

“Kindness is like snow—it beautifies everything it covers.”

—Khalil Gibran

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— Norma Jean-Jacques, Editor

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Spotlight on Rev. Dr. Gary Simpson

Senior Pastor,
Concord Baptist Church of Christ



When Gary V. Simpson heard the call to ministry at the age of 15, his father, a bi-vocational solo pastor who worked nights at the Timken Roller Bearing Company, told him, “Do something else.” But Gary Simpson couldn’t shake it.

“My father wanted to save me from the thousand heartbreaks that were inevitable in leading a people,” Gary Simpson explained. “I didn’t want to get into the family business just because my father was a pastor, but I had dreams of providing leadership in the church in some way.”

That same year, Gary Simpson preached his first sermon at the Southfield Missionary Baptist Church in Columbus, OH, and at the age of 20, was ordained by the Eastern Union Missionary Baptist Association. From there, he has never looked back.

After Gary Simpson received his Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary, he was asked to serve as an associate pastor with Dr. Gardner Taylor at Concord. Following a brief tenure as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Morristown, NJ, he was called to serve as Senior Pastor at Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn, NY in 1990. Reverend Dr. Gary V. Simpson has continued to serve there ever since.

His partner in life and ministry is his wife Reverend Dr. Emma Jordan-Simpson, Executive Pastor of Concord Baptist Church and President of American Baptist Churches-Metro NY.

In addition, Dr. Gary Simpson is the Chair of the Ordination Council of the American Baptist Churches – Metro New York and Associate Professor of Homiletics at Drew Theological Seminary. He also currently serves on several Boards of Directors, including the American Baptist Home Mission Society.

A Community of Service

The 2,700-seat Concord Baptist Church of Christ has a long history of serving its community through such initiatives as a credit union, a nursing home and the Concord Baptist ChristFund, which funds social causes nationwide.

“During a pandemic, wisdom ought to be a highly valued commodity. While none of us have been in this place before, many retired clergy have been through life altering trials and community circumstances. They have a long view that could be very helpful and inspirational to many of us.”

– Rev. Dr. Gary Simpson

According to Dr. Simpson, the ChristFund, established in 1988, is a way to achieve evangelism through economics. Endowed with \$1 million, in its first few years, the Concord Baptist ChristFund provided critical financial support for HIV/AIDS programs and supported the completion of the documentary, *Eyes on the Prize II*. Since its inception, the ChristFund has given away more than \$1 million by using the annual interest earned on the principal to award grants for programs, such as those for teen mothers or job training. In the past 30 years, the fund has provided more than 300 gifts.

An Unprecedented Challenge

Concord Baptist Church has weathered many turbulent times, including September 11 and the Great Recession, but none have compared to the coronavirus pandemic.

Nearly 40 congregants have died during this COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Simpson reveals, “It’s been tough. The cruelest part of this moment is the isolation. Sickness and death happened in profound loneliness at this hour. That is not the natural way we grieve. The crying together, hugging each other, bringing food to the grieving family has not been possible. When I presided over a congregant’s homegoing, I was the last person to see them before burial. I would kiss the person who left us on the cheek. Now that is not an option.”

He explained, “We’ve learned that presence is not necessarily proximity and that being present in a physically distant time is important. We are still creating community; we are still gathering.” The church now conducts virtual and remote funerals, weekly services, bible study, ministry groups and team meetings, and new online groups are forming as the need arises.

Assisting in maintaining that sense of community is where Dr. Simpson feels retired pastors can play a crucial role. “Many retired people are among the communities most vulnerable to this virus. Because people must think in this moment of their own health, first everyone must act safely. Secondly, a lot of people just need someone to talk to right now or want to remain steady in their discipleship. Zoom and phone calls can fill that need safely,” states Dr. Simpson.



“We live in a world where we’re addicted to algorithms or data we can easily access through various social media platforms. We think having so much information makes us knowledgeable, but wisdom is applied knowledge that comes with a long view over time. So, during a pandemic, wisdom ought to be a highly valued commodity. While none of us have been in this place before, many retired clergy have been through life altering trials and community circumstances.

They have a long view that could be very helpful and inspirational to many of us. We need the inspiration and the aspiration of their witness.”

According to Dr. Simpson, his church’s responsibility at this moment is not to survive the pandemic but to plant new life. With that in

mind, Concord Baptist Church has aimed to use its programs to help coronavirus victims. The church-sponsored credit union is assisting businesses in the neighborhood with loans. The ChristFund gave \$35,000 to RIP Medical Debt, which buys and then forgives oppressive medical debt for pennies on the dollar. Through this donation, Concord Baptist Church relieved all of the second-market arrears in Kings County, Brooklyn, and a large measure of debt in Essex county, NJ. That \$35,000 assisted more than 4,000 families and relieved \$4.3 million in arrears.

Dr. Simpson adds, “We wanted to do some good first in our neighborhood in Brooklyn and also be a blessing and allow people to be beneficiaries of that blessing. It has been a wonderful kind of morale-booster for us in the middle of the pandemic.” With a role in revitalizing a community, Dr. Simpson is leading Concord Baptist Church of Christ to a job well done.

Anniversaries



Rev. Dr. Stephen D. Jones and his wife, Janice E. Jones, celebrated 50 years of marriage on March 28, 2020. They were married in Mrs. Jones' home church, the First Baptist Church of Kansas City, MO, where Rev. Jones now serves as

co-pastor. He and Mrs. Jones met while working as college students in a summertime ministry with neighborhood inner city children for the First Baptist Church of Kansas City.

After graduating from William Jewell College, Dr. Jones completed studies at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School and earned his Doctor of Ministry degree from United Theological

Seminary in Dayton, OH, in 1982. He has served ABC churches in Boulder, CO; Dayton, OH; Wayne, PA; Birmingham, MI; Seattle, WA; St. Louis, MO; and Kansas City. Mrs. Jones graduated magna cum laude from the State University of New York at Brockport and pursued graduate studies as well.

The couple has two grown children and one 7-month-old granddaughter, the sparkle in their life! The pandemic seriously curtailed any 50th-anniversary festivities, but the Joneses plan to extend their celebration year to 2021.

Dr. Jones is the author of seven books. He has mentored more than 16 seminary interns whom he helped transition into their calling over the years. For a number of years, Dr. Jones served as president of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. The Joneses plan to live in their patio home in south Kansas City for as many years as possible.

Dr. Jones is inspired to work past typical retirement age by the multi-racial, multi-ethnic congregation he serves, a true picture of what God's Beloved Community looks like.

In Memoriam



El Pastor, Rev. Modesto DeLeon López, 92, of Orlando, FL, entered his eternal home on September 5, 2020. Born in Gurabo, Puerto Rico on January 15, 1928, Rev. López came to the U.S. mainland in 1945.

From there, Rev. López was recruited to serve in the U.S. Army. After he married his devoted wife, Juanita Figueroa López, they began their life journey in the ministry. Following extensive seminary preparation and mentoring, Rev. López was ordained in 1951 in Chicago, IL, at Central Baptist Church. His first assignment was to provide leadership to the missions development for American Baptist Churches USA. This included church planting and youth ministry targeting Chicago street gangs, some of whose former members are now ordained pastors.

In the early 1960s, Rev. López's ministry took him to migrant camps throughout northern Illinois and southeast and south-central Wisconsin. He worked alongside leaders of the farmworkers' movements to establish culturally and linguistically relevant programs in the local schools for their children. These efforts

were the precursor to today's bilingual education and school nutritional programs, and the hiring of Latino staff and teachers.

Over the years, Rev. López founded several Baptist churches to serve the spiritual needs of the growing Latino population, and collaborated with many established churches to hold Sunday services in Spanish. He also served as pastor in numerous churches, including North Shore Baptist Church in Chicago, First Baptist Church in Elgin, IL; First Baptist Church in Racine, WI; and First Baptist Church and Central Baptist Church in Orlando, FL, among many other American Baptist churches.



He assumed leadership roles that supported and informed his ministry including President, National Baptist Church, USA and Puerto Rico; Vice-President, American Baptist Churches USA General Board; and Board of International Ministries, among others.

Rev. López also served in the Puerto Rico National Guard and was a veteran of the Korean War era. Although he retired 28 years ago from the American Baptist Churches USA, he served as the Chaplain for Military Veterans, and founded and served as Senior Pastor for La Fraternidad Cristiana at a senior mobile home community in Orlando, FL.

To mark his 75th year in ministry, Rev. López was recognized in a special service on the anniversary of his ordination on January 22, 2017, in Orlando, FL. For his 90th birthday celebration on January 15, 2018, he received special recognition from the American Baptist Home Missions Society. Rev. López received full military honors from the U.S. Army at interment on September 5, 2020.

He is survived by his daughters, Celeste (Gregorie), Jeanne (Fagan) and Generosa (Molina); and son, Modesto; grandchildren; great-grandchildren; great-great-grandchildren; sisters, Carmen Martinez, Francisca López, Maria Luisa Orozco, Elsie López, Sonia Ramos and Norma Perez; two brothers, Ignacio López and Pablo López; and countless nieces and nephews.

Managing Your Finances in Uncertain Times

The perfect storm of a pandemic and an ensuing recession has made navigating the financial landscape more challenging. *News and Notes* editors spoke to Colin Nass, Director of Financial Planning at MMBB, about financial issues affecting retirees and those nearing retirement during these unprecedented times.



What guidance would you give in this environment?

For anyone who doesn't have a financial plan, now might be a good time to make one. Many times, we simply don't know what we don't know, but working with a financial planner can be a good first step to organizing your finances and understanding if you're on track to reach your goals. A financial plan is like a roadmap linking where you are today with where you would like to be in the future.

If you have a financial plan, think about what has changed that would necessitate altering your plan. If nothing is different in your personal life, then you probably don't need to modify your plan in any significant way. However, if you have experienced major life events, like the birth of a child, the death of a relative, a marriage or divorce, then you may want to sit down with your financial planner and review these changes.

Where can members start who are wondering how COVID-19 has affected their finances?

You can begin with these steps:

- Organize your records
- Create a simple balance sheet (assets/liabilities)
- Understand your risk tolerance and time horizon

- Review your spending plan
- Boost your emergency fund
- Review your asset allocation

Should members who are already retired still be investing?

Maybe. It really depends on several factors including your goals, risk tolerance and time horizon. For many, retirement could last another 20 to 30 years. If the funds are needed in the short-term, then moving to a more conservative investment may be appropriate. For funds that are invested for the long-term (i.e. more than 10 years), it may be appropriate to consider more aggressive investments, knowing that these investments typically are also more volatile.

What financial guidance would you give someone whose spouse has passed away?

The death of a spouse is a tremendous loss and is a source of enormous grief. There are many non-financial aspects to this, but as a financial planner, I try to focus on the immediate steps that a surviving spouse should consider, such as:

- Reviewing any estate planning documents that have been created including wills and trust documents, if any
- Locating any needed online account IDs and passwords
- Reviewing the accounts the couple own and determining which accounts need to be retitled, as well as understanding who the beneficiaries are
- Reviewing any potential changes in income and expenses
- Finally, it is also important to update any beneficiary forms after a life event like the death of a spouse.

What if a retiree is in financial hardship?

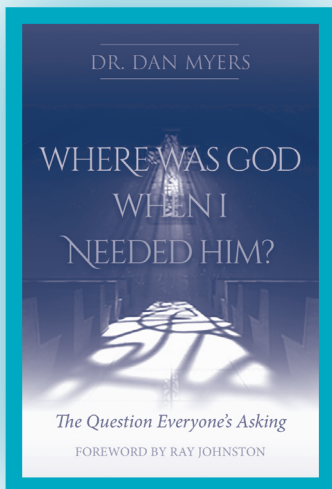
MMBB understands that our pastors may continue to experience financial challenges in the coming year. We are here to provide emergency assistance to pastors who may be faced with making choices about purchasing food, prescription drugs, medical services or necessary home repairs. MMBB also invites you to contact our financial planners. They will work with you to manage your financial resources, so you can maintain your financial health.

Whether for financial planning or emergency assistance, please contact MMBB's Senior Benefits Specialists at 800.986.6222 or service@mmbb.org. We are here to assist you with just about any element of your financial well-being and it is a privilege to serve you.

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Book Review

In the book, *Where Was God When I Needed Him?* by Dr. Dan Myers, the author uses his own experience with loss and grief to share how he struggled with his faith in the face of adversity. The book is designed to help the bereaved tackle crises of faith when they must endure hardship.



Early on in the book, Dr. Myers shares how his life changed the day his daughter, Renee, is injured by a drunk driver. Renee is rendered comatose and eventually dies despite the Myers' and their congregations' fervent prayers.

Dr. Myers describes that time as walking through a dark corridor of life, a time when faith did not seem to be enough. He describes the challenge of being a faithful pastor while un-

able to reconcile some primary teachings of the Christian faith. Throughout the book, he references Romans 8:28 (see the top of the next column) and with each chapter explains how his journey to better understand this scripture was tied to the restoration of his faith.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (NIV)

The book details several other incidents that shaped his path to restoration: his ability to forgive the drunk driver who was responsible for his daughter's death, the redemption of a drug-addicted thief who stole his car and the brutal murder of one of his congregants.

Dr. Myers has been the lead pastor of two congregations over his ministry career. During those years he served as president of the Minister's Council for the American Baptists of the Pacific Southwest, now known as Transformation Ministries.

In the second half of his ministry, he was the president and founder of Master Plan Ministries, a company that assisted more than 325 churches, guiding them through stewardship development. He and his wife Dorene are active members of Southwest Church in Indian Wells, CA. Dr. Myers is now retired.

Any views or opinions presented in this book are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of MMBB. We welcome all submissions of books for review in News & Notes. Because of the large number of submissions received, we are not able to publish a review of all of the books sent to us. We are grateful for the suggestions you share with us and look forward to publishing some of them during the year.

The Skinny on Quarantine 15

Winter is usually a time when people spend less time outdoors and curl up in their armchairs with a hot cup of tea and warm fuzzy slippers. But this year is like no other in living memory. With a pandemic winter upon us and the threat of another wave of COVID-19 outbreaks, people will be spending even more time indoors.

This hibernation may result in “quarantine 15,” the term coined to describe the 15-pound weight gain many people have experienced during pandemic lockdowns because stress and boredom have led to overeating. Studies have shown that it may be more difficult to lose unwanted weight after age 50,¹ so it is even more important for retirees to practice healthy eating habits. Though quarantine 15 is more than just a catchphrase, you can avoid it and still enjoy winter meals. See some tips below.

1. **Eat mindfully** – Avoid eating while watching television or reading. Concentrate on your meal. People tend to eat more when they are distracted or multi-tasking.

2. **Out of sight is out of mind** – Junk food is one item you might not want to stockpile in your home during the pandemic. If it is more difficult to access these foods, you're less likely to overeat them.

3. **Replace junk food with healthy snacks** –

Do stock up on foods that contain a lot of fiber, which are filling like brown rice. Snacks like lightly salted popcorn are tasty and fun alternatives to greasy, fatty foods.

4. **Make sure to exercise** – try taking a half-hour walk if weather permits or doing calisthenics while watching tv or listening to music. You might also try a Zoom exercise class or using video calling to work out with a friend.

1. “18 Most Effective Ways to Lose Weight After 50, According to Experts.” Meghan Rabbitt, Leah Groth and Kaitlyn Pirie. *Prevention*, August 28, 2020.

