



Brethren in Christ U.S.

# ANNUAL 2018 REPORT

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Lexington, Ky. (p. 4)**

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# to know, love, & follow Jesus

General Assembly 2018

July 13-16, 2018

More than 580 people congregated in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, for General Assembly 2018.

For nearly 150 years, we have gathered at General Assembly. Core to our heritage is *covenant community*: the belief that ministry is not realized in isolation. Rather, in the Brethren in Christ family, we value interpreting Scripture and discerning God's calling collectively.

**Simply put, we follow Jesus together.**



## DEAR FRIENDS,

What has God given to us?

*His son, life eternal, salvation, a beautiful world?*

These are good and true responses. Along with many gifts, however, God has also entrusted us with *weighty, significant responsibilities*.

The apostle Paul tells us that God, having reconciled us to himself through Christ, has given us the *ministry and message of reconciliation* (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

For more than 240 years, the Brethren in Christ have taken seriously being people to whom God has committed the ministry and message of reconciliation. The story of our denominational family combines the *quest for piety* with the *desire for obedience* to carry out this dual mission. Those who have run the race before us have become part of the great cloud of witnesses cheering us on as we carry the baton of reconciliation in a sinful and divided world (Hebrews 12:1).

During 2018 the Brethren in Christ U.S. continued the ministry and proclaimed the message of reconciliation. The *2018 Annual Report* cannot possibly highlight all the ministry fulfilled through congregations across the country and missions around the world. However, the report does highlight aspects of our story during the last 12 months.

Be encouraged as you read about leaders serving incarnationally among the communities of Lexington, Kentucky, and Okeechobee, Florida. Be encouraged as you learn from the groundbreaking mission of Christian apologist and polemicist Jay Smith. Be encouraged as you hear of World Missions ministry initiated by missionaries and global partners, many of whom are brothers and sisters from the Brethren in Christ national churches in countries throughout the world.

But in addition to being encouraged, *be challenged!* Be challenged to faithfully receive and carry what God has given us — the ministry and message of reconciliation.

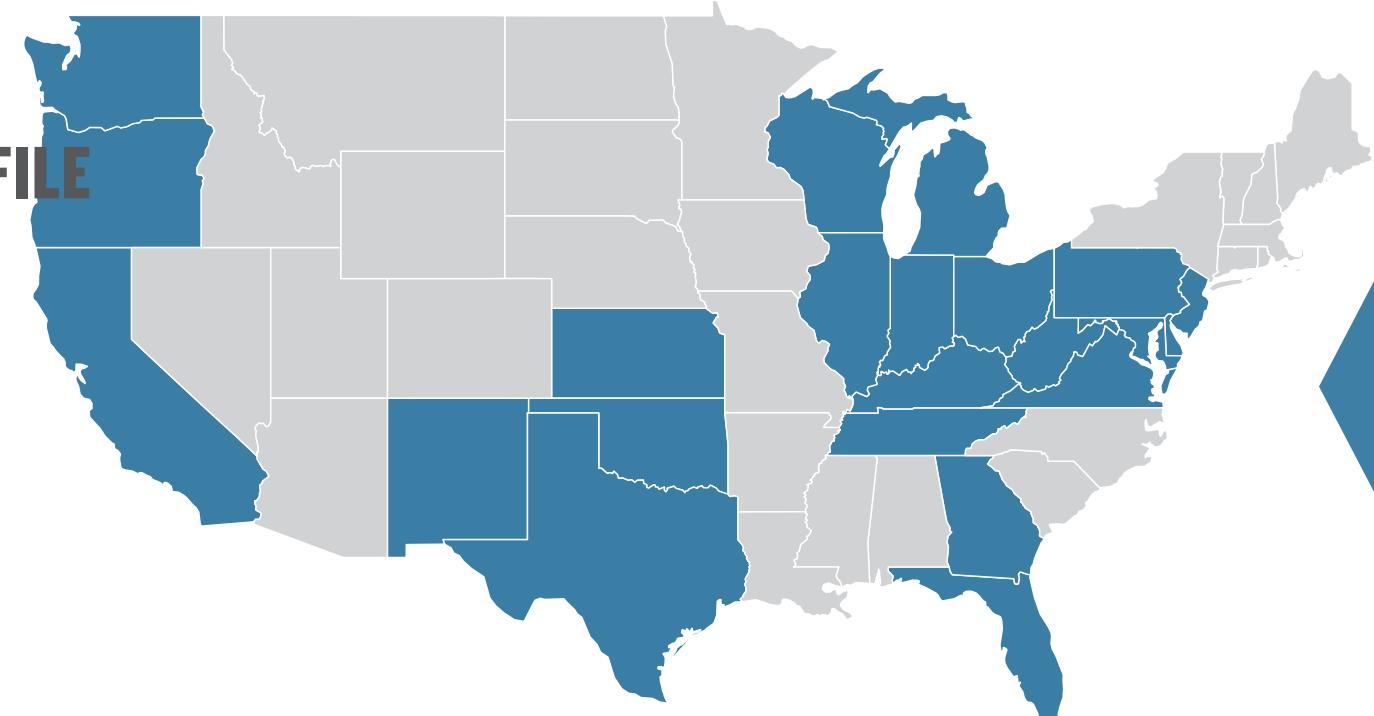
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robinson".

Alan Robinson  
National Director  
Brethren in Christ U.S.

**COVER ART** by Dana Wolford, Plowshares BIC (page 6). Plowshares BIC often gathers in the Plantory, a coworking space for businesses and nonprofits. Dana's artwork is displayed in the space — inviting the community to enter into worship.



**2018  
PROFILE**



# 27,330 WORSHIPPERS

average weekly attendance

# 1,509 PEOPLE

began or renewed  
relationships with Jesus

Number based on 92% of congregational sites reporting

## 261 CONGREGATIONAL SITES

## 22 STATES & 1 U.S. TERRITORY

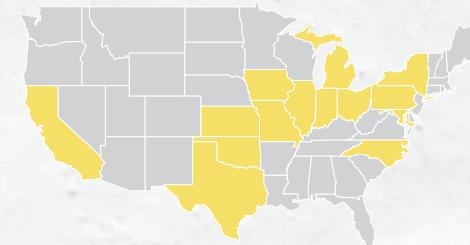
## A GROWING CHURCH: Church Planting in Our History

1880



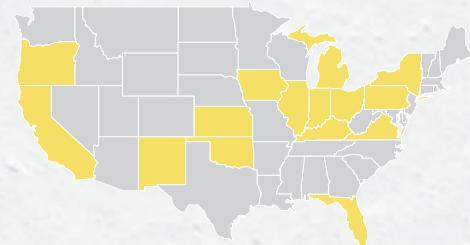
MEMBERSHIP: 1,663  
HOUSEHOLDS: 718\*

1910



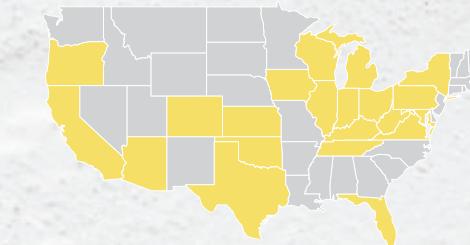
MEMBERSHIP: 3,397  
SITES: 73

1950



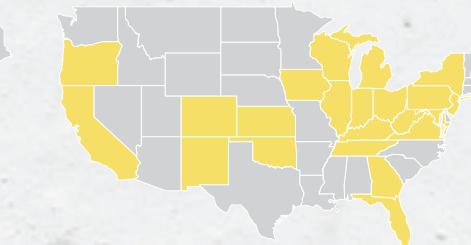
MEMBERSHIP: 5,837  
SITES: 103

1975



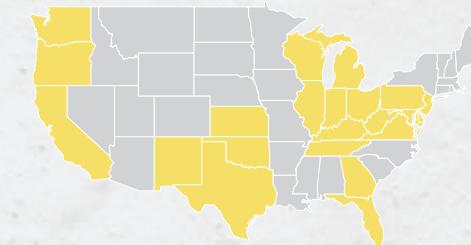
MEMBERSHIP: 10,784  
ATTENDANCE: 15,715  
SITES: 156

2000



MEMBERSHIP: 20,587  
ATTENDANCE: 23,961  
SITES: 215

2017



MEMBERSHIP: 22,982  
ATTENDANCE: 28,642  
SITES: 262

**1780-1880** Influenced by revivals of the 18th century Great Awakening, families from several religious groups in Central Pennsylvania — primarily Mennonites — begin planting churches emphasizing spiritual rebirth in Jesus Christ. Over the next 100 years, the Brethren, as they call themselves, expand West in search of farmland.

**Did you know?** "Brethren in Christ" becomes our official name during the Civil War, when the denomination registers as a nonresistant organization.

**1880-1910** In 1879, about 300 settlers colonize Kansas. Over the next 30 years, the Midwest Brethren marry a heart for evangelism with a pioneering spirit: Their innovations — such as starting revivals and Sunday schools — sharpen the denomination's focus on evangelism, leading to the birth of U.S. and international missions.

**Did you know?** Facing many hardships, the Oklahoma Brethren first live in primitive dugouts, as well as sod houses and brush arbors.

**1910-1950** Gaining momentum abroad, missions also flourish at home: Gutsy families pioneer ministry in rural and urban outposts designated as missions, from which congregations often multiply. By 1950, the Brethren in Christ have 43 rural and 14 city missions in North America.

**Did you know?** Sunday school enrollment (13,322) is more than double congregational membership in 1950.

**1950-1975** Amid rising youth attrition rates, leaders meet at the National Association of Evangelicals convention in 1950. Gathering in their hotel, they confess the denomination, bound by legalism, has lost sight of the gospel's core message: grace. The meeting opens the way for the Church to engage culture, catalyzing growth.

**Did you know?** Within this time span, congregational sites increase more than 50 percent.

**1975-2000** From a familial fraternity of congregations, the Brethren in Christ matures into a nationally recognized denomination. Energized by the denominational growth of the preceding 25 years, Brethren in Christ leaders and laypeople welcome many new individuals and families.

**Did you know?** One regional conference begins a campaign to start 10 churches in 10 years. Three of the 10 congregations planted between 1976-1984 still exist today.

**2000-2017** A movement ignites among a cluster of Spanish-speaking congregations in the Miami metropolitan area, following years of setbacks and modest expansion. Through planting and adopting new congregations, they now represent a fifth of all BIC U.S. congregations.

**Did you know?** The Greater Miami Area congregations have also adopted and planted about 50 congregations in Latin America, which equals their U.S. congregational presence.



#### 2018 Church Plant Statistics

**26 CHURCH PLANTS**  
supported financially

**\$174,000 DISTRIBUTED**  
for BIC U.S. church multiplication



## PASTOR PROFILE: LUKE EMBREE

Founding & Lead Pastor, Plowshares BIC (Lexington, Kentucky)

**Hitchhiking across the United States** at 18, Luke posed a question to the Creator of the universe.

He had been about to head West on Route 50 — the highway slicing America’s midsection — when he’d been struck by the majesty of the Appalachian Mountains. The beauty of the created world pointed to a Creator.

*“God, I know you exist,”* Luke prayed for the first time in years. *“But I want to know your name.”*

That afternoon, a driver in a Volkswagen van, a Christian, pulled up beside him. He offered Luke a ride, then a temporary place to stay.

While living there, Luke encountered a Presence who addressed him personally: “Luke, this is God, and my name is Jesus Christ.

“You don’t have to follow me. But you can never again say you don’t know my name.”

**Since then, Luke says he has been captivated by the God who was willing to engage his questions.**

“The most profound mystery that I’ve found in Scripture is the incarnation, that a holy, magnificent God became human and identified with us,” said Luke.

“That’s the core driver of our ministry: Jesus became one of us, so we can identify with others.”

In 2017, Luke and his wife, Christina, founded Plowshares Brethren in Christ, Lexington, Kentucky — *which centers itself in Christ’s ministry of incarnation.* Plowshares meets people in the places they live, work, and play — in office buildings, homes, and parks. They also worship within life’s weekly rhythms: over dinner, lunch breaks, weeknights.

They can follow the cadences of daily life because their congregational model is elastic. Plowshares comprises four community groups of 6-15 people. Each community group ministers within a geographic neighborhood.

**By practicing church more fluidly, Plowshares engages the growing percentage of individuals and families who would never step inside a traditional church.**

#### A Church for the Unchurched

Between 2007-2013, the percentage of U.S. individuals identifying as having no religious affiliation increased from 16 to 23 percent. The percentage is even higher among millennials (about 35 percent).<sup>1</sup>

“We recognize fewer and fewer people are going to church,” said Luke. “It’s time for the church to go to the people.”

On Fridays and Sundays, one Plowshares community group meets at the Plantory. Housed in a former Wonderbread Factory, the Plantory is a coworking space for businesses and nonprofits.

People from the work collective, representing a range of faith and non-faith backgrounds, often join Plowshares.

“Welcome to ministry in the 21st century,” said Luke. “We are explicitly Christian, and the individuals joining us are just thrilled that Jesus would come to where they are.”

Often, following their gatherings, these individuals will ask to sit down with Luke over coffee, curious to learn more about the God interested in inhabiting their workspace. Luke loves to engage them, knowing the God who met him on the road years ago also desires to respond to their questions.

1. Michael Lipka, “A closer look at America’s rapidly growing religious ‘nones,’” Pew Research Center, May 13, 2015, [pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones](http://pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones).



## FROM THE AMAZON TO OKEECHOBEE: THE CALLING OF MISUEL AND YANET LOPEZ

Ministering among the Migrant Community, Okeechobee, Florida

**Set to fly to the Amazon** as missionaries, Misael and Yanet Lopez received unexpected news.

Yanet was pregnant.

For 12 years, they had prayed for a child. During years of waiting, soul-searching, and heartache, God had begun reorienting their lives. Always involved in serving their church, Iglesia Rescate, Hialeah, Florida, they began to sense a full-time ministry calling.

*In 2015, they rented out their house, quit their jobs, and decided to buy one-way plane tickets to Ecuador — intending to serve in the Amazon rainforests.*

"I was training my work replacement when I learned I was pregnant," said Yanet.

With the news of the pregnancy, the couple halted their plans, devoting the months waiting for the baby's arrival to prayer. **They sensed God had prompted them to sell their possessions — and upend their lives — for a specific ministry.**

### Plea for a Spanish-Speaking Congregation, Central Florida

Northwest of the Greater Miami Area, Lake Okeechobee lies at the center of Florida's finest farmland. Harvesting the region's crops — from sugarcane to oranges — is a primarily Spanish-speaking migrant population.

Few churches serve this vulnerable community.

One Monday in 2016, an English-speaking congregation from Okeechobee — a city along the lake — met to pray. They asked God to plant a Spanish-speaking congregation among the seasonal workers there.

The next day, they received an email from Misael.

Iglesia Rescate had commissioned him to gauge the need for planting Spanish-speaking churches in Okeechobee, as the congregation had just bought a large ranch in the vicinity.

The following week, the pastor of the English-speaking church met with Misael. "We've been praying for you to come," he said simply.

*At the 40-acre ranch in Okeechobee, Florida, the Lopezes supervise several ministries and live with their daughter, Abby, and foster son, Noah.*

In the subsequent months, Pastor David Monduy of Iglesia Rescate agreed to launch a congregation among the underserved community.

As they prayed, the Lopezes felt personally called to start the congregation.

Meanwhile, the church board hired the Lopezes to supervise the ranch in Okeechobee, newly purchased with a loan from the BIC Foundation. The ranch would house two ministries: the church's recovery program for men with addictions and a Christian retreat center.

Late summer 2016, Abby was born, to the joy of her parents. The next spring, the Lopez family uprooted their lives to Okeechobee.

### Serving among the Immigrant Population, Okeechobee

If you drive up to the ranch in Okeechobee, you'll discover a vast rural setting — ideal for seeking solitude, spiritual renewal. The Lopezes opened Rescate Retreat Center this past July. The retreat center is staffed by men participating in Casa Rescate, the only exclusively Spanish-speaking recovery program in the region.

On Sunday afternoons, Spanish speakers from around the area, primarily seasonal workers, gather for worship. But the heart of the Lopezes' church plant, Iglesia Rescate Okeechobee, is on weekdays.

*Church* for the Lopezes has become entering the realities of the immigrant community: They teach English classes, minister at hospitals, jails, and detention centers. In the area, Misael is also the established minister presiding over funerals in Spanish.

Their ministry is an outflow of their growth over the last decade. While praying for Abby, they said they began to encounter the Lord in a new way.

"Yes, God answered our prayer with Abby," Misael said. "*But during those years, we learned to fall in love with him.*"

Experiencing the generosity of God's love themselves has prompted them to offer it lavishly to their community.

# 74 GLOBAL WORKERS

including BIC U.S. employees and partners

## 22 COUNTRIES



In northeastern Thailand, a dedicated team of World Missions and Thai church planters are pioneering a house church planting ministry among the Isaan people. An unreached people group, fewer than 1 percent of the 18 million Isaan people profess a relationship with Jesus.

Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Luke 10:2). Approximately 360 more global workers are needed for the gospel to fully penetrate the Isaan community.



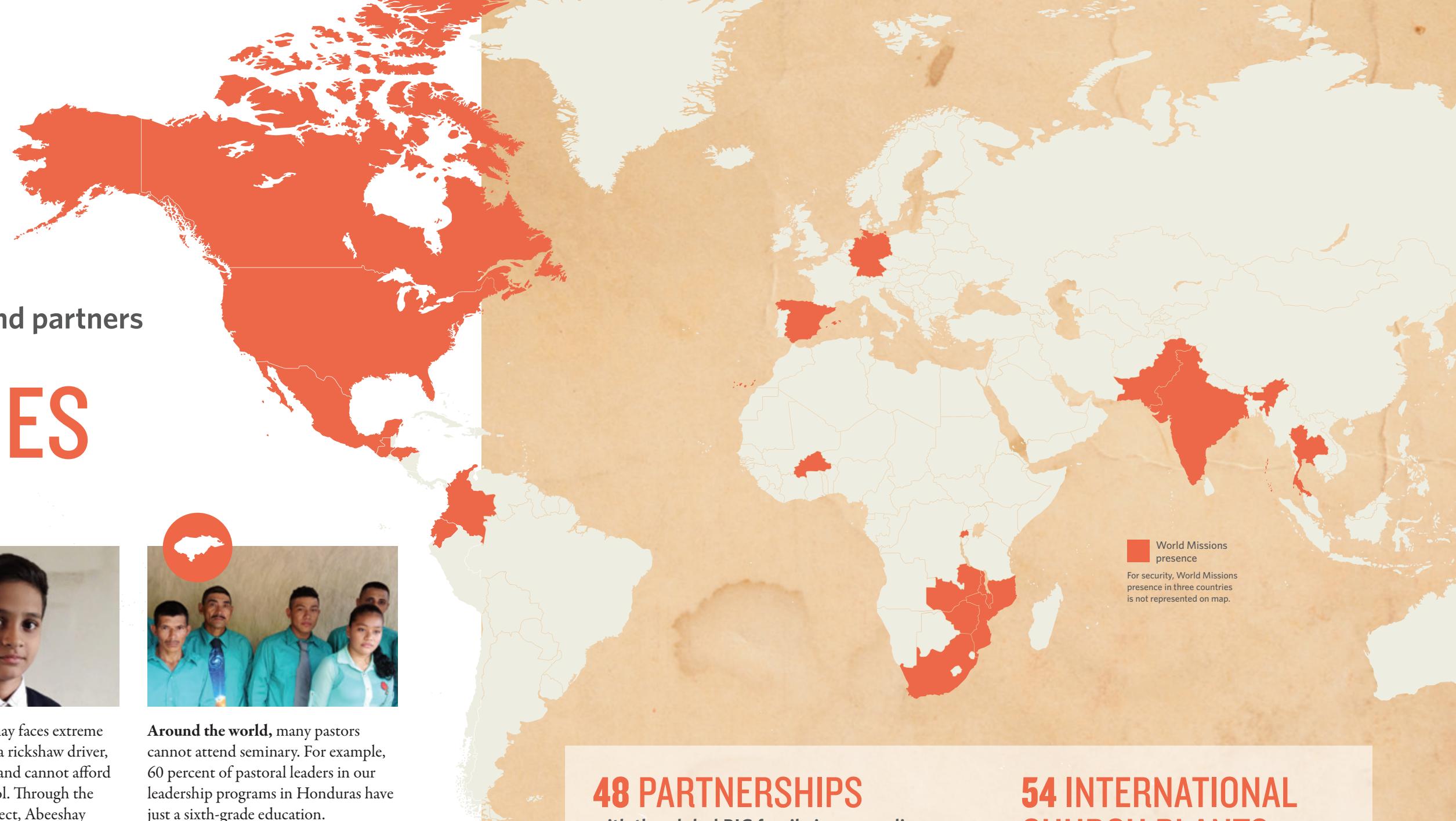
In Pakistan, Abeeshay faces extreme poverty: His father, a rickshaw driver, is addicted to drugs and cannot afford to send him to school. Through the FGA education project, Abeeshay receives a second chance: He now attends a high-quality Christian school, where he also experiences the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. Abeeshay now says, “I want to become a pastor and preach the gospel.”

In 2018, the FGA education project provided Christian education to more than 1,400 marginalized children across Pakistan. As global partners of the project, we helped support 11 schools to offer Christ-centered education to children like Abeeshay.



Around the world, many pastors cannot attend seminary. For example, 60 percent of pastoral leaders in our leadership programs in Honduras have just a sixth-grade education.

Through our pastoral leadership training, **Honduran pastors are being equipped to teach the gospel**. In 2018, more than 70 leaders participated in Bible and theology classes at our BIC Bible Institute and Continual Formation in Ministry program founded by missionary Nathan Bert.



**48 PARTNERSHIPS**  
with the global BIC family in evangelism,  
education, and health care

**36% OF GLOBAL WORKERS**  
served least-reached peoples

**143 MINISTRY SCHOLARSHIPS**  
awarded to international leaders

**54 INTERNATIONAL CHURCH PLANTS**  
supported by BIC U.S. World Missions

**1,189 INTERNATIONAL LEADERS**  
participated in leadership training



## ENGAGING ISLAM, ON ITS OWN TERMS

Dr. Jay Smith, BIC U.S. World Missions

### Apologetics course through Jay Smith's veins.

His theological lineage includes Francis Schaeffer. The theologian discipled Jay's missionary parents, who, in turn, discipled Ravi Zacharias, the globally renowned, Indian-born Christian apologist.

But rhetoric, he argues, is also in the DNA of India, his birthplace. It's no coincidence the world's most formidable apologists like Zacharias, Dinesh D'Souza, and Vishal Mangalwadi come from the subcontinent of India. For hundreds of years, they have held *munazaras*, formal debates, in public squares.

In the Indian subcontinent, debate is a social art.

The Indian subcontinent is now the epicenter of the Islamic world. India, alone, is to be the largest Muslim population globally by 2050.<sup>1</sup> And Asians already make up more than 60 percent of the world's Muslims (over 600 million), Arabs, by contrast, 20 percent.<sup>2</sup>

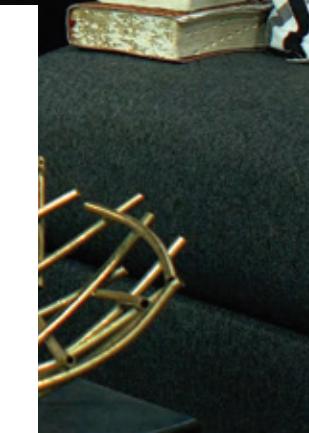
Thus, Jay engages the growing Muslim populations from Asia in styles of communication that emulate their own: apologetics and polemics. Christian apologetics is a defense of Christianity, polemics an offense against Islam, through theological and historical critiques.

Today Jay travels around the world equipping Christians to dialogue with Muslims and debating Muslim leaders. He's also helped found the Pfander Centre for Apologetics, which studies Islamic theological and historical critique with the purpose of engaging Muslims with the gospel.

While having an impressive theological ancestry, Jay became an acclaimed apologist and polemicist through grit and a willingness to take a theological — and, sometimes, physical — beating.

In the 90s, his theological sparring partners, who were often combative, were almost exclusively more radical Muslims (Islamists) from South Asia. Much of their zealousness flows from their religious views: For example, in South Asia, 76 percent of Muslims believe individuals should be killed for abandoning Islam; 84 percent support sharia law; and 81 percent back extreme penalties, like severing hands of thieves.<sup>3</sup>

Devout and educated, such Muslims confronted Jay with questions unknown to modern Western Christian apologetics.



### An Education in Hyde Park

Full of bravado, Jay arrived in London armed with master's degrees in both Christian apologetics and Islamic studies — ready to engage Muslims with the gospel and to get a doctorate in polemics.

"I thought I knew everything," he said, laughing. "Then I encountered Speaker's Corner." For more than 160 years, individuals have been exercising free speech at the historical site located in Hyde Park.

There, the Muslim apologists arrived with Bibles overflowing with Post-it notes, each marking a supposed error in the biblical text.

They deftly attacked Christianity.

"I came back whipped and humiliated," he said of challenging their theological arguments for the first time.

But he returned to Hyde Park the following Sunday. Each week, Jay was pummeled theologically and, on occasion, physically, as the agitated crowds harassed him.

Afterward, he documented their questions.

*Within six months, he had a list of 50 recurring questions from Muslims about Christianity, most unidentified by modern Western Christian apologists. (Western apologetics address a secular framework: questioning the existence of God. But devout Muslims believe in God. Their concerns relate to the Trinity or divinity of Jesus.)*

Soon, Jay garnered attention for his innovative research, and universities across England began to invite Jay to debate Muslim clerics. In 1995, a Cambridge University historian in Islamic history helped him outline 10 criticisms on Islam for a debate.

"To this day, no one has answered those 10 criticisms, and we have added many more to them," said Jay.

### Platform Opens Access to Question Islam

In 2005, YouTube was founded, unlocking doors to engage the Islamic world. In many societies adhering to Islam, barriers exist to questioning religion. So, in 2006, Jay created PfanderFilms, an outreach of the Pfander Centre.

The platform enables Muslims to investigate religious questions. In the last 20 years, Western historians have unearthed data undermining the historicity of much of Muhammad's life and the text of the Qur'an.

Until now, such historical critique has been confined to the ivory tower. *But PfanderFilms has become a bridge between Western academia and the Islamic world.* It provides open access to groundbreaking theological and historical critique of Islam.

"We want Muslims to decide for themselves whether Islam holds up to its historical claims," said Jay.

Today PfanderFilms has more than 3 million views, many from Muslims in countries hostile to the gospel.

Jay is mindful his apologetics and polemics were smelted in Speaker's Corner. The Muslim apologists there refined his arguments, ridding them of theological sediment and inconsistencies, to extract apologetics speaking the language of his audience.

And in so doing, they taught Jay to boldly profess Jesus Christ to the Islamic world.

1. "10 Countries with the Largest Muslim Populations, 2010 and 2050," Pew Research Center, April 2, 2015, [http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/muslims/pf\\_15-04-02\\_projectionstable74/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/muslims/pf_15-04-02_projectionstable74/).

2. "Mapping the Global Muslim Population: Asia-Pacific Overview," Pew Research Center, October 7, 2009, <http://www.pewforum.org/2009/10/07/mapping-the-global-muslim-population9/>; "Demographics of Islam," Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University, accessed Jan. 16, 2019, <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/demographics-of-islam>.

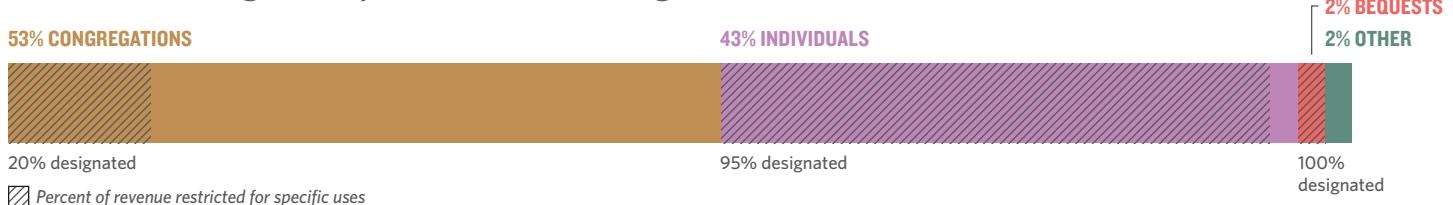
3. "The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society," Pew Research Center, April 30, 2013, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-overview/>.

**"WE WANT MUSLIMS TO DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES WHETHER ISLAM HOLDS UP TO ITS HISTORICAL CLAIMS."**

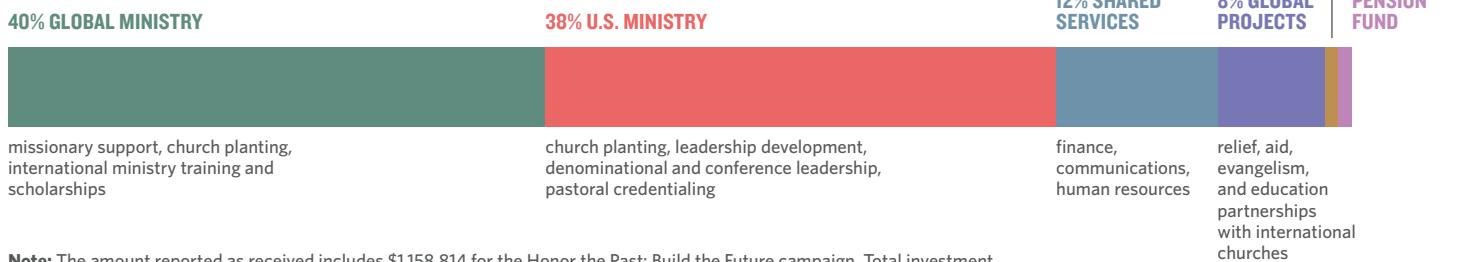
# FINANCIALS

## \$5,832,009 RECEIVED

\$3,130,206 designated | \$2,701,803 undesignated



## \$5,103,007 DISTRIBUTED



**Note:** The amount reported as received includes \$1,158,814 for the Honor the Past: Build the Future campaign. Total investment loss of \$340,786 is not included as part of the amount received. The loss in investment value is consistent with the overall market decline in 2018, with the anticipation that, over time, longstanding investments yield returns.

All numbers are as of Dec. 31, 2018, and are preliminary. Audited 2018 financial statements will be published online summer 2019.

# LEADERSHIP TEAMS

## LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Alan Robinson, national director | Bob Beaty, bishop, Susquehanna Conference | Perry Engle, bishop, Midwest and Pacific Conferences  
 Bryan Hoke, bishop, Atlantic Conference | Jonathan Lloyd, director, World Missions | Mitchell Martin, director, finance and shared services  
 Aner Morejon, bishop, Southeast Conference | Rob Patterson, bishop, Allegheny Conference | Lynn Thrush, bishop, Great Lakes Conference

## GENERAL CONFERENCE BOARD

Cathy Musser board chair member-at-large	Sherri Flohr Allegheny Conference	Adam Forry Atlantic Conference	David Espinosa Great Lakes Conference	Jeff Piepho Midwest Conference	Tom Law Pacific Conference	Carlos Alfaro Southeast Conference
Gary Lebo vice chair Susquehanna Conference	Rachel Diaz secretary member-at-large	Emerson Leshner member-at-large	Kevin Noll member-at-large	Ron Kramer member-at-large	Julie Stout treasurer member-at-large	Alan Robinson national director ex officio member