

LifeWay to discontinue World Changers program

May 4, 2020

NASHVILLE (BP)—LifeWay Christian Resources is canceling World Changers mission projects for summer 2020 and closing all future operations due to declining numbers and the inability to host projects this summer because of COVID-19.

“We are sad about the closing of World Changers, but we know now is the time to make this decision based on more than 10 years of decline in participants and the current financial impact related to the coronavirus pandemic,” said Ben Trueblood, director of student ministry at LifeWay.

Part of cost-cutting at LifeWay

The decision came in conjunction with budget cuts designed to save \$25 million to \$30 million annually—about 10 percent of LifeWay’s budget—in an attempt to counter a steep revenue decline amid the global pandemic. Cuts also included staff layoffs and hiring and discretionary spending freezes.

LifeWay reported April 29 that revenue was down 24 percent over a five-week period as compared to the year before, and that the trend was expected to continue. A week earlier, LifeWay announced it was exploring options for the sale of Ridgecrest Conference Center and Summer Camps in North Carolina.

Since 1990, World Changers has provided students and adults opportunities to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others by making repairs for low-income homeowners at no charge. Volunteers donated a

week of their time in the summer, often sleeping on classroom and gymnasium floors at local schools, while tackling projects like building wheelchair ramps, applying fresh coats of paint and replacing windows and siding.

"While World Changers as an organization is going away, the impact upon thousands of lives over 30 years of ministry is undeniable," Trueblood said. "The love of Christ was shown to homeowners and communities across North America. People came to know the Lord, and students were trained in sharing the gospel and being the hands and feet of Jesus."

Students repaired substandard housing, shared the gospel

World Changers launched its first project in the small coal-mining town of Briceville, Tenn., in 1990. Repairing substandard housing was the key avenue for sharing the gospel at that first World Changers project.



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ramps, applying fresh coats of paint and replacing windows and siding. (File Photo from 2013)

It marked the first time any organization used students in construction-type ministry projects. That summer, 137 youth and adults painted, roofed and performed other light construction jobs on nine homes in the area.

Partnering with local churches, Southern Baptist associations and city governments, World Changers became one of the first student volunteer organizations to help alleviate substandard housing in the United States. It also was one of the first pre-packaged mission trips for Southern Baptist churches.

“For 30 years, World Changers has provided meaningful missions experiences for more than 400,000 students and adults throughout North America,” Trueblood said. “It’s important we celebrate this incredible ministry and the work the Lord has done through it for three decades.”

World Changers originally began under the umbrella of the former Southern Baptist Convention Brotherhood Commission and was moved to the North American Mission Board in 1997.

In 2011, LifeWay partnered with NAMB to bring World Changers to the LifeWay student ministry family and assume day-to-day operations of the ministry. Summer 2012 was the first summer World Changers was operated by LifeWay.

“I am deeply proud of our World Changers team and the work they’ve done for the last eight years serving churches, communities, and providing life impacting missions experiences for teenagers.” Trueblood said. “They’ve poured their lives into this ministry, and I’m grateful for the work the Lord has done through them. They’ve had an undeniable impact on thousands of

lives."