

SOUTHERN BAPTIST
TEXAN

DECEMBER 2024 | VOL. 23 | NO. 12

**THANK
YOU,
JESUS**

He's not only the reason for the season, but the spark who ignited amazing things in 2024

SEND NETWORK SBTC SEES
RECORD PLANTING EFFORT

GROWING NUMBER OF CHURCHES
EXPERIENCE NEW LIFE THROUGH REGENESIS

A LOOK BACK AT SOME OF OUR
FAVORITE STORIES OF THE PAST YEAR

WHAT A BLESSING!

LIFE HAS A UNIQUE WAY of bringing moments of reflection. As we enter December, I can't help but reflect on the incredible year the Lord has given the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

When we begin a new year, we are usually looking forward. This is a good thing—we must always look to the possibilities that lie ahead. However, we also never know what to anticipate in the future. January 2024 was no different.

As we began the new year, we started implementing the SBTC's new mission focus. We jumped in wholeheartedly to our mission of mobilizing churches to multiply disciple-making movements in Texas and around the world.

Though we didn't know what 2024 would bring, God has once again been so good to us. Allow me to highlight a few things we can celebrate together:

1. Our convention is growing.

Throughout the year, we had quite a few churches affiliate with the SBTC. We love when we can grow and see the gospel advance together. We currently have the largest number of churches in SBTC history.

2. Church planting is growing.

When we created Send Network SBTC in partnership with the North American Mission Board, we didn't know what to expect. Over the past three years, we have seen over 145 churches planted in Texas through the SBTC. That is an incredible number of churches. In fact, we anticipate planting between 60-65 churches in 2024 alone. I am so grateful for all that God is doing!

3. Reach Texas is growing.

Our Reach Texas State Missions Offering took in a record \$1,752,383 to be used for missions and evangelism through SBTC churches. We are praying God will allow us to hit over \$2 million next year.

There are so many things to look back on and be thankful for. Yet, as we close out this year, we are looking to the future with great anticipation. We believe God is going to continue to use our network of churches to see disciple-making movements multiplied in Texas and around the world.

As we enter January, there is one thing I want to make you aware of. Our *Texan* magazine serves as an incredible tool to tell the stories of how God is using SBTC churches. Over the course of this year, we have experienced significant increases in printing costs. Our desire is to be the best stewards of Cooperative Program dollars, so in response to rising costs, we will print eight *Texan* issues in 2025 instead of 12. However, we are increasing our page count from 32 pages per issue to 48 pages per issue. Therefore, you will have the same number of pages, stories, and content as before, just in fewer issues.

This creates significant savings in the cost of printing and shipping, allowing us to best manage CP dollars. While the frequency will change, we remain committed to devoting the same amount of space to conveying all that God is doing across our state. We look forward to continuing to provide the best communication piece out there.

I pray you have a great Christmas season. I encourage you to reflect on the goodness of God over the past year and enter 2025 full of expectancy of what He will do. I love you and am honored to serve you!



Dr. Nathan Lorick
SBTC Executive Director

SOUTHERN BAPTIST TEXAN

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Encourage.
Equip.

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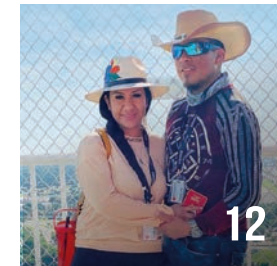
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SOME OF OUR FAVORITE GOD STORIES OF 2024

AS WE HUNT FOR STORIES TO FILL THE *TEXAN* each month, we are driven by our main mandate: tell the stories of what God is doing in the churches of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

Sometimes we do that by reporting about how God is moving at a church. Sometimes we tell stories about the individuals who make up the body of Christ. Still other times we stumble on a story where God uses a squirrel to impact His kingdom (more on that in a minute).

As we say goodbye to 2024 and anticipate what God will do in 2025, here are some of our favorite stories from this past year:

Lobs for the Lord (April 2024)

God can use anything to reach people—including the burgeoning sport of pickleball. Jane Rodgers, one of our longtime *Texan* contributors, found out several churches across Texas are leveraging the sport's popularity to build community and share the gospel. She specifically profiled the outreaches of two churches: Coggin Avenue Baptist Church in Brownwood and First Baptist Church Dallas. A couple of weeks after our article published, Fox News picked up on the story and broadcast a pair of interviews featuring the gospel pickleball outreaches happening at those same churches—amplifying the message of Christ and a pretty unique way to tell others about Him.



Making an eternity of difference a world away (May 2024)

Earlier this year, Bruno Molina, the SBTC's language evangelism associate, received news that our 1Cross app had been used to share the gospel with someone in India. In response, the person who heard the gospel made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. The app contains brief gospel presentations in more than 70 languages—including one in English. If you don't know about the 1Cross app, you're missing out on what may prove to be an incredibly useful tool in helping you and others in your congregation share the gospel.



'God is going to heal her' (June 2024)

Correspondent Arlene Sanabria's account of the near-death experience of Irma Ramos, wife of longtime SBTC pastor Marcos Ramos, compellingly uses dialogue to take the reader directly into some of the harrowing moments experienced by the family—from Irma's fall and subsequent head injury to the hospital where doctors questioned her ability to fully recover. It's a story of bold faith and a family that stubbornly clung to the belief that Jesus would restore Irma to health.



Salvations, squirrels & stability (September 2024)

How can you not like a salvation story that includes a wild squirrel running amok through a church? First Baptist Church in Timpson has seen God move in some amazing ways, not the least of which happened when the pastor, W. Dee Daniel, shared the gospel with a man dispatched to the church to catch the aforementioned crazed squirrel. That man decided to follow Jesus that day. The next week, that man's son accepted Christ. Two weeks later, his daughter followed suit. Somewhere, Ray Stevens is smiling. If you know, you know ...



ROCKY WEATHERFORD



In 2020, Rocky Weatherford returned to First Baptist Church Tool for a second stint as pastor. He has also pastored four other churches in Texas over the last 37 years and served local Baptist associations in several positions. He has been a Lifeway trustee and served the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention as vice chairman and chairman of the executive board. Weatherford was among those who were instrumental in helping found the SBTC a quarter century ago. He and his wife, Marsha, have been married for almost 48 years. They have three adult children and three grandchildren.

What is something you've been able to celebrate at FBC Tool recently?

Over the last five years, in spite of the challenges of the pandemic, the economy, and the secularization of society, we have seen people respond to the gospel. We have baptized an average of eight people each year. We are seeing real spiritual growth in our youth, as well.

What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced in your ministry lately?

Honestly, there have been two: encouraging our people to grow spiritually and the problem of church insurance. Our premiums have tripled since I came back to the church. A lot of churches around here are being forced to either drop insurance coverage or opt for liability coverage only.

What's a lesson you've learned to this point of your ministry you know you'll never forget?

The best lesson I have learned is to remember that I am called to whatever God desires me to do. Sometimes that's been serving in a church and sometimes a college. I always thought I was called to pastor a church, but a friend told me, "No. You are just called. You have to do what God tells you to do."

What's one thing you'd like to see God do specifically at FBC Tool this year?

This year my goal is to build spiritual leadership. There is a desperate need for men and women to grow spiritually and to step up and lead under the Lord's direction in the various ministries of the church.

How can the other churches of the SBTC be praying for you?

My prayer is that God would become real to us. I am amazed at how many Christians will say they have never heard God speak. I want to see God become personally real to each member of FBC Tool. When He becomes real in our lives, we are much more effective in sharing Him with others.



LEAPING FOR JOY



WHAT A WONDERFUL TIME OF YEAR! I am grateful to God for this Christmas season where we focus our attention even more on the Lord Jesus Christ.

For my Christmas sermon series in December, I am preaching on “Christmas Joy.” There is much fear, confusion, and even chaos in our nation and the nations of the world, just like that first Christmas when Jesus came from heaven to earth to be born of the Virgin Mary.

My mother-in-law, Evelyn, posted a picture on social media that grabbed my attention. It is a picture of when Mary visited Elizabeth. The reactions on both their faces reflect pure joy. Luke 1:39-45 details the scene. Please take a moment and read this passage in your Bible.

When Mary, the mother of Jesus, visited her cousin, Elizabeth, she was pleasantly surprised by the reception. The babe in Elizabeth’s womb, John the Baptist, leaped! This was the same man who said in John 3:30 that Jesus must increase but he must decrease. He was that servant of the Lord prophesied in the Old Testament who would come and prepare the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3).

Elizabeth, though advanced in years, was thrilled at what she was seeing and experiencing. I love how Luke tells the reader that she was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit had not yet descended at Pentecost, but here she is being

filled. Then, with a loud voice she made statements about Mary, the baby she was carrying, and in speaking she reveals much about herself.

It was Elizabeth, not Peter, who made the first confession that Jesus Christ is Lord. Scripture teaches us no one can declare Jesus is Lord unless it is granted by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). I love how Elizabeth responds to Mary’s visit with wonder, excitement, humility, and joy. Should this not characterize all the children of God especially at Christmastime? I hope you will experience the wonder of Christ afresh this year, that you would not just go through the motions but have true excitement and genuine joy. The way you and I will be blessed in these ways is through humility, recognizing we are nothing and He is everything. Jesus must increase in our lives because it is all about Him.

Look at Luke 1:44: When Mary arrived, the babe in Elizabeth literally leaped for joy! What a revealing passage of Scripture. It teaches us about the miraculous. John the Baptist was simply doing what he would do during his ministry—getting excited about the person and ministry of Jesus. This text also teaches us something else that is affirmed in Scripture: that God values life. This was not just a blob or mass or a fetus. No, these two individuals were babies, real people highly favored and loved by God like all babies in the womb.

My prayer is that you will have a blessed and excited Christmas, one with much joy. I also pray you will be surprised afresh with the wonder of Jesus and that He would do a miracle in your life even today!

Bringing Jesus to the middle of the mess

SBTC Disaster Relief finds plenty of work, gospel opportunities to celebrate in ‘24

Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Disaster Relief neared the end of its major 2024 deployments on a mountaintop in North Carolina with mass feeding and chaplaincy efforts in the tiny town of Spruce Pine.

Volunteers were serving survivors of Hurricane Helene, the devastating late September storm that swept through Florida, Georgia, and Appalachia, claiming more than 200 lives and causing billions of dollars of damage.

Helene was the third hurricane—following Francine and Beryl—to which SBTC DR responded in 2024. But the year was about more than just hurricanes.

“Disaster relief strengthens the faith of volunteers and survivors alike,” said Scottie Stice, SBTC DR director. “Volunteers see God’s provision for ministry as they experience Christian fellowship while deployed. They witness a suffering world in which God intervenes with the gospel. Survivors encounter the compassion of Christ through His servants who come to help.”

And help they did in 2024.

“Our volunteers are, as SBTC Executive Director Nathan Lorick said recently, ‘mobilized missionaries,’” Stice said.

Throughout the year, SBTC DR volunteers continued ministry along the Texas-Mexico border, responded to Panhandle wildfires, and assisted survivors of Houston and Southeast Texas storms and flooding, North Texas and Arkansas tornadoes, a Temple tornado, and New Mexico wildfires.

The year provided rich opportunities for ministry. Early March saw teams rush to the Texas Panhandle where five wildfires raged, burning more than a million acres. Volunteers worked in conjunction with churches to serve survivors. Teams prepared more than 1,000 meals using the QRU quick response food truck from Pampa. Chaplains and recovery crews followed. One pastor noted his church had been praying to be a “beacon of light” in their Panhandle community. DR made that a reality, as

(Top) An SBTC DR volunteer counsels a survivor at Spruce Pine. (Bottom) Drive-thru food distribution sparked ministry in North Carolina. **SUBMITTED PHOTOS**



TEXAS DEPLOYMENTS	29
OUT-OF-STATE DEPLOYMENTS	5
TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS	34
VOLUNTEER DAYS	5,169
VOLUNTEER HOURS	451,200
GOSPEL CONTACTS	44,415
PROFESSIONS OF FAITH	4,151*
RECOVERY JOBS COMPLETED	244
ADDITIONAL RECOVERY JOBS ADDRESSED	376
MEALS PREPARED	161,373
MEALS SERVED TO PUBLIC BY SBTC DR	63,157
SHOWERS PROVIDED	2,641
LAUNDRY LOADS DONE	2,149

*includes the border ministry of West Brownsville Baptist Church

church members worked alongside SBTC DR teams.

Following early summer wildfires in Ruidoso, N.M., SBTC DR volunteers assisted with mass feeding, dodging flash floods themselves and praying together while witnessing swift-water rescues by first responders in the river just below the DR center of operations at a church.

In July, SBTC DR teams saw nine salvations among survivors of eight tornadoes in Southeast Texas spawned in the wake of Hurricane Beryl. Stice said Beryl was the biggest mass deployment since Hurricane Harvey. Teams assisted for six weeks.

In North Carolina, ministry proved especially fruitful as a new drive-thru model of food distribution was launched which facilitated thousands of personal contacts in Spruce Pine. Volunteers handed out 19,500 hot meals and chaplains prayed with all who were willing.

“We had chaplains visiting with and praying for everyone who drove through or walked up at Spruce Pine, if they wanted us to,” said SBTC DR chaplain Debby Nichols. “We heard hundreds of stories of losses, heartaches, and praises.”

One man asked for prayer for “this whole mess,” Nichols recalled. After she prayed, the man said he had lost his uncle in the flooding when a mudslide destroyed the family’s house. Ten inside the house survived; two did not.

“So, we prayed again,” Nichols said, choking up.

“I had grown, strong men pray and cry with me,” said SBTC DR chaplain Mike Henson. “I had several individuals share with me not only the hurt from the disaster but also the longtime burdens of their lives. I saw how disaster softened hearts. There is no doubt in my mind that the Lord Jesus was exalted in Spruce Pine.”

That is the heart of disaster relief: that Jesus is exalted—even in the midst of crisis.



tax seminars

Through online seminars, the SBTC brings experts in the fields of minister taxation, church accounting, and tax for training and dialog.

tuesday
JANUARY 21, 2025
1:00-4:00PM

tuesday
JANUARY 21, 2025
6:00-9:00PM

thursday
JANUARY 23, 2025
9:00AM-12:00PM

FIND DETAILS AT

sbtexas.com/tax

‘God wants to multiply us’

What does Send Network SBTC want after a banner year of planting churches? **More.**

A lot of strategy goes into planting a church: demographics studies, assessments, myriad trainings, ongoing pastoral care, financial support, community outreach, and so much more.

While those strategies have proven incredibly effective, Julio Arriola credits something else as the primary reason so many churches have been planted through Send Network SBTC over the past few years—prayer.

“The reason we have seen an increase is that God has been answering our prayers,” said Arriola, director of Send Network SBTC. “We have started each year, two years in a row, with 21 days of prayer and fasting as a team. ... The harvest is plenty, the laborers are few, [and] God is answering the prayers of His people.”

In November 2021, the SBTC Executive Board voted unanimously to enter a church planting partnership with the North American Mission Board. Through that partnership, Send Network SBTC was born and a fruitful relationship began.

In 2022, Send Network SBTC’s first full year, 41 planting candidates were assessed and 35 churches were planted. As 2024 winds to a close, 70 candidates—34 of which are Spanish-speaking—have been assessed, and it’s estimated that about 60 churches will have been planted by year’s end.

Kyle “Bruiser” Lee, pastor of Corner Post Cowboy Church in Nacogdoches, went through Send Network SBTC’s assessment in October 2023 and was officially endorsed as one of its planters in January. He said the resources provided by Send Network SBTC have been



“The reason we have seen an increase is that God has been answering our prayers.”

— JULIO ARRIOLA, pictured above kneeling at front right

overwhelmingly encouraging and helpful. That includes things such as a year of insurance coverage provided to all new planters, an initial deposit into a retirement account, and even occasional gifts not only for Lee, but also for his family.

The practical ministry benefits, he said, are unmatched. Lee meets with a cohort and has monthly coaching consultations that help him think through topics such as strategic planning, identifying his church’s unique identity, and overcoming barriers. Sometimes those meetings are scheduled to coincide with some of the SBTC’s anchor events, including the Equip Conference and annual meeting.

The interactions with experienced planting leaders, as well as with other planters walking the same road, have given him a venue to share ideas and be encouraged about how God is moving through other plants across Texas.

“Being able to meet with pastors, being able to meet with coaches, the way they try to help us see the bigger picture ... it’s just been a Godsend,” Lee said.

Lee said working alongside Send Network SBTC has not only helped him see God move through the ministry at Corner Post, but also his church’s role in advancing the mission of the kingdom.

“Now, we’re actually in talks about planting a church,” Lee said. “That’s what Send Network SBTC has done—given me more confidence in knowing ... I’m not alone in doing this. God wants to multiply us, and [through Send Network SBTC], He has provided a resource that we can do that through.”

'A lasting impact for the kingdom'

Regenesis churches are **praising God for the turnaround** they are experiencing

The past 20 years have brought staggering growth to Fate, a North Texas city located just north of Interstate 30 and east of ever-sprawling Rockwall. In 2000, Fate was home to about 500 people. By 2020, the population swelled to nearly 20,000, with city officials expecting that number to exceed 50,000 by 2040.

But when R.J. Nanny looked around First Baptist Church in Fate, he saw no such growth. On any given Sunday, 10-15 people—at most—would be in attendance. Nanny, the church's pastor, knew God could use FBC Fate to impact His kingdom. He just didn't know how.

So, Nanny turned to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, which had started a church health and revitalization process called Regenesis. It's a process designed to help church leaders clarify their mission and network leaders walking through similar circumstances.

Nanny led FBC Fate through the eight-month process, walking away with a multiyear plan to lead the church toward health and effectiveness. Since completing the Regenesis process, Nanny said FBC Fate has seen its membership and average weekly attendance grow, and 30 people have been baptized.

"The resources, training, and mentorship we received through this initiative have been invaluable," Nanny said. "[The SBTC's] dedication to revitalizing churches like ours has equipped us to reach our community and make a lasting impact for the kingdom."

In 2022—the first year of Regenesis—two cohorts met representing 18 churches and 55 lay leaders.



SBTC'S CHURCH HEALTH & REVITALIZATION PROCESS

SBTC REGENESIS CHURCH
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH FATE

CITY POPULATION IN 2000 **500**
CITY POPULATION BY 2020 **20,000**
EXPECTED POPULATION BY 2040 **50,000**

Looking for where to start with the Regenesis process? Scan the code or visit sbtexas.com/regenesis



DFW Regenesis Cohort



East Texas Regenesis Cohort

SBTC REGENESIS COHORTS

2022	2 COHORTS (18 CHURCHES & 55 LAY LEADERS)
2023	9 COHORTS (69 CHURCHES & 259 LAY LEADERS)
2024	11 COHORTS (74 CHURCHES & 378 LAY LEADERS)

That number jumped to nine cohorts (69 churches, 259 lay leaders) in 2023. This year, 11 cohorts representing 74 churches and 378 lay leaders began going through the process that, for some, will conclude next May.

In addition to the cohorts, the SBTC began hosting Regenesis One-Day gatherings in 2024. Thirteen One-Day events drew 139 churches and 235 lay leaders. All told, that's 300 churches that have participated in Regenesis—roughly 10% of the total number of SBTC-affiliated churches.

More expansion is planned for 2025, including 15 more One-Day gatherings and the launch of Regenesis Español.

"We are witnessing signs of revival in many ways within these churches," said Anthony Svajda, who oversees Regenesis for the SBTC. "Those that were once stagnant are now advancing their mission. Those that were once confused now have clarity. Churches that were once inward-focused are now turning their focus outward. It's evident that God is actively working and building His church."

"This wasn't part of our church culture a year ago. The Spirit of Christ has been changing our church family's attitude toward one another and our community as we've started to unify together to make disciples."

—JASON POINTS

The numbers don't just speak for themselves. Pastors who are leading their churches through Regenesis are speaking up about how they've seen God use a revitalized focus to help build healthy cultures within their congregations.

Jason Points, lead pastor at First Baptist Church in Trenton, said he has watched the culture begin to change at his church since participating in Regenesis. One way that change has manifested, he said, has been through a group of women in the church who have started intentionally and strategically encouraging people in the congregation and the community.

"This wasn't part of our church culture a year ago," Points said. "... The Spirit of Christ has been changing our church family's attitude toward one another and our community as we've started to unify together to make disciples who make disciples who love Jesus deeply."



Mobilized and making an impact

SBTC churches have much to celebrate as year of gospel impact comes to an end

God is moving mightily through the family of churches known as the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

In February, the SBTC's annual Empower Conference delivered tools, training, and encouragement to a record crowd of nearly 4,300 people. In its second year, the Empower Student Rally drew nearly 750 students—double the number who attended the inaugural event the previous year. Included in those attendees were 18 students who made professions of faith in Jesus Christ.

It was an exciting year for SBTC student ministries, which reached 6,600 students through the rally, M3 WKND, and M3 summer camps. Of that number, 940 made professions of faith, expressed a desire to be baptized, or acknowledged a call to ministry, missions, or leadership in the local church.

SBTC En Español has seen engagement among Hispanic Texans vastly increase. Its men's conference, Hombres de Impacto, drew 750 men while its Florece retreat attracted nearly 800 women—representing the largest attendance numbers in the history of both events. SBTC En Español's Youth Week student camp had nearly 700 campers.

Another noteworthy first: In June, First Baptist Church Woodsboro became the first SBTC church to serve on mission in Nevada as part of the convention's partnership with the Nevada Baptist Convention. The aim of the partnership is for the two state conventions to work together to strengthen existing churches and plant new ones in Nevada. A similar partnership

has also been underway between the SBTC and the Convention of Southern Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico, and plans to do similar work in Europe through the SBTC are well underway.

In September, the convention announced SBTC churches gave \$1,752,383 through the Reach Texas State Missions Offering this past year—the most collected in a single year. The offering period covered September 2023 to August 2024. The previous record was set only a year earlier, when \$1,673,560 was given. Reach Texas funds a variety of gospel-fueled efforts, including church planting, disaster relief, missions mobilization, and the Empower Conference.

Throughout the year, the SBTC has continued to cast a renewed vision for the next decade: to see all its affiliated churches mobilized to multiply disciple-making movements in Texas and around the world. Twenty-five years ago, Texas was home to 19 million people. Today, 19 million people are estimated to be lost in a state that is now home to 30 million people.

"This is a daunting reality—one that ought to move our hearts to action," SBTC Executive Director Nathan Lorick said during his report to messengers at the 2023 SBTC Annual Meeting. "What we've seen time and time again over the past 25 years as a convention [is this]: What seems like an insurmountable mountain to

"This is a daunting reality—one that ought to move our hearts to action. What we've seen time and time again over the past 25 years as a convention [is this]: What seems like an insurmountable mountain to the world becomes a God-sized opportunity to reach every person and place God sends us."

—NATHAN LORICK

the world becomes a God-sized opportunity to reach every person and place God sends us."

Through October, the number of churches affiliated with the SBTC stood at 2,786. That number was expected to rise following November's SBTC Executive Board meeting, which happened after the *Texan's* publishing deadline.

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER



Twenty-five years ago, the population in Texas was over 19 million. Today, there are over 30 million Texans and lostness is growing. How do we reverse the growing rate of lostness in Texas? Just as we have throughout our history: Together. We are refocusing on the massive challenge we face. In 10 years, we envision all SBTC churches mobilized to multiply disciple-making movements.



TRAGEDY, MEET TRIUMPH

WHEN A SHOCKING DEATH THREATENED TO CRUSH HER HEART, GOD REDEEMED MARIBEL CHÁVEZ'S LIFE AND CHANGED ETERNITIES IN THE PROCESS

By Arlene Sanabria | Texan Correspondent



FORT WORTH

JULY 24, 2024. THAT'S THE DAY MARIBEL CHÁVEZ'S WHOLE WORLD CHANGED.

Her husband, José, had left the couple's home on a Monday to run what she expected would be a relatively quick errand. But as the hours passed and he had not returned home, she began to worry.

A day passed. Still no sign of José. One day turned to two. The family reported his disappearance to police. Three days passed, then four—nothing. They continued to desperately reach out to friends and acquaintances to see if anyone had seen him.

Finally, after five days of searching, Maribel's oldest son, Edwin, now 19, located José at an area hospital, where he was taken after being found unconscious in a street following a stroke. When the family arrived at the hospital, they found José connected to machines that were keeping him alive.

"When we saw him plugged in to so many machines, we were very shocked," Maribel recalled. "The first thing I did was hug him and tell him to please [not] leave me."

Though he was unconscious, she knew he could hear her; tears began to stream from his eyes as she spoke.

José passed away on July 24, 2024.

A powerful witness

Maribel, a member of Travis Avenue Baptist Church En Español, knows God has been with her and her family as they have navigated the grief brought on by José's death. She even said she feels God had been preparing her since the beginning of the year.

Though she had been attending Travis Avenue En Español for two years, she said she had not been feeling very connected to the church or the Lord. She was, in her own words, "just using a chair."

◀ Maribel and José Chávez. SUBMITTED PHOTO

"I had stopped praying and crying out to God, but in January of this year, I had an urgency and need to feel God's presence," she said, "so I began to seek Him with all my heart in prayer."

While José was in the hospital, the only thing Maribel remembers doing is praying. Through her intercessions, the Lord helped her realize the desire she had to begin urgently seeking Him was a call for her to return to Him as a season of adversity approached.

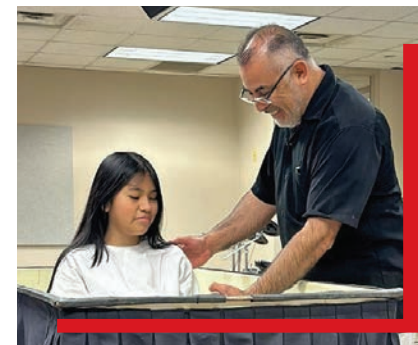
She noticed something else: the church family to which she didn't feel close instead pulled close to her, providing for her material and spiritual needs and offering continuous encouragement.

"We don't have family close by, but we have a family of faith that has continued to keep us," she said.

Maribel said the church's ministry to her family caused a friend of hers, who was not a Christian, to take notice. That friend saw how leaders and church members loved Maribel and her family unconditionally. Travis Avenue's lead teaching pastor, Ben Bolin, stayed in contact. So did En Español Pastor José Rodríguez and his wife, Lea. Bobby Bridge, the church's minister of pastoral care, was there, too—showing compassion and concern that made her feel a deep sense of gratitude.

The friend, quite frankly, didn't understand what she was seeing.

"Who are all these people that come to visit you?" the friend



Chávez's three children, Amy, Edwin, and Joshua were baptized by Travis Avenue Baptist Church En Español Pastor José Rodríguez. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

"We don't have family close by, but we have a family of faith that has continued to keep us."

— MARIBEL CHÁVEZ

repeatedly asked Maribel.

Maribel's answer was always the same: "They are my brothers [and sisters] from the church."

The friend also did not understand how, even in the face of tragedy, Maribel was able to remain calm. Maribel said it gave her opportunities to testify about the peace that only God can give through His gift of eternal life through Jesus.

"I am calm because I know that my husband is with God," Maribel told her friend, turning the conversation to her friend's own spiritual state.

"And you, are you ready to go with God?" she asked her friend. "Do you know where you are going [when you die]?"

"I don't know," the friend replied, "but I want to be with God."

The friend has now heard the gospel and regularly attends Travis Avenue En Español.

The Lord has continued to use Maribel to tell others about Jesus. She has led two families to Christ, as well as her three children. Her 11-year-old daughter, Amy, was impacted by seeing the peace Maribel had knowing her husband was with the Lord. It caused Amy to see her own need for God, so she accepted Christ as her Savior. A week later, Amy, Edwin, and her other son, Joshua, 15, were baptized.

Maribel said she takes every opportunity possible to tell others about the Lord, letting her moments of grief and anxiety over "losing such an important pillar" of her home trigger gospel conversations more than sadness.

“When I’m very anxious, I go out on the street in my neighborhood and evangelize people on the street, including alcoholics and drug addicts,” she said. “Doing that takes away everything I’m feeling at that moment.”

One church, one mission

For Rodríguez, Travis Avenue’s En Español pastor, it was powerful to see how Maribel and her children have been witnessing for Christ and how God is working in their lives.

Rodríguez has pastored Travis En Español since August 2022, when he began serving as an interim pastor before being officially installed that October. One thing Rodríguez said he loves about his church is that the Spanish ministry at Travis Avenue En Español has the same vision as the rest of the church.

Since his ministry began there, the focus has been on discipleship. As a result, Travis En Español has seen a group of about 45 attendees blossom into about 140 by God’s grace. The church seeks to cast a vision into its community of biblical faithfulness, service, and kingdom expansion by sending people on mission across the street and around the world.

People like Maribel and her family.

“You think a family will not come back for a while after such a difficult experience,” Rodríguez said, “but it has been wonderful to see the Spirit working in them, testifying of Christ and persevering in the faith.”

TRAGEDIA CONVERTIDA EN TRIUNFO

CUANDO UNA MUERTE ESPANTOSA AMENAZÓ
CON ROMPER SU CORAZÓN, DIOS REDIMIÓ
LA VIDA DE MARIBEL CHÁVEZ Y CAMBIÓ
LA ETERNIDAD DE ALGUNOS EN EL PROCESO.

Por Arlene Sanabria | Corresponsal del Texan

FORT WORTH

24 DE JULIO DE 2024. ESE FUE EL DÍA EN QUE EL MUNDO ENTERO DE MARIBEL CHÁVEZ CAMBIÓ.

Su esposo, José, había salido de casa un lunes del pasado mes de julio para hacer lo que ella esperaba que fuera un encargo relativamente rápido. Pero a medida que pasaban las horas y él no había regresado a casa, ella empezó a preocuparse.

Pasó un día. José seguía sin aparecer. Un día se convirtió en dos. La familia denunció su desaparición a la policía. Pasaron tres días, luego cuatro y nada. Siguieron buscando desesperadamente entre amigos y conocidos para ver si alguien le había visto.

Finalmente, tras cinco días de búsqueda, Edwin, el hijo mayor de Maribel, que ahora tiene 19 años, localizó a José en un hospital de la zona, adonde lo habían llevado después de encontrarlo inconsciente en una calle tras sufrir



un derrame cerebral. Cuando la familia llegó al hospital, encontró a José conectado a máquinas que lo mantenían con vida.

“Cuando lo vimos conectado a tantas máquinas, nos quedamos muy sorprendidos», recuerda Maribel. «Lo primero que hice fue abrazarlo y decirle que por favor no me dejara”.

Él estaba inconsciente, pero ella sabía que podía oírlo; porque lágrimas comenzaron a brotar de sus ojos mientras ella hablaba.

José falleció el 24 de julio de 2024.

Un testimonio poderoso

Maribel, miembro de la Iglesia Bautista Travis en español, sabe que Dios ha estado con ella y su familia mientras han navegado por el dolor provocado por la muerte de José. Incluso dijo que siente que Dios la había estado preparando desde principios de año.

Aunque había estado asistiendo a Travis en español durante dos años, dijo que no se había sentido muy conectada con la iglesia o con el Señor. Ella estaba, en sus propias palabras, «sólo usando una silla».

El esposo de Maribel, José, junto a sus hijos, a la izquierda: Joshua, Edwin y Amy. José y Maribel aparecen a la derecha. FOTOS COMPARTIDAS

“Había dejado de orar y clamar a Dios, pero en enero de este año, tenía la urgencia y la necesidad de sentir la presencia de Dios”, dijo, “así que empecé a buscarlo en oración con todas mis fuerzas”.

“En enero de este año, tenía la urgencia y la necesidad de sentir la presencia de Dios, así que empecé a buscarlo en oración con todas mis fuerzas”.

—MARIBEL CHÁVEZ

Mientras José estaba en el hospital, lo único que Maribel recuerda haber hecho es orar. A través de sus intercesiones, el Señor le ayudó a darse cuenta de que el deseo que tenía de empezar a buscarle con urgencia era un llamado que Dios le hizo para que volviera a Él porque se acercaba una época de adversidad.

Se dio cuenta de algo más: la familia de la iglesia, a la que anteriormente no se sentía unida, en cambio se acercó a ella, proporcionándole lo que necesitaba material y espiritualmente y dándole ánimo continuamente.

“No tenemos familia cerca, pero tenemos una familia de fe que no nos ha dejado”, afirmó.

Maribel dijo que el ministerio de la iglesia hacia su familia hizo que una amiga suya, que no era cristiana, notara algo diferente. Esa amiga vio cómo los líderes y los miembros de la iglesia amaban incondicionalmente a Maribel y a su familia. El pastor principal de enseñanza de Travis Avenue, Ben Bolin, se mantuvo en contacto. También lo hicieron el pastor de la congregación en español, José Rodríguez, y su esposa, Lea. Bobby Bridge, el ministro de atención pastoral de la iglesia, también estuvo allí, mostrando una compasión y preocupación que le hacen sentir una profunda gratitud.

La amiga, francamente, no entendía lo que estaba viendo.

«¿Quién es toda esta gente que viene a visitarte?», le preguntó repetidamente a Maribel.

La respuesta de Maribel era siempre la misma: «Son mis hermanos [y hermanas] de la iglesia».

La amiga tampoco entendía cómo, incluso ante la tragedia, Maribel era capaz de mantener la calma. Maribel dijo que eso le preparó oportunidades para testificar sobre la paz que sólo Dios puede dar a través del don de la vida eterna por medio de Jesús.

“Estoy tranquila porque sé que mi esposo está con Dios”, le dijo Maribel a su amiga, girando la conversación hacia el propio estado espiritual de su amiga.

“Y tú, ¿estás preparada para ir con Dios?”, le preguntó a su amiga. “¿Sabes a dónde vas a ir [cuando mueras]?”

“No lo sé”, respondió la amiga, “pero quiero estar con Dios”.

La amiga ahora ha escuchado el evangelio y asiste regularmente a Travis en español.

El Señor ha seguido usando a Maribel para hablar a otros de Jesús. Ella ha llevado a dos familias a Cristo, así como a sus tres hijos. Su hija Amy de 11 años fue impactada al ver la paz que Maribel tenía al saber que su esposo está con el Señor. Esto hizo que

“No tenemos familia cerca, pero tenemos una familia de fe que no nos ha dejado”.

— MARIBEL CHÁVEZ

“Uno piensa que una familia no volverá por un tiempo después de una experiencia tan difícil pero ha sido maravilloso ver al Espíritu obrando en ellos, testificando de Cristo y perseverando en la fe”.

— MARIBEL CHÁVEZ

Amy viera su propia necesidad de Dios, así que aceptó a Cristo como su Salvador. Una semana después, Amy, Edwin y su otro hijo, Joshua, de 15 años, fueron bautizados.

Maribel dice que aprovecha todas las oportunidades posibles para hablar a los demás del Señor, dejando que sus momentos de dolor y ansiedad por «perder un pilar tan importante de su hogar» desencadenen conversaciones evangelísticas que calman su tristeza.”

“Cuando estoy muy ansiosa, voy a la calle en mi vecindario y evangelizo a la gente de la calle, incluidos alcohólicos y drogadictos», dijo. “Hacer eso me quita todo lo que estoy sintiendo en ese momento.”

Una iglesia, una misión

Para Rodríguez, el pastor de Travis en español, fue impactante ver cómo Maribel y sus hijos han estado testificando de Cristo y cómo Dios está obrando en sus vidas.

Él ha pastoreado Travis en español desde agosto de 2022, cuando comenzó a servir como pastor interino antes de ser instalado oficialmente en octubre. Él dijo que una cosa que le encanta de su iglesia es que el ministerio en español de Travis tiene la misma visión que la iglesia principal.

Desde que comenzó su ministerio allí, el enfoque ha sido en el discipulado. Como resultado, Travis en español ha visto un grupo de unos 45 asistentes florecer llegando a recibir hasta 140 asistentes por la gracia de Dios. La iglesia busca proyectar una visión en su comunidad de fidelidad bíblica, servicio y expansión del reino, enviando personas en misión al otro lado de la calle y alrededor del mundo.

Personas como Maribel y su familia.

“Uno piensa que una familia no volverá por un tiempo después de una experiencia tan difícil”, dijo Rodríguez, “pero ha sido maravilloso ver al Espíritu obrando en ellos, testificando de Cristo y perseverando en la fe”.



INAUGURAL RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED FOR RICHARDS ENDOWMENT FOR KINGDOM ADVANCE

HOUSTON

The Jim and June Richards Endowment for Kingdom Advance, established by the Southern Baptists of Texas Foundation (SBTF) in 2021, has designated its first allocations to ministries in Texas. The announcement was scheduled to be made during the November board meeting of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) Executive Board by the convention's executive director, Nathan Lorick.

The endowment's purpose is to support “individuals or organizations which promote kingdom causes through religious ministry consistent with the doctrinal statement of The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention” according to the endowment's establishing documents. The initial funding for the endowment came from SBTF's reserves.

“SBTF formed the Richards ministry endowment to acknowledge the continuing legacy of Jim and June Richards and to honor their years of service to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention,” SBTF Executive Director Bart McDonald said. “I am excited to oversee distributions that will continue Dr. Richards' legacy.”

In addition to allocations to Reach Texas, the SBTC's state missions offering, the endowment provided funds to the SBTF Jubilee Fund, an effort to preserve the

properties of churches in crisis or disbanding. A further gift was made to Austin church planting resident Brock Braxton.

Jim Richards said of Braxton, “I watched Brock grow up and answer a call to ministry, and he has strong connections to the SBTC. June and I are happy to be able to facilitate this investment in the next generation of pastoral leaders.”

Jim is executive director emeritus for the SBTC and is well-known as the convention's founding executive director. He served in that role from 1998 through 2021. The convention grew from 120 churches to more than 2,600 churches during his tenure. Prior to coming to Texas, he pastored for 21 years in Louisiana and then served as an associational executive director in Northwest Arkansas.

June is a faithful pastor's wife, mother, and grandmother who assisted Jim through decades of ministry. She has been widely known among SBTC staff members and church leaders as a constant prayer warrior and encourager.

Jim and June have three grown children and six grandchildren. They have retired to East Texas, though Jim still serves as a consultant to the convention while maintaining a busy preaching schedule.

A DESPERATE CALL FOR PRAYER FROM THAILAND

Fort Worth couple serving with IMB says Buddhist culture is a major obstacle, but God is moving

By Erin Roach | Texan Correspondent

ISAAN, Thailand

NOEI WAS A HOUSEKEEPER for an International Mission Board worker in Bangkok, Thailand, for many years when she accepted Christ as her Savior.

She became a trusted assistant in ministry, not just a housekeeper, but when she retired and moved back to her home in rural Isaan, she lost touch with Christianity.

Less than 1% of Isaan is Christian, and Noei and her husband, Seri, prayed for God to send a shepherd to look after them. That was 10 years ago. They forgot about the prayer and became entrenched in Buddhist culture again.

God didn't forget the prayer, though. He arranged for a Korean-born man to meet a Korean born woman in the U.S. and travel to Isaan as IMB workers in 2021. When Joshua and Sarah Jung found Noei and Seri, they had Buddhist statues in their home and were wearing Buddhist necklaces.

"We told her, 'God still loves you. God is still waiting for you. He wants you to come back,'" Joshua recounted. Noei wasn't ready to live for Jesus again, but she was willing to attend Bible study with the young missionaries.

One day, she was in a motorcycle accident but was unharmed. That was enough to convince her God still had plans for her, and soon both Noei and Seri were serving the Lord again, now with a shepherd in Isaan.

The Jungs were sent to serve through the IMB in Thailand by Hanmaum International Baptist Church, a Korean congregation in Fort Worth. The church prays for them at weekly prayer gatherings and



(From right) Joshua and Sarah Jung

individual members provide financial support and encouragement.

Joshua was himself involved in a motorcycle accident in Korea when he was 5 years old, and he was seriously injured. His mother, a nominal Christian at the time, prayed God would spare her son. If He would, she would offer him as a missionary someday. She didn't share that prayer with Joshua until he was preparing for ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"She hid that prayer from me for many years," Joshua said. "Also, she probably forgot about it. After that day, she told God she wanted me to become a rich person who could support missionaries. That was her second prayer. I guess



Making connections, such as through holiday events (above), can open doors for more meaningful conversations about Christ, which can lead to participation in Bible studies. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

God listened to the first prayer. God called me to the mission field."

Isaan, where the Jungs serve, covers about one-third of Thailand—about 21 million people. The population is largely uneducated and very poor.

"There is a saying that to be a Thai is to be a Buddhist," Joshua said.

Missionaries can freely share the gospel there, he said, but hearts are hard toward Jesus.

"They turn their backs and get very harsh with their family who want to become a Christian," he said. "We teach children English and Bible stories, and some of the kids want to become a Christian. Once they become a Christian, their grandparents stop sending the children. That happened to us many times."

It's the grandparents in charge of the children, he said, because the parents often have left for Bangkok, Chiang Mai, or another country in search of work. That makes the population of Isaan very old and very young.

One way the IMB team makes inroads in the unreached, unengaged people group there is through a sewing ministry founded many years ago in Bangkok. Now in the rural regions, the missionaries teach women to sew dolls at home to earn a small income. Each person who is taught to sew also is taught the Bible.

Another way of gaining access is through an eyeglasses ministry. The missionaries travel to villages handing out eyeglasses, and each person who receives glasses hears the gospel. "Through that we make connections," Joshua said.

Because Buddhism is so prevalent in Thailand, holidays are Buddhist holidays, funerals are held at Buddhist temples, and ceremonies are Buddhist ceremonies, he said. Helping people leave that culture and follow Christ is a monumental task, and churches are key in grouping believers together for support.

The Jungs focus on church planting, and on Sundays he preaches in a small group in Isaan. Sarah, who recently underwent radiation

"ISAAN IS A VERY, VERY HARD PLACE. WHEN WE SHARE THE GOSPEL AND ASK IF THEY'VE HEARD ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, THEY'VE NEVER HEARD THE NAME OF JESUS."

—JOSHUA JUNG

therapy in Bangkok for early-stage breast cancer, takes turns with other members of their team leading Bible study with the sewing ministry.

"Isaan is a very, very hard place," Joshua said. "When we share the gospel and ask if they've heard about Jesus Christ, they've never heard the name of Jesus. A lot of missionaries who come here have a very hard time. Pray for the Isaan people so whenever they hear the gospel their hearts will be open.

"Pray for our team. It's a large area, the largest in Thailand, and we only have [a small number of workers]. Pray that God will send workers and raise up local leaders."





GUTTING IT OUT FOR GOD'S GLORY

By Erin Roach | Texan Correspondent

Church's perseverance through a series of setbacks leads to growth, effectiveness

HOUSTON

PASTOR ZACH BRACKETT at LifeBrook Church in Houston says he wouldn't wish on his worst enemy any of the hardships the church has endured in the past five years. Yet he can see how God has used the obstacles for his good and the good of the congregation.

A few months after Brackett arrived at the church, the baptismal waters began to stir once again, but a backup somewhere in the line sent the drain water flooding into the church offices. Then COVID-19 hit right as he was getting to know his new flock.

Later in 2020, lightning struck the church sanctuary and it caught fire, displacing the congregation for

two and a half years. They were able to convert the fellowship hall into a worship space, but a year and a half of struggling with the insurance company took a toll. After that came a year of rebuilding the sanctuary.

Twice during that time, the church was robbed, including once by a criminal taking the contents of the church safe early on a Monday morning.

Earlier this year, Brackett thought the church campus had escaped unscathed after Hurricane Beryl until he realized the winds had picked up a 7.5-ton air conditioning unit from the roof and thrown it onto the power lines behind the church. The unit had severed the lines, so when power was restored, sparks flew and smoke billowed.

The insurance deductible was so high that the church paid nearly \$100,000 to replace the unit and repair three others. The church budget is just over \$450,000.

"Jokingly, some of the pastors around here call me the unluckiest pastor," Brackett said. He is no stranger to sleepless nights spent crying out to God, but "it has opened our congregation up in a beautiful way."

"We weren't in our sanctuary for two and a half years, but we got to see people come to Christ,"

he said. "We got to see people get baptized. We got to see people get disciplined. It stretched our congregation, and we began to realize the church has nothing to do with this building. This is where we meet, but we are the church."

The hardships helped LifeBrook be more flexible regarding the past and what needed to be done to reach people in the future.

"Even in me, the past five years as a pastor have been a very humbling time and a time where God has drawn me back to His Word and the call to be faithful," Brackett said, noting success in God's eyes is determined by faithfulness. "God has used it to grow me a lot as a leader and as a pastor and help make me more reliant on His strength."

LifeBrook was founded as Lazybrook Baptist Church in 1962, but it changed the name about two years ago as recommended by a discovery team charged with discerning God's plan for the church's future. Lazybrook is the name of a nearby neighborhood, but Brackett said he had heard all the lazy church jokes he could handle.

The church had been in decline for about a decade when Brackett arrived, and the discovery team, aided by the Union Baptist Association, charted a way forward. "We put everything on the table," the pastor said, adding that church leaders wanted to know where God was leading, not where they wanted to go.

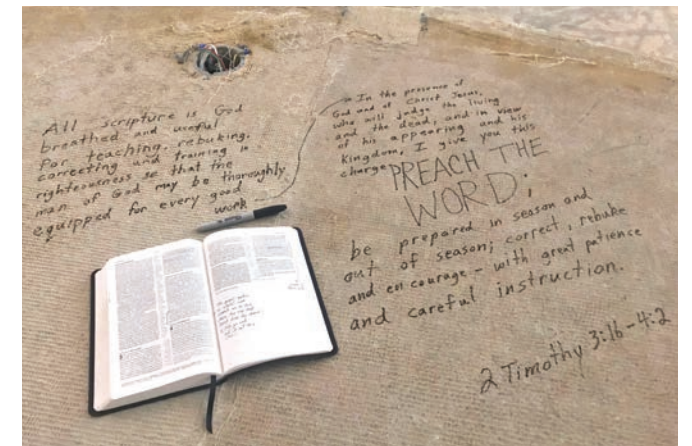
They started with overhauling the bylaws and making church membership more meaningful, Brackett said. They streamlined the church schedule. "We were keeping our people really, really busy doing a ton of things, but if you're so busy with stuff at the church building, how can you actually live out the gospel in your neighborhood?"

One major community need the discovery team cited was childcare. During COVID, more than 20% of preschools in the area closed, Brackett said. "We have a lot of dual income families—a lot of young professionals in their 30s with kids. One of the preschools has a waitlist of around 200."

LifeBrook drew up plans to bring one of its buildings up to code to start a preschool that would care for 85 students, but some of the money for that ministry was in a facilities fund

"We got to see people get baptized. We got to see people get disciplined. It stretched our congregation, and we began to realize the church has nothing to do with this building. This is where we meet, but we are the church."

—ZACH BRACKETT



Among the Scripture verses written below the flooring in the renovated worship space at LifeBrook Church in Houston is a reminder at the pulpit to preach the Word.

When storms hit Houston—including hurricanes—church members headed out into the community to help with debris cleanup and to distribute meals.

◀ Zach Brackett, the church's pastor, says he relies on God more after hardships the church has endured the past five years.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS



After a decade of decline, LifeBrook Church in Houston is now poised to reach its community for Christ.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

with a local moms group for an Easter egg hunt, a trunk-or-treat, and a holiday hayride.

“It’s been a crazy journey, but I believe God has some great things in store for our church,” Brackett said. “What I will say about church revitalization is it’s a long-term journey. It’s not a quick fix.

“... I’d encourage other pastors [to remember] that faithful service over the long term makes a great impact. Oftentimes, things get hard, and as pastors it’s easy to get frustrated and want to leave right before God does something amazing. But I think there’s beauty in having pastoral grit.”

that was used to replace the 7.5-ton air conditioner that fell victim to the hurricane.

“Now we’re just trying to figure out what we need to do to finance those renovations so we can do that for the community,” the pastor said of the preschool.

Through the hardships, LifeBrook—with an average Sunday attendance of 110—has been busy ministering to the community. When storms hit, they send people into the neighborhoods with chainsaws and meals. They send volunteers to read with local elementary students, provide lunch for the teachers, and contribute to toy drives and food drives. They partner

AN EQUIP ROAD TRIP TO WEST TEXAS

By George Schroeder | Texan Correspondent

By now, in his third year pastoring in West Texas, Paul Fisher is used to the mispronunciation—and the unintentional humor.

“Sometimes people say, ‘How is it in ‘Farewell?’” he says with a laugh. “Which is funny, too, because you literally leave the state when you leave our town.”

That is why members of First Baptist Farwell (pronounced “Far-wuhl” by the locals), hard by the New Mexico border, are used to leaving town and crossing Texas to participate in most things that happen in Baptist life. And it’s why Fisher was so excited to learn about the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention’s Equip West Texas conference, scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 18, at Southcrest Baptist Church in Lubbock.

The Equip Conference has traditionally been held once per year and rotated between the Dallas and Houston metro areas. Phil Todd, the STBC’s spiritual formations team leader, says taking the event on the road is being done to better serve churches in the farther reaches of the state that are not close to Dallas or Houston.

“My hope is Equip West Texas will be well-attended, bring strong value, and maybe lead the way to do other regional [Equip] conferences in other parts of the state,” Todd said. “... We’ve taken some steps to try to be more proactive in being in the areas where churches are rather than asking churches to come to us.

“I’m very hopeful. So far, we’re getting a very positive response from pastors in the West Texas area about an event like this being in their geographic region.”

Equip conferences are geared for church ministry leaders, with emphasis on volunteer/lay leadership. The theme for Equip in 2025 is “Above and Beyond,” based on Ephesians 3:14-21. The goal of the conference is to help churches accomplish through the Lord “above and beyond” all they can think or imagine in their ministries.

Planning for Equip West Texas includes 70 breakout sessions by 27 presenters covering 20 critical

“We’ve taken some steps to try to be more proactive in being in the areas where churches are, rather than asking churches to come to us.”

— PHIL TODD

church ministry areas including apologetics; worship, children’s, student, family, men’s, and women’s ministries; deacons; discipleship; cyber/tech and video/website ministries; evangelism; missions; Sunday school/groups; security; and more. There’s also an En Español track with main sessions and breakouts. The keynote speaker is Anthony Svajda, who oversees the SBTC’s Regenesi church revitalization process.

Brett Hoyle, pastor of First Baptist Friona, has participated in previous Equip conferences and called the training events “amazing,” but admits the distance and expense to take a group to Dallas or Houston is a huge hurdle for many churches in the farther-flung regions of Texas.

“They’re almost too far to get away to in one day for our folks,” says Hoyle, who hopes to bring as many as 20 leaders to Lubbock. “I’m excited for the regional Equip Conference and hope churches attend.”

Fisher says he’s grateful the SBTC will bring Equip to the region.

“They’ve recognized some of the challenges that some of us further out here in the Panhandle or wherever face,” he said. “It shows they care about our churches and equipping them. They’re willing to meet us where we are. It’s just a huge deal.

“If I can load up one of our buses and take a good group of us down there, I will. To go to Lubbock is no big deal.”



1.18.2025



SOUTHCREST BAPTIST CHURCH, LUBBOCK

EQUIP WEST TEXAS

Equip is designed for anyone serving in the local church and resources churches with tools and training in a variety of ministry areas. Whether you are a pastor, volunteer, deacon, or church staff, Equip offers breakout sessions to strengthen your leadership.

A Regional Equip Experience Closer to Home

sbtexas.com/equipwtx



By Jane Rodgers | Texan Correspondent

A MEETING OF THE MOMS

STRONG & COURAGEOUS SINGLE MOTHERS MINISTRY CONTINUES TO THRIVE AT FIRST DALLAS

DALLAS

SHEA LOWERY EXPERIENCED SINGLE MOTHERHOOD in the blink of an eye more than three decades ago. Her friend Nicole Pineda found the journey to singleness through separation and divorce when her husband was incarcerated.

The two women became fast friends and, eventually, partners in a ministry that continues to thrive in Dallas and beyond.

“I was a 24-year-old stay-at-home mom with no college education. I had awakened that morning a married woman and I [went] to bed that night a single mom,” Lowery recalled of the day her husband, Jeff, died in a construction accident in Alabama. Her world was upended.

Trauma to triumph

Lowery turned trauma into triumph, eventually founding Entrusted Hope Ministries in 2017.

Strong & Courageous, the single mothers’ ministry under Entrusted Hope’s umbrella, grew when Lowery was asked to teach a Sunday school class for single moms at First Baptist Dallas. The class flourished, with Shea using the Strong & Courageous curriculum she developed.

Recently, Lowery has moved the headquarters of Entrusted Hope to a Christian university in Mississippi, a move she made to be closer to family. There she serves as an adjunct professor, engages in discipleship on campus, and continues her speaking and writing ministry, producing biblically based resources for single moms and families.

The move to Mississippi meant a move from First Baptist Dallas, where Strong & Courageous had become a vital part of the church’s overall women’s ministry.

Enter Pineda. She began attending the S&C Sunday school and other classes almost five years ago at

First Dallas and started serving on the churchwide S&C ministry committee three years ago.

“I found Strong & Courageous because of my mom,” Pineda said. “When everything happened with my ex, we left the church we were at and went to First Baptist Dallas. We wanted to go to a large church, blend in, go with the flow, and not be seen.”

At least initially.

Building community

When Pineda found herself ready to “start building community,” her mom, Kathy, told her about Lowery. “I met Shea. She is a single mom and teaches a Sunday school class. She is the sweetest person,” Kathy told her daughter.

Pineda thought she would give it a try. “That is where I am,” she recalled thinking.

Pineda quickly felt at home. “The first time I came, I walked in and was greeted with smiles. Shea hugged me. They had never even seen me before. They welcomed me,” she said.

“We have prayed already for everyone who walks through these doors,” Shea said.

It didn’t take long for Pineda to get involved in the Sunday school class. “I became a prayer partner, care leader, group leader ... I loved the community [and] being able to be with women who are in the same season of life, who understand your frustrations and struggles. It was a nice thing to be able to go to each week,” she said.

A natural administrator, Pineda, who works as an electronic data interchange analyst, became the event coordinator for the S&C ministry. “That’s my sweet spot,” she said. “I love organizing.”

Something for every single one

Today the S&C ministry has grown to include a popular Mother’s Day luncheon, back-to-school events, and 4-5 fellowships throughout the year when the church offers parents’ night out.

“Then the moms just enjoy game night or going out to eat with one another,” Pineda said.

In mid-October, S&C held its first free oil change event as a White Rock Lake area automotive repair company partnered with the First Dallas women’s



These single moms, flanking Nicole Pineda (in white), and others received free oil changes in October as part of the Strong & Courageous ministry at First Baptist Dallas. SUBMITTED PHOTO

“I AM EXCITED TO HELP OTHER SINGLE MOMS.”

— NICOLE PINEDA

ministry and Strong & Courageous to provide free oil changes for more than 20 single moms, Pineda said.

In addition to the S&C class, single moms can attend S&C offerings during the fall and spring semesters as part of the church’s Discipleship University.

These include Entrusted Hope’s Equip series, in which guest speakers address such topics as resumé building, interview tips, budgeting ideas, hospitality, and parenting. Groups also go through Lowery’s Bible study *My Life as a Single Mom* and other curricula from Entrusted Hope.

Pineda is embracing the opportunity to continue Lowery’s work in leading S&C.

“I am excited to help other single moms,” she said, noting that S&C has also benefitted her family by providing opportunities for her children to develop friendships with other kids of single mothers. “I am very thankful for the opportunity to get to serve and to share the ministry and the blessing it’s been for me and my family.”

Church Positions

For the latest listings, visit texan.digital/church-positions

PASTOR

FBC Sherman is seeking a FT pastor. Sherman is expecting growth that will add 3,000+ new jobs to the community. If God is speaking to your heart, we want to hear from you. Send resume to searchteam@fbcsherman.org.

Kingwood First Baptist Church in suburban Houston is seeking a FT senior pastor to provide spiritual leadership and accountability for the congregation and staff and the overall leadership of the church and its ministries according to God's Word, church goals, and the bylaws of Kingwood FBC. Email resume to kfbsearch@gmail.com.

First Baptist Church in Mobeetie is seeking a FT pastor. Send resumes to fbcrobeetiepastorsearch@yahoo.com.

College Baptist Church in Big Spring is seeking an immediate FT senior pastor. Interested candidates, please submit your resume to cbcsearch23@gmail.com. We began reviewing resumes in November.

Northside Baptist Church is seeking a FT or bivocational pastor. NSBC is a small, financially secure congregation. We are looking for a pastor committed to the Bible's authority, dedicated to prayer and text-driven exposition. Send resume by mail to Northside Baptist Church, 406 N. 12th, Lamesa, Texas 79331. If you prefer, you may email resume to northsidebaptistchurchlamesa@gmail.com.

Wildwood Baptist Church in Village Mills is seeking a bivocational pastor with preaching experience, leadership ability, and a servant's heart for the Lord. Wildwood is located in an HOA with 24/7 security gate and many amenities. Send resume to P.O. Box 729, Village Mills, Texas 77663. Attn: Pulpit Committee.

Rochelle Baptist Church in Rochelle is seeking a FT pastor for their small, praying, and gospel-centered church to help them grow spiritually. Prefer expository preaching. Send resume to dbaker925@outlook.com.

FBC Flat is prayerfully seeking a bivocational or FT pastor in a rural community. Faithful congregation, financially stable. Parsonage provided. Email resumes to fbcflat.bookkeeper@outlook.com.

Freedom Fellowship in Roanoke is seeking a lead pastor to guide our church into the future. Located in a rapidly growing area, our church is in excellent position to expand evangelistically in the coming years. Submit cover letter with resume and links to resumes@fforinfo.com. For more information, visit fforinfo.com/lead-pastor-job-description.

Winfree Baptist Church in Orange is seeking a bivocational pastor. We are affiliated with the SBC, with our foundation based on the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. A man with proven experience in

ministerial leadership skills, discipleship, and a heart for evangelism, outreach, and missions is desired. Send resume to pastorsearch@winfreebaptist.org.

North Oaks Baptist Church in Spring is seeking a PT or bivocational Spanish ministry pastor. Spanish speaking. Two years experience, two years theological education, or pursuing theological degree. Email resume to rossjavier2@gmail.com.

Maplecrest Baptist Church in Vidor is seeking a FT senior pastor for a congregation that averages 70-90 people on Sunday mornings. Parsonage provided. MBC is looking for a man with strong preaching/pastoral skills and who is a skilled disciple-maker. Please send your resume to the attention of MBC Pastor Search at maplecrestbc@outlook.com.

MUSIC

Lake Church in Arlington is seeking a FT contemporary worship associate. Prior experience leading band and worship preferred. Send resume to Pam Mason at pmason@lakechurchdfw.org.

Calvary Baptist Church in Rosenberg is seeking a PT worship leader. Blended worship style. Some musical training and ability to play an instrument are a plus but not required. Send resumes to church@calvaryrosenberg.org.

Broadview Baptist Church in Abilene is seeking a FT contemporary worship minister. Salary with benefits. Please send resumes to taylor@broadview.church.

FBC Mt. Vernon is seeking a FT minister of music. Prefer experience with choir and orchestra. Send resumes to pepper@fbcmv.com and attach video file of service if available.

STUDENTS

FBC Hamshire is seeking a FT youth pastor for 6th-12th grade. Sunday service attendance averages 250 and youth group attendance averages 40-50. Seminary degree, as well as some ministerial experience, preferred. Send resume to Casey Hall at casey.hall@hexacontainment.com. Church office: 409-243-2163.

FBC Borger seeks a FT student pastor to be responsible for partnering with families in seeing 7th-12th grade students come to Christ, grow in conformity to the image of Christ, and form a biblical worldview. Email resume to Jonathan@firstborger.com.

Holly Brook Baptist Church in Hawkins is seeking a FT youth minister. Email resume to robby.hargrave@hollybrookbaptist.org.

Wellspring Church in China Spring is seeking a FT student minister. Send resume to wellspring@ws.church.

Sherwood Baptist Church in Odessa is seeking a FT minister of youth to introduce young people to

Christ, teaching them to become spiritually mature followers of Christ and equipping them to become disciple-makers. Send resumes to personnel@sherwood.church.

Meadowbrook Baptist Church in Rockdale is looking for a FT youth minister who will connect with the students of our community and equip them to grow and practice their faith. Please send a resume to youthsearch@meadowbrookrockdale.org.

FBC Queen City is seeking a FT youth minister. Submit resume to youthpastorsearch@fbcqc.org. Visit fbcqc.org for church insights.

Heights Baptist Church in Alvin is seeking a FT student pastor. Salary is \$60,000+. Email resume to pastorlee@heightschurch.org.

Fellowship at Field Store in Waller is seeking a bivocational youth pastor to develop and maintain strategies to minister to 6th-12th grade students. Contact: Travis & Annie Jackson. Email resume to annieloujackson@hotmail.com. Church website is fellowshipatfieldstore.org.

CHILDREN

West Conroe Baptist in Conroe is seeking a FT children's minister. Visit vanderbloemen.com/job/west-conroe-baptist-childrens-minister for more information. Email resume to resumes@vanderbloemen.com.

Woodlands First Baptist is seeking a FT preschool minister. To apply, visit vanderbloemen.com/job/the-woodlands-first-baptist-preschool-minister.

Oak Grove Baptist in China Spring is seeking a PT children's ministry director. Email resume to kody@myoakgrovechurch.com.

COMBINATION

Central Baptist Church in Hillsboro is seeking a FT worship and discipleship minister. This will include choir, worship team, band, and overseeing other areas of music ministry. Discipleship will include helping coordinate and administrate Sunday school and discipleship ministries. Send resumes to pastord.beggs@gmail.com.

OTHER

Lake Church in Arlington is seeking a FT financial assistant. \$18-20 per hour. Two years grant writing and accounting required. Send resume to Oles at omironyuk@lakechurchdfw.org.

Grace Bible Church Midtown Campus in Bryan/College Station is seeking a FT teaching pastor. For more information, visit vanderbloemen.com/job/grace-bible-church-midtown-teaching-pastor. Email resume to resumes@vanderbloemen.com.

Cross City Church in Euless is searching for a FT

film & story associate to craft moving stories using video & film formats. Please submit your resume to hr@crosscity.church.

Cross City Church in Euless is searching for a FT communication assistant & project coordinator

to provide admin support & project management to our comms department. Please submit your resume to hr@crosscity.church.

FBC Keller is seeking a PT media associate. Please send inquiries to abearden@fbckeller.org.

Second Baptist School in Houston is seeking a FT head of schools. For more information, visit vanderbloemen.com/job/second-baptist-school-head-of-schools. Email resume to resumes@vanderbloemen.com.

Paid Classifieds

For the latest listings, visit texan.digital/church-positions

PASTOR

FBC Hatfield in Arkansas is prayerfully seeking a FT or bivocational pastor who preaches the whole counsel of God. A parsonage is provided. Please send a resume and include a link to three recent sermons to FBC Hatfield, P.O. Box 108, Hatfield, Ark. 71945, or email fbchatfield@gmail.com.

Crossgate Church in Hot Springs, Ark., is actively seeking a FT lead pastor. Crossgate is an elder led SBC-affiliated church with an average attendance of 600, dedicated to making an impact both locally and globally. Our church seeks to make more and better disciples for Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit with a desire to invest in the next generation. Our worship style is contemporary and focused on foundational Bible teaching. Crossgate

Church offers a beautiful, versatile facility that supports a wide range of ministries. The prospective lead pastor should preferably have 10 years of leadership and ministry experience, including 5 years as a teaching pastor. He should be a bold, Spirit-led, in-depth teacher of the Word, dependent on prayer, a servant leader, subject to counsel, who leads by example in a spirit of humility and authenticity. To apply: crossgatechurch.info.

WORSHIP

First Baptist Church in Hobbs, N.M., is seeking a PT worship leader. Candidate must have a strong musical background and a heart for reaching people for Christ. \$20-\$25 per hour with an average of 8-10 hours per week. Please send resumes or questions to william.carl.griffith@gmail.com.

STUDENTS

FBC Pineville in Louisiana seeks a FT student minister to lead our growing ministry to junior high, high school, and college students. With reach into 15 local junior high and high schools attended by our students, two local college campuses, and a nearby vo-tech campus, the potential is great for a thriving ministry. Learn more at fbcpineville.net/news/student-minister-position-description.

Cullendale First Baptist Church in Camden, Ark., is seeking a FT or PT worship pastor to lead and develop the music ministry in a way that is consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message. If interested, please send a resume to cfbcmusicsearch24@gmail.com.



2025 events

Roundtable

CONVERSATIONS

January 25 Multisite
Local churches all over the state

Roundtable conversations aim to create regional networks across Texas through the sharing of ministry ideas and solutions. These networks provide ongoing support to strengthen and provide resources to women's ministry leaders.

Leadership

SUMMIT

January 31 - February 1
SBTC Office, Grapevine

Whether you are a volunteer, paid staff member, or ministry team leader, you will come away from this event with resources and tools to help you lead women in your church well.



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sbtexas.com/women
for more information and event updates

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

This is a great time of year to be reminded of how generous our God is, as well as how generous His people should be. Here are a few things to remember about God's blessings:

God really does want to bless us

Of the 36 recorded miracles of Jesus, the feeding of the 5,000 is the only one mentioned in all four gospels besides the resurrection. Jesus blessed that crowd by feeding them literally and spiritually. Do you genuinely believe He wants to bless you today too?

“What man among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ... how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him” (Matthew 7:9,11).

God wants to bless others through us

“I will bless you ... so that you will be a blessing” (Genesis 12:2).

Those who followed Jesus to the northern part of Israel were basically stranded on a remote mountain. When faced with the logistical nightmare of feeding at least 5,000 people without any legitimate food source, the disciples all stated the most obvious and practical solution: Send them home (Luke 9).

That is ministry-speak for “not our problem.” But Jesus essentially replied, “They actually are your problem” (Luke 9:13).

I must admit that the disciples had some legitimate points. Philip wondered, “Where can we buy bread? We don't have enough money!” Andrew asked, “What are five barley loaves and two fish for so many?”

In reality, there is no way your church will be able to meet every need in your community, much less the

world. But is that a legit excuse to do nothing for the needy?

“If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but closes his eyes to his need—how can God's love reside in him? Little children, we must not love with word or speech, but with truth and action” (1 John 3:17–18).

Your obedience triggers God's blessings

When Jesus commanded the disciples to go look for food among the crowd, a generous boy gave up his meager lunch of bread and fish. I'm guessing that little boy's basket was fuller when he left than when he came!

“A generous person will be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor” (Proverbs 22:9).

The other side of that gospel coin is that our disobedience triggers God's discipline:

“The one who gives to the poor will not be in need, but one who turns his eyes away will receive many curses” (Proverbs 28:27).

Have you led your church to become a channel of blessing for widows and orphans, the helpless and homeless, the prisoners and refugees? Perhaps no church can tackle all these challenges, but our calling is to channel the unique resources of our churches to bless our neediest neighbors in our community and our world. The happiest pastors and churches I know are the ones who understand they have been blessed to be a blessing.

“Happy is one who cares for the poor, the Lord will save him in a day of adversity. The Lord will keep him and preserve him, he will be blessed in the land” (Psalm 41:1–2).



Mark Dance is director of pastoral wellness for Guidestone Financial Resources.

WHAT'S UP NEXT?

2024 CALENDAR

For more information about SBTC events, visit sbtexas.com/events or scan the QR code



DEC. 1–8
Lottie Moon Christmas Offering
Week of Prayer

DECEMBER

5–8 Student Ministers Getaway, Austin



JAN. 7–9
Houston's First Baptist Church

JANUARY

- 7** Regensis One-Day, Corpus Christi
- 10–11** M3 WKND, Houston
- 13** Evangelism Connections (online)
- 17–18** M3 WKND, DFW
- 18** Equip West Texas, Lubbock
- 21** Regensis One-Day, Abilene
- 21, 23** Tax Seminars (online)
- 25** Women's Roundtable Conversations (multisite)
- 27** Bivo Pastors Network Regional Gathering, Waco
- 28** Regensis One-Day, Dibold
- 1/31–2/1** Women's Ministry Leadership Summit



FEB. 24–25
Irving Convention Center

FEBRUARY

- 10** Evangelism Connections (online)
- 11** Regensis One-Day, El Paso
- 18** Regensis One-Day, College Station
- 21–22** Apoderados (Empower Spanish Session)
- 23** Asian Evangelism Conference
- 23** Empower Conference Student Rally
- 2/28–3/1** M3 WKND, Odessa

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