

Transcript

Dr. Ron Mackey Interview

4.03: "Telling the Story of the Baptist Home" & "Responding to COVID-19 and Future Plans"

This episode was recorded on September 21, 2020, eight days prior to the first positive COVID case confirmed at TBH Chillicothe campus on September 29th. The fact that The Baptist Home experienced no COVID-19 cases for seven months was nothing short of a miracle.

Andy Braams: I'm here with Dr. Ron Mackey and Ron, you are a part of The Baptist Home here in Missouri. And could you just tell our audience a little bit about yourself and where you serve and how your position affects your service?

Ron Mackey: [00:00:16] Well, first of all, I am a native of Oklahoma, and in growing up there, our family owned and operated nursing homes around the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. At one time, we had 10 nursing homes and my family was involved in Baptist life in Oklahoma, from those early days of my life [and] going forward. I ended up following a call to serve as a pastor. I went off to college [and] seminary in Fort Worth and Southwestern Seminary. I served as a pastor in Oklahoma, Texas, and most recently, in Missouri. After moving to Missouri in [00:01:00] 1997, I had the opportunity to serve on the Board of Trustees for The Baptist Home, beginning in 2002, and did that through 2010. In 2010, I came to work for The Baptist Home as an advancement officer for Eastern Missouri and then transitioned into the Director of Advancement position. Most recently, I am now serving as the Vice-President of Community Engagement for The Baptist Home.

Andy Braams: [00:01:31] Okay. So, as the current someone, who has been working on advancement [and] now moving on to community engagement as you are, what is The Baptist Home specifically? What is the mission of The Baptist Home? Who is it? Who is your general audience? Who are you? Who are you serving as The Baptist Home here in Missouri?

Ron Mackey: [00:01:57] Sure. The [00:02:00] Baptist Home, and some folks might not see it, this might be a unique way of saying it; The Baptist Home is a Christian sanctity of life ministry. We often look at that [sanctity of life], pre-life and early life, but we believe that the sanctity of life has implications on every generation of our lives. And The Baptist Home is there to serve aging humanity in that last journey, which probably will be the longest aspect of their physical existence and may be the most difficult. The Baptist Home does that by providing housing for folks in a variety of ways: independent living [and] assisted living all the way through skilled nursing care.

Currently on four campuses, our original campus in Ironton, Missouri, Chillicothe, Missouri, Ozark, Missouri, and our newest campus, which is still under construction in Ashland, Missouri. [00:03:00] we serve aging humanity. We don't have an age limit on that. We don't say you have to be 65 or anything like that, but we serve people who need assistance as they age.

And that assistance could be as rudimentary as, “I’m tired of mowing the grass and I don’t want to change light bulbs anymore.” It could be as significant as, “I need help with virtually every activity of my daily living.” And we do that in order to serve them as spiritual people. We often look at it from standpoint of: we have the physical aspect of our ministry so that we can be there to serve their spiritual journey.

Without the physical aspect of it, we wouldn’t have the venue of serving there and their spiritual journey. We have campus pastors on each of our campuses; full-time campus pastors who are there to supplement our residents’ [00:04:00] local church ministry, and to help serve them during those that aging process.

So that’s basically who we are and what we do and how we do it.

Andy Braams: [00:04:11] Okay. So, as your title is even changing and morphing a little bit, can you describe a little bit about what your role is with The Baptist Home and, and how your role fits within the general scheme of The Baptist Home?

Ron Mackey: [00:04:26] One of the interesting things about The Baptist Home is we do long-term care in a very unique way.

So when, when you say The Baptist Home, most folks are going to have in their mind, a very distinct portrait of a typical nursing home. And it is my job to help tell the story of the unique approach of The Baptist Home: that we care for people in a thoroughly Christian environment; that we do that at this point without any federal [00:05:00] or state financial assistance; we are [a] private-pay organization. When our residents run out of their own assets, we have a benevolent fund that helps cover those extra costs for their care. And I lead the team that helps tell that story about who The Baptist Home is, why we exist, and how we’re doing what we do. And then, also helping to raise that support for the care of our folks who are in need of some financial assistance.

We are fundraisers, but we’re not direct fundraisers. I’ve often joked with our staff that I’m the chief storyteller and they are the storytellers.

Andy Braams: [00:05:43] So one of the things that you do Ron in telling stories, I know that this is beyond just Missouri for you. You have opportunities to serve in many places, many locations, and in previous discussions, even [00:06:00] globally.

So with that, how has COVID impacted your ability to serve? I mean, obviously you’re in protection mode in one sense for your own residents, but how has COVID impacted The Baptist Home’s ability to serve beyond Missouri and even beyond the nation?

Ron Mackey: [00:06:21] The reality is outside of the borders of Missouri, it has pretty much put everything on a standstill.

There was a trip planned to Cuba that got put off. There were preliminary plans for an exploratory trip to Poland. Those were put off. And basically what we’re doing now is we are connecting with those leaders electronically as much as we can. Because of translation

issues, quite honestly, that's through email. It's very difficult to do a video Zoom conference unless you're able to bring in a translator for that. [00:07:00] And that could get a little bit expensive. And the fact that many of these folks, like most of us here in the States, are now working from home, and that gets really difficult for some of them because of technology issues, where, where they may be living and things like that.

I would say that most of the organizations and ministries that we had been working with are quite honestly in survival mode. In addition to medical issues, they've got governmental issues that are much more chaotic than anything we would have experienced here in the States. We can gripe all we want about dealing with different things, but they have it very, very difficult in that regard.

And so, we are just praying for them, holding on with them, supporting them personally, as they try to navigate their way through it. Some of [00:08:00] those places, like in Belarus, and in El Salvador, Nicaragua, where they had already ongoing nursing-type ministries, they are financially-struggling. They are medically-struggling, dealing with people who have been infected with the virus.

And so, we're doing everything we can to help them. Sadly, we are not able to physically help them. We have found it very difficult during these days to even support them if we could, with financial gifts, that might benefit them because quite frankly, it's just really dicey to me sending money in a foreign capacity right now.

Andy Braams: [00:08:46] Yeah. Yeah. Maybe this is not appropriate given your last sentence, Ron, but, if there was somebody listening to this or watching this at a later point that wanted to direct some funds towards that end, [00:09:00] what would they do? How would they contact you to do that?

Ron Mackey: [00:09:04] They can contact me directly at The Baptist Home. That would be the best way to do it. I could have a personal conversation with them about how to make that happen.

Andy Braams: [00:09:14] Okay. Okay. Wonderful. So, obviously Ron, you are well-educated. You have a Ph.D. A lot of times our education doesn't always fit in the direction that we end up serving. What specifically [is your] Ph.D. in, and how has that helped you in your role with The Baptist Home?

Ron Mackey: [00:09:33] My Ph.D. was in church history, specifically the Reformation, which, all the way from my bachelor's degree, everything has had a historical focus to it in that regard. How has it helped me directly in this ministry? I'm not an expert in any one field, obviously. Quite honestly, the Ph.D. taught me how to work hard, study well, [00:10:00] and finish what you started.

And that's really the most important aspect of it is that I've learned how to learn, and how to find information that is needed. And I often attribute my education to a sense of stubbornness that was taught to me by my father.

Andy Braams: [00:10:21] Okay. Okay. Well, this is a new podcast and you're one of the first guests on this podcast, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*. And this is obviously an intentional ministry of The Baptist Home. As you are the Vice-President of Community Engagement, formerly the Director of Advancement, you had a role in developing this idea. So, can you share a little bit about how this, of the story of how this podcast being the master storyteller or the supervisory storyteller that you are?

Can you share a little bit about how this podcast came to be, what your hope and intent is, and any goals that you may have for the podcast?

Ron Mackey: [00:10:58] Sure, this was Dr. [00:11:00] Harrison's, our president's, dream. He brought this to Becky Barton, our Director of Communications, and I a few months ago, with the idea that he wanted to see us take The Baptist Home's experience, expertise, and story to a broader audience.

We have always been a quiet provider, but our new mission statement does have the language that we will be an advocate for the aging. And we are now going to use that experience and understanding that we have to help broaden that expression. And we are leveraging our history and our experiences with Dr. Harrison's relationships in the theological field to help bring together a more thoroughly biblically based concept, [00:12:00] of aging. When you look in the field, what you find now is quite honestly not much written. If it is out there, it is written from a secular standpoint or from such a progressive Christian standpoint, that biblical information is brought in more as anecdote or nice little stories, but not foundational principles of how you treat human beings as they age.

So, we want to bring that to a broader community, hopefully, one aspect of the audience will be those in theological work. We would also really love to be able to start communicating to those in the medical field about aging. There is an absolute dearth of knowledge and training in the field of gerontology.

[00:13:00] We are looking at the greatest boom of aging adults in the history of mankind at the same time that our medical institutions seem to be oblivious to this fact.

Andy Braams: [00:13:11] Okay.

Ron Mackey: [00:13:12] So that would be the goal.

Andy Braams: [00:13:13] Okay. So, obviously you mentioned Dr. Rodney Harrison as the new president of The Baptist Home and knowing Dr. Harrison, myself, he's a very strategic thinker; [he] does not like to stay in the box at all. So, as you think about some of those things, is there anything partnering with the medical field, partnering more theologically, with those from Rodney's background in that regard? Can you give maybe a few specifics of what you were thinking from The Baptist Home as you look forward, maybe two, three, five, 10 years ahead, even?

Ron Mackey: [00:13:49] Sure. We are specifically next month, we will be meeting with Hannibal LaGrange University. Dr. Harrison is speaking in chapel, and several of us are going to be [00:14:00] there to meet with their nursing department to discuss connections between Hannibal LaGrange and our nursing needs. It is really difficult to find quality CNAs, CMTS, LPMs, and RNs – that whole nursing spectrum – that is needed for long-term care. And we're looking at a partnership with Hannibal LaGrange in that aspect.

We are also in the early stages of a conversation with Missouri Baptist University and Southwest Baptist University. Those three universities are relatively close to each of our campuses. And so, we're going to look at some possibilities of doing some training, perhaps some practicum work and things like that that could be done on our campuses. We are also, at Midwestern Seminary, discussing the possibility of our current campus pastors helping provide some information [00:15:00] for current students at Midwestern about, perhaps a chaplaincy track, maybe to help develop their CPE process there at the seminary. And we're trying to work together in that way.

You will find in the state of Missouri, there is a lack of licensed nursing home administrators. And there is a distinct lack of biblical Christian nursing home administrators. When you go to look for them, you have to look long and hard to find a biblically-qualified candidate in that regard.

Andy Braams: [00:15:39] So, as you just mentioned, even in the previous question, you know, extending not only the influence, but extending your partnerships with educational institutions, etc., that sounds like an exciting possibility.

And now again, I know that Rodney's only been a part of The Baptist Home for, officially, a few months, [and] served as an [00:16:00] interim for a few months as well. What are some things in his early days that you see from his leadership that shows a bright future? Some things that shows him to be the man to lead The Baptist Home into the future?

Ron Mackey: [00:16:16] Well, I tell you, his proactive approach to dealing with COVID-19. He became the official president in April. As an interim president in March, we all woke up one day and the world had changed. And all of a sudden here came all of these emails from the alphabet soup of healthcare nationally.

And we had to discern that. And without disparaging those organizations, they're very adept at saying a lot of things, but actually not telling you what to do. But they will hold you accountable for creating your own process. One, your process better work. Two, you better follow [00:17:00] your process. And if you don't, we're going to find you. He worked very quickly and very proactively to help us determine what we needed to do, how to communicate it – which is probably more important than what we're doing – how to communicate it internally, [and] how to communicate that externally.

And he just got us all together in a room via Zoom and we plowed through it and came up with a plan. And then we've been executing that plan through that time. You are right. He is an out-of-the-box thinker. I don't think he even knows they're supposed to be a box. So, he is a very visionary leader.

But I would say this. Sometimes in dealing with visionary leaders, they have a tendency to leave you behind. And you're constantly trying to catch up with this ever-evolving stream of consciousness that's coming out of them. Dr. Harrison brings together that visionary ideology in some ways [00:18:00] with a very collaborative process. He really does want us in the room. He really does want to hear our voice. And he really does want us to know what we're talking about. So when he asks, "I need you to tell me about this process or this opportunity," – because we know he's going to act upon what he heard from us – it really inspires me to go out and get the best information I can for him so that we can make these decisions.

Now, we are a 107-year-old ministry that sometimes acts like we are 107 years old. His pace of ideas at work is different than we've experienced before. But in this time where we are constantly updating ideas and [00:19:00] modifying things and learning, where you got to do it just a little bit differently in relationship to COVID-19, he has created a very team-oriented, fluid process where we are, quite honestly, we are more engaged together as a team now than we've been in quite some time.

Andy Braams: [00:19:18] Oh, that's good to hear. Yeah. I've known Dr. Harrison for a number of years and couldn't say enough high things about him.

So, a little bit of a different question for you, Ron. What is the best part of your job? What is the part that makes you, and I'm guessing just on what you've said so far, telling stories would be a part of that, but, what do you most love about your particular position and how you get to engage with people at The Baptist Home?

Ron Mackey: [00:19:49] That's what I most love is that I get to engage people. I've always had an affinity for older people. I just...it was natural. It was, [00:20:00] the way we grew up, you know. From my earliest memories, I was walking the halls of one of our nursing homes. I was some older person's great-grandkid, you know, my whole life. And so, I've always had an affinity to be around older people and to learn from them and to listen to their stories about who they are, where they came from.

And in my role at The Baptist Home, I have the opportunity sometimes, my staff and I have the opportunity, to be the very first contact with that senior, who's likely a donor to the home and now finds themselves needing to make some really difficult, big decisions. And so, getting to know them in that context, helping them figure out, "How am I going to sell my home? How am I going to liquidate my assets? How do I make this decision to move from being completely independent [00:21:00] to a journey where my independence is going to shrink on a moment-by-moment basis?" And then, when they come to the home, I have the privilege of traveling around the state and being in our homes and connecting with them as they've made that journey.

And I have to tell you, sometimes it's a difficult journey. And it's a sad journey. As you watch them as their world has gotten smaller, they get smaller. And their health declines and their mobility goes away and you see them kind of become more frail. And, you know, no one wins when it comes to aging, we're all going to face the same fate.

And, oftentimes we get the chance to 1) learn from the depth of their faith, but 2) also assist them in the vagaries of aging. I remember one lady, I stopped by her [00:22:00] room to say, "Hi," to her. And I asked her how she was doing and she [says], "Well, I woke up again." And, you know, so we had a conversation about, you know, God being absolutely in charge of life and death and what is our responsibility and our opportunity between now and then.

And she said to me, "Well, Ronald, I agree. And I understand that, but you don't understand there's another place I would much rather be right now." So, that part of it, I've never worked a day since I came to work for The Baptist Home. It's just been a joy. Don't tell Rodney I said that.

Andy Braams: [00:22:35] Well said, though. Well said. Is there anything else that you'd like to share today with the audience, Ron?

Ron Mackey: [00:22:45] Aging is not a physical thing. It's not a medical thing. We happen to live in a culture where we try to fix aging. We try to change aging. On my [00:23:00] way from Jefferson City back to Ironton, I drive through one particular town and there's a business there. Their business name is Aging Made Easy. And there are moments when I want to stop and tear the sign down and I have to turn the hippie off inside my head and say, "You can't do that."

There's not one thing easy about aging at all. It is a long journey. It is a debilitating journey. we lose our...we lose a lot of who we think we are in that process. And The Baptist Home has learned how to bring deep, biblical concepts alongside people in this process to help them understand not just how to age, but how to age from a biblical standpoint, and do it faithfully and do it in a way that honors Christ. [00:24:00]

And that is absolutely counterintuitive to most of what we hear in our culture. And so, the opportunity to share that with people and to help people grow in that responsibility is who The Baptist Home is. If we never take care of a person inside The Baptist Home's facilities, we still have a responsibility to help them understand what God's Word says about their aging, because we are disciples until the day we meet Christ face-to-face.

Andy Braams: [00:24:29] Hmm. With that, let me just ask you to share any insights that you might want to share from Psalm 71, because I know that is the Psalm that speaks to the heart of what you intend to do. So, do you want to take just a second to address why Psalm 71 is that psalm?

Ron Mackey: [00:24:48] Sure. I think one of the most forward-looking aspects of that is David or the author of Psalm 71 says, "Let me have the [00:25:00] opportunity to tell what I've learned from you to those future generations." He talked about feeling abandoned and he says, "God, don't leave me here." But at the end of that, he says, "I still have a task. I still have something to share. I still have something to give." And I think one of the things that we do at The Baptist Home is we encourage our people to tell their stories.

And, and if I may, just last week, one of our residents at Chillicothe, who is a retired pastor, who is physically struggling, he's lost his sight, can no longer read, can't read his Bible, you know, and it's a really a difficult thing for him. His son passed away a few months ago, and that's brutal to be a parent who outlives a child.

He had been really struggling. And he was going through physical therapy, and in the physical [00:26:00] therapy, we were using an outside contractor to do that physical therapy. And in the process, he had the opportunity to share his faith with his physical therapist. And she prayed to receive Jesus Christ.

Andy Braams: [00:26:14] Amen.

Ron Mackey: [00:26:15] And that to me is the epitome of how you age well for the glory of Christ.

Andy Braams: Amen. Thank you for sharing that, Ron. Well, how can our audience pray for you? Your ministry? Particularly specifically, perhaps you, but also generally The Baptist Home? How would you ask the audience to pray at this time for those who are more praying types?

Ron Mackey: Oh, absolutely. I would ask for people to pray for The Baptist Home that God continue to protect us. At this date, we have had no COVID-19 infections among our residents. We are thankful to God and humbled by that. We are going to begin reopening our facilities [00:27:00] now. We have some instructions from Medicare and from the Department of Health and Senior Services about how we can start having more personal, intimate visits with family. And we're now working on crafting a design for that. And how we do that. We need to get this done well. We need to get this done right. Shutting down our campuses was one thing. Reopening them is a completely different process. And we just need the wisdom of God to know how to do this well.

God has protected us for his glory and it's our job to continue to trust Him, to lead us forward. And to help us do this in a way that at the end of this, we will be able to say, "God was good and God has been glorified." So [if] people would just pray for us as we continue to navigate this, that would be a wonderful blessing for The Baptist Home.

Andy Braams: [00:27:55] Well, great, great word. And I enjoyed getting the chance to visit with you today, [00:28:00] Ron. Thank you for this opportunity and [I] look forward to seeing how your new role, how The Baptist Home continues to blossom under Dr. Harrison's leadership and this partnership with the podcast that, how we can help communicate and advocate, as you said, be an advocate for the aging in the days and months and years ahead.

Ron Mackey: [00:28:20] All right. Thank you, Dr. Braams.

Andy Braams: [00:28:21] You're welcome, sir. You're welcome.