

## A STEP OF FAITH

By Steve Willis, pastor, Kenova First Baptist Church, Kenova, WV

Over 20 years ago, a godly couple known as the Terrys left Kenova First Baptist Church much of their life savings, a sum of \$50,000. They were not a rich couple, they just saved frugally. They had a heart for missions and their dying request was that the money be spent for furthering the gospel through missions. Our church placed the money in a reserve account and used the interest to support missions on an annual basis. The past few years, the interest on the account was almost nil.

The economy tanked and money was tight. At times, our church sent very little money to foreign missionaries because, after all, charity starts at home, right? “God wants us to take care of our own first” – although we didn’t say this, we sure practiced it in our budgetary decisions.

Two years ago we made a decision. We were going to tithe to missions, that is, give away at least 10% of our income to ministries outside our walls. If times were tight, we would tighten our own belt and not starve our missionaries on the field. This was not an easy decision as we were planning to embark on a \$1.5 million building project, but we took the step of faith and proceeded as God led.

Guess what happened? 2007 became our greatest financial year EVER. Not only that, but when the recession hit in 2008 our offerings only increased. We decided not to participate in the recession. We have added more members in 2008 and 2009 than in the previous five years combined! People got excited about giving and we have nearly completed our building project, 90% paid for in cash.

But the story doesn’t stop there. This past summer we received a number of letters from missionaries stating how giving was down and their need was greater than ever before. One particular group, the Zambian International Theological College, was endorsed by ABCUSA as a mission partner, but their funding was dangerously low. The college was facing having to shut down. What could we do?

We took a hard look in the mirror. We had the Terry Mission money sitting in an account, drawing almost no interest, while overseas seminaries were preparing to shut their doors. Prayerfully, we decided to release the entire \$50,000 because someday, we surmised, Jesus was going to come back and there would sit \$50,000 in the bank. Those missionaries needed it now and we believed the Terrys would have wanted to provide a bailout of their own. We made that decision on a Sunday.

The very next day, our church got a call from Hollywood, CA.\* Their film crew was coming to Huntington and had read online about our food and exercise ministries. We told them we wanted to finish our building project so the community could come as families and cook dinner and exercise together. Over the last few months, they continued to film in our area and decided to adopt our project. Due to their hard work, and the

Lord's good blessings, their people are finishing up much of our building project this week. In total, they have provided nearly \$200,000 in goods and services to Kenova First Baptist Church.

Now what would inspire a secular television company to feature a gospel-preaching church on national television, and at the same time help fund their building project? My friends, it is clearly the Lord's way of rewarding us for stepping up our commitment to missions. Bless others and don't miss out on the blessings God has for you. He may have something special stored away for your congregation, but the key to His storage building is a thing called generosity.

*\*The show will air on ABC television beginning Friday, March 26. It will be a six-week mini-series addressing health problems in the Huntington area.*