

December 2024

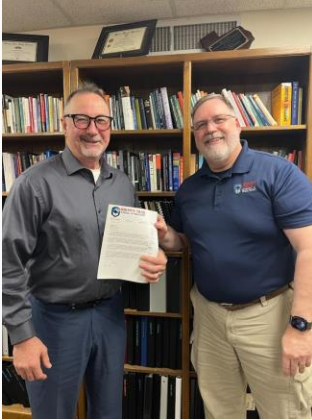
I find it hard to believe that 2024 is about to end and that we will soon welcome a new year. 2024 has been an excellent year for the Brown Trail School of Preaching. We are finishing the year with 14 full-time preaching students, 13 in our women's program, 6 auditing or taking classes part-time, and 15 taking courses with our online STEP program geared to young Christians, specifically those who may be interested in preaching one day. We are entering December with three men who have already sent in applications to attend, starting in June. We are grateful to all who unite with us in order to make all this happen! May God be glorified!

We officially started our Winter Quarter on December 2 and will have three weeks completed before we take our winter break. I am teaching *1 and 2 Corinthians* this quarter, and many other classes like the *Gospel of John*, *Homiletics V*, *Greek Exegesis*, *Local Program of Work*, *How to Keep a Job*, and more are being offered this quarter.

New Student William Ford

I am grateful to announce that Brother William Ford from Oakland, California, has just been accepted to start our two-year program next year. William became a member of the church at 21 years old and has studied the Bible and preached some in the past. At 56 years old, he decided to prepare himself for full-time ministry. After hearing many great things about BTSOP, he applied and visited the school, where he had the opportunity to sit in some classes and meet the students and staff.

He is newly married to Tho Huong Ngyen-Ford, and together, they will be moving to the Fort Worth area sometime next May. Please keep them in your prayers as they begin this new journey.



Graduate Update

Ernie Christie

Brother Ernie Christie and his wife Judith graduated from BTSOP in 1974. He was part of a graduating class of 10 young men who went out to preach the gospel, and two from that class are still preaching full-time 50 years later. Since then, he and his wife have faithfully served the church in several places throughout Texas. Recently, Brother Christie decided to retire from full-time ministry. Age has a way of catching up with us. We are very grateful for his service since he graduated 50 years ago. Below is something he posted on his Facebook page to announce their retirement.

"My tenure with Lake Shore Drive church of Christ concluded harmoniously and without regrets on August 31, after I had the honor of serving as the pulpit preacher for 28 years, followed by a supportive role as the associate preacher and a volunteer chaplain at local hospitals for 11 years. My 39 years of unwavering service at Lake Shore account for nearly half of my life and most of the life I've shared with my wife, Judith. We are immensely grateful for the blessings and the kinship of the Lake Shore family. We pray that grace and peace will be bestowed upon Judith and me in our forthcoming years, and we continue to pray for Lake Shore's continued growth in grace and peace, to the glory of God the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord, and Savior.

Additionally, this year signifies a milestone of 52 years dedicated to preaching, having served only three congregations during this time."

The Christie family is a wonderful, loving family, and I am grateful to have known them over the last few years. I know he is taking a step back, but preachers never really retire like most of us; we find other ways to serve our living God and His community! Please keep them in your prayers as they transition to normal in their lives.



Congratulations!
Sonny and Wionna Balch

We want to congratulate Sonny and Wionna Balch for celebrating their 65th anniversary on December 13, which happens to be almost two weeks after his 85th birthday. The two were married in 1959, and they decided to attend Brown Trail in 1967 and graduated in 1969. He is now our third oldest graduate that is still faithfully serving God, all these years later.



Congratulations!
Paul and Kelsie Degaldo

We also want to congratulate Paul and Kelsie on the birth of their second child. Paul graduated from BTSOP in 2010, and they were married in 2013. Since his graduation, he has served the church in Fort Worth, Texas, and now they are in Elgin, Illinois, just outside of Chicago. I know they are rookies, only being married for 11 years now compared to the

Balch's, but Kelsie recently gave birth to their second child, Micah, in October. Micah spent the first three weeks of his life in NICU, but is now home, healthy, and growing with his family.



Obituary

Bill Reed

Brother Bill Reed passed away on November 21, 2024, and he was 90 years old. He and his wife Ellen were married 71 years before his passing. When Bill came to Fort Worth in 1965 to start his studies, he came to us from California, where he was well on his way to a promising career in Aerospace. They decided to give up financial stability and to give their lives to ministry. Upon graduation, he and his family labored in Louisiana, California, and Arizona. For the past 30 years, they worked with the church in and around Lake Havasu City, Arizona. At times, he and his wife worked at Walmart to make ends meet so that he could preach. He retired from full-time preaching just a few years ago. I remember the congregation calling me and saying he just retired and had been there for 30 years, and they were looking for someone to come for the next 30 years. I smiled when the man said that because it is rare to find a preacher who can stay at a location that long.

Together, they had three children, five grandchildren, and numerous great and great-great grandchildren. If you look at the BTSOP banner above this newsletter, you will see the picture of the first four BTSOP graduates. He is the third from the right. Below, you will see two pictures, one from when he had just graduated from Brown Trail, and the second is one of the last pictures of him preaching!

I have never met Bill and Ellen. They say he was a very studious and humble man who loved to study his Bible and instill her precepts into their family. His wife, Ellen, is known as a perfect preacher's wife, with people saying they just complemented each other perfectly.

I met his son, William, in Henderson, Texas, a couple of years ago, and William is now serving as the pulpit minister at the Henderson church of Christ. William credits his father

for shaping and molding him into the man he is and training him to preach and serve. Please keep Bill's family in your prayers. The family will have a memorial for him at the Ora Grande Blvd congregation in Lake Havasu City on January 11, 2025.



2025 Financial Needs

I try not to write much about our financial needs every month. However, with the new year starting in two weeks, I find this to be a beneficial time to mention some specific needs we have each year:

1. We are always looking for new financial support for our General Fund. Our General Fund pays for the salaries and operational costs of the school. We always find that this the most challenging fund to raise money for, but we need to find an additional 50 congregations or individuals who can donate \$50.00 a month to help us break even next year.
 2. We are raising \$2,000.00 for International Travel. With our Spanish Department being one of the world's most respected Spanish preacher training programs, our Spanish-speaking staff are constantly asked to travel abroad to preach Gospel Meetings and teach at lectureships. With many of these requests coming from second and third-world countries, those congregations often need more funds to pay for our instructor's travel.
 3. Our students travel annually to attend the Polishing the Pulpit Lectures. This year, we need to raise \$3,000.00 to help cover the cost of attending this lectureship.
 4. We are raising \$5,000.00 for Software and Technology.
 5. \$3,000.00 for student's books.
 6. \$ 2,000.00 for the school's pantry.
 7. We need to raise \$4,000.00 for our bi-annual Restoration Tour, which will take us to
-

Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia, and a stop to see the Ark Experience and Creation Museum in Kentucky, just south of Cincinnati, Ohio.

8. \$5,000.00 for the Student Emergency Fund. This fund covers unexpected expenses that arise from time to time. Over the years, the fund has been used to pay for dental work, emergency care, the rebuilding of transmissions, etc.

Please also note the Robert Stapleton Endowment Fund. Robert, my father, directed and taught at BTSOP for 17 years (14 as Director), and along with him establishing the Chimala School of Preaching (Tanzania, East Africa) in 1985, he has been responsible for the training of hundreds of men who now serve in pulpits all over this world. Upon his death in 2017, it was decided to establish the Robert Stapleton Endowment Fund, hoping to raise enough money to place in an endowment that would eventually pay for the Director's salaries at BTSOP. We would appreciate any donation to this endowment. We hope to one day have enough in the endowment fund so we no longer need to raise money from the brotherhood. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Conclusion

As the year ends, we look forward to more time on planet Earth to glorify God and His kingdom. What a blessed gift for all of us to unite to bring glory to God by training preachers who will spend years and decades "preaching Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23-30). Thank you for your daily prayers for our program and the financial support.

Brotherly,
heath w stapleton
