



# **SOUTHERN BAPTIST** **Texan**

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Newsjournal of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention ★ MORE NEWS AT [TEXANONLINE.NET](http://TEXANONLINE.NET)

## **Special legislative session yields pro-life victories but Privacy Act dies**

By **Bonnie Pritchett**  
 TEXAN Correspondent



**AUSTIN** Texas lawmakers passed only a portion of Gov. Greg Abbott's priority pieces of legislation during the special session that gaveled to an abrupt end Aug. 15, one day earlier than scheduled. As with the regular session, ideological difference between and within political parties thwarted efforts to pass bills supported by the SBTC and faith-based advocacy organizations.

As of Aug. 17, Abbott had not indicated whether he would call a second special session to address the unfinished business.

Lawmakers had 30 days to pass 20 bills Abbott declared as priorities. Ten passed muster. Legislation passed included education budget, some pro-life measures and funding extensions for the Texas Medical Board and research into Texas's maternal morbidity rate. But bills addressing privacy, property tax reform, school vouchers and addi-

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# **NEW LIFE:** **Children's laughter music to ears of revitalized church**

By **Bonnie Pritchett**  
 TEXAN Correspondent



Cameron Marcelin, 6, sat patiently as Ava Leigh Coates, 12, transformed his face into a super hero mask. Marcelin and his family joined the festivities at Cornerstone Baptist Church's neighborhood outreach July 22. PHOTO BY BONNIE PRITCHETT

**HOUSTON** The on-again, off-again summer evening showers forced a dampened group of church members, volunteers and neighbors to retreat indoors just as the Cornerstone Baptist Church block party kicked off. The sound of laughter, chatter and children running in the hallway carried like music to the ears of church members (old enough to remember when running in the church was

considered sinful behavior), who relished every note.

It had been too long since such happy sounds echoed throughout the building or since the congregation had so intentionally extended the gospel message to their neighbors. Personal conflicts and financial troubles left Cornerstone with no pastor, no building and a dwindling mem-

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## SBTC EXECUTIVE BOARD

# **HIXSON NAMED SBTC MISSIONS DIRECTOR, PRUITT MOVES TO EVANGELISM DIRECTOR**

By **Tammi Reed Ledbetter**  
 Special Assignments Editor

**GRAPEVINE** The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Executive Board called Doug Hixson of Spearfish, S.D., to serve as the new director of missions and approved a proposed a \$28.8 million operating budget for 2018 during its Aug. 15 meeting in Grapevine.

After two years of leading the missions department, Shane Pruitt becomes the director of evangelism, filling a vacancy created by the departure of Nathan Lorick to lead the Colorado Baptist General Convention.

Hixson, 46, is the founding pastor of Connection Church, which he began as a home Bible study in 2010. Now averaging more than 200 people in attendance each week, the South Dakota church has baptized more than 60 people since its launch and planted three other churches in the state.

He also served as president of both the Dakotas Baptist Convention and their Pastors' Conference, having been a member of their Executive Board, and has been active in his local Baptist association and disaster relief ministry.

While in Texas, Hixson pastored Cornerstone Baptist Church in Pampa and served as missions and small groups minister at Inglewood Baptist Church in Grand Prairie.

"Not only was he a successful church planter, but in a very hard area to plant churches he devised a church planting system and three churches have grown out of that," stated SBTC Executive Director Jim Richards. "He has proven himself to be a kind of networker, church planting strategist and successful church planter himself

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Doug Hixson (right) speaks to the SBTC Executive Board during their meeting, Aug. 15, where he was named the new director of missions. PHOTO BY GARY LEDBETTER

## NEW LIFE

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bership these past five years. But with an SBTC revitalization covenant and Pastor Dave Cash's arrival, the remaining congregation believes it is with good reason they held on to hope.

"I believe God knew what was in the works," church member Bonnie Stevenson told the TEXAN. "We're the remnant of what God wants for this church."

What God saw "in the works:" mishandled tax filings and the resultant crushing Internal Revenue Service fine; the sale of the church to pay IRS penalty; conflicts about the church's mission; and members fleeing.

But even a church in crisis is not without hope, said Kenneth Priest, SBTC director of convention strategies. The SBTC's church revitalization models have been recognized nationwide as successful tools for restoring churches to spiritual health, Priest said.

But a good plan is only as successful as a congregation's desire to follow through on the recommended steps to recovery, Priest said. Cash and Cornerstone's members had to agree to the three-year covenant and its accountability measures. From their first meeting, Cash said

he found Cornerstone's people willing to do what is required for restoration.

"They really felt God wasn't done with them," Cash said. "That, or they were stubborn. They weren't sure."

The 30 or so resilient members have enthusiastically poured themselves into revitalization efforts that are breathing new life into a church left for dead.

Churches in need of the SBTC revitalizations efforts are either "viable," "sick," or "in crisis," Priest said. A "crisis" church like Cornerstone has no budget, no staff and probably wouldn't exist within three years.

To resuscitate such churches and restore spiritual health, Cash, the members, and the SBTC have entered into a covenant agreement—the most "hands-on" and effective revitalization model. During the three-year commitment, the convention provides support and training for the pastor. He must also lead the church through an extended sermon

**"I BELIEVE GOD KNEW WHAT WAS IN THE WORKS. WE'RE THE REMNANT OF WHAT GOD WANTS FOR THIS CHURCH."**

—CHURCH MEMBER BONNIE STEVENSON

series and small group Bible study provided by the convention. SBTC's curriculum gives the Bible passages and recommended outlines for the sermon series, but the pastor studies and writes his own sermons.

God's grace has been evident in the midst of the difficult process at Cornerstone. Although they had to sell the church to pay the IRS fine, the buyer—Fallbrook Baptist Church, another SBTC congregation just down the road—allows Cornerstone to use the building for only a portion of the price of the utility bills.

Stevenson and fellow Cornerstone holdouts Pete Stewart, Sandra Hendon, Cheryl Jones, Doug Coleman, and Judy and Joe Celenza shared stories with the TEXAN of their beginnings at the church 30 years ago. Although damp and tired from the block party and the week's worth of pool parties, VBS and Bible studies at neighboring apartments and a mobile home park, it's a good kind of tired, they said.

A large band of fifth and sixth grade volunteers from Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano helped with the week's activities, including setting up the game and food booths on the church lawn that Friday evening.

Watching the preparation brought Cheryl Jones to tears. The neighbors wouldn't be the only ones benefitting from the evening's fun and games.

Cash and his family arrived in April, and while the emotional wounds are still raw, Cash said he detects no anger or bitterness. The interim pastor, Andy Hill, did a lot to help the congregation heal the people, he said.

"The past is the past," Cash told the TEXAN. He knows Cornerstone's troubles are common knowledge in the community, but their recent outreach has borne fruit—they will host weekly Bible studies at two apartment complexes, the mobile home park and a retirement residence.

But while focusing on community outreach, Cash understands revitalization is not as much about growing a church as it is about the spiritual health of the church members now and going forward.

"My goal is to get in with these neighbors," he said. "And that my people will see God working after their waiting period."

For more information on church revitalization through SBTC, visit [sbtexas.com/revitalization](http://sbtexas.com/revitalization). ❖

## SBTC partners to revitalize North Dakota church

By Bonnie Pritchett  
TEXAN Correspondent

**WILLISTON, N.D.** In an unprecedented move, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention is partnering with the Dakotas Baptist Convention (DBC) to assist with revitalization efforts in one of its churches. The venture is a covenant agreement assisting the DBC to bring new life to Cornerstone First Baptist Church in Williston, N.D., through a revitalization method developed by the SBTC.

An oil and population boom to northwest North Dakota beginning in the mid-2000s more than doubled the population of Williston, the epicenter of the Bakken oil patch fracking production, to almost 30,000. The boom also created a lot blue-collar workers with six-figure jobs.

Flush with cash and a pastor with big ideas, Cornerstone First Baptist Church relocated the church and built a \$4 million facility. But the influx of people and money to the community and the church proved too much too fast. And the change became unwieldy.

With 98 percent of the congregation employed and "making good money," DBC Executive Director Garvon Golden said the members paid down the debt on their new building to \$1.2 million. But the underground fissures that brought financial wealth subsequently fractured the church when the price of oil and paychecks dropped precipitously in 2013. Cornerstone FBC membership plunged from 250 to 75, and even the pastor left.

An interim pastor served for about a year and, in 2016, Golden began making the five-hour, one-way trip from his home in Rapid City, S.D., each weekend to fill the pulpit. The drive gave him time to think and pray. The remaining congregation was committed to holding



the church together, but Golden knew they would need help.

Throughout North and South Dakotas there are 87 SBC churches. The far-flung congregations average 30-35 members, with six churches having membership over 100 and the largest topping 200. The larger churches are "young and developing," Golden said. But all combined, the convention did not have the resources to assist Cornerstone FBC.

Recalling a 2009-11 partnership between DBC and SBTC, Golden sent an email to Texas and two other SBC state conventions in the South asking for help.

Kenneth Priest, SBTC director of convention strategies, remembered the request.

"They could pay the bills, but they couldn't pay a pastor," said Priest.

Golden said SBTC Executive Director Jim Richards responded immediately asking the executive board to approve a revitalization covenant with a church outside the state. It had not been done before, but the prior working relation-

ship between the two conventions and the realization that North Dakota could lose one of its strongest churches prompted SBTC leadership to readily agree, Priest said.

When Golden informed the congregation of the offer, he said they were "blown away."

"Why would folks in Texas help?" he recalled them asking. "They were so encouraged to know they were not alone."

That reassurance sparked a revitalization movement before officially partnering with the SBTC, and church members began filling the pulpit in October to relieve Golden of the task.

As part of the agreement, the church as well as any prospective pastor, had to sign on to the covenant. T.J. Green heartily agreed, saying he relished the idea of working with Cornerstone FBC, not in spite of but because of its circumstances.

In July Green accepted the call to pastor Cornerstone and moved his family—wife, Kristy, and their three sons Caedmon, 7, Tyler, 6, and Maverick, 10 months—from northern Florida to Williston, which is located just 70 miles south of the Canadian border. When asked by the TEXAN if he had purchased long underwear, Green laughed saying he had already researched clothes layering in preparation for the sub-zero degree winter.

Green, like the congregation, is grateful for the Texas partnership and sees it as more than a one-off venture. The SBTC's covenant partnership model used in the DBC-Cornerstone FBC relationship "is the route people need to take," he said.

That kind of covenant revitalization, he said, is an untapped resource. Referring to his own congregation at Cornerstone FBC, Green said, "What about these churches? We can save them." ❖

### 3 Stages of Church Revitalization

Kenneth Priest, SBTC director of convention strategies, describes three types of churches in need of revitalization in medical terms:

❖ **Crisis:** Church needs immediate intervention. The church has no budget, no staff and can't exist for more than three years.

❖ **Sick:** Church can exist for another three to five years. There is enough time to turn things around with several options on how to proceed.

❖ **Viable:** Church is not yet in decline, but its stagnant baptism rates, membership and giving point to decreased spiritual health that warns of possible future illness or crisis.

SBTC offers assistance in all three stages, with the most hands-on process being the three-year Revitalization Covenant. The convention carefully screens interested churches since the agreement requires a significant involvement and training support from the convention as well as commitment by the congregation and pastor to follow through on specific action points. Accountability in the shepherding process is vital and rooted in Scripture.

SBTC created an online tool to assist churches in determining their need for revitalization assistance, which is available at [sbtexas.com/revitalization](http://sbtexas.com/revitalization) under the "Calculator" tab. ❖



EXEC BOARD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

so that I felt deeply impressed that Doug Hixson was our man to continue the work Shane has done in these areas.”

North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell praised Hixson’s character and integrity, adding that he “motivates leaders and laity to excel and to reach their full potential.”

Hixson earned a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies with a minor in communications from Ouachita Baptist University. In 2004 he earned the Master of Arts degree in Christian Education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is married to Dana, and they have two children, Benjamin and Adyson.

The Board also approved a recommended budget for 2018 of \$28,880,178 that requires approval of SBTC messengers during the convention’s annual meeting at Criswell College in Dallas, Nov. 13-14. The proposal reflects a 2.56 percent increase over the previous year and includes a \$100,000 increase in church planting and \$150,000 increase in church revitalization.

Board members considered a recommendation from the administration committee to discontinue a long-standing “matching benefit” that contributes \$17.50 per month into the retirement account of qualified recipients serving SBTC affiliated churches. Chris Moody of Beaumont spoke in favor of keeping the benefit, saying it “creates partnership and ownership with young pastors.”

The \$450,000 line item requires \$1 million in Cooperative Program dollars as those undesignated funds are divided 55 percent for SBC causes and 45 percent for in-state use. With three years of CP decline, the committee sought to tighten expenses for the coming year. Through the end of June, Cooperative Program receipts were \$13,603,332—slightly below the \$13,753,217 given through June of 2016.

“Maybe the answer is let’s go get more Cooperative Program dollars so we have the resources to do what we’re called to do,” interjected David Fleming of Houston. “I hate to have to choose between good things. Let’s fund it.”

Eric Shinn of Houston agreed, referring to an earlier motion in which the Board agreed to volun-

tarily encourage affiliated churches to participate in or increase CP giving. “You’re asking us to create awareness so why not trust that all of us will do our part, and we can come up with \$1 million more for the incoming budget?”

The Board unanimously voted to continue the benefit for ministry staff members only, a net impact of about \$100,000 on the 2018 in-state budget, and increased the minimal CP contribution by churches to \$500 per participant per year.

Funding grants approved from reserves will cover the cost of enabling interface between SBTC’s database and event registration system, initiatives related to celebration of the convention’s 20th anniversary in 2018, and providing a reception, exhibit booth and Pastors’ Conference sponsorship at next year’s Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Dallas. A grant of \$125,000 to help with this year’s health insurance premium costs was extended into 2018 and beyond as needed.

The Board voted to revise the Policy on Ministry Relationships with the intent of making the categories more distinct. “Affiliated” agreements will be limited to educational institutions and

family services ministries and has no impact on any of the convention’s current affiliated ministries—two colleges and a children’s home.

The second category of relationships, now called “fraternal,” will be limited to fellowships and other groups that are not institutions or commercial enterprises. Two of the convention’s current relationships, Houston Baptist University and the Baptist Credit Union, would no longer qualify under the new terms when the policy takes effect in 2018. HBU, as an educational institution, can under the new policy apply for an affiliated agreement—a close relationship that includes agreement that the institution will work within the parameters of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.

Giving through mission offerings by SBTC churches showed small decreases over the previous year. One month into the reporting year, the Lottie Moon Christmas offering for International Missions received \$91,725, down from \$99,853 for the same period last year.

The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American missions, with nine months reporting, amounted to \$2.54 million, a decrease of \$59,948 from

a year ago. Reach Texas giving hit \$1.3 million for the first 10 months, down \$6,340 from the previous year.

The Board approved affiliation requests from 27 churches, bringing the total number of affiliated churches to 2,637. Thirteen churches that have disbanded, three that merged with other congregations, three that no longer wish to affiliate and one operating outside the bounds of the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 were removed.

Jack Pogue, founder of the W. A. Criswell sermon library, was chosen as recipient of the 2017 H. Paul Pressler Distinguished Service Award during the SBTC annual meeting. The Board also heard reports from three affiliated ministries—Texas Baptist Home for Children, Jacksonville College and Criswell College.

In response to a motion asking SBTC to explore the use of video venue locations to allow full participation in the annual meeting, the Executive Committee projected costs exceeding \$80,000 for each remote location. Due to the functional complexity and potential technical issues that could prevent messengers from conducting business, the Board chose not to pursue the idea. ❖

SBTC camps see students changed for eternity

By Morgan Collier  
TEXAN Correspondent

As young hearts collided with the truth and love of the Heavenly Father through student camps this summer, student leaders also felt God’s hands better train them for spiritual leadership within their churches. This summer, God moved in and through the Southern Baptists of Texas M3 and Youth Week student camps in more ways than just the record-breaking attendance.

“This is the biggest and best year we have had since the camp started in 2010,” Garrett Wagoner, SBTC student ministry associate and M3 camp director, said. “Each year we are growing as a camp and in numbers. We are gaining more confidence in our leadership, and we have found what God is calling us to do.”

There were three M3 camps, each in a different location and almost hitting capacity in all three; Highland Lakes registered 706, Camp Zephyr in Live Oak County registered 507, and Glorieta held in Glorieta, N.M., reined in 1,558 students, student pastors and adult volunteers.

According to Wagoner, M3 stands for moment, mission and movement.

“We want to see students, youth pastors and adult leaders have a moment where they encounter Jesus at camp, then equip them to live a life on mis-

sion and be a part of the movement of Jesus as they go home to advance the gospel and make disciples,” Wagoner said. “We pray that camp is a gathering of churches all over Texas coming together to experience that.”

Located at Texas Baptist Encampment, Palacios, Youth Week brought in 300 registrants. The camp, which is organized by the SBTC Hispanic ministries but draws a multi-ethnic crowd of teenagers, recorded 20 students who dedicated their lives to Christ and three students who surrendered to a call to ministry.

“We emphasized prayer and calling out to God, for everyone to be broken over our sin and desire to be used as instruments of revival,” Jesse Contreras, Hispanic ministries associate and Youth Week camp director, said. “Through that, we had a large number of first-time attendees from one particular church commit their lives to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.”

During Youth Week, contemporary Christian artist Jamie Grace put on a concert for the camp.

“This year we were blessed to have Jamie Grace have a concert and challenge our youth to glorify and live in holiness in our relationships and to continue to dream for him,” Contreras said.

Both sets of camps had one theme in mind, momentum with Acts 26:12-18 as the camp verse.

Brandon Bales, student pastor for Northeast Houston Baptist Church, attended M3 camp in Glorieta with his students and adult sponsors.

“The two most important things that we received from camp, that really sets it apart from any other, is the sense of community you feel within your own church group,” Bales said. “Second, the intentionality of networking student pastors together throughout the week is a true blessing.”

With a balanced combination of evangelism and discipleship, M3 Camps teach students and adults to check their own lives with Christ and leave knowing how to bring others in their community to Christ, Wagoner said.

“For our church, we spent most of the summer on mission and this camp provided a reflective conclusion to our students by coming together as a large community,” said Kayla Williams, student ministry associate for Northeast Houston Baptist Church. “The most important part of the camp was being able to meet with our students during church group and debrief with them at the end of the day to see how God is moving in and through them.”

Youth Week and M3 Camps invite youth leaders to grow in their spiritual walk along with the students they bring to camp.

“This year we added a workshop specifically for youth leaders and emphasized outreach to the Muslim world during our



▲ Adult volunteers counsel with students at Youth Week who came forward to make decisions for Christ. PHOTO PROVIDED

▼ Campers and adult volunteers participate in recreation time at M3 camp in Glorieta, New Mexico. PHOTO PROVIDED



‘What’s Next’ special program,” Contreras said.

Many students and sponsors were set free from their bondage to sin and others learned how to pray for the first time, Wagoner said.

“There was a spiritual awakening happening,” he said. “We saw students get set free from addictions, abuse and things that held them captive. We

saw youth pastors encouraged to keep going in their ministry, and we heard about marriages from leaders come to reconciliation. We watched many walk away tired physically but spiritually refreshed in their walk and on fire for God.”

For more information about next year’s camps, stay tuned to sbtexas.com/m3 and sbtexas.com/youthweek. ❖



# THE TEXAS PRIVACY ACT



**Gary Ledbetter**  
Editor

Occasionally when talking to reporters I can sense a bit of incredulity or condescension at the views of evangelical Christians. The nice ones approach me the way you might talk to a crazy uncle building a time machine in his garage—somewhere between curiosity and fear. After SBTC made statements supporting six of the 20 issues under consideration during the Texas legislative special session, I was asked by media outlets in Asia, Europe and Fort Worth about only one of those—the “Bathroom Bill.” One international reporter said that she asked me because she didn’t know of anyone else who disagreed with fluid gender bathrooms. Although the reporters were fair and professional, it was clear that they, and presumably their audiences, thought we were a freak show. No worries; we’re supposed to be different. But I am frustrated at how mangled the message became over this issue. Other issues we supported, pro-life bills, were also mischaracterized, but they were not mentioned as often because there was no lurid shorthand for the issue, like “Bathroom Bill.”

Okay then, why do we care “so much” about who goes in which dressing room or restroom? We don’t actually care more about this than anything else. I told one reporter that if a government entity decided to impose an unbiblical view of adultery or stealing on us, we would care about that as well. It’s surreal to many of us that otherwise serious people are presuming to overturn 100 generations of understanding about the definition of male and female. This discussion even divides conservatives in the most conservative state, at least in effect.

We are discussing a foundational philosophical issue, whether we acknowledge that or not. Is it the will of our Texas communities that all differences between male and female people will be disregarded? Will our public institutions impose that view on our families, school districts and businesses? I believe

the growing number of even very young children being trotted out as transgender has a lot to do with advocacy from our political leaders over the past 10 years. Children have some peculiar and transient ideas about reality that, if aggressively reinforced, can become an identity. That has happened a tragic number of times in recent years. Senate Bill 6, passed weeks ago out of the Texas Senate, does not impose a view of gender on individuals or businesses but rather constrains political bodies from imposing a view on them. It also forbids public institutions, schools primarily, from allowing biological males and females to use the same changing or restrooms at the same time. The Texas Senate leadership took one view of this issue when they passed the Privacy Act, and the Texas House leadership took the other when they killed it.

The bill gives way to parents and local communities to train and protect their children during a very recent flurry of irrational laws and teaching on gender identity. To remind you of what’s at stake, remember the 2016 effort by the superintendent of the Fort Worth Independent School district to require access to restrooms and changing facilities to any student who decides to identify as a new gender. It also forbade school personnel from telling parents if their minor child was “changing genders” at school. Parents objected, and the directive was withdrawn. It clearly did not represent the views of those entrusting their children to Fort Worth schools. It’s happened elsewhere.

Business interests were huge players in the defeat of the Texas Privacy Act. I know nothing about the personal convictions of the people who put millions of dollars into lobbying against the act based on a belief that companies and sports leagues would punish Texas if we passed a “discriminatory” law. In all likelihood these parents and grandparents would prefer their little girls didn’t have to change clothes standing next to a strange man. And yet, these convictions were apparently trumped by the imagination of losing a sporting event or automobile headquarters in the

**IS IT THE WILL OF OUR TEXAS COMMUNITIES THAT ALL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE PEOPLE WILL BE DISREGARDED? WILL OUR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IMPOSE THAT VIEW ON OUR FAMILIES, SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND BUSINESSES?**

state. I wonder, if I can give you 10 bucks, or 10 million bucks, to abandon a conviction, was it a conviction at all? Is it a matter of belief or just a matter of price?

Some have argued that this is a hysterical response to an imaginary issue. Okay, let’s set aside what has been recognized as common sense for

thousands of years and just talk about today. If we go beyond binary (male or female as identified by biology) gender identification, how do we know if a man is sincerely convinced that he’s a woman or if he is merely devilish? The guidelines I have seen for some businesses, and those tempo-

rarily guiding the Ft. Worth ISD, were unhelpful—if a person with a beard says “call me female,” you can’t question him until he commits a crime. One business that famously declared its bathrooms and changing rooms open to all has experienced criminal activity in those rooms. It’s not a made up problem, and further difficulties are not beyond anyone’s imagination. I encourage our families and churches to be alert as these issues arise in our city councils and school boards. Absent the Privacy Act, I predict some communities are going to face shocking challenges.

I close by saying that the defeat of this bill, mostly by moderate Republicans, is not the end of the world. It’s not the most important decision our legislators should have made. It’s not the most important thing that your church or our fellowship of churches should care about. But it is mind boggling that we have to care about it at all. 🚫

## Leading Messy People



**Tony Wolfe**  
SBTC Director of  
Pastor/Church Relations

*“Where there are no oxen, the manger is clean, but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox.” Proverbs 14:4*

Whether you are a pastor, church staff member, employer, team leader at work or a leader in any other capacity, every person on your team is unique. They all have strengths and weaknesses. Learning to encourage them in their strengths and work together through their weaknesses is vital. Proverbs 14:4 implies two options: either everything under your supervision can be clean, organized, and exactly as you want it, OR you can work with real people. And working with real people can get messy.

But here’s the thing: the people on your team are your greatest resource. Farmers like clean stables, no doubt.

And it would be easy to keep the stables clean if the farmer could just get rid of the oxen. But farmers don’t reap abundant harvests because they have clean stables. They reap abundant harvests because they have hard-working oxen, all moving in the same direction. Much like this, you won’t reach maximum effectiveness because desks are always organized, your t’s are always crossed and i’s are always dotted, and there are never personality conflicts on your team. You will reach maximum effectiveness because you have quality, hard-working team members who are all moving in the same direction toward a common goal.

Sure, there are times when letting a team member go is the right thing to do. But most of the time, before this is even an option, we should look into our leadership first and ask the hard questions. Are my expectations realistic? Have I clearly communicated my expectations? Is this a real issue or only a perceived

issue? Do I have the right person in the wrong position?

Learn to appreciate the different personalities of your team members. When the small things aren’t exactly like you want them, be thankful that you are leading a hard-working group of people. Leadership is not about keeping the feeding troughs clean; it’s about getting all of your people moving in the same direction toward a common goal.

I’d rather have a diverse group of hard working team members who work through personality difficulties and other minor idiosyncrasies to be exceptionally productive than a handful of superficially spotless wax figures who expend most of their energy keeping the stalls clean.

Clean stalls = no oxen. No oxen = no productivity. Value the oxen more than the stalls. Stalls are not your greatest resource, nor should they be your greatest investment. People are your greatest resource, and they should always be your greatest investment. 🚫



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*A higher standard.  
A higher purpose.*



# TOGETHER AT THE FEET OF JESUS



**Jim Richards**  
Executive Director

In 1968, as I entered my sophomore year at Wossman High School in Monroe, Louisiana, three African-American teenagers enrolled to attend classes. Within two years, an African-American school in the city was closed, and the students were sent to predominately white schools. Wossman went from zero African-Americans to 40 percent in these desegregation efforts, and racial tensions ran high. A bi-racial committee was formed of students and teachers to help navigate a way to bring normalcy to the school. It was my privilege to serve

on that committee as the vice-president of the student body. I was saved my senior year of high school, and a few months after graduation I answered God's call to the ministry. Upon attending a Baptist college that fall, one of the first friends I made was an African-American ministerial student. We were from the same town but knew nothing of each other. We traveled together several times going home. Later as I pastored, racism reared its ugly head. We had a special outreach emphasis one Sunday in the church where I was serving, and an African-American family visited that day. I had a church leader tell me not to give an invitation because "they" might come forward. I told him the ground was level at the foot of cross and gave the invitation as usual.

THE ONLY RACIAL RECONCILIATION THAT WILL BE PERMANENT IS WHEN WE ARE AT THE FEET OF JESUS. HE IS THE GREAT EQUALIZER. LET'S STAY CLOSE TO JESUS; THEN WE WILL BE CLOSE TO ONE ANOTHER.

I was weary of many of the trappings of a typical church and wanted to do something different. A church only 18 months old began to consider me for their pastorate, and in my self-righteous smugness, I told them I would not consider it unless they had an open door to all people. They told me the vice-chairman of deacons was in an inter-racial marriage. I had to check my own heart to see if I really

meant what I was saying. For seven years I pastored a multi-racial congregation reaching all kinds of people. When I became executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, I made every effort to pursue Hispanic, Asian, African-American and multi-racial involvement in the convention. About 600 of the 2,600 affiliated SBTC congregations are non-Anglo. We have worked hard to have a diverse

staff, and elected leaders reflect that diversity as well. Last fall I was privileged to perform a marriage ceremony of a bi-racial couple. Since the African-American groom lost his mother a few years back, he has called my wife "mom." If this gets me in trouble with the "Alt-Right White Supremacists" and the KKK, so be it. I renounce their anti-Semitism and racism. As a white man I cannot experience the feelings held by those of other races. I am still a work in progress. All I can do is seek to submit my heart to the Lord Jesus and love people unconditionally like he did. The only racial reconciliation that will be permanent is when we are at the feet of Jesus. He is the great equalizer. Let's stay close to Jesus; then we will be close to one another. ✝

## How to Build a Church-wide Prayer Culture



**Nathan Lino**  
SBTC President  
Pastor, Northeast Houston Baptist Church

Building a consistent foundation of church-wide prayer into a congregation is one of the great challenges of leading a church. In the vein of sharing strategies currently working for a particular church, I'd like to share with you a little about my congregation's imperfect, multifaceted, church-wide prayer effort.

There are three intentional components to the church-wide prayer life of our congregation: the main prayer time in our Sunday morning services, the main prayer time in our secondary weekly worship service, which takes place Wednesday nights, and our Sunday evening weekly prayer meetings. The main prayer time in our Sunday morning services lasts five to seven minutes and is led by one of our pastors. We often encourage people to kneel at their seats or come to the altar area. The prayer time usually takes place right before the sermon to ensure as many

people are in the room as possible. We generally use Acts 1:8 to structure the prayer time, praying for our city, our nation, the world, and then back to our local church. This paradigm both helps the pastor leading in prayer with his preparation and helps the congregation follow along as they listen to the prayer. We pray for the spread of the gospel in each category as well as addressing specific issues raised by each category. For example, under the "city" section, the pastor is forced to consider whether there are major issues in our city that are either on our congregation's mind or that should be. The "nation" category is where we pray for any major current events related to social justice issues, natural disasters and elections. The "global" segment ensures we raise the issue of international missions and UPGs in our members' minds every single Sunday. Finally, we use the section on our local church to pray for a specific ministry or segment of our congregation, such as single parents or college students. In our secondary weekly worship service, which takes place Wednesday nights, we pray in small groups for five to ten minutes. The pastor leading the service will present three or four major prayer items to the entire congregation, then ask for members willing to lead a small group in prayer to stand up. We then circle around those members standing in groups of five to fifteen people. The members who volunteered to lead will pray first to break the ice, lifting up one or two of the is-

sues the pastor presented, and then open it up for others in the group to pray. When it's time to close down the prayer segment of the service, the pastor leading the service will start praying over the microphone to the entire room. Our weekly prayer meeting takes place on Sundays from 5-6 p.m. in our worship center. Depending on the Sunday, 4-7 percent of our Sunday morning attendance comes to prayer meeting. We do not offer childcare, singing or a Bible study. We simply pray for an hour. A few members come almost every week, but most attendees come periodically. I'd estimate 10-12 percent of our congregation comes to prayer meeting more than one time over the course of a year. Our adult small group Bible studies "sponsor" prayer meetings on a rotating basis. For example, if we had 10 small groups, each small group would have an internal push to attend every tenth prayer meeting together. Here is the prayer meeting format we generally follow:   
• **5:00-5:05 p.m.** The prayer meeting leader (usually me) welcomes attendees, reads a passage of Scripture, and then provides either a few big prayer requests or tips for praying well in small groups. We provide a prayer guide, but do not take prayer requests from attendees.   
• **5:05-5:55 p.m.** Attendees break into groups of five or six around the worship center to pray.   
• **5:55-6:00 p.m.** The prayer meeting leader prays aloud over the entire worship center

to indicate each group should wrap up their praying. Then everyone meets at the altar area at the front of the worship center where we stand in a circle, hold hands, and sing one of the songs our church family knows well. Then we are dismissed. I measure the value of prayer meeting in terms of man-hours of prayer. Pastor, if 12 people in your church gather to pray for one hour, that's twelve man-hours of prayer for the ministries of your congregation. If 24 people pray together for an hour, that's a full 24-hour cycle of prayer coverage. Have you ever tried to fill up a 24-hour cycle with volunteers committing to pray for a half hour each? It's incredibly difficult. But if just 24 people show up for one hour, it's a full 24 man-hours of prayer undergirding your church for the week! What if 48 people show up, or even 72? Building a consistent foundation of church-wide prayer into a congregation is one of the great challenges of leading a church. The aforementioned three components working together over time have laid a foundation of prayer in our church. It has not been easy. It requires constant work and the strategy has never worked perfectly, but our congregation is consistently praying together in a meaningful way. I'd love to hear what is working in your church in terms of a congregation-wide prayer life. May the Holy Spirit grant us wisdom as we seek to build a strong, church-wide prayer into our various congregations. ✝

### Curry elected as new president of Texas Baptist Home

During a special called Baptist Missionary Association of Texas meeting Aug. 8 at Farley Street Baptist Church in Waxahachie, Jason Curry was elected unanimously to serve as the new president of Texas Baptist Home for Children. ✝







## Non-denominationalism is on the rise, Gallup finds

Only 30 percent of American adults identified with a specific Protestant denomination in 2016, down from 50 percent in 2000, according to a Gallup survey released in July. Over the same timeframe, the percentage of Americans who regarded themselves as Christians without claiming a specific denomination rose from 9 percent to 17 percent.

Of Americans who do claim a specific Protestant denominational identity, Baptists are the largest group with 10 percent of the population. Some 3 percent identified

specifically as Southern Baptists in 2016, down from 8 percent in 2000.

Southern Baptist Convention President Steve Gaines said a strong denominational identity doesn't seem to hinder the church he pastors or the SBC. Still, the manifest work of God in a church is far more important than its denominational identity.

"We are 'Bellevue Baptist Church,'" Gaines said of the Memphis-area congregation he leads. "I don't believe the word 'Baptist' hinders our ministry. I don't believe being part of the SBC hurts us. I believe if what is happening in and through a specific local church is Christ-honoring and Spirit-anointed, people will come and get involved regardless of what the name of the church is or what denomination it is part of."

J.D. Greear, pastor of The Summit Church

in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., said the rejection of denominations may be a rejection of stereotypes associated with those groups rather than a rejection of their doctrine.

"While many say they prefer a non-denominational church, I think their bigger concern is not wanting to be a part of a church that fits their stereotypes of certain denominations," Greear said. "If a church is big on the gospel, the mission and loving each other, then denominational affiliation is less of an issue."

"In other words, I don't think the answer is downplaying our denominational affiliations, but on 'playing up' gospel love."

The survey was drawn from telephone interviews of 2,053 adults over two periods in 2016: May 4-8 and Dec. 7-11.

—Baptist Press

# News BRIEFS

### ABC's Persons of the Week have SBTC ties



ABC's Persons of the Week are only a handful in, well, 7.5 billion residents worldwide. Enter Shane Pruitt, his wife Kasi, and their daughters, jubilant at the unexpected introduction to the family's newly adopted baby girl, just one month old.

The Pruitts, now a family of seven with three adoptees, caught the eye of ABC Nightly News Aug. 4 after the internet video of their daughter entering the family's home in Kasi's arms went viral. Pruitt, director of evangelism for the SBTC, conducted about 30 interviews for television, radio and newspapers after the video gained viral status.

The short video received millions of views.

"Are you kidding me?" asked 6-year-old Harper. Tears flowed from her 11-year-old sister Raygen's eyes, as she gingerly stroked the hair of the baby who was now their own sibling.

Pruitt used the opportunity to share about his faith in Christ.

"Everything we do in our family is in response to what our great Heavenly Father has done for us," he said. "Through the gospel of Jesus, he adopted us into his family. Kasi and I have had adoption on our hearts from day one of our almost 13 years of marriage."

—TEXAN/Baptist Press

### North Korea frees pastor who was sentenced to prison for life

North Korea in early August freed a Korean-Canadian pastor who had been sentenced to life in prison for crimes against the state.

Hyeon Soo Lim, who is in his 60s, was freed on "sick bail" nearly two years after the rogue nation accused him of using religion to undermine the North Korean system and for helping U.S. and South Korean authorities lure and abduct North Korean citizens.

Lim pastored the Light Korean Presbyterian Church in Toronto and was on a humanitarian mission when North Korean officials detained him. North Korea has one of the bleakest human rights records in the world and harshly persecutes Christians, according to Human Rights Watch.

—World Magazine/  
Religion News Service

### DNA BREAKTHROUGH:

#### 'The ends do not justify the means'

Scientists have successfully edited the DNA of human embryos for the first time ever. But a Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary bioethicist says the research in question was unethical for its destruction of embryos and raises moral questions about genetic engineering.

The research—published in the journal *Nature* in early August—used a gene-editing tool known as CRISPR-Cas9 to correct in dozens of embryos a genetic mutation that causes a potentially fatal heart condition. The embryos were purposefully created with the mutation and destroyed following the experiment.

"Addressing life-threatening medical conditions, such

as myocardial disease, is certainly a laudable goal," said Charles Patrick, a Southwestern Seminary vice president who holds a Ph.D. in chemical and biochemical engineering. "However, the ends do not justify the means. Biblical truth takes precedence over scientific advances."

The experiments "consisted of creating 131 human embryos strictly for the purposes of experimentation. The embryos were genetically altered, tested and then disposed of. This type of experimentation is morally wrong based on biblical truth," added Patrick, a former research scientist at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

The research, he said, raises a host of ethics questions, such as:

- ✦ "Is it morally permissible to change the human germline, [which] lasts the life of the individual and is passed onto future generations?"
- ✦ "Is it morally permissible to use the technology to design a baby with enhanced or preferred traits?"
- ✦ "Who decides what is considered an improvement on the human genome?"
- ✦ "As a matter of justice and equity, who would have access to germline engineered therapies?"
- ✦ "Would germline engineering change the view on the value of human life?"
- ✦ "Did God mean we have control over our DNA when he said man has dominion over creation?"

—Baptist Press

### POLL: 1 in 10 churches has had money embezzled



About 1 in 10 Protestant churches has had someone embezzle funds, according to a new LifeWay Research survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors.

That figure isn't surprising, said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. Most churches rely on volunteers to handle their finances, he said.

Those volunteers are usually honest. But churches often

lack systems to catch those who aren't. As a result, he said, money that could have been used for ministry goes missing.

"Churches run on trust—but they also know people are imperfect and can be tempted," said McConnell. "That's why safeguarding a church's finances is an important part of ministry."

All totalled, 9 percent of pastors say that their church has had funds embezzled. Ninety-one percent say they are not aware of any embezzlement.

The survey was released in August. It was conducted in August and September of 2016.

—LifeWay Research

### STUDY: Netflix, Amazon Video offer kids easy access to adult content



Children have easy access to adult content on streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Video in part because parental controls are virtually non-existent, according to a new study by the Parents Television Council.

"Parents who believe they've found a safer TV environment for their children by relying on Netflix, or other streaming services, will be shocked to learn that these devices and services generally do not protect kids from adult content," PTC President Tim Winter said.

**Among the findings:**

- ✦ Hulu and Netflix provide the option of a separate user profile for child viewers, but there is nothing to stop a child from switching to the adult profile.
- ✦ Amazon Video streaming does not offer child profiles, meaning a family must scroll past adult-oriented cover art to find kid-friendly content..
- ✦ Netflix offers "pornographic titles and cover art" which are in close proximity to family-friendly content. There is no clear way to eliminate the offensive titles.

Sixty-five percent of original/exclusive programming on Netflix streaming is rated TV-MA. Only 1 percent is TV-G.

"Our research found that

kids have very easy access to adult content on these devices and services, even when parental controls are used—and if parental controls are available at all," Winter said. "This news demands change, given that these services try to hook families into subscribing by using children's programming as bait and giving a false sense of protection and control."

—Parents Television Council

### Down syndrome disappearing in Iceland, but not for good reasons



With the rise of prenatal screening tests across Europe and the United States, the number of babies born with Down syndrome has significantly decreased, but few countries have come as close to eradicating Down syndrome births as Iceland.

Since prenatal screening tests were introduced in Iceland in the early 2000s, the vast majority of women—close to 100 percent—who received a positive test for Down syndrome terminated their pregnancy.

While the tests are optional, the government states that all expectant mothers must be informed about availability of screening tests, which reveal the likelihood of a child being born with Down syndrome. Around 80 to 85 percent of pregnant women choose to take the prenatal screening test, according to Landspítali University Hospital in Reykjavik.

Other countries aren't lagging too far behind in Down syndrome abortion rates. According to the most recent data available, the United States has an estimated abortion rate for Down syndrome of 67 percent (1995-2011); in France it's 77 percent (2015); and Denmark, 98 percent (2015). The law in Iceland permits abortion after 16 weeks if the fetus has a deformity, and Down syndrome is included in this category.

—CBS News



# African-American youth group ministers to Navajo Nation

By Jane Rodgers  
TEXAN Correspondent

**MESQUITE** Sixteen middle school and high school youth and eight adults from Mesquite Friendship Baptist Church wondered how they would be received at the Navajo Nation Reservation in Arizona on a recent mission trip.

The July 30–Aug. 4 outreach was part of the church’s “Look Like Heaven” emphasis in July, said pastor Terry Turner.

“Initially we were a bit apprehensive, a predominantly African-American church going into a Native American situation,” said Caleb Turner, Mesquite Friendship’s equipping pastor, adding he believed the group was the first African-American team to work in the area.

Their concerns proved unfounded.

“The love of the community was absolutely amazing,” Turner said.

“We were so warmly received. They were so welcoming,” said Barbara Allen, who sponsors the youth group with her husband, Kenneth, also on the trip.

Work centered on the small communities of Many Farms and Chinle, Ariz. After doubling the congregation of Many Farms Baptist Church for Sunday morning worship, the volunteers split into three teams to do three days of special projects.

One team demolished a small house in Chinle.

“We tore it down. It sounds like the opposite of what you should do on a mission trip,” Turner said, explaining that only three to five Walmarts serve a reservation the size of West Virginia, making supplies and equipment hard to get.

The group salvaged two-by-fours, sheetrock and nails to be reused. The homeowners, whose primary residence

was nearby, made the salvaged supplies available to the community.

Turner said some of the youth tutored the homeowners’ two young children during the demo project.

A second Mesquite group painted the interior of the home of a woman named Nellie, who attended Many Farms Baptist Church, where the team was housed.

“Miss Nellie didn’t have running water in her house,” Barbara Allen recalled. “In my house, water runs freely all the time. She was struggling with that.”

Allen called the experience both “heartwarming,” referring to the warm welcome the group received, and “heart-wrenching,” referring to the grinding poverty they saw.

“Our kids discovered you don’t have to go out of the country to see people who live in poverty,” Caleb Turner said. “Most of the youth probably worked harder than they’ve worked in a long time,” he added with a chuckle.

The kids learned “they take a lot of things for granted that other people long for,” added volunteer Fullisha Pickrom.

A third group visited the Navajoland nursing home near Chinle, celebrating birthdays of residents and playing games with them. Some, like 17-year-old Precious Smith, worked jigsaw puzzles with quieter residents, prompting tears of gratitude from one older Navajo gentleman.

In the evenings, Many Farms Baptist Church hosted area children for games and stories. Although promoted as a parents’ night out, many mothers brought their children and stayed. The Mesquite ladies invited the women to join them in Bible study.

The local women were eager. One said she was rededicating her life to God.



PHOTOS FULLISHA PICKROM AND BARBARA ALLEN

Turner said Mesquite Friendship plans to send teams to the Navajo Nation for four more years, expanding the outreach.

“We are interested in finding young Native American men interested in teaching the Bible,” Turner said. “We want to offer classes (and) give them the tools they need to present the gospel

themselves in their own communities.”

“They are a people who are hurting. Alcoholism, drug addiction, extreme poverty are rampant. We want to go out there and show Jesus. ... We want to help people and establish relationships.

“It felt like the beginning of something great that God’s going to do through us.”

## LEGISLATION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tional pro-life measures died in committee or in irreconcilable debate. Some ministry leaders and conservative lawmakers lay the blame for legislative failures at the feet of Speaker of the House Joe Straus.

Straus, who called Abbott’s special session legislative priorities a “pile of manure,” appoints committee chairpersons, who control what bills will be debated and voted on by the House. The Senate passed 18 of Abbott’s 20 priority bills within the first week of the special session and sent them to the House only to have some of them, like the Privacy Act, die in House committees without even a hearing.

That kind of power, critics contend, proved fatal for bills that would have prohibited taxpayer funding of abortion facilities and provided school vouchers for disabled children.

In the special session lawmakers refiled pro-life bills that could not get a hearing during the regular session. As of Aug. 17 Abbott had signed into law:

- House Bill 13:** Expands reporting requirements of complications due to abortions.
- HB 214:** Avoids taxpayer-funded

abortions by removing elective abortion from Texas health insurance plans.

**HB 215:** Improves reporting requirements regarding minors and permission to receive abortion.

**SB 11:** Requires patient or patient advocate approval before hospitals or doctors can place a Do Not Resuscitate order on a patient.

But HB 14, which would have prohibited municipalities from contracting with abortion facilities, was held up in the Calendars Committee and never sent to the House for debate and vote.

Last minute tit-for-tat disagreements between the two chambers over property tax reform and school financing saw the latter sent to the governor for his signature but only after the House grudgingly accepted major cuts made by the Senate. Property tax reform died for lack of agreement between the two chambers—both sides agreed the two tax issues are in need of major overhaul.

Probably the most contentious bill, the Texas Privacy Act, failed to get a hearing in the House State of Affairs committee chaired by Rep. Byron Cook, R-Corsicana, after the Senate passed the bill. The Privacy Act would have established a state-wide policy that requires persons use the public restroom and changing room that corresponds with the sex on their birth

certificate or driver’s license.

The law would have applied only to government facilities, including school districts. Some cities would have been forced to rescind or rewrite existing nondiscrimination laws that allow transgender persons to use the restroom and locker room that corresponds with their preferred gender identity. Private businesses would be allowed to establish their own policies for those facilities.

“It is disgraceful that even though the majority of Texans want a privacy act that the Texas House leadership gave into the scare tactics and intimidation of corporate lobbyists trying to dictate our public policy,” said Cindy Asmussen, advisor to the SBTC Ethics and Religious Liberty Committee.

San Antonio pastors who, in 2013, fought the kind of nondiscrimination ordinance the Privacy Act sought to overturn added their voices to over 1,000 pastors who in letters and personal visits tried to convince lawmakers to put the bill, HB 46, to a vote after it became clear the Senate version would not get out of Cook’s committee.

But transgender activists testified against the bill calling it “discriminatory” and warning that the suicide-prone transgender teens could be pushed to the brink if the bill passed.

While sympathetic to the emotional struggles of gender dysphoric persons,

some pastors called the LGBT tactics “emotional manipulation.”

“Teens go through so many emotional struggles, and adding the sexual issues to their lives only complicates the emotional state that some of them face,” Steve Branson, pastor of Village Parkway Baptist Church in San Antonio, told the TEXAN. “Allowing them to pick the bathroom or dressing room they want to use will in no way ease the emotional pain that they are encountering, and I honestly believe the emotional pain will increase with the reactions of other teens placed in that situation.”

Renewed efforts to unseat Straus, who represents the 121 District in San Antonio, in the 2018 election could be in the works. In an Aug. 16 meeting called by Straus’s most vocal opponents, the House Freedom Caucus, about 80 of the 95 House Republicans, including Straus, discussed changing the procedure for electing the Speaker of the House in order to allow for a selection from a broader field of candidates. Following the meeting the Freedom Caucus posted on its Facebook page:

“Honest perspectives were shared, and it was the best Republican family meeting many of us can remember. The take away is that the discussion will continue at the next Caucus meeting, which will be held in late September.”

# SBTC annual meeting theme ‘Belong’ to feature sermons from Eph. 4-5

By TEXAN Staff

## Tony Evans to deliver guest sermon

**DALLAS** Messengers to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention annual meeting in Dallas this November will gather around the theme “Belong,” based on Ephesians 4, SBTC President Nathan Lino told members of the convention’s executive board, Aug. 15.

The primary focus of the Nov. 13-14 meeting at Criswell College, in addition to accomplishing convention business, will be on creating an “environment of encouragement” for pastors and church members, Lino said.

“We have been very intentional about designing an environment of encouragement for our pastors. It’s a burden that many of us share to encourage the laborers, the leaders of Christ’s churches in our state, to send them back to their churches for another year of ministry. We have this vision for the annual meeting to be a place of renewal and refreshment in every way, genuine renewal and refreshment in the Lord, so that our pastors can go home invigorated and re-inspired, believing that the Holy Spirit is for them and with them.”

In a similar fashion to last year’s annual meeting, eight convention sermons will be preached sequentially through Ephesians 4 and part of Ephesians 5 during the meeting. The expositional sermons will be preached by Juan Sanchez, pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin; Nathan Lino, pastor of Northeast Houston Baptist Church in Humble; Andrew Hebert, pastor of Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo; J.R. Vassar, pastor of Church at the Cross in Grapevine; SBTC Executive Director Jim Richards; Criswell College President Barry Creamer; Josh Smith, pastor of MacArthur Blvd Baptist Church in Irving; and a concluding guest sermon by Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas.

SBTC Executive Director Jim Richards expressed his excitement over this year’s meeting, noting it will position the convention well as it celebrates its 20th year of ministry next year.

“Although this is not a pastors’ conference,” Richards said, “it’s definitely going to be something that is going to help our pastors and will help our laypersons who attend to be strengthened, encouraged and inspired.”

Sunday, Oct. 22, has been designated as a Day of Prayer for SBTC annual meeting, and churches are encouraged to set aside time during their worship services to pray for the meeting and the work of the convention.

For more information about the annual meeting, visit [sbtexas.com/am17](http://sbtexas.com/am17).

## Juan Sanchez to be nominated as SBTC president



By Keith Collier  
Managing Editor

**GRAPEVINE** Juan Sanchez, pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, will be nominated as president of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention at the annual meeting in Dallas, Nov. 13-14. Steve Washburn, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pflugerville, will nominate Sanchez, who has served the past two years as secretary of the convention.

Sanchez was born in Puerto Rico and moved to Florida with his family at 8 years old. He confessed Christ as savior as a teenager in 1983.

Sanchez has been pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church since 2005 and has also served churches in Florida, Georgia, Indiana and Texas. In 2016, High Pointe gave \$50,202.35 through the SBTC to Southern Baptist causes, including \$19,708.97 through the Cooperative Program. The church also planted Cedar Pointe Baptist Church in Cedar Park with assistance from the SBTC church planting department.

Sanchez holds a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Florida as well as a M.Div., Th.M. and Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He is a council member of The Gospel Coalition and cofounder and president of Coalición.

### Housing Assistance Available for SBTC Annual Meeting

In order to assist bi-vocational pastors and other pastors who might be unable to attend the SBTC annual meeting this year for financial reasons, the convention is making a limited number of rooms available to address the need. Pastors needing housing assistance can contact SBTC Chief Financial Officer Joe Davis, [jdavis@sbtexas.com](mailto:jdavis@sbtexas.com), for details. The 2017 SBTC annual meeting will take place at Criswell College in Dallas, Nov. 13-14. More information about this year’s annual meeting can be found at [sbtexas.com/am17](http://sbtexas.com/am17).

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS OF TEXAS CONVENTION

2017 ANNUAL MEETING

**Belong**

EPHESIANS 4

**NOVEMBER 13-14**

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4010 Gaston Avenue • Dallas, TX 75246

**HOTELS**

**MAGNOLIA PARK CITIES**  
6070 N Central Expy  
Dallas, TX 75206  
(214) 750-6060  
\$129/night  
Cut-off date: Oct. 23

**LAQUINTA INN UPTOWN**  
4440 N Central Expy  
Dallas, TX 75206  
(214) 821-4220  
\$85/night  
Cut-off date: Oct. 22

**HAMPTON INN DOWNTOWN**  
1700 Commerce St  
Dallas, TX 75201  
(844) 571-1940  
\$114/night  
Cut-off date: Oct. 25

**SBTEXAS.COM/AM17**

**QUESTIONS?**  
Email [aminfo@sbtexas.com](mailto:aminfo@sbtexas.com) or call the SBTC office at 817-552-2500.

Please specify SBTC for group rates when making any hotel reservations.




# SBTC PREPARES TO ADVANCE KINGDOM MISSION THROUGH REACH TEXAS OFFERING

By JC Davies  
TEXAN Correspondent

Every day, 1,200 more people call Texas home, and as the state’s population grows, so too grows its need for the gospel message.

“Living in Texas means you can no longer say you live in the Bible belt,” said SBTC Director of Evangelism Shane Pruitt. “Texas is home to 19 million people that do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. ... The Bible belt has burst with lostness here in Texas.” To ensure that Southern Baptists are equipped with the necessary tools to engage in Jesus’ Great Commission in the Lone Star State, the SBTC is inviting churches to partner again in the

annual Reach Texas Missions Offering, with the 2017-2018 goal of raising \$1.4 million. Pruitt said that every penny of what is given will go directly toward advancing the kingdom through church planting, evangelism and missions in Texas. With more than 400 different people groups represented inside its borders, Texas ranks as the most diverse state in the nation. Southern Baptists’ gifts help support the work of Pierre Bitar, who ministers to one of those people groups as the pastor of Arabic Community Church in Allen. After coming to Dallas to continue his education in 2013, Bitar soon realized a large number of his neighbors hailed from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and other Middle Eastern countries. “I started to pray, and I started to see how the fields are white and are plentiful for harvest,” he said. With support from Southern Baptists, he is now able to serve local Arabic peoples by offering



## advance

verb | ad·vance | \əd-ˈvan(t)s/

move forward, proceed, press on, push on, push forward, make progress, make headway, gain ground, typically in a purposeful way.

them a community while they are far from loved ones and by telling them of Christ’s salvation. “We eat with them. We celebrate with them, and we pray, and the most important thing (is) that we share the gospel with them,” Bitar said. “I’m so grateful for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and for the generosity and for their support and for help to be able to accomplish this ministry.” Funds from the Reach Texas offering also help meet physical needs through the SBTC disaster relief ministry, which works with local churches to assist with disaster cleanup and provide food and other necessities for victims. “You come to a place where people are in anguish and in pain and hurting emotionally, physically and spiritually. Our main purpose is to make sure that we share the message of hope in Jesus Christ. It is a message that people need at that moment,” said Julian Moreno, SBTC disaster relief task force member. Churches can prepare for the offering by participating in the Reach Texas Week of Prayer and Emphasis, from Sept. 17-24. A prayer guide is available online, which includes a seven-day devotional for individuals, families or small groups, with specific prayer points and stories of how God is using SBTC churches and ministries to reach the lost. To download the prayer guide and access additional resources, including videos, posters, bulletin inserts and curriculum for all age ranges, visit the Reach Texas page on the SBTC website: [sbtexas.com/reachtexas](http://sbtexas.com/reachtexas).

# REACH TEXAS

2017-2018

Your SBTC State Missions Offering

## ADVANCING THE KINGDOM IN TEXAS

BUT YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER AND HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM AND IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA AND TO THE END OF THE EARTH



STATEWIDE CHALLENGE GOAL:

# \$1.4 MILLION

# 100%

of your Reach Texas giving is spent on missions and evangelism strategies

## ADVANCING THE KINGDOM IN TEXAS

### WHAT IS THE REACH TEXAS OFFERING?

- The annual state missions ministry offering of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention
- A way for you and your church to participate in a Great Commission strategy for Texas
- A way to start more churches and reach more people for Christ
- A way to help change lives





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# FOUR MYTHS OF “LIVING TOGETHER”



Terri Stovall  
SWBTS

I still remember the week of my wedding. I had just graduated from seminary and needed to move out of student housing. So, Jay, my then-fiancé, moved me into the home he had just rented for us. My family was in town for the wedding, and after an evening in our home of dinner, laughter and storytelling, Jay said his good nights as he prepared to leave for his parents' house where he was living.

A family member was surprised. He didn't understand where Jay was going and why we were not staying together. Our response was: "Because we're not married yet!"

A young woman named Sydney recently wrote an article defending her decision to move in with her boyfriend. They have purchased a house together and are using this time to get to know each other in their journey toward marriage. Sydney professes to be a believer, and the message of her article, as indicated in its subtitle, is "You may not agree and that's fine, but it works for us."

More than likely, you know someone who is in a cohabiting relationship. (Perhaps that someone is you.) Analysis of current census studies by Pew Research indicates that the number of adults cohabiting with a partner continues to rise. Interestingly, while the largest number of cohabiters is in the 18-34 age range, the largest percentage increase is seen in those 50 and over. And many of these, like Sydney, are professing Christians.

As a woman who is a follower of Christ, is it ever okay

to live with your boyfriend as a precursor to marriage? After all, if you are going to get married anyway, what's the harm? Before answering those questions, for our purposes, let's define what we mean by cohabitation before marriage: Cohabitation is living together as a couple, with the full marital privileges of a husband and wife, without being married.

**MYTH: Cohabitation is a new thing and the Bible does not speak against it.**

**ANSWER:** Cohabitation is nothing new. Remember the encounter Jesus had with the Samaritan woman in John 4? He confronted her about her many marriages and even called her out on the fact that the man she was currently living with was not her husband. The Bible may not specifically say, "Thou shall not live with thy boyfriend before marriage." But, like many issues today, we must take the biblical principles and apply them to a practical outworking. Scripture does declare that if you are unmarried you are to remain devoted to the Lord without distraction and to avoid sexual immorality. Even Sydney indicated this tension in her article when she states, "I'm aware that we didn't follow the Bible, and that does bother me."

**MYTH: Cohabitation is okay for Christians as long as we are not having sex.**

**ANSWER:** Technically, it is not a sin for a man and woman to be living in the same household if they are abstinent. But, Scripture does warn that as believers, we are to abstain from every form of evil ... even from the appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22; Eph. 5:3). When we meet a couple who is living together, there is an assumption that they are sharing the same bed. Even



so, if a couple has remained abstinent, as a couple grows closer together, the temptation to become physically intimate grows stronger. Even the most mature of believers can fall in this area right before a wedding if not vigilant. How much more so if you are sleeping in the same space? Instead, we must, as Scripture directs, flee temptation (2 Tim. 2:22-24).

**MYTH: Cohabitation allows us to discover if we are compatible in daily life.**

**ANSWER:** You do learn a lot about someone when you live with him, but that is one of the purposes of dating. You do not have to live together to learn what foods he likes, what music he enjoys, whether someone is a morning person or a night owl, whether he is a neat freak or messier. The dating and courtship phase of any relationship is important. This is where you talk about dreams for family, children and goals. It's where you learn how each other celebrates holidays and what are each other's family traditions. The truth is, you

never stop learning about your spouse after you get married. Saying that you must live with someone to know if you are compatible is a false premise to rationalize a wrong decision.

**MYTH: Cohabitation ensures that we are sexually compatible before we commit to a lifetime.**

**ANSWER:** The wonder of discovering the physical pleasures of the marital relationship is part of the mystery, fulfillment and journey of marriage. But marriage is more than sex and sexual fulfillment. When I was in a serious relationship with a guy in college and we began to talk about marriage, I was encouraged to make sure we were physically compatible before we said, "I do." Today, now married to a different man for over two decades, I am thankful I did not take that advice. Through the ups and downs of life, health scares, and daily challenges, I rest in the understanding that, while the physical sexual act is a wonderful part of marriage, my marriage's fulfillment, sat-

isfaction, love and pleasure are anchored in so much more than just the physical.

Here is the bottom line:


- ◆ Cohabitation before marriage stands in direct opposition to the Bible's teaching on marriage and defiles the marriage bed. (Heb. 13:4)
- ◆ Cohabitation no more prepares you for marriage than changing the diaper on a baby doll prepares you for motherhood. Marriage is a great mystery, and the coming together as one flesh is an emotional, spiritual and physical act that can only be fully understood when you are in a committed, covenant relationship. (Eph. 5:31-32; Gen. 2:24)
- ◆ Any physical, sexual intimacy outside of marriage between one man and one woman is sin. (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3)

Jay and I have now been married 26 years. We chose not to live together as a premarital experiment. These years have been wonderful and hard. They've been full of highs and had their lows. Yet, at the end of the day, they have been worth every minute. It is not easy to stand firm today, but the rewards of going into marriage God's way are great.


My sister, if you are living with a man outside of marriage, even if you see this as a step in the journey toward marriage, this is not God's ideal nor his plan for you. That little nagging feeling and voice is the convicting tug of the Holy Spirit. And, like the woman at the well in John 4, it is not too late to make things right.

God can redeem, restore and help you build a solid marriage relationship if you will seek to do it his way. Cohabitation is never justified in the life of a true follower of Christ. ❖


—This article first appeared on [BiblicalWoman.com](#).

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# MEET AN SBTC CHURCH PLANTER

**CHURCH PLANTER:** Jay Beerley

Family:

**WIFE:** Christi (wife)**KIDS:** Andrew (13) and Anna (8)**NAME OF CHURCH:** Cross Fellowship Church**CITY:** Savannah, TX**WEBSITE:** [www.crossfellowship380.com](http://www.crossfellowship380.com)**WHEN DID YOU PLANT THE CHURCH?**

We started meeting in our home in September 2015.

**WHY DID YOU CHOOSE YOUR CITY/NEIGHBORHOOD TO PLANT?**

This area of North Dallas is rapidly expanding with neighborhoods. With so many people in such a small place, we noticed there just were not many churches in the area. Many of the people we come into contact with that live in our area are transplants and often without a church background. They are seeking community, and we feel a calling to show them what genuine gospel community looks like.

**WHAT'S YOUR CHURCH'S GREATEST NEED?**

Our greatest need is discipleship. Even though many people want to talk about when we will get a permanent building (we meet in a school), the reality is that furthering our love for Jesus and his Word

is what will really impact our community. So many of our people are young in the faith but hungry for growth.

**HOW CAN PEOPLE PRAY FOR YOU, YOUR FAMILY, AND/OR YOUR CHURCH?**

Our biggest item of prayer would be the transition from caring for a small group of believers to a larger congregation. This requires good systems and buy-in from everyone to embrace the New Testament concept of "one another."

**DESCRIBE ONE WAY YOU'VE SEEN GOD MOVE MIGHTILY IN YOUR CHURCH OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS.**

God has been doing incredible things. The month of May brought these victories: we had 28 in our CFC 101 (membership) class, we had 14 children participate in child dedication on Mother's Day, we baptized two adults and four children/youth as well.

**WHAT'S A UNIQUE MINISTRY OPPORTUNITY THAT YOUR CHURCH LEADS OR PARTICIPATES IN?**

Our church has found a distinctive place in our planned community. We take pictures with Easter Bunny and Santa, pass out balloon animals, and volunteer to serve our community in every way possible. One of our values is to not try and reinvent the wheel but to plant and serve in places where our community is already.

**WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON FOR YOUR CHURCH?**

Our major focus right now is the establishment of Bible reading groups, small groups built around the reading of the Word, discussion and prayer. We hope that this will be highly evangelistic. Other than that, we want to continue to build a footprint in our community where it matters that our church is here, and that by the impact of our lives we can show the world around us that "Grace Changes Everything."

## CHURCH POSITIONS

**PASTOR**

- ◆ Timber Crest BC in Waco seeks a FT pastor. Send resumes to Pastor Search Committee, 1625 Crow Drive, Waco, TX 76705 or email: [tcbcwaco@aol.com](mailto:tcbcwaco@aol.com). The church office number is 254-799-5551. [timbercrestbc.org](http://timbercrestbc.org).
- ◆ Martinsville BC (Nacogdoches County) is seeking a PT/bi-vocational pastor that preaches sound Southern Baptist doctrine. Please submit resumes to [pastorsearch@martinsvillebc.com](mailto:pastorsearch@martinsvillebc.com) or mail to Martinsville Baptist Church, Attn: Pastor Search Committee, PO Box 34, Martinsville, TX 75958.
- ◆ Bethel BC in Deer Park is seeking a PT/bi-vocational pastor. Please submit resumes by email to Randy McCartney, Pastor Search Committee Chairman, [bethelbaptistdp@att.net](mailto:bethelbaptistdp@att.net) or by mail to 2702 E Pasadena Blvd, Deer Park, TX 77536.
- ◆ New Life BC in Cooper is seeking a PT pastor. Average Sunday attendance is about 40. Parsonage provided (4 bedroom/2 bath). For more information go to [www.newlifecooper.com](http://www.newlifecooper.com).
- ◆ North Hills BC in Whitesboro is seeking a PT/bi-vocational pastor with a strong sense of leadership to help our church grow. We are a large church with a small congregation. Preferring someone who likes blended worship services and has a passion for drawing families. Resumes can be emailed to [Northhillsbaptistchurch@yahoo.com](mailto:Northhillsbaptistchurch@yahoo.com) or mailed to North Hills Baptist Church, PO Box 649, Whitesboro, TX 76273.
- ◆ FBC of Loop is seeking a pastor for a small rural West Texas Southern Baptist church. Nice parsonage and utilities furnished. Salary is negotiable. For more information contact Danny Yocom, Pastor Search Committee Chairman at (806) 752-6164.
- ◆ Fortress BC in Fritch is seeking a bi-vocational pastor for a congregation of 35 with room to grow. Parsonage provided. Youth ministry and mission-minded important.

Experience and education a plus. Email resumes to [fritchfortress@gmail.com](mailto:fritchfortress@gmail.com).

**MUSIC**

- ◆ FBC in Junction is seeking a FT music leader for worship and church music program. Contact [jfbcmusicedmin@gmail.com](mailto:jfbcmusicedmin@gmail.com).
- ◆ San Saba's FBC is seeking a dynamic leader to nurture a strong worship culture that lifts up the name of Jesus. For more information and to apply, visit [SanSabaFBC.org](http://SanSabaFBC.org).
- ◆ FBC of Mixon is seeking a PT music minister to oversee all aspects of music ministry (choir, praise team, band and media.) Please send resumes to search committee chair, Charles Martin, at [chrismrtn.63@gmail.com](mailto:chrismrtn.63@gmail.com) for consideration.

**COMBINATION**

- ◆ FBC Garrison is a congregation of 140 people seeking a PT worship pastor and a PT student pastor or a combined FT minister. A full resume may be emailed as an attachment to [worshippastorsearch@fbcgarrison.com](mailto:worshippastorsearch@fbcgarrison.com) and/or [youthpastorsearch@fbcgarrison.com](mailto:youthpastorsearch@fbcgarrison.com). Please state the position you are applying for, and include links or attachments of videos/audios of you leading.
- ◆ Custer City BC in Gainesville is searching for a PT music/youth minister. You may email your questions and/or resume to [rkwebb143@msn.com](mailto:rkwebb143@msn.com) or Custer City Baptist Church, 31 Custer City Lane, Gainesville, TX 76240.

**YOUTH**

- ◆ FBC Buffalo is seeking a FT youth minister. Master's level is preferred. Seeking an evangelistic team player who loves students. Email [agrisham@fbcbuffalo.org](mailto:agrisham@fbcbuffalo.org).
- ◆ New Boston's FBC in northeast Texas is seeking a FT student minister whose primary responsibility is leading 7th-12th grade students with additional ministry to 3rd-6th graders. Must hold a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college; seminary

degree preferred. Submit resume to [search@fbcnewboston.com](mailto:search@fbcnewboston.com) or [www.fbcnewboston.com/student-minister-search](http://www.fbcnewboston.com/student-minister-search).

- ◆ Cornerstone BC in Lucas seeks a pastor of students in one of the fastest growing areas of DFW. We are praying for a mature, experienced, fun loving, theologically grounded and God-called youth pastor. Excellence in ministry required. Send resume and references to Darrell Edwards at [pastor@cbcLucas.com](mailto:pastor@cbcLucas.com).
- ◆ Southside BC in Bowie is accepting resumes for a PT/FT youth minister with flexible salary package for 6th-12th graders. Bowie is within commuting distance from DFW and Wichita Falls. Established youth program and very supportive congregation. Email resume to [therog@att.net](mailto:therog@att.net) or at [southsidebowie.weebly.com](http://southsidebowie.weebly.com) or mail to Southside Baptist Church, 311 W Wilbarger St, Bowie, TX 76230.
- ◆ FBC in Silsbee is seeking a PT/FT youth minister to partner with our church and parents to build a foundation on the gospel for our youth. Good organization and communication skills are a plus. Send resumes to [parish.bob@gmail.com](mailto:parish.bob@gmail.com).

- ◆ FBC in Fruitvale is seeking a bi-vocational student minister. Please submit a resume to: First Baptist Church, PO Box 177, Fruitvale, TX 75127 or email to [garykvaughn@aol.com](mailto:garykvaughn@aol.com).
- ◆ Meadowbrook BC in Rockdale is seeking a youth minister who is young, evangelistic, adheres to the BF&M 2000, has a love for youth, people, and is willing to be a team player. Email resumes to [pastorsteve@meadowbrookrockdale.org](mailto:pastorsteve@meadowbrookrockdale.org).

**CHILDREN**

- ◆ FBC in Fruitvale is seeking a PT children's ministry director. Please submit resume to First Baptist Church, PO Box 293, Fruitvale, TX 75127 or email to [garykvaughn@aol.com](mailto:garykvaughn@aol.com).

**OTHER**

- ◆ Farley Street BC is searching for a PT outreach director who is passionate about outreach and missions. Seeking someone who has experience in local and community outreach, leading and caring for and pastoring people. Formal education and/or seminary training is a plus. Send resumes to [resume@farleystreet.com](mailto:resume@farleystreet.com).

## STATE NEWS

- ◆ **THE WALKER MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHAPEL** 30th Anniversary Celebration, Sept. 17, 2017 at 11 a.m., 8135 Wharton's Dock Rd, Bandera, TX 78003. If you have served with us or attended at any time, come and share your fondest memories! A BBQ brisket meal will be served after the service. For information, call 830-796-3171 or 830-688-1560.
- ◆ **THE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS OF CENTRAL TEXAS ASSOCIATION** invites you to a free Apologetics Conference with author and commentator Alex McFarland on Oct. 13-14 at Lakeview Baptist Church, 7717 State Hwy 317, Belton, TX 76513. Pre-registration is required at [www.sbtcta.com](http://www.sbtcta.com). For more information, please call James Stevens at 254-780-1884 or Carrol Hambrick at 254-495-4466 or email [pastor@fbcgholson.org](mailto:pastor@fbcgholson.org).

## PAID CLASSIFIEDS

- ◆ **FBC IOWA PARK, TX** selling: two Da-Lite 120 inch motorized projection screens - \$1,000 for both. 940-592-2151.
- ◆ **ROCK CREEK BC WOMEN'S CONFERENCE:** Building a Culture of Biblical Femininity in the Home, Church & Community will be Oct. 5-7 at the Riley Center on the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. For more information or to register, please visit [RockCreekBC.org](http://RockCreekBC.org) or contact Pat Ennis at 817-923-1921 x3630 or [paennis@swbts.edu](mailto:paennis@swbts.edu).
- ◆ **MESSIAH'S RANCH CHRISTIAN CAMP**, located near Bryan/College Station, will have a few very rare open weeks in the summer of 2018. We have 200 beds on 100 acres and are in high demand, as our facilities are unique. Dates will be grabbed quickly. Check us out at [messiahsranch.org](http://messiahsranch.org).
- ◆ **CUSTOM SCREEN-PRINTED T-SHIRTS FOR CHURCHES** Great prices and free shipping across the state! Small and large orders welcome. Printed by Christian owned and operated business. Call Southeast Texas Printing Co. 409-622-2197.
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# EQUIP: EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY CAN BREATHE LIFE INTO CHURCHES, FLEMING SAYS



David Fleming, pastor of Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston, delivers the keynote message at the 2017 SBTC EQUIP Conference, Aug. 12. PHOTO BY GARY LEDBETTER



Stephanie Chase, kids minister at Champion Forest Baptist Church, leads a breakout session on how to teach children during the 2017 SBTC EQUIP Conference, Aug. 12. PHOTO BY GARY LEDBETTER

**By Keith Collier**  
*Managing Editor*

**HOUSTON** “Jesus had a small group strategy. Do you?” David Fleming asked a crowd of nearly 1,400 pastors and lay leaders at the 2017 SBTC EQUIP Conference, hosted by Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston, Aug. 12. Fleming, pastor of Champion Forest Baptist, gave the conference keynote address, encouraging churches to see effective small group ministry as a “silver bullet” for church growth and discipleship.

“How can we breathe new life into the most comprehensive, organized structure for discipleship, evangelism,

ministry, fellowship, service?” Fleming asked.

Fleming explained from Mark 3:13 that small group ministry is not a new idea, but a very old one. Jesus gathered a small group of men who would be with him so he could send them out to do ministry. Likewise, Fleming said, churches should value small groups—whether they call them Sunday School, life groups, or whatever—as an organized system with powerful spiritual benefits, including community, accountability, discipleship, ministry, mobilization and leadership development.

Regardless of church size, Fleming said, Christians need to connect with other believers. “We are only as strong as the

connections we make,” he said.

Additionally, he explained, “We become like the people we associate with,” acknowledging the discipleship and spiritual growth opportunities through small groups. For this reason, the Bible must be at the center of small group ministry.

Small groups also equip and encourage church members to take responsibility for ministry and service as well as mobilize them for missions, Fleming said. They also provide opportunities for mentoring and training up future leaders.

“Sunday School is not an organization of the church,” he said. “Your Sunday School is your church organized to fulfill the Great Commission.”

Following the opening keynote session, conference participants from more than 160 churches dispersed to breakout sessions on topics related to children’s ministry, adult Sunday School, discipleship, worship, family ministry, men’s and women’s ministry, pastoral ministry, leadership, and more. Sessions were also dedicated to equip Hispanic, Asian and black congregations. Throughout the morning and afternoon sessions, attendees chose four breakouts from a list of more than 250 options, led by 73 trainers.

Jeremy Bradshaw, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Bridge City, brought 10 people from his church.

“EQUIP was a tremendous resource for me, but also for the church staff and volunteers who came with me,” Bradshaw said. “It was the fusion of practical training and spiritual renewal that we needed to continue our mission as a church. Everything was first-rate for minimal expense on our end. It was also an encouragement for my church members to see our Cooperative Program support coming back to strengthen the local church.”

Next year’s EQUIP conference will take place Aug. 11, 2018, at North Richland Hills Baptist Church. For more information, stay tuned to [sbtexas.com/equip](http://sbtexas.com/equip). 📺

## Panel: Financial stewardship is a heart matter

**By Erin Roach**  
*Baptist Press*

**PHOENIX** Good financial stewardship stems from a right relationship with God, and the Bible has plenty to say about managing God’s resources God’s way, a group of pastors said during the President’s Panel on Stewardship June 14 at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix.

Led by SBC President Steve Gaines, the panel consisted of Hance Dilbeck, pastor of Quail Springs Baptist Church in Oklahoma City; Jordan Easley, pastor of Englewood Baptist Church in Jackson, Tenn.; Ronnie Floyd, pastor of Cross Church in Springdale, Ark.; Frank Page, president of the SBC Executive

Committee; K. Marshall Williams, pastor of Nazarene Baptist Church in Philadelphia; and Chris Brown of Ramsey Solutions in Nashville, Tenn.

In a culture where the average American spends \$1.26 for every dollar earned and 70 percent of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck, the church must teach God’s way of handling money because Americans will naturally gravitate toward the world’s way, Brown said.

“The world is doing a great job of teaching their way,” Brown said, adding that God’s way is based on gratitude while the world’s way is tied to entitlement.

Stewardship is about lordship, Dilbeck said, “so when people are struggling with stewardship,

there is that sense of a deeper issue about lordship.” He noted that the Apostle Paul teaching on financial stewardship in 2 Corinthians points to the cross.

“He doesn’t talk about money,” Dilbeck said. “He talks to them about what Jesus has done for us on the cross and how we owe him everything. Oftentimes, I find that people who are struggling with financial stewardship have never really gotten ahold of the lordship of Christ—him owning everything.”

Williams said he considers believers God’s trustees, and each year he leads his church in a series on stewardship. “Many times people’s hearts are right in their wallets, in their pocketbooks,” Williams said. “I figure if you get the heart, you’ve got the wallet.”

One way to preach about stewardship, Floyd said, is to encourage believers through personal testimony. Tell the story of how God impacts individual lives through giving, he said. “It’s grounded in the doctrine of God, that God owns absolutely everything and I own absolutely nothing,” Floyd said.

Easley said that if the Word of God addresses it, the preacher of God’s Word ought to address it. “I believe as shepherds of hearts we have to teach people how to express love to the Lord,” Easley said. “I believe that giving is attached to the expression of love.”

Tithing is a learned spiritual discipline, Dilbeck said, such as prayer, worship and sharing the gospel. “When a child learns to tithe, they’re learning to order their financial life. It’s one of the best things we can do for a young person as we raise them up,” Dilbeck said.

Gaines, pastor of Memphis-area Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn., said his children remember him tearing up credit card applications that would come in the mail.

“If you mortgage the future to pay for the present,” he said, “you’re in a lot of trouble.” 📺



▲ Southern Baptist Convention President Steve Gaines leads the President’s Panel on stewardship with pastors (left to right) Hance Dilbeck, Ronnie Floyd, K. Marshall Williams, Jordan Easley, Frank S. Page, and Chris Brown. PHOTO BY MATT JONES



# PALS MINISTRY MENTORS BOYS FROM SINGLE-PARENT HOMES

By Jane Rodgers

TEXAN Correspondent

**PLANO** A priceless moment between single-mother JoJuana Turner of The Colony and her son occurred recently when 15-year-old Joshua showed his mom how to fish, a skill he learned from PALS mentors at Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano.

"[He showed] me how put together a fishing rod the correct way, how to hold it. He taught me something. This was due to PALS," Turner said, adding, "It is a precious memory. I am so proud of him."

These types of stories make PALS founder Joe Perry smile as he prepares to retire at the end of August following nearly two decades as Prestonwood's minister of missions, his last stop in a pastoral career spanning 33 years serving churches in Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas.

Perry, a former coach, plans to remain active, continuing to sponsor PALS at Prestonwood while exploring ways to partner with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention to expand the program.

PALS (Providing Adult Leadership) started after men on a

church dove hunting retreat expressed a desire to do something for boys without a father in the home.

Perry seized the opportunity and pitched the concept of PALS to the group.

"Throughout my life, God has put me in situations where I've been aware of the needs of inner-city boys in particular, but (also) boys in general who don't have dads," Perry said.

These situations included coaching at Alexandra, Louisiana's all-black Peabody High School in the 1970s where Perry noticed most players were from single-parent homes. "We didn't even have enough dads for a booster club," he recalled.

Later, as a Little League coach in Oklahoma City with two sons himself, Perry recruited boys with absentee fathers to play on his tournament teams, paying expenses with donations. His awareness increased of the great "void" faced by fatherless boys.

With PALS, Perry felt he was finally doing what God had called him to do about the issue.

Funded then as it is now by donations, PALS launched in 2001, providing outings at no cost for boys from single-

parent homes along with volunteer mentors. The format evolved into hunting or fishing weekends.

"Hunting and fishing are what we do because many of my mentors are just good old boys," Perry chuckled.

"Over 300 boys have done at least three trips per year," Perry said. "We seldom encounter a boy who, once he goes on a trip, doesn't want to repeat."

Boys may start PALS at age 8 and participate through high school, provided they have begun PALS by age 14.

Mentors go through training, an intense personal purity analysis, and a background check, Perry said. Rules are strict. Adults and boys are never alone together, except when deer hunting, a trip reserved for boys 10 and older.

Being a mentor is "rewarding" but "tough" and "not glamorous," Perry said.

PALS annual outings include a dove hunt near Wichita Falls, a deer hunting trip near Brownwood, a fishing trip to a ranch near Sherman and a trout fishing excursion and tour of the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center at Athens. Sometimes hog hunts or summer sand bass

or striped fishing trips are held.

Mentors and boys spend nights in tents or church family life centers. Trips involve up to 18 boys.

Each trip incorporates segments from the biblically based REAL curriculum Perry has developed, emphasizing the responsibilities of manhood. Topics include prioritizing a relationship with God, choosing a spouse, exercising leadership, avoiding peer pressure, preparing for a career, handling anger and being honest.

Rochelle Sladky, whose three sons participated in PALS, called Joe "great at fostering relationships and pointing them to the cross," adding that her 29-year-old son always calls Perry when he comes to town.

PALS gave her sons "stability" and "examples of what it looks like to be a good husband [and] good father," Sladky said.

JoJuana Turner laughed that while Joshua balked at messy tasks at home, he could gut a fish or deer with ease in PALS.

"He told me, 'You just do what you have to do, Mom,'" Turner said, adding that Perry

"has made a footprint on Joshua's heart that will last a lifetime."

Perry references the James Dobson claim that if good men would spend four to five hours with fatherless boys four to five times a year, the effect on their lives would be profound.

"We know this is true. We have seen it," Perry said.

Of all the boys in PALS, he said he knows of only one who has had a minor scrape with the law. That boy straightened out, Perry said, adding that most "are active and faithful in churches. They are great men."

Perry said he has nothing but admiration for single-parent moms of boys: "Most men couldn't do the job a single mom does." He intends to keep helping them through PALS.

For more information on starting a PALS program, contact Perry at [jperry@prestonwood.org](mailto:jperry@prestonwood.org). ❧



## Ministering to the families of inmates

**MERCY HEART LAUNCHES ONLINE TRAINING. GOAL: CHANGE PRISON MINISTRY NARRATIVE 'TO INCLUDE FAMILIES'**

By Michael Foust

TEXAN Correspondent

**FORT WORTH** A full 97 percent of Protestant pastors in a LifeWay Research survey earlier this year agreed that churches should care for the families of those who are incarcerated. But only 14 percent of pastors said their church has a formal ministry to that often-neglected group.

Why the disconnect?

The head of a unique ministry that focuses solely on the families of the incarcerated thinks he knows: Pastors and other church leaders simply aren't equipped or don't know what to do.

"That's not something that pastors learn in seminary," Ryan Northcutt, CEO of Mercy Heart, told the TEXAN. "You don't take a class about what to do with these kinds of families. That seems to still be a question that a lot of pastors that we talk to have."

Mercy Heart was formed out of Glenview Baptist Church in Fort Worth in 1995 and has since grown to encompass a small network of congregations nationwide that partner together for the betterment of families of prisoners.

The ministry recently launched an online training platform at [MercyHeart.org](http://MercyHeart.org) that allows church leaders to train their members to reach out to the families of inmates. The platform includes training videos for leaders and volunteers, as well as downloadable curriculum.

Unlike traditional prison ministries that focus on inmates, Mercy Heart assists the families back home who are without a key member—often a father—and are struggling to make ends meet. It also assists ex-offenders as they transition back into society and family life.

"We minister to children," said Roger Hollar, the founder and director emeritus of Mercy Heart. "We minister to moms

and dads who have a son or a daughter in prison. We're trying to change the whole prison ministry narrative to include families in that discussion and in that conversation."

Mercy Heart is the only such ministry nationwide that uses the local church to assist such families, Hollar said.

"Law enforcement will tell you that it's critical what happens with the family before the person comes home as to whether or not they'll be successful in their re-entry," Hollar said. "The family is essential."

"Statistically, most churches already have these families in the church," Northcutt said. "They just don't know about it. Families who have a loved

one incarcerated are living in the shadows of society. There's a stigma that's attached to it. There's a shame. There's a fear."

Northcutt hopes the digital training platform will boost the number of churches who are involved. In the past, a training session at a church required the physical on-site presence of a Mercy Heart representative. That no longer is necessary.

"We have taken 20 years' worth of experience and translated it into this digital content, and we've put all of our training resources and curriculum onto the website so that a pastor can access it immediately right where they're at," Northcutt said.

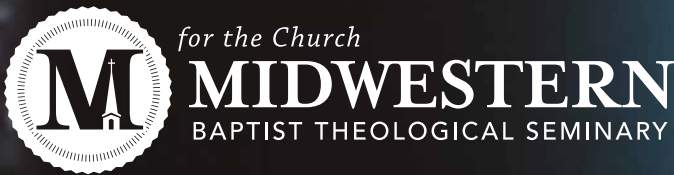
For more information, visit [MercyHeart.org](http://MercyHeart.org). ❧



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## FROM TRANSGENDER TO TRANSFORMED:

## ‘PRODIGAL’ DAUGHTER’S RETURN ANSWERS MOTHER’S PRAYERS

By Brian Hobbs  
The Baptist Messenger

**BARTLESVILLE, Okla.** Francine Perry and her daughter Laura recently sat down to look at family photos. As they reflected on the good times, they also could see how God was at work, especially through the difficult times—and there were many of those.

On the heels of rebellious teenage years, Laura lived as a transgender man for nearly a decade of her adult life. Other than her family and select friends, though, most people just knew Laura as “Jake.”

Laura was living with a partner who also identified as transgender and had become estranged from family members and the church.

Laura had grown up in a Christian home. Her parents, Paul and Francine, were and are active members of First Baptist Church of Bartlesville, Okla., where they took Laura and her siblings to church nearly every time the doors were open.

“I grew up going to church constantly,” Laura said. “I was in Sunday School, children’s choir, GA’s, Bible Drill, VBS and more. But ultimately I lacked a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Growing up, Laura constantly struggled with her sexual identity and did not “feel” like a girl. She experienced other various challenges through childhood, which culminated in poor choices in her teen years and later embracing a transgendered life during her 20s.

When they found out about Laura’s choice to embrace a transgender male identity, Laura’s parents were devastated.

“At first I said, ‘how could you do this to us, after all we have done for you?’” Francine said.

Though she had support from friends in church and in her ladies Bible study, Francine felt depressed and isolated because of the family’s plight. Out of a sense of desperation and hopelessness, she began to dive deeper into God’s Word.

“I realized, through our ‘prodigal child’ experience, that I had a more works-based faith in Christ, a more legalistic mindset,” Francine acknowledged. “I was Pharisee-like in so many ways.”

God, though, began to soften Francine’s heart. Her ladies Bible study group began to lift up Laura in prayer. Yet things got worse before they got better.

Laura once wrote a letter to her mother that said, “This

is what I was supposed to be. Please accept me.”

Francine and Paul began to become more open in sharing their struggles. The Perrys also refused to believe that God would leave Laura in the transgender life. They asked people to pray.

Meanwhile, Laura had delved deeper into the transgender life, attending pro-LGBT support groups and even taking hormonal and surgical steps to become less feminine and more masculine.

“I bought into the lies of Satan, believing that my sinful choices would make me happy,” Laura said. “Inside, I was miserable and searching for real peace.”

Laura’s transgender partner happened to be a staunch political conservative, which exposed Laura to various talk radio and teaching programs.

“I got fascinated with the idea of absolute truth,” she said. Her interest in politics led her then to listen to biblical preaching on the radio.

One day a co-worker asked if she was a Christian. Laura said, “Yes.”

“That was the first time in a long time that I said I had anything to do with Christianity,” she said.

It would be a long road leading home, but God began to awaken faith and belief in Laura.

“I always knew about Jesus and believed. But I never knew Jesus personally or made him Lord of my life,” Laura said.

Eventually, the truth began to get through, bit by bit. And Laura reached a breaking point.

“God opened my eyes to the truth. He made me realize that the transgender life was not his will for my life, that it was a dead end. But I was still conflicted.”

One day, through tears and much struggle, Laura prayed

“I AM LIVING PROOF THAT  
GOD’S LOVE IS GREATER  
THAN THE DEVIL’S LIES.”

—LAURA PERRY

and asked God for help. She was, however, still in a transgender lifestyle and relationship. God continued to work on her heart.

Francine and Paul kept the lines of communication open and met with Laura from time to time.



▲ Francine, left, and Laura with a family photo album. After many rocky years, God has fully restored family relationships.

PHOTO BY BRIAN HOBBS

▼ Past & Present: Laura when she was known as “Jake” (left), and Laura today (right). PHOTO BY BRIAN HOBBS



Francine said, “It was as if God said to me, ‘If you keep trying to fix Laura yourself, I will not. If you just sit down and leave Laura to me, I will work.’”

That began the change, not only in Francine’s life and heart but Laura’s as well.

Laura asked her mother one day, “Is it OK if I come to church?” Francine, who was the church pianist, struggled with the idea of Laura coming to church.

“I thought if she showed up to church looking like a man,

“Satan whispers in your ear along this dark road, but God’s grace won out,” Francine said.

Laura eventually made the hard, painful decision to turn away from her transgender life, leaving her partner, and made the step home, moving back home with her parents.

“I didn’t know what came next,” Laura said. “But I was clinging to God’s promise that He would take care of me. I experienced such love and acceptance from my mother’s Bible study group. It was hard, but I had never experienced such peace and love as when I came back to the church.”

The ladies group helped Laura acquire a new wardrobe, including earrings and dresses. Members of First Baptist have continued to walk alongside Laura.

Brandi Biesiadecki, wife of pastor James Biesiadecki, has mentored Laura.

“It is so encouraging to see the true repentance and restoration Laura has undergone,” she said.

Last August, Laura made her decision to follow Christ public in front of the church and was baptized the following month.

Today, Laura has fully embraced her God-given sexuality as a woman, and she is active in the church.

The journey home, which took place a year ago, has led to both restoration and reconciliation. Francine and Paul believe God answered their prayers, and they believe that parents should never stop praying for their “prodigal” child or children.

They give all glory to God. “Only God could have done this,” Francine said.

Pastor James also sees God’s grace demonstrated in the Perry family.

“Laura’s testimony, and the testimony of the Perry family, is proof that Jesus is the answer to sin and life’s struggles,” he said. “I am so thankful for this dear family, and I pray Laura’s testimony of salvation and new life in Christ will continue to inspire many people.”

In addition to co-teaching a Sunday School class at church, Laura has been able to share her story in front of audience, as well as on Tony Perkins’ national radio program.

“I am living proof that God’s love is greater than the devil’s lies,” Laura said with a smile. ☀