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West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



May 2016

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Keeping the Faith in A Faithless Age: the Church as a Moral Minority

“The greatest question of our time,” offered historian Will Durant, “is not communism versus individualism, not Europe versus America, not even East versus the West; it is whether men can live without God.” That question, it now appears, will be answered in our own time.

For centuries the Christian church has been the center of Western civilization. Western culture, government, law, and society were based on explicitly Christian principles. Concern for the individual, a commitment to human rights, and respect for the good, the beautiful, and the true—all of these grew out of Christian convictions and the influence of revealed religion.

All of these, we now hasten to add, are under serious attack. The very notion of right and wrong is now discarded by large sectors of American society. Where it is not discarded, it is often debased. Taking a page out of Alice in Wonderland, modern secularists simply declare wrong, right, and right, wrong.

Quaker theologian D. Elton Trueblood once described America as a “cut flower civilization.” Our culture, he argued, is cut off from its Christian roots like a flower cut at the stem. Though the flower will hold its beauty for a time, it is destined to wither and die.

When Trueblood spoke those words over two decades ago, the flower could still be seen with some color and signs of life. But the blossom has long since lost its vitality, and it is time for the fallen petals to be acknowledged.

“When God is dead,” argued Dostoyevsky, “anything is permissible.” The permissiveness of modern American society can scarcely be exaggerated, but it can be traced directly to the fact that modern men and women act as if God does not exist, or is powerless to accomplish His will.

The Christian church now finds itself facing a new reality. The church no longer represents the central core of Western culture. Though outposts of Christian influence remain, these are exceptions rather than the rule. For the most part, the church has been displaced by the reign of secularism.

The daily newspaper brings a constant barrage which confirms the current state of American society. This age is not the first to see unspeakable horror and evil, but it is the first to deny any consistent basis for identifying evil as evil or good as good.

The faithful church is, for the most part, tolerated as one voice in the public arena, but only so long as it does not attempt to exercise any credible influence on the state of affairs. Should the church speak forcefully on an issue of public debate, it is castigated as coercive and out of date.



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Keeping the Faith in A Faithless Age: the Church as a Moral Minority - Continued

How does the church think of itself as it faces this new reality? During the 1980s, it was possible to think in ambitious terms about the church as the vanguard of a moral majority. That confidence has been seriously shaken by the events of the past decade.

Little progress toward the re-establishment of a moral center of gravity can be detected. Instead, the culture has moved swiftly toward a more complete abandonment of all moral conviction.

The confessing church must now be willing to be a moral minority, if that is what the times demands. The church has no right to follow the secular siren call toward moral revisionism and politically correct positions on the issues of the day.

Whatever the issue, the church must speak as the church—that is, as the community of fallen but redeemed, who stand under divine authority. The concern of the church is not to know its own mind, but to know and follow the mind of God. The church's convictions must not emerge from the ashes of our own fallen wisdom, but from the authoritative Word of God which reveals the wisdom of God and His commands.

The church is to be a community of character. The character produced by a people who stand under the authority of the Sovereign God of the universe will inevitably be at odds with a culture of unbelief.

The American church is faced with a new situation. This new context is as current as the morning newspaper and as old as those first Christian churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Laodicea, and Rome. Eternity will record whether or not the American church is willing to submit only to the authority of God; or whether the church will forfeit its calling in order to serve lesser gods.

The church must awaken to its status as a moral minority and hold fast to the gospel we have been entrusted to preach. In so doing, the deep springs of permanent truth will reveal the church to be a life-giving oasis amidst American's moral desert. ~ *Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*

The Foundation of Forgiveness

God doesn't change (Malachi 3:6). But man's view of Him frequently does—driven by man's own fluid emotions and flexible morality. And as the world around us becomes increasingly permissive, it expects God to adjust with that moral shift.

Specifically, sinners count on the Lord to take sin as carelessly and casually as they do. And they expect His forgiveness to be equally casual. That should not surprise us—if you don't take sin seriously, how can you ever fully appreciate what it means to be truly forgiven?



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The Foundation of Forgiveness - Continued

A Corrupt Caricature

But when God's forgiveness is reduced to blind acceptance it reflects a corrupt caricature of His holy character. God cannot and will not acquit transgressors by blithely dismissing or ignoring the evil they've done. To do so would be unjust, and God is a God of perfect justice.

The Bible repeatedly stresses that God will punish every sin. In Exodus 23:7 God says, "I will not acquit the guilty." Nahum 1:3 is unequivocal: "The Lord will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." In the gospel message itself, "The wrath of God is revealed . . . against all ungodliness and unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

Scripture describes the relationship between God and the sinner as enmity (Romans 5:10; 8:7). God hates sin, and therefore all who sin have made themselves God's enemies. "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11, KJV).

Those who violate some minor point of God's law are as guilty as if they had broken every commandment (James 2:10). No sin is trivial (Romans 3:10–18). All people are born with an insatiable penchant for sin (Psalm 58:3). They are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), objects of God's holy anger (Ephesians 2:3), and utterly without hope (Ephesians 2:12). From the human perspective, this is a truly desperate state of absolute futility.

God, on the other hand, is perfect, infinitely holy, absolutely flawless, and thoroughly righteous. He cannot violate His nature by blindly pardoning sin. He says: "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 17:15). His justice must be satisfied by punishing every violation of His law. And the due penalty of our iniquity is infinitely severe: eternal damnation.

What About the "Good News"?

The gospel is good news because it tells us that God does justify the ungodly (Romans 4:5). But how can God grant such forgiveness without compromising His own standard of justice? How can He forgive sinners without breaking His own Word, having already sworn that He will punish every transgression?

The answer is: God Himself has made His Son, Jesus Christ, the atonement for our sins. This truth lies at the very heart of the gospel message. It is the most glorious truth in all of Scripture. It explains how God can remain just while justifying sinners (Romans 3:25–26). And it is the only hope for any sinner seeking forgiveness.

Perhaps the most important single passage in all of Scripture about Christ's substitution on sinners' behalf is found in 2 Corinthians 5:



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The Foundation of Forgiveness - Continued

God . . . reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18–20)

The truth is glorious: God has a plan by which He can accomplish the very thing that seemed so completely impossible. There is a way to satisfy His justice without damning the sinner. He can both fulfill His promise of vengeance against sin and reconcile—extend complete forgiveness to—sinners. He can remain just while justifying the ungodly (Romans 3:26).

Too many people think of divine grace as a sort of benign forbearance, by which God simply excuses sin and looks the other way—as if grace involved a lowering of the divine standard in order to accommodate what is unholy. Scripture teaches no such thing. Again, God Himself has sworn that every transgression and disobedience will receive a just penalty (cf. Hebrews 2:2), and He cannot relinquish His perfection in order to indulge the wicked. To do so would compromise His own righteousness.

So how does God reconcile sinners to Himself? On what grounds can He extend forgiveness to sinners? Here we are brought face to face with the need for atonement. If God's wrath is to be satisfied, if God is going to be propitiated to the sinner, a suitable atonement is required. God must fulfill the demands of justice by pouring out His wrath on a substitute who bears the sinner's punishment vicariously.

And that is precisely what happened at the cross.

The apostle Paul distills the whole gospel in one simple statement in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Grasping Divine Forgiveness

This profound truth is the key to understanding divine forgiveness: God made the sinless Christ to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become in Him the very righteousness of God. In simple language, the apostle Paul's point is this: God treated Christ like a sinner and punished Him for all the sins of all who would believe, so that He could treat them as righteous and give them credit for Christ's perfect obedience.

Isaiah makes this staggering statement: "The Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief. . . . He would render Himself as a guilt offering" (Isaiah 53:10). The death of Christ "pleased" God? That is exactly what Scripture teaches. Repeatedly the Bible says Christ died as a "propitiation" for our sins (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The word propitiation speaks of an appeasement, a total satisfaction of the divine demands on behalf of the sinner. This is a marvelous truth. It means Christ paid the full price—the ransom—for sin on behalf of those He redeemed.



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The Foundation of Forgiveness - Continued

The notion of imputation is also important in explaining 2 Corinthians 5:21. Imputation speaks of a legal reckoning. To impute guilt to someone is to assign guilt to that person's account. Likewise, to impute righteousness is to reckon the person righteous. The guilt or righteousness thus imputed is a wholly objective reality; it exists totally apart from the person to whom it is imputed. In other words, a person to whom guilt is imputed is not thereby actually made guilty in the real sense. But he is accounted as guilty in a legal sense.

In the same way that the guilt of sinners was imputed to Christ, His righteousness is imputed to all who believe.

As early as Genesis 15:6 we read that Abraham "believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." And Romans 4 uses Abraham's justification as the model for how all believers are justified. That means every believer is forgiven immediately, just like the thief on the cross. Forgiveness costs us nothing, because it already cost Christ everything.

And if God justifies the ungodly solely through faith (Romans 4:5), of what does this faith consist? It is a refusal to trust anything but Christ for salvation. It means the abandonment of self-righteousness and a single-minded reliance on Christ alone for salvation. It therefore involves a sincere love for Christ and a turning away—repentance—from sin.

If you understand that you are a sinner and long for freedom and forgiveness from your sin, turn to Christ even now. He won't cast out any who come to Him (John 6:37). He is eager to forgive and reconcile sinners to Himself. All else that we have to say about forgiveness is moot if you don't know the forgiveness of God for your sins.

All Christians are forgiven an unpayable debt solely on the basis of what God Himself has done for us. That inestimable gift of free forgiveness becomes the ground on which all other kinds of forgiveness are based, and also the pattern for how we are to forgive others. If we keep in perspective how much God forgave, and how much it cost Him to forgive, we will soon realize that no transgression against us can ever justify an unforgiving spirit. Christians who hold grudges or refuse to forgive others have lost sight of the price paid for their own forgiveness.

God's forgiveness is the pattern by which we are to forgive. That is the foundational truth on which all godly relationships are built and developed. It is the dominant example for all who honor God through ministry to a fallen world. And it is to those implications of God's forgiveness that we will turn in the days ahead. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**

The Reformation Isn't Over

"You do not want to end up on the wrong side of history." This platitude has been granted prognostic status in our day, though one could properly question its fundamental truthfulness. It reflects, however, the prevailing attitude of Western culture, a pragmatism that enshrines in the judgment of "history" (whatever that means in this context) the final arbiter of morality, goodness, and worth.



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The Reformation Isn't Over - Continued

Often this phrase is being urged upon the church to “move on” from opposing homosexuality or the redefinition of marriage.

But this adage also captures the general attitude of a large portion of the population on both sides of the Tiber River to the Reformation and the continuing battle over the issues that gave it birth. Isn't it time to just move on? Can't we lay aside our differences for a greater good? Aren't we a small enough minority now in the midst of a tsunami of secularism and the rising tide of Islam? Shouldn't we be looking for unity, not for more reasons to remain separate?

We dare not dismiss the weight that these rhetorical questions carry with many within our congregations, and even among the clergy. At the same time, we must recognize the responsibility that is ours as heirs of the great struggle that was the Reformation. Can we betray those who came before us? What would such a betrayal involve? Are we really willing to assert that the great and momentous beliefs they fought for are no longer as important as we once thought?

The election of a new bishop of Rome in 2013 shed new light on the state of these questions in the minds of many who profess to be “evangelicals” and “biblical” in their faith and orientation. One well-known evangelical leader communicated with his followers electronically that we should be praying that God would “guide” the process of the selection of a new pope. In most venues, the objection that there is nothing remotely biblical about a “supreme pontiff” who is to be venerated as the “vicar of Christ on earth” or the “holy father” found little expression outside of those whose strongest feelings on the matter are borne of prejudice rather than conviction. And once the selection was made, many in the evangelical camp expressed pleasure at the selection, if for no other reason than Francis I has seemed significantly more, well, human—or at least less imperial—than Benedict XVI.

But very little of the public response was prompted by a passionate commitment to, say, the *solas* of the Reformation, or a knowledgeable, informed rejection of Rome's soteriology over against a deep-seated love of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone.

Should the Reformation continue to hold a place of importance in the church that faces such immense opposition as that coming from radical, gospel-hating secularism? Wouldn't a united front, free from partisan bickering, help the cause of Christ? The answer has to be, “Of course the Reformation remains important, and, in fact, its work must continue in our day, and into the future as well.”

The reason is not hard to see, even if it seems hidden to many in our day. Wonderfully nebulous catchphrases like “the cause of Christ” often hide the truth: the cause of Christ is the glorification of the triune God through the redemption of a particular people through the cross-work of Jesus Christ, which is a rather Puritan way of saying, “The cause of Christ is the gospel.” Each of the emphases of the Reformation, summed up in the *solas*, is focused upon protecting the integrity and identity of the gospel itself. Without the inspiration, authority, harmony, and sufficiency of Scripture, we do not know the gospel (*sola Scriptura*). Without the freedom of grace and the fullness of the provision of the work of Christ, we have no saving message (*sola fide*). And so on.



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The Reformation Isn't Over - Continued

The Reformation fought a battle that each and every generation is called to fight simply because each and every generation is made up of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam, and hence there will always be those who seek to detract from the singular glory of God in the gospel through the addition of man's authority, man's merit, man's sovereignty. Is this not the meaning of *semper reformanda*, the church always reforming, always seeking to hear more clearly, walk more closely, to her Lord?

With the ebb and flow of human history, the forces arrayed against the church and her Lord and the particular front upon which the battle rages hottest will change. Rome's theology has evolved and her arguments have been modified, but the issues remain very much what they were when Luther and Eck battled at Leipzig, only modified and complicated. God's kingship, man's depravity and enslavement to sin, and the insatiable desire of sinners to control the grace of God will always be present. And today, the sufficiency, clarity, and authority of Scripture are at the forefront, just as they were then. The need for the Reformation will end when the church no longer faces foes inside and out who seek to distort her purpose, her mission, her message, and her authority. Till then, *semper reformanda*. ~ **Dr. James R. White**

Seasons of Motherhood Study Group



The young mothers of West Suffolk Baptist Church have been studying a devotional by Melissa B. Kruger entitled "*Walking with God in the Season of Motherhood*". During our time together we have been discussing God's purpose for mothers, obtaining His wisdom through His word, and entrusting children to the Lord through prayer. Approximately seven ladies and various children have been at the first three meetings which have been full of encouragement and plenty of fellowship.

While the moms of young ones meet, the children are watched over by other ladies who have so graciously offered to help. It has been a sweet time of fellowship by all. The gatherings are being hosted at both the church and at homes of members of the church. We are meeting twice a month at 10am. The last Tuesday of each month we meet at someone's home and a potluck lunch follows.

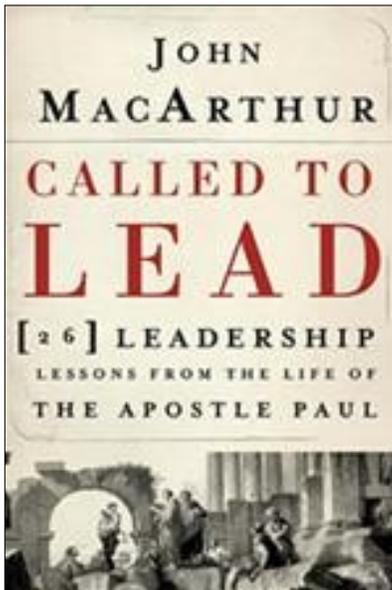
All ladies from West Suffolk Baptist Church are invited to attend and be a part of the study group. Ladies are welcome to join and help with the children or join the discussion. Books are available at the church, or you can download a version. Thank you for coming alongside all the women involved in prayer and encouragement. Please see Carrie Purser or Jessica Twilley for details on dates or any questions.



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Book Reviews *Called to Lead* *Dr. John MacArthur*

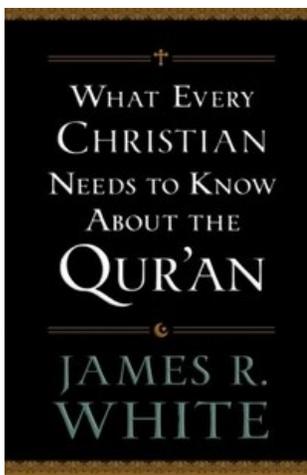


Think you're not really a leader? Think again. Leadership means influence. Young or old, man or woman, if you're a Christian, God has called you to influence others. In your church, your job, your school, your social circle, or the quietness of your home, someone is watching and waiting to follow your lead.

But what does leadership look like in a Christian? Most Christian leadership gurus today look more to corporate America for answers than to Scripture. The result is an unbiblical leadership model that sounds Christian but looks like the world—leadership based on power, personality, manipulation, and coercion.

Drawing on decades of leadership experience, tested and tempered by decades of in-depth study of God's Word, Dr. John MacArthur offers you an alternative model for true, spiritual leadership. In *The Book on Leadership*, John explores the life of the ultimate Christian leader, the apostle Paul, and uses Scripture to take on the common myths about what a leader really is and does. You'll also benefit from John's wise, practical counsel for budding leaders. A great tool for not only developing your leadership, but also knowing how to recognize godly leadership when you see it.

What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an *Dr. James R. White*



Relying on the media and politicians to tell us what Muslims believe isn't going to cut it. Christians need to be better informed, whether the goal is to understand global politics or to talk to a Muslim neighbor across the street.

Through fair and accurate use of the Qur'an and other documents, scholar and accomplished debater Dr. James White examines what Muslim sacred texts teach about Christ, salvation, the Trinity, the afterlife, and other crucial topics. This book provides the answers you've been looking for to engage in open, honest discussions about Islam with Muslims and others.

Dr. James R. White is the director of Alpha and Omega Ministries and author of numerous books, including most recently *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an*.



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The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

The Church - Chapter 26

1. The universal church (brought into being by the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called the invisible church. It consists of the complete number of the elect who have been, who are, or who shall be gathered into one under Christ its Head. The church is the bride, the body, the fullness of Christ who fills all in all.
2. All people throughout the world who profess the faith of the Gospel and render obedience to God by Christ according to the Gospel, and who do not destroy their own profession by any fundamental errors, or by unholy behavior, are and may be called visible saints. All local congregations ought to be constituted of such people.
3. The purest churches under heaven are subject to mixture and error, and some have degenerated so much that they have ceased to be churches of Christ and have become 'synagogues of Satan'. Nevertheless, Christ has always had, and always will have to the end of time a kingdom in this world, made up of those who believe in him and profess his name.
4. The Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church. In him is vested, by the appointment of the Father in a supreme and sovereign manner, all authority for the calling, institution, order and government of the church. The Pope of Rome cannot in any sense be the head of the church, but he is the antichrist, that 'man of lawlessness', and 'son of destruction', who exalts himself in the church against Christ and all that is called God, whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.
5. In executing the authority entrusted to him, the Lord Jesus, through the ministry of his Word and by his Spirit, calls to himself out of the world those who are given to him by the Father. They are called to walk before him in the ways of obedience which he prescribes for them in his Word. He commands those who are so called to form local societies or churches for their mutual edification and to engage in the public worship which he requires of them while in the world.
6. The members of these churches are 'saints' by calling and they visibly demonstrate and give evidence of their obedience to the call of Christ by their profession and walk. They willingly consent to walk together according to Christ's instructions, giving themselves to the Lord and to one another by the will of God, affirming their subjection to the directives of the Gospel.
7. To each church so gathered according to the mind [of Christ] as declared in his Word, the Lord has given all the power and authority required to conduct the form of worship and discipline which he has appointed for them to observe. He has also given commands and rules for the right and proper use of that power.
8. A local Church, gathered and organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members. The officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church are bishops or elders, and deacons. They are appointed particularly to oversee what the Lord has ordained, and to execute the powers and duties which the Lord has entrusted to them or to which he calls them. This pattern is to be continued to the end of the world.
9. The way appointed by Christ for calling any person qualified and gifted by the Holy Spirit for the office of bishop or elder, is that he is to be chosen by the communal vote of the church itself. He shall be solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with the laying on of hands by the elders of the church (if there are any previously appointed bishops or elders). Similarly, a deacon is also to be chosen by vote of the church and set apart by prayer, with the laying on of hands.



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The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

The Church - Chapter 26 - Continued

10. The work of pastors is to give constant attention to the service of Christ in his churches, in the ministry of the Word and prayer, and by watching over their [members'] souls as they must give an account to Christ. Therefore the churches to which they minister have an obligation to give them all due respect, and also to provide 'all good things' according to their ability, so that they may have a comfortable income without being entangled in secular affairs, and may also be able to exercise hospitality towards others. This is required by the law of nature and by the specific command of our Lord Jesus who has ordained that those who preach the Gospel should live by the Gospel.
11. Although the bishops or pastors of the churches are obliged to regularly preach the Word as part of their office, yet the work of preaching the Word is not exclusively confined to them. Others who are also gifted and qualified by the Holy Spirit for the task, and who are approved and called by the church, may and ought to perform it.
12. All believers are obliged to join themselves to local churches when and where they have opportunity to do so, so that all who are admitted to the privileges of the church, are also subject to the correction and government of the church in accordance with the rule of Christ.
13. No church members who have been offended by a fellow member, and who have followed their prescribed duty towards the person they are offended at, may disturb church order in any way. Nor should they absent themselves from the meetings of the church or the administration of the ordinances because of the offense, rather, they should wait upon Christ and the further actions of the church.
14. Each church and all its members are obliged to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all Christ's churches everywhere. At all times churches should assist all believers within the limits of their area and calling in exercising their gifts and graces. Therefore, when churches have been planted by the providence of God so that they may enjoy the opportunity and advantage [of fellowship], they should seek fellowship amongst themselves to promote peace, increase love, and mutual edification.
15. When difficulties or differences arise in points of doctrine or [church] administration which concern the peace and edification of churches in general or any single church, or when a member or members of a church are injured by disciplinary proceedings not consistent with truth [in the Word] and [church] order, it is according to the mind of Christ that a number of churches in fellowship together, through their representatives, should meet to consider the matter in dispute, give their advice about it and report to all the churches concerned. However, when these representatives are assembled, they are not entrusted with any real church power nor with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves; they cannot exercise discipline over any churches or persons, nor impose their conclusions on the churches or officers.



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Redemptively Relevant”*

Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America

Birthday and Anniversary Corner - May 2016

Birthdays

Elyse Twilley - May 1
Francis Carter - May 2
Patrick Dillard - May 2
Sarah Hurst - May 22
Mike Myers - May 22
Jackson Twilley - May 22
John Hurst - May 30

Anniversaries

Tom and Marcie Skora - May 22
Ben and Charlene Scofield - May 25



This week (May 1st) in our morning service our message (**Finishing the Task**) was given by A.M. Kuriachan who is ANM’s (Advancing Native Missions) South Asian Field Coordinator which focuses on “Reaching the Remaining Unreached”. His work involves frequent visits to the different mission fields of his homeland of India. In support of this mission A.M. surveys and collects data on unreached people. In his surveys he has discovered hundreds of villages and several people groups who have never heard the Gospel. In his visits, A.M. has been given the opportunity to preach and teach the Word of God among different people groups and to challenge them to evangelize their own people.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or it’s leadership.



West Suffolk Baptist Church

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Please submit information to Walt Lawrence by the second Sunday of the month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.