

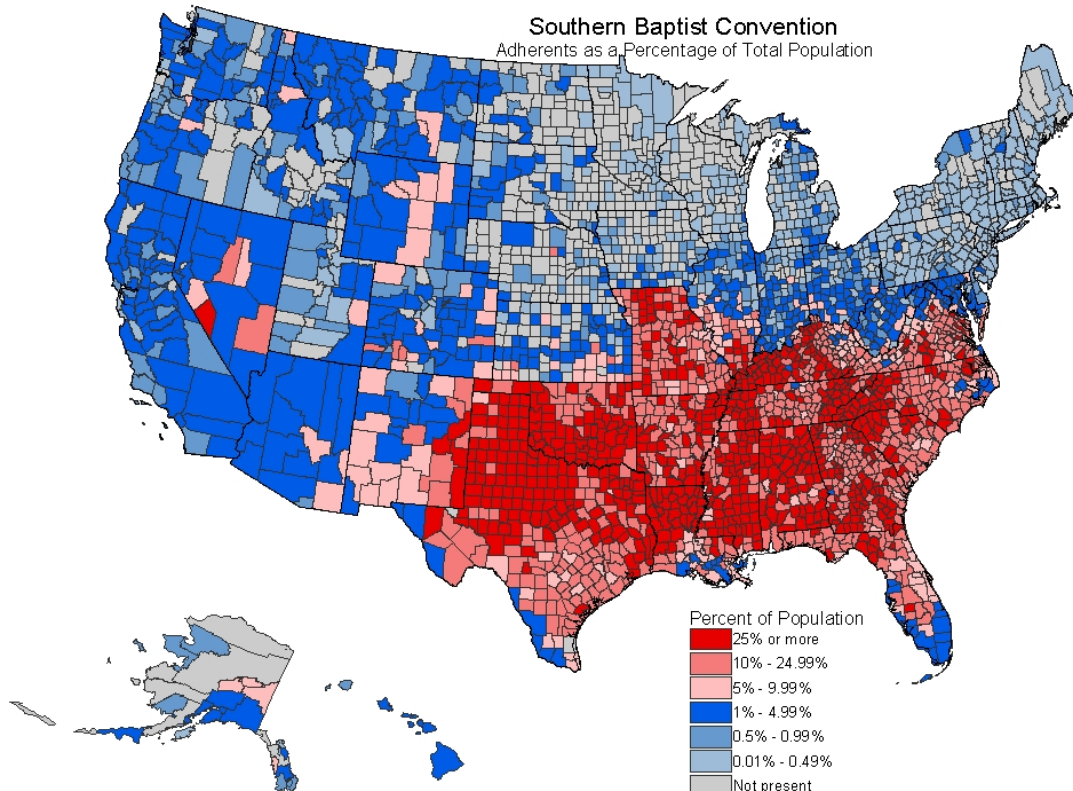


Heartland Interstate Strategy

Why Do Southern Baptists Need a Heartland Interstate Strategy (HIS)?

When you look at a national map of Southern Baptist Church members as a percentage of population by county, there are two major regions that jump out even to a casual observer. [See Glenmary map below.] The first is not a surprise: the New England States. The second probably was not as obvious before you took a peek at the map: the Upper Midwest.

The New England area, which includes eleven states plus the District of Columbia, is appropriately being featured by our North American Mission Board based upon its population density. In the region NAMB has targeted six Send Cities. This emphasis is supported by the data pictured below and the population density.



In the five states (Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota) and the Canadian province (Manitoba) that are the primary targets of the Heartland Interstate Strategy, there are 13 million people in an area that is more than three times the size of the New England region. And in this area there is only one NAMB Send City (Minneapolis-St. Paul). There is a great need, and there are exciting opportunities to impact the vast lostness of the region.

Hopefully, the visual above has answered the question, Why do Southern Baptists need a Heartland Interstate Strategy? The balance of this paper is designed to address two additional questions:

1. Why are there so few Southern Baptists in the area?
 - Those who settled the area have a strong ethnic identity tied to a national church.
 - Southern Baptists are relatively new to the area.
 - Southern Baptists have experienced significant missiological challenges.

2. What are the next steps?
 - See the possibilities that a new era of SBC life in the upper Midwest can provide.
 - Become aware of the new and exciting partnership opportunities that exist in the region.
 - Identify the best partnership opportunity for you and establish a partnership covenant.

Why are there so few Southern Baptists in the area?

There are a variety of reasons, but the three most significant are the strong ethnic identity tied to a national church, the late arrival of Southern Baptists, and the missiological challenges we have experienced.

Those who settled the area have a strong ethnic identity tied to a national church.

To comprehend this issue, one needs to understand the history of the region. The Upper Midwest is part of what residents fondly refer to as the Heartland. Another phrase heard quite often in the area, but not in a positive light, is “Flyover Country.” The latter term is derived from the reality that people from the more populous east and west coasts fly over the area to get from one populated area to the other. Take that image back in history and you could have aptly referred to the region as “Travel Through Country.” As Americans began moving west from 1830-1870, they were focused on getting to the goldfields of California and to the fertile valleys of Washington and Oregon. The Oregon Trail, Mormon Trail, Pony Express, Red River Trails, and Transcontinental Railroad all traversed the area and were used to transport people and information from the east to the west coast. The cities along the historic trails were platted out in the early to mid 1800s; however, those beyond the major transportation corridors were not established until the late 1800s.

This happened for a variety of reasons:

- 1) The negative image of the area as portrayed by early explorers. Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery (1804-1805) and the Pike Expedition (1805-1807) were both commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson to survey the Louisiana Purchase. Their report described much of the region as "The Great American Desert."

A later expedition by Major Stephen Long (1819-20) up the Missouri and Platte Rivers reinforced the images portrayed by the Corps of Discovery and Pike. Long wrote of the area, "I do not hesitate in giving the opinion, that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course, uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence. Although tracts of fertile land considerably extensive are occasionally to be met with, yet the scarcity of wood and water, almost uniformly prevalent, will prove an insuperable obstacle in the way of settling the country."

Long's subsequent expedition down the Red River of the North (1823) encouraged continued fur trading in what is now Minnesota, North Dakota, and Manitoba and led to the development of the Red River Trails. These oxcart trails formed a trade route connecting the head of navigation on the Mississippi with Fort Gary (Winnipeg). But the worlds of the fur trader and that of the settler were vastly different.

- 2) The marshy nature of much of Iowa, Minnesota, and parts of Missouri and the harshness of the winters discouraged settlement. The region provided wonderful waterfowl and beaver habitat but it was too wet to farm. That is until the area became the "last frontier" for immigrants who tilled and drained the wet lands so it could be farmed. The net result has been some of the most fertile farming ground in the world. And those who settled the area were predominantly from northern and eastern Europe so the winters were not an obstacle.
- 3) The areas in the region that were not marshy offered few trees and limited fresh water supply. Sod homes became the way of the plains, but they were quickly replaced by traditional wooden frame homes as soon as settlers could import and afford the materials. This did not begin to happen until the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 and subsequent rail construction in the region was completed in the years that followed.

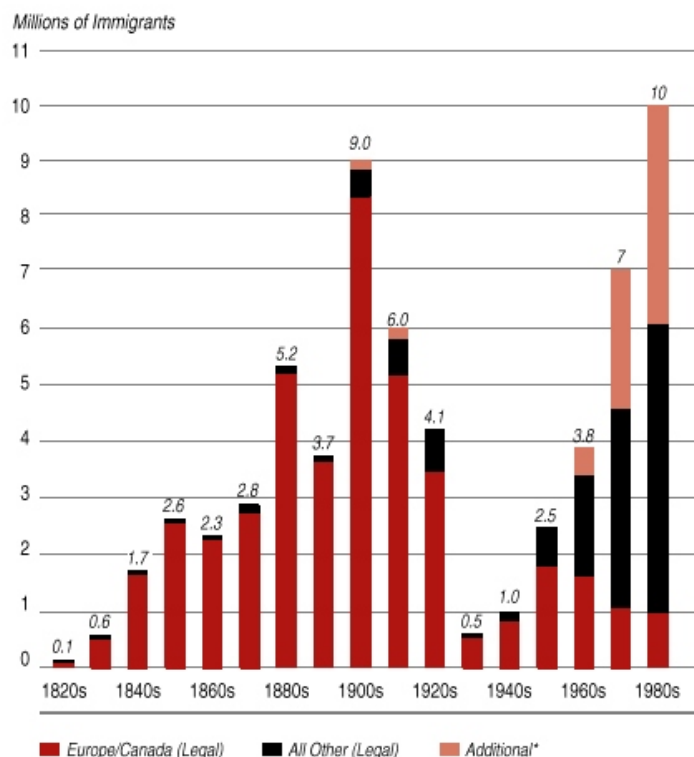
The major cities along what is now Interstate 29 were all platted out in the mid to late 1800s. Although there was considerable travel and trade in the area by European explorers, fur trappers, and pioneers dating back to the early 1600s, at the time of the American Civil War, the region was still primarily a frontier area. Formal settlement of the major cities on I-29 are as follows:

- St. Joseph, Missouri, was a fur trading post in 1823 before it was platted in 1843.
- Bellevue, Nebraska, (the state's oldest continuously settled city) was a fur trading post from 1822-1832. Baptist missionaries Moses and Eliza Merrill arrived in 1833 to minister to the Native Americans. In 1835 the Merrills moved with the Otoe tribe about eight miles to the west, where they established what was known as the Otoe or Moses Merrill Mission. The trading post was abandoned about 1839-1842, and the city of Bellevue was not incorporated until 1855.

- Council Bluffs, Iowa, (across the river from Bellevue) was founded in 1838 by Sauganash (Irish father and Mohawk mother) and his Potawatomi band of Native Americans. Missionary De Smet, a Jesuit missionary, founded a mission there in 1838-39. In 1848 Mormons platted the town and named it Kaneshville. In 1852 the majority of the Mormons moved west and the town was renamed Council Bluffs to acknowledge the area where Lewis and Clark had their first formal encounter with Plains Indians.
- Omaha, Nebraska, was not formally founded until July 4, 1854. The historic Union Stockyards were established in the 1870s, and it became the primary livestock market place for the region and for years the largest in the world.
- Sioux City, Iowa, was founded in 1854 as a trading point for fur traders and Native Americans. On April 29, 1869, Rev. Sheldon Jackson, Rev. T.H. Cleland and Rev. J. C. Elliott, climbed a high bluff overlooking the town, the Missouri river, and the surrounding vicinity. Standing on that Iowa bluff they could look across the river into Nebraska and up river into present day South Dakota. There they prayed together and then set out to win the west for Christ.
- Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is on the site of Fort Dakota, established in May 1865. It was formally incorporated as a city in 1876.
- Fargo, North Dakota, was not founded until 1871 even though the French had a fur trading post in the area in the 1740s. It was later a stop on the Red River Trail between St. Paul, MN and Ft. Gary (Winnipeg).
- Winnipeg, Manitoba, boasts the oldest recorded European settlement. A French officer arrived in the area in 1738 and built the first fur trading post on the site: Fort Rouge. However, Winnipeg was not actually incorporated until November 1873

The area's major period of settlement did not begin until 1870, and those who moved to the region were primarily fresh European immigrants who brought their families, their culture, their language, and their churches. And most came from countries with an established state church. In other words, to be Norwegian meant you were Lutheran and to be Irish meant you were Catholic. By the turn of the 20th century, America, which had been historically protestant, suddenly found the Roman Catholic Church to be its largest denomination. For decades, Baptist missionaries like the Merrills and Presbyterian missionaries like Jackson, Cleveland, and Elliott worked among the Native Americans.

Figure 1 Immigration to the U.S., by Decade, 1821–1830 through 1981–1990



* Additional immigrants include illegals, Special Agricultural Workers (SAWs), refugees, asylees, etc.

Source: Urban Institute and Immigration and Naturalization Service estimates.

For decades, passionate, evangelical, circuit riding, Methodist lay pastors and passionate men like the Andover Eleven had started hundreds of evangelical churches among the early settlers in Iowa. Suddenly, a radical shift occurred that filled the region with Catholics, Lutherans, and a sprinkling of other evangelicals all of whom spoke very little, if any, English. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. The chart on the left pictures the U.S. immigration pattern. Only in recent decades have we experienced the immigration levels encountered in the late 1800s and early 1900s. What magnifies the impact in the 1800s is the fact that in 1880 the U.S. population was only 50 million compared to 308 million in 2010. The magnitude of the impact on the culture of the Upper Midwest is almost impossible to comprehend—that is unless you are living in a U.S. community where first generation immigrants are today transforming the culture.

To say that the landscape of the Upper Midwest changed during the late 1800s is an understatement. Suddenly, entire cities were incorporated and established with clearly identifiable ethnic and religious identities. For example, the motto of Sioux County Iowa is, “If you ain’t Dutch, you ain’t much,” reflecting its strong Dutch Reformed history. The Orange City High School band marches in wooden shoes and the community attracts thousands to its annual Tulip Festival. These very strong ethnic ties built barriers to those from the “outside” with residents looking back to their European origins to maintain their cultural identity. For example, Emmetsburg, Iowa, was settled by Irish immigrants who celebrate every year with a three day St. Patrick’s Day Celebration which has featured members of the Irish Parliament as parade marshal.

Only in recent decades, with the advent of the television era and the mobility of the American population, have some of these longstanding ethnic barriers begun to dissolve. These changes have opened the door for more effective evangelism and church planting by Southern Baptists.

Southern Baptists are Relatively New to the Area

The earliest Baptists in the region were missionaries like Moses and Eliza Merrill, who were the first missionary residents in Nebraska and who served among the Otoes. The early Baptist churches in the region were primarily affiliated with American Baptist Churches USA (formerly Northern Baptists and prior to that Triennial Convention). As Southern Baptists, we share a common historical ancestry until the 1845 establishment of the SBC. A series of Comity Agreements between the American Baptist Home Mission Society and the Home Mission Board of the SBC identified the states and territories in which each board would place missionaries.

The first agreement between the two boards was the 1894 Fortress Monroe Comity Agreement. In part it stated:

We believe that, for the promotion of fraternal feelings and of the best interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, it is inexpedient for two different organizations of Baptists to solicit contributions, or to establish missions in the same localities, and for this reason we recommend to the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and to the American Baptist Home Mission Society, that in the prosecution of their work already begun on contiguous fields, or on the same field, that all antagonisms be avoided, and that their officers and employees be instructed to cooperate in all practical ways in the spirit of Christ. That we further recommend to these bodies and their agents, in opening new work, to direct their efforts to localities not already occupied by the other.

The states in the Upper Midwest were the responsibility of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The initial Comity Agreement was revised over time, expanding the reach of SBC life first into New Mexico and then Oklahoma in the early 1900s. The Dust Bowl migration resulted in SBC leaning churches being planted in California. Their desire to affiliate with SBC life led to a decision at the 1942 SBC Convention in San Antonio to recognize California. It took three national conventions, 1946-1948, and a floor amendment reversing the recommendation of a committee appointed at the 1947 convention to “Consider the Kansas Application” before the Kansas Convention was accepted. The SBC action in 1948 opened the door to further national expansion over the next two decades.

Migration from historical SBC areas during and following World War II to fill jobs in the more industrialized northern states, to staff the military bases many of which were outside the south, and to explore the oil and mineral rich areas in northern and western states led to a more national vision on the part of Southern Baptists. The first Southern Baptist Church in the south was FBC Charleston, South Carolina, and it was established in 1682. By contrast, the first SBC churches in the Upper Midwest are as follows:

- North Dakota—First Southern Baptist Church, Ray (later disbanded), 1953
- Iowa—Fairview Baptist Church, Anamosa in 1954
- Nebraska—First Southern Baptist Church, Lincoln (now Southview), September 1955
- South Dakota—First Southern Baptist Church, Rapid City (now Calvary), 1955
- Minnesota—Southtown Baptist Church, Bloomington in 1956
- Manitoba—Friendship Baptist Church Winnipeg (now New Life Sanctuary) in 1973

Calvin Miller, who planted Westside Church in Omaha, the first SBC mega-church outside the traditional SBC area, was quoted in a 1965 article as saying, “When the early missionary traveled by canoe and on foot, the Jesuit missionary came. When trails had been made and men traveled by horseback, the Methodist preacher came. When the railroads were pushed west the Lutheran pastor came. When they build the jet airports at Omaha and Lincoln, Southern Baptists came.” Although stated with intended humor, Calvin’s statement speaks volumes.

When you read the history of the region, you encounter Baptist groups not found in traditional SBC regions. They include The North American Baptist Conference that traces its roots to German immigrants. They have seminaries in Sioux Falls, SD, and Edmonton, Canada. Another is Converge Worldwide, formerly the Baptist General Conference, which sprang out of the Swedish Pietistic movement in the mid 1800s. They have a seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. The General Association of Regular Baptists (GARB) was formed in 1932 (former Baptist Bible Union 1923) as a conservative splinter group formed out of the American Baptist Churches USA. Although there are no longer formal ties, Faith Baptist Bible College and Seminary in Ankeny, Iowa, was formed by GARB church leaders.

Other evangelical groups have a historical presence in the region: the Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA), the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC), and the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). The EFCA was formed in 1950 from the merger of the Swedish Evangelical Free Church and the Norwegian-Danish Evangelical Free Church Association—note the strong ethnic identity of its roots. The ECC has 800 congregations in the United States and Canada. It was founded in 1885 by Swedish immigrants. Historically Lutheran in theology and background,

it is now a broadly evangelical movement—again note the ethnic identity. The C&MA was founded by Rev. Albert Benjamin Simpson in 1887. It did not start off as a denomination, but rather began as two distinct parachurch organizations: The Christian Alliance, which focused on the pursuit and promotion of the higher Christian life, and The Evangelical Missionary Alliance, which focused on mobilizing "consecrated" Christians in the work of foreign missionary efforts. These two groups amalgamated in 1897 to form The Christian and Missionary Alliance.

*But in the Upper Midwest, the membership of **ALL** evangelical churches combined will usually number less than 10% of the population in any given county. And Southern Baptists will generally be well under 1%. We are new and we are few, but with effective strategies, we can make a significant impact. The use of effective missiological strategies brings us to our third point.*

We Have Experienced Significant Missiological Challenges

Added to the aforementioned challenges (strong national ethnic identities and the late arrival of Southern Baptists) is the reality that most of the early Southern Baptist Churches were, in essence, ethnic churches. Their members often heard, "You're not from around here, are you?" Or they were asked, "Where are you from?" Their potlucks featured foods "new to the region."

The early churches were viewed as cults and lumped in with the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses because they were the only groups who went door-to-door. Their worship services were different—even different from other evangelical churches in the area: public invitations, informal relational style (a lot of hugging and chatting before services began), and services held also on Sunday and Wednesday nights. The churches strong emphasis on congregational polity, individual church autonomy, and lay pastors surfaced ecclesiological issues unfamiliar to most area residents. Many pastors were not comfortable connecting with other pastors in the community because of their theology and/or education and ended up isolating themselves. In an area where ecumenism is highly valued, the perception that Southern Baptists were sectarian and were proselytizing drove a wedge of separation and created barriers to evangelism.

Like many ethnic churches in America today, pastors and lay leaders unintentionally expended significant energy maintaining their cultural identity and staying connected "back home." To be Southern Baptist meant you were or you became, to some extent, southern—like becoming Lutheran meant, to some extent, becoming German. Too often, if a pastor or a church suggested an activity or strategy or name outside the traditional arena, it was viewed with skepticism and might even be called unbiblical.

In some new work areas the number of Southern Baptist churches and the number of church members has plateaued or, in a few cases, even declined in the last twenty years. However, the good news is that there are pockets where SBC pastors and lay leaders have learned effective ways to lean into our historic passions and strengths: we are Biblically based, desire to cooperate with one another to accomplish more together than we can individually, are unapologetically evangelistic, and global in our missions orientation. In some areas of the Upper Midwest, Southern Baptists have found a balance between the passion for solid biblical theology and the need to be able to connect relationally with people from a very different culture and background. They have redefined being Southern Baptist from becoming southern

and being passionate about the Word of God to simply making disciples who are passionate about the Word of God.

What are the next steps?

The new millennium finds the historic ethnic barriers dissolving. Southern Baptists have been around long enough (50 years in the region) that we are finding greater acceptance. And, most Southern Baptists have awakened to the reality that seeing lives being transformed by the Love of God does not require people in the Midwest to eat grits just because farmers in the area grow a lot of corn. Three specific actions that will help Southern Baptists take advantage of these factors are as follows:

1. See the possibilities that a new era of SBC life in the Upper Midwest can provide.

The Heartland Interstate Strategy was birthed out of the needs in the region, a desire by regional leaders to work together, and the reality that we are in a new era for SBC work in the Upper Midwest. We are moving from a Matthew 9:38 Era to a Luke 10:2 Era.

In the context of Matthew 9:38, Jesus saw the multitudes, and “He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.” Then as He prepared to send out the 12 apostles, He said, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest.” Then Jesus sent them out two by two. Fifty years ago Southern Baptists began responding to the call for help from laymen whose jobs had “sent them” into the region, and we began to plant churches in the area. Over the years hundreds of faithful Southern Baptists have heeded the call and became involved in the harvest fields of the Upper Midwest. In many places laborers were identified in the harvest field, and they too were called, equipped, and began working in the harvest fields.

The new era, the Luke 10:2 Era, involves a renewed commitment and a desire to provide additional resources for the accomplishment of the original task. Luke records for us that after the twelve returned and spent more time with Jesus, He sent out a second group of disciples. As He prepared to send out the 72, He gave them the following instructions: “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth laborers into His harvest.” We are at a point where it is imperative that we again extend with passion the call to go forth into the harvest fields of the Upper Midwest where truly “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” We need to do it with renewed passion, energy, and resources.

Indicative of this new era is the renewed emphasis by NAMB on church planting and the vote at the 2012 SBC Convention in New Orleans approving the use of an alternative name that carries more of a national image: Great Commission Baptists. The fact that the vote carried by only a slim margin (53-47) indicates many Southern Baptists are not aware of issues like those addressed in this paper—we have to do a better job of communicating both history and current reality.

2. Become aware of the new and exciting partnership opportunities that exist in the region.

The purpose of the Heartland Interstate Strategy is to *Transform our Heartland through planting reproducing churches along the I-29 corridor*. This will be accomplished as we...

- Communicate the needs,
 - Promote partnership opportunities, and
 - Facilitate local strategies
- 1) Hopefully this paper has helped by *Communicating the Needs*. Additional information will be made available at the Heartland Interstate Strategy web site <http://heartlandinterstate.org>.
 - 2) The web site will be the primary tool used to *Promoting Partnership Opportunities*. Church planters will be able to upload specific needs that will provide potential partners with the basic information including the person to contact along with their contact information.
 - 3) As a multi-convention, international, coordinated effort, the Heartland Interstate Strategy is very Baptist in that it is designed to *Facilitate Local Strategies*, not develop a top down, one-size fits all solution.

3. Identify the best partnership opportunity for you and establish a partnership covenant.

As you consider partnering through the Heartland Interstate Strategy, here are some typical steps:

- 1) First and foremost, we are asking you to pray that the SBC leaders in the region will have wisdom and energy to meet the task at hand.
- 2) We encourage you to become informed about specific opportunities in the area and then to pray for divine leadership to see if God wants you to get involved. The initial phase of the strategy has identified the following “hub cities” where new church plants will become key to the long-term fulfillment of transforming our Heartland:
 - a. Sioux Falls, South Dakota
 - b. Grand Forks, North Dakota
 - c. Fargo, North Dakota/Moorhead, Minnesota
 - d. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
 - e. Sioux City, Iowa/South Sioux City, Nebraska/North Sioux City, South Dakota
 - f. Omaha, Nebraska/Council Bluffs, Iowa
 - g. St. Joseph, Missouri/Northeast Kansas
- 3) Become a prayer warrior for one or more of the specific needs.
- 4) Plan to participate in a Vision Tour or schedule a one-on-one vision trip to see first hand what God is doing.
- 5) Prayerfully identify THE opportunity that God has placed on your heart.
- 6) Establish a partnership covenant.
- 7) Continue to pray as you fulfill the terms of the partnership covenant.

We are confident that God will continue to raise up from our harvest fields more laborers while at the same time He leads Southern Baptists from other areas to join us in gathering the spiritual harvest in the Upper Midwest! We invite you to prayerfully consider connecting with the Heartland Interstate Strategy as part of your obedience to Jesus’ command in Acts 1:8—“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”