

MISSION
TO NORTH
AMERICA

Presbyterian Church in America

Multiply

Profiling God's Great Work in North America

Dear Friends:

When looking at a map of North America, it's quite evident that the strongest presence of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) is in the Southeast and that Mississippi has the greatest PCA concentration within the Southeast. The large number of churches, along with the region being the so-called Bible Belt, might lead us to believe that planting additional churches in the region is not necessary and outreach opportunities are minimal. But as Mississippi Valley Presbytery has demonstrated, even in communities with well-established churches, Gospel ministry is still needed and vital to furthering the Kingdom of God.

This issue of *Multiply* features some of the current outreach efforts of Mississippi Valley Presbytery. Whether through church planting, mercy ministries, or evangelism, PCA believers in Mississippi are reaching out to their neighbors and sharing the truth of Christ's love. The church planters in the area are humbled and overwhelmed by the goodness of God that they have seen at work in their communities, but they know that there is much more that God is calling them to do. As you read this issue, I ask that you join me in faithful prayer and support of the work God is doing in Mississippi.

Mission to North America (MNA) is committed to serving the churches and presbyteries of the PCA not only in Church Planting, but also English as a Second Language (ESL) Ministries, Mercy Ministries, Leadership and Ministry Preparation (LAMP), Revitalization and Evangelism, Capitol Service, and MNA ShortTerm and Disaster Response. Your continued support, both in prayer and financially, is crucial to seeing this work grow and to spreading the good news of the Gospel throughout the United States and Canada. Thank you for being a part of MNA.

In Christ,



Jim Bland, MNA Coordinator



Hunter Brewer (pictured on right with Bill Whitwer) is planting Madison Heights in Mississippi. He lists as one of the most significant challenges for the church a perceived lack of permanency in the community: "We rent space at a school for our worship. We set up and disappear all on a Sunday. We can't put a sign out for the church. This raises suspicion. Many people aren't sure they can trust a group who is here on Sunday and then seemingly gone during the week." One reason for this is the high price of land in the area. But it doesn't deter Hunter from seeing God at work in the community, "When God wants to do something, He does it."

help from Bill. "Two years ago, Bill came back to Mississippi and is now helping me with Madison Heights, offering wise counsel from his many years of experience," Hunter

says. "In fact, two of the several churches supporting Madison Heights were planted by Bill – Pear Orchard and Lakeland." Since their first public worship service in September 2006, Madison Heights has averaged 120 worshippers each week. Hunter credits much of the church's success to Bill. (Continued)

In the Deep South, the Need for Gospel Ministry Still Significant

When Hunter Brewer left law school to pursue a career in the ministry, he thought the next logical step would be to enroll in seminary. But then Hunter met Bill Whitwer. Bill, a seasoned veteran of church planting, was serving as pastor at Hunter's home church in Rainbow City, Alabama. "**Bill suggested I take a few years to get some ministry experience and to confirm my calling,**" Hunter recalls. "I worked for two years with him, and it was during that time that I became hooked on church planting."

Shortly after seminary, Hunter accepted the call to serve as an assistant pastor at Lakeland Presbyterian in Jackson, Mississippi, a church that Bill had planted. He quickly became familiar with the Jackson area and Mississippi Valley Presbytery. "The presbytery had already decided to plant more churches in the Jackson area, and I knew God was calling me to be a part of it."

Lakeland Presbyterian Church



Today Hunter is hard at work planting Madison Heights Presbyterian in Madison County, Mississippi, with





MADCAP – Madison Citizens Against Poverty – is an outreach program in which Madison Heights Presbyterian members participate. Each month, church members collect such items as coats or blankets to hand out in the community. Hunter Brewer says, “I’ve been really impressed with the church’s willingness to serve. They all lead very busy lives with a lot of responsibilities. They are truly being loving neighbors.”

In order to increase outreach to the African American community, Redeemer began broadcasting sermons by Mike Campbell (pictured at right with his wife, Keren) every Saturday morning as part of a radio ministry called “Redeeming Grace.” Redeemer is also involved in providing theological training to future African American leaders in the Jackson area through Tyrannus Hall. This intensive training in reformed theology is led by Elliott Greene of Westminster Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas. Elliott (pictured second from left) travels to Jackson for training sessions once every other month and makes himself available to the students in between his visits.



Bill is a pioneer of church planting, starting his first church in Gadsden, Alabama, in the late 1960s. With 50 years of ministry experience, Bill has spent most of that time in Alabama and Mississippi. “In the late 1970s, I was on staff at First Presbyterian in Jackson and they asked me to plant Pear Orchard, which we did in 1978,” remembers Bill. “I served as pastor there for about 10 years. Then, we planted Lakeland in the late 1980s, and now I’m helping Hunter with Madison Heights.”

Through the years Bill has seen many changes in the churches and in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). “In 1973, I was working at First Presbyterian Church in Gadsden. At that time, the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) was experiencing conflict among its members, specifically regarding key theological points and the training of our future leaders. *During that time leaders in Mississippi Valley Presbytery played a vital role in holding true to Scripture and, in the end, the forming of the PCA.*”

Since that time, the churches of Mississippi Valley Presbytery have continued to be instrumental in the growth of the PCA throughout North America and throughout the world. However, Jeff Elliott, associate pastor at Pear Orchard and MNA chairman for the presbytery, cautions that even though the presbytery is well-established and there are many PCA churches in the area, Gospel outreach is far from over. *“Even with 50 PCA churches in central Mississippi, still only four people out of ten in the general population have any significant church connection,” he says. “The number of people really tied in to a church – any church – is low.”*

By 2003 Trinity Presbyterian had outgrown its facilities in north Jackson and after much prayer and consideration decided to move to another building in a different neighborhood. But the church had been ministering among African American families in the area for years, and some had begun to join the church; a group of Trinity members wanted to continue this outreach in the community. The group that continued to worship and serve in the original Trinity Church facility started Redeemer Church and in 2004 called African American Pastor Mike Campbell to lead the congregation.



Trinity Presbyterian Church

“Our community of Broadmoor/Broadmeadow is roughly 65 percent African American, 30 percent Caucasian, and five percent Hispanic and Asian,” Mike explains. “This neighborhood is very diverse and very eclectic socio-economically – with people of affluence and people living in poverty just a few blocks from each other. *Our goal is to embrace all who believe in Christ regardless of ethnicity or economic level. We are dedicated to being a multi-ethnic congregation while remaining true to the reformed faith.*”

“The last census we have shows that about 70 percent of the city of Jackson is African American,” Jeff reports. “But we are also seeing our Hispanic population increase fairly rapidly. *The Lord is bringing the nations to our door just like He is doing everywhere.*”

At Pear Orchard, the need to address this growing diversity has led to a fruitful English as a Second Language (ESL) Ministry. Mary Jane Kimball, ESL director at the church, says: “When we started, our vision was to reach the internationals in our area, which included individuals from a host of countries such as Mexico, Honduras, Argentina, Guatemala, Peru, China, Korea, and Malaysia. Since we started in 2003, we’ve had a total of 32 different countries and eight different language groups represented. Currently, we are averaging 30-40 adults per week in three different classes.”



Pear Orchard builds strong relationships with the many people groups in the area through ESL classes. Church members Joel and Sasha Clarke also uncovered another international ministry need one day while eating at McDonald's. “A company arranged for Russian students to come to the US to work in this restaurant and visit the country,” explains Joel. “It turned out that the arrangement was a disaster and that many of the students had no money to buy the everyday essentials.” The Clarks enlisted the help of church members and were able to provide the students with the basic necessities, as well as fellowship.



First Presbyterian of Jackson participates in several community ministries, including a ministry to internationals in the area and the Neighborhood Christian Center, which provides spiritual and practical support in a low income African American community. The church also hosts the Twin Lakes Fellowship, a resource for church planting and theological training.

First Presbyterian of Jackson ministers to the international population in its community through conversational English classes and relationship building, led by Steve Edwards, a church elder, and his wife, Kathryn. In their weekly meetings, church volunteers who work one-on-one with participants on language needs also speak on various topics. The group is predominately Asian and includes professionals and graduate students. Jim Stewart is missions pastor at the church. Having spent time serving the Lord in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, his familiarity with the Chinese language is a significant help.

Gospel ministry outreach is happening in Mississippi Valley smaller cities and rural areas. One such effort is taking place in Yazoo City at the Federal Prison. Joe Easterling, pastor of First Church, has been ministering at the prison for almost four years. “There are about 4,000 inmates at this facility. *Our goal is to introduce and encourage these men in Christ, and our message is clear: only the Gospel rebuilds and rehabilitates a human life.* I see men hungry for the Gospel and I see men living out their faith in some of the most powerful ways behind bars.” Bill and Joyce Couch, members of First Presbyterian, serve alongside Joe at the prison through discipleship, preaching, teaching, and music. Church and prison ministry are tied together by Federal Prison Chaplain Juan Alba, a Reformed Seminary graduate.



Madison Heights is in an area of Jackson that was once considered rural but in the last several years has seen incredible growth. “This growth has been fueled by two things,” explains Hunter. “First, the natural expansion of Jackson as a metropolitan area, and second, the addition of the Nissan plant, one of the nation’s largest automobile factories.” Jeff says, “When we heard about the Nissan plant being built and considered the implications for the area’s population, we knew we needed a church there.”

Joe Easterling counts himself blessed to be able to work in the Prison Ministry in Yazoo City. He describes Bill and Joyce Couch, a couple deeply committed to the ministry, as “faithful and practical.” He says the love, care, and encouragement the couple gives to the inmates offers them incredible hope. From left to right: Joe, Bill, Joyce, and Juan Alba.



Three churches in the Jackson area – Pear Orchard, Lakeland, and Highlands – offered considerable support in getting Madison Heights off the ground, and Hunter affirms that the assistance he has received from these churches is invaluable. “These churches were all planted by First Presbyterian (Highlands was established in 1993), and now they are coming together to help us plant Madison Heights. We have elders from all three churches overseeing our church, and we are able to glean information from each church.”

Left: First Presbyterian of Jackson works jointly with Christ United Methodist on Habitat for Humanity projects. This house was built for a single mother and her two daughters. The family had been living with other family members, often sharing two twin beds between the three of them. First Presbyterian deacon Glen Bush (second from left) heads up the program.

(Continued)



Joseph Wheat, above left, leads Highlands Presbyterian. Highlands is one of the three daughter churches of Jackson's First Church who sent families and are financially supporting Madison Heights Presbyterian.

Carthage Presbyterian, with support from the presbytery and other PCA churches in the area, organizes ministry efforts to the Choctaw Indian Reservation. Ken Roberts, an RTS student, who leads Bible studies and worship services on the reservation, has more than 10 years experience working with the Navajo Tribe in Arizona. Ken is pictured standing, second from left.

"Madison Heights is an incredible example of seeing God at work through His churches," says Bill. "It's hard to start a church from scratch. When you have these established churches sending out people to start a new church, that makes it so much easier." In addition to this participation from the established churches, one of the strengths of Madison Heights is that it is starting with a sizeable group of people who were not active in other churches.

Jeff explains that as the Jackson metro area continues to spread out into the suburbs, more churches will be needed. "We are continuing to look at new opportunities in both growing and established neighborhoods for future churches." Hunter hopes that when the time comes, Madison Heights will be ready to be a part of sending support for a new church. ***"Our church needs to be in the position to help start these new churches. My view is that we'll only stop planting churches when Christ comes."*** ■



When Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Region, Brandon Presbyterian in Brandon, Mississippi, served as the base for MNA relief operations, and Women in the Church members provided the coordination and scheduling of the volunteer teams. Ongoing relief work and future planning is headed by Paul Adams, an elder at North Park Presbyterian in Jackson (pictured on right), and Tim Muse, pastor of Brandon. Also pictured here: Dean Rydbeck (left), pastor of North Park, and M.S. Bennett, an elder at North Park.

MNA MINISTRY LINK

Multi-Site Church Conference, cosponsored by MNA and Harbor Presbyterian Church; March 13 - 14 in San Diego, California.

Stay connected with the latest ministry news from MNA at www.pca-mna.org.

Enriching the Kingdom:



2007 Mercy Ministries Conference

This year's Mercy Ministries Conference is April 20-22 in Atlanta, Georgia. Sponsored by Christian Education & Publications and MNA, this conference will feature speakers Phil Ryken, Diane Langberg, March and Mariam Bell, Randy Nabors, Amy Sherman, Steve Corbett, and others. Topics will include prison ministry, justice and mercy, economic development in communities of need, and ministering to those facing crisis in marriage and other family relationships. ***For more information, contact Loren Easterling at 678-825-1132 or training@pcanet.org, or visit www.pca-mna.org.***

Hurricane Katrina Rebuilding Continues!

MNA ShortTerm and Disaster Response continues to coordinate volunteer teams, rebuilding homes in the Gulf region. While life goes on normally across the nation, thousands of families still live in FEMA trailers and even in tents in that region. In addition, MNA continues to plan for future disasters. ***Regional training events will be offered through April 2007.*** To sign up for work in the Gulf region, or to prepare for future events, go to www.pca-mna.org for more information.

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For a list of MNA staff, visit our Web site: www.pca-mna.org.

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