

CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

VOLUME 109, NUMBER 6

DID JESUS ONLY BUILD ONE CHURCH?

Kerry Clark

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Jesus made this promise almost two thousand years ago. Notice that Jesus did not say He would build a church, or churches, or one of His churches. He did say, “...I will build my church...” (Matt. 16:18). The apostle Paul wrote, “There is one body...” (Eph. 4:4). Paul also wrote, “...the church, which is his body... (Eph. 1:22,23). From these verses it is obvious that Jesus only built one church. The word church comes from a Greek word “ekklhsia” which means “called out.” The church in the New Testament was composed of people who had obeyed the Gospel and thus they were called out of darkness into the Light of the Son of God (2 Thess. 2:13, Col. 1:13). It is our plea for people to return to this simple pattern. With more than one thousand denominations existing today, can we find the church Jesus promised to build?

The answer to this question is a resounding yes! The Bible gives us all we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), so God has given us the information we need to recognize the church Jesus built. Read the Bible, find the description of the church and then find the one church that matches that description. I would like to suggest some distinguishing marks of the church Jesus built.

First, an illustration. If someone were to ask you to go to the airport to pick up someone you had never met, you would ask for a description of the person. For the sake of this illustration, we will say the description you are given is as follows: the person is a Caucasian male who is six feet

tall and weighs about two hundred and fifteen pounds, they have brown hair and brown eyes. You would immediately recognize this description is helpful, but not enough to distinguish them from a host of other men. So, you would probably ask for more information. The man they say will be wearing a cowboy hat and cowboy boots. He also has a scar on his forehead. But, and maybe even most importantly, they will also tell you the person’s name. Armed with this information, you could find this person quite easily. So, let us begin our journey looking for the one church built by Jesus Christ.

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FROM THE EDITOR:

WHY YOU MUST BE A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Cody Westbrook

A casual observation of our religious landscape reveals that there are thousands of different churches spread throughout the world—Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Adventist, Presbyterian, Non-Denominational, Inter-Denominational, and many, many more. All of these churches believe and teach varying doctrines, creeds, and traditions. Some of these churches are very old and are composed of thousands of followers. Some are relatively new and have only a small following. Regardless of size or influence, each one claims to be following Christ in the correct way, and to be heading down the path to ward Heaven.

In the middle of all of this religious confusion stands the church of Christ. This church is unique because it is pre and anti-denominational. It is certainly not the largest in the world, and you will not find many majestic edifices of meeting among its members. The message that it preaches is one that is not very popular, and you will not find many of its preachers making national news headlines or being invited on prime-time television news. However, there are many things about this church that make it stand out. Consider these three reasons why you *must* be a member of the church of Christ.

It is the Body of Christ – In speaking of Christ, Paul wrote, “And [God] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). The church of Christ is the body of Christ and Paul would later write, “There is one body...” (Eph. 4:4). We are baptized into that body (Gal. 3:27) and all spiritual blessings are found within it (Eph. 1:3). Why does all of this matter? Christ has promised to save only His body (Eph. 5:23), and therefore, it is impossible to go to heaven without being a member of it.

Christ purchased it with His blood – Just before his departure Paul exhorted the Ephesians elders to “Take

heed therefore unto yourselves, and unto all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). The church of Christ is so important because it is blood-bought, not man-made! Jesus “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. 1:5). He shed His blood on the cross to buy us back from the bondage of sin (John 8:34) and give us the opportunity to “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). No other religious body can trace its origin to the blood that flowed from Calvary.

It is the Church the Prophets saw – In Ephesians 3:11 the Scripture speaks of God’s eternal purpose. That purpose, or goal, was to provide a way for all mankind to be saved, and that salvation is found in the body of Christ, which is His church (Eph. 1:23; 5:23). In Acts 15:18 James said, “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.” Before He spoke the Universe into existence, God knew that the church of Christ was going to be established. Little by little, He revealed through the Old Testament Prophets, that the church was coming (Rom. 16:26; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Today, there are many churches in existence, but the prophets saw only one church—the church of Christ.

God wills that all people be saved (2 Pet. 3:9), but salvation is not found just anywhere. It is found only in Christ (Acts 4:12), His blood (Eph. 1:7), and His body (Eph. 5:23). Therefore, God has called all people through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14) to leave the life of sin and be added to the body of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:47). That is why you must be a member of the church of Christ.

CW



WHAT ABOUT THE COMMUNITY CHURCH?

Bryan Hodge

The community church movement is popular and growing. Community churches or “non-denominational” churches refers to independent local congregations which have no affiliation with the major denominations. Determining exact numbers is difficult. A study released in 2010 by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research reported that there were more than 12 million adherents in the U.S.A. to nondenominational churches.

Some trace the community church to nineteenth century America. “The earliest origins of the community church movement are likely from the nineteenth century and the practical concerns of many small American communities: there was not enough members of individual denominations to each have a congregation, and many times such Protestants would come together to establish a community church of sort” (Community Church Movement, astudyofdenominations.com).

However, a real movement began in the twentieth century. “The community church movement began in the early twentieth century alongside ecumenism and represented an attempt to aspire to the ideal of that movement:

Christians, mostly Protestant and Evangelical, coming out of denominations and being unified in a community church concept” (ibid). The International Council of Community Churches (ICCC) was formed in 1950. Not all community churches are a part of this council.

It is impossible to summarize the beliefs and practices among community churches. Some have ties to major denominations but have replaced denominations names, rebranding themselves. Others have no ties to the major denominations. Some are charismatic. Others are not. Some have traditional denominational worship. Others are very non-traditional.

While many of these churches are self-described as being “non-denominational,” the reality may at times be better described as “all-denominational.” There tends to be de-emphasis on doctrine. “Unity” has priority over doctrine. One source says,

In many cases, these community churches were a true amalgamation of beliefs. In a quest for unity, each group would compromise on some doctrinal or practical point that caused contention with the other group. As a result, many community churches had very loosely defined beliefs and allowed wide variations of beliefs among their members.

Another says, “As denominational particularities are ignored or hidden, what’s often left is a ‘lowest common denominator’ spiritually that is often little more than ‘worship’ and ‘discipleship’ devoid of cognitive content.”

There is sometimes a trend to develop the church around what people want. Before Rick Warren launched Saddleback Church in 1980, he conducted a community survey. He writes, “I wrote down in my notebook five questions I would use to start Saddleback: (1) What do you think is the greatest need in this area? (2) Are you actively attending any church? (3) Why do you think most people didn’t attend church? (4) If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for? (5) What could I do for you?” (Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, chapter 11). While there is nothing wrong with asking questions, let us remember the church belongs to Christ. The first consideration should be on what He wants, not what man wants. Sometimes people want things that are not what they need (Isa. 30:10). Sometimes people want things that are unbiblical (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Sometimes truth offends (John 6:66 – 67; Matt. 15:12-14; Gal. 4:16).

Rick Warren comes from a Baptist background. Saddleback’s beliefs are basically Southern Baptist. He does

not believe that baptism is necessary for salvation, and he believes in eternal security or “once saved, always saved” doctrine. However, the Southern Baptist Convention has recently ousted Saddleback following the ordination of four female pastors. What do you expect when the model seems to be “what do the people want”?

Some community/non-denominational churches are about reaching or appealing to a certain demographic. Therefore, there are cowboy churches, biker churches, etc. While there is nothing wrong with reaching out to a certain demographic (we should be trying to reach all), the church should not be about culture but the gospel. The early church was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. God did not set up a Jewish church and a separate Gentile church. He set up the church. Jews and Gentiles attended together. I have heard some ask concerning a local church: “Is this an old people’s church or a young people’s church?” “Is this a city church or a country church?” “Is this a black church, a brown church, or a white church?” Such thinking is foreign to the scriptures and God’s plan. It comes from man and not God. What we should seek is to be His church, the church of Christ. It should not be our club, but His church. There should not be needless divisions among us over race, age, or culture. In Accra, Ghana there is a Ghana Police Church. What is next, Farmers’ Church, Shepherds’ Church, Bankers’ Church, Accountants’ Church, Teachers’ Church, Retailers’ Church, Oil workers’ Church, Railroad Workers’ Church, Steel Workers’ Church, Tailors’ Church, Cooks’ Church, Artisans’ Church, Rich people’s Church, Poor people’s Church? How many ways can we needlessly divide? Jesus brought together fishermen, a tax collector and even a zealot. The Gospel should draw us together in one body. There is room for all in the church of Christ.

CW

DOES ORGANIZED RELIGION MATTER?

John Haffner

The term “organized religion” leaves a bad taste in the mouth for many people today. Perhaps this stems from the abuses and controversies which have recently plagued many religious groups. More and more people are utilizing the description “spiritual but not religious,” also sometimes known as “spiritual but

not affiliated,” to denote their detachment. I believe this rejection of responsibility and accountability goes too far in many respects. More than just getting out from under manmade labels, conventions, and mother churches, some are advocating a break with all structure or authority, even devaluing what has been prescribed by God in His word.

Organized religion comes from God. To be more precise, not ALL organized religion comes from God, but what God has given His followers is organized religion. Organization is not a negative thing—our God is a God of order (Gen. 1:14-18; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40). Neither is religion a dirty word. In fact, the Bible often contrasts the corrupt religion of man with God’s pure and undefiled religion (Mark 7:1-13; Jas. 1:25-27). The design of the true Christian religion comes from the highest authority. As Jesus carried out the will of the Father, He established His church and provided instruction regarding its structure (Matt. 16:18; John 4:34; 14:26; 16:13). God’s plan for His church, as revealed by the Holy Spirit, details how those who obey the gospel are added by the Lord to His church through His blood (Acts 2:37-38, 47; Col. 1:13-14). The apostles taught about Christ’s configuration for His church, including the roles of elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-12; Tit. 1:5-9). Christ Himself is the head of the church, the Chief Shepherd (Eph. 1:22; Col 1:18; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). God has designed a place for us to serve Him together within the one body (1 Cor. 12:13, 18; Eph. 4:4-6). If that’s not organized religion, what is?

Organized religion gives us accountability. A great change happens when one becomes a Christian. We are no longer strangers who are disconnected from Christ and the body of His followers. We become fellow citizens, as those having a place of belonging, as members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19-20). Members of the church are accountable to one another because we are family (Mark 3:31-35). Could a man be in Christ without a connection to the family of God? Of course not. We are all joined together like stones in a house (1 Cor. 3:9; 1 Pet. 2:5), and a man behaves differently when he realizes he is a part of something greater. God never intended for us to try and navigate our spiritual life alone. In the family of God, we must pray for, about, and with each other (Col. 4:3; Phile. 1:4; Jas. 5:16). What’s more, we can know God wants us “organized” for our own good because He has specifically tasked the elders with watching out for our souls (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17).

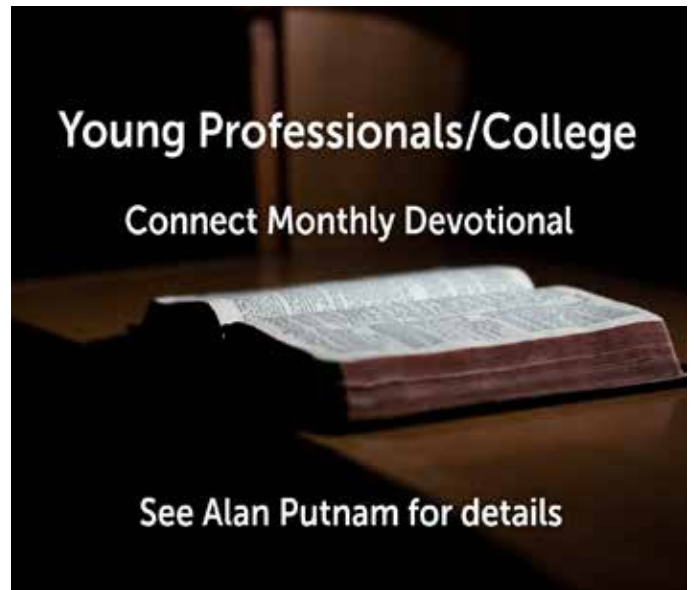
Organized religion gives us support. The wisdom of God’s plan is further seen in the companionship provided to us by the church. Consider Saul’s example after his conversion. He “spent some days” with Christians in

Damascus and when he came to Jerusalem, he immediately tried “to join the disciples” (Acts 9:19, 26). After Barnabas vouched for him, Saul was with the disciples, “coming in and going out” (Acts 9:28). A Christian is not an island, serving in isolation. At least, that is not the prescription of the New Testament. Rather, the saints of God are to be a united holy nation, speaking the same things (1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Pet. 2:9). Christians are joined together within the ranks of God’s spiritual army (Eph. 6:10-20; 2 Tim. 2:1-4). Additionally, Christians provide a pure and unfeigned love, continually demonstrating goodwill (Rom. 12:9-15; 1 Pet. 1:22). Spiritually minded servants reject selfish ambition and conceit in order to provide for the interests of others (Phil. 2:1-4). Sometimes this takes the form of physical, even monetary, support (Acts 4:32; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; Phil. 4:10-11). Sometimes this takes the form of loving spiritual correction (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 1:13-14). The church of Christ upholds us and aids our struggle against sin.

Organized religion gives us purpose. Here we can see some overlap as we must provide to other Christians the same blessings which we receive from the Lord’s church. This is an obligation, but at the same time, a specially planned and privileged function (Eph. 2:10). We help keep other followers of God from being hardened by the lies of Satan (Heb. 3:12-13). We perceive the needs of our church family and through regular interaction we prompt greater devotion and activity in the kingdom (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:24-25). The elders’ role should be considered here as well. Part of our purpose according to God’s arrangement is in honoring and showing that we value our shepherds (1 Thess. 5:11-13). Truly, we have great power to impact the lives of those around us. Christians often think of evangelistic work as “soul-winning,” but we also “save souls” in fulfilling our purpose toward those who are already in Christ (1 Tim. 4:16; Jam. 5:19-20; 1 Pet. 4:8). Our spiritual work needs doing, and we benefit from having an area in which to work.

It is dangerous for members of the church to see themselves as independent Christians who “chart their own course” spiritually speaking. God’s plan for us is higher and nobler. In God’s true religion we are organized as fellow soldiers, laborers, citizens, and heirs. We sacrifice for one another and love each other after Christ’s example (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7). Let us return to the pattern of inspired scripture, avoiding what man has devised and following the authorized arrangement which God has provided for our good.

CW



Does the First Century Church Exist?

Johnie Scaggs

The world we live in is very different from the 1st century. On every side, we are plagued with numerous denominations of every brand. These denominations have significantly impacted the minds of many members of the body of Christ. Through printed pages, television, media, Facebook, etc., they preach their sermons and pollute the minds of the innocent. “The number of denominations varies depending on how they are defined and counted. Some sources estimate more than 200 in the U.S. and 45,000 globally, while others suggest around 30,000 or 40,000.”

With all the confusion, the question is asked, “Does the first century Church exist today?” “Can we find the true church today?” Can we understand the difference between the Lord’s church and denominations? Of course, we can, but only if we go back to the Word of God for our answer. Paul wrote, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). Paul also instructed the brethren in Corinth to “. . .all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Is it possible for all to be perfectly joined together and to all speak the same mind? Yes, absolutely, it is if we use the same guide.

The beauty of the church is that no matter what century one may live in, the church can be found because it is not a building but rather a spiritual body. The plea of the restoration movement was to go back to the Bible and do all things according to the Word of God. In 1809, Thomas Campbell spoke these words, which are still words to live by today. "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." These words are in agreement with the tone of the word of God. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 4:11).

In Matthew the 13th chapter and Luke the 8th chapter, the Lord gives us a parable about a sower who went forth to sow the seed in the ground. There are four different types of ground mentioned in both accounts. The soil in each account refers to the world, the kingdom of men. Luke refers to them as different types of hearts. Three of these hearts were influenced by the devil and worldly things. However, the last heart was a good and honest heart that received what was sowed and produced a hundred-fold. In both accounts, the seed is identified as the word of God. When the word of God is planted in a good and honest heart, it will always produce the same thing every time.

The concept of planting and reaping is a Biblical concept that God often uses when illustrating the kingdom's growth (church). Everyone understands that when you plant a corn seed, that seed will always produce corn. Likewise, when you plant a pea seed, that seed will always produce peas. Corn seeds will never produce peas; likewise, a pea seed will never produce corn. This is true in all reproductive seeds; they will always produce after their own kind. This has been true since the beginning and is still true today. "And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so" (Gen. 1:11).

The Lord promised to build His church in Matthew 16:17-19. We learn later that it was on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) that the church was established, and the first converts were added to the church when they obeyed the gospel call by being baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38; 41:47). When one obeys the gospel of Jesus Christ, they will be raised to walk in a newness of life (Rom. 6:1-5). At this point, the Lord adds the saved person to His church, and each person becomes a Christian, a child of God, and thus entitled to all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). This is the seed

concept, when the gospel of Christ, which is the word of God is planted in the hearts of men and they receive it with joy, the result will always be the same, a child of God will be born and will be added to the New Testament church.

From this point, one begins to build upon the right foundation, and thus the church will be established at any given time and in any given place. Paul wrote, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:10,11). If there is a foundation to build upon, then that implies that there is a structure to build. How do we know how to build the structure? Under an inferior covenant, God commanded Moses to build the temple a certain way.

Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises (Heb. 8:5-6).

If we have received a better covenant, then does it not stand to reason that we should build the church by using the pattern set forth for us in the New Testament? If, under the Old Testament, they could build the tabernacle over in the same manner each time they moved from one place to another, then should we not think we can build the church in the same way wherever we find ourselves by using the pattern found in the New Testament? If I was going to look for the New Testament church today, here are some things I would look for. First, how does one become a member of the New Testament church? Second, How do they worship God? For example, do they believe in partaking in the Lord's Supper each first day of the week? Do they believe in giving on the first day of the week? Do they use mechanical instruments of music, or do they believe in singing without the instruments of music? Do they practice preaching and praying on the first day of the week? (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-29; 1 Cor. 16:1,2; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16,17; Acts 20:7; 1 Tim. 2:8).

Does the church of the first century exist today? Yes, and I am thankful for being a member of the church our Lord promised He would build and did, in fact, build.

CW

Southwest School of Bible Studies 45th Graduation Weekend

Graduation Banquet
Friday, July 7 @ 7:00 pm (\$15/person)

Graduation Sunday
Sunday, July 9
Guest Speaker: Wade Webster

Ryan Brewer
Raoul Ferris
Augie Freiley
Ty McClellen



Curtis Scherffius
Grace Stein
Taylor Stein
Jesse Stewart

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Next, notice the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom of heaven denote the oneness of the church. The church of Christ is the kingdom of heaven. This is evident from Jesus' use of the words in Matthew 16:18-19 when speaking to Peter,

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Notice Jesus promised to build His church and give Peter the keys to open the doors to the kingdom of heaven. Obviously, Jesus is using two descriptive terms to describe the same thing. Now to the Old Testament prophecies concerning the kingdom of heaven.

Notice only one kingdom was prophesied. Isaiah and Micah wrote about the mountain of the Lord's house being established in the last days in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-3 and Mic. 4:1-2). Notice there is only one mountain, and one house. All nations were to flow into it. Daniel also prophesied the kingdom being established in the days of the Roman kings (Daniel 2).

The Old Testament prophets told us the King was coming and He would build His kingdom. Jesus alone has the right

to build the church. He alone is the One Who shed His blood to purchase the church. Notice Paul's statement in Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

Also consider when the church was built. The Old Testament prophesied that the kingdom of God, the church, would be built during the time of the Roman Emperors (Dan. 2:44). Jesus lived and died during the days of the Roman empire. So, we would expect the church Jesus built to be established during those days, which exactly what the Bible teaches.

Notice also where the church was built. Again, the Old Testament prophets predicted that the church would be built in Jerusalem (Isa. 2, Dan. 2, and Joel 2; to name a few). We learn in Acts 2 that that is exactly where the church was established.

With these thoughts clearly established, carefully consider the following chart. Please understand that it is not exhaustive but should be used as a guide to help us find the church Jesus built.

TIME	PLACE	FOUNDER	CHURCH
33 A. D.	Jerusalem	Jesus	Church of Christ
606 A. D.	Rome	Boniface III	Roman Catholic
1520 A. D.	Germany	Martin Luther	Lutheran
1534 A. D.	England	Henry VIII	Episcopalian
1536 A. D.	Switzerland	John Calvin	Presbyterian
1550 A. D.	England	Robert Browne	Congregational
1607 A. D.	Holland	John Smythe	Baptist
1739 A. D.	England	John Wesley	Methodist
1830 A. D.	America	Joseph Smith	Latter Day Saints
1872 A. D.	America	Charles Russell	Jehovah's Witnesses
1906 A. D.	America	Charles Parham	Assemblies of God
1920 A. D.	America	Orvis Jordan	Community Church
1972 A. D.	America	Glenn Smith	Cowboy Church

It should be abundantly clear that of all the major "religious groups" that exist today that we can say without fear or hesitation that they were all built during the wrong time, in the wrong place, by the wrong person, and they carry the wrong name! The only exception to that rule is the church of Christ. Please carefully and prayerfully read your Bible and see if what we have written is not so.

CW



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“To Know Jesus and...make Him known”

From the Director's desk



Trent Kennedy
Assoc. Director
SWSBS

The training at SWSBS begins in the classroom, but our program includes numerous “hands on” opportunities for students to work and serve. This quarter the student body worked with the SW congregation during our annual summer camp at Camp Hensel. The students were counselors, life guards, dish washers, and much more. The camp is a great place to learn some practical lessons about life and ministry.

The second year students, who are just a few weeks from graduating, had the opportunity to visit a local funeral home. While this might not seem like an ideal place for a tour, the funeral home is an important place in the work of a minister. This tour allowed the students to see what goes on and to ask questions of the managers. One of the first places a preacher should visit when he begins a work in a new community is the funeral home. These connections help the preacher minister to families in grief and help provide a source for evangelistic contacts.

A number of our students are engaged in weekly Bible studies with local prospects or new Christians. SWSBS students have shown themselves to be evangelistic which will serve them well through their time at school and long after graduation. A few of our students and family plan to join the American Mission Campaign immediately after graduation weekend to knock doors and study the Scriptures with people in Cleburne, TX.

These practical ministry opportunities and others like them complement the classroom instruction students get while at school. Our program will always be based on what the Scriptures teach because our aim is to know Jesus and make Him known, but we know that preachers must be men of the word AND men who serve others.

www.swcofc.org