

**Gospel Sharing
in the Pandemic**



Using shoes and socks to spread the gospel in Central Texas

→ Page 11

Opinion

Gary Ledbetter, Editor

The SBC Executive Committee meeting this month is kind of a big deal. → Page 2

News Briefs

POLL: Pastors more hesitant to address racial reconciliation in sermons than in 2016

→ Page 3

Racial Reconciliation

NAAF, seminary presidents hold 'open and honest conversation' on racial reconciliation in the SBC

→ Page 8

SBC

Stone, Litton and Adams join Mohler as SBC presidential nominees

→ Page 16

International



MORE THAN 3 MILLION UYGHURS DETAINED IN FORCED LABOR CAMPS IN CHINA

Page 14

**Gospel Sharing
in the Pandemic**



MCALLEN CHURCH ADDS ONLINE PASTOR, NOTES 454 PROFESSIONS OF FAITH IN JESUS IN 2020

Page 10

SOUTHERN BAPTIST Texan

**FEBRUARY 2021
VOLUME 20 • NO. 2**

NEWSJOURNAL OF THE
SOUTHERN BAPTISTS
OF TEXAS CONVENTION

texanonline.net

'RACISM SHOULD BE OUR LEAST PROBLEM'

By Gary Ledbetter | Editor

The TEXAN asked current SBTC vice president Richard Lewis, pastor of Unity Baptist Church in Copperas Cove, and former SBTC president Terry Turner, pastor of Mesquite Friendship Baptist Church, to talk with us about how Black and white Southern Baptists can have greater unity and common purpose. Much of the virtual conversation is included here.



A conversation on race in the Southern Baptist Convention



▲ Richard Lewis and Terry Turner

TEXAN: How would you characterize relationships between Black and white Southern Baptists today?

Lewis: Even though we try, in certain areas there is a lack of day-to-day relationships—of just being able to connect with each other. [In] Killeen, there is not a sense of camaraderie. We started a couple things before the pandemic. And I think it was working well, just making sure that we [knew] each other outside of church settings, because we can come and worship together for different situations,

See RACE, 6

Cooperative Program lunch at Empower to recognize top-giving churches amid COVID-19 pandemic



By Rob Collingsworth | TEXAN Correspondent

IRVING Pastor Brian Haynes will be the special guest speaker at the annual Cooperative Program lunch during the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention's upcoming Empower Conference at the Irving Convention Center on Tuesday, Feb. 23 at 11:45 a.m.

Haynes, pastor of Bay Area Church in League City, is the author "Shift: What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today" and "The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting."

The lunch traditionally serves to highlight the various ways SBTC churches are making the gospel known locally and globally through

See EMPOWER, 5

FREEDOM HILL: A replant that works



Pastor Ryan Napier of Freedom Hill Church in San Antonio said the church is committed to the Cooperative Program because it's "a way to be a part of a bunch of different things," investing in kingdom impact.

By Erin Roach | TEXAN Correspondent

SAN ANTONIO Freedom Hill Church in San Antonio is what Doug Hixson, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention director of church planting, calls a "unicorn," a replant so rare it had only a one percent chance of working out in the first place, pastor Ryan Napier said.

See REPLANT, 9

FROM THE EDITOR Gary Ledbetter

Boring but important

Remember church business meetings?

I know that many churches still do them, but I sense a certain apologetic attitude on the part of even those who plan the agenda, as if we're embarrassed to take the time of the Wednesday night gang that shows up for financial reports and consideration of major actions. Business meetings are tedious sometimes, mundane often and only occasionally contentious, but it's the process whereby most churches convert that opening in music ministry into a person who actually helps with the music ministry. That roof leak that makes the high school boys' class musty and floods the ladies' bathroom downstairs? The solution was likely considered by a committee that sweats the details as part of their voluntary service to the church and then submits a proposed action to the faithful few at a church business conference. Boring maybe, too boring for most church members, but things spin out of control if no one cares about church business until Sunday morning (when the downstairs ladies' room is flooded).

The Southern Baptist Convention has an analogous gathering, in addition to our annual convention in June (2020 excepted). The Southern Baptist Executive Committee is the Southern Baptist Convention during the 11 months and 28 days each year when the actual convention is not in session. The EC does their work subject to the convention's constitution and bylaws, its statement of faith, and the instructions and actions of the messengers during the annual meeting. But three times a year, this committee does important things on behalf of the rest of us. During times of extraordinary tension or opportunity within our fellowship, the work of the EC becomes more important. Pay attention,

“
DURING TIMES OF
EXTRAORDINARY
TENSION OR
OPPORTUNITY WITHIN
OUR FELLOWSHIP,
THE WORK OF THE
EC BECOMES MORE
IMPORTANT.
”



even if you never do, to the meeting this Feb. 22 and 23.

The headlines of challenges to our nation's wellbeing always give us a clue as to the challenges Southern Baptist Americans will face in their Great Commission work. Here are a few things likely to be discussed in February, and because of this, be directed to the messengers during our June convention in Nashville.

2021-2022 Budget Because the convention did not meet last year, the SBC has been operating on the 2019-2020 budget for an additional year. Our entities have faced budget and staff cuts because fundraising and ministry implementation has been hampered by the pandemic. Even though CP giving has been encouraging, the financial problems of our institutions are real and likely ongoing—as they are for most other organizations.

Black-White Relations As I said, what happens in U.S. communities comes to church with us on Sunday. The report from a recent meeting between African American leaders in the SBC and several of our institutional presidents was encouraging, though no one believes this conversation is finished. Southern Baptists are looking for action on the national level to say that the white majority understands what our Black brothers and sisters are saying to us.

The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission Right before the quarantine began last March, the EC began an investigation of how concerns about the work of the SBC's moral issues agency have affected Cooperative Program giving in several states. The EC began this process; it was deferred by the cancellation of the 2020 SBC annual meeting; and this matter has remained on low simmer for a year. It should be on the agenda this month, I'd think.

Vision 2025 Last February, Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd shared “Vision 2025,” a challenge to share Christ with every household in the U.S. by 2025, among other things. The plan would have been fleshed out in greater detail during our 2020 annual meeting. Of course, that didn't happen. I don't believe the vision just faded away though. I expect Floyd to continue his plan to lead the convention in that direction. I'd expect this to be an important update at this upcoming Executive Committee meeting, and then of course at the SBC meeting in June. It's also a positive way for us to point our noses in the same direction and put the challenges of 2020 behind us.

Look at baptistpress.com Feb. 22-23 and you'll find stories that describe how those who sweat the details are recommending that we proceed. We'll also post these stories on texanonline.net. These deliberations directly and indirectly affect the worldwide mission that joins Southern Baptists in voluntary partnership. As your church gives and supports in other ways the seminaries and mission boards of our convention, you should be interested in how the business of our convention empowers that Great Commission work.

For some of us, it will always be tedious, the way a budget and a plan can be in the details. But thankfully, there are some who see how these mundane things can have a kingdom impact. You, a Southern Baptist church member, should look in on them from time to time. It's really not so boring as you've heard. ✎

gledbetter@sbtxan.com
 @sbtxan



SOUTHERN BAPTIST
Texan

VOLUME 20 | VOLUME 02 | FEBRUARY 2021

Jim Richards, Executive Director
 Gary K. Ledbetter, Editor
 Jane Rodgers, Managing Editor
 Gayla Holt Sullivan, Circulation Manager
 Russell Lightner, Designer

Correspondents:

Rob Collingsworth
 Michael Foust
 Kaylan Preuss
 Erin Roach
 Devyn Ross
 Karen L. Willoughby

The Southern Baptist TEXAN

is the official newspaper of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, P.O. Box 1988, Grapevine, Texas 76099-1988. Toll-free 877-953-7282, Phone 817-552-2500, FAX 817-552-2520. Email: gsullivan@sbtxan.com

Obituaries, memorials and classified advertisements

listing items and services for sale will be published at a cost of 30 cents per word with a minimum of \$10. Copy is limited to 100 words and must be submitted within three months of death or event. Submit information to gsullivan@sbtxan.com and mail check for full amount.

Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words and should refrain from personal attacks. Submit by email to gsullivan@sbtxan.com or mail to the address to the left.

Individual subscriptions are free of charge within Texas. A \$10 per year donation is requested for out-of-state subscriptions. Email changes to gsullivan@sbtxan.com.



A higher standard.
A higher purpose.

texanonline.net
[sbtxan](https://twitter.com/sbtxan)
[sbtxan](https://facebook.com/sbtxan)

What's Next?

sbtxan.com/events



February

03 SBTC Chapel
Grapevine

22 Church Health and
Leadership Dinner
Empower Conference

04 RevTalks
Online, Zoom

22 Young Pastors Dinner
Empower Conference

19-20 Apoderados, Cross City
Church, Euless

22-23 **EMPOWER**
CONFERENCE
Irving Conv. Center, Las Colinas

22 New SBTC
Pastor Orientation
Empower Conference

27 Disaster Relief Phase 1
FBC Pflugerville

For more details on SBTC events
visit sbtxan.com/events

For a full calendar,
use your phone's camera
to scan our QR code. →



March

04 RevTalks Live
Paramount BC, Amarillo

11 RevTalks Live
Zoom

06 She Stands
Fallbrook BC, Houston
Tallers en Español

11 55+ Adults Ministry
Training, SBTC, Grapevine

06 VBS Training
Spring BC, Spring

24 SBTC Chapel
Grapevine

All In person events subject to change based on COVID conditions.

07-13 ANNIE
ARMSTRONG
EASTER
OFFERING



POLL

Pastors more hesitant to address racial reconciliation in sermons than in 2016



U.S. pastors today are more reluctant to address issues of race than they were four years ago, according to a new LifeWay Research survey.

The poll, released in January but conducted Sept. 2-Oct. 1, found that 57 percent of U.S. pastors say they "strongly agree" their congregations would welcome a sermon on racial reconciliation, compared to 32 percent of pastors who answered that way in 2016.

Among other findings:



→ 12 percent of pastors say they have received negative feedback about a sermon on racial reconciliation, compared to 5 percent who answered that way in 2016.



→ 16 percent say they have not addressed racial reconciliation from the pulpit in the last two years. In 2016, 10 percent said they had not addressed it.



→ 17 percent say their congregation would not welcome a sermon on racial reconciliation. Four years ago, 7 percent of pastors answered that way. "The typical pastor is addressing racial reconciliation from the pulpit and without pushback from their congregation," said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. "However, the noticeable increase in pastors avoiding the topic and receiving criticism could signal there are new dynamics emerging."

—LIFEWAY RESEARCH

Texas abortion rate increased 5 percent from 2017 to 2019

A well-known pro-life expert says Texas' new looser restrictions on chemical abortions may be to blame for the uptick in the state's abortion rate.

The Texas Health & Human Services Commission reported in recent weeks that the abortion rate in Texas increased 5 percent between 2017 and 2019, impacting nearly every age and race.

Michael New, a visiting assistant professor at the Catholic University of America and an associate scholar at the pro-life Charlotte Lozier Institute, says "one possible explanation" is that it "has become easier for Texas women to obtain chemical abortions early

in pregnancy." A chemical abortion involves the taking of medication early in a pregnancy to cause the death and expelling of the unborn baby.

"In 2016, Texas was one of three states to require that physicians administering chemical-abortion drugs follow the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) label," New wrote in a column at NationalReview.com. "However, in 2016 the FDA updated the labeling for the abortion drug Mifeprex, allowing chemical abortions to be obtained later in pregnancy, with fewer visits to the physician's office. It seemed to make a difference: Between 2017 and 2019, the number of chemical abortions obtained by Texas women increased by about 32 percent."

The data also had good news for pro-

lifers: The abortion rate among Texas minors declined by 3 percent between 2017 and 2019. Since 2010, it has fallen 64 percent, New said.

"This information is significant because in 2010, Texas removed Planned Parenthood from the state's family planning program," New wrote. "Public-health professionals criticized this decision sharply, claiming that the rate of teen pregnancy would skyrocket. To the contrary, the significant long-term decline in both the minor birth rate and abortion rate demonstrates that positive public-health trends can continue without requiring taxpayers to fork over millions of dollars to Planned Parenthood."

—NATIONALREVIEW.COM

Ugandan man killed one week after converting from Islam to Christianity



A Ugandan man who converted from Islam to Christianity in late November was beaten and killed within a week by a Muslim mob, according to a religious liberty watchdog.

Yusuf Kintu, a 41-year-old man, had converted to Christianity following multiple conversations with Pastor Andrew Nyanma of the Full Gospel Church in Dolwe Island, Uganda.

Kintu previously was an imam at Macca Mosque on Dolwe Island.

International Christian Concern reported on Kintu's conversion and death.

"We had been talking on several occasions but he was so argumentative when we touched on matters related to faith," Nyanma said. "He was a brilliant Muslim imam but also respected other people's faith. On this day, he was calm and receptive. He gave me humble time to explain to him why Christ is the only way to the Father. He repented of his sins and committed to following Christ."

Three days after his conversion, his wife left him to go live with her father. On Dec. 7, Kintu was murdered.

"According to several witnesses, the local Muslim community was upset [with] Yusuf for leaving Islam and becoming a Christian," International Christian Concern reported. "Yusuf was seriously beaten and left unconscious. His older son and daughter were not able to help him immediately, until morning when Pastor Andrew arrived and took him to the hospital."

He died at the hospital.

—INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

Tony Dungy, Benjamin Watson to host evangelistic Super Bowl special

Two well-known NFL personalities are teaming up for an evangelistic streaming special in February that churches can use for Super Bowl outreach.

Tony Dungy, an NBC football analyst, and Benjamin Watson, a former NFL tight end, will co-host "Football Sunday" in February. Sports Spectrum is producing it.

"The theme of the event is 'Unshaken,' which is taken from Psalm 16:8: 'I have set the Lord continually before me; because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken,'" Dungy and Watson wrote in a Sports Spectrum column. "Please encourage your local church to participate. It will be a practical and encouraging way to re-engage our



church families either in-person or online."

Participating churches will receive promo videos, invitation cards and copies of a "Football Sunday" magazine.

A promotional website calls it a way to "leverage football's biggest weekend with the power of the gospel."

Learn more at FootballSunday.com.

—FOOTBALLSUNDAY.COM

Franklin Graham urges Christians to 'unite our hearts' and pray for Biden, Harris

Evangelist Franklin Graham is urging Christians to pray for the new administration of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris.

"The division in our country is as great as any time since the Civil War," Graham wrote on Facebook in January, the day after a mob stormed the capitol building. "I am calling on Christians to unite our hearts together in prayer for President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, and for the leadership in both parties."

"Pray that everyone will stop the finger-pointing and realize that both parties bear responsibility for the problems we face today. Pray that they will come together and work together for the good of all of the American people."

—FACEBOOK

“
The division in our country is as great as any time since the Civil War.
”

Franklin Graham

Investigation concludes that Ravi Zacharias engaged in sexual misconduct

An interim report by an outside party has concluded that Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias "engaged in sexual misconduct over the course of many years."

Zacharias died last year.

The two-page interim report was conducted by Miller & Martin PLLC and released in December by Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, which said it was "heartbroken" over the news. The misconduct took place at a wellness spa and involved employees, Miller & Martin said.

The interim report said the investigation involved interviews with dozens of witnesses as well as the reviewing of "numerous documents and electronic devices."

"Some of that misconduct is consistent with and corroborative of that which is reported in the news recently, and some of the conduct we have uncovered is more serious," the interim report said.

Ravi Zacharias International Ministries said the misconduct is "deeply troubling and wholly inconsistent with the man Ravi Zacharias presented both publicly and privately to so many over more than four decades of public ministry."

"We are heartbroken at learning this but feel it necessary to be transparent and to inform our staff, donors, and supporters at this time, even while the investigation continues. We will speak more comprehensively to all concerned after the completion of the investigation," the organization said.

Miller & Martin said it hopes to conclude its investigation in January or February.

—RAVI ZACHARIAS INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES

WHY KEEP EVANGELISM A PRIORITY?



Jim Richards
Executive Director

jrichards@sbtxas.com
@RichardsJim

Empower 2021 is upon us. The conference is full of uplifting worship music, powerful preaching and breakouts for training and fellowship.

On Feb. 22 and 23 our true purpose for gathering at the Irving Convention Center is to seek a spiritual awakening that only God can bring. Please check out the schedule at sbtxas.com/empower and register.

Why are we keeping evangelism in the forefront? Why spend so

much time, energy and money on a conference? Because everything we do in the way of cooperative work revolves around evangelism. To be clear, evangelism is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ found in 1 Corinthians 15: 3,4.

Southern Baptists of Texas Convention church planting experienced an uptick in new church starts from 2019 to 2020. This is nothing short of a miracle. Church planters have a passion to reach those without Jesus as their Savior. The foundational element of a new church must be evangelism. Telling people about Jesus is the reason to start a new church. When the apostle Paul went into a new city, he preached the gospel. Those who believed were baptized. A new church was formed. This is New Testament church planting.

Church health is a major concern. One of the ways your SBTC staff seeks to help churches is through revitalization. Plateaued and declining churches have varying symptoms but one remedy. Evangelism is the answer to an ailing church. Every church must contextualize its ministry. Finding how to reach the community with the gospel will fill the building, pay the bills and encourage the saints. Some churches must transition to a new type of church, but it still



“
I PRAY FOR LOST PEOPLE DAILY. I ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO CONVICT AND CONVERT THOSE ON MY HEART.
”

means a desire to reach the community for Jesus must be the primary factor.

Tools are available to help the existing church. An entire support system is ready for those who want to plant new churches. It comes back to the purpose of the Empower Conference. I pastored for 20 years, served as a director of missions, and now seek to serve the churches through the state convention. Two challenges have continually remained a challenge for me as a leader—prayer and evangelism.

I pray for lost people daily. I ask the Holy Spirit to convict and convert those on my heart. I must intentionally set aside a

time to share the gospel with them. Acts 6:4 describes a minimal job assignment for pastors and other leaders. We are to devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. Preaching is important. The pulpit cannot be the only evangelistic outreach. Paul told Timothy that the pastor was to do the work of an evangelist. We must lead by example.

Empower 2021 is simply a time to recharge your batteries. Let's get a heart for souls. We want others to experience what happened to us. Evangelism will flow out of the power of prayer. Pray specifically for someone who needs Jesus. Plan to share the gospel with that person. ✝

Evangelism 2021 (part 2)



Kie Bowman
SBTC President

kbowman@hpbtc.org
@KieBowman

Turning 30 was a big deal to me and not in a good way. I felt like I was somehow “behind” in life. That was 34 years ago.

The dilemma I was facing was a common one. I was questioning my purpose. The day I turned 30 I prayed and asked God for direction. In that prayer, I sensed (in that unmistakable way we know when God is speaking) the Lord was impressing me with a question. I've never forgotten it because he blessed me that day with a gift. He gave me clarity. The question was simple and direct: “Kie Bowman, if you're not winning souls, what are you doing?”

There are a lot of “jobs” and tasks in ministry, but only one Great Commission. In the words of the late Dawson Trotman, we are “born to reproduce.” In other words, if

“
THERE ARE A LOT OF “JOBS” AND TASKS IN MINISTRY, BUT ONLY ONE GREAT COMMISSION.
”

we are not advancing the gospel, sharing our faith, and doing everything possible to lead more people to Christ, what are we doing?

Last month in this column, I suggested three practices that can help us develop a stronger evangelistic effectiveness. One of those suggestions has to do with training people to share their faith. According to Scripture, equipping believers to do the work of ministry is essential to the success of the church (Ephesians 4:11-12, 2 Timothy 2:2).

D. L. Moody once said, “I don't want to do the work of a thousand men. I want a thousand men to do my work.” Training for evangelism is essential.

To equip people we need equipment. In other words, equipping requires resources. Fortunately, the SBTC is ready to help. One of the best opportunities for training and equipping in Texas is the

Empower conference that happens later this month.

This year the Empower conference is in-person but much of it will also be available online. The past focus on senior pastors resonated with many of us, but this year's conference focuses on providing something more for everyone. Every church member can benefit from attending Empower.

Conference speakers include leaders from across a broad spectrum of ministry. Dennis Swanberg, Ken Hemphill, and Ted Traylor will highlight the “vintage” session.

There will be a ladies session with speaker and author Latasha Morrison. Matt Carter will speak on missional living. Student ministers will have an opportunity to meet and learn from one another and national leaders.

Other speakers include Nic Vujicic, Gary Chapman, Costi Hinn and Johnny Hunt.

The breakouts may be the best part of the two-day conference. There will be at least nine options: each designed to help us increase our people-reaching passion and skills.

Churches across Texas can benefit from Empower. Equipping believers is made easier when we take advantage of this excellent annual conference.

There is one other benefit to attending Empower that I want you to consider. The fellowship with believers and leaders from around the state of Texas can be a major stimulus in our own spiritual walk. We need conferences but we need one another more. Fortunately, at the Empower conference we get the best of both. ✝

Church Planting + Revitalization



REACH CITIES

VISION TOURS

AUSTIN

April 12-14

Contact Steve Cochran
scochran@sbtxas.com

HOUSTON

April 12-14

Contact Ben Hays
bhays@sbtxas.com



sbtxas.com/reachcities

EMPOWER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

their regular Cooperative Program giving.

“The Cooperative Program lunch every year is just a celebration of the Cooperative Program. We give an annual report from the year before and then it sets the stage for Cooperative Program Sunday,” said Kenneth Priest, SBTC senior strategist for cooperative ministries. “The 2021 video gets played, resources are given out, and we point [attendees] to the website where they can download the video and other resources such as bulletin inserts. We also provide for churches to invite a speaker from the SBTC if they’d like someone to come in and promote the CP.”

The lunch is usually accompanied by a time of corporate worship, but ac-

“**THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM LUNCH EVERY YEAR IS JUST A CELEBRATION OF THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM.**”

**KENNETH PRIEST,
SBTC SENIOR STRATEGIST
FOR COOPERATIVE MINISTRIES**

According to Priest the SBTC is still evaluating whether to include that as a part of this year’s lunch due to concerns regarding COVID-19.

The ongoing pandemic is expected to result in a smaller turnout this year as well, though Priest emphasized that the Irving Convention Center has the capability of keeping the event at or below 50 percent capacity, which falls within the Dallas County

guidelines for large events. Additionally, the convention will be taking a number of precautions to prevent the spread of COVID for those who choose to attend in-person.

According to Priest, the lunch will be set in the 50 percent capacity model that the convention center has in order to remain in compliance and mitigate the risk of spread as much as possible.

During the lunch, the SBTC will recognize the churches within the convention that have given the most over the last year, both in terms of dollars and per capita giving.

Tickets to the lunch, which will be held in the Irving Convention Center’s Grand Ballroom, will be in even shorter supply this year due to the convention center’s 50 percent occupancy policy. Individuals are encouraged to register as soon as possible at sbtexas.com/empower. 📄

Swanberg, Hemphill to highlight Classics lunch, session at Empower

By Rob Collingsworth
TEXAN Correspondent



Ken Hemphill

IRVING This month’s Empower Conference at the Irving Convention Center will kick off with a Classics luncheon at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, Feb. 22 featuring Christian comedian Dennis Swanberg.

According to his website, Swanberg, a mainstay of Christian entertainment over the last three decades, served the local church in pastoral ministry for 23 years before starting his “ministry of encouragement” in 1995. He received an undergraduate degree from Baylor University and both an M.Div. and D.Min. from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth.

Following the lunch at 1 p.m. will be the Classics session, which will feature speakers Ken Hemphill, Jerry Chaddick and Ted Traylor.

Hemphill, who served as the president of Southwestern Seminary from 1994-2003 and national strategist for the SBC’s Empowering Kingdom Growth emphasis from 2003-11, is currently an administrator at North Greenville University. He was a candidate for president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2018.

Having spent time serving the local church and as an evangelist, Chaddick has pastored churches in Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and Texas. He is currently the president of Spirit Truth Ministries and pastor of Mims Baptist Church in Conroe.

Traylor has been the pastor of Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola since 1990. He served on the Great Commission Resurgence task

force and was the first vice-president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2000, in addition to being nominated for president of the SBC in 2010.

Music for the Classics session will be provided by the Southern gospel group Greater Vision.

The COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly have an effect on attendance at this year’s Empower Conference, although it is difficult to know how many people will choose to attend in-person vs. online.

According to a statement released by the SBTC, they are working with the Irving Convention Center to do everything possible to ensure the event is as safe as possible for all attendees.

Kenneth Priest, SBTC senior strategist for cooperative ministries, confirmed that attendees will be asked to wear masks and practice social distancing. The convention center has advised the SBTC that it has implemented safety protocols in compliance with local health authorities, including include reduced occupancy, required mask wearing in all areas except when individuals are eating or drinking, additional hand sanitation stations, signage and floor markers to aid in social distancing, and increased housekeeping in which the building will be sanitized multiple times daily.

Both the Classics luncheon and session are open for all age groups. Tickets for the luncheon are \$10 each and can be purchased at sbtexas.com/empower. 📄

“The conference served as a great reminder, refreshing and intensifying my awareness of the difference my ministry can make. It was good to be reminded that

IT’S NOT ONLY IMPORTANT THAT I BE WILLING TO PERSONALLY GO AND SERVE WHEN GOD CALLS, BUT THAT I NEED TO BE CHALLENGING AND ENCOURAGING THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN OUR MINISTRIES

to constantly be considering how God may be calling them to serve.

”

RACE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

but we really don't have that personal connection, one with another as the body of Christ, as the members do. We may have relationships with other pastors, but our churches don't have that kind of relationship.

CROSSING OVER THE RACIAL BARRIERS TO DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRES WORKING ON IT.

TERRY TURNER

Turner: I've noticed over the years, relationships are not something that just come automatically, and especially between African Americans and Anglos, and really any other race of people, because we come out of our cultures. And so, crossing over the racial barriers to develop relationships requires working on it. You've got to really, really commit yourself to say, I'm going to befriend individuals of different races.

What I've found [as] the author of [the] "Look Like Heaven" [initiative] in the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, along with Dr. Richards and the committee at that time, we were asking pastors and churches to come together to get to know one another because we weren't doing that. One of the things we really pressed was, when you come together, don't expect an African American to come in and act like he's an Anglo brother. Accept him for who he is, and vice versa. We've been doing this now, since 2013 or 2014. I don't know that it's worked very well. I think some pastors have tried, while other pastors haven't tried, didn't want to try. It becomes a heart issue. We've got to, as the SBTC and as the SBC, understand that we have to work on being one with people of other ethnicities. And I'd like to see that really develop into a national movement

Lewis: That has to be a two-way street. What I've recognized is that sometimes, even here where we've made the effort to reach across the street ... when it is time for that to be reciprocated, it's not done. It's easy for me to come to you and have fellowship at your house. But when it's time for you to come to my house, and have that kind of relationship, then it doesn't happen. I may not understand my Anglo brother's culture, but I'm going to come and be a part of whatever he's doing.

Turner: I have, over the years, developed a mind within our church, where we invite people of all ethnicities to come into our pulpit, to worship and to preach. And I ask them to bring their churches with them so our churches can fellowship. The people who come and worship are the same people who, outside of the church, have relationship. If a brother is sick, and he's having sur-

gery, I love to get that call, and to be able to pray for a brother of a different ethnicity. When we meet at the convention, I have certain brothers of other races, we're going to have lunch together, we're going to do these things together. That's what has to develop. It has to be not only just inside the church, but we've got to come outside of the church and learn to do some things together as well as community projects in advancing the kingdom.

Lewis: We started a thing in Coperas Cove where I pastor, five of us that are part of the SBTC would rotate from church to church and have that fellowship each fifth Sunday. The pandemic put a stop to that for a while. And one thing that I purpose to do is to have lunch with brothers here. I'll call them and say, "Hey, man, let's have lunch, let's go to Applebee's." I make sure our wives are invited to the fellowship, because that begins to develop relationships that begin to let you know me as a human being, and I can see you as a human being. [Otherwise], we're totally missing it because you never get to understand me. You see me as the brother that's proclaiming the gospel. The problem is, what do we do [next]? I shared this with one of our preachers. I say, "Pastor, the police chief doesn't go to my church. The fire marshal doesn't go to my church. He goes to yours." And so when you and I are talking, and we begin to talk about issues, you have a direct line to the police chief. I do not. But if I'm speaking with you, then you understand where my heart is and where it relates to our culture and our people.

Turner: I can appreciate that. That camaraderie of having dinner together, sitting down supping together. It's a very important part of worship, being invited into homes, and I've had a few brothers who've done that with me, and I can really appreciate the fact that they opened their doors and invited me to their dinner table. And that, I think is important, and they were pastors within the SBTC.

But on the other hand, when we look at our convention, and what [the SBC] represents, what Brother Richard and I are talking about is probably rare. The convention, as a whole right now, is under tremendous strain as to these relationships. The race issue is front and center. And it's really become detrimental to African-American churches and pastors who are within the convention. It's killing the relationship.

I think we all love the Cooperative Program, but the mind of the convention, to tie in what we have considered today to be white nationalism and white supremacy, we just don't understand. We're hurt by it. We are confused by how brothers that we look at as a part of our convention can love the convention, and say they love us, while at the same time not be as strong against racism as they are against abortion. That is what is really hurting the relationship within the convention today. We're against abortion; we're against same-sex marriages. Those of us who are part of the SBTC, we have like theology. But one thing that rests higher than all the others,

is how our convention handles and deals with racism.

Lewis: [Agreeing] ... I've had Anglo brothers ask me this question, "Why do Blacks call all whites racists?" [I answer that] we don't classify all Anglo brothers as racists. But the problem is, when you see racist things, you don't speak out. We've got to have a voice. And I do agree with you. I hate abortions. I hate same sex-marriages. But you've got to [understand] also the fact that we can't sit by and watch things done, and we know they're not right. Dr. King said it's not my enemies that I'm concerned about. It's my friends that are silent when these things are going on.

As the convention, we can't sit by and watch these things take place

BECAUSE RACISM DOESN'T ONLY HURT ME AS A BLACK PERSON, IT HURTS ALL OF US BECAUSE WE CAN'T COME TOGETHER. WE CAN'T MOVE FORWARD.

RICHARD LEWIS

without actually saying something ... and not just giving a cookie-cutter statement—but actually having a statement that has heart, that has substance, as hard as we fight against abortion. Because racism doesn't only hurt me as a black person, it hurts all of us because we can't come together. We can't move forward.

Turner: The other side of that is, we do have some of our brothers in the [SBC] who do speak out. I don't want it to ever seem like the convention is not making progress. I joined the convention over 28 years ago. I've seen a lot happen with the race relationship in those 28 years. I've seen a [Black] president elected to the SBC. I see now we have a [Black] chairman of our SBC Executive Committee this year. I've seen our convention come together time and time again. In 1939, I didn't see that [first SBC apology for slavery and lynching]. We did it again in '95 [SBC resolution against racism]. We came back in 2016 and 2017 and we apologized again, and we condemned the Confederate flag. We make all of these statements, which are good, but without structured change, it really doesn't say a whole lot.

Our SBTC executive director, Dr. Jim Richards, is one who will speak out on race issues. He makes his thoughts known. He condemns every situation he sees when it's wrong and I appreciate him making those statements. But when it comes down to what we really look like in our [SBTC] leadership—sure, I've served as president, Richard is vice president this year, Dante Wright has served as vice president, Tony Mathews has served as vice president. But is our convention strong enough to have an African American in leadership and our

churches support it? I think that's where the real issue always is.

It's a hard issue because Richard and I, we follow the convention and we follow people who don't look like us simply because we believe in what the convention is about and what the convention does. Would our white brothers who have the same southern frame of mind who are a part of our convention do the same? Dr. Richards is retiring this year. If there were an African American to replace Dr. Richards, what would happen to our convention?

How do we get to the heart issue of it? ... We've got to develop a system of thinking for how we are going to handle racism, and we have not done that in any of our [state Baptist] conventions that I know of. ... I know we have one state convention that has an African-American [executive director] and that's Maryland/Delaware ... Kevin Smith. He's doing a great job. They accept him in Delaware, but I don't know [if that] would happen in Texas. I hope it would.

TEXAN: What should the Southern Baptist Convention do to put feet to the resolutions or pronouncements we've made in the past?

Lewis: When I came to the Southern Baptist Convention, it was because of Kevin Smith. Kevin and I grew up in a Sovereign Grace flavor of church and Kevin introduced me to E.W. McCall. To have the relationship with E.W. and to have him speak in such glowing words about the convention, him coming from California and then coming to Texas, and being part of Dr. Richards embracing him and giving him the liberties to do the things that he did, I think that goes back to what Dr. Turner has said.

I DON'T BELIEVE IN ALL THE TENETS OF CRT/I, BUT THE TENET THAT I DO BELIEVE IN IS THAT WE OUGHT TO HAVE RACIAL EQUALITY TAUGHT WITHIN OUR SEMINARIES.

TERRY TURNER

We've got to have men in positions that speak to and that the convention supports and stands with ... and understands that their leadership is valid and that who they are is valid. ... I think that has to happen. Even if we don't select an African American to follow Dr. Richards, that should be someone that is seriously considered and that it ought to be known among the brethren that this person is not being considered as a token, but being considered seriously in the leadership of the SBTC. Those are things that I think will help us along the way.

Turner: [Referring to recent controversy among the National African American Fellowship and SBC seminary presidents*** over the place of CRT/I**] That argument ... finds its real teeth in the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. I think when it comes to

***CRT/I** refers to Critical Race theory and Intersectionality. The resolution approved by SBTC messengers last November included the following working definition of Critical Race Theory: *Critical Race Theory is the secular view that the law and legal institutions are inherently racist and that race itself, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is a socially constructed concept that is used by white people to further their economic and political interests at the expense of people of color. It is an unbiblical approach to the problem of sin that brings division among ethnic diversity and, as such, must be rejected.* "Intersectionality" was not defined by messengers but, according to Merriam Webster, refers to the "complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups." Critics have rejected intersectionality as overemphasizing divisive identity.

***see article, page 8, on this meeting.

“
**NONE OF US ARE GUILTY
 OF OUR HISTORY BUT
 WE ARE THOSE WHO
 INHERITED OUR HISTORY.**
 ”

TERRY TURNER

the BF&M 2000, it was written in a time when the issue on the table had nothing to do with racism. When it [was] developed, it had everything to do with liberalism within our convention and the convention being reestablished as a conservative convention. So now, we are dealing with something that the Baptist Faith & Message is silent on.

I understand they had a meeting the other day where the seminary council rejected CRT/I. I don't believe in all the tenets of CRT/I, but the tenet that I do believe in is that we ought to have racial equality taught within our seminaries. ... I think that's a part of our problem right there, is that most [of] our white brothers don't understand, truly know African-American history and the plight that the African American has had to go through. And neither do they want to be taught because it is a difficult history, a dark history; it really is a despondent history—but it's our history. We can't get away from it as African Americans, but white Americans tend to not want to deal with it. None of us are guilty of our history but we are those who inherited our history. We've got to live up to who we are and what has happened in the past to us.

I believe that we have come to a day where we need to start to make amendments to our BF&M 2000 so that it reflects where we are today. The seminary presidents have walked in and had a great conversation with the African American Fellowship and say we have no room for movement because we are bound confessionally to the Baptist Faith & Message and walk out without anything structurally happening. That has to change. If we want our convention to be what it can be racially, we've got to make some changes in its confession. I know that's a can of worms, but racism is a can of worms. If we don't deal with it, then you're going to see massive exits.

There may be some people who don't care whether all the African Americans leave the convention—and I say all—never is all—all is never—but you're going to have a lot who are going to find themselves disheartened and begin to exit because they have no footing within the convention. All of America is making the change. Why is it that conservative-minded people who think like me always have to be the last ones to come around to racism? Why can't we be first? We are conservative. We believe in the Bible. We love the Bible. We love the Lord. We say we love our brothers as Christ has commanded that we love one another. Why not be in the forefront? We've given that issue to the liberals, instead of holding on to it for ourselves and making it who we are.

Lewis: When we use terminology it sometimes makes it impossible for us to move because we hear the term “conservative,” and we don't

apply that to our theology. We apply that to our politics. ... [W]ithin the church, I'm as conservative as I can possibly be, as it relates to my theology. And, if you ask [if] I am conservative politically, that may mean something different ...

There are some things that are happening politically on the liberal side that I don't agree with, but there are some things that are happening on the conservative side politically that I don't agree with. If our message is Jesus Christ and him crucified and resurrected on the third morning, then I stand with you and I move forward with you. Information is powerful. Information is key. What we have to do is make sure the right information is being put out to those pastors.

Sometimes when we use certain terminology, we ask, “Are we talking politics or are we talking theology?” We've got to put some teeth into the definition of words that we're using. What does that mean? ... We do need to have some amendments to the 2000 statement of faith. There are some issues that we must address. We've got to.

“
**I'M FINDING TODAY THAT
 OUR FOOLISHNESS IS
 CONTINUING TO MULTIPLY
 ON THE RACE ISSUE
 WHILE THE WISE WITHIN
 THE CHURCH ARE BEING
 SILENT ON IT.**
 ”

TERRY TURNER

Turner: I can see how that will help us to redefine conservative views versus liberal views by putting some biblical structure—for African Americans, that is very important to what we believe conservatively. ... I'm talking about conservatism from a biblical standpoint always, never from a political standpoint. Politics should never control the church, and it should never control the world. I believe that godliness ought to control politics. That, I do believe. Nelson Mandela made it very, very plain—fools multiply when the wise are silent. I'm finding today that our foolishness is continuing to multiply on the race issue while the wise within the church are being silent on it. I thank God for those who are in leadership who are speaking out. We've got to take it a step forward and put some rules in our structure from our doctrinal and our creedal beliefs.

TEXAN: What do you see in the Southern Baptist Convention today, at the end of a pretty hard year, that gives you hope?

Lewis: The first thing for me is that we're talking. When you cut off communication you have no way of becoming better. The fact that we have men in local communities that are talking to one another, I believe that this conversation will open up conversations. ... As long as we can communicate with one another, I believe that we can make necessary changes. I've got to come to the table honestly. I can't have an agenda. I can't believe that when I'm having an honest conversation with you that it's not honest, that there's a

“
**THE FACT THAT WE
 HAVE MEN IN LOCAL
 COMMUNITIES THAT ARE
 TALKING TO ONE ANOTHER,
 I BELIEVE THAT THIS
 CONVERSATION WILL
 OPEN UP CONVERSATIONS.
 ... AS LONG AS WE CAN
 COMMUNICATE WITH ONE
 ANOTHER, I BELIEVE THAT
 WE CAN MAKE NECESSARY
 CHANGES.**
 ”

RICHARD LEWIS

hidden agenda [about race]. Until we are able to have an honest conversation about how we come to the table, this thing is going to always be under the table.

Turner: ... I think the Cooperative Program is the best thing going in our world today when it comes to the kingdom of God and I can see how the Cooperative Program continues to be a blessing to everybody, to every ethnicity, how it started our church many, many years ago. We were a church plant and we were planted to start an African-American fellowship because the convention wanted to be able to reach into the African-American community and develop churches and to be able to expand its outreach into the African-American community. White pastors just weren't able to do that.

What we're dealing with today is that the Cooperative Program, I believe, is going to continue to sponsor pastors regardless of their ethnicity, regardless of their outreach, whether they're trying to reach into the African-American community or the Asian community or the Hispanic community and fund those churches ... to incorporate the gospel into those communities. It's important for me to see the CP at work.

“
**ONE OF THE THINGS
 THAT YOU HAVE
 CONVICTED ME OF
 IS TO LEARN MORE OF
 WHAT THE CONVENTION
 HAS TO OFFER.**
 ”

RICHARD LEWIS

One thing that would be very beneficial is for the convention to establish a human resources society just for race relationships. ... It can be the voice. Really, the ERLC was established for that Unless the ERLC or some board can be established for that particular purpose, where powerful pastors who don't understand race relationships have no commitment to it, cannot control the entity that is over it, we'll continue to have problems. I think in the future that we're going to come to that reality.

Lewis: A lot of times, and especially with young Black pastors coming into the convention, they're not aware of all the entities that are available to them and the programs that are there. So, they don't reach out to those programs because they don't know they exist because they don't have a voice in those programs. What's available to our congregation? How does it help us in our communities?

One of the things that's being asked is, “Why are we in the Southern Baptist Convention? Can you tell me why?” When I explain the differences, their face lights up a lot of times and they say, “Oh, I get it now.” But when you don't know what's available, you don't know how to use [resources].

[To Turner] I hear your Southern Baptist roots coming through. You were a church plant. You were a part of that organization. But, what about that guy that's coming in that has a congregation and he has to get his congregation entangled with the convention? My church loved Kevin Smith, and he had preached at my church, and E.W. McCall was easy to come, and Richard Taylor was easy to come. [My church] saw Black faces that were part of the convention. I was able to bring in Dr. Richards and other white brothers like Bart McDonald that were a part of what we were doing and they preached, but they had a relationship with us.

One of the things that you have convicted me of is to learn more of what the convention has to offer. I can't just take what my limited knowledge is and become more exposed to it. I've got to be able to speak to other brothers that are like me that are asking those questions.

Turner: [Discussing the difficulty of presenting the Cooperative Program to Black pastors who may feel the SBC is “all-Anglo” and they are unwelcome.] Consequently, getting them to the table has been one of the major issues that we've had to deal with in the past. The very things you've said, we've tried to do over the years and we've actually promoted it quite a bit for educational purposes and the very people you've actually named, we've gone around and we've talked to different associations and different pastors....

And, at every convention for years we would have our African American Fellowship and we would introduce the things to the fellowship that the convention was actually doing with the CP, but that ... cloud, was always there. I think the only way to move that cloud is to develop the frame of mind that the convention has front and center an understanding of race relationships, that it is working through some entity ... to make the changes that need to be made. I think that if there's an entity that is started just for that—for the purpose of race relationships and is funded for that purpose—we get that cloud removed.

We can get our brothers at the table. They're saying now to us, “Why don't you just leave?”

And, I'm saying to them, “I'm invested. I knew what I was joining when I became a part of the Southern Baptist Convention and I'm invested to stay here until the change comes or until the Lord calls me home.”

See RACE, 8

NAAF, seminary presidents hold 'open and honest conversation' on racial reconciliation in the SBC

By Scott Barkley
Baptist Press

NASHVILLE A multi-ethnic group of Southern Baptist leaders described a Jan. 6 virtual meeting as productive and trust-building, saying although they did not agree on all points, they were committed together to fighting racism and to honoring "our common commitment to the inerrant Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ."

The meeting was called by Ronnie Floyd, president of the SBC Executive Committee, to address turmoil resulting from recent statements issued by various SBC-affiliated groups concerning Critical Race Theory and race relations, including a Nov. 30 statement issued by seminary presidents that condemned racism but called CRT inconsistent with the Baptist Faith & Message. Along with Floyd, the participants in the January meeting included officers of the National African American Fellowship of the SBC, presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries and SBC President J.D. Greear.

In a joint statement afterward, they called it "an honest and open conversation, hearts to hearts," adding: "[W]e spoke candidly and respectfully about our perspectives and concerns related to" CRT and Intersectionality.

The discussion, conducted virtually, lasted approximately three hours. Marshal Ausberry, president of the NAAF and first vice president of the SBC, said "seeds were planted by both sides in the face-to-face conversation—even if it did take place on a screen."

"We believe they heard us," Ausberry told Baptist Press, referring to the seminary presidents. "And we sincerely heard them."

Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and the current chairman of the Council of Seminary Presidents,

said: "Brothers shared their hearts and concerns openly and graciously. The love and respect each has for one another was very evident."

Participants pledged to continue similar conversations. Ausberry said they discussed plans for the NAAF to work alongside the seminaries to increase the enrollment and continued engagement of Black students.

The seminary presidents shared the conviction that CRT will not be taught at their seminaries," Ausberry said. "That's their role to make those decisions and we can respect that."

NAAF representatives shared their insight and convictions that some aspects of CRT can be useful in detecting and identifying systemic racism in institutions and organizations. Frank Williams, senior pastor of Wake-Eden Community Baptist Church in The Bronx, N.Y., and vice president of NAAF, who will become its president in June, said "the interaction was mutually authentic and respectful."

"We shared our beliefs and perspectives on CRT," Williams said. "We really pressed into our differences on the usefulness of some aspects of CRT as a tool to help us identify and uncover systemic racism in our society."

"We differed on that, but what we did not differ on is that systemic racism exists. And ultimately, we need to live the gospel of Jesus Christ to remedy this sin, both in the church and in the culture."

Akin emphasized several areas in which the groups shared common ground, saying "it was clear from our time together that there is so much that we agree on."

"We are together in our commitment to the Bible as the inerrant Word of God," Akin said. "We are together in our commitment to be Great Commission Baptists. We are together in our commitment to the Baptist Faith and Message. We are together in our commitment to fight

“
**WE BELIEVE
THEY HEARD
US. AND WE
SINCERELY
HEARD THEM.**”
”

**MARSHAL AUSBERRY, PRESIDENT
OF THE NAAF AND FIRST VICE
PRESIDENT OF THE SBC**

racism in every form, both personal and structural. We are together in our commitment to work better together in the future by listening and talking to one another on a regular basis.

"These common commitments do not mean we see eye-to-eye at every point. We acknowledge that there are areas where we disagree. But what it does mean is we all understand that we are together on those things that are essential for us to move forward united in service to King Jesus for the fulfillment of the Great Commission."

As they were meeting Wednesday, participants became aware of the unrest in Washington, D.C., where protesters broke into the U.S. Capitol. They immediately paused to pray together for the nation.

Floyd opened the meeting by reading Ephesians 4:1-16, then led the group in prayer.

"These are difficult conversations, but needed ones," Floyd said. "I'm thankful for the spirit of unity and commitment to having these discussions together. We cannot accomplish the work of the Great Commission without doing our very best to reach all the peoples of the world. It's

going to take all peoples to reach all peoples."

Ausberry said the seminary presidents acknowledged that the perspective of Black pastors should have been considered before the release of the Nov. 30 statement.

"They said that had that conversation occurred, they may have addressed CRT in a different form or format," Ausberry said. "We appreciated that."

Referring to the entire discussion, Ausberry added: "We sincerely feel they received what we were saying, and we received what they were saying."

In the last three decades, while attempting to reckon with racism and race relations, the SBC has grown in diversity. Messengers to the 1995 SBC Annual Meeting issued a resolution on racial reconciliation, acknowledging the role of slavery in its founding, denouncing racism "as deplorable sin, apologizing "to all African Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism," repenting and asking forgiveness.

CRT/Intersectionality rose as a controversial issue in the SBC with the passage at the 2019 SBC Annual Meeting of a resolution that affirmed the sufficiency and supremacy of Scripture and rejected the embrace of CRT as a worldview, while suggesting it "should only be employed as analytical tools subordinate to Scripture."

Greear, who had affirmed the Council of Seminary Presidents' statement when it was released, apologized for how it hurt Black Southern Baptists. He said their insight and input was essential in considering "what a gospel-based response to racism in our country looks like."

Greear added, "If we're serious about the Great Commission, the future of the church in America will need to be a multi-ethnic one." ❏

RACE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Lewis: That's things we may need to have at the EQUIP Conference. If we're equipping brothers to be better, that may be part of what we need to do. Say hey, this is here for you, this is for senior pastors. Guys, we need to have you in here, and we need to have a conversation. The bottom line is, either you're in or you're out. If you're in, then get in here and make a difference.

Turner: We see baptisms declining and we see cooperative giving plummeting and I think we've got to be, as Christ said, as wise as a serpent and as humble as a dove. The way I've always looked at that passage is, a serpent knows when to strike, and he knows when to run. And yet, at the same time, we have to be as harmless as a dove, even when we strike, that we make the difference. Every time I hear somebody say that Southern Baptists

are racist, it just breaks my heart, because I've been part of this convention for so long, and I love it. It's very important to me that it's successful. I know there are some who don't care as long as they stay in power, as long as they stay in control.

Lewis: The bottom line is ... racism should be our least problem with all the sin problems that we're facing. Racism should not be at the top of the list. If we say we are who God has called us to be, then racism should not be an issue that we have to talk about in church.

TEXAN: Give us a final word.

Turner: I've been so burdened by everything that's been going on in our country, in our world. I've been so confused why we are not doing better. ... [May] our pastors as well as our congregation within our SBTC ... understand the importance of the commandment Christ has given to us that we love our neighbor even as we love ourselves, which is the second and greatest commandment. Just being part of the conven-

tion has been very rewarding for me. I don't know where else I would have been able to do what I've been able to do for the kingdom other than in Southern Baptist life. I look forward to what God is going to do in the future.

I know that so many of us are tied to the politics of today more than we are tied to Christ. I think that's where we really have to revive ourselves. Politics has always been detrimental to the Christian. It's always been detrimental to faith because it will take the place of that which is most important. There's going to be some losses in Christendom because we got so tied to politics and not staying steadfast to the Word of God. We see our pastors being political. We see our convention heads being political, and we've got to remember right is right and wrong is wrong.

And we stand for what is right because the Bible teaches us what is right. And when we stand on the Word of God, we can resolve a whole lot of our issues. I suggest we

get back to the Bible and do what the Bible tells us to do.

Lewis: If our commandment is to go make disciples and to teach them whatsoever he has taught us, then we can't get caught up in being anything other than being godly. Our responsibility is to make men and women look like Christ. The Scripture says, let us follow after Paul as he followed after Christ. How can people follow after us, to Christ, if we're leading them to a political agenda? Our agenda has to be to win souls for Christ...

At the end of the day, my responsibility is not to make a good Republican, a good Democrat, but to make a Christian. Are you God-like? Are you living according to what the Word of God says? God says there is really only one way to heaven and that is through his beloved Son Jesus Christ. That has to be our message. The gospel is the most important message that we have to offer, and if we're not offering the gospel, then we're missing the mark. ❏

REPLANT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

God called Napier to plant a church in 2018, and while that was in the beginning stages, he ended up filling the pulpit of Eisenhower Road Baptist Church—once a bright light in San Antonio drawing more than 800 people—for a couple of Sundays. The church had dwindled to below 50 people, and after he preached, several members asked Napier to be their pastor.

“I was like, ‘I appreciate that. I’m humbled by that, but I’m already a pastor of a church plant, and this is what God has called me to do.’ Basically, ‘Thanks, but no thanks,’” Napier told the TEXAN.

A deacon at Eisenhower Road asked Napier if he had considered replanting a church. “I told him, ‘I have no idea what that means. I don’t even know if that’s a thing.’”

Napier called Hixson, who told him replanting means a church has to vote to dissolve on paper “and then give all their stuff to the church plant,” Napier recounted. Thus, chances of success are slim.

The church plant core that Napier had been preparing by leading a Bible study in his home continued to plan a launch for September 2019. Meanwhile, Napier

“**I DON’T HAVE THIS CRAZY WISDOM OR ALL THE ANSWERS TO ALL THE QUESTIONS. I JUST KNOW THAT GOD CALLED US TO START A CHURCH, GOD PROVIDED A PLACE FOR US TO MEET, AND HERE WE GO.**”

RYAN NAPIER OF FREEDOM HILL CHURCH

went back to Eisenhower Road and explained what a replant would entail.

“I said, ‘I’m willing to back up and then take another run at the starting line.’ ... Long story short, 55 days after the first day that I preached there, they voted yes to do that,” Napier said.

“We went from 25 people meeting in my house for a Bible study to 70 people overnight. We went from no place to meet to 10 acres of land and a 32,000-square-foot campus.”

Eisenhower Road also had a sizable staff and ran a licensed day-care. “It was mind-boggling,” Napier said, comparing the experience to Star Wars where “the stars go from little dots to lines because they’re

going so fast. That’s what it felt like. We went into hyper-speed.”

The SBTC helped extensively with the transition, Napier said, walking the church through the considerations and training to make the replant happen. Hixson reminded Napier, “This doesn’t happen. Whatever you’re doing, keep doing it,” the pastor remembered.

“I was like, I don’t know what I’m doing. I’m just following God, and whatever God tells me to do, that’s what I’m doing. He’s just blessing it,” Napier said. “I don’t have this crazy wisdom or all the answers to all the questions. I just know that God called us to start a church, God provided a place for us to meet, and here we go.”

Something Napier wants to be careful to do at Freedom Hill is to honor the fact that the current congregation has a stable foundation to build upon “because of the sacrifice, the blood, sweat and tears of the people of Eisenhower Road Baptist Church.”

Napier was born and raised in Houston, and for 10 years he traveled with the gospel music group Paul’s Journey, leading worship in churches across the country full-time. He served as worship leader and assistant pastor at his home church for several years before becoming a church planter. He and his wife, Angela, have two children.

Freedom Hill Church got up to 110 people by the end of last February. They were seeing people saved and baptizing people. Then COVID hit. The replant never really had an official launch date, Napier said, because they had been planning that for the springtime, near Easter.

Throughout the pandemic, the church has been ministering to people much like other churches—offering online services and making disciples through Zoom.

Part of the foundation of their ministry is a strong commitment to the Cooperative Program, and though they’re a small congregation, they forward 10 percent of all receipts through the Southern Baptist Convention’s plan for supporting missions and ministry.

“What a way to be a part of a bunch of different things,” Napier said of CP, “and it doesn’t matter the size church you are. We can be involved in the same things that the megachurches are involved in. It may not be as big of a dollar figure, but it’s a good percentage of what’s coming in here.”

“We’re able to make those investments, and obviously, it’s going to pay big dividends because many people are going to get to hear the gospel because of that, many people are going to come to Christ because of that, many people will get help because of that,” the pastor said. ✎

Freedom Hill: Una rara replantación que ha funcionado

Por Erin Roach
TEXAN Correspondent

SAN ANTONIO La iglesia Freedom Hill en San Antonio es lo que Doug Hixson, director de plantación de iglesias de la SBTC, llama un unicornio, refiriéndose a que es una replantación tan rara, que sólo tenía un uno por ciento de posibilidades de funcionar, dijo el pastor Ryan Napier.

Dios llamó a Napier para plantar una iglesia en el 2018, y mientras eso estaba en las etapas iniciales, terminó en el púlpito de la Iglesia Bautista Eisenhower Road. Esto fue una luz brillante en San Antonio que atrajo a más de 800 personas, durante un par de domingos. La iglesia se había reducido a menos de 50 personas, y después de que predicó, varios miembros le pidieron a Napier que fuera su pastor.

“Mi sentir era: ‘Te lo agradezco. Me siento honrado por eso, pero ya soy pastor de una iglesia plantada, y esto es lo que Dios me ha llamado a hacer’. Básicamente,” Gracias, pero no gracias”, dijo Napier al TEXAN.

Un diácono de Eisenhower Road le preguntó a Napier si había considerado replantar una iglesia. “Le dije, ‘No tengo idea de lo que eso significa. Ni siquiera sé si eso existe’.”

Napier llamó a Hixson de la SBTC, quien le dijo que replantar significa que una iglesia tiene que votar para disolverse legalmente “y luego dar todas sus cosas a la plantación de la iglesia”, relató Napier. Por lo tanto, las posibilidades de éxito de una replantación son escasas.

El equipo de la plantación de iglesias que Napier había estado preparando, al dirigir un estudio bíblico en su casa, continuó planificando un lanzamiento para septiembre de 2019. Mientras tanto, Napier regresó a Eisenhower Road y explicó lo que implicaría una replantación.

“Dije: ‘Estoy dispuesto a dar marcha atrás y luego hacer otra carrera desde el punto de partida... Para resumir, 55 días después del primer día que prediqué allí, votaron sí para hacerlo’, dijo Napier.

“Pasamos de 25 personas reunidas en mi casa para un estudio bíblico, a 70 personas durante la noche. Pasamos de no tener ningún lugar para reunirnos, a tener 10 acres de terreno y un campus de 32,000 pies cuadrados.”

Eisenhower Road también tenía un personal considerable y tenía una guardería con licencia. “Fue alucinante”, dijo Napier. Comparaba la experiencia con Star Wars, en donde “las estrellas pasan de pequeños puntos a líneas porque van muy rápido. Eso es lo que se siente. Entramos en hipervelocidad.”

La SBTC ayudó ampliamente con la transición, dijo Napier, guiando a la iglesia a través de las consideraciones y la capacitación para hacer que suceda la replantación. Hixson le recordó a Napier: “Esto es algo poco común que suceda. Lo que sea que usted esté haciendo, siga haciéndolo”, recordó el pastor.

“Yo estaba algo dudoso, porque la verdad es que no sé lo que estoy haciendo. Sólo estoy siguiendo a Dios,



Freedom Hill Church in San Antonio is a rarity, a church replant that has had a successful start and appears to have a bright future building on the sacrifices made through the years by members of Eisenhower Road Baptist Church. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE CHURCH

y cualquier cosa que Dios me dice que haga, eso es lo que estoy haciendo; y Dios simplemente lo está bendiciendo”, dijo Napier. “No tengo una gran sabiduría, ni todas las respuestas a todas las preguntas. Solo sé que Dios nos llamó a comenzar una iglesia, Dios proporcionó un lugar para que nos reuniéramos y aquí vamos.”

Algo que Napier quiere muy cuidadosamente hacer en Freedom Hill es honrar el hecho de que la congregación actual tiene una base estable sobre la cual construir “debido al sacrificio, la sangre, el sudor y las lágrimas de la gente de la Iglesia Bautista Eisenhower Road”.

Napier nació y se crió en Houston, y durante 10 años viajó con el grupo de música gospel Paul’s Journey, liderando la adoración en iglesias de todo el país a tiempo completo. Se desempeñó como líder de adoración y pastor asistente en su iglesia local durante varios años antes de convertirse en plantador de iglesias. Él y su esposa, Ángela, tienen dos hijos.

La Iglesia Freedom Hill reunió a 110 personas a fines del pasado febrero. Estaban viendo gente salvada y bautizando personas. Luego, el COVID golpeó. La replantación nunca tuvo una fecha oficial de lanza-

miento, dijo Napier, porque habían estado planeando eso para la primavera, cerca del tiempo de pascua.

A lo largo de la pandemia, la iglesia ha estado ministrando a personas de manera muy similar a otras iglesias, ofreciendo servicios en línea y haciendo discípulos a través de Zoom.

Parte de la base de su ministerio es un fuerte compromiso con el Programa Cooperativo (PC), y aunque son una congregación pequeña, envían el 10 por ciento de todos los ingresos a través del plan de la Convención Bautista del Sur para apoyar las misiones y el ministerio.

“Qué gran manera de ser parte de un montón de cosas diferentes”, dijo Napier sobre el PC, “y realmente no importa el tamaño de la iglesia que seas. Podemos estar involucrados en las mismas cosas en las que están involucradas las mega iglesias. Puede que no sea una cifra tan grande en dólares, pero es un buen porcentaje de lo que está llegando aquí.”

“Podemos hacer esas inversiones y, obviamente, dará grandes ganancias, porque mucha gente va a llegar a escuchar el evangelio por eso, mucha gente va a venir a Cristo por eso, mucha gente recibirá ayuda por eso”, dijo el pastor. ✎

McAllen church adds online pastor, notes 454 professions of faith in Jesus in 2020

By Karen L. Willoughby
TEXAN Correspondent

MCALLEN Nearly 500 people made professions of faith in Jesus during 2020 through the multi-site ministries of Baptist Temple in McAllen in the Rio Grande Valley.

"We have a commitment to presenting the gospel every week," Chris DuPree, BT pastor, told the TEXAN. "We do a traditional invitation every week. We baptize as soon as possible, even the same day." In 2020 BT baptized 139 people in its main campus swimming pool or elsewhere.

DuPree and 14 other ministers lead the congregation that, pre-pandemic, averaged about 2,800 in four physical locations and online. At the start of 2021, about 1,500 attended physically and 1,500 online.

Faithfulness in serving its on-site and online communities led to the church's more than quadrupling its usual number of professions of faith in Jesus as Lord, the pastor said.

On-site and in the community

"We have favor in our community because we're involved with the school system and we bless our first responders," DuPree said. "We just try to be intentional in loving the teachers, administrators and first responders."

By local ordinance, on-site worship was not permitted at Baptist Temple from March 22 to Sept. 13, except for four weeks starting the third week in May.

"Our area became one of the worst places as far as [COVID] mortality rates," DuPree said. "We had double-digit deaths each day for eight weeks."

As the church's actions revealed its concern for people reeling from the

pandemic, God moved in people's hearts and they responded, the pastor said.

"There was so much uncertainty, so much tension, and so much division stemming from the pandemic we realized that people both near and far were searching for hope," DuPree explained. "While we continued to focus on reaching and ministering to those around our physical locations, we began to see an outpouring of individuals and families from all over the country connecting with us. Many of those connections resulted in people placing their faith in Jesus."

Online with renewed purpose

Baptist Temple, expanding its reach beyond its McAllen, Sharyland, Edinburg and Alice campuses, has had an online presence since 2016.

When online numbers jumped from about 350 pre-COVID to 3,000, DuPree added Danny Rangel to the staff as online pastor for the church.

"As our online presence grew, I knew we wanted to provide more than something for people to watch," DuPree said. "I wanted to provide a platform that people could connect with. Those individuals watching online were still longing for connection and interaction."

Baptist Temple is Rangel's home church and DuPree, his "mentor since day one in ministry," Rangel, 31, told the TEXAN. A former youth pastor, with 11 years in ministry, Rangel also helped plant a church in the New York City borough of Queens.

Rangel's BT assignment was to create an online campus in which he would serve viewers who did not live close to a physical campus. "COVID helped [grow the online campus.] The things we desire to do



Praying in small clusters is an important element of worship at Baptist Temple. The church saw more than 400 professions of faith in 2020 despite the pandemic, when in-person services were not permitted for months.

are connecting with people digitally so they can grow spiritually," he said.

BT Online uses Facebook, Instagram, Baptist Temple's website—bt.church—and podcasts to engage followers.

"This was the direction churches were going to have to go to in a digital world," Rangel said. "COVID made the churches do it faster. This [the internet] is where people are hanging out. This is the direction we're going."

"The Great Commission talks about going to the end of the earth, and I believe our going now means going to people in a digital way," Rangel said. "The beauty of it now is that nations can be reached through computer screens. That's our vision."

One challenge of online ministry is making a digital environment personal for people viewing through their computer screens, the online pastor said, adding, "Yes, we're talking to a camera but we're also talking to people, and we need to keep that in mind."

It's a fact that "people can have church right where they are. They can grow in their faith right where they are and they can serve right where they are," Rangel said.



When Baptist Temple's online presence increased tenfold on Sundays, Danny Rangel assumed the role of online pastor. PHOTOS PROVIDED

People hundreds or thousands of miles away from McAllen, are holding watch parties and inviting friends to their homes for BT Online. Rangel has interacted with several, included a group of 40 in San Antonio. Viewers tune in from Chicago, Missouri, Ontario, Canada, Spokane, Washington, Bangalore, plus Brownsville and Corpus Christi.

"Watch parties are new—'Invite your neighbors and friends to watch church together'—and a very different paradigm from a lot of churches that use social media to simply promote what they're doing," he said.

Baptist Temple uses social media to "provide content people can consume to help them grow spiritually," Rangel said. He develops Scripture-based Bible study and devotional videos to enhance worship. At the end of the morning's worship, Rangel, rather than the on-site preacher whose message has been broadcast, gives an invitation.

In January, the church started podcasts on goals, featuring interviews with experts in such fields as marriage, parenting, finances or physical, mental and spiritual health.

"This all ties into what people are currently deal-

ing with," Rangel said. "Everybody is consuming something digitally. I believe we are disciplined by what we consume. My hope with using social media as a platform for ministry is providing content people can consume throughout the week that can help them in their spiritual life."

In his first year as Baptist Temple's online pastor, Rangel is learning who is watching and is connecting with them demographically and individually.

"We can see where people are watching from, but not who they are," Rangel said. "We have to provide ways to gather their info to find out who they are, such as digital connect cards, and if people are watching on Facebook they can contact [us] that way."

During live broadcasts, watchers can text or message for more information, make professions of faith, request baptism, prayer, or counseling or make other requests, all of which Rangel responds to within the week.

All together

Baptist Temple records the total number of professions of faith and other

See McALLEN, 12



Baptist Temple youngsters respond to associate pastor Nick Maddox's high energy.

Cross City Espanol's Night of Hope

By Kaylan Preuss
TEXAN Correspondent

EULESS For much of 2020, the spread of COVID shut down all normalcy for Americans, including schools, churches, restaurants, stores, large gatherings, events, and more—at least for periods of time. But that hasn't stopped the gospel from spreading in the most unique ways.

On Dec. 7, Cross City Espanol adopted Oakwood Terrace Elementary School in the HEB school district to spread the joy and hope of Christmas to families in need. Partnering with 6 Stones Mission Network, a local non-profit that serves as a catalyst for missions opportunities, the congregation hosted "Night of Hope," carrying on a four-year running tradition amidst COVID restrictions.

Pastor Humberto Gonzalez of Cross City Espanol, who planned and organized the event, said, "At the beginning of October, I didn't think we could even do the event, but I prayed and prayed. I started to think about what was going to happen to all those families in need. My heart was bro-



Pastor Humberto Gonzalez of Cross City Espanol is interviewed on local radio. The station broadcast the Christmas story to guests lined up in their vehicles for Night of Hope at Oakwood Terrace elementary.

ken to think they wouldn't receive anything."

After meeting with the school's principal and counselor, the solution became clear: host an outdoor, drive-thru event.

Because people would be stuck inside their cars this year, Pastor Gonzalez knew he had to do more than what they had done in years past.

"I spoke with one of my friends at Chick-fil-a and she donated chocolate cookies for each person and activities for the children. Then I spoke with my friend at the radio station and he came to do a live event, broadcasting the

Christmas story on their radios," Gonzalez said.

More than 500 families from all ethnicities attended the drive-thru event. While most of them were Hispanic, a portion of them spoke Arabic, French and English. Because of this, Gonzalez said, "We also recruited volunteers to share the Christmas story in each of their languages."

According to Pastor Gonzalez, his initial goal was to recruit 75 volunteers to help out. However, after the request and much prayer, 105 volunteers signed up to serve at three different stations—even



More than 500 families attended the drive-thru event, receiving food and gifts and hearing the gospel in multiple languages. Forty-five trusted Jesus as Savior. PHOTOS PROVIDED

braving the cold temperatures and possible COVID exposure.

At the first station, volunteers registered and welcomed attendees, passing out cookies and activities plus toys, turkeys, bags of potatoes and canned foods. Moving on to the second station, participants witnessed the live nativity and retelling of the Christmas story, which involved more than 20 actors and featured wise men, shepherds and a manger scene. At the final station, nine evangelistic teams waited to share the gospel, answer questions about what guests had seen, and offer

the best gift of the holiday season: salvation in Jesus.

After the event ended and tallies were totaled, 45 people received salvation, 32 wanted to know more about God, and 33 wanted to know more about Cross City Church.

"We're going to start following up with each family who gave us their information," said Gonzalez. "We'll start with the Hispanic families first because we have a Christmas fiesta coming up in our congregation. But we're looking forward to reaching out to all the families and walking with them in their new faith journey." ❄️

Using shoes and socks to spread the gospel in Central Texas

By Devyn Ross
TEXAN Correspondent

BROWNWOOD On a cool December Saturday morning, members of Coggin Avenue Baptist Church in Brownwood, Texas, opted to wake up early on the weekend. They gathered Dec. 19 to volunteer and serve their community for the annual First Blessing event. This ministry is unlike any other at the church because it uses a peculiar tool to connect community and congregation: shoes.

This December marked Coggin's fifth First Blessing; however, the church is not alone. First Blessing occurs in almost 30 churches of various Christian denominations in Texas every year as children receive both a new pair of shoes and exposure to the gospel.

In Brownwood, Coggin volunteers called "shepherds" accompanied children and parents, forming connections as they entered the church gym area for the event.

First, the children picked a pair of socks to go with

their new shoes. From there, the shepherd showed kids and parents into the shoe room where the youngsters chose from three pairs of shoes in a range of brands, sizes and styles, ensuring that all children got to pick a pair they truly liked.

From there, the shepherd escorted the family to get the shoes bagged and paid for. Each pair cost three dollars, the nominal fee enabling the parents to retain dignity and give a gift.

"It's not about doing something for someone that they can't do themselves, but it's really about giving the parents the opportunity to buy shoes for their children," said Chris Stuard, director of Coggin's Love Brownwood ministry, who oversees the event and other community outreaches for the church.

The last stop at Coggin's First Blessing allowed guests to pick up a children's Bible in either English or Spanish and go outside to take a photo at the live nativity scene which featured goats, chickens and a cow.



Coggin member and volunteer shepherd Lori Zaccardo helps a young guest select a new pair of shoes at the First Blessing event. PHOTO BY DEVYN ROSS

The event looked a bit different than in previous years, thanks to the pandemic. The COVID-19 epidemic made the church cut back and change plans to safely accommodate the families and volunteers.

"We'll take temperature checks, and everybody is required to wear a mask. The shoe room is a lot more spread out. Now instead of rows clumped together, it is up against the wall all around the perimeter," Stuard told the TEXAN.

COVID-19 also affected the number of people attending the event.

"We have about 180 kids signed up," Stuard said. That number was less than the previous year when 285

children came for shoes, yet still shows growth from the first year when 88 kids got shoes. The decrease in attendance was not an issue for Stuard and Coggin. First Blessing is not about the numbers for them but instead about the connections the church gets to make with the community.

First Blessing creator Glenn Lackey said that to build connections was why he began the ministry at his church in Temple six years ago.

"After spending 20 years in the retail shoe business and seeing children that really need shoes and were being fitted in the wrong size at the retail stores that I managed, I just thought

it would be a great way to minister to families and [impact] the community," Lackey said.

The event idea came to Lackey after his church was commissioned by its pastor to create a program reaching those outside of the church walls. Lackey, with a warehouse full of shoes, realized he could use a physical need to hopefully touch the spiritual needs of the community.

"We are trying to touch the whole person: food, shoes, and the love of Christ," Lackey said.

The program has done just that as it has branched out to churches all over Texas,

See SHOES, 12

SBTC DR shared hope on the field in 2020 despite pandemic

By Jane Rodgers
Managing Editor

The year 2020 saw changes in deployment protocols for Southern Baptists of Texas Disaster Relief in response to COVID-19, yet the ministry remained vibrant and active, albeit on a smaller scale than in previous years. The year featured a growing partnership between SBTC DR and the Salvation Army, with the American Red Cross curtailing its traditional support of mass feeding because of COVID.

"SBTC DR had 25 deployments in 2020, half what we did the year before," SBTC DR Director Scottie Stice told the TEXAN, adding that five deployments involved out-of-state work in California, Oklahoma and Louisiana.

Most were shorter missions, as volunteers served those affected by fires, ice and windstorms in the Panhandle and elsewhere and moved equipment from California to Texas.

Tornadoes struck Texas at Onalaska in April and Bowie in May, marking the first major DR deployments of the year, testing COVID protocols.

"Mississippi DR produced guidelines for doing disaster relief during the pandemic," Stice recalled. "We adapted it for the SBTC and we went to work. We were among the first teams, if not the first, on the field in a COVID context."

To date, not one coronavirus case among SBTC DR volunteers has been reported as stemming from a deployment, although other state Baptist teams have reported cases among their volunteers related to DR work, Stice said.

Many Baptist state DR teams assisted communities in food distribution in response to COVID. SBTC DR did some of this in support of the Houston Food Bank, but "we mostly responded to disasters on the field," Stice said.

Three hurricanes—Laura, Delta and Sally—pummeled Southeast Texas and Louisiana in rapid succession from August to October, while Hurricane Hanna hit the Rio Grande Valley in July. SBTC DR teams served survivors of each storm, providing food and recovery assistance.

"The year 2020 also marked the continuation of an outstanding relationship with the Texas Salvation Army," Stice confirmed. "We worked closely with them, making use of our quick response kitchen units and manning both our larger mobile kitchens and theirs to prepare meals for survivors." SBTC DR worked with Southern Baptist DR teams from Mississippi and Louisiana in these efforts, he added.

IMB and NAMB DR merge under Send Relief in 2020

On the national disaster relief front, changes also

came in 2020 as the International Mission Board and North American Mission Board combined DR efforts under Send Relief.

"Send Relief has become the umbrella for the national relief efforts of NAMB and the international relief efforts of the IMB. Baptist Global Response now also falls under Send Relief," Stice explained.

Stice, who is in his second year as chairman of the national Southern Baptist Disaster Relief steering committee, expressed enthusiasm about the restructure, suggesting that it will lead to "a bigger and better Southern Baptist response to storms internationally and nationally."

Volunteers needed

Stice reiterated the need for new volunteers to become trained in disaster relief, noting both in-person and online training sponsored by the SBTC and directing those interested to visit <https://sbtexas.com/disaster-relief/online>.

"There is a need for younger volunteers, but they are often limited to deploying on weekends and vacations because of work and families," Stice said, calling for the newly retired to also consider becoming part of SBTC DR.

Men and women who have recently retired have the time, skills and health to contribute, Stice said, adding, "New retirees are where we build our ranks." ❧

sbtc DISASTER RELIEF 2020



25

NUMBER OF DISASTERS

4,060 Total DR volunteers deployed

478 Total of Texas Relief volunteers deployed

40,600 Volunteer hours served

1,056 Heavy equipment hours

185,608 MEALS PREPARED

1,172 Chainsaw jobs completed

1 Fire recovery sites completed

19 Temporary roofs installed



44

FLOOD RECOVERY SITES COMPLETED

2,050

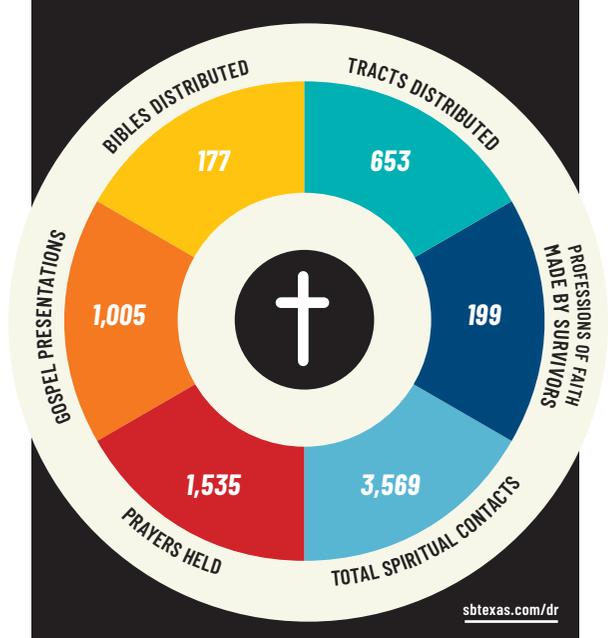
Showers provided

1,236

Total clean up and recovery sites completed

1,174

Laundry loads run



McALLEN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

spiritual decisions from each campus. The entire ministry staff works at follow-up. Those who accept Christ are encouraged to pursue baptism and church membership, join a community group and serve on a ministry team.

The church as a whole is responsible for its 13 church plants in Africa, the five NAMB church planters they support in Texas, the church plant in Queens, three international orphanages, various local and global ministries as well as four or five annual mission trips.

Evangelism is at the heart of each of these ventures. So are the dollars given to missions through the SBC's Cooperative Program, DuPree said.

“
CHURCH ONLINE MIGHT NOT BE IDEAL BUT GOD IS ALLOWING PEOPLE TO TURN TO CHURCHES WE WOULD NEVER HAVE REACHED BEFORE.
”

CHRIS DUPREE, BAPTIST TEMPLE IN McALLEN

"We are seeing a significant outpouring of salvations in our services but I believe we also have a premium on our people sharing their faith through the week," DuPree said. "Our people are great at bringing people with them. Every week I say, 'Next week is bring your friend week.'"

"We have a culture of celebration," the pastor continued. "The reason we know we have 454 people who accepted Christ in 2020 is that we celebrate every story."

DuPree added a caveat: "We try to do our best but

leave it to the Holy Spirit to draw people to himself. We encourage personal evangelism but this year has been a challenge. This year has thrown everyone a curveball.

"Church online might not be ideal but God is allowing people to turn to churches we would never have reached before," DuPree said. "I believe God has ... changed the course of our ministry. Our focus now is to pour into our ministry in South Texas and pray for revival, believing that will change the world." ❧

SHOES

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

moving from Temple to include Kerrville, Brownwood and beyond.

While some congregations opted to not do the event in 2020 due to COVID-19, First Blessing will still impact the lives of many Texans. Lackey estimated that between 4,000 and 5,000 kids will receive shoes this winter.

The new year promises more blessings, with many churches who canceled in 2020 already planning for 2021.

"We think 2021 will be our most blessed year so far," Lackey said.

The community benefit is undeniable.

"First Blessing has connected us with people that we might not have come



in contact within our day-to-day lives. The greatest impact something like this can have on a church is to open our eyes to those around and see others as God does," Stuard said. "It warms my heart," said Rebecca, mother of two boys who received new shoes at Coggin's First Blessing. "You're with your church family. I really love it and it really warms my heart up." ❧

SBTC administrative assistant retreat May 10-11 will be 'refreshing for the spirit'

By Gayla Holt Sullivan
TEXAN Correspondent

This year marks the ninth for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention's Administrative Assistants Retreat, which will be held at Calvary Baptist Church in San Marcos on May 10-11. This ministry event, provided by the SBTC to all church and associational administrative assistants across Texas, is designed to inspire, refresh and encourage attendees in their unique roles and to instill community amongst fellow assistants.

Ed Laymance, professional counselor and founder and director of Impact

Counseling Center in Arlington, will be joined by Karen May, a conference and retreat speaker from Karen May Ministries, as this year's speakers.

The duo will engage listeners on important subjects such as handling stress to avoid burn out, balancing life and ministry and keeping one's walk with the Lord fresh.

Aside from networking with others in their own fields of ministry and gaining insight from seasoned experts, participants will enjoy free time, with opportunities to relax, shop and fellowship.

Liz Cooper, front office receptionist at Brazos Pointe

Fellowship in Lake Jackson, shared that she researched the retreat and put in a proposal with her church's leadership team to attend the first year. "When I came back rejuvenated and feeling spiritually full, they chose to add the retreat to our budget so we could continue to be involved," Cooper said.

Jeri Norris, the ministry assistant at Lake Fork Baptist Church in Alba said she attends the AAR for "restoration, fellowship and worship." She added, "The admin retreat is a great time of refreshing for the spirit, lots of fun, and the ability to learn others' tricks of the trade."

Early bird registration by

ADMINISTRATIVE Assistants Retreat

May 10-11
Calvary Baptist Church, San Marcos

Church and associational assistants will have the opportunity to learn from instructors and others in their field, with free time to relax, shop and fellowship.

Made possible by your Cooperative Program giving. sbtexas.com/assistants

March 2 is \$100 per person, with regular registration \$139 after March 2. Breakfast and one-night's lodging are included in the price.

Space is limited. Registration closes when all guestrooms have been taken or by April 3. Register at sbtexas.com/assistants. 📧

Church Positions

PASTOR

- FBC in Haskell is seeking a FT pastor. Send resume to haskellpastorsearch@gmail.com.
- FBC De Leon is accepting resumes for a FT pastor. Send to First Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, PO Box 228, De Leon, TX 76444 or fbdeleon@cctc.net.
- Hodges BC in Hawley is seeking a FT pastor with a vision to grow our traditional, loving congregation of 50 average attendance. Please send your resume and references by February 12 to aadkins@transoiltx.com or Hodges Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, 13933 CR 495, Hawley, TX 79525.
- FBC in Newton is currently seeking a FT lead pastor. Please inquire with the church office for more details at fbnewtonsecretary@gmail.com or 409-379-3381.
- Dogwood Church in Athens, an elder-led church of approximately 140 members, is seeking applications for a FT senior pastor. Send resumes to Dogwood Church, Pastor Search Committee, 6467 FM 2494, Athens, TX 75751, or dogwoodathens@outlook.com.
- Keltys FBC (9Marks, SBTC and BMAA) in Lufkin is seeking a FT lead teaching pastor. Send resume, ministry philosophy and sermon links to jobs@keltys.org or Keltys First Baptist Church, PO Box 3043, Lufkin, TX, 75903. Visit keltys.org/pastorsearch for more information and a job description.
- FBC in Miami is seeking a FT pastor. Send resume to wheeler.montyj@gmail.com.
- Bethel BC in Warren is accepting applications for the position of Pastor. Please submit resumes to b-church@att.net "Search Committee" or Search Committee, Bethel Baptist Church, PO Box 96, Warren, TX 77664.
- West End BC in Beaumont is seeking a FT or bivocational pastor. Financially

secure, loving congregation of 50 average attendance, traditional worship service. We are affiliated with the SBTC. Send resume to webcbeaumont@gmail.com.

- Prairieville BC, about 10 miles north of Mabank, is seeking a bi-vocational pastor to lead our SBTC affiliated congregation. PBC has a 3 bedroom/two bath/plus garage parsonage. Candidate must adhere to the BF&M 2000 and have Baptist seminary educational training or equivalent experience in a pastoral role. Send cover letters and resumes by March 14, 2021 to Prairieville Baptist Church, 11258 FM 90, Mabank, Texas 75147 or garymacksapp@aol.com. Include sources where the candidate's sermons can be viewed.

- Sylvester BC, a small SBTC rural church, seeks a bivocational pastor. Parsonage available. Send resume to dpippin38@yahoo.com or Sylvester Baptist Church, PO Box 8, Sylvester, TX 79560.

- Greenfield Acres BC in Odessa is seeking a bivocational pastor. We are an SBTC church and adhere to the BF&M 2000. Parsonage is available. Send resume to Greenfield Acres Baptist Church, 2114 W. Yukon, Odessa, TX 79764 or gabcsearch@gmail.com.

MUSIC

- Faith BC in Wichita Falls is looking for FT minister of music to promote and lead the music ministry of both contemporary and blended worship services. Must be capable of conducting adult and children's choirs, instrumentalists and special services and events. Email resumes to craigl@faithwf.com.

- First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT worship minister with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is a domestic and international church planting network. Other cities are available. Please email a video of you leading worship to Sarai Harding at

saraih@firstcolleyville.com

- FBC in Rogers seeks a bi-vocational music minister to lead blended style worship services. Will consider music/children's combination. Send resume to fbcrogers@fbcrogers.com.

- Marsh Lane BC in north Dallas is searching for a PT worship leader to assist in the transition of traditional worship to a more modern tone with grace and passion. Send resumes to Scott@mlbc.org.

- Westside BC in Corsicana is accepting resumes for a PT music minister for Sunday morning and evening. Email resume to westside.church@sbcglobal.net or mail to Westside Baptist Church, 1522 N 24th St., Corsicana, TX 75110.

- Anderson Mill BC is searching for a PT worship minister for a multi-generational and multi-ethnic church in northwest Austin. A heart for God and the local church, along with the appreciation for both traditional and contemporary worship are required. Submit resume to rminor@ambcaustin.org.

- Calvary Baptist Pearland seeks a PT worship pastor. Please send resumes and demo videos to nathan@calvarypearland.org.

STUDENTS

- Meadowbrook BC in Rockdale is looking for a FT youth pastor. Degree preferred. Church is located across from high school. Seeking energetic, motivated, person with heart to reach youth with the Gospel. Send resumes to pastorsteve@meadowbrookrockdale.org.
- FBC in La Vernia is seeking a FT youth pastor. Send resumes to search@fbclv.com before 2/10/21.

- First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT student pastor with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is an international and domestic church planting network. Other cities are available. Email resume to

saraih@firstcolleyville.com.

- Lighthouse Baptist Chapel in Frankston is receiving resumes for a bi-vocational youth pastor to grow a youth ministry, bring in young families and lead Sunday night worship services. Mail resumes to George Folmar, Lighthouse Baptist Chapel, PO Box 1118, Frankston, TX 75763.

CHILDREN

- FBC in Rogers seeks a bi-vocational children's director to lead and enhance children's ministries. Send resume to fbcrogers@fbcrogers.com.

COMBINATION

- Lake Athens BC in Athens is seeking a FT pastor of discipleship and family ministry. See details at nextstep.sbtexas.com. Send resume to personnel@lakeathensbaptist.com.

- First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT kids and family minister with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is an international and domestic church planting network. Other cities are available. Email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.

OTHER

- Lamar BC in Arlington is searching for a PT media assistant. Email resumes to dallas@lamarbaptist.org.

- Single young adults interested in cross-cultural ministry may apply to become a missions intern at Southcliff BC in Ft. Worth. Work with a team to engage refugees and other apartment dwellers. Complete a minimum of 12 hours of ministry per week in exchange for room, utilities and internet. Dr. Stu Cocanougher will mentor you as a part of the missions team. Email resume to stu@southcliff.com.

- First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT lead planter with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is a domestic and

international church planting network. Other cities are available. Please email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.

- First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT pastor of community engagement with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is an international and domestic church planting network. Other cities are available. Email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.

- Huntington FBC is hiring a FT next generation pastor to oversee their growing youth and children's ministries. They are seeking someone who has a vision to impact the next generation in our church as well as their families. See more information at huntingtonfbc.org/nextgenpastor/.

- First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT pastor of spiritual development with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is an international and domestic church planting network. Other cities are available. Email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.

Paid Classifieds

- First Southern Baptist Church in Lawrence, KS is seeking a pastor of worship and music. See www.fsbcfamily.com for a job description and church profile. Resumes can be sent to search@fsbcfamily.com.

- For more job listings, visit: <https://nextstep.sbtexas.com>.

Enjoy **2.00% APY** for an **11-month term** & maximize your ministry's impact

Learn more at sbtexasfoundation.com/springpromo

Promotional rate good through April 30, 2021
Church Expansion Term (CET) investments are available to Texas churches and ministries.

More than 3 million Uyghurs detained in forced labor camps in China



By Diana Chandler
Baptist Press

XINJIANG, China They reportedly number more than 3 million. Uyghur American human rights advocate Rushan Abbas describes them as university presidents, doctors, entrepreneurs and artists. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) calls them criminals.

China's work to kill Christianity is highlighted in persecution watchdog Open Doors USA's 2021 World Watch List. But China's persecution of religious groups also includes the imprisonment and forced labor of Uyghur Muslims at concentration or "reeducation" camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

"The Chinese government tried to say that those are religious extremists or people who are engaged in illegal religious activities," Abbas, a Virginia resident advocating for the freedom of Uyghurs in her homeland, said Wednesday during an Open Doors press conference. "Just saying 'salam alaikum,' which is Arabic greeting, means 'peace be with you'—most peaceful way to say hello, basically—even saying that could cause you to end up in the concentration camps."

Abbas, whose sister Gulshan is among Uyghurs held in China, said "the Chinese Communist regime is waging a war against religion," adding: "To me, this is a test for the conscience of the world. This is about humanity. Anybody who hears about what's happening to Uyghur people, anybody who vowed never again after World War II, should take action with their conscience and of course to pray for my sister and for those Uyghur people."

In 2017, Abbas founded the Campaign for Uyghurs human rights advocacy group and works to mobilize

the international community around the cause. The Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission is among groups advocating for Uyghur freedom.

Among the ERLC's latest initiatives is support for the bipartisan Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives in August 2020 and referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in September.

"Currently, any brand sourcing apparel, textiles, yarn or cotton from XUAR is almost certainly profiting from forced Uyghur labor," the ERLC wrote in August in support of the legislation. "The United States must send a strong message to the CCP that products made through forced labor will not be accepted because these egregious inhumane practices will not be tolerated."

"It is unconscionable for a free country like the United States to ultimately be accomplices in this Communist Party's plan to profit from slave labor," the ERLC wrote. "In holding the CCP accountable for the horrors that occur on a daily basis in the labor camps of Xinjiang, the United States has the opportunity to send a clear message that total disregard for human life will not be tolerated."

Although the bill died in Congress, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) on Jan. 13 restricted entry into the U.S. of any cotton and tomato products produced in the XUAR.

The Department of Home-

land Security "will not tolerate forced labor of any kind in U.S. supply chains," Acting DHS Deputy Secretary Ken Cuccinelli said. "We will continue to protect the American people and investigate credible allegations of forced labor. We will prevent goods made by forced labor from entering our country and we demand the Chinese close their camps and stop their human rights violations."

Open Doors CEO David Curry cited the enslavement of Uyghurs among the reasons China is listed as 17th on the 2021 World Watch List of the most dangerous places for Christians to live.

"The inhumanity against Uyghur Muslims is shocking," Curry said Wednesday in releasing the World Watch List. "I encourage every Christian, every person of any faith, and anybody who wants to have freedom of conscience, to speak out for the Uyghur Muslims. ... They're not criminals."

Open Doors has estimated the number of detained Uyghurs at more than 1 million, but Campaign for Uyghurs estimates the number has surpassed 3 million and quotes a document from CCP secretary Chen Quango ordering that detention centers "teach like a school, be managed like the military and be defended like a prison." Detention centers "must first break their (Uyghur) lineage, break their roots, break their connections and break their origins," the Campaign for Uyghurs quotes the document. ❧

I ENCOURAGE EVERY CHRISTIAN, EVERY PERSON OF ANY FAITH, AND ANYBODY WHO WANTS TO HAVE FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE, TO SPEAK OUT FOR THE UYGHUR MUSLIMS. ... THEY'RE NOT CRIMINALS.

DAVID CURRY, OPEN DOORS CEO

Written by a former Hindu | IMB field story

Born in darkness, live in light



I was born into darkness.

The interesting thing is that I did not really know it was dark. I don't think you can comprehend the difference between darkness and light until you have truly seen light. Thankfully, my life story does not end in darkness, but it did start there.

I was born a Hindu in India, which means I grew up in fear of evil spirits. In my home, there were always idols that my family would constantly bow before and plead with for protection, wealth and help. We gave these statues baths, placed flowers around their necks, and laid food and drinks before them. We lit the oil lamps and incense and did everything we were told to do to please these gods. I watched my mother go through all the ceremonial motions of worship on behalf of our family. Then my marriage was arranged, and I had to learn how to do all the necessary pujas (Hindu worship) for my future family.

I married and settled into my duties as wife and then as mother. I was a good Hindu but felt so little security and hope in my life. The statues before me never ate the food or took the flowers. I looked to them for help and they were silent.

Then one day a woman came and told me about a God who loves me and wants to have a relationship with me. She said that he has made a way for us to be free from the burden of our sins. No more fear? That seemed amazing. She taught me that he is a jealous God and I could not worship these idols and this one true God at the same time. I was tired of a life serving these statues, so I prayed for God to come into my life.

Then it was there. Light. Bright, beautiful and glorious light.

I told my husband. He beat me. I was no longer a good wife because I refused to complete all the prayers to these worthless idols. The more he beat me, the more I prayed.

I told others about this God, and they too wanted to see the Light. Others followed. People began meeting together to pray to this wonderful God who heard our prayers and filled our hearts with love.

One day my husband said, "If you are going to pray—then pray for us to have some money." So, we all prayed, and within a few days he found money on the ground. Another time he said, "If you are praying, then pray for me to get a job." We again joined together in prayer for my husband's request. God answered us with a good job. Still my husband would beat me and try to burn me and even electrocute me for my faith. Every time, I came back to God and asked for his help and mercy.

Our little group of God followers then began to pray that my husband would stop drinking. He was a mean drunk and this added to my misery. Soon, every time he took a drink he would vomit. This shook him and he decided to come to church.

Now, my husband also follows the one true God. We have seen many others turn away from idols to worship God. So, you see, I can tell you the difference between light and dark. It is the difference between life and death.

I chose life.

Retired couple joins IMB on and off the field (at the same time)

By Arizona SBC staff

The retirement years are often viewed as the time to enjoy a break from years of hard work. For Joe and Wanda Kord*, retirement was time for a new kind of work as they followed the Lord's leading to volunteer with the International Mission Board in West Africa.

Rather than leasing or selling their home in Mesa, they decided to open their home to missionaries visiting Arizona. In partnership with HiWay Baptist Church in Mesa, the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention and members from Heart of Mesa Church, the Kords' home has been used these past three years to do just that. God has led the Kords to serve on mission in the U.S. and in West Africa at the same time.

The initial assignment for Wanda in West Africa was to manage the guesthouse used by missionaries as a stopover during travels and as a hostel for volunteer teams on short-term mission trips. Joe's job was to do building maintenance on the mission compound. About a year into their service, long-term personnel changes and security threats caused their roles to change.

"We thought we would do something different from the roles we had in the U.S. in teaching and business management," Wanda said, "but in God's perfect timing, He led us to use those very skills."

▶ Joe and Wanda Kord*

Wanda had turned down offers to work at the school for missionary kids when she first arrived in country, as she felt led to focus on the needs at the guesthouse. However, as the year progressed, heightened security and safety concerns meant fewer visitors to the guesthouse. Around this time, the American international school, where individuals from a variety of backgrounds and religions attended, offered her a position. There, Wanda had the opportunity to share the love and hope of Christ with people who had not yet heard this good news.

Joe arrived with no expectations of managing major strategies on the mission field.

"I was happy to just be a maintenance worker who could be productive and get things done," Joe said.

But when the logistics coordinator unexpectedly left the country, Joe's business management experience allowed him to fill a critical need at just the right time. With security threats rising, outsiders were bringing greater scrutiny from the



As travelers on motorcycles were considered dangerous troublemakers, local partners needed a different type of transportation. Putting his business experience to use, Joe managed the logistics of switching out motorcycles for bicycles so that local partners could continue to go to the six church plants in the surrounding area. **IMB PHOTOS**

local government. Local partners were being called upon to be more in front of sharing the gospel and discipling local believers.

As travelers on motorcycles were considered dangerous troublemakers, local partners needed a different type of transportation. Putting his business experience to use, Joe managed the logistics of switching out motorcycles for bicycles so that local partners could continue to go to the six church plants in the surrounding area.

In October 2020, the Kords returned to Arizona and to their home that hosted many missionaries over the past three years. When they opened the door, they found a house that was deep cleaned, with a stocked pantry and welcome-home treats.

"We went to [West Africa] on our own dime, but we have seen again that you cannot out give God," Joe said. ✠

*Names changed for security

Supreme Court sides with Colorado church, as John Roberts joins conservative bloc



By ScotusBlog.com

The U.S. Supreme Court sided with a Colorado church in December that had sued the state over COVID-19 restrictions—and this time, Chief Justice John Roberts joined the conservative bloc.

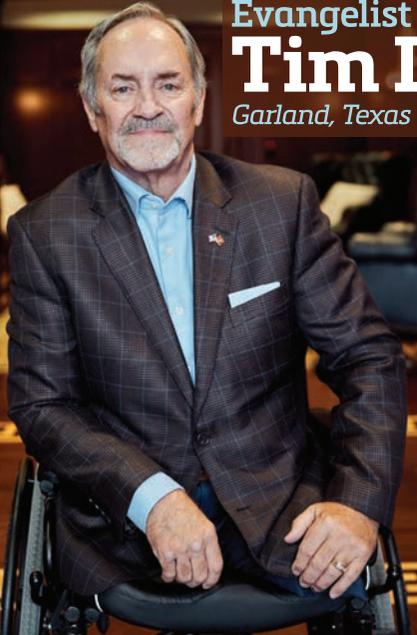
The congregation, High Plains Harvest Church, had sued the governor and argued the state's restrictions on churches were more severe than those on businesses.

The Supreme Court handed the church a win by vacating a lower court decision that had gone against the congregation. The justices told the district court to reconsider the issue "in light of Roman Catholic

Diocese of Brooklyn v. Cuomo." In that latter decision, released in December, the Supreme Court prohibited New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo from enforcing restrictions on houses of worship. The restrictions limited churches to 10 and 25 persons, depending on the location.

Although Roberts sided with the liberal bloc in the November decision, he sided with the conservatives in the Colorado case, indicating that church advocates may now have six of the court's nine votes in future cases.

Justices Elena Kagan, Stephen Breyer and Sonia Sotomayor dissented from the court's Colorado order. ✠



Evangelist
Tim Lee
Garland, Texas

A combination
of power and
patriotism

"2020 has been a trying year for many but we are looking at this as an opportunity to stay closer to home and drive more to our meetings. In 2021-2022 we will be focusing on a six hour radius from our office in Garland, Texas.

We believe this could be a opportunity for us to reach our state and our surrounding states for Jesus."

Tim Lee

In 1971, while serving in the United States Marine Corps in South Vietnam, Tim Lee gave both of his legs to America. Instead of quitting or becoming bitter, God used this major event in Tim's life to propel him into a ministry that no one could have imagined at that time.

Since 1979, he has preached in thousands of churches and special events as small as a group of 12 in a home in Tokyo, Japan to 18,000 on the Capital steps in Lansing, Michigan.

Tim Lee is a harvest evangelist with the heart of a revivalist.

His three main burdens as an evangelist are to **honor God**, **see lost people saved** and to **see real revival in our generation**.

Go to www.timlee.org to read more about Tim, contact us or to schedule a meeting.

- Harvest Sundays
- One Day Revivals
- Men's Conference/Beast Feast
- God & Country Day

Mississippi flag change influenced by SBC resolution

By David Roach
Baptist Press

JACKSON, Miss. When Mississippi raised its new state flag this week, the banner did not bear the Confederate battle emblem—a symbol ditched six months ago by state lawmakers. A prominent Mississippi legislator says the SBC helped influence the change with its 2016 resolution on the Confederate battle flag.

Philip Gunn, speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives, attended the 2016 SBC Annual Meeting in St. Louis amid a personal struggle to determine how Scripture applied to the debate over the Confederate emblem. A longtime Southern Baptist but relative newcomer to SBC annual meetings, he found himself at the St. Louis event by virtue of his position as chairman of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary board of trustees. He had concluded the Confederate symbol hindered the gospel's spread, but he was seeking confirmation of that conclusion.

When messengers adopted a resolution calling Christians “to discontinue the display of the Confederate battle flag as a sign of solidarity of the whole Body of Christ,” it was just what Gunn needed.

“I felt like I had some backup at that point,” said Gunn, a Republican, adding: “That was just kind of an affirming moment for me because I was struggling to make sure my reading and understanding of Scripture on the issue was correct. When

you have theological and spiritual giants like there were in that room that rise up and say the same thing, it just affirms what I had understood.”

Gunn returned to Mississippi emboldened to change the state flag—a quest that culminated Jan. 11 when the new flag, which bears a magnolia and the phrase “In God We Trust,” was hoisted above the state capitol.

Gunn's push to change Mississippi's flag began in 2015, after a white supremacist gunman, who had posed in photos with the Confederate emblem, slaughtered nine black Christians at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C. Gunn told media the Confederate symbol was a point of offense to many and urged legislators to discuss Mississippi's state flag, which then included the emblem. Deadly riots two years later at an alt-right rally in Charlottesville, Va., prompted more discussion of a flag change.

Finally, the May 2020 death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man, while in the custody of Minneapolis police, and subsequent demonstrations moved Mississippi lawmakers to act on changing the flag. Gunn knew it would be a heavy political lift, and he was thankful when Mississippi Baptists supported the flag change.

Mississippi Baptist Convention Board Executive Director Shawn Parker and a team of other Mississippi Baptist leaders issued a statement in June that encouraged “our governor and state legislature to take the necessary steps to adopt a



new flag for the state of Mississippi that represents the dignity of every Mississippian and promotes unity rather than division.”

Ligon Duncan, chancellor of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, also issued a statement at Gunn's request.

Following the statements from evangelical leaders, the Mississippi House voted June 27 by the requisite two-thirds majority to allow introduction of a bill changing the state flag even though the deadline for submitting bills in last year's legislative session had passed. The next day, it passed a bill authored by Gunn discontinuing use of the previous flag and establishing a commission to design a new flag.

Mississippi voters affirmed the new flag on Election Day, and the legislature codified that vote with a bill making official the new flag.

Ronnie Floyd, president of the SBC Executive Committee, called it “humbling and amazing” that God used Southern Baptists to influence Mississippi's flag change.

“Through the most recent years, the SBC has repeatedly stood against individual and systemic racism,” said Floyd, who served as SBC president when the Confed-

erate flag resolution was adopted. “It is quite humbling and amazing to know our convention's stand in 2016 regarding this issue influenced the change in the Mississippi state flag. I am also very thankful for the churches of our Mississippi Baptist Convention who influenced this decision in their state and also stand with us to commit ourselves to eradicating racism across our nation.”

The SBC's Confederate flag resolution cited Floyd's call to “rise up and cry out against racism that still exists in our nation and our churches.” It also urged “fellow Christians to exercise sensitivity so that nothing brings division or hinders the unity of the Body of Christ to be a bold witness to the transforming power of Jesus.”

Gunn knows some Christians disagree with his conclusion on the flag, and he told BP he's not making a person's stance on the Confederate battle symbol a litmus test of their commitment to Christ or his Word. Yet for Gunn, the right decision seemed clear—both for the SBC and the state of Mississippi.

When fellow believers challenge Gunn's stance, he asks them, “Would you put that emblem on your t-shirt and go try to witness to people and share the gospel?” Most say no, Gunn said, “because they know that symbol has been coopted by some who wish to advocate hatred, and they know that would be inconsistent. It's hard to stand there and tell a man that ‘God loves you and I love you’ when you're promoting that.” ☞

Stone, Litton and Adams join Mohler as SBC presidential nominees

By Scott Barkley
Baptist Press

BLACKSHEAR, Ga., SARALAND, Ala., VANCOUVER, Wa. Two pastors and a convention executive director joined a seminary president as candidates for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Mike Stone, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, Ga., and immediate past chairman of the SBC Executive Committee, will be nominated for SBC president at the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting, stated a Jan. 13 announcement by fellow Georgia pastor Kevin Williams.

“Southern Baptists need to be led by a trusted local church pastor with strong convictions about the sufficiency of Scripture, a passion for evangelism, and deep experience in the work of our convention,” said Williams, the current Georgia Baptist Convention president and pastor of First Baptist Church of Villa Rica, Ga.

The announcement did not disclose who would nominate Stone at the annual meeting, which

is scheduled for June 15-16 in Nashville.

Stone, a member of the steering council of the recently formed Conservative Baptist Network, served for five years on Emmanuel's staff before becoming pastor in 2002.

Since then, Emmanuel has averaged 9 percent given annually through the Cooperative Program and contributed approximately \$2.5 million through December 2020.

Stone was the second announced nominee for SBC president, joining Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. Stone told Baptist Press he spoke with Mohler.

Mohler was originally announced as a nominee in October 2019 for the 2020 annual meeting. After that gathering was canceled due to COVID, Mohler agreed in October to accept the nomination for president in 2021. He will be nominated by H.B. Charles, senior pastor of Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla.

A third presidential candidate emerged on Jan. 19 when for-

mer SBC president Fred Luter announced his intention to nominate longtime friend and Mobile, Ala.-area pastor Ed Litton for SBC president at the upcoming annual meeting in June.

“I have known Ed Litton for over 20 years. Our relationship started when we preached for each other as part of the SBC Racial Reconciliation Sunday during the month of February,” Luter told Baptist Press.

Since 1994 Litton has been pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala.—known as North Mobile Baptist Church until 2014. A Southwestern Seminary graduate, Litton served in the college and career ministry at First Baptist Eules, and in the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention Evangelism department. In 1987 he planted Mountain View Baptist Church in Tucson, Ariz.

Litton has also served in numerous roles in SBC denominational leadership.

For the last six years—following the riots in Ferguson, Mo.—Litton has been involved in The Pledge Group of Mobile, a diverse group of area pastors seeking to further racial reconciliation.

During Litton's pastorate, Redemption Church has averaged nearly 152 baptisms annually with resident membership growing by 27.3 percent over the last 10 years. From 2018-2020 the church aver-

aged 3.66 percent of undesignated gifts given through the Cooperative Program. From September 2019 through August 2020, it also contributed 12.33 percent of its undesignated budget through Great Commission Giving.

Citing a desire for Southern Baptists' focus to “be on the mission, with the Bible as our sole and final authority on all matters,” Northwest Baptist Convention Executive Director/Treasurer Randy Adams announced his candidacy on Jan. 20.

Adams, who has served in his current role since 2013, intended to be nominated for SBC president at the 2020 annual meeting. In January's announcement, he stated that his reasons for accepting that nomination have only intensified over the past year.

In a post on his personal blog, Adams pledged to push for “transparency and accountability” among the SBC's national entities.

Adams, along with several other non-South state executives, has been involved in a prolonged dispute with the North American Mission Board over its allocation of funds to states related to church planting and evangelism.

Russell Fuller, a former professor of Old Testament at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, will nominate Adams. ☞



Randy Adams



Ed Litton



Mike Stone



R. Albert Mohler Jr.