

This Morning... I started the day with a commitment to read all of Isaiah 43 as part of my devotional time. I confess...I did not live out my commitment. I got stuck, and could not get past Isaiah 43:18-19. As God unfolded His plan and promise to deliver Israel from their time of exile, He reminded them of the marvelous ways in which He had “delivered” them in the past, particularly in the exodus from Egypt. Then, He said: “*But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do! For I am about to do a brand-new thing. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness for my people to come home. I will create rivers for them in the desert!*” (Isaiah 43:18-19, NLT) That little phrase, “*Do you not see it?*” is the one that hit me squarely between the heart. It caused me to stop and reflect on the “new things” God is doing in the churches of the Mid-South that I might not have taken the time to “see” and reflect upon.

Two weeks ago... I had the privilege of joining a team of volunteers from Bellevue Baptist Church who spent the day applying a fresh coat of paint to the exterior of Leclair Baptist Church, just inside the I-240 loop. As part of the “Bellevue Loves Memphis” project, it was a wonderful example of the sharing of cooperation, resources, and manpower in our association as volunteers from both churches worked together to complete the task. I am not sure that all of the workers knew the full impact of the “new thing” they were doing at Leclair. You see, for several months the leaders and members of Leclair and National Avenue Baptist have been talking, praying and thinking about how they might combine their energies and vision for reaching their communities with the Gospel to do a “new thing” inside the loop. On May 4, the “former” members of those two “former” churches will gather at the “former” Leclair Baptist Church facility to celebrate the beginning of New Church Memphis, a new Southern Baptist work with a new vision for shining light in the darkness and sharing the Good News in their community. Their God-given vision includes the future establishment of a community ministry center on the site “formerly occupied” by National Avenue Baptist Church. God is doing a “new thing” through New Church Memphis. Please pray for New Church Memphis! Please pray about the possibility for your church to encourage and perhaps participate in this “new thing” that God is doing in Memphis!

That Same Afternoon... after my under-developed painting skills were discovered and I left the worksite in shame, I made my way to the corner of Rocky Point Road and Walnut Grove Road where I joined the congregation of the Memphis Mandarin Baptist Church for dedication of their new worship facility. It was a tremendous celebration of a “new thing” God has done in the life of this Chinese congregation and through the lives of committed believers who have prayed, trusted, given, and worked for many years toward the realization of a vision. It was also a wonderful reminder of the support, encouragement, and resources that area churches like Eudora Baptist Church and Whitten Memorial Baptist Church have shared over many years so that the gospel might be shared with the “nations” and the church might be established. Please pray for Pastor Peter Tsai and the Memphis Mandarin Baptist Church as they continue to experience the “new things” of God in the new facility He has provided.

Night Before Last... I ended a long day of long meetings by having dinner with our Administrative Leadership Council and introducing them to Reverend Willie Jacobs, the new North American Mission Board National Missionary who will soon be a resident of our city. Reverend Jacobs represents a “new thing” that God is doing in Memphis through a new pilot project partnership between the North American Mission Board, the Tennessee Baptist Convention, and the Mid-South Baptist Association. He will be leading us in an effort to identify the various people groups that live in our city, working with our churches to develop effective plans for sharing the gospel within those cultures, developing Christian leadership within those groups and potentially starting new churches. This is a “very new thing” that God is doing among us. Please pray for the partners in this pilot project. Please pray for Reverend Willie Jacobs as he becomes part of our community and shares in our common task of reaching “all of the peoples” of Memphis with the life-changing message of the gospel.

Yesterday Morning... I was blessed as I joined a gathering of Mid-South church planters for a time of fellowship and celebration of what God is doing through the new churches He is establishing in our region. A guest said to me: *“I trust you know how blessed you are to have in this room the commitment and energy of such a well-prepared, knowledgeable and diverse group of church planters. You don’t see this everywhere.”* His comments reminded me of the “new things” God is doing through new churches in Memphis. Please pray for the planters, pastors, and sponsors of our newest churches as they continue to discover the new things God wants to do through them.

Tomorrow... I hope to wake-up with my eyes open. Not only in the physical sense that would insure that I did, indeed, wake-up, but I hope to be awakened with a spiritual sensitivity that will cause me to keep my eyes and my heart open to the new things that God is already doing in Memphis. I pray that I might wake-up with a fresh commitment to join Him in His mighty work of making “pathways through the wilderness” and “rivers in the desert” so that our city and our region might find their way to Jesus and drink of His living water! Will you join me in that prayer?