years ago reopened for business. After the original owner died, the restaurant closed for several years. After our having several meetings with the surviving family members, God moved and the restaurant reopened. This year our renovation team installed a decorative boarder inside the restaurant and repainted the interior. We usually bring business to this restaurant by contracting with them to prepare our afternoon meal each day.

We were also delighted to hear a detailed vision from the Mayor of Tchula on the economic development plan for the City of Tchula.

We agreed to make the renovation of Saints Academy one of our main projects for 2018. Saints Academy is a great location for the International Missions Training Headquarters for the Church of God in Christ. It will also be a great location for camps, retreats, etc. As Elder Dean said, we need to drop our denominational differences and function in unity in the Kingdom.

We will also need to help put a roof on Good Samaritan, which is our host church in Tchula. Pray for resources to get this done.

J. The Repair Team.

The repair team hung a door with the frame for a family in the country; they painted the interior of the Southside Restaurant, and gave away 300 shoes at the VBS locations. Fifty shoes were donated to Pastor Carthan to give to needy students for the beginning of school.



K. The Seniors Outreach Team.

The senior outreach team reached 35 seniors in their homes and in a senior complex clubhouse. The team discussed healthy eating, diabetes, heart disease, prostate cancer, high blood pressure, and the team did a meaningful bible study.

We gave out healthy cookbooks, and the team collected addresses to stay in touch with the seniors throughout the year.

Two seniors who had not come outside of their homes after 6:00 pm in over two years attended the concert on Thursday night.

The team also discussed their expensive electric bills received by the seniors, and offered to help them get into special programs for low-income seniors.

L. The Sewing Ministry

This year our normal locations for the sewing ministry were closed due to the administrator's vacation schedule. Next year we may have a more permanent location in Tchula where our machines and trainers will help prepare community members for a potential industry opportunity.

M. Team Learning, Growth.

1. Our utilizing 10 vehicles to move teams more efficiently around the county each day was positive and well worth the investment (Budget's corporate rental department and the local manager in Memphis worked an incredible deal for us).
2. Flying the team across country is still the best way to travel. Once again Southwest Airlines group rates department stepped up to the plate and served us well. By allowing two free checkon bags, we brought 350, shoes, 5 sewing machines, and much more across country for free. Everyone automatically had an extra bag (lol).
3. The cook team received needed support (a designated vehicle each afternoon) to get supplies and provide a healthy and hearty breakfast to start each day. Praise Him!
4. One residence for the entire team expedited our ability to address concerns to keep us moving in harmony.
5. Meeting at the restaurant each afternoon also helped us accomplish number three above.
6. Unleashing more key leaders and supporting their decisions was much more helpful this year. Having multiple leaders with equal authority takes getting used to when the team is used to one or two leaders making most of the decisions. This is a great transition for us.
7. Hearing God speak to us regarding our need to change specific areas in our lives helped us overcome decisions that were potentially harmful to our unity as a team. We were also able to better focus on blessing an underprivileged, underserved, and underrepresented community.
8. Having a day to relax before we return home is good for the team to bond, and resist disconnecting and individualism.



- 9. Having a multi-generational team from a variety of churches was a daily lesson on our theme: “The Healthy Functioning of the Church” (Rom 12:4-5). Our tag line was members of the body functioning in harmony.
We also have the opportunity to start training a new generation of missionaries.
- 10. Mailing flyers to each church and the city offices, and passing out flyer upon our arrival is still effective. Social media is also an effective way to promote the ministry.
- 11. Having one document with all needed information is still is effective (sending the document to participating pastors, and key leaders is also effective).
- 12. Meeting with the local leaders in one location for orientation prior to starting VBS was just as powerful as we thought. People saw how they were involved in something much bigger than any single local church.
- 13. The concert is a great idea, but we must work on reliable local support as well as bring leadership with us. Gospel artist, Ruth Davis was a ram in the bush for us this year.
- 14. Full team breakfast briefings and end of day debriefings helped maintain unity.
- 15. Visiting all participating churches on Sunday for worship service was powerful and spoke volumes to all participating churches (we participated in nine Sunday morning worship services on July 9, 2017).

N. The 2017 Mississippi Missions Team.

1. California Volunteer Team (30 team members):

Pastor Kennedy	Bedford Matthews	David Barnett	Brian Wallace
Reginald Kennedy, Sr.	Mahari Smith	Seminole Guchulmow	Freddy Alfaro
La Rose Edwards	Ellis Love	Johnathan Powers	Mazdak Ruw
Cynthia Beatty	Jayah Beatty	Sharon Bailey	Monique Roberts
Jewel Craver	Ruth Davis	Jayvier Vazquez	Anita Dickenson
Marsha Hayes	Kennedi Smith	Kahadda Poston	Kathy Jones
Jacqueline Jackson	Corky Chavers	Reginald Kennedy, Jr.	
Florita Randolph	Terri Randolph	Alton Green	

2. Florida Volunteer Team (2 team members):

Sonja and Henry Borom

3. Mississippi Volunteer Team:

- a. Six churches provided VBS team leaders and teachers.
- b. Pastor Eddie Carthan (County liaison & host)
- c. Bonita Streeter (volunteer from the beginning).



4. Team Count:

Adult Men: 12
Adult Women: 13
Youth Males: 2
Youth Females: 1
Children: 4

O. VBS numbers for future planning:

Greater Nazareth (24), Good Samaritan (25), Pine Grove (20), Mt. Olive (6), Good Hope (35), Holy Pentecostal (31), Mt. Calvary (42), Leawood Apartments (22), R.I.S.E. (33), Seniors Served (35).

On behalf of the entire team, we praise God for connecting people to Jesus for the sake of expanding His kingdom. We also praise God for giving Mt. Zion and several other church leaders a heart for missions in Mississippi. Thank you Mt. Zion Trustees and congregation for allocating generous funds to underwrite the lion share of this ministry.

God Bless,

Pastor Brian E. Kennedy, Sr.