

COVID



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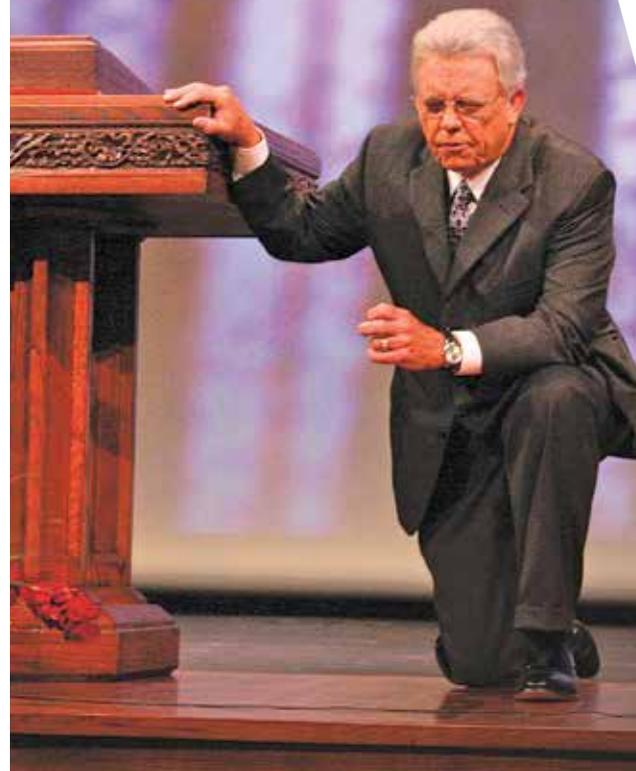
MAY 2021
VOLUME 20 • NO. 5

NEWSJOURNAL OF THE
SOUTHERN BAPTISTS
OF TEXAS CONVENTION

texanonline.net

Historic 53-year pastorate, church financial freedom hallmarks of John Morgan's career

By Rob Collingsworth | TEXAN Correspondent



While many things can be said of John Morgan's ministry, perhaps nothing speaks more to his passion and character than the length of his tenure at Sagemont Church.

Founded in 1966, Sagemont called Morgan as its first pastor. He served there for 53 years, committed to seeing the gospel go out to the world from suburban Houston.

As a seminary student in Fort Worth in 1966, Morgan said he wasn't expecting the phone call from Gene Alexander, a banker who attended his father's church. Alexander asked him to fly down and see the burgeoning city and the empty rice paddy in southeast Houston where they were planning to build a church.

"He began to tell me the story of the First Baptist Church of Pasadena, which had started a mission in every part of the city. NASA was coming in and they had gotten word of a builder that was wanting to have two churches in his building area, one a Methodist and one a Baptist," Morgan told the TEXAN.

See MORGAN, 9

Generosity, service, 'life habits' at Primera Iglesia Bautista Grand Prairie



Primera Iglesia Bautista in Grand Prairie "has a giving heart," pastor Joe Rivera said. Operation Christmas Child is one of their many ministry involvements. PHOTO SUBMITTED

By Erin Roach | TEXAN Correspondent

GRAND PRAIRIE In-person church attendance may have dropped, but the COVID pandemic is prompting acts of generosity and service in many congregations, including Primera Iglesia Bautista in Grand Prairie, where the pastor said, "It's a life habit for them that the Lord has put in their hearts to help each other."

See CP, 8



Endowment to help non-South state conventions

By TEXAN Staff

FORT WORTH Nathan Lorick, SBTC executive director-elect, knows the challenges of sharing Christ in areas of the country lacking a wealth of Southern Baptist churches. He returned to the SBTC after serving more than three years as executive director of the Colorado State Baptist Convention. On April 20, Lorick proposed to the SBTC Executive Board a plan to endow a fund to help state conventions outside the South. The plan was approved.

"There was great joy in serving in a highly unreached area; there were also incredible challenges due to the lack of resources," Lorick wrote in submitting the initiative for board consideration. "While our hearts wanted to see the gospel advance in unparalleled ways, often we didn't have

See ENDOWMENT, 5

FROM THE EDITOR Gary Ledbetter

Not peace but a sword

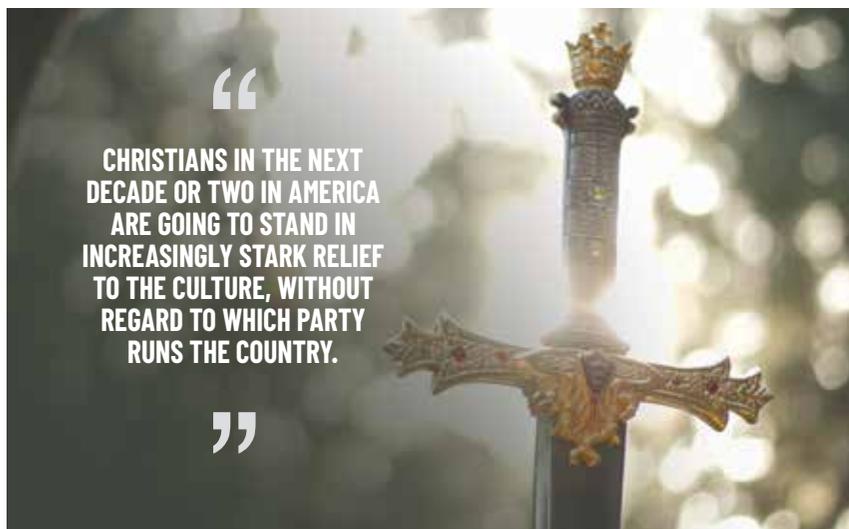
I resonate with those who decry the disunity in our nation, and with those who discourage squabbling in our own convention. We devour each other daily. Calls for greater civility have become mundane, though. It's as though everyone has made a call for peace and mostly meant to apply it to others.

We are right to think it's dreadful. But let me offer a contrarian perspective: Division in American society may be the revealing of what's always been true spiritually. An interesting article in the *April Atlantic* suggests that American society has become more contentious because our culture has become our religion—with deeply held and warring creeds—but without grace and patience formerly infused in a more church-going population. For Christian Americans, a clear divide between those who believe God's revealed truth and those who find the notion absurd is more overt now than at any time in our history.

Consider merely 20 years ago: Same-sex marriages were not recognized nationally by Supreme Court fiat. Gender dysphoria was considered a psychological malady rather than a privileged status. Twenty years back, the idea that a person could be effectively punished for his religion in the U.S. was much harder to imagine than it is with today's Equality Act waiting in the wings.

All those things have changed. "Settled science" has reversed itself. Ideas recently on the lunatic fringe of corporate America are now doctrine in personnel handbooks. But maybe the sharpness of the divide between biblical Christianity and most everyone else can be a great blessing to us.

Times and places where the culture was outwardly Christian-ish made churches more at home in a



society that did not share their biblical priorities more deeply than misquotations of "love thy neighbor" and "don't judge." Schools dared not plan events on Wednesday night, much less Sunday, because everyone went to church or claimed to. It made Christians assume some things about their communities and their churches that didn't hold up to scrutiny. That pretense of respect for Christianity is far less common now. In fact, some today find it unacceptable that we believe, much less speak, some things the Bible says about God, man, sin and redemption.

We don't have to call it persecution yet. Instead, consider that those who would cancel you for simply quoting hard passages of Scripture have noticed that what the Bible says is different from the world's proclamations. A banished sermon has to be heard in order to give offense. We shouldn't be surprised that the exclusivity of Jesus Christ is a doctrine that offends people, for example. At some point in the more comfortable past, we should have been anxious that no one was listening carefully to notice the implications of John 14:6 for those who don't believe.

I have on an occasion been asked by a reporter, "Wait, are you saying that devout followers of [name a man-made religion] are going to hell?" They were listening to what Jesus said and to some degree understood what he meant! I think that's good. In a small way we had that conversation of clarity at the SBTC this week. A tech vendor got partly into a project with us when one of its employees actually read some of our content. The result was a canceled contract after he spoke with one of us to hear more

of what the convention stands for. It was inconvenient, but someone who perhaps had never heard the gospel read it and then heard it from a godly Baptist deacon at SBTC. I like the idea that those tech workers talked about us over coffee, even if they were shaking their heads in amazement.

Christians in the next decade or two in America are going to stand in increasingly stark relief to the culture, without regard to which party runs the country. We, and hopefully our message, will be noticed, even if we don't always find the attention affirming.

Within the family of God, division is more distressing. Inside the fellowship of those who do believe what God has said, we fuss, as though we are Democrats and Republicans, over politically correct words or mask-wearing or presidential politics. That divide is not always clarifying. It is not a stark line between those who believe God and those who plainly don't. Don't hear me affirming a fight for its own sake; I am not praising those who are just mean and argumentative. All division is not the same; neither is all unity.

Unless you are cloistered, most of the people you know don't have the hope of life in Christ and they won't act as if they do. That's always been the case, even when people have not been so proud to be unbelieving. Look at it as if darkness is more obvious, unmasked, now than before. We, the light of the world, must be unashamed to shine brighter in contrast. Some of our neighbors may notice that light for the first time. ✠

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST
Texan

VOLUME 20 ISSUE 05 MAY 2021

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What's Next?

sbtxan.com/events



May

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

06

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER



10-11

Administrative Assistants Retreat
Calvary BC, San Marcos

11

Hispanic Leadership Summit
SBTC, Grapevine

12-14

Roundup
Fort Worth

15

Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament State Finals
SBTC, Grapevine

All in-person events subject to change based on COVID conditions.

June

Full calendar, use your phone's camera to scan QR code. →



13-16

SBC Annual Meeting & Send Conference

14

SBTC Reception @ the SBC

Nashville

18-19

Capacitarte Regional Conference
Belmont BC, Odessa

24

RevTalks Online
Zoom

25-26

Pastor & Wife Retreat
Omni Houston Westside

JUNE 28-
JULY 2

m3
CAMP

Highland Lakes, Spicewood

57 percent of Americans often ponder the 'meaning and purpose' of life, Lifeway poll shows

"How often do you wonder: 'How can I find more meaning and purpose in my life?'"



A year of lockdowns apparently has led Americans to consider the purpose and meaning of life more than they previously had, according to a new Lifeway Research survey.

The poll found that 57 percent of Americans say they wonder, at least monthly, "How can I find more meaning and purpose in my life?" That's an increase from 2011, when 51 percent answered that way.

One in five (21 percent) say they consider the question daily, which is an uptick from 18 percent in 2011, and another 21 percent say they think about it weekly (compared to 19 percent in 2011).

"During COVID-19 many experiences, pleasures, and metrics of success became irrelevant overnight," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research. "It is not surprising that more people thought about their purpose and what matters in life."

But the poll also showed that Americans are less certain about what lies beyond death.

Although more than 4 in 5 U.S. adults (85 percent) believe there is more to life than the "physical world and society"—a similar percentage to 2011—there is significant movement away from certainty. In 2011, 67 percent strongly agreed and 21 percent somewhat agreed with that statement. Today, 43 percent strongly agree and 42 percent somewhat agree.

"In the midst of such a discouraging season, fewer Americans are convinced there is something more to this life than their daily activities," McConnell said. "A large majority still lean toward there being an ultimate purpose for a person's life, but instead of escaping the pandemic with thoughts of something greater, far fewer strongly hold such a view. A growing number of Americans have become open to the idea that this might be as good as it gets."

The survey of 1,200 Americans was conducted in September and released in March.

—LIFEWAY RESEARCH

Abortion rights are as important as religious liberty, says Secretary of State Blinken

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken says the Biden administration will consider restrictions on abortion on par with violations of religious liberty in its foreign policy around the world.

Blinken made the comments in March as his department released the annual Human Rights Reports on foreign countries.

Although the Trump State Department had removed a section on "reproductive rights" from its annual Human Rights Reports, Blinken said his department was re-inserting it. "Reproductive rights" is a phrase used by the pro-choice community that includes legal abortion.

"For many years, our human rights reports contained a section on reproductive health, including information about maternal mortality, discrimination against women in accessing sexual and reproductive health care, and government policies about access to contraception and skilled health care during pregnancy and childbirth," Blinken said. "These topics were removed from the country reports by the previous administration, so they're not a part of the reports released today, which cover the year 2020. I've asked our team to release an addendum for each country report later this year that will cover these issues."



Blinken also criticized a Trump-era report by the 11-member Commission on Unalienable Rights, which argued for a "hierarchy" of human rights. At the top of the hierarchy, the commission said, is religious liberty and property rights. The Trump State Department launched the commission.

"Human rights are also co-equal; there is no hierarchy that makes some rights more important than others," Blinken said. "Past unbalanced statements that suggest such a hierarchy, including those offered by a recently disbanded State Department advisory committee, do not represent a guiding document for this administration. At my confirmation hearing, I promised that the Biden-Harris administration would repudiate those unbalanced views. We do so decisively today."

—STATE.GOV

Houston's First breaks annual missions offering record

Houston's First Baptist Church recently surpassed its goal of \$1,400,000 in its annual World Mission Offering, the church reported April 8. Despite the pandemic year, church members gave \$2,628,946, an increase of \$340,000 from last year. Amounts distributed include the following:

- \$1,000,000 to the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board
- \$300,000 to the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board
- \$100,000 to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention

The additional funds will go toward various projects including Scripture translation projects, church planting in India, human trafficking initiatives and the church's Legacy 685 Adoption, Foster Care & Orphan Care ministry.

—HOUSTON'S FIRST BAPTIST

SBC Annual Meeting relocates to downtown Nashville



The 2021 SBC Annual Meeting will move to the Music City Center in downtown Nashville June 15-16, the SBC Executive Committee announced April 15.

According to Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, the shift was made in order to allow "abundant space conducive to holding a meeting that is efficient, effective and safe for every attendee" while adhering to local COVID-19 protocols. Floyd said the decision was made in collaboration with the City of Nashville, the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, the Nashville Convention and Visitors Corp. and the Music City Center.

While other options were explored, Floyd said the Executive Committee wanted to keep the annual meeting in Nashville for reasons including the protection of previously made travel plans by attendees. Nashville was selected as the site for the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting by messengers to the 2016 Annual Meeting.

The Music City Center offers 1.2 million square feet of convention space, almost twice as much as the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center, a few miles northeast of downtown. The exhibit hall and childcare will also move to the Music City Center. Jeff Pearson, the SBC Executive Committee's chief financial officer, said although lodging, transportation and other details have not been finalized, several blocks of hotel rooms have been secured near the Music City Center.

—GEORGE SCHROEDER/BAPTIST PRESS

THE PANDEMIC'S END 'RUNS THROUGH THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH,' CHRISTIAN LEADER SAYS

Evangelist Franklin Graham and other high-profile Christian leaders are encouraging evangelicals to get vaccinated against COVID-19, saying the demographic is key to ending the pandemic in the U.S.

A Pew survey in February found that only 54 percent of white evangelicals said they would "definitely or probably" receive the vaccine, or already had, making them the most skeptical subgroup among all religions.

"Samaritan's Purse has been working in COVID areas," Graham, the CEO of Samaritan's Purse, told CBS News. "Last year, we were in Cremona in Italy. We were working in New York City. And then we went on to the Bahamas and opened up another one here in North Carolina, then Los Angeles County. We have seen what COVID can do. I've had some of my own staff, one of them was on a ventilator for three months. And ... from what I have seen and experienced myself, I don't want COVID and I don't want anybody else to get it."

Graham wrote a Facebook post this year endorsing the vaccine, which he has received.

"I'm certainly not telling others that they have to take it. It's just, I think it's a good health decision," Graham said.

Curtis Chang, a senior fellow at Fuller Theological Seminary and the founder of Redeeming Babel, said he believes "the pathway to ending the



pandemic runs through the evangelical church."

"It's just undeniable statistically," said Chang, who launched a pro-vaccine website, ChristiansAndTheVaccine.com.

"Public health has got to start investing resources and energy to equip evangelicals to be the ones out there trying to convince their fellow brothers and sisters," Chang said.

The Ad Council in April announced a partnership with several evangelical groups to encourage Christians to get the vaccine. The partnership will include new content and events with "trusted messengers" to reach evangelicals, according to a press release.

The pro-life Charlotte Lozier Institute lists the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines as "ethically controversial."

—CBS NEWS, AD COUNCIL

FAMILY DAYS



Jim Richards

Executive Director

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📍 @RichardsJim

Like many other matters related to denominational life, the Southern Baptist Convention calendar has fallen on hard times. Not too many churches note some of the emphases that have been approved by the messengers in annual meetings. I think it is time to reclaim observances of value. It might be “old school” but it is incumbent on us to remember some practices we have abandoned.

May begins with the first Sunday as Senior Adult Sunday. Since I am a senior adult, it seems almost self-serving to promote it. Boomers do

not think of ourselves as senior adults like our parents did. Most of us have a mindset that we are 30 years of age rather than being closer to 80 years of age. We are more active, generally healthier and still desirous of making a difference than prior generations. As I approach so-called retirement, my “yes” is on the altar. Golf and fishing are fine, but they cannot define my last years on earth. I plan to do whatever God would have me to do. Churches should use Senior Adult Sunday to challenge those who are in this age group to do something worthwhile for the Lord Jesus in the fourth quarter of life.

Mother’s Day is not on the SBC calendar, but Christian Home Week is May 9-15. It is hard to believe that honoring women for their contribution to the Lord’s work often becomes a forum on the role of women in the church. Women are worthy of recognition. Their contribution to the kingdom of God is invaluable. Some women are called to be single, and others cannot bear children, yet it is still appropriate to show appreciation to mothers.

Christian Home Week is a good time to remind ourselves

of the necessity of family worship. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 is not to be relegated to a bygone time. Although the primary interpretation of that passage concerns the Jewish people passing their faith on to the rising generation, there is a practical application for New Testament believers. Nothing takes the place of prayer and Bible study within the family unit. If we are going to see a vibrant living faith in the next generation, it will need to be nurtured in the home. We are one generation away from losing a Christian influence in our nation.

Students will be graduating from high school and college in May and June. These transformational moments in life provide an opportunity to underscore one final time the value system instilled in the home. Make much of following Jesus during the graduation celebrations. Send those students off with a passion to find God’s will.

Father’s Day is not on the SBC calendar in June, but a Baptist Men’s Day emphasis is. We desperately need godly men to provide leadership in the home, church and society. Calling men to serve Jesus is a bell that must be rung.

Love for Jesus will be evidenced by a lifestyle that expresses itself in sacrifice. Ephesians 5:22-6:4 shows the role of the man in the home. When a man fulfills his responsibility to be a leader and to show love, everyone benefits. Leadership cannot be abdicated.

Culture’s definition of the family is fluid. The Baptist Faith & Message Statement (2000) in Article 18 defines the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention’s position on the family. It states, “God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.” The statement goes on to say that marriage is between one man and one woman. There can be no equivocating on the biblical description of the family.

In these next two months, let us renew our commitment to placing our attention on strengthening the family. All seasons of life have their challenges, but by God’s grace we can make a difference to the glory of God. 📖

Go to sbtxas.com/family for resources.

Sbtexas.com/church-ministries can help you minister to different groups within your church.

The ministry of baptism



Kie Bowman

SBTC President

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📍 @KieBowman

In March 2018, George Barna released a study revealing that a majority of church attenders in the U.S. have no knowledge of the phrase “the Great Commission.” An additional 25 percent recalled hearing the term but couldn’t remember what it meant.

For the few who do understand the Great Commission, we know that after his resurrection, Jesus gave his church their “marching orders.” He gave them a command to “make disciples.” In addition, Jesus instructed his followers to baptize the new disciples and initiate the process of teaching them his commands (Matthew 28:19-20). That is the Great Commission: Evangelize. Baptize. Teach.

As soon as the early church was released and empowered to act on their own, they took the Great Commission of Jesus literally. They followed his instructions even to the point of observing the order of the actions commanded.

For example, in Acts 2:41 the early church “made” their first disciples as people believed the gospel. The apos-

“
THAT IS THE GREAT
COMMISSION: EVANGELIZE.
BAPTIZE. TEACH.
”

ties baptized the 3,000 converts immediately (2:41), and in the next verse the teaching ministry was launched (2:42). That is the New Testament order: make disciples, baptize them, and teach them.

In Southern Baptist life, our practice of baptizing converts has defined us to the point of giving us our name. In other words, we don’t baptize because we’re Baptists. Instead, we’re Baptists because we baptize. Fortunately, the ministry of baptism isn’t primarily a denominational distinction—it is a ministry given to the body of Christ by Jesus himself.

The practice of baptism by immersion predates both the ministry of the early church and Jesus. John the Baptist was probably the first person in history to baptize other people, but for hundreds of years prior to John, the Jews had built and used small ritual cleaning pools called mikvehs for “self-baptism.” Several of these ancient “baptistries” have been uncovered around the Temple area today, and throughout Jerusalem, dating back to at least the Second Temple period. The first converts at Pentecost were probably baptized in these. In addition, mikvehs are also located in an unexpected area where water is the most scarce—Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. The frequently discovered ancient baptismal pools throughout Israel illustrate the fact that a form of full-immersion baptism was the Jewish practice even before the New Testament era. No one, for instance, ever questioned

John the Baptist or Jesus about what he was doing when people were being baptized. The culture was accustomed to seeing full-immersion baptisms. The critics questioned why John and the followers of Jesus were baptizing; they did not question the method of their baptism—only the meaning.

A review of the book of Acts shows the emergence of a familiar pattern of baptismal practice in the infant church. In every example of baptism occurring after the Resurrection, the baptism is by immersion, for believers only, and takes place immediately after conversion. Baptism was obviously a priority in the rapid expansion of the early church and was always essentially concurrent with the salvation experience. For the early church, therefore, baptism was clearly both the most obvious identification of the new believer and also served as the first step of the discipleship process.

Today, the number of baptisms in Southern Baptist life has plummeted to lows not seen since the 1940s. It is time to recapture a New Testament passion and recommit to effective practices in order to win and baptize more people than we have in the last few years. How can we reverse the negative trends? Here are a few ideas.

Preach and teach what the Bible says about believer’s baptism. Call people to commitment.

Hold classes where baptism can be explained and where interested people can ask questions, and receive biblical, practical answers.

Set goals. Some Christians recoil at the thought of setting goals, thinking perhaps it’s too worldly or manipulative. On the contrary, Jesus commanded us to make and baptize disciples “of all nations.” That’s an aggressive goal. Surely by comparison we can set goals for Vacation Bible School or youth camp!

Always be ready to baptize. If you have a baptistry, keep it full of water. Keep the dressing rooms clean and prepared with the things people need. Imagine what your mother, your children, or a co-worker might need to be comfortable before and after getting soaked in public. If you don’t meet in a location with a baptistry, buy a portable system. Invest in towels and clothes of all sizes suitable for baptism for those who may be ready spontaneously. No matter what it takes, be ready.

Baptize at any and every service. Be creative. Offer baptism during concerts, Christmas Eve services, Fourth of July picnics, and any other time when your church gathers. In some instances be prepared to baptize during weekdays when family members, church staff, and smaller groups can gather around and support the new believer. In the book of Acts people were baptized in pools, in rivers, in desert watering holes along the side of the road, and even in jail! Expel limits from your thinking imposed by tradition which may lack biblical support. Start assuming that if your church gathers for any reason in any location, you will expect to baptize people or at least be ready to do so.

Recruit and train baptism teams to assist with baptism. Leave nothing to chance or caprice. Jesus instructed his church to baptize people and we need to teach and equip leaders so that everyone knows what we believe and why baptism matters.

Jesus gave us the Great Commission and included baptism as part of his plan. He hasn’t changed his mind or suggested an alternate vision. Baptizing every disciple is his priority and must be an immediate and consistent priority for us, too. 📖

Kaunitz to be nominated as SBTC president

By TEXAN staff

HOUSTON Jarrett Stephens, pastor of Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston, has announced his intention to nominate Todd Kaunitz, pastor of New Beginnings Baptist Church in Longview, as convention president during the SBTC annual meeting in November. Kaunitz has served New Beginnings since 2010.

Stephens formerly served as teaching pastor for Prestonwood



Todd Kaunitz

Baptist Church and came to know Kaunitz while in that role. "What I love most about him is his passion for the local church," Stephens told the TEXAN. "Todd is about evangelism. His church has grown from averaging 450 to nearly 2,500. He has baptized 1,400 people there during his tenure at New Beginnings. He is passionate about

church planting. I think they partner with about six other churches and have planted 25 churches internationally.

"He understands the importance of denominational work at all levels, from the local level to the national level," Stephens added, noting that Kaunitz "at his core is about relationships. He is about making sure that churches are partnering together for the purpose of reaching people for Christ."

Kaunitz is a current member of the SBTC Executive Board and is the board's elected secretary. He has been a speaker at multiple SBTC training events during his time at New Beginnings. He is a graduate of East Texas Baptist University. Kaunitz and his wife, Adrian, have three children.

New Beginnings contributed \$90,783 through the Cooperative Program in 2019. The church's 2020 CP giving was \$103,217. ✠

SBTC Executive Board approves grants, honors Richards

By TEXAN Staff

FORT WORTH The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Executive Board met at the Riley Center on the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary April 20, marking the first regular board meeting held entirely face to face since November 2019. Members approved grants and a resolution to honor Jim Richards, SBTC executive director who is stepping down from that role in 2021.

In his report, Richards announced that the Woman's Missionary Union had approached the SBTC to formalize a relationship between the two organizations. The WMU, an SBC auxiliary, joins the 11 national Southern Baptist Convention entities in recognizing the SBTC.

Richards will work with staff to determine "what, when and how" the relationship with the WMU will proceed.

July 1 will complete Richards' role as SBTC executive director and will mark the start of Nathan Lorick's official assumption of duties, Richards said.

Lorick called for the SBTC to continue to have a "prophetic voice" and "servant's heart," noting Richards' announcement that the SBTC had planted more churches in 2020 than in 2019, despite the pandemic.

New endowment

The board approved motions to give \$2,400,000 of the convention's reserve funds to a variety of projects, including \$1,000,000 to support the work of Southern Baptist state conventions located outside the South. Part of the million dollars will fund a grant of \$800,000 for the creation of the revocable State Convention Ministry Endowment to be invested and managed by the Southern Baptists of Texas Foundation. (See "Endowment.")

A \$200,000 reserve funding grant was also approved to immediately assist non-South conventions.

Other grants approved

The board further approved the following grants:

- \$500,000 to the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention for the SBC allocation budget.
- \$300,000 to Jacksonville College for campus renovations
- \$100,000 to the Montana Southern Baptist Convention for Yellowstone Christian College

The board also approved \$500,000 to cover possible costs of air conditioning and roof repair at the SBTC building.

Joe Davis, chief financial officer, reported that at the close of February 2021, the SBTC had \$10,343,186 in operating reserve, 10.4 months of in-state operating expenses, \$4,374,731 above the six-month reserve goal threshold in the convention's business plan. Grants were issued from this reserve.

Convention finances

Regarding the convention's overall budget and finances, Davis noted the convention was \$2.3 million under budget in receipts for 2020 but underspent the budget by \$3 million for that year with ministry events held online rather than in-person.

Davis also noted the SBTC building has been listed for sale at \$9.2 million.

Marie Bosillo of PSK Accountants & Advisors presented results of the 2020 audit of the SBTC, resulting in a "clean opinion" affirming the sound financial condition of the convention and the strength of its "internal control structure."

Other business

The board declined to pursue the implementation of the DBA "Great Commission Baptists," a motion introduced at the 2020 annual meeting.

The board received an update on a motion approved in early March by the Executive Committee and Administrative Committee by email ballot in response to the unprecedented winter storms which hit Texas in February. The committees authorized a reserve funding grant of up to \$100,000 to assist with damage to affiliated churches and pastors' homes caused by the storms. In addition, the convention has received winter storm grants totaling more than \$105,000 from other Baptist state conventions. A committee of three board members reviews requests; to date, the SBTC has assisted 12 churches, five pastors and three associations with funds totaling approximately \$115,000. Additional requests for funds are expected.

Sixteen churches were approved for affiliation with the SBTC while 10 were removed: two had merged with other churches; five disbanded and three expressed the desire to no longer affiliate. As of April 2021, the SBTC has 2,682 affiliated churches.

Wittman elected

In other business, Calvin Wittman of Duncanville was elected as ministry associate for Church Health and Leadership. He will fill the vacancy created by Jeff Lynn's move to senior



Board vice chairman Caleb Turner leads in prayer for newly elected Church Health and Leadership associate Calvin Wittman. Also pictured: Wittman, executive director-elect Nathan Lorick and Mark Hogan, board chairman. PHOTO BY GARY LEDBETTER

strategist of that department, following Tony Wolfe's becoming SBTC associate executive director and senior strategist for Cooperative Ministries as of May 1.

Wittman pastored Baptist churches in Texas in the 1980s and 1990s. Before pastoring Applewood Baptist Church in Denver, he served with the IMB in Spain from 1995-1998.

Jim and June Richards honored

Finally, the board approved a resolution of its "deepest appreciation and gratitude" to Jim and June Richards, designating the convention's founding executive director as

Executive Director Emeritus.

The resolution recognized Richards' 22 years at the helm of the SBTC, honoring the outgoing director for "for his fidelity to the inerrant Word of God, his capable and godly leadership, and his service to the kingdom of God and to the churches of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention," and June Richards for "the vital role she has played in supporting, praying for and participating in the ministry of her husband," and for her own ministry of encouragement.

This was the final board meeting at which Richards made the executive director's report. ✠

ENDOWMENT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

the people, partnerships or finances to support this goal," he added.

The approval of the revocable State Convention Ministry Endowment set in motion a six-year strategic initiative whereby the SBTC will assist its sister state Southern Baptist conventions outside the South.

The endowment creates a funding mechanism to supply ongoing, board-approved ministry grants to qualified recipients who affirm the Baptist Faith & Message. Funded with an initial \$800,000 contribution from SBTC reserve funds, the endowment is expected to reach \$3,000,000 with annual contributions, subject to the SBTC's financial position. Once that level is reached, \$150,000 per year would be avail-

able to invest in the ministries of sister conventions, including but not limited to church planting, evangelism and revitalization.

In addition to the endowment, the board approved a reserve fund grant of \$200,000 to provide immediate grants to SBC conventions outside the South.

Southern Baptist work in some parts of the country is relatively new since an agreement between Southern Baptists and American Baptists limited the work of Southern Baptists in the North and West until the middle of the 20th century. Those conventions generally have fewer and smaller churches than older conventions located in the South and Southwest. The SBTC historically has opened partnerships with cities and conventions outside the areas of greatest Southern Baptist strength in recognition of the great need. ✠

SBTC Racial Harmony panel urges listening, relationships



Tony Mathews moderated the panel on racial reconciliation. L-R Mathews, Kaunitz, Ogletree with mic, Satterfield, Pruitt, Criner. PHOTOS BY GARY LEDBETTER



Kasi Pruitt shares her experiences as a mother to a multiracial family during the April 13 in-person and online event.

By Jane Rodgers
Managing Editor

GRAPEVINE A five-person panel advocated understanding, intentionality and proactivity when confronting racial issues dividing the body of Christ. The April 13 discussion was sponsored by the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention in Grapevine and attended by online and in-person registrants.

Tony Mathews, pastor of North Garland Baptist Fellowship and SBTC interim senior strategist for Missional Ministries, moderated the afternoon panel which included Michael Criner, pastor of Rock Hill Baptist Church near Tyler; Todd Kaunitz, pastor of New Beginnings Baptist Church in Longview; Joe Ogletree, pastor of Image Church in Houston; Kasi Pruitt, adoption and foster care coordinator for Lakepointe Church, Rockwall; and Mike Satterfield, teaching pastor at Fielder Church in Arlington.

Mathews, Satterfield and Ogletree are African American. Kaunitz, Criner and Pruitt are Caucasian, with Pruitt the mother of a multiracial family.

The discussion was designed to motivate action, Mathews said. He asked questions of panelists along the topics indicated below. What follows is a summary of the conversation. The discussion was serious, yet cordial and respectful.

Their hopes and fears about the panel's work

"My hope is that we become real and not reactionary, but intentional and proactive," Satterfield said.

Criner noted his desire that the group would create "light and not heat," while Kaunitz said he hoped the conversation would not be "hijacked by politics," too often an unwelcome distraction.

"I pray that this is not just something for show," Ogletree said, adding, "As African Americans, we're tired. ... We want to see some progress. We want to see some steps. I am here hopeful, and I want to be part of the solution."

On national and SBC tensions, CRTI

Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality proved not to be divisive in the panelists' churches.

Ogletree said that until the [Nov. 30, 2020] statement issued by the SBC seminary presidents, CRTI was "not even a topic" at his mostly Black church. Neither was Marxism (to which CRTI is frequently linked).

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ALL DIFFERENT PEOPLE
WORSHIPING JESUS TOGETHER.
WHY WOULD WE NOT WANT
THIS NOW ON EARTH?**
”

—KASI PRUITT

Still, he called the seminary presidents' statement "hurtful," since it was not part of an ongoing conversation, and he urged "more listening" and "less labeling."

"Some of the hot topic discussions that are happening within the convention aren't happening in our pews," Kaunitz said, echoing Ogletree's observation about CRTI and adding that people are concerned about injustice, not labels.

"What our church is concerned about is unarmed Black men dying at the hands of police," Ogletree replied when Mathews confirmed that CRTI was not the issue. "Our church is concerned about the silence of our friends."

Satterfield offered a new acronym, not WWJD but WDJ: What Did Jesus Do? "[Jesus] came in humility and he came to effect change for unity, and I want to look just like him," he explained.

Pruitt affirmed the dangers of making racial reconciliation too political.

"Heaven is going to be a diverse kingdom. All different people worshiping Jesus together. Why would we not want this now on earth?" she asked.

Barriers impeding racial harmony

The panel offered the following, with suggestions for the sort of "actionable" responses Mathews urged.

1. Lack of trust: Satterfield noted that people don't trust others of varying backgrounds, income levels or even sports affinities. "This lack of trust has caused individuals to come to church with fists up instead of arms open," he said, calling for believers to break the "wall of distrust."

2. Mistaken identity: Criner argued that Christians are often "not confident enough in our identity in Christ" to submit ourselves. Pride spawns posturing, but instead, like Paul in Galatians 2:20, we must die to ourselves.

“
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AND PROACTIVE.**
”

—MIKE SATTERFIELD

"Dead men don't bow up. If they do, run," Satterfield quipped.

3. Lack of historical understanding. "There have been no good old days since the fall [of man]," Pruitt said, suggesting white believers sometimes lack historical context regarding what other races have endured. "The good old days [for some] were also the days of segregation," she added.

Ogletree agreed with Pruitt's assessment about a lack of education regarding slavery, segregation and Jim Crow: "1964 was not that long ago, the Civil Rights Act." He added that the SBC started because of slavery and the South was its epicenter, yet affirmed, "The beauty of what the gospel does is that [past] doesn't have to define you."

We must be willing to have this conversation about history, Kaunitz said: "It's not about living and wearing the sin of yesterday. It's about being sympathetic [to] the sin of yesterday and its effects today."

"Many of us are not sensitive of the fact that many are carrying the scars of what their fathers have done," Satterfield said. "We jump to protect ourselves instead of listening to understand. Our churches need to repent individually and in community, collectively, so we can start now and really use what's become a cliché for truth: the best is yet to come."

4. Anti-social media. All panelists acknowledged the dangers of social media.

"When social media determines the platform and culture determines the tone, it's never going to end well," Kaunitz said.

Owning your bias

"I really do see our family as a picture of heaven because it's diverse and that's what it's going to look like," Pruitt said. She noted the challenges of having to hold conversations with her adopted kids that she did not have to have with her older biological daughters.

"When it comes to the context of church, I want a family," Satterfield said, and this involves embracing differences: "We don't laugh at the same jokes. We don't like the same foods. There are a lot of different biases that exist just culturally from your upbringing. You have to learn that getting along is messy."

"When you start having conversations with people who grew up in a different ethnicity than you did, you learn," Criner agreed.

Kaunitz noted his church's intentionality toward diversity, with its multi-ethnic staff. Having to swallow his pride and "hear things that are hard" has been challenging, he said.

Ogletree admitted that privilege is a "hot word," and that he had grown up in privilege, in a good home with his middle-class family, only discovering differences in college. "We all have biases," he said, adding, "The answer to bias is to listen."

Pruitt agreed that bias exists for all and it must be surrendered. She admitted that walking through the adoption of most of her children with their biological moms exposed biases she held. She warned against preconceptions and urged people to see others as made in the image of Christ. She also said the adoption process revealed her own previously unrecognized privilege.

Avoid the broad brush

Mathews told a story from the early days of his church decades ago. A white man who had come to his office to ask about the church had refused to shake Mathews' offered hand. Discouraged, Mathews wondered if his idea of a multiracial ministry would work. An hour passed, and in walked a white couple.

"The lady hugged me. The man talked me to death. They were so nice and friendly. I learned something from that: I can't paint with a broad brush," he recalled.

Satterfield suggested another acronym: DIMTY: "Do I Matter To You?" To matter is a deep-seated need of humankind: "I acknowledge you matter to God. You matter for eternity."

Ogletree cautioned against minimizing the pain or sin carried from generation to generation.

"Within the African American community, racism has always been the topic," he said, pointing out that the Black Lives Matter cause has grown because "a black life has really never mattered." Events such as the killing of George

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 HAS EXPERIENCED.**
 ”

—TODD KAUNITZ

Floyd trigger memories of years of mistreatment among Blacks and provoke reactions akin to PTSD.

“The answer is relationship,” Kaunitz said, deep, honest conversation that reveals the pain another person has experienced. “You can’t find [perspective] without relationship.”

Ministering to all races
 How does one minister to white congregants who feel they are being blamed repeatedly for race problems? Mathews asked.

Remember “Jesus is our substitute, but he is also our example,” Criner said, later adding, “We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.” He said he tells people questioning why they must apologize, “There’s no they. It’s us. If they are part of the body of Christ, they are us.”

“Usually people who ask that question often don’t have a lot of relationships with people who don’t look like them,” Pruitt said, advising others to pursue such friendships to hear their stories.

“Just like I’ve got to listen

to my Black friends as they process, I’ve got to listen to my white friends as well,” Kaunitz said.

Bridge-building tips

Becoming all things to all people builds bridges, Satterfield said, whether it means preaching in chaps and a cowboy hat at a Jasper, Texas, cowboy church or donning a “19-piece suit” for a New York church.

“It is enabling the Spirit in his wind to blow me wherever God wants me to go,” Satterfield continued. Assignments can be uncomfortable, and you must realize you can’t “fix” people, he said, adding, “I plant, I water, and then I lift my hands and watch God bring the increase.”

Criner advocated purposeful church planting,

noting that his church is investing in a predominantly Black church start. He also recommended involvement in foster and respite care.

The key is to be “slow to anger,” Ogletree said. “I grew up with my own blinders. With people in my congregation, I have to listen more and stop judging and listen to their circumstances. I want to reach out. But at this point, it would be nice to have someone reach in. I need someone to hear me and understand me.”

Pruitt again urged the development of intentional relationships, noting that Gen Z is more diverse than prior generations and the trend will continue. She also cautioned parents to be bridge builders for their kids at home and not to criticize

other ethnicities, for the children are watching.

About staying in the SBC

During a Q&A session afterwards, panelists affirmed support of the SBC.

Satterfield likened abandoning the SBC to abandoning family. Criner, Kaunitz and Pruitt noted doctrinal unity with the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 and missions.

“I am hopeful. I not only want to see change, I want to be part of change,” Ogletree said.

“This is not the end. This is the beginning,” said Jim Richards, SBTC executive director, closing the meeting in prayer. 🙏

Watch the panel discussion at sbtexas.com/racialharmony

Church Positions

PASTOR

- ◆ Coggin Avenue BC, Brownwood, is prayerfully seeking a FT senior/lead pastor. Please email resume, references, and sermon links and a brief answer to the following items to cogginpastorsearch@gmail.com: Why are you interested in this position? Share your salvation experience and vocational call. Explain the message of the gospel.
- ◆ South Avenue BC in Pasadena is seeking a FT senior pastor with a Southern Baptist Seminary degree. Effective communication/administrative skills and strengths in preaching and leadership with focus on Bible study. Lead church in community outreach/ministry programs. Work with blended music program. Bilingual English/Spanish preferred. Forward resume with references to office@southavenue.org.
- ◆ Calvary Baptist in Gainesville is searching for a FT senior pastor. Email calvarygainesville@gmail.com.
- ◆ Living Word in Odessa is looking for a FT senior pastor. We average around 40 to 50 members and we are not reformed nor have a desire to become led that way. Must be a born again Christian and demonstrate the qualities described in Timothy 3:1-7. Email resume to rusty51russell@gmail.com.
- ◆ New Day Church in the Greater Houston area is hiring a FT campus pastor for second location. We are a replant that has a heart for being a biblical and missional church that meets in different locations across the Greater Houston area. Email resume to john@newdaychurch.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.
- ◆ The Barn Fellowship in Grand Saline is seeking a pastor. The present pastor is retiring after founding the church in 2011 and pastoring for over 40 years. The church is debt-free. Email resume to KIM.JS1@Verizon.net.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ San Pedro BC, a small rural SBTC church averaging approx. 40 in worship, seeks a PT or bivocational pastor. No parsonage. Send resume to sanpedrobc@yahoo.com.
- ◆ Lakeview BC in Vidor is in search of a bivocational pastor. We will consider a man with limited experience, but who loves the Lord, believes and preaches the word of God, and is willing to work hard to build up our congregation and spread the gospel. Send resume to brett.gray82@yahoo.com. Feel free to visit us on Sundays at 11a.m. at 3280 Hwy 1131, Vidor.
- ◆ Northside BC in Uvalde is looking for a bivocational or semi-retired pastor. Email resume to DWILLIAMS@stx.rr.com.

MUSIC

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ FBC West Columbia is looking for a PT worship pastor. Primary responsibilities include leading the church in spiritual growth through the use of music, seeking to help those in the music ministry to grow in their knowledge and ability in using their gifts. Email resume to GandL.Schiller@embargmail.com.
- ◆ Crossroads Church in Rowlett is looking for a worship leader that has a heart to lead a team spiritually. While this person will certainly lead on stage, their heart should be to equip, empower and platform others. This person should see their role more through the lens of discipleship than music. We are open to considering this position as both FT and PT. Email resume to jcollins@crossroadsrowlett.org.
- ◆ Pruitt BC is searching for a minister of music. Must be able to lead a blended worship service for small congregation. Ability to lead choir and choral arrangements a plus. Email resume to americanus777@gmail.com.
- ◆ FBC Granbury is a Southern Baptist Church seeking a worship pastor. Visit frootgroup.com/fbcgranbury. Email resume to mjacobus@frootgroup.com.
- ◆ Point View BC seeks a minister of music for both contemporary and traditional music styles and work with the ministry team to achieve church mission/objectives. Person must lead weekly rehearsals to prepare for upcoming services/events. Email resume to patty@pointviewbaptist.org.

STUDENTS

- ◆ FBC in Dayton is looking for a FT pastor of student ministries. Email resume to pastorsearchteam@fbcdayton.com.
- ◆ FBC in Bridge City is seeking a FT youth minister. This person should express a call to youth ministry and will lead our church to reach and disciple the youth in our community. If interested, go to <http://www.fbcbc.org/positions-1>.
- ◆ FBC, De Leon, is accepting resumes for a FT minister of students. Send to Minister of Students Search Committee, First Baptist Church, PO Box 228, De Leon, TX 76444 or e-mail to fbdeleon@cctc.net.
- ◆ Redeemer Church in Tomball is looking

- for a FT student minister. Email resume to kevin@makingmuchofjesus.org.
- ◆ 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 Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.
- ◆ Shadycrest BC in Pearland, south Houston area, is seeking a PT youth pastor. Email Lead Pastor Tyler McKinney at tmckinney@shadycrest.org (www.shadycrest.org).
- ◆ Pleasant Grove BC in Boyd is seeking a PT youth leader. Send resume to James@pgbcboyd.org.
- ◆ Cottonwood BC in Lorena is searching for a PT youth minister Youth Minister. Email resume to thecottonwoodbc@gmail.com.
- ◆ The Fellowship at Field Store in Waller, a church of 70 members in the greater Houston area, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational associate pastor for youth. See listing in <https://nextstep.sbtexas.com> or email resume to jack77son@hotmail.com.
- ◆ Willow Bend Church is seeking a PT youth pastor with a heart for discipleship and a passion to see kids grow. WBC is a small church in a prominent area with great potential. Successful candidate will love this current generation of kids. Email resume to bob@willowbendchurch.org.
- ◆ New Hope BC in Bloomburg is searching for a PT youth director. Send resume to dbaxley2@juno.com.

CHILDREN

- ◆ Southcliff Church in Fort Worth is in search of a missional children’s ministry intern to make a difference in the lives of children who are not connected to a church, love families no matter what their background and be involved in cutting-edge, team-based children’s ministry both inside and outside the walls of the church building. Email resume to Stu.Cocanougher@stu@southcliff.com.

COMBINATION

- ◆ Central Baptist Kirbyville is in search of a called FT student/children’s minister to lead and disciple young people. A college graduate with Bible training and experience preferred, music and media knowledge a plus. We will prayerfully consider all applicants. Send resumes to cbckville@sbcglobal.net.
- ◆ FBC Palestine is accepting resumes for an associate pastor of discipleship/education and missions. In addition, there will be responsibilities involving Senior Adult Ministry. Job description is available at <https://tinyurl.com/yx9pp5ow>. Email Pastor Tony Watson at tony@firstpalestine.org.
- ◆ FBC New Caney is currently seeking a music/youth minister. Email resume to fbcnewcaney@att.net.
- ◆ 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

- ◆ FBC Mont Belvieu is seeking a FT pastor of family ministries to equip and disciple students and families with preschoolers through high school to wholeheartedly follow after Christ and make disciples. Send resume to search@yourfirstbaptist.com.
- ◆ FBC Pearland is creating a new position for an executive pastor. This person will oversee and cultivate areas regarding organizational health. This includes areas of administration and team alignment between ministries. For more information on the full job description email info@fbcppearland.org.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Crossroads Church in Rowlett is a growing mission minded church who seeks an executive pastor/associate pastor to help with the needs of our growing church. Being a part of our staff means a desire to work collaboratively with our staff and

- teams to live the mission God has given Crossroads Church and assisting the lead pastor in leading the ministries of the church. Email resume to jcollins@crossroadsrowlett.org.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ North Richland Hills BC is seeking a PT social media director for NRHBC & Cross Church campuses who will be responsible for posting all materials to all social media platforms. Please send all resumes to Danny Koonce, minister of worship, at dkoonce@nrhbc.org.
- ◆ Crossroads Church in Rowlett is looking for a digital media team lead that not only has an eye for design and content, but a heart for the people on the other side of a screen. This position will work collaboratively with our staff to develop content used to communicate the message of the gospel, and the personality of Crossroads publicly. Email resume to jcollins@crossroadsrowlett.org.
- ◆ North Richland Hills BC is searching for a PT videographer to work with volunteers using Pro Presenter, Live Stream of services and pre & post production of all worship videos and other videos as requested. Please send all resumes to Danny Koonce, minister of worship, at dkoonce@nrhbc.org.

Paid Classifieds

- ◆ **First Baptist Church of Festus & Crystal City, Missouri, is seeking a senior pastor. Our former pastor retired and the church runs 300+ in attendance. We are located 40 miles south of St. Louis, MO. Our website is www.fbcfcc.org. Resume or referrals may be sent to fbcfestus@gmail.com for consideration.**
- ◆ **Baker Book House pays cash for pastoral and academic religious libraries, large or small. Email quotes@bakerbookhouse.com or call 866-241-6733**
- ◆ **Parkway Baptist Church in Creve Coeur, MO, is now accepting resumes for a part-time student minister who would be responsible for leadership and vision-casting for an established middle/high school student ministry. The position has a competitive compensation package including benefit options. Interested applicants may send a letter of interest, resume, references and statement of faith to studentsearch@parkwaybaptist.net or by mail to Student Search Committee,**

Parkway Baptist Church, 12465 Olive Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141-6499.

- ◆ **Foundations of Faith Dairy Ministry is looking for a bilingual chaplain who would primarily minister to the Spanish speaking workers at dairies and other agriculture businesses in the Texas Panhandle/Eastern New Mexico area. Visit our website to learn more about the ministry, www.ffaith.net. Please contact Stanley Jones at 575-760-7321 or Melissa Lamb 575-760-1561 for more information.**
- ◆ **Are you looking for a place to do missions? We have wonderful opportunities in Port Arthur, Texas to reach people who desperately need Christ, such as conducting Backyard Bible Clubs, VBS, Kidz Musik Clubs for Children, door-to-door outreach and flyer distribution in the community, block parties, etc. We also have the need for skilled laborers to make repairs on our buildings damaged by hurricanes (drywall, painting, etc.). Your team could come for a day, a weekend or a week. Facilities provided to accommodate your group for 30+ volunteers. Contact Bill Brazell at 409-983-5654 or goodnewsbill@gmail.com.**

CP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

When two couples in the church were struck with COVID and couldn't work, church members quickly organized a rotation to provide meals. "They'd drop off breakfast, drop off lunch and drop off dinner," Joe Rivera, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista since 2008, told the TEXAN.

The congregation was a mission of First Baptist Church in Grand Prairie before a fire on that campus displaced the mission in 1985, Rivera said. Once they found property of their own, they constituted as a church and historically have been strong supporters of the Cooperative Program.

"Even though this whole pandemic seems to cause some people to worry, it has also caused some people to gain in their faith," Rivera, a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Executive Board member, said. "Their faith has increased, and their patience has increased. The Lord has been faithful."

Primera Iglesia Bautista partnered with a local church last year to distribute boxes of vegetables and meat

to families with urgent food needs caused or exacerbated by the pandemic.

"People would bring in lists of names of people who were in need and would actually home deliver the stuff," Rivera said. "That was really a big blessing to see people go and say, 'I want to take these for so and so,' and they'd give us lists of names."

Rivera describes the church, which had an attendance between 100 and 120 before the pandemic, as having a giving heart.

"Even before I became pastor, we always participated in all of the missions offerings, and also we truly believe in Cooperative Program giving, that it's not just an option. Just as the members tithe, the church also tithes of what it receives so that we can serve together."

Primera Iglesia Bautista serves locally, but they know they can reach farther through CP, said Rivera, who was born in Monterrey, Mexico. His parents moved the family to the United States in 1970 when Rivera was seven years old.

"My dad was actually running away from alcoholism and being around the wrong friends," Rivera said. "He

wanted to get away from that, so he thought coming over here would do it, but he started drinking again. But the Lord touched him and changed his life."

Rivera's father was a pastor in Texas for many years, and some of the scholarships he received for seminary came from Cooperative Program dollars, Rivera noted. "We saw the benefit from that, growing up with my father serving in various churches."

One way Rivera encourages giving is by inviting missionaries to speak "so that our members can see what our giving is doing." The church also had Royal Ambassadors and Girls in Actions groups going strong in the children's department before the pandemic, and they hope to restart those when they can do so wisely, Rivera said.

Rivera serves on the board of the Pregnancy Resource Center of Grand Prairie, and church members volunteer there. Each spring, Primera Iglesia Bautista participates in the baby bottle fundraising campaign for the resource center, distributing bottles at Mother's Day and collecting them at Father's Day full of money to donate.

Once, an SBTC employee

called Rivera to say the convention wanted to present a check to the Pregnancy Resource Center and asked if they could do it during a service at Primera Iglesia Bautista.

"I said, 'Yes, please do, because that's another way that our church sees our Cooperative Program money in action,'" Rivera said. "I told [the church], 'You didn't know this, but indirectly, through your tithes and offerings, you gave to the Pregnancy Resource Center.'"

When Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017, members of Primera Iglesia Bautista were eager to help in whatever ways they could. They filled a U-Haul truck with donated food items and water, Rivera said, as well as shovels, ham-

mers and other tools, and a group from the church drove to Houston to assist.

"People are just ready to give and serve in different ways," Rivera said. "With COVID, a lot of the things I'm not involved with because it grows in their hearts, and things are happening, and I don't find out until afterwards, 'Oh, yeah, so and so needed this, so we helped.'"

When COVID hit, Rivera knew people were having a difficult time financially, so he didn't want to remind them to send in their offerings. "But they're the ones that pushed me and said, 'How do we get our offerings to the church?' The Lord has provided. We have not lacked." ❏



Joe Rivera, a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Executive Board member, has been pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista in Grand Prairie since 2008. He commended the church for its longtime commitment to missions involvement through the Cooperative Program. PHOTO SUBMITTED

La generosidad y el servicio como "hábitos de vida" en la Primera Iglesia Bautista en Grand Prairie

Por Erin Roach

Corresponsal del TEXAN

GRAND PRAIRIE Puede que la asistencia a la iglesia en persona haya disminuido, más, sin embargo, la pandemia de COVID está provocando actos de generosidad y servicio en muchas congregaciones, incluyendo a la Primera Iglesia Bautista en Grand Prairie, de la cual el pastor dijo: "Es un hábito de vida que el Señor ha puesto en sus corazones para ayudarse unos a otros".

Cuando dos parejas en la iglesia se vieron afectadas por COVID y no pudieron trabajar, los miembros de la iglesia organizaron rápidamente una rotación para proporcionarles comidas. "Compartirlos el desayuno, el almuerzo y la cena", dijo al TEXAN Joe Rivera, pastor de la Primera Iglesia Bautista desde el 2008.

Nuestra congregación comenzó como una misión impulsada por First Baptist Church de Grand Prairie antes de que un incendio en ese campus desplazara la misión en 1985, dijo el pastor Rivera. Una vez que encontraron una propiedad para establecerse, se constituyeron como una iglesia e históricamente han sido fuertes partidarios del Programa Cooperativo (PC).

"Aunque toda esta pandemia parece preocupar a algunas personas, también

ha hecho que algunas personas crezcan en su fe", dijo el pastor Rivera, miembro de la Junta Ejecutiva de la Convención de los Bautistas del Sur de Texas. Su fe ha aumentado y su paciencia ha aumentado también. El Señor ha sido fiel. "

La Primera Iglesia Bautista se asoció con una iglesia local el año pasado para distribuir cajas de verduras y carne a familias con necesidad alimentaria urgente, causadas o agravadas por la pandemia.

"La gente traía listas de nombres de personas que estaban necesitadas y de hecho, ellos mismos entregaban las cosas a sus casas", dijo el pastor Rivera. "Fue realmente una gran bendición ver a la gente ir y decir: 'Quiero tomar estos para fulano de tal', y dándonos listas de nombres".

El pastor Rivera describe a la iglesia, que tenía una asistencia de entre 100 y 120 antes de la pandemia, como una iglesia de corazón generoso.

"Incluso antes de convertirme en pastor, siempre participamos en todas las ofrendas misioneras, y también creemos verdaderamente en las donaciones del Programa Cooperativo, y que las mismas no son sólo una opción. Así como los miembros diezman, la iglesia también diezma de lo que recibe para que podamos servir juntos. "

La Primera Iglesia Bautista sirve localmente, pero saben

que pueden llegar más lejos a través del PC, dijo el pastor Rivera, quien nació en Monterrey, México. Sus padres trasladaron a la familia a Estados Unidos en el 1970 cuando el pastor Rivera tenía siete años.

"Mi papá en realidad estaba huyendo del alcoholismo y de estar con los amigos equivocados", dijo. "Quería alejarse de eso, así que pensó que lo haría al venir aquí, pero comenzó a tomar de nuevo. Hasta que el Señor lo tocó y le cambió la vida. "

El padre del pastor Rivera fue pastor en Texas durante muchos años, y algunas de las becas que recibió para el seminario provinieron del dinero del Programa Cooperativo, señaló el pastor Rivera. "Vimos el beneficio de esto mientras crecía junto a mi padre sirviendo en varias iglesias".

Una forma en que el pastor Rivera anima a dar, es invitando a los misioneros a hablar " para que nuestros miembros puedan ver lo que estamos haciendo". La iglesia también tenía grupos del programa Embajadores Reales y Niñas en Acción, los cuales estaban fortaleciendo el departamento de niños antes de la pandemia, y esperan reiniciarlos cuando puedan hacerlo de una manera sabia y segura, dijo el pastor.

El pastor Rivera es miembro de la junta del Centro de Recursos para el Embarazo



Primera Iglesia Bautista in Grand Prairie takes seriously its responsibility to disciple the next generation, offering Royal Ambassadors and Girls in Action groups before the pandemic.

de Grand Prairie, y los miembros de la iglesia son voluntarios allí. Cada primavera, la Primera Iglesia Bautista participa en la campaña de recaudación de fondos de biberones para el Centro de Recursos, distribuyendo biberones en el Día de la Madre y recogiendo los en el Día del Padre llenos de dinero para donar.

Una vez, un empleado de la SBTC llamó al pastor Rivera para decirle que la convención quería presentar un cheque al Centro de Recursos para el Embarazo y preguntó si podían hacerlo durante un servicio del la Primera Iglesia Bautista.

"Dije, 'Sí, por favor, porque esa es otra forma en que nuestra iglesia ve el dinero de nuestro Programa Cooperativo en acción'", dijo el pastor. "Le dije [a la iglesia]: 'No sabían esto, pero indirectamente, a través de sus diezmos y ofrendas, ustedes dieron al Centro de Recursos para el Embarazo'".

Cuando el huracán Harvey golpeó en el 2017, los miembros de la Primera

Iglesia Bautista estaban ansiosos por ayudar en todo lo que pudieran. Llenaron un camión de U-Haul con donaciones de alimentos y agua, dijo el pastor, así como con palas, martillos y otras herramientas; y un grupo de la iglesia se dirigió a Houston para ayudar.

"La gente está lista para dar y servir de diferentes maneras", dijo el pastor Rivera. "Desde COVID, muchas de las cosas en las que no estoy involucrado crecen en sus corazones, y están sucediendo sin ni siquiera yo enterarme hasta después que ocurre cuando personas me comentan: 'Oh, sí, tal y cual necesitaba esto, así que lo ayudamos.'"

Cuando llegó el COVID, el pastor Rivera sabía que la gente estaba pasando por un momento difícil económicamente, por lo que no quería recordarles que enviaran sus ofrendas. "Pero fueron ellos los que me impulsaron y dijeron: '¿Cómo llevamos nuestras ofrendas a la iglesia?' El Señor ha provisto. No nos ha faltado." ❏

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Though he had recently been offered a pastorate with a higher salary at an established church, Morgan said he and his wife Bethel did not have peace about accepting that call. But after his visit to Houston and his conversation with Alexander, Morgan said they found the peace they were looking for and he accepted the Sagemont position.

Back to his roots

"The Lord strongly spoke into my life, and to my wife, that he was bringing me back to where I was born," he said.

Part of Morgan's sense of calling stems from growing up as the son of a missions-minded pastor, L.D. Morgan, who led FBC Pasadena, the church Alexander had noted for its mission outreach, for 33 years. Every time FBC Pasadena reached 1,000 people, they would plant a church with members who lived in that part of town, Morgan said.

When it came to Sagemont, however, there were only two people who lived in the area where the new church was being built. Morgan said that after arriving, he spent the first few months personally inviting people to be a part of the church when they launched.

"When I came down here, I knocked on every door of the area that we were going to reach out to and told them what we were going to do and invited them to some meetings we had in homes," he said. "The first Sunday we had 151 in attendance, and we had one young man saved who is a member of our church right now, and his son was a missionary for quite a while and is back on staff at our church now."

Of those in attendance that first Sunday, 50 people



Matt Carter poses with his Sagemont predecessor after interviewing John Morgan for a Core Vision video series for the church. PHOTO SUBMITTED

"
I LOVE TO TALK TO PASTORS. THE THING I TELL THEM IS TO TRY TO LEAVE OUT ALL OF THE LANGUAGE REGARDING 'MY' CHURCH, BUT TO KEEP THE ROLE OF BEING A SERVANT.

—JOHN MORGAN

decided to join the church—despite the toilet overflowing into the sanctuary just hours before the service started.

Morgan noted many qualities that made Sagemont unique, including the sense of unity within the church.

"I retired after 53 years, and we never had an ugly word spoken in a church conference or a deacon's meeting or any committee meeting in all of those years. There was just something that brought us into one accord," he said.

Church unity was such that when it came to voting to approve deacons, the



Morgan meets in Alpharetta, Georgia, at the North American Mission Board with a group of pastors he is mentoring through NAMB's Timothy+Barnabas Institute. PHOTO BY BRANDON ELROD, NAMB

lowest percentage a deacon nominee ever received was 99.7% in secret ballot voting.

Debt-free policies lead to financial freedom

One well-known legacy of Morgan and Sagemont has to do with the church's approach to finances. According to Morgan, when he started in ministry most of his contemporaries and mentors believed that going into debt was a perfectly acceptable approach to church finance.

In 1975, as he read through the entire Bible, Morgan was convicted by a verse in Deuteronomy regarding a command not to borrow, and he was surprised as he looked through Scripture to see that God's people never borrowed anything to complete the work God had called them to.

This conviction led Morgan to challenge the people of Sagemont to pay off all of their loans and never again borrow money for anything they were planning to do.

"When we got out of debt, it just changed everything," Morgan said.

One of the ways in which the church was able to get out of debt was by taking on a challenge to give back to the Lord everything they made for 40 days. To make the most out of that time, many from the church did odd jobs around the community to make extra money to give back to the church.

During one of these jobs to help out a family that had recently moved to the area, an unsaved man named Jim was so surprised by the church's generosity that he demanded to speak with Morgan. Later that night he gave his life to the Lord, and his wife told the church that she had been

praying for Jim's salvation for over 20 years.

Morgan's book *Financial Freedom* and his Financial Freedom seminars, which have been presented to over one million people, are rooted in the principles he honed at Sagemont, bringing the church to fiscal health, with every building project and undertaking since paid for in cash.

According to Morgan, church members have given close to \$400 million since its founding.

Sagemont's financial practices proved contagious, and pastors like John Bisagno, Bailey Smith and W.A. Criswell sought Morgan's help in doing similar things at their own churches. He told the story of being asked by Criswell to speak at First Baptist Church Dallas and being so nervous at preaching for the SBC luminary that he forgot his Bible in Houston.

"I prayed that the Gideons had put a Bible in the hotel room," he added, chuckling.

As stewards of God's money, Morgan said that Sagemont decided early to advertise the church in ways that wouldn't require expenditures. That approach required creativity on the church's part but blessed the community.

Instead of placing paid ads on television or in the papers, Sagemont started making the front page for good news as God revealed local projects, Morgan said.

For instance, Morgan said the church refurbished and purchased new furniture for the teachers' lounges at a local school, which brought significant favor with the community. After a local student died in the middle of a basketball game, Sagemont

offered to cover funeral costs when the young man's family lacked the means to pay.

"Very quietly ... with just the people that needed to know, we paid for the cemetery lot and the funeral," he said. "The next week, the headlines of the paper told what Sagemont had done."

At one point the church was even named Citizen of the Year by the local Chamber of Commerce.

What's next?

In addition to his financial ministry, Morgan is also known for his mentorship of younger pastors, something he plans to continue in his next season of ministry as he stays involved with the Timothy+Barnabas mentoring initiative sponsored by the North American Mission Board.

"It's what we call a Paul/Timothy kind of thing where every Timothy needs a Paul. I had one in my dad when I was Timothy and my dad was Paul," Morgan said in an interview upon the occasion of his 2019 retirement from Sagemont.

"I love to talk to pastors," he told the TEXAN. "The thing I tell them is to try to leave out all of the language regarding 'my' church, but to keep the role of being a servant."

As he speaks of Sagemont's legacy, it is clear that Morgan views people—and their commitment to the gospel—as the central ingredient to any success he has had as a pastor.

"Sagemont has been blessed not because of me, but it has been blessed because it's been able to keep the main thing the main thing," he said of the megachurch.

Matt Carter, who followed Morgan into Sagemont's pulpit in May 2020, said of his predecessor: "His impact for the kingdom in the city of Houston and beyond is impossible to quantify. People tell me all the time, 'you have big shoes to fill.' I disagree. They're giant."

"Retirement' is only a word and not a reality to Brother John," said Kathie Reimer Morgan, whom John married in fall 2018, a year and a half after Bethel's death in May 2017. Their combined five children, spouses, and ten grandchildren keep the couple busy. Morgan and Kathie's first husband Jim, a pastor who also died in 2017, were friends.

Morgan welcomes opportunities to preach and teach, especially in the areas of evangelism, financial freedom and church growth. An avid sportsman, he enjoys reaching men who share his love of the outdoors.

Morgan may be contacted through his administrative assistant, Beverly Chambers, at 713.725.4056, directly at 281.414.5433 or at JohnMorgan.sbc@gmail.com. ❧

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS OF TEXAS CONVENTION

2021 Exhibit Qualification Requirements

Approved exhibitors at the SBTC Annual Meeting include (subject to available space) SBTC ministries, SBC agencies, SBTC ministry relationships (under the oversight of the Ministry Relationships Committee of the Executive Board), Baptist associational ministries and any host church. All other entities desiring booth space must submit their requests in writing to Joe Davis at the SBTC, prior to July 1, 2021.

Entities or individuals may share exhibit space with approved exhibitors only with the approval of the Committee on Order of Business. For-profit entities that have no formal relationship with the SBTC shall not be granted exhibit space.

All exhibit material must be in agreement with the SBTC Constitution and Bylaws, which includes the Baptist Faith & Message 2000.

Fundraising or sales that do not conflict with SBTC priorities will be allowed in the exhibit area.

SWBTS board approves increased budget, hears faculty appointments



By Alex Sibley
SWBTS

FORT WORTH God is doing “a fresh and marvelous work” on Seminary Hill, President Adam W. Greenway declared to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary’s board of trustees during their spring meeting, April 12-13.

During the meeting, Greenway announced the seminary plans to resume “full, normal on-campus operations in the fall” and the board approved the 2021-2022 budget, elected officers, received encouraging enrollment updates, approved changes to bylaws and degree programs, promoted faculty, received announcement of the appointment of six new faculty, and conducted other business.

This meeting was the board’s first in-person gathering since the fall of 2019. COVID-19 restrictions resulted in both the spring and fall 2020 meetings being held in a primarily virtual format. During the meeting, social distancing was practiced, and some board members participated via videoconferencing.

Speaking of the “remarkable things” God has done to “provide for and sustain”

the student body, Greenway noted that enrollment has been steady over the last year, with the number of graduate applications for the fall 2021 semester showing an 83 percent increase over last year, and the number of undergraduate applications showing an increase of 103 percent.

Greenway also noted God’s financial provision, with the 2021-2022 budget representing an 11.5 percent increase over the current year’s budget.

Finally, Greenway addressed the joint lawsuit with Baylor University against the Harold E. Riley Foundation, which was resolved in February.

“No institution takes on legal matters lightly,” Greenway said, “and it is something that we do not seek to engage in. But there are times where justice demands that we act. And God, in his marvelous providence, vindicated this institution powerfully and demonstrably in what happened in terms of the legal settlement earlier this year, in the resources that now have come and will be coming to support students here at Southwestern Seminary.”

Greenway informed the board of the appointment of six new faculty members:

- ♦ M. Todd Bates as professor of philosophy and associate dean of Scarborough College;

- ♦ Ian Buntain as associate professor of missions in the Fish School and director of the World Missions Center;

- ♦ Mark McClellan as professor of missions in the Fish School and director of Hispanic Programs;

- ♦ Blake McKinney as assistant professor of history in Scarborough College;

- ♦ Joshua M. Philpot as assistant professor of biblical studies in Scarborough College; and

- ♦ Justin Wainscott as assistant professor of Christian ministry in Scarborough College and director of discipleship and campus ministries.

The board also approved the following faculty rank promotions: Nathan Burggraff, to associate professor of music theory; Ben Caston, to professor of voice; Karen Kennemur, to professor of children’s ministry; Jeremiah Kim, to associate professor of theology; and Matt Queen, to professor of evangelism.

The board affirmed multiple recommendations from the Academic Ad-

ministration Committee regarding degree programs. First, they approved two new associate’s degrees for Scarborough College—the 60-hour Associate of Arts in Christian Studies, and the 60-hour Associate of Arts in Humanities. Second, they approved the revision to two of the college’s bachelor’s degrees—the 123-hour Bachelor of Arts in Christian Studies and the 126-hour Bachelor of Arts in Humanities.

Third, the board voted to phase out the Master of Arts in Philosophy and Master of Arts in Apologetics degrees.

At the recommendation of the Business Administration Committee, the board approved a \$34.4 million budget for 2021-2022.

In other recommendations from the Business Administration Committee, the board authorized the president to designate at fiscal year-end (July 31, 2021) the transfer of any available excess income over expense from operations to capital improvements, salary supplements, other projects and/or reserve for contingencies. The board also authorized the president to designate the transfer of any available excess income over ex-

pense from auxiliary enterprises to student housing debt retirement, essential physical improvements for auxiliary enterprise operations, or education and general expenditures beyond education and general revenue.

Additionally, the board approved the engagement of Guinn Smith & Co. to perform the annual financial audit and authorized an exception to internal investment policy with regard to the sale of Citizens, Inc., stock.

Trustees also elected board officers: as chairman, Danny Roberts, executive pastor of North Richland Hills Baptist Church in North Richland Hills, Texas; as vice chairman, Jonathan Richard, senior pastor of First Baptist Church Estancia in Estancia, New Mexico; and as secretary, Jamie Green, retired speech-language pathologist in Katy, Texas.

In his concluding remarks before adjourning the meeting, outgoing board chairman Philip Levant affirmed, “We are in a strong position now, and that will only get better—by the grace of God, and by the hard work that the Southwestern family is doing.” ✠

Nueva Vida Dallas hosts 25 years of daily prayer, May 8 evangelism conference

By Gayla Holt
TEXAN Correspondent

DALLAS David Galvan, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista Nueva Vida (New Life in Christ) in Dallas for 39 years, has seen many blessings through the transforming power of prayer. Early in his ministry, he realized that “the church needed to have a covering of prayer” to reach its community. That was 25 years ago.



David Galvan

On Feb. 1, 1996, a daily prayer meeting began from 6-7 a.m. Monday-Sunday at the church. They called it Morning Prayer, or Oración Matutina in Spanish. The bilingual group ran up to 12 participants on campus. But, to Galvan’s amazement, COVID opened an unexpected new door. Because of the shift from in-person meetings, Morning Prayer now draws a daily crowd averaging 55, with the highest virtual attendance at 63.

Nelson Fonseca, minister of evangelism at Nueva Vida, said Morning Prayer has impacted his own life since moving to the Dallas area two and half years ago. Both individual and corporate prayer are necessary for a healthy spiritual life, Fonseca said. Morning Prayer allows the church as a body of Christ to pray for one another and for missionaries who share the gospel daily.



Nelson Fonseca

“I set my alarm every day at 5:50 a.m., but I must admit that from time to time the Lord wakes me up earlier so I may start reading a portion of Scriptures,” Fonseca said, offering the following example of how God has worked in his life through Morning Prayer.

“Last year I started praying for the salvation of my brother Cesar who is a U.S. Marine. I specifically asked that God would open a door to start a conversation with him, especially that his

heart will soften because he’s been going through some post traumatic disorder in war. He is also experiencing physical ailments.

“The Lord heard our prayers and even though Cesar has not made a profession of faith, he is now open to expressing how he feels and I am trusting the Lord that Cesar will surrender his life to Christ,” Fonseca said. “That type of intimacy is created ... when the body of Christ comes as one and shares requests.”

The whole church benefits. “As a result of intercessory prayer, God gave us the location where we are at today, as an answer to prayer, debt-free,” Galvan said.

Galvan became Nueva Vida pastor in 1981. The congregation filled its Garland location, and he began praying whenever he drove past the old Second Baptist Church of Garland. After Second Baptist voted to disband in 1993, the Dallas Baptist Association facilitated the transfer of the property to Nueva Vida.

“If I prayed 13 years for

Evangelism Conference in English and Spanish May 8, 7:30 a.m. -12:30 p.m. at Primera Iglesia Bautista Nueva Vida, 2626 Gus Thomasson Rd, Dallas, TX 75228. Register for the FREE conference and breakfast by emailing nfonseca@newlifedallas.org or calling 817-723-8827. No childcare.

Conferencia de Evangelismo en inglés y español el 8 de mayo de 7:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. en la Primera Iglesia Bautista Nueva Vida, 2626 Gus Thomasson Rd, Dallas, TX 75228. Regístrate para la conferencia y el desayuno GRATIS con Nelson Fonseca a nfonseca@newlifedallas.org o llame al 817-723-8827. No habrá cuidado de niños disponible.

that location, one of our deacons, Jesse Flores, prayed for 21 years,” Galvan said.

In 2009, in another answer to prayer, the growing church purchased its current campus from the former Casa View Baptist and paid for the balance through the sale of the Garland facility.

Bold to Evangelize conference May 8

The church’s upcoming evangelism conference, Bold to Evangelize, scheduled May 8 at Nueva Vida was born out of Morning Prayer. The free event will be in English and in Spanish.

“There is definitely a connection between this conference and what we are already doing during morning prayer. For example, so far, we have had 40 professions of faith for the glory of God. One of those was my mother-in-law. These are answered prayers of people who are sharing Christ and others need to be equipped as well,” Fonseca said.

This conference will allow believers to overcome obstacles as they share the gospel. The event will be held in person and will also be available via YouTube live.

See newlifedallas.org for more information. ✠

THE LONGEST YEAR: Collegiate ministries go techie, grow deeper relationships

By Sue Sprenkle
TEXAN Correspondent

When colleges locked down campuses in March 2020, it changed collegiate ministry ... possibly forever.

Spring break 2020 started it off. Students were notified the break had been extended an extra week as their schools figured out COVID-19 plans. Gracie Thomas, a junior at Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, said she and her friends were ecstatic at first. Then, reality set in. Campuses shut down and classes moved online.

Thomas said it was a confusing and weird time. Students were used to being

in community, constantly surrounded by friends. Some lost jobs during the pandemic. Many went from life as independent young adults to sitting in their childhood bedrooms or alone in apartments staring at computer screens.

If there was ever a time for collegiate ministry to shine, it was the pandemic year. Collegiate ministers adapted from "bringing students into the community" to taking it to them. These ministers saw growth in ways they never expected: larger numbers at a time when universities experienced decreased enrollment; deeper relationships and exponential growth in faith.

Read on to see how collegiate ministers and students paved the way to merging technology with personal contact to create a new hybrid ministry geared to challenging times.

VIRTUAL "IN REACH" BRINGS MORE STUDENTS

By Sam Dossett
Associate Director of College Outreach
Redeemer Church, Lubbock

When college campuses closed last spring, we did a huge pivot. We moved to Zoom but quickly found students were tired of sitting in front of screens all day for class and then doing it again for small group Bible studies. That's when we knew we had to be even more intentional with relationships.

We shifted from being outreach to "in reach" focused. Our students needed to feel connected to one another and the church. The students were tired and apathetic, but they still wanted to engage and were desperate for community. This meant we reached



out to every student with phone calls, not texts. We wanted that personal contact. We created weekly fireside chats on Zoom that involved a lot of Q&A opportunities so there was healthy online interaction.

As students returned to campus, we pivoted again. Most were living in the dorms but still had classes online. We taught students how to create relationships in their Zoom classes: use the chat room to ask questions, send questions to specific individuals. We challenged them to memorize names and faces of classmates on Zoom. The idea was to create enough of a relationship so that when you ran into someone at the coffee shop, you'd have the opportunity to have a gospel conversation or invite that person to a small group.

Not only did the community grow in number but deepened relationships with Christ and a sense of belonging became the by-products. ✝

DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD

By John James, University Director
Fredonia Hills Baptist Church, Nacogdoches

It was hard maintaining a normal college ministry community with everyone so spread out when campuses closed last year. A lot of what we normally did struggled some from an online standpoint. Sure, we used Zoom and had small groups meet online but what really worked was getting deep and personal with students. They craved to talk to someone. Gen Z hates to talk on the phone but they got over the social awkwardness just to have a real conversation.

Through these conversations we found a need to teach our students how to feed themselves spiritually. There was never going to be a better time in their lives to learn this skill as most were just



sitting at home. We can't depend on the church to always feed us. It is up to us, as believers, to dig into the Bible and pray. The goal was to create an authentic, personal relationship with God where we live out our faith.

Students bought into it. When campus reopened in the fall, we saw a huge difference. Our returning students took the lead on campus. Part of it was because outsiders couldn't be on campus but the other part was that they were spiritually ready to lead.

We've always been a small group ministry instead of a big event program. It was easy for us to adjust to COVID precautions with meeting online or in backyards. With students leading the outreach, we doubled down in these life groups. There were fewer students on campus but God gave us growth.

I have always loved to think about the lost students on campus but this last year taught me that it's also important to care for students already in your ministry. They are hurting and walking through things, too. Invest in them. Feed the hungry and they will multiply. ✝

CREATING A NEW LOOK

By Mitchell Johnson, College Director
The Austin Stone Community Church, Austin

Our ministry never really stopped. We just changed how we did things. For instance, every fall we normally have a big event called College Night of Worship. It's a time when we meet new students and really set how the school year will go. We had to rethink how to get students involved, especially new ones.

We offered an eight-week summer discipleship program online. It was open to current and incoming students. Each week we had a different topic. Then we broke up into small groups in chatrooms. This was a time to ask questions and get to know others.

This transitioned into our "new" version of College Nights of Worship. We



did it in the church parking lot, kind of like a drive-in theater. We live streamed the event to a large screen. Students could come in their cars and feel like a community or watch at home. God used this event to touch hearts. In fact, we just had one student baptized this Easter who said God used that night to show her why her life was worth surrendering to Jesus.

Even as things are returning to normal, we see the fruits from this time of leaning on technology. As we enter this next phase, it will be about trying to balance the good things that happened this last year with some of the old in-person ways. For instance, we plan to keep the summer discipleship program but to make it hybrid—you may attend online or in person.

We found out that being a missional community does not mean everything has to be fully in person. We learned to meet the students where they are, helping them feel loved and cared for by the love of God. ✝

For information on SBTC Collegiate contact Mitch Tidwell at mtidwell@sbtxan.com.
For information about SBTC's May collegiate event go to sbtxan.com/roundup.

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GOD BRINGS US THROUGH THE CHAOS

By Gracie Thomas, Junior - Nursing Major
Stephen F. Austin University, Nacogdoches

Let's be honest, we students knew that doing small groups on Zoom would be awkward and uncomfortable. We were already using it for class. It was just weird looking at all of the black screens that were supposed to be fellow students. Interacting with dearest friends on deep levels was hard, but believe it or not, we figured it out.

When life groups started up again, we were so excited to have access to community outside our four walls. It was very sweet. The Lord gave us an opportunity to



grow closer to him and fellow believers through technology. Not only did we do small group Bible studies but we did book clubs. These were so different from our college classes online, so it wasn't a chore to sign on. These online groups were interactive—we talked to each other, could see each other and encourage one another.

I have never felt closer to God than I did in quarantine. My relationship with the Lord grew a lot because I was constantly in the Word. I'll never forget sitting in my room and [experiencing] the emotion of just reading the Bible and understanding a specific character of God sweeping over me.

As we went back to campus, I learned to live day-to-day more intentionally in this "new normal." This means meeting one-on-one and fostering deep relationships. I want to help others find comfort in the chaos: Jesus Christ. ✝

Christian campus groups win in court

By Tom Strode
Baptist Press

WASHINGTON Federal courts have recently delivered victories to student faith groups that were kicked off state university campuses for requiring their leaders to be Christians.

Wayne State University in Detroit violated the First Amendment rights of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship by revoking its status as a religious student organization, a federal judge in Michigan said in an April 5 opinion.

On March 22, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis ruled administrators at the University of Iowa were personally liable for violating the free speech and expressive-association rights of Business Leaders in Christ.

Southern Baptist religious freedom specialist Travis Wussow said the cases “highlight just how far outside the bounds of the Constitution these university administrators were acting in both cases.”

“I’m glad that these federal courts ruled what is plainly obvious – that government officials cannot target students and discriminate against their groups because they are religious,” said Wussow, general counsel and vice president for public policy of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. “Such double-standard viewpoint discrimination is as incoherent of a policy as it is injurious to a university community. I know firsthand how valuable a Christian campus ministry is to one’s college career and character formation.”

The court opinions are the latest regarding the clash between the rights of campus religious groups to limit leadership to those students who affirm their beliefs and the anti-discrimination policies of universities. In recent years, schools such as Vanderbilt University and California State University have removed religious groups from official

recognition because of their faith-based requirements for leaders.

In his opinion, federal judge Robert Cleland said Wayne State’s Board of Governors and two of its administrators violated InterVarsity’s “rights to internal management, free speech, freedom of association, freedom of assembly,” as well as the free exercise of religion and establishment of religion clauses of the First Amendment.

“[T]he ability of religious groups to select leaders who in fact agree with the religion is exactly what the First Amendment protects,” Cleland wrote in his 83-page opinion. “No religious group can constitutionally be made an outsider, excluded from equal access to public or university life, simply because it insists on religious leaders who believe in its cause.”

Cleland ruled the two Wayne State administrators who are defendants were liable for all of InterVarsity’s claims except the one regarding freedom of assembly.

InterVarsity, which has been at Wayne State for 75 years, welcomes all students as members but limits its leaders to those who affirm its statement of faith. When InterVarsity sued Wayne State in 2018, the school restored it as an official student organization but did not revise its non-discrimination policy and continued to say the group is in violation.

“The law is crystal clear: universities can’t kick religious student groups off campus just because they choose leaders who share their faith,” said Lori Windham, senior counsel at Becket, a religious freedom advocacy organization that represents InterVarsity. Calling it a “common-sense ruling,” Windham said in a written statement it means InterVarsity “must be treated fairly ... and now can continue its good work serving a diverse campus community.”

In the Eighth Circuit case, the Uni-



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”

—ERIC BAXTER, VICE PRESIDENT OF BECKET

versity of Iowa had not challenged a federal judge’s ruling that the school violated the rights of Business Leaders in Christ under the First Amendment to free exercise of religion, free speech and expressive association. Instead, the Christian organization appealed the lower court’s finding that the university’s administrators qualified for immunity from those violations.

In its ruling, a three-judge panel of the Eighth Circuit held the administrators were personally responsible regarding the free exercise and expressive association violations but not the free-exercise claim.

Federal judge Stephanie Rose had ruled in separate cases that the university violated the First Amendment rights of both InterVarsity and Business Leaders in Christ.

“It’s deeply ironic that school officials tried using the university’s nondiscrimination policy to discriminate against religion,” said Eric Baxter, vice president of Becket, which also represents Business Leaders in Christ. “They knew this was wrong yet did it anyway. We’re pleased the court has recognized that such blatant religious discrimination brings personal consequences.” ✎

Court sides with Christian professor in religious liberty/LGBT pronoun case

By Alliance Defending Freedom

A Christian professor who was threatened with dismissal over the usage of a student’s pronouns won a major religious liberty case in late March.

Nicholas Meriwether, a philosophy professor at Shawnee State University, was disciplined by the administration after he declined to use the preferred pronouns of a biological male student who identifies as female. Meriwether offered two compromises to the university—including using only the student’s last name—but the administration rejected both offers.

The U.S. Sixth Court of Appeals sided with Meriwether in a unanimous 3-0 decision. The appellate panel overturned a lower court and or-

dered the judge to reconsider the ruling in light of the new decision. The lower court had dismissed the case.

“If professors lacked free-speech protections when teaching, a university would wield alarming power to compel ideological conformity,” the court ruled. “A university president could require a pacifist to declare that war is just, a civil rights icon to condemn the Freedom Riders, a believer to deny the existence of God, or a Soviet émigré to address his students as ‘comrades.’ That cannot be.”

Shawnee State “exhibited hostility to his religious beliefs,” the Sixth Circuit said. The panel quoted Meriwether’s department chair, Jennifer Pauley, as saying religion “oppresses students.” Alliance Defending Freedom represented Meriwether. ✎

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Unity for empowering mission key Ed Litton SBC aim

By Art Toalston
TEXAN Correspondent

Editor's note: The TEXAN earlier interviewed SBC presidential candidate Albert Mohler for an article posted online Jan. 27, 2020, and reviewed his candidacy in an Oct. 23, 2020 article. Both Mohler articles are accessible at TEXAN online. The April print edition of the TEXAN included interviews of SBC presidential candidates Mike Stone and Randy Adams.

SARALAND, Ala. Ed Litton envisions nurturing relationships in the Southern Baptist Convention to strengthen unity of mission if elected as SBC president during the June 15-16 annual meeting in Nashville.

One of four announced nominees for SBC president, Litton was the convention's first vice president in 2001-2002 and president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference in 2009.

He has been pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., since 1994. The Mobile-area congregation, online at goredemption.com, was known as North Mobile Baptist Church until 2014.

Litton is a former Arizona Southern Baptist Convention evangelism staff member; Arizona and Alabama pastors' conference president; and trustee of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

His wife Kathy was elected as SBC registration secretary in 2019 but has

resigned since the Registration Committee oversees balloting for SBC president and other officers during the annual meeting.

Litton addressed the priorities he would set forth as SBC president in answer to questions from the Southern Baptist TEXAN:

1) Four proponents of biblical inerrancy have declared their willingness to serve as SBC president. What is distinctive about your vision for serving in this role?

First of all, I am thankful that the foundations of the SBC are not shaking like the foundations of our culture when it comes to truth. We're people of the Book. I'm so grateful that all four people seeking this office believe in the inerrancy, infallibility and sufficiency of God's Word. If our messengers elect me as president, I hope they will see that God's Word and the Holy Spirit will be my guide.

God's Word highlights that the world will know we love him by the way we love one another. I want us to be a convention unified in his love and unified in his gospel. God's Word tells us that we are to make disciples. So we must be a convention that plants churches and sends missionaries. I think one of the signs that God is moving among a people—a sign of genuine biblical revival—is that there is visible unity. Revival is not so much a tent meeting as it is repentance, seeking the Lord, and being unified in the gospel.

2) What are two of the foremost challenges facing the SBC today?

It concerns me that our growing divide in the SBC mirrors the political culture we live in, and not a focus on God's call to missions and church planting. Nor is our unity in our sameness or complete doctrinal alignment on every issue. Our doctrinal alignment is aided by the Baptist Faith & Message, but our unity is based in the gospel. And we must be unified in this mission, church planting, revitalization and training the next generation.

Ken Burns' documentary on the Vietnam War quotes a General Wilson who said, "Americans fight their next war the way they fought their last war. We thought that we could defeat the Vietnamese with raw power and then rebuild them." He said, "We were ignorant and arrogant." Then he said, "You cannot dispel ignorance until you deal with your arrogance." I think we need to deal with our arrogance first through repentance. We are a warrior tribe and I believe that God would rather have us fight for love.

My second serious concern is the failure of our churches to robustly engage lostness. In the face of a rapidly growing secular culture, many believers are sequestering within the walls of the church. In the face of increasing globalization we are not seizing the opportunities among those who are coming to our shores. We must to learn to live as exiles in a world foreign to us. We need to abandon nostalgia and embrace and adopt an aggressive love to reach as

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”

—ED LITTON

many as possible with the gospel. I often encourage my church family to “engage with those who don't look like you, think like you or vote like you.”

3) Has the COVID pandemic amplified or accelerated these challenges?

COVID has certainly accelerated the challenges facing our churches. While everyone has been affected by the pandemic, some have been crushed by it. We're looking around in our community for those who need encouragement and help. I think that's something churches, associations and state conventions can do, and we as a national convention of churches likewise can care about each other because a lot of people have suffered loss.

4) How would you hope to use the SBC president's influence/bully pulpit to impact these major challenges?

If God were to put me in this role, I believe in being honest and open with people about our unity and disunity, and helping bring our focus back to our mission. I will lead us to catch a vision for what we can cooperatively do together. It's just too easy, in our autonomy, to turn away from each other. We must strive for unity. It will take all of us committed to this task. We truly are better together.

5) What would you say to those, particularly Black pastors, who are considering leaving the SBC because of discouragement over racial tensions?

I can certainly understand why some are exhausted. It can be very exhausting when you feel like people don't grasp what you're facing. It can be crushing when others appear not to care. My years of experience in diversified relationships in

my own community has brought these realities into light for me. Listening and learning has changed my heart, and the heart of so many other Southern Baptists, pastors and leaders. For those who are wondering, “Why should we stay?” I want us to envision a better future together for the gospel to the nations. We need all hands on deck for this great heroic battle against darkness. We cannot spare one soul that God has called for this fight. This convention needs all people to reach all people. The fastest-growing demographic in our SBC family is among our brothers and sisters of color, and I celebrate that. It will be exciting to see more of these men and women on our committee appointments and taking leadership roles in the SBC.

In my local racial reconciliation experience we have discovered how many ways we are alike and how many ways we are different. We've learned to give honor to one another. We're seeing God heal wounds and strengthen fellowship and relationships among Black and white pastors as well as civic leaders. The gospel has been the center of the whole thing.

6) Why should any pastor or church remain with the SBC, or join it—what is good and strong about our convention right now?

I don't think I could answer any better than my friend Fred Luter when he was asked this question recently. He said, “I don't remain in the SBC because we're good at racial reconciliation, because we're not.” He said, “I choose to stay in and work through those issues because this convention is the best at training evangelists, planting churches and sending missionaries.” I would add that, while I agree with Fred, we have to do better at reconciliation. We have serious work to do together. We need more people joining the dialogue, more people reaching across lines. We need to humble ourselves and develop deeper relationships with each other. Jesus said, “By this they will know that you are my disciples, that you love one another.” We need visible expressions of that. It needs to be a reality, not something we do because it's politically correct or trending. It's something we do because the Scripture commands us to do it. We glorify Jesus when we do this together. ✠



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Hospitality house in Central Asia meets physical and spiritual needs

By Caroline Anderson*
IMB Writer

CENTRAL ASIA Snow shuts down half of this province in the winter. Where a person is when the immobilizing snow hits is where he or she will be until the spring. This inability to travel has dangerous and sometimes deadly consequences for people living in remote areas who need healthcare.

The 160-bed hospital where Brady Drew* practiced medicine supports around 1 million people in this country. Drew served in Central Asia with the IMB for 20 years with his wife Rani* and their children.

"It's really a very remote, 'back at the back of the planet' place," Drew said of the area.

The hospital is the primary medical facility in the province and many of the patients travel for days on the backs of donkeys to receive health care. It takes some patients five days to reach the hospital.

"They would have great faith that now that they

are in the hospital, they're going to get better," Drew said. "They've spent their last dollar to get there by donkey, or wheelbarrow, or taxi or whatever they could afford."

The hospital is supposed to stock and supply free medicine, but Drew said the hospital often sends patients to outside pharmacies to fill their prescriptions. Another hurdle families face is lodging.

Every patient is accompanied by a caretaker, and family members of patients cannot stay in the hospital and must find accommodation. Drew said they often stay in local hotels, which are typically large rooms with mats on the floor where many others also stay. A night's stay costs the equivalent of one or two dollars.

The hotels, as well as the entire town, have limited electricity, and clean water is scarce. Drew saw the needs and wanted to help.

"I just wanted to step in. I wanted to provide somebody with either a place [to stay] overnight, or a square



Illustration by Lydia Webster*, age 16. Lydia serves with her family among Central Asian peoples.

meal or help them buy their medicines," he said.

Drew started by speaking to a pharmacist. He sent patients to this pre-arranged pharmacy with specially marked prescriptions. He asked that the pharmacist keep a tally of all medicines he prescribed, and then Drew paid for the total at the end of the month.

He also began paying for one night's stay for his patients' families, but soon began investigating opportunities for more sustainable and long-term shelter. Drew said the Lord gave him the vision to open a medical hospitality house that would provide lodging and meals for families of patients.

In addition to meeting physical needs, the hospitality house provided an opportunity to share Christ with people who have little or no access to the gospel. The Drews purchased televisions to show the JESUS film and other faith-based videos.

A local believer named Burhan* manages the hospitality house. Though illiterate, he is familiar with Scripture because he regularly and repeatedly listens to audio versions of the Bible.

Burhan's journey to Christ began with a dream that led him on a journey to find spiritual healing and salvation.

"In his dream, Jesus was at the top of a waterfall with a decaying body in a coffin and a very well-preserved body in a coffin. Jesus told him, 'I can preserve you in life and in death,'" Drew said.

Burhan asked the man in his dream, "Well, who are you?"

"It is me, Jesus."

Burhan woke up and knew he needed to find out about Jesus. He had to travel to find someone who could tell him more.

Drew said Burhan, who has no passport, traveled to two neighboring countries in search of someone who could tell him about Jesus. He couldn't find anyone, so

he returned home where he met a foreigner who told him about Jesus and gave him an iPod with a recording of the New Testament on it.

Burhan wants to provide others who've made long journeys with the same opportunity to hear about Jesus. He distributes Christian media to guests who pass through the hospitality center. Through technology, the gospel has journeyed into even more remote regions of the country.

Over dinner in the hospitality house, Burhan would ask leading questions as Drew would share the gospel following a showing of the JESUS film.

One night, for example, Burhan led the discussion with this question: "I hear there are Muslims that are believing in Jesus now. Can that really happen?" he asked, nonchalantly.

Through encounters like these and repeat viewings of the evangelistic film over several years, the guards at the hospitality house committed their lives to Christ. A woman who cleans and does laundry also committed her life to Christ.

Now all of the staff at the hospitality center are Christians.

The current capacity of the house is 30 people, and it's often full, especially in the winter, when all the roads are closed.

Heavy snowfall brought two pregnant women and their husbands to the hospitality house several months before the women were due. One of the women said she has been pregnant three times and lost all three babies. For this pregnancy, she wanted to be seen at the hospital and hopefully go home with a living baby. The staff members shared the gospel with the two couples.

Many people have heard about the hospitality house and will check in there before going to the hospital to make sure they have a room. Other people stumble upon it.

One of these "stumblers" was a man who came to town for eye surgery but wasn't able to obtain the services he needed. His funds were insufficient. He walked through the local bazaar and prayed and asked the Lord if he was real, could he help him? The man ran into a short-term worker who pointed him in the direction of the hospitality center. A discount was arranged with the eye surgeon, and he was able to work for some extra money while he stayed at the hospitality house.

The man was amazed that God immediately answered his prayer.

Another man brought his son on a three-day journey to the hospital. The young boy needed surgery for a hernia. The hospital told him to return in two weeks. The man spent half of a year's salary to travel to the city and returning later was financially unfeasible and impractical.

Realizing that the hospitality house is not well set up for housing children for many days at a time, Burhan offered to host the father and son in his own home so the son could play with his children. Each evening Burhan faithfully shared the gospel with the father, who committed his life to Christ. He was the first Christian among his unengaged, unreached people group.

The father's earthly story has a sad ending. Desperate for money, he signed up for military service and was killed in a volatile area. The man is now spending eternity in heaven.

Though some earthly stories have sad endings, many stories are still unfolding as new Christians grow in their faith and share the hope that they found in the hospitality house.

The Drews are currently in the U.S., while Burhan and other Christians continue to operate the hospitality house. ✝

*Names changed for security

China closes house churches, yet Christians remain faithful: God 'uses his words to comfort us'

By China Aid
International Christian Concern

Chinese officials in March closed and ransacked house churches across the country as part of a continued crackdown on Christianity.

In Hebei province, local officials booted Yanjiao Abundant Church off its property by forcing the landlord to discontinue the lease. They also took the speakers, a guitar and the communion supplies—and even tore up posters that listed the Apostles' Creed.

Pastor Caleb Yang took comfort that a portion of a poster remained. It read, "and will come again to judge the living and the dead."

"God is amazing, he uses his words to comfort us!" Yang said.

In Guizhou province, local officials posted a notice

announcing that Renai Reformed Church would be closing. According to the notice, the congregation was "an unauthorized self-established venue for Christian activities." The members, the notice said, "held illegal religious activities on multiple occasions."

In the city of Shanghai, police entered Shanghai Lanchun Church during a Sunday morning service and took away its pastor, Zhang Peihong. Police also searched the congregation.

All three congregations are unregistered house churches. Protestant churches in China are required to register and join the Three-Self movement, which is legal but which places churches under severe restrictions, such as limits on what can be preached. ✝

*Name changed for security

Discipled members minister throughout Marietta community

By Karen L. Willoughby
TEXAN Correspondent

MARIETTA, Texas What church planters Chas (Charles William Carlisle III) and Amy Carlisle learned to do in Ohio, they've applied since 2012 at Oak Ridge Baptist Church, a 142-year-old church in far northeast Texas.

The church and the community have responded, and Oak Ridge Baptist continues to grow and flourish, despite the past year's events.

"COVID put a dent in the church's attendance, but it's on its way back," Carlisle said. "We have not had a baptism since last March and I continue to beg God to bring a harvest to our community. However, I can't ignore how many new people God continues to bring to our services, despite the pandemic."

Born in Hallsville, some 60 miles south of Marietta,

Chas Carlisle was a music minister at New Colony Baptist Church in Linden before moving to Ohio for six years to serve as a church planter. "The way Amy and I had to invest in relationships in Ohio because we knew no one, turned out to serve us well when we moved to Marietta," Carlisle said. "When we came here, the same things we did to build relationships in Ohio are really the things we started doing when we moved back to Texas. It can be hard to build relational equity in a small town.

"Anything we could get involved with, we did," the pastor continued. "I joined the volunteer fire department; we joined the Marietta community organization."

Nonetheless, Carlisle credits the congregation for the fact that in a town of fewer than 130 people, 70 or more people (pre-COVID) attended Sunday worship

services and with the COVID vaccine being distributed, at least that many were expected at Easter. Church members have continued to minister in the community, the pastor said.

"God has been faithful to our church family, but it has little to do with me and everything to do with how he works through his people," Carlisle said.

"A young couple moved into our town. We didn't know it, but they had no running water in their house. One of the deacons found out and took care of it," the pastor said. "If one of our members hears there's a need and they can take care of it, they just do it. They'll learn a widow needs a light bulb replaced or oil changed in her car, and they take care of it. Often, I don't find out about it until afterwards."

Not only do members help people in the community, they also bring Jesus into the conversation.

"That lays heavy on the shoulders of the one helping," Carlisle said. "It's just as simple as telling the couple that didn't have water: 'We give because we've been given a great gift. Do you know Jesus Christ as your savior, that he has forgiven you of your sins?' It's as simple as that.

"We came with a mindset we were going to disciple people in the pews," the pastor said. "We're trying to do that. As they grow in their faith, they serve: delivering food, making repairs to houses, helping with bills. Any needs that come up, we try to address them with long-term goals in mind, to meet them in a way we can share the gospel.

"We rely heavily on our church to know what needs to be done for folks in the community," Carlisle continued. "Service, outreach, and evangelism are a part of their everyday lives."

Audrey Crook has been a member of Oak Ridge Baptist Church for 69 years. She's lived through many pastors, since most of them have stayed less than three years. Carlisle, now in his eighth year, is an anomaly she appreciates, Crook said.

"They are so devout Christians, and he has done miracles with everything we have," the widow said. "He talks with people. He's a wonderful pastor. His wife is wonderful. He has made everybody fall in love with him and his family."

Carlisle says he's an introvert, uncomfortable with praise.

"Honestly, I am one of thousands of small church pastors struggling to faith-



Charles (Chas) and Amy Carlisle are ministering to a small town. More than half the residents of Marietta, Texas, attend church at Oak Ridge Baptist.

PHOTOS SUBMITTED.



Marietta's Oak Ridge Baptist held services for attendees in their vehicles at the town's fire department during the COVID lockdowns.

fully navigate ministry during COVID, and most recently, the winter storm," Carlisle said. "The growth and maturity that our church has experienced over these last eight years has been primarily because of the people.

"I have tried my best to serve faithfully by guiding our people, building their knowledge of God's Word," the pastor continued. "It's about discipling people in a way they understand they're intentionally living for Christ."

David and Gayle Pittman have been members for about two years. "Pastor Chas is highly intelligent," David Pittman told the TEXAN. "He studies more and is more educated on church history and Bible history than any pastor I've ever sat under before. He's straightened me out on a lot of stuff."

Oak Ridge members don't need any "straightening out" on financial matters. They give generously of their time, talents and treasure.

"There has been no door-to-door knocking. It's conversations, meeting people in the café, post office, doing community events, slowly building relationships," Carlisle said.

"The vast majority [of contacts] is the people in our church being as intentional as possible as they go about their daily lives, loving their

neighbors" the pastor said. "It's them being disciples as they're going out and doing everyday things." One of these areas is a market that happens at the old Marietta School. "We've got several ladies involved," Pittman said. "Through the market, several have started attending church."

This year Oak Ridge Baptist is partnering to help an existing church in Louisiana financially and hands-on. They also partner with a church plant in Bar Nunn, Wyoming (see <http://texanonline.net/archives/6710/>). The church has partnered with an orphanage in Ecuador in the past, and currently helps missionaries in Europe and Asia.

"If we look at our mission endeavors, this work accounts for 20 to 30 percent of our finances," Carlisle said. "One year we hit the 40 percent mark. I remember adding up those numbers and thinking that's impossible. It was shocking.

"This last year COVID brought many new challenges," the pastor continued. "God slowed our church down and gave me time to rest. However, God did not stop working. Though our activities were limited, God was faithful to continue to work in the community through his church. I am thankful for the reminder that he builds his kingdom, not me." ❖

SBTC DR, churches in migrant crisis: 'Our DR units remain on call' — Scottie Stice, SBTC DR director



West Brownsville Baptist volunteers distribute backpacks containing Bibles and other essentials to migrants released by immigration authorities and waiting at the Brownsville bus station for passage north. PHOTOS SUBMITTED



SBTC DR chaplain Julian Moreno, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista Uvalde, arrived to assist DR volunteers and share the gospel with migrants in Del Rio. Linda Mitter, Debby Nichols also pictured. Not pictured: SBTC DR volunteer Andie Skidmore.

Texas Bike Ride 2021 supports Cambodian relief and unites area churches

By Jane Rodgers
Managing Editor



SAN ANTONIO

A sunny spring week attracted 14 bicyclists of varying experience levels and 14 support personnel from around the United States desiring to make a difference across the world.

They enjoyed six days of Texas hospitality, barbecue, music, and a little help from local churches during a 400-mile fundraising ride from San Antonio through the Hill Country to South Texas from April 9-14.

The Texas bike tour was the 37th sponsored nationally by Ends of the Earth Cycling, said ride organizer Ian Goff, an Ends cyclist since 2019 and a deacon at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs.

Ends of the Earth, through “Christ-centered bicycling tours” like April’s trek, raises funds for youth-centered ministries globally.

Goff said the group’s flagship ride goes from Fort Myers to Key West annually, and Ends sponsors four or five other rides per year around the country. The COVID-19 pandemic put pause on all but one 2020 ride, Goff added.

“God is good and we are restarting a regular schedule this year,” he said.

The slogan “Pray, Pedal, Repeat,” summarizes the Ends cycling mission. Each rider raises support and pays an entry fee. Proceeds from the Texas ride will be donated to Legacy of Hope, International, in Cambodia, an organization that supports educational, human trafficking prevention and public health initiatives.

Including the Lone Star State, Ends has sponsored rides in 31 states benefiting youth outreaches in 21 countries.

“Statistics show that in the U.S. we have 90 percent of the world’s youth ministry resources as far as Bible colleges, training curriculum materials, but we only have four percent of the world’s youth,” Ends founder Justin Hanneken told the TEXAN in Kerrville on April 10. Hanneken, who spent eight years as a Southern Baptist youth pastor at Taneytown Baptist in Maryland before moving to

Florida to start the cycling ministry, added that 90 percent of the funds raised in each ride support the cause, while the other 10 percent covers costs.

More than 15 civic and Christian groups and churches of varying denominations—including four Southern Baptists of Texas Convention congregations—lent support for the Texas ride by providing lodging, food or other services.

A ride through Texas culture

The event kicked off April 8—day zero—as riders arrived in San Antonio and assembled near Freedom Hill Baptist and its neighboring church, Bethany Methodist. The riders, from as far away as New York, enjoyed Korean barbecue that evening prepared and served by members of the Han-Ma-Eum Baptist Church.

The ride officially began the following morning as cyclists covered from 60-100 miles per day with stops at churches for meals and lodging at Boerne, Kerrville, Canyon Lake, Gonzales and Sutherland Springs before winding up again in the Alamo City.

Along the way they enjoyed community meals, experienced corporate worship and prayer, and heard from local pastors and Legacy of Hope CEO Brendon Journey.

A typical tour day involved 8:15 a.m. departure after breakfast, with breaks for lunch and rest, and arrival in each destination in the early afternoon. Wherever they stopped, they visited museums, ranches, and local attractions.

A trip highlight was Saturday’s leg from Boerne to Kerrville, where that evening they toured the Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden with its 770-foot cross and collection of Christian sculptures. Worship followed fea-



▲ Members of San Antonio’s Han-Ma-Eum congregation prepared Korean barbecue for ride participants.

PHOTO BY CARSON LATHAM, NEW INTERNATIONAL

▶ Julie Workman, tour nurse; Ian Goff, ride organizer; Ray Warren, Sutherland Springs associate pastor helped the Texas Bike Ride run smoothly. PHOTO BY JANE RODGERS



turing Ray Warren, FBC Sutherland Springs associate pastor, and the Sutherland Springs praise band, led by Kris Workman, a survivor of the 2017 shootings that changed that church forever.

Workman’s mother, Julie, a R.N. who was also wounded in the church attack, volunteered as the bike tour’s nurse for the week. Workman said she takes one or two medical missions trips annually, but with the pandemic, it was more feasible to serve locally this year.

The tour’s grand finale occurred April 13 at Sutherland Springs and featured the award-winning Williamsons gospel group from Oklahoma and a message from Sutherland Springs pastor Frank Pomeroy.

The ride would not have been possible without the help of so many churches, groups and volunteers, Goff said. In addition to FBC Sutherland Springs, Freedom Hill, and Han-Ma-Eum, Prairie Lea Baptist was the fourth SBTC congregation involved, assisting the group in Gonzales.

The ride featured a little bit of Texas for the participants, even mariachi music in San Antonio.

“We’ve got San Antonio’s fiesta flair, some Hill Country German stuff, a whole slew of Texas culture and vibrancy that makes Texas what Texas is,” Goff said.

Why they rode

Bryan Wood, an elementary school counselor from Moore, Oklahoma, said the event provided a way to do a mission trip combined with cycling, both of importance to him.

Jay Carlson of Des Moines, Iowa, said the Texas ride was his fourth or fifth with Ends of the Earth. He will be a ministry intern with the organization this summer. He said he is passionate about “ending human trafficking,” and that biking is a sport he can do, despite his visual impairment.

“I can’t drive, so if I’m not riding this bike, I am riding my everyday bike to and from work,” Carlson said.

For Ian Goff, wanting to help the underserved of the world

came naturally, as did doing so through cycling.

Born and raised in the Philippines to missionary parents, Goff entered the military and is currently a reservist. He became a firefighter, EMT and for the last dozen years has worked as a nurse at Saint Luke’s Baptist Hospital. High energy, he also has a tree business.

“I love Jesus and I’ve always been involved in ministries of various kinds,” he said.

Like many others, he felt called to help Sutherland Springs following the 2017 shootings. He assisted some survivors in redoing their homes with ADA accommodations and helped retrofit the temporary facility erected on the church’s property until its new building was completed.

Goff felt God leading him to become a member at Sutherland Springs following these initial volunteer opportunities.

To mark the two-year anniversary of the shootings, Goff embarked on a “personal venture,” a 2,100 mile border-to-border bike ride from Niagara Falls, New York, to Del Rio, Texas. Along the way, he stopped at churches and shared what God had done at Sutherland Springs, not only in healing the survivors but in sending others to continue the ministry.

Goff’s message was of souls saved and God’s provision after tragedy.

“We have over 300 members at a church that just three and half years ago, lost half its members. It’s a pretty incredible story.”

As for the April Texas ride, each cyclist raised a minimum of \$1,000 in addition to the entry fee to participate. The money plus any left from registration fees after expenses will go to Legacy of Hope.

“We get to break bread and fellowship with local bodies of Christ in the different towns we ride through. And we use every opportunity to be a witness to anyone God brings along the way. It’s all for his glory. It’s a labor of love,” Goff said. 🚲