

**CMBA Celebrates Three Outgoing VLC Members**

The Visionary Leadership Community (VLC) is a collection of representatives from the CMBA Family of Churches, serving together to conduct business and make important decisions about the ministry and vision of the association. As the CMBA office became virtual in 2021, the VLC began holding its monthly meetings in churches to further celebrate the staff and work of local congregations. As the year draws to a close, CMBA now celebrates the work and service of Ethan Brown, Jacob Helsley and James “J” Thompson who are completing their VLC terms.

**Ethan Brown** is the pastor of Stephen Greene Baptist in Winnsboro and, in addition to VLC, serves on the CMBA Thriving Congregations team. He and his wife Charron have been married four years and have two children, Israel is two and Lydia is five months. The self-proclaimed “comic book nerd” is originally from Wellington, Kansas, and has been at Stephen Greene for three years. Ethan says his experience on VLC has broadened his view of the collective work of Midlands churches.

“There is an incredible wealth of knowledge and loving support in the CMBA. Our Family of Churches is not just a resource to help us survive, it also provides relationships that strengthen all congregations to thrive in carrying out the Lord's work,” Ethan says, adding that “it's been great to hold our meetings physically at the different churches in the CMBA because you get to better understand the diverse ministry context each church is set in and the challenges each present. The better we know each other, the better we can serve each other.”

The holidays bring a special time for Ethan’s extended family to gather at his grandparent’s old country church to sing carols, take communion and conclude the evening by ringing the church bell. “It’s a wonderful time to praise God as a family and remind ourselves that while we celebrate the coming of Christ as a baby in a manger, we also expectantly look to when Christ will come again,” he says.

As he looks toward the future, Ethan’s reflections include Executive Director George Bullard’s impact on his ministry through personal mentorship and by playing a key role in his ordination. He also sees God’s hand at work right now in CMBA through open discussions about the future, saying that many of these discussions are “difficult but necessary to have. To see how God works to bring His people together to accomplish His mission never ceases to amaze me. The Lord has gifted CMBA with leaders who are knowledgeable in discipleship, church planting and who have a heart for His mission.”

**Jacob Helsley** has served as pastor of Blaney Baptist in Elgin for seven years. An Irmo native, Jacob and his wife Sarah Beth celebrated six years of marriage this year and are parents to four children – Evelyn Mae is five, Henry is three, James Allen is 20 months and a baby boy is expected to arrive in 2022. In his spare time Jacob enjoys time spent outdoors and occasionally writes poetry “as a catharsis.”

Prior to beginning his VLC service in 2018 Jacob was part of the former administrative team. He calls seeing the work of CMBA from the inside out as enlightening and something that strengthens his connection with and commitment to other local churches as they collectively pursue the Kingdom mandate.

“I’ve learned that the purposes of God are served and continue vibrantly in various manifestations of church life. That pluriform picture highlights one of the hopes of glory when every tribe, tongue and language are unified at the feet of the Lamb in worship. I have learned that churches cannot fulfill the mission by themselves,” Jacob says.

While his VLC term concludes, Jacob continues to serve as a member of the CMBA executive director search committee. He sees CMBA as poised for great impact with the gospel of Jesus Christ and its faithful diversity further positions it to reach the Metro Columbia of the future, saying, “there are and will be challenges, but there will always be this side of glory. The particular challenge will be knowing when and for what to contend. I look forward to the future Executive Director the Lord is raising up to lead us. As I and the committee continue to pray and work, I would summon the prayers of our churches on behalf of our work.”

**J Thompson** has served as pastor of Cedar Creek Baptist in Blythewood since 2002. He and his wife Donna met at Southwestern Seminary and have been married for 43 years. The couple has two adult sons who have families of their own – Jim and his wife Sara Joanna have James and Anna, and Daniel and his wife Sarah Kim have Jay and Ray. J became a believer in 1972 through the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ while a student at the University of South Carolina. The Bennettsville native enjoys playing guitar, reading and spending time with family, and shares this fun fact about himself – “I used to play drums in a beach music band while I was in high school.”

Since starting his term on VLC in January 2019, J was Vice Moderator in 2020 and currently serves as Moderator. He was also a member of the 2016 Executive Director search team.

According to J, the biggest lesson he’s learned about serving in the CMBA is that “we are better together. Large churches, medium size churches, small churches and new church plants all have something to offer. We can encourage one another, provide resources and make a greater impact for the Kingdom. Together is better!”

Beginning in January 2022, CMBA will share spotlight introductions of current and new VLC members. Visit [www.columbiametro.org](http://www.columbiametro.org) for additional information and regular updates about the ongoing ministries of CMBA.