



545 Commerce Ave NW
Warren, OH 44485
330-775-3401
www.ohiosvba.org

the Steel Valley Baptist Association COMMUNICATOR

January, 2023

Sandra Parks
Secretary, Treasurer
sandra@ohiosvba.org

Gary Frost, 917-817-6287
Associational Missionary
gary@ohiosvba.org

Theme for 2022: Advancing The Kingdom ... One Soul at a Time

The Thrill of Orthodoxy



Trevin Wax

Why do we so easily lose our wonder at truths that have informed and inspired Christians for generations? How is it we find ourselves no longer wowed by old truths? Why are we drawn toward theological error? To better understand our susceptibility to this spiritual malaise, we should take a closer look at our context, to see the forces at work—in our world, in our churches, and in us—that diminish our devotion.

Cultural Chaos

We begin with the anxiety and unsettledness of these chaotic times, a result of political polarization, technological advances, and worldwide disasters. We are inundated by information (and disinformation), flooded by various views and opinions ranging from the absurd to the abstract, which make it difficult to discover what sources are credible. Anyone can grab a megaphone and shout down those who would deviate even slightly from whatever new orthodoxy unites a particular community or political party. We don't know who we can trust.

For Christians, this sense of disorientation is magnified by the shifting moral landscape. No longer can we expect religiosity to be respectable. Long-held beliefs and values drawn from Christian doctrine are now "extreme." Assumptions shared by

see Orthodoxy, next page

Exec Board Meeting

Our next Executive Board Meeting will be held at Cornersburg Baptist Church, Monday, January 9, with dinner beginning at 6 PM and the meeting beginning at 7 PM.

A key topic for the meeting will regard the future of the Tod Avenue property. A buyer for the property and the building has submitted an offer to purchase. Related matters will be voted on for our association to move forward and advance God's kingdom.



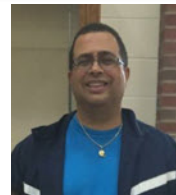
Between 6:45 and 7:00 PM an additional treat will be provided. The women at Cornersburg would like to share some of the ministries they are doing and hope it will incite even more energy in other churches to use the gifts and talents God has given us.

Association Music

We hope to see all of you at the next quarterly MusicFest. It is always the 5th Sunday of the month, the next one being Jan 29. The location is the new gathering place for Unity Baptist Church, 531 Neoka Drive, Campbell OH 44405, where Rafael Cruz is pastor.

Missions & Ministry

Luke 19:41 *As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it*



Rafael Cruz Jr

As we see depravity not only increasing but increasing because it is promoted even in the schools, we know the lost are falling to a new depth of lostness. And, as believers, we know the end of their story if they don't repent. We also know they are empty, lost, hurting, angry and self-destructive. Many are hurting the ones they love, and they hate themselves even more because of it. They are hopeless and miserable because they don't know the One who loves them with an everlasting love.

In the same way that Jesus wept over the lostness and upcoming time of suffering of the people of Jerusalem, the lost condition of the souls of people around us should cause us to painfully grieve for them. It should cause us to desperately desire to do whatever it takes to introduce Jesus to them hoping that they might be saved from God's wrath and experience God's love, mercy and grace. Jesus came into this world out of His immense love for us that is so pure that He was willing to sacrifice everything so that we might be saved.

see M&M, next page

Orthodoxy, from previous page

nearly everyone a few decades ago are suddenly beyond the pale. As fewer and fewer people identify with a religious tradition, those who adhere today to institutional forms of religion fall further outside the mainstream.

In generations past, respectable religiosity and cultural Christianity presented their own set of challenges to true faith and practice. The way of Christ is never easy, and believers in every era are prone to forget their first love (Revelation 2:4). In our era, the danger of abandoning our first love manifests itself through the pressures of a society where Christianity is not the norm, and common Christian beliefs and morals no longer seem plausible. In the midst of constant flux, “stability” is now regarded with suspicion. Like everything else, faith is caught up in the whirlwind of change.

Church Confusion

Meanwhile, many churches are in a stupor—bewilderment drains the energy of the believers who attend. Congregations and denominations are embroiled in conflicts that resemble the world of hardball politics. Widespread disillusionment has settled into the church following the scourge of sex abuse scandals, abusive leadership patterns, and institutional coverups of atrocities committed by some of the world’s most trusted and admired faith leaders.

Hypocrisy has bolstered the anti-institutional sentiments of many toward the church, leading to an explosion of new religious options and narrowly tailored spiritual experiences.

In response, some Christians call for the updating and improvement of the faith for a modern era. Others disavow aspects of historic Christianity but try to hold on to a few preferable parts. Several high-profile leaders have renounced the faith altogether. Meanwhile, large swaths of once-faithful churchgoers have quietly closed the door and just slipped away.

Christian Complacency

What happens to those who are

left, the rank-and-file Christians who love their families and cherish their churches? In every generation, we face the danger of longing for the past while fearing the future. And this mix of nostalgia and fear leads us into a state of complacency—a mission-less faith. We file in and out of the sanctuary week after week, content to recite the same words with our lips, but our hearts remain unstirred by the truths we confess and we are less likely to invite others to believe the good news.

Complacent Christianity causes compartmentalization—a convenient separation of Christian truth from the beliefs that frame our day-to-day activities.

Christianity becomes just one aspect of a busy life. What we believe, we’re told, isn’t as important as how we live. And even then, it’s fine if our life choices don’t line up with Christian teaching as long as our faith helps us be true to ourselves and keeps us from hurting anyone.

What’s missing from this scenario is any sense of Christianity as a mission that requires obedience to a King, a rollicking adventure that brings us face to face with opposition, as we proclaim something bigger and more satisfying than personal preference. Christianity’s call to costly obedience may not appear on the surface as heroic or radical—we may experience seasons of stress as we struggle to raise our kids, clock in and out of an unfulfilling job, and do our best to serve the believers in a church filled with problems—but we must remember that the pathway of repentance and faith imbues even the smallest acts of self-sacrifice with eternal significance. The mission remains, and it stands in contrast to a complacent Christianity that would domesticate the faith and dampen its revolutionary passion. In countless ways that may not seem obvious to us or others, we are to rebel against the rebellion of a fallen world and witness to the rule of the risen Jesus over the universe.

The Diagnosis

I’m convinced that one of the primary causes of this spiritual malaise is our loss of confidence in the truth and

goodness of the Christian faith. In every generation, we risk losing our wonder at the glory of Christian truth and the enduring witness of the church. Amid chaos and confusion, we can easily turn our focus on ourselves and, as a result, forget God. It’s as if we have inherited a vast estate—sprawling grounds surrounding beautiful buildings filled with priceless heirlooms—but we stay cooped up in a broom closet, complacent and bored, with no desire to explore all that we’ve been given in Christ.

We’ve been here before. Chaos and confusion are not new. Every generation faces these challenges, for different reasons. The key to renewal is not to do away with the aspects of Christianity we find unsettling in our time. (After all, if Christianity is true, we ought to expect every culture to come into conflict with its claims at some point or another.) Neither should we ignore new challenges and wave away hard questions about what we believe and why.

No, the key to renewal is to return to the only truth that is reliable and sturdy when so much in the world seems fleeting and faddish: the gospel of God delivered once for all to the saints. The gospel is the royal announcement that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived a perfect life in our place, died a substitutionary death on the cross for our sins, rose triumphantly from the grave to launch God’s new creation, and is now exalted as King of the world. This announcement calls for a response: repentance (mourning over and turning from our sin, trading our agendas for the kingdom agenda of Jesus Christ) and faith (trusting in Christ alone for salvation by the power of the Spirit). The way forward is to reach back, to find renewal in something old—foundational truths tested by time, a fount of goodness that refreshes and satisfies, long-forgotten beauty from the past that lifts our eyes above the suffering and sorrow of the present.

What the church needs today is to recapture the thrill of orthodoxy.

M&M, from previous page

We are called to have His heart of love and desperation for the souls of the lost. We are called to be His witnesses. We are called to love with the purity of His love for them. We are called to be willing to make any sacrifice, to do whatever it takes, to fight the good fight for the souls that are currently destined for eternal damnation.

Let 2023 be the year when we are faithful to be the Jesus the world needs to know. May 2023 be the year when the Church rises up in battle for the lost souls and see a great harvest for Jesus as we draw closer to the return of our Lord. May 2023 be a year of significant victory for the Church's work of evangelism in reaching the lost in Jesus's name!

There are a few things your church can do to prepare to reach out to your community:

1. Make plans to do outreach. If you don't commit to doing it and make the plans to do it, you won't do it.
2. Start praying for the lost on a regular basis and challenge your congregation to passionately do so in their daily prayers.
3. Set dates to go prayer walking – praying as you walk the streets and then knocking on doors and offering prayers to the local residents.
4. Set a date to have an outreach event. Ask for help if you need it.
5. Get commitments from members

who will volunteer to serve in doing outreach. Pray over every volunteer as they make their commitment to serve.

6. Bathe the work of outreach in prayer. Every person, even those who hand out hotdogs, need to be spiritually prepared.
7. Follow up with those who come to Christ or ask for prayer at the event. Get their contact information if they are willing to give it. Don't be pushy if they do not.

If you would like help in planning and training your church for the event, please call me. I would love to help you out.

We would love to establish a team that will be willing to help churches in doing their outreach ministry. Please present the need to your church. I will set up a date and time to meet with all volunteers and train them to be outreach specialists.

Let me know what dates you need the association block party trailer so I can add them to my calendar. 2023 is completely open at this time. It's \$75 to use the trailer plus a \$25 deposit. This helps to replenish supplies.

Let's make 2023 a year of faithfulness to the gospel and victory in sharing Jesus with those who desperately need Him!

God bless you,
Rafael Cruz Jr., (330) 507-0117
Missions and Ministry Team Leader

O.N.E. School Spring Semester

God wants everyone to be mature, *accurately handling the word of truth* (2 Tim 2:15). Therefore, the next class to be offered will be "How to Interpret the Bible Accurately." As of now the class starts in less than two weeks, Jan. 17. It will be held every Tuesday from 6 to 9 PM and will continue 15 weeks (with a week off for the Easter break).

No class that we offer presents resources like this class. It will not give you all the answers to questions about the Bible, but it will provide a vast supply of resources so that your study time diminishes greatly and increases accuracy. One of the many benefits from this class is speeding up the time while studying—knowing how to target the most important matters related to the text.

Assis't Editor Position

Would you like to serve as an assistant editor of a newsletter? Would you like to be trained in desktop publishing? Then contact Randy Langham at 330-398-2455.

Finances for the Year

Budget for year 2022: \$66,938.00
Spent during the year: \$58,546.65
Income for the year: \$49,323.23

Confronting Abuse, Making Church Safe

The SCBO, First Baptist Church of Garrettsville, and the Renaissance Family Center, 9005 Wilverne Drive, Windham, Ohio are teaming up to present Confronting Abuse, Making Church Safe, March 4th, 9 AM to 3 PM.

An exciting conference will be held at the Renaissance Family Center in Windham, Ohio. Participants will learn ways to protect their members, the general public, and their organizations from the scourge of abuse. The State Convention has produced several sug-

gestions and recommendations to help churches and organizations create policies related to abuse.

Greg Wilson, co-author of the book *When Home Hurts: A Guide For Responding Wisely To Domestic Abuse In Your Church*, will lead us in identifying and understanding abuse in its many forms. He along with Attorney Tommie Jo Brode will help attendees create sound policy to help keep individuals and churches safe.

We never know when the problem of abuse will rear its ugly head and we must be prepared or suffer the consequences which can include harm to those we are to love and protect and damage to the reputation of our churches in the community.

The conference is free but registration is required. To register go to <https://scbo.org/satf> or call 330-326-3003. Lunch will be provided and an offering will be received but not required for Renaissance Family Center.