



## ON DECK • Calling the next generation into the game

One-in-ten IBSA churches is looking for a pastor. As populations shift away from smaller towns and the numbers responding to a call to ministry decline, it's harder to find a pastor. And it often takes longer.

"Who will go for us?" is not only a question from Isaiah's time. It's very real today.

That's why the work of IBSA Zone Consultants like **Cliff Woodman** is so important. ZC's offer mentoring for pastors through cohort groups and preaching labs. They bring many churches into the kingdom task of calling out the called.

"Part of being a healthy church is being outwardly focused," Woodman said. "What can we do outside of our four walls—or however many walls we've got?"

Woodman also serves as pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Carlinville. He was **Blake Harding's** pastor when, as a high schooler, the young man was trying to clarify his call to ministry. Woodman created a pipeline to grow his leadership.

"They gave me opportunities to serve, and that's what I'm grateful for," Harding said. "Being a greeter at the door or doing ushering, these small steps helped me grow comfortable serving in the church."

Then at 16, the church gave him responsibility for a Sunday school class of 3rd-5th graders. Eventually, with Woodman's encouragement, he left for Hannibal-LaGrange University, a Southern Baptist school in Missouri. During and after college, the pastor kept pouring into the young man, connecting him with an IBSA pastors' study cohort and presenting ministry opportunities through Macoupin Baptist Association and the state association.



WOODMAN

"One of the things I got from my cohort groups was this idea of unity," Harding said. "I'm not doing ministry on my own. I have other churches in the association. I have other churches in the state, with access to

IBSA that have resources to guide me no matter what difficulties I might come across."

Harding's college graduation coincided with the pandemic, so finding a ministry position wasn't easy.

"For quite a while, we were getting nothing," **Dwight McDaniel** (above right, with Harding) said of Highland Avenue Baptist Church's search for an associate pastor. "Sometimes I was beginning to wonder over that two-year-period (whether) our guy's out there. It was hard."



But God brought Harding and the Robinson congregation together in 2022. Woodman was pleased.

"To send somebody from our church to do God's ministry, to be part of the kingdom ministry someplace else," Woodman said, describing the reward he feels about Harding's new call. "Knowing that what we did here is carrying on, and the lives that he touches, essentially we touch."

There are nearly 900 churches in IBSA. Eventually all of them will need help calling new pastors. In the meantime, an entire generation of future leaders needs loving confrontation with their own call to ministry. For churches and the people who will one day lead them, IBSA is at work calling and training the called.



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