

# CommonCall: Former fishing guide now fisher of men

April 30, 2015

WATER VALLEY, Ky. (BP)—Jimmy Brown trusts God whenever he goes fishing, whether the fishing hole is filled with lake water or the silt of an undredged life.

“I had never realized the similarities between fishing, soul-winning and pastoring,” said Brown, a former professional fishing guide on Kentucky Lake who has been pastor of Pilot Oak Baptist Church in western Kentucky since 2007.



Pilot Oak Baptist Church, a small rural congregation in western Kentucky, baptized 13 people in 2013 and 18 the year before that. Fishing may be fun, but it's also “hard work ... work you have to be persistent at,” he said.

Brown, who often speaks on fishing at outdoorsmen's events and pastors' conferences, sees numerous parallels between fishing for fish and fishing for people.

Pilot Oak, a rural church that averages about 100 in Sunday morning worship, baptized 13 people in 2013 and 18 the year before that, although the baptism total for 2014 was a bit lower.

“We have to take time to disciple those we win,” Brown said. “A lot of people like to fish but don’t want to clean them.

“If I reach people but don’t disciple them, what have I accomplished? ... When we win someone to the Lord, that’s when the hard work begins. We need to get them established in the faith so they become productive, reproducing Christians.”

### **Expanding missions vision**

Brown also challenged Graves County Baptist Association, of which Pilot Oak Baptist is a part, to greater missions efforts. Since Brown became captain of the association’s missions and ministry team last year, they’ve gone on the first associational mission trip that he’s aware of.

“I began to talk it up, and last year we went to Muskogee, Okla.,” Brown said. “We did construction and a Vacation Bible School at the Murrow Children’s Home, led a backyard Bible club, surveyed for one church and painted for another church.”

The team also cleaned and performed organizational work at Bacone College, a liberal arts school established by the American Baptist Home Mission Society in 1880 to provide Christian education for Native Americans.

“The more involved we get in doing missions, the stronger our churches here will become,” Brown said.



Pastor Jimmy Brown, a former professional fishing guide, sees numerous parallels between fishing for fish and fishing for people. "We have to take time to disciple those we win," Brown said. "A lot of people like to fish but don't want to clean them." (Photo: SBC Life) For several years prior to his arrival, Pilot Oak had reduced its missions giving through Southern Baptists' Cooperative Program unified budget to \$1,000 per year. Brown began reminding the church the Cooperative Program is how Southern Baptist churches work together to fulfill the Great Commission through their state conventions, across North America and around the world. The money they give to missions through the Cooperative Program, he noted, extends Pilot Oak's reach far beyond what the church could do on its own.

"The first meeting I had with the finance committee, I asked them if they thought people should tithe, and they all said yes," Brown recounted. "Then I asked them, 'Do you not think your church should tithe?'"

As the church prepared its 2009 budget, Brown led them to dedicate 3 percent of their undesignated offerings through the Cooperative Program, 2 percent to the Graves County Baptist Association and 5 percent for local benevolence "to minister to people in our community whether they're members or not," Brown said.

The Cooperative Program percentage increased a bit each year. Pilot Oak

gave \$1,000 in 2008. Five years later, it gave \$13,744 through the Cooperative Program and \$22,257 in total missions giving, according to the church's Annual Church Profile report. Brown said the church gave 19.5 percent of its income to some type of cooperative ministry in 2014 and has raised its 2015 Cooperative Program budget projection to 5.5 percent of undesignated receipts.

### **Giving to missions offerings**

Members also began giving generously to seasonal missions offerings. Last year the church was the top per-capita giving congregation in the Southern Baptist Convention for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions.

"I told the church, 'You are to be commended, but don't stop,'" Brown said. "They're beginning to catch on about being kingdom-focused."

Last year, Pilot Oak bought a tool trailer for construction missions. It has become known in its community as "the church that cares" because of its commitment to meeting local needs—whether it involves an unpaid electric bill, the need for a handicap ramp into someone's house or some other pressing concern.

By identifying with the residents of its rural farming community and being ready to help, members of Pilot Oak have become alert to seeing where God is at work and joining him, Brown said, citing a principle from Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God*.

### **'Takes time, effort, energy'**

"You've got to be willing to do whatever it takes to earn the right to tell them about Jesus," Brown said. Just like in fishing, "it takes time, effort, energy ... but when you do it like the Lord wants you to do it, it's not hard."

“You’ve got to go out with the intention that we’re going to have fun. We’re going to fish all day, and at some time during the day, we’re going to catch fish. So just relax, fish and enjoy it. God is going to give you fruits for your labor.”

*For similar articles, see the May edition of CommonCall magazine, devoted to the theme “recreation.” CommonCall features inspiring stories about Christians living out their faith and informative articles about ministries that actually work. An annual subscription is only \$24 and comes with two complementary subscriptions to the Baptist Standard. To subscribe to CommonCall, [click here](#).*