

SOUTHERN BAPTIST Texan

APRIL 2017

Newsjournal of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention ★ MORE NEWS AT TEXANONLINE.NET



EMPOWER CONFERENCE:

*Christian unity
must undergird
gospel witness*

By Keith Collier

TEXAN Correspondent

LAS COLINAS

"Pragmatically, the failure of the Christian church to pursue unity ... undercuts all the praying and the crying and the snorting we do about revival," Kevin Smith told attendees at the Southern Baptists of Texas Empower Conference. Smith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, was one of about a dozen main session speakers who addressed the 2,082 registered for the annual evangelism conference at the Irving Convention Center in Las Colinas, Feb. 27-28.

Noting racial, political, generational and economic divisions in society, Smith exhorted Christians in a sermon from Ephesians 4:1-6 to not let these divisions put them at odds with fellow believers.

"Stop freaking out, read the Bible, don't be ashamed of the gospel, and don't be ashamed of the people that the gospel calls," Smith said.

"We can't be ashamed of each other. We can't back up from our fellowship and our relationship and our love for one another. We live in a di-

See EMPOWER, 10

Preacher, Firefighter, Mayor

Pastor takes community involvement to another level



By Jane Rodgers

TEXAN Correspondent

LEFORS Since coming to First Baptist Church of Lefors in March 2014, Ken Houston has done many things for the first time: shot a buck, made EMT calls, fought grass fires, and was elected mayor. "Preacher," as locals call him in the Texas Panhandle town of 500, is making a difference.

Outside Lefors, oil rigs and windmill farms dot the dry, grassy countryside west toward Pampa. First Baptist is the largest church in town, growing from 30 in attendance when Houston arrived to around 60-70 each Sunday.

"We'll pack the place on Easter," Houston tells the TEXAN.

Staccato bursts from Houston's emergency radio sound the alert that 40- to

60-mile-per-hour winds threaten the parched countryside.

"Grass fires today," Houston says. Upon arrival at the Lefors firehouse, two of the four fire trucks have rolled out, but a third "won't crank," says another fireman.

"I love being a fireman," Houston says, "standing on the front end of the truck

See LEFORS, 2

PAST FIVE YEARS: OVER 10,000 PATIENTS. 2,419 INFANTS SAVED. 509 PROFESSIONS OF FAITH.

CHOOSE LIFE

San Antonio medical center offers life-saving alternative to Planned Parenthood

By Jane Rodgers

TEXAN Correspondent

► (left-to-right) Life Choices Medical Center executive director Charity Farrar, board chairman and Village Parkway Baptist Church pastor Steve Branson, and clinic director Donna Schmidt stand in front of a proposed rendering of a new building.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LIFE CHOICES MEDICAL CENTER

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LEFORS

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spraying water.” He responded to almost 50 fires last year and has been treated for smoke inhalation. Emergency response provides him “an opportunity to minister to people on probably the worst day they have ever had.”

Lefors ISD and its 165 students is another avenue of ministry. A \$3 million bond has paid to renovate the high school auditorium, but the building dates from 1923. Two-thirds of the students qualify for free lunch.

“Ken doesn’t shy away from showing God’s love and compassion to anybody,” Lefors ISD Superintendent Joe Waldron says. The two worked together during Houston’s stint on the school board, a post he resigned when elected mayor.

Born in Chicago, Houston’s small-town high school experience in Havana, Ill., prepared him for life in Lefors, as did his upbringing in Southern Baptist churches. His family has settled in nicely as well, with his wife Margo teaching kindergarten.

Houston came to Texas in 1982 with a criminal justice degree from Illinois State, turning to retail and pest control when law enforcement jobs proved elusive. Transferred to Abilene, he and a friend started a pest control business that was later bought by a national firm. Eventually as a branch manager for that national firm, Houston “had it made,” working from 8 to 4 and “talking theology” with his friend and service manager.

His “highest bonus” equaled his “first year’s salary at FBC Lefors ... and I was miserable,” Houston laughs.

“You are not where God wants you to be,” his friend said.

With Margo’s encouragement, Houston started online classes through Liberty University.

“I started taking classes, and God started opening doors.” Houston supplied pulpits in Amarillo and around the Panhandle until FBC Lefors called.

“We felt so loved,” Houston says of the church. “We were surrendered to wherever God wanted to send us.” The congregation’s vote to call him was unanimous.

Deacons asked if he would be involved in the community.

“Absolutely,” answered Houston. Besides volunteering as a fireman and training as an EMT, he attended school events, spoke at baccalaureate services and ate lunch at the senior citizen center. He balked when asked to run for mayor as a write-in, trying unsuccessfully to convince others to run.

He won the election with 79 percent of the vote.

Houston has “been really good” as mayor, city secretary Lindy Forsyth says. “He



has grounded everybody. He’s had a lot of experience. Going back to him being a preacher, he deals with people very well. I get a lot of angry people in here. He can diffuse a situation quickly.”

Small town administrators face challenges uncommon to their counterparts in larger municipalities.

“You’ve dug several ditches,” Forsyth reminds Houston. “We put him to work at the wastewater plant cleaning up sludge.”

“Christians need to be involved civically,” Houston says. “Everybody else has a voice and they are certainly sharing it.” His two goals as mayor are to see the outdated wastewater plant modernized and the groundwater storage tank refurbished.

A drive up a gravel road in Houston’s pickup leads to the water tank and an overlook. From this vantage point stretches the expanse of Lefors: a collection of brick and frame homes, slag and paved streets. The church’s tall white steeple stands visible above the skyline. Houston says he sometimes drives up here to pray over the town but doesn’t “do it near enough.”

Another pickup pulls alongside Houston’s on the dusty road. “Hey Preacher, why ain’t you fightin’ the fire?” an elderly man asks with a grin.

“They had enough without me,” Houston replies, introducing 83-year-old Floyd Lott, who calls himself the “oldest active firefighter in Texas.”

“He is an honest, straightforward young man,” Floyd says of Houston.

After Floyd drives off, Houston points to a grassy field where a young man he had baptized threatened suicide one cold evening. Deputies surrounded the area. Houston, sick with the flu, convinced authorities to let him help.

“You know what you’re asking?” the sheriff asked. He didn’t at first but realized quickly as they fitted him with a bullet proof vest and escorted him into the field behind a shield flanked by armed deputies.

“You’ve got people who love you. Your family loves you. I love you. Think about your baby,” Houston told the man. “It’s cold. I’m cold. Come on out, and let’s talk about this.” The young man finally did and later thanked him.

Houston calls his mother’s death in 2012 a “turning point.” His “greatest regret” is that she never saw him preach, but the family has brought her legacy to Lefors. A plaque erected at the city cemetery honors Mrs. Houston and marks the new



fence donated by the family in her memory.

“We wanted Mom to be part of our life here,” said Houston. “God sent us to minister here as long as he wants us here. We are going to make as much difference as we can.”

Grassfires engulfed the Panhandle within a week of the TEXAN’s interview with Preacher, claiming three lives

in McLean, five miles from Lefors. The Lefors VFD responded; Houston spent two nights fighting the blazes and was called out again the afternoon of March 8. He cancelled that evening’s Wednesday night Bible study in favor of a community-wide prayer event at the church.

For more information, visit leforsfirstbaptistchurch.com. ☘

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS OF TEXAS CONVENTION

2017 EXHIBIT QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Approved exhibitors at the SBTC Annual Meeting include (subject to available space) SBTC ministries, SBC agencies, SBTC ministry relationships (under the oversight of the Ministry Relationships Committee of the Executive Board), Baptist associational ministries, and any host church. All other entities desiring booth space must submit their request in writing to Joe Davis at the SBTC, prior to June 1, 2017.

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

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

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

LIFE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Nobody gave Donna Schmidt options when she had two abortions as a teenager. Schmidt’s parents, the boy’s parents and her pastor recommended the initial procedure in 1970s California. Today, Schmidt, a registered nurse, serves as clinic director of San Antonio’s Life Choices Medical Center to ensure patients in crisis pregnancies understand their choices and receive professional prenatal care.

Life Choices began more than 20 years ago as the Agape Pregnancy Center. Schmidt, an original board member, was encouraged at that time by her pastor, Steve Branson of Village Parkway Baptist Church in Northwest San Antonio, to become involved. A graduate nursing school research paper on the topic of informed consent led Schmidt, then in her 40s, to find healing. “I started having flashbacks about my abortions,” Schmidt recalled. “God used that class to bring me to abortion recovery.” God kept “pressing on my heart” to tell Branson about her past, Schmidt told the TEXAN. Both found the conversation transformative as Branson discussed the challenges of addressing abortion from the pulpit. His interest in abortion recovery grew. Branson has chaired the board of Life Choices for the past five years. “I feel like it’s my center,” he joked, adding that while other churches are

involved with Life Choices, Village Parkway “is the main one,” having contributed \$800,000 to date. In addition to Schmidt, executive director Charity Farrar and more than half the volunteers and board members attend the church. From a “mom and pop” pregnancy center, Life Choices has transformed into a comprehensive well-woman health clinic for underserved populations, Branson said. The shift began in 2011 with assistance from Focus on the Family. The clinic was recently approved as a Medicaid provider through the state’s Healthy Texas Woman program. “We’ve never charged for our services,” Farrar said. “We can be reimbursed for [Medicaid] services from the state of Texas, but the patient never pays.” Life Choices provides prenatal and well-woman care, including cervical cancer screening, STD and STI testing. Non-medical services include counseling and classes in parenting, nutrition, lactation and home safety. Personnel facilitate patients’ enrollment in GED and college courses and provide daycare, housing and adoption referrals. Material assistance with diapers, wipes and clothing is also available. Until this year, volunteer medical professionals have staffed the clinic, but as of March 1, a nurse practitioner will be employed full time by the center, which expects to see 4,000 patients a year. A 2017 grant of \$100,000 from a local non-profit, coupled with the center’s qualification as a Medicaid provider, has made the addition of the full-time nurse practitioner possible. The grant will cover services for about 670 patients or 1,800 visits. A larger grant is promised next year if the center accomplishes its goals, Farrar said. “Our grant is for spiritual wellness, dealing with crisis pregnancies, well-woman care, cervical cancer screenings and prenatal care,” Farrar explained,

“[At Life Choices], we are doing everything that Planned Parenthood says they do, but we don’t kill babies.”

—STEVE BRANSON OF VILLAGE PARKWAY BAPTIST CHURCH IN NORTHWEST SAN ANTONIO

noting that center personnel will follow up with patients on both health matters and their spiritual journeys. Life Choices is also a part of the Alternative to Abortion program of the Texas Pregnancy Care Network established in 2006. “We are one of their top providers,” Farrar said, adding that as such, the center certifies that it does not make abortion referrals. Informed consent is the goal. Life Choices staff use the booklet “A Woman’s Right To Know” published by the Texas Department of Health, which includes information on abortion, pregnancy and adoption to educate clients. “We give them all of the information. We do not judge them,” Schmidt said. “If they walk into an abortion clinic, they are not going to get the whole story,” Farrar added. “We go over all of their options—the risks and benefits—so that they can make an intelligent decision. The decision is completely theirs.” If a woman chooses to carry a pregnancy to term, Farrar said the center personnel will “walk them through” or provide contacts to adoption agencies. The center makes no referrals to abortion clinics but welcomes patients to return for future services, including abortion recovery. “We will be here to help them pick up the pieces afterwards,” Farrar said.

“Counseling is very lovingly done. They will be exposed to the gospel: Christ being the one and only way. We will love them through whatever has



happened, no matter what,” Branson said. Still, the goal is to “save babies,” Branson noted, adding that 2,419 infants had been saved in the last five years. In that same time period, the center saw more than 10,000 patients and 509 professions of faith. Branson and Farrar credit the gift of two sonogram machines from the local Knights of Columbus Council as instrumental in convincing parents-to-be to choose life. With its location near a city bus terminal close to Ingram Park Mall, Life Choices is accessible from all parts of San Antonio and less than two miles from Village Parkway Baptist Church. “[At Life Choices], we are doing everything that Planned Parenthood says they do,” Branson said, “but we don’t kill babies.”

Texas Baptist Home for Children president resigns

By Texan Staff

WAXAHACHIE The board of trustees for the Texas Baptist Home for Children accepted the resignation of President Eddie Marsh, effective immediately, during a special session March 9. According to a statement from board chairman Charles Johnson, Marsh, who has served as president for 12 years, “has chosen to take retirement.” “The board thanks Bro. Eddie for his service to the Home during his term as the leader of the Home ministry. Our prayers are extended to him and his wife Lynda as they transition to the next place of service the Lord has for them in His Kingdom’s work,” the statement continued.

Randy Odom, executive vice-president of Texas Baptist Home, will serve as interim president until a replacement is selected. Jami Hogan, programs administrator, will assist Odom in leading the organization. Trustees said the two have 41 combined years of employment at the home and have served during similar times of transition in the past. “The trustees are confident with God’s helping hand, gifted leaders, and strong staff members working in one accord that the Home ministry will continue to successfully function during this vacancy,” the statement read. Trustees decided to spend the next month in prayer before beginning the search for a new president. Guidelines for the process will be determined at the regular quarterly board meeting on April 11. Texas Baptist Home for Children is an affiliated ministry with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.



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THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL TO THE GOSPEL



Jim Richards
Executive Director

Easter is April 16 this year. Since Easter observance is based on the movement of the moon it fluctuates significantly. Historically, the earliest Easter has arrived is March 22, which happened in 1818, and latest is April 25, which occurred in 1943.

As we approach Easter I could not resist putting forth a thought for consideration. We know that our current

Western calendar is four years off of historical accuracy. This would put Jesus being born in 4 B.C. and starting his ministry around 26 A.D., with the crucifixion and resurrection taking place in 30 A.D. Passover (Jesus' crucifixion as the Pascal Lamb) would have been April 6 by our present calendar dating, which would mean that Jesus was crucified on Thursday. So much for Good Friday! But the resurrection was still on Sunday! Now that I've stirred that hornet's nest, let's move on to the more important topic, the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus, the

foundation for hope on Easter.

As a student in a Baptist college I heard in a chapel service that it wasn't important whether Jesus literally and bodily resurrected from the dead. I was told as long as the influence of Jesus lived on in me that was the important thing. Denying the miraculous was not uncommon in our Baptist institutions almost a half-century ago. For those who get weary of hearing about battles for the Bible, let me remind you that eternal vigilance is necessary to preserve the truth. The battle for the Bible will be over when Jesus returns.

The testimony of Jesus Christ is found in every book of the Bible. The Bible is our only reliable witness of the historicity of Jesus and his words. Five times Jesus was seen on the Resurrection Day: Mary Magdalene, the women, Peter, the eleven, and the two disciples traveling to the village of Emmaus. Easter is a good time to reintroduce others to the literal, bodily resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection is the foundation of the gospel. Without the resurrection, the cross is a sad ending of a good man; with the resurrection, the cross is the sufficient sacrifice of the God-man. The Apostle Paul put it plainly that "if Christ is not risen, your faith is in vain; you are yet in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Without the resurrection, we have no hope; but with it, we have the assurance of eternal life. Preaching the gospel must

include the resurrection because it is an integral part of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

The resurrection promises us a glorious future. Believers will not live in eternity as disembodied spirits but will receive resurrected bodies like Jesus. "We know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). We have much to celebrate.

Christians observe the resurrection every Sunday when we gather to worship. A life-changing experience is available with the risen Lord. This is what Christianity is all about—the living Lord Jesus. Is this extremism? Yes. So are Islam, Communism, and secularism. It is time to get extreme about the living Lord Jesus. He puts within us a desire to tell the Good News like the women on that first Easter morning. It is easy to find bad news; let's be bearers of the Good News. He's alive! ✠

WISE AS SERPENTS:

Why the SBC adopted a board of trustees model



Gary Ledbetter
Editor

A GOOD LEADER WILL SOMETIMES FIND THE PACE SET BY 40 BOARD MEMBERS TEDIOUS, BUT A WISE LEADER WILL KNOW HIS OWN LIMITATIONS.

Jesus more than once exalted "common" sense or decency in the course of his teaching. In some of those cases he acknowledged that even unbelievers do this; other places he referred to the self-evident reasonableness of behavior with a spiritual application. Some strategies that work in a business application translate easily to the life of churches or institutions with a godly purpose. This is why books intended to support the work of tech companies or financial institutions find popularity among Christian leadership gurus. People have common traits whether they are church members or sales associates.

Some of the things we observe in our neighbors are true of us, even the smartest of us. When Jesus compared mortal fathers with our heavenly father in Matthew 7, he said to his followers, "if you then, being evil ..." Proverbs 14 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of

death." This verse does not say, "There is a way that seems right to an unbeliever..." Here, we are warned of our need for revelation and "many counselors."

This is why Southern Baptists have adopted a board of trustees model for our institutions. Those trustees find God's best leader for the institution, our churches hail their decision as sagacious, and then those boards govern that leader's work on behalf of those churches. We don't send only famous pastors and accomplished laymen to serve on those boards; we include your pastor, housewives from your church, and average laymen on those boards. Why hobble genius leaders with amateurs who only visit the head office a few times (in one of our institutions only one time) each year? Isn't it more efficient to let a godly leader run free toward greater accomplishment?

It is more efficient, usually. Autocracy can be the most efficient form of governance. But we've also observed that "there is a way that seems right to a man." Our goal should be wisdom rather than efficiency. A good leader will sometimes find the pace set by 40 board members tedious, but a wise leader will know his own limitations. Here are some reasons why even our most crucial Great Commission work benefits from board oversight.

Gifted and God-called leaders are not infallible—Remember the great, unsolicited advice that Moses' father-in-law gave him about delegating authority. Moses might have said, "Who spoke to the burning bush, you or me?" Instead Moses heard and took good advice from someone not called to be the leader. Jethro actually confronted Moses when he said, "What you are doing is not good."

None of us knows what's coming—In Ecclesiastes 8, Solomon reminds us that none of us knows the day of his death or the outcome of the days between now and then. The best we can do is seek the Lord, who does know those things. The New Testament witness is that God's people better discern the will of the Lord corporately. We saw this when the apostles sought a replacement for Judas, again when the church appointed servants to care for widows, and even in the deliberation of the apostles over the ministry of Paul to the Gentiles. Even the best of those leaders made mistakes, misspoke or sinned in the course of a God-called ministry. They seemed to value the companionship and correction of those who shared a commitment to the same work.

The work of Southern Baptists flows outward from churches—Clothing retailers or fast-food companies live or die depending on how well they hear their customers. They need people to choose their products over their competitors' and give them money. Our mission is grander than fast food, but it still depends on the trust and support of churches and lay-

men who agree with how our mission is being implemented. A Southern Baptist leader fails when he loses touch with those who sent him, who appointed his board and who express agreement with the direction of his ministry by funding it. A leader's friends and direct reports—advisors he selects—cannot be the only voices he hears.

These are a few of many reasons why even the tedious system Southern Baptists use is better than the alternatives we've found so far. Those to whom we are accountable should be as diverse as those who sent us and empower our ministries. That is why I believe responsible and fair news media should have access to a bit more than any chief executive (or his lawyer) is comfortable with. The presidents in Richmond, Alpharetta, Washington, Nashville, Dallas, Fort Worth, Louisville, New Orleans, Wake Forest, Kansas City, and Ontario all need those they lead to know their work in a way not crafted solely by corporate public relations staff.

We need counsel and accountability, unless we are exceptions to biblical descriptions of mortal, limited, fallible men. There is only one leader like that, and all of us already serve him. ✠

SBC
Southern
Baptists of Texas
Convention

Southern Baptist TEXAN

VOLUME 16 NUMBER 04 APRIL 2017

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

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

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STAGGERED & HUMBLLED



Jonathan Akin
NAMB Director of Young
Leader Engagement

I took Intermediate Greek in seminary with Dr. John Polhill, and we did our work in Philippians for the entire semester. Each student had to select a passage in Philippians on which to write three exegetical papers. I grew up listening to my dad preach a wonderful message on Philippians 2:1-11, so I selected that passage for my papers. That beautiful passage that some think was an early Christian hymn tells all about the humility of Christ and how he voluntarily set aside privileges that were rightly his in order to serve humanity. I was pumped about digging into the Greek syntax and learning more about it. I studied that passage for four months. I did lexical work, syntactical work and exegetical work. I knew the ins and outs of all the Greek clauses. In fact, I memorized the passage in Greek. You could say I was an expert on Philippians 2. The problem is that while I worked hard to become an intellectual expert on Philip-

pians 2, I didn't work hard to become a practical expert on it. Far from having the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5) and far from displaying the humility of Christ, I actually became more arrogant and prideful. Despite Dr. Polhill's best efforts to challenge the students, including me, to make this more than an intellectual exercise, I failed to adequately apply the passage to my life. Regretfully, as a young minister, I have often been guilty of arrogance and pride. I have often thought I knew better than my elders. I have often been cocksure that my solutions to the problems were always the correct ones. I still have Philippians 2:5-11 memorized, at least in English, but I often fail in having the mind of Christ. And yet, the other day I was convicted and challenged anew to apply Philippians 2 in my life when I got to see firsthand a brother in Christ powerfully demonstrate the humility of Jesus to me. I met recently with some state convention executive directors. Backstory: I have at times been very critical of state conventions and state convention leaders. So, I was

REGRETFULLY, AS A YOUNG MINISTER, I HAVE OFTEN BEEN GUILTY OF ARROGANCE AND PRIDE. I HAVE OFTEN THOUGHT I KNEW BETTER THAN MY ELDERS.

meeting with some men who had every reason to be upset with me. One of the men in the room was Dr. J. Robert White, the executive director of Georgia's state convention, and he asked to go first. I braced myself wondering what he would say. However, Dr. White turned the conversation on a dime and changed the temperature of the room with his first sentence, "Jonathan, I want to ask you to forgive me." I was caught off guard and humbled within seconds. Dr. White went on to say that I had written some hurtful things about the Georgia Baptist Convention, and he said that instead of doing the biblical thing that he knew to do—call me or come see me to talk it out like brothers—he chose to just be upset with me. For that he said he was sorry

and sought my forgiveness. It was such a powerful moment. I was almost moved to tears and did choke up when it was my turn to speak (especially since it's a ministry of Georgia Baptists that led to my mom to faith in Christ while she lived at the Georgia Baptist Children's Home). It was a powerful moment because Dr. White displayed the mind of Christ. Dr. White is a man in a very important position. He is my elder. He has tenure in ministry longer than I have been alive. He honestly didn't owe me anything. I hadn't had the respect or courtesy to call him or sit down with him before I wrote those things. And yet, he voluntarily humbled himself before me. He apologized to me. He sought my forgiveness. In that moment I was reminded of Philippians

2 again, and I knew that's the kind of man I want to be. I was staggered. I was humbled by Dr. White. Of course, I forgave him and I sought his forgiveness in return. In my zeal to see more resources get to the places with little to no gospel witness, I have sometimes been guilty of being uncharitable to other brothers and have arrogantly thought my proposed solutions are the only right ones. Dr. White graciously forgave me as well. It was an encouraging and convicting meeting—one I'll never forget. And it's a reminder to me that knowing the Word is one thing but practicing the Word is quite another. I hope this will be a challenge to all students and young pastors. I know it's a challenge to me. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5) and "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). ✝

Jonathan Akin, pastor of Fairview Baptist Church in Lebanon, Tenn., since 2011, has been named to begin a young leader initiative of the SBC Executive Committee and North American Mission Board to better engage pastors between the ages of 25-45 [see brief on page 6]. This article first appeared in The Christian Index, newjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

Easter and the Posture of Hope: Why are you looking for the living among the dead?



Christopher A. Graham
Criswell College

The day of Jesus' resurrection has always been an orienting point for Christians. From the beginning, it was the day for their weekly gatherings. Soon it became a pivotal day in the annual Christian calendar. Prior to Easter each year, we reflect on Jesus' perfect submission—from his victory over Satan's temptations in the wilderness to his ultimate act of obedience on the cross. We examine our own devotion and deal intentionally with the temptations and distractions that keep us from full obedience. The posture prior to Easter, then, reflects a penitent heart. At Easter, this posture of penitence gives way to a posture of celebration. The commemoration of Jesus's resurrection pivots us from contemplating the humility of the suffering Lamb to celebrating the power of the risen Lamb; from identifying with the crucified Servant to exalting the victorious Savior.

This shift in postures is rooted in the events that occurred on the very day of Jesus' resurrection. The two women who went to Jesus' tomb that morning received the first lesson on proper Easter posture. The lesson comes in the form of a question: "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5). While it is true that the question has something to do with their location at the tomb, it is their posture that prompts the question. Luke reports that when the women "inclined their faces to the ground" the messengers asked the question, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" Why would the women's posture toward the ground prompt this question? Because early Christians knew that they lived in a world governed by the words of Genesis 3:19: "You will eat food by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it; for you are dust, and you will return to dust." The women's posture that morning was entirely reasonable in light of these words. Each and every body laid in a tomb

ALLOW THE FACT OF JESUS' RESURRECTION TO GIVE YOU THE CONFIDENCE TO FACE YOUR FUTURE. WITH HIS RESURRECTION IN MIND, STAND UP AND FACE YOUR FUTURE WITH HOPE.

would return to the ground, the dust. A change had occurred that morning, however, that the women's posture did not reflect. Jesus' resurrection had brought about a new posture. The women should not be inclined toward the ground looking for Jesus but standing and facing him as their risen Lord. Easter posture is not, however, merely standing and facing the resurrected Lord. It is standing and facing our future because of his resurrection. Forty days prior to Easter, some Christians have ash placed on their foreheads and hear the words: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." They are reminded of the brevity of life and the urgency of present obedience. If you have been to a funeral this past

year, you don't need an ashen symbol to remind you of the brevity of life or that death still grips creation. As you inclined your face toward the body that was to be placed in the ground, you were confronted with the fact that this is not how God created that person. The eulogies testified to the fact that there is no one in the world who spoke, sang, laughed or loved like the one whose body lay in the casket. It is at just this point where the women's lesson is vital for us because the Easter posture is a posture of hope. Death results in the body returning to the ground—for now. Sorrow and grief are real—for now. Because of Jesus's resurrection, however, we can stand and face our future with hope. Paul says it this way: "But now

Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Are you struggling to face your future? Maybe you have experienced a great tragedy in your life: the death of a friend or family member, a diagnosis of a terminal disease. Maybe the loss of someone or something that has provided security has shaken your confidence in the future: the betrayal of a close friend or spouse, the loss of a job. Maybe anxiety is just your persistent struggle; you struggle to face the future even in the absence of crises. The question is good for you to hear: Why do you seek for the living among the dead? Allow the fact of Jesus' resurrection give you the confidence to face your future. With his resurrection in mind, stand up and face your future with hope. ✝



Surprise: Older people donate money online, too

Nearly one in three people 75 and older who give money to charities say they have done so online, according to a new survey

that questions conventional wisdom on the issue. Just as significant, those among this older generation who give online have donated through the internet 25 percent more frequently than younger generations. Although the survey was of the general population and not of churchgoers, it may help provide church leaders with more data as they examine the pros and cons of online giving.

“We often think of the younger donor as the one giving online,” said Rick Dunham, president and CEO of Dunham+Company, which commissioned the survey. “But the fact is the older donor demographic is beginning to adopt this giving behavior.” The study was conducted by Campbell Rinker among 1,391 U.S. donors who had given at least \$20 to a charity in the past year. —A. Larry Ross Communications

News BRIEFS

Man who sued church for publicizing baptism loses case



An ex-Muslim who sued the church that publicized his conversion has lost his case at the Oklahoma Supreme Court. The unidentified man, a Syrian Muslim, converted to Christianity and then asked First Presbyterian Church in Tulsa, Okla., to baptize him, which it did in December 2012. But the church then listed information about the baptism in the church bulletin, which was subsequently posted on the church’s website. That became a problem when he fled back to Syria to marry his fiancé. Islamic extremists, including his uncle and his cousin, had learned about his conversation via the church website and kidnapped him. They tortured and threatened to kill him, but he escaped. He and his wife eventually made their way back to the United States, where he sued the church for \$75,000. The Oklahoma Supreme Court, in a 5-3 decision in February, sided with the church. “The record indicates that the public nature of baptism is an integral part of the Presbyterian Church’s understanding of the sacrament,” Chief Justice Douglas Combs wrote for the majority. “For example, the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) provides: ‘By baptism, individuals are publicly received into the church to share into the church to share in its life and ministry.’” —Christianity Today

Family Christian Stores closing all 240 locations

Family Christian Stores, which called itself the “world’s largest retailer of Christian-themed merchandise,” announced Feb. 23 it is closing all its stores after 85 years in business. The company employed more than 3,000 people across 36 states and blamed “changing consumer behavior and declining sales.” It filed for bankruptcy in 2015.



“We had two very difficult years post-bankruptcy,” said company president Chuck Bengochea. “Despite improvements in product assortment and the store experience, sales continued to decline. In addition, we were not able to get the pricing and terms we needed from our vendors to successfully compete in the market.” —Christianity Today

Tim Keller stepping down as Redeemer pastor

Timothy Keller, one of the country’s most popular and influential conservative Christian thinkers, announced Feb. 26 he will step down this summer as pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York. His last day will be July 1, although he is not retiring.



The transition is part of a plan to turn the church’s three sites into stand-alone, distinctive churches. Keller said in a statement on the church’s website that he will be “working full-time” through the Redeemer City to City church planting network to “teach and train the next generation of leaders and pastors who will accelerate a movement of church planting and gospel renewal for the good of the city.” The church was founded 28 years ago and has 5,000 members. Keller is 66. —RNS/Christianity Today/ Redeemer.com

William Crews, Texan & former seminary president, dies

Former Gateway Seminary President William O. (Bill) Crews died March 1 after a brief illness in Vancouver, Wash. A Texas native, Crews became the sixth president of Gateway Seminary (formerly Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary) in December 1986, and then transitioned to the role of chancellor in 2003 before retiring from the seminary in 2005. He subsequently was elected by the Northwest Baptist Convention as executive director-treasurer in 2007, serving until his second retirement at the end of 2012. “William O. Crews was a Baptist statesman who profoundly impacted our work in the western United States,” said Jeff Iorg, president of Gateway Seminary. “He was a friend and mentor to many, who will miss him deeply. His impact at Gateway Seminary lives on through our emphasis on shaping leaders—Bill’s passion and legacy.” A native of Houston who grew up in San Angelo and preached his first sermon at age 15, Crews held a doctor of ministry degree from Gateway Seminary; a bachelor of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and a bachelor of arts degree from Hardin-Simmons University in Texas. He received Southwestern’s distinguished alumni award in 1994 and



was awarded two honorary degrees in 1987—the doctor of humanities degree from Hardin-Simmons and the doctor of divinity degree from California Baptist University. —Baptist Press

National CP 4.86 percent ahead of budget

Year-to-date contributions to Southern Baptist Convention national and international missions and ministries received by the SBC Executive Committee were 4.86 percent above the year-to-date budgeted projection through February, and 0.86 percent below contributions received during the same time frame last year. As of February 28, gifts received by the Executive Committee for distribution through the CP Allocation Budget through the first five months of the SBC’s fiscal year totaled \$82,575,921.81, which is \$3,825,921.81 above the \$78,750,000.00 year-to-date budgeted amount to support the convention’s ministries globally and across North America, and is \$717,637.76 below the \$83,293,559.57 received through the end of February 2016. —Baptist Press

Young leader initiative announced by EC & NAMB

The SBC Executive Committee and the North American Mission Board are launching a young leader initiative to better engage pastors between the ages of 25-45. The network’s goal will be to provide a sense of brotherhood for those already participating in Southern Baptist life and find ways to engage those who are disconnected or minimally involved. “A look at the research and a look around the room at most SBC meetings tells you we must do a better job at engaging and including young leaders,” Kevin Ezell, NAMB’s president, said. “I know there are thousands of young pastors who have a great contribution to make to our Southern Baptist family,” Ezell added. “We want to serve them better and let them know they are loved, valued and needed.” Ezell said the Executive Committee and NAMB will form a diverse group of advisers that represent

an ethnic and theological mix. Jonathan Akin will join NAMB’s staff to lead the joint effort. He is transitioning from his role as pastor of Fairview Church in Lebanon, Tenn. The entities plan to launch the initiative midway through 2017. —Baptist Press

Norma McCorvey, the ‘Roe’ in Roe v. Wade, dies

Norma McCorvey, the plaintiff in the Roe v. Wade abortion rights case who later converted to the pro-life cause, died Feb. 18 in a Katy, Texas, assisted living facility of heart failure. She was 69. “What we should remember most is that finding Christ turned her from a path of death to everlasting life for herself, and caused her to become a friend of life.” —DOROTHY PATTERSON, A SOUTHWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY

The mother of three is believed to have never had an abortion herself. The New York Times said upon her death, as she carried to term the pregnancy that was the subject of the 1973 court case. McCorvey professed a Christian conversion in 1995 and became increasingly vocal in her defense of the unborn, petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court in 2005 to overturn Roe v. Wade because she believed abortion was harmful to women. “What we should remember most is that finding Christ turned her from a path of death to everlasting life for herself, and caused her to become a friend of life,” said Dorothy Patterson, a Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary professor of theology. “She spent her last years in arduous pro-life activities trying very hard to undo and redo the earlier decision she had made.” —Baptist Press

REACH HOUSTON:

‘WE NEED MORE CHURCHES’

‘Vision tour,’ June 5-7, will give church leaders overview of strategy

By Michael Foust
TEXAN Correspondent

Ben Hays, the strategist for the SBTC’s Reach Houston initiative, understands why some people are puzzled by a major church planting strategy in Houston, the largest city in the Bible Belt. But it doesn’t take him long to persuade those same people that it’s needed.

Geographically, the Greater Houston area is larger than six states, including New Jersey. Houston’s population ranks fourth nationally, although it is projected to pass third-place Chicago in the next 10 years. And earlier this decade Houston surpassed New York as the most ethnically diverse city in the U.S., according to a study of U.S. Census data. More than 300 people groups call it home.

But it is the city’s rapid growth that has led to the Reach Houston initiative, which has three goals: 1) plant-

ing new churches, 2) revitalizing current ones, and, 3) mobilizing mission teams from churches outside of Houston to go on a short-term trip within the Greater Houston area.

“The population in Houston is growing at an astronomically faster rate than churches are growing. Houston is growing by 2,000 new people a week,” said Hays, who also serves as pastor of the Church in the Center in downtown Houston. “Therefore, you have 2,000 new people to reach with the gospel per week, and it is not even possible for current churches to reach them fast enough. Numerically, we need more churches.”

The task becomes even more urgent when considering that 68 percent of people in Houston are lost and unchurched.

“Most of the people who are moving here are not people who are coming from the Bible Belt where they have the same set of presuppositions of who Christ is,” Hays said. “So it’s people who are coming, mostly, without the knowledge of Christ. They’re coming from all over the world. And because

“You have 2,000 new people to reach with the gospel per week, and it is not even possible for current churches to reach them fast enough. Numerically, we need more churches.”

—BEN HAYS, SBTC REACH HOUSTON INITIATIVE STRATEGIST

the city is not only growing but the city is changing, we need not only more churches but many more types of churches.”

On June 5-7, Hays will host pastors and church leaders as part of a “vision tour” where they will tour the city, meet with church planters, and hear about their vision and needs. The goal is to forge partnerships.

“The idea is to let them get a firsthand taste of what is already going on and what partnerships could emerge to continue helping us plant more churches in Houston,” Hays said.

The Reach Houston initiative already has experienced spiritual fruit. Fourteen churches have been planted, and church planters have related stories such as:

♦ A man who had been going to church off and on his

entire life finally accepted Christ through the work of a church plant, The Pathway Church. “This is becoming a regular thing on the east side [of Houston],” said the church’s pastor, Chris Bradford. “The Holy Spirit is moving on the hearts of blue collar plant workers, and they are primed for the harvest.”

♦ A woman who gave her life to Christ shared her experience with her Catholic family, who condemned her decision. “We are trying to walk her through what it looks like to forsake father, mother, brother and sister for Christ,” said church planter John Powell of Emmanuel Baptist Church. “It’s difficult for her.”

♦ A member of a church plant led someone else to Christ. The woman started a conversation with a Kroger

gas station cashier, and the two agreed to meet later at Starbucks, where the cashier prayed to receive Christ. “She has shared the gospel with many and prays regularly for her family and friends,” said church planter Buddy Brents of the Nations Church. “The gospel still changes lives.”

Thankfully, Hays said, churches outside of Houston are seeing the need to plant churches throughout the region.

“One of the successes we’re seeing is the responsiveness of our established churches across Texas that are willing and ready to come to Houston on a mission trip and come alongside and join us,” Hays said. “In other words, the churches in Texas are seeing how Houston is a very vibrant and compelling mission field, and churches are responding to that call and wanting to be a part of what God is doing here.”

For more information about the vision tour or involvement in Reach Houston, contact Ben Hays at bhays@sbtexas.com or at 832-489-3908.

Learn more about Reach Houston at ReachHouston.net. ✠



Ben Hays

Reach
HOUSTON

CHURCH PLANTING + REVITALIZATION

THE REACH HOUSTON INITIATIVE

A strategic process to mobilize churches for the purpose of intentionally focusing church planting and revitalization in the greater Houston region.

THE NEED

According to the 2010 Census Houston is the most diverse mega-city in North America.

Population of study area:

5,000,000. 2020 projection - 5,379,389
(7.5% increase over 2015)

Race/Ethnicity:

39.8% Hispanic, 31.9% White, 18.7% Black,
9.5% Asian/Other

Approximately 68% lost and unchurched
(3,400,000)

PRIMARY OUTCOMES

• Church Planting

• Church Revitalization

REACH HOUSTON STRATEGY

• Establish church planting centers and coordinate with existing churches to plant churches in the Houston area

• Advance revitalization efforts to strengthen established churches

• Enlist churches in Houston, around Texas and from across the United States to help Reach Houston

reachhouston.net

72 Planters + Churches

1

Joseph Ingram
Common Bond Church
200 Gray St. Houston, TX 77002
commonbondchurch.org

2

Richard Hultto
King's Church
4503 Interstate 45 N, Conroe, TX 77385
kingschurchconroe.org

3

Buddy Brents
Nations Church Houston
1441 Legend Falls Court, Houston, TX 77083
nationschurchhouston.org

4

Cory West
Connexus Community Church
506 W Edgewood Dr, Friendswood, TX 77546
connexuschurch.com

5

Johnathan Sublet
Crossover Community Church
1507 W 5th St, Freeport, TX 77541
crossoverfreeport.com

6

John Powell
Emmanuel Baptist Church
99 Grand Parkway E Hwy 59
ebchouston.com

7

Chris Bradford
The Pathway Church
12450 Eagle Pointe Dr, Baytown, TX 77523
thepathwaychurch.tv

8

Malcolm Griswold
Houston Reformed Baptist Church
5834 Southcrest St, Unit A, Houston, TX 77033

9

Lee Peoples
Journey Church
9434 Hughes Ranch Road, Pearland, TX 77584

10

Gilbert Allen
Open Gate Fellowship
28503 Tomball Parkway
Hwy 2149 at Holderness, Tomball, TX 77375
opengatehouston.org

11

Israel Rodriguez
Iglesia Cristiana Nueva Vida
14314 Walters Road Houston, TX 77044

12

Joseph Ogletree
Image Church
1729 Spring Cypress Rd, Tomball, TX 77377
yourimagechurch.com

13

Chris Clemons
Way of Life Church
9434 Hughes Ranch Rd, Pearland, TX 77584
thewayoflifechurch.com

14

Cary Perrin
CityView Church
324 E House Street, Alvin, TX 77581
cityviewalvin.com

'TRUMP BUMP' ADDS \$600 MILLION IN GUIDESTONE ASSETS

By Rob Collingsworth
TEXAN Correspondent

DALLAS GuideStone Financial Resources ended 2016 with \$13.3 billion in assets, officers told trustees during the board's winter meeting in Dallas Feb. 27-28.

Chief Operating Officer John Jones presented a report that detailed GuideStone's state of affairs through 2016, noting the \$13.3 billion in assets shows steady growth, up from the \$6.8 billion at the nadir of the economic crisis of 2008-09. More than \$540 million in assets were added during calendar 2016.

Jones reported that GuideStone has also added almost \$600 million in assets in the first seven weeks of 2017, which he attributed to the "Trump bump," a reference to the climbing U.S. stock market since President Donald Trump took office.

Also included in the COO's report was an indicator of GuideStone's success as related to its peer financial institutions. According to fi360, an investment firm that ranks the performance of financial management groups, GuideStone ranked in the top 35%, ahead of major mutual funds



such as Fidelity, T. Rowe Price, and Putnam.

"This obviously so positively reflects on both the kingdom, first and foremost, and for Southern Baptist life," Jones said. "The Extended-Duration Bond Fund has probably been our most highly recognized and awarded fund. For 2016 we ranked No. 1 in the 1-, 5- and 10-year periods."

Group plan enrollments have grown by 4.6 percent over the last year while participation in individual plans has decreased by almost 10 percent. According to Jones, the individual plans are largely comprised of pastors of small churches for whom traditional insurance has become cost-prohibitive.

"So many of those pastors are truly at the proverbial crossroads and cannot afford insurance. And the government exchanges that are offered with the subsidies offer a viable alternative for them," Jones said.

Retirement aggregates for 2016 totaled \$550 million, compared to a three-year average of \$470 million for 2013-2015. There was also a significant increase in investments from intermediary platforms, which jumped from \$2 million in 2015 to \$144 million in 2016.

Trustees also approved an official media policy in response to a motion from last year's Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. Lonnie Wilkey, a messenger from Tulip Grove Baptist Church in Old Hickory, Tenn., submitted a motion asking entity trustees to examine their media policies and consider making committee meetings open to the public.

Although Guidestone's plenary sessions have historically been open to the press, trustees chose to keep committee meetings private.

"For decades individual committee meetings of the Board of Trustees and their reports

to the board are work sessions and involve discussion of sensitive and personal information (including legal, competitive data, personal financial data of Mission:Dignity participants, and private health information governed by HIPAA) and are therefore restricted to trustees, appropriate staff and invited vendors," the statement read.

Insurance premiums increased by 5.6 percent last year, while client and reserve adjustments jumped by 11.4 percent. This was a result of higher-than-anticipated healthcare claims, particularly in-hospital claims and catastrophic claims, classified as those that exceed \$825,000.

Mission:Dignity, which provides financial assistance to retired pastors and widows, had a record year in 2016 with the number of giving units up 20 percent over 2015. For the first time in a decade, Mission:Dignity saw a net year-over-year increase in the number of participants receiving financial assistance.

GuideStone underspent its 2016 budget by \$7.6 million, largely as a result of lower salary costs. Compared to this point last year GuideStone has

seen a 12 percent reduction in number of staff, though Jones reports maintained efficiencies.

GuideStone President O.S. Hawkins reported to the trustees on this year's theme of innovation, using the story of Nehemiah as an example of approaching old problems with new solutions. He pointed out that those who seek to innovate must face up, team up, gird up, and look up.

"We want to achieve a culture of innovation at GuideStone so that we are able to meet the needs of our participants today and anticipate the needs of our participants as we seek to honor the Lord by being their lifelong partner in enhancing their financial security," Hawkins said.

Rolling off the board after this meeting include trustees Ronald E. Brown (Ohio), Gerald R. Davidson (Missouri), William R. Dunning (Pennsylvania/South Jersey), J. Wesley George (Arkansas), James W. Hixson (Michigan), Kirk R. Hudson (New Mexico), Shadd G. Kennedy (West Virginia) and G. Bryant Wright Jr. (Georgia).

The departing trustees were honored by Hawkins at a dinner where they were presented with a gift for their service. ✨

New 'God focused' missionaries share stories in IMB Sending Celebration

By Joni Hannigan
TEXAN Correspondent

RICHMOND, VA. Three years ago Aaron and Kristy K* moved into an apartment complex in Fort Worth where over half the residents are refugees.

"I had never considered international missions before I met Aaron," Kristy said, "but through many short-term opportunities, God began softening my heart."

Kristy and Aaron were among 29 new Southern Baptist missionaries—six with ties to Texas—appointed through the International Mission Board March 1 near Richmond, Va.

Sent from Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Aaron said their family, after living among refugees has "seen their needs and heard their stories and come to a deeper understanding of their needs."

The celebration featured other couples from Texas who shared testimonies of their faith and commitment:

✦ Andrew and Hannah Wilde*, who will serve among North African and the Middle Eastern Peoples, noted their specific call to that region. "We live in a time when there are more refugees and more displaced people than any other time in history," Andrew said.

✦ Caleb and Clara Yun*, also to serve among NAME peoples, spoke of God's faithfulness. "We are excited to carry on the church's mission," Caleb said.

✦ Eric and Cait Marshall*, who will serve among the Central Asian Peoples, and are sent by a Texas church, talked about God's interruption while he was pursuing the American dream. "Jesus was worth the sacrifice of following his desires," Eric said.

A COMPLICATED TASK

Addressing the new missionaries and their families, IMB President David Platt told the newly appointed missionaries theirs will be the "most complicated work in the entire world."

"I can't think of anything that is more complicated," Platt said. "To go into every ethnic group in the world and live and speak in such a way that people in that ethnic group totally transform ... what they believe in themselves and the world, their customs and cultures accordingly and what they value and what they live. ...

"That makes negotiating peace in the Middle East easy comparatively," Platt said.

Telling the appointees, "I think you're good, but you're just not that good," Platt reminded them "this is a work that only God can do."

Speaking on the importance of prayer from Exodus 33:1, Platt asked what the greatest obstacle might be to advancing the gospel and emphasized the power of fervent prayer for the purpose of God showing his glory.

"We cannot do this work apart from the power of the Almighty God," he said.

Drawing an illustration of Moses being told he could have



Taylor Edmonds (center) receives concerted prayer on her behalf as she is appointed as a Southern Baptist missionary to the European peoples.
PHOTO BY ROY M. BURROUGHS/IMB

the promise of God without the presence of God, Platt said this is similar to the "blasphemous" prosperity gospel preached across the world.

Moses' refusal to step away from God is key to how missionaries should live, Platt told them, offering four guiding principles for how they live:

① You have an assignment you cannot fulfill, Platt said. If people overestimate their own resources

and do not rely on the power of God, they will fail, he said.

② You have a privilege you cannot forsake. "Once you taste the glory of God, you want to see more and more and more," Platt said.

③ You have a family you cannot forget.

④ You have a God you cannot fathom. ✨

* names protected for security purposes

PLATT CHALLENGES TRUSTEES TO ‘MOVE ON’ IN DAYS OF UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITIES

By Joni Hannigan

RICHMOND, VA. Amidst the world's growing refugee crisis, Southern Baptists should focus on spreading the gospel in a world of urgent need and “move on” from distractions, International Mission Board President David Platt told trustees at the group's spring meeting Feb. 28 – March 1 near Richmond, Va.

Trustee officers also announced they will begin an “investigative process” to discern how IMB trustees are placed on the board in order to better accommodate pioneer areas and small state conventions [see related story below].

Noting “unprecedented” times, Platt referenced 1 Cor. 16:8-9 in talking about the church's mission. “Paul says a wide door for effective work has opened to me; and there are many adversaries,” he said.

“It is high time to move on” from “deception, diversion, distraction, [and] division,” Platt said, noting how “these things” dominate news in the culture, in the church and “specifically in the Southern Baptist Convention.”

An example of “such distraction,” Platt said, is discussion of

an amicus brief the IMB joined last May in support of a New Jersey's Islamic society's right to build a mosque. In mid-February at a meeting with Baptist state paper editors, Platt apologized to Southern Baptists for the action after Tennessee pastor Dean Haun resigned as an IMB trustee in November because he said IMB's action was not consistent with its mission.

Platt told his board at the meeting, “regardless of one's views on religious liberties,” there is a new process in place to handle such matters.

“We're living in a day with wide open doors both here and abroad, and it's high time for Southern Baptists not to divide but to join together,” Platt said, “not to be distracted, but to be resolutely focused on the purpose for which we came together in the first place—to spread the gospel in a world of urgent need ... and unprecedented opportunity.”

Speaking of courage and strength, Platt urged Southern Baptists to be an example to the world of what happens when churches join together “in love” to reach the needy.

“Look at the refugee crisis around us,” Platt said. “Never

before in history have so many people been displaced or forced from their homes and driven to different lands, including our land—people who are longing for hope and we have an eternal hope to share with them, people who are longing for a home and we have an eternal home to bring them to. So let's walk together through wide open doors.”

Platt introduced a video about “Abuk,” a young woman from First Baptist Church in Amarillo who embodies the immigrant spirit. She was displaced with her family as a young girl to live in the United States but is now returning abroad as an IMB missionary.

“Immigrants,” Platt said. “When we hear those words today, and they are so politically charged. ... If we are not careful we can start to picture immigrants as problems to be solved, not people to be loved.”

Platt closed his report by reading aloud the names of retired staff and missionaries who have died in the past year, which included 58 emeritus missionaries that collectively represent 1,672 years of spreading the gospel, for an average of 29 years each.



IMB President David Platt challenges new missionaries during a Sending Celebration March 1. The service, designed to honor appointees and the churches sending them, was conducted in conjunction with an IMB board of trustees meeting. PHOTO BY ROY M. BURROUGHS/IMB

GOD AT WORK

In a time of prayer awareness, IMB's senior VP for prayer, Gordon Fort, introduced the Arasu of India as an unengaged and unreached people group. He reported that in June 2011, the IMB counted 3,684 UUPGs in the world, and today there has been a net drop of 448 UUPGs from the list, leaving 3,227 remaining.

“Today, someone cares for their soul. Someone is learning the language and preparing to plant a church,” Fort said.

OTHER BUSINESS

During the meeting, IMB trustees also approved the appointment of 29 new person-

nel, including 16 units that will serve around the world with a combined missionary force around 3,600 [see commissioning story on page 8].

Seth Polk, IMB's support services committee chair, presented two recommendations related to endowments the board approved. The first proposed the appropriation percentage for 2016 be approved at 2 percent, and the second directed monies associated with endowments be moved to a separate pool with a specific investment strategy with designated returns for a projected payoff.

The next IMB trustee meeting is June 12, 2017, in Phoenix, Ariz. ☞

IMB trustees launch investigation, express concern over board representation

HOUSTON A Texas pastor serving as a trustee of the International Mission Board said several of the smaller state conventions could be in danger of losing representation on the board if changes are not made in how the board is comprised.

David Fleming, pastor of Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston and an IMB trustee, will serve as a member of a trustee representation study group that he said will evaluate the process of trustee representation on the board and present any findings and/or recommendations for discussion at or before the board's June meeting in Phoenix.

Fleming said the move to form the study group came as officers of the board of trustees at the IMB “learned recently that several of the smaller state conventions have lost or will be losing their seat on the board per SBC and IMB trustee selection guidelines.”

The issue was discussed in the final moments of the



David Fleming

IMB's Feb. 28 trustee forum, at which time board officers asked Fleming and others to serve on a team, including Chair Rob

Peters of North Carolina, Lucinda Snead of Arizona, Joel Williams of Louisiana, and Spencer Plumlee of Missouri.

Currently there 77 IMB trustees representing the following states: Alabama, 5; Arizona, 1; Arkansas, 3; California, 1; Colorado, 1; Florida, 4; Georgia, 6; Hawaii, 1; Illinois, 1; Indiana, 1; Kansas/Nebraska, 1; Kentucky, 3; Louisiana, 3; Maryland/Delaware 1; Michigan, 1; Mississippi, 3; Missouri, 3; Nevada, 1; New England, 1; New Mexico, 1; New York, 1; North Carolina, 5; Northwest, 1; Ohio, 1; Oklahoma, 1; Pennsylvania/South Jersey, 1; South Carolina, 3; Tennessee, 5; Texas, 12; Utah/Idaho, 1; Virginia, 2; West Virginia, 1.



IMB trustees are elected by messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention annually for a four-year term based on a formula set forth in the SBC Constitution and the IMB charter indicating the board includes one member from each cooperating state and the District of Columbia, one additional member from each state having 250,000 members, and an additional member for each additional 250,000 members. The president of the SBC also is an ex officio member on the board.

Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Executive Director Jim Richards currently serves as chair of the SBC Committee on Nominations, which reviews the qualifications of potential nominees to fill SBC trustee and committee vacancies and nominates a slate of names to messengers at the SBC annual meeting each year.

“Several states including Texas lost trustee positions on the International Mission Board due to the formula that is used,” Richards said. “Proportionate

representation is ideal. Hopefully, an equitable system can be proposed.”

Fleming, in response to questions posed by the TEXAN, said he cannot predict a possible outcome of the effort to study this process.

“We certainly respect the guidelines but have concerns about churches and state conventions not having a voice on the IMB,” Fleming said. “The officers would like to have a sub-committee study the issue and bring any recommendations back to the board.”

The move to study the process was announced March 1 at the close of the IMB board meeting by board chair Scott Harris, from Brentwood, Tenn.

Fleming confirmed the trustee officers asked him to serve on the team.

“We hope to have a discussion with the full body of trustees to see if there are positive ways to make sure all Southern Baptists are represented,” Fleming said. ☞

EMPOWER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

vided culture; we live in a divided society; and nothing is a more refreshing witness than the unified people of God of every kindred, tribe, tongue and nation.”

Smith said he does not like to use the phrase “racial reconciliation” because even atheists can champion that cause. While reconciliation between ethnicities is important, he said, additional divisions exist that need reconciliation in the culture, all of which only a relationship with Jesus Christ can fix.

“It’s more than just race,” he said. “It is totally understanding that Jesus can save anybody; and if Jesus can save anybody, our congregations will have people coming in and gathering among us who are different than we are, ... and we must be eager about that.”

Smith spoke of Southern Baptists’ commendable determination in recovering biblical fidelity during the 1980s and ‘90s, saying, “The effort we put into sound doctrine and the effort we put into personal holiness, we ought to likewise put effort into pursuing Christian unity.”

Of course, this type of Christian unity must have theological boundaries, Smith insisted. The seven “ones” outlined in Ephesians 4:4-6 make up the parameters of “the unity of the bond of peace.”

Within those boundaries, Smith said Christians need not be ashamed of one another and must put forth every effort to show humility, gentleness and patience toward one another.

“As Southern Baptists have pursued different approaches to the political system in a fallen culture, where there are no perfect solutions, our interaction with one another has not necessarily been characterized by humility, gentleness and patience. Sometimes when we don’t understand one another’s church methodology, our interactions are not characterized with gentleness, humility and patience. If we’re going to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond

“It’s more than just race. It is totally understanding that Jesus can save anybody; and if Jesus can save anybody, our congregations will have people coming in and gathering among us who are different than we are, ... and we must be eager about that.”

—KEVIN SMITH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE BAPTIST CONVENTION OF MARYLAND/DELAWARE

“I’m actually not so convinced the issues are that we don’t know how to share or whether we should share. I think the issues are that we don’t hurt for people like the Good Shepherd hurts for his lost sheep.”

—ED STETZER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE BILLY GRAHAM CENTER FOR EVANGELISM AT WHEATON COLLEGE

of peace, we have to have a disposition toward our brothers and sisters where we at least want to give one another the benefit of the doubt. I don’t want to start suspicious of my brother or sister.”

Ed Stetzer, a professor and executive director of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College, challenged pastors and church members to reflect Jesus’ compassion for the lost.

“When we pray that Jesus would send people to his harvest, we feel the depth of compassion for his mission and the people, and in doing so our hearts align with his,” Stetzer said in a message from Matthew 9:35-38. “When we pray, we see people for who they truly are—in desperate need of the Good Shepherd for their souls.



▲ Dennis Erwin (right), a full-time vocational evangelist from Edgewood, Texas, with more than 40 years of evangelistic ministry, received the Roy Fish Lifetime Achievement Award for vocational evangelism. PHOTO BY ALLEN SUTTON

▼ Lewis Jones (right), pastor of First Baptist Church in Groveton, received the W.A. Criswell Lifetime Achievement Award for pastoral evangelism. PHOTO BY ALLEN SUTTON



“I’m actually not so convinced the issues are that we don’t know how to share or whether we should share. I think the issues are that we don’t hurt for people like the Good Shepherd hurts for his lost sheep.”

Stetzer noted that Jesus’ command to his disciples to pray for gospel workers directly preceded his sending them out as those workers. Part of the answer to their prayer is their own obedience, he said.

“Praying for an evangelistic outpouring without knowing your neighbors is ultimately a fool’s errand,” Stetzer told the crowd. He then narrowed his focus to the pastors in the room and exhorted them not just to preach the gospel but to also share it with their own neighbors.

“If you won’t do it, don’t expect your church members to do it,” Stetzer said.

Jerry Vines, former SBC president and pastor emeritus at First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., delivered a message from Psalm 126 and said every church must prioritize evangelism.

“Intertwined into the warp and woof of all of the programs in our churches has to be the golden strand of evangelism,” Vines said.

“Somewhere along the way we got the idea that the lost are supposed to come to the church, and so we think all you have to do is put up a sign that says, ‘Come on in you sinners and get saved.’ Yet the Bible makes it very clear that the lost are not invited to come to the church, but the church is commanded to go to the lost.

“You know what Southern Baptists need? We just need to get back out there on the field sowing the seed.”

SBC President Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church near Memphis, Tenn., preached from Acts 2:14-41 on the necessity of gospel preaching, which he said must be prophetically declared, scripturally based, Christ-centered, evangelistically persuasive, and spiritually fruitful.

“There is nothing going on in this world that God cannot repair through biblical preaching. Gospel preaching, in my opinion, is the need of the hour,” Gaines said.

“God is looking for men who will share Jesus from the pulpit and preach the Word of God.”

In 2018, the Empower Conference will return to the Irving Convention Center in Las Colinas, Feb. 26-27. 📍



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NAME:
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DESCRIBE YOUR JOB.
I help Mike Gonzales, our department director, in promoting new initiatives to help pastors and churches in their administrative, mission and corporate life. I specifically oversee the Spanish regional conferences, pastors and wives retreat, and the Hispanic Leadership Summit. Our Hispanic ministries department is made up of very gifted individuals that encourage, support and

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Jesse loves meeting people of different cultures and languages. He likes to engage in conversations, and no one is a stranger to him. He is a bookworm who enjoys reading but never really finishes a book because he wants to learn a little about everything every day.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

- Southside BC in Henderson is seeking a FT pastor for a mid-size SBTC church. Prefer seminary training from a Southern Baptist seminary. Send resume to rbwells@suddenlink.net or to Rob Wells, 1928 Eastwood, Henderson, TX, 75652.
- The Quarries Church, a ministry of Hyde Park BC in Austin, seeks a campus pastor. Responsibilities include all areas of discipleship, administration, and volunteer recruiting and training. Send resume to Dr. J. Kie Bowman, Senior Pastor, Hyde Park Baptist Church, 3901 Speedway, Austin, TX 78751 or email to kbowman@hpbcc.org.
- Fairfield Glade FBC, Crossville, TN, is seeking a FT senior pastor who is God-led to be our shepherd. He must preach and teach sound biblical doctrine; have a heart for evangelism, missions and membership care; and be supportive of doctrines within the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. He must possess the ability to communicate & counsel different age groups and lead multiple staff. Must have a minimum of 10 years senior pastoral experience; provide pastoral leadership, vision and pastoral care. MDiv

degree required. Salary TBD. Job description posted on website: www.onhisrock.org. Send resumes to: pastorsearchfgfbc@gmail.com.

- Second BC in Lamesa is currently seeking a FT pastor. Parsonage furnished. Located in West Texas with a population of 9,300. Please mail resume to Second Baptist Church, 1705 N Bryan St, Lamesa, TX 79331 or email to jguzman@sbclamesa.org or to Richard Winford rwinford48@yahoo.com.
- Cornerstone Fellowship BC, Haskell, (loving, generous, 14 yr. old SBTC plant) is seeking a FT pastor. Seminary preferred, not required. Please send resume to pastorsearch2017@gmail.com or text Jo @940-864-4648 with questions.
- Crescent Valley BC, a small community church in Victoria, is seeking a FT or bi-vocational pastor. Please send resumes to: cvbcpastorsearch@gmail.com, or mail to: CVBC Pastor Search Committee, 6679 ST HWY 185, Victoria, TX 77905.
- Trinity BC in Vidor is currently seeking a FT or bi-vocational pastor. Please submit resume to trinitybaptist09@aol.com or mail to Trinity Baptist Church of Vidor, Attn: Pastor Search Committee, 2850 Hwy 12, Vidor, TX 77662.

- FBC Merkel is seeking a FT pastor. Parsonage available with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a two-car garage. Send resumes to office@fbcmerkel.com or PO Box 399, Merkel, TX 79536. For questions, please contact the office at 325-928-5351 or our interim pastor, T.C. Melton, at 325-201-8272.
- FBC of Big Wells is seeking a FT bi-vocational pastor. We are a Southern Baptist Church and applicants must adhere to the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message. Recently renovated church and parsonage. Please research area prior to submitting resume. Email resumes to: fbcfbigwells2016@yahoo.com.
- Sylvester BC is a small church searching for a bi-vocational pastor. Parsonage available. Mail resume to Sylvester Baptist Church, PO Box 8, Sylvester, TX 79560 or email to countrygirl38@msn.com.
- Lovera BC is seeking a PT bi-vocational pastor. Ten years of ministerial experience and formal theological education preferred. Resumes and letters of reference should be sent to Pastor Search Committee at Loverabaptistchurch@yahoo.com or mailed to Lovera Baptist Church, 333 Lovera Blvd, San Antonio, TX 78212. DVDs or links to online sermons are appreciated.

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. Resume should be submitted electronically to search@fbcnewboston.com or to this link: www.fbcnewboston.com/student-minister-search.

- Carey BC is looking for FT youth minister, house & utilities provided. If you have what it takes to lead our students into a deeper relationship with Christ, send your resume to Pastor Randy Wilson, careybaptist@gmail.com. For information about our church visit: www.carey1stbaptist.com.
- Cornerstone BC in Lucas seeks a FT student minister needed in one of the fastest growing areas of DFW. Excellence in ministry required. Contact Darrell Edwards, pastor@cbcLucas.com.
- Cook Springs BC seeks a Christ-filled, highly motivated, youth-loving individual, to fill position as PT youth minister. Serious applicants should forward an in-depth resume including character references to: Cook Springs Baptist Church, Recruitment Team, 1936 A State Highway 75 N, Huntsville, TX 77320. For more information, please contact Stacie Wright at 936-439-6542.
- FBC Mixon of Troup is seeking a PT youth pastor responsible for discipleship and evangelism. Will minister to students in grades 6-12 and college. Must be at least 25 years of age. Please send resume to church office at karenm@fbcmixon.org.

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- FBC Odessa is seeking a worship pastor to lead an established, dynamic worship ministry including a large choir, orchestra and praise teams for blended worship. Please send resume to First Baptist Church, 709 N Lee, Odessa, TX 79761 or email to worshipsearch@fbcodessa.com.
- Memorial BC in Spring is looking for a FT worship pastor. Candidate must have at least a bachelor’s degree in music and at least five years’ experience in music ministry. Please send resumes to Cliff Mayton, senior pastor at cliffmayton@gmail.com.
- The Quarries Church, a ministry of Hyde Park BC in Austin, seeks a PT worship pastor. Responsibilities include leading modern worship and worship band rehearsal. Send resume to Dr. J. Kie Bowman, Senior Pastor, Hyde Park Baptist Church, 3901 Speedway, Austin, TX 78751 or email to kbowman@hpbcc.org.
- Lovera BC in San Antonio is seeking a PT music director. Resumes and letters of reference can be sent to Administrative Committee Chairman at Loverabaptistchurch@yahoo.com or mailed to Lovera Baptist Church, 333 Lovera Blvd, San Antonio, TX 78212.

YOUTH

- FBC of New Boston, in northeast Texas is seeking a FT student minister whose primary

OTHER

- The Christian Academy for the Deaf is a non-profit, tuition free, privately funded school with a planned opening of August 2017. The board is seeking letters of interest and resumes for the position of Headmaster. A job description and school information can be found at christianacademyforthedeaf.com. Inquiries can be sent to: admin@christiandeafacademy.com.
- Frio River Baptist Association in Pearsall is currently accepting resumes for a FT director of missions. Please send resume and other information for consideration to FRBA. SearchCommittee@outlook.com.
- FBC Borger seeks FT church finance director to perform the administrative tasks related to financial recordkeeping and day-to-day financial operations. Qualifications: 1) a bachelor’s degree, preferably in accounting; CPA is preferred, but not required. 2) Five years’ experience performing accounting and bookkeeping functions at the enterprise level, including knowledge and experience in fund accounting. 3) Must have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and the strong desire to serve him by serving the local church. Resumes to shana@firstborger.com.

OBITUARY

- On Nov. 8, 2016, at the age of 62, Rev. Abel Puente Escamilla went to be with his Lord. Abel was born on Sept. 6, 1954, to Paz and Felipa Escamilla. Abel was a MSGT in the Air Force and the recipient of the Lone Star Medal of Valor. Abel served 34 years as the pastor of Iglesia Bautista Sur San Antonio. He devoted his life to the Lord by serving others selflessly. He is survived by his wife, Elisa Vinton Escamilla; his children: Noah (Brittany) Escamilla, Ashley (Tony) Cuaron, Abel David Escamilla, and his granddaughter Olivia Andrea Cuaron.

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DISCIPLE-MAKING TASK FORCE TO WORK ADDITIONAL YEAR

By Diana Chandler
Baptist Press

NASHVILLE A group tasked with encouraging and teaching disciple-making among Southern Baptist churches will extend its work an additional year, task force chairman Robby Gallaty told Baptist Press.

Gallaty, hosting a task force meeting in Nashville March 9, said the group will not issue a report at the 2017 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Phoenix. The task force will instead seek an additional year to evaluate discipleship and strategize. They plan to give their report at the 2018 SBC annual meeting in Dallas.

"We need more time, as you can imagine this is an overwhelming task," said Gallaty, pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn. "And I would just ask the folks to pray for us for wisdom and direction in this."

LifeWay Christian Resources President Thom Rainer and North American Mission Board President Kevin Ezell

appointed the group in 2016 to recommend ways churches can improve their discipleship programs and encourage a renewed emphasis on discipleship across the SBC.

At the March 9 meeting, the group discussed results of 250 surveys conducted among pastors of a diversity of churches, church plants and college ministries across the SBC, Gallaty said, including various ethnicities, congregation sizes and demographics.

"What we've found is for years, our church culture has been a catch and consume culture," Gallaty said. "So we reach the lost, we catch them, we consume them in our church. But what we read in the New Testament is more of a disciple/deploy mentality; that's what Jesus did."

"He called, he caught them, but then he disciplined them, and then he deployed them, and that's really where the missing link is, I think, in the process," Gallaty said. "That's where the wheels are kind of falling off if you will, in moving people through a process."

Task force member Kevin Smith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, surveyed pastors in urban areas, those in economically disadvantaged areas, and those outside the South.

"When you're outside of the South, there's not an automatic church culture," he said, "but the advantage is, without that automatic church culture, when you introduce ... what it means to be a follower of Christ, that's the first introduction in that person's life. ... You don't have to unteach anything."

With the diversity in the SBC, one particular discipleship model or methodology won't apply across the board, Smith said. Churches within and without the SBC need to do a better job of making disciples among the poor and overcome what he called "a very middle class element to American Christianity."

"I've pastored churches where discipleship and small-group interaction would usually happen in someone's house or in a café," Smith said.



Robby Gallaty (second from right), pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., leads a March 9 meeting of a task force charged with encouraging and teaching disciple-making among Southern Baptist congregations. PHOTO BY REBECCA WOLFORD

"All of that assumes a certain economic level where you have a house or hospitality, or you're the type of person that has coffee-shop type discretionary income."

Gallaty is leading the group to address diversity and develop discipleship strategies that address varying concerns and challenges. "We're putting together some guiderails for a process that could be implemented at every level in any size church, in any context," Gallaty said.

Evangelism must remain a part of discipleship and must be embraced by the whole church, Gallaty said.

"We're highly interested in evangelism. We just don't want the pastoral staff to be the only evangelists, which is normally the case in most churches," Gallaty said. "We want to empower an army of people to go out in the community and share the gospel, and live the gospel, and love like Christ loved."

Joining Gallaty and Smith on the task force are Adam Dooley, pastor of Sunnyvale Baptist Church in Sunnyvale, Texas; Eric Geiger, pastor, Clear-View Baptist Church, Franklin, Tenn.; Johnny Hunt, pastor, First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga.; Paul Jimenez, pastor, First Baptist Church, Taylors, S.C.; Mark Marshall, pastor, The Glade Church, Mount Juliet, Tenn.; and Pavel Urruchi, pastor, Erlanger Baptist Church, Erlanger, Ky. Also in attendance at the Nashville meeting was Gus Hernandez, spiritual formation pastor at Long Hollow Baptist Church. ✨

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LGBT THEMES SPREAD IN KIDS' ENTERTAINMENT

By Diana Chandler
Baptist Press

NASHVILLE Themes promoting gay, bisexual and transgender lifestyles are becoming more prevalent in entertainment expressly marketed to children, most notably with Disney's updated version of "Beauty and the Beast."

Disney's remake of Beauty and the Beast debuted in theaters March 17 and includes a reimagined LeFou, who expresses a homosexual yet conflicted attraction to the brutish and macho Gaston, the movie's director Bill Condon told the gay *Attitude Magazine*.

The movie comes after Disney already included a scene with several same-gender couples kissing in the Feb. 27 episode of the children's cartoon "Star vs. the Forces of Evil," available on the Disney XD network website.

At the Feb. 18-21 New York Toy Fair, Tonner Doll Company unveiled a new doll portraying a boy who perceives himself a girl. The Jazz doll, named after transgender 16-year-old Jazz Jennings, will be available in July, CNN reported. The doll has no specific characteristic that would deem it transgender but is designed with Jennings' facial features.

One Million Moms (1MM) has pushed back against the LGBT-friendly themes, opening a campaign against Disney with a petition that had already collected over 21,000 signatures a day after its March 1 posting at onemillionmoms.com.

"This is the last place parents would expect their children to be confronted with content regarding sexual orientation. Issues of this nature are being introduced too early and too soon, and it is becoming extremely common and unnecessary," 1MM said in a March 1 press release. "Disney has decided to be politically correct versus providing family-friendly entertainment. Disney should stick to entertaining instead of pushing an agenda."

The live-action version of Beauty and the Beast will include a moment that Condon has described as "exclusively gay."

"LeFou is somebody who on one day wants to be Gaston and on another day wants to kiss Gaston," Condon is quoted by several news outlets including time.com. "He's confused about what he wants. It's somebody who's just realizing that he has these feelings. And Josh [actor Josh

Gad] makes something really subtle and delicious out of it. And that's what has its payoff at the end, which I don't want to give away. But it is a nice, exclusively gay moment in a Disney movie."

Regarding the animated Disney XD cartoon featuring homosexual kisses, 14-year-old princess Star, the title character, is attending a concert at which same-sex couples are included in a scene featuring several characters kissing.

"Disney has been under pressure from the gay community to portray openly gay relationships in its TV shows and movies," 1MM said. "And last fall, the creators of 'Moana' mentioned in an interview ... that they wouldn't rule out an LGBT Disney princess. Director Ron Clements said, 'It seems like the possibilities are pretty open at this point.'"

In his daily podcast The Briefing March 2, Southern Baptist Theologi-

cal Seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. noted Disney's intention "to be known as the production company that comes out with a movie that has the first major same-sex relationship portrayed for children."

"We also have to note that when we laugh at something, when we find something interesting and not to mention entertaining, effectively our thinking will become aligned with our hearts," Mohler said. "That's exactly why Hollywood is Ground Zero for so much of the change driving the moral revolution around us."

The Jazz doll debuted with a pink shirt and denim shorts, the outfit Jennings wears on the cover of the memoir "Being Jazz: My Life as a (Transgender) Teen." But the doll was also featured in New York in a sparkling white ballerina dress.

Jennings posted a photo of the doll on Instagram with the descriptor, "The doll is considered to be the first 'transgender' doll because it's based on an individual who is trans. Of course it is still just a regular girl doll because that's exactly what I am: a regular girl!" 🧚



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LUBBOCK PASTOR FINDS RENEWED MINISTRY AT THE ALTAR

By Jane Rodgers
TEXAN Correspondent

LUBBOCK For Robert Cortez, pastor of Lubbock's Thrive Family Church, big things happen in October amid tears at the altar.

The 60-year-old was saved at age 15 in a Dallas church when he fell down, crying before God at the altar. Decades later, in his mid-50s, Cortez again found himself awash in tears at a church altar, ready to quit the ministry entirely.

Although his saxophone skills earned him the promise of a "full ride" to then Texas Tech College if he finished high school, Cortez left home at 15.

The family dynamics were tense; his parents had separated and Cortez started skipping school.

"I became disrespectful, a disruptive kid," he recalls. After authorities nearly arrested his father for his son's truancy, Cortez hitched a ride to Dallas with a friend who dropped him downtown at 4 a.m. "without a penny in my pocket."

He walked around the city for 13 hours. Using Dallas skyscrapers as landmarks, he managed to find his aunt's house. It was Wednesday night, and his aunt insisted he accompany her to church.

At the conclusion of the service that evening, Cortez "felt the altar calling [his] name" and went forward to pour his heart out to God. "Tia, something has happened to me. I feel clean," he told his aunt.

"You got saved," his aunt replied.

Afterward came a reunion with his mother, then preaching to the homeless on Dallas streets, and eventually, evangelizing throughout South Texas with his brother. The teenagers traveled, conducting revivals and supporting their ministry with income as shoe salesmen.

Cortez's schedule was daunting: morning hours of prayer, afternoon Bible

"God covered our mouths and filled our eyes with tears. He saw this coming. He didn't let us quit."

—ROBERT CORTEZ, PASTOR OF LUBBOCK'S THRIVE FAMILY CHURCH

reading and study, preaching at night. He learned when he studied the Bible more, his sermons improved.

He returned to Lubbock, where he met and married his wife, Sylvia. As a newlywed, he felt "the push" to start his first church. His wife agreed.

Fast forward 40 years. After pastoring churches in Lubbock and Lamesa, Cortez faced a crossroads in October 2013. Grace Beyond Walls, the church he had founded 10 years previously, had suffered two splits and dwindled, kept afloat chiefly by the Spanish language FM station operating out of the facility. The church needed an affordable building.

Times were tough. The Cortezes could not even afford medicine for Sylvia's asthma. "I listened to her wheezing one night, and I felt less a man," Cortez says. He planned to send out resumes, get a job and quit the pastorate.

The next morning, the Cortezes arrived at the church before their morning radio show. They unlocked the sanctuary door and approached the altar on opposite sides. No words came. They just cried.

"After awhile we get up, get all happy and do the morning show," Cortez says. They decided to keep the church going till January.

A phone call later that morning from Jerry Newman, worship pastor of Southcrest Baptist Church, changed everything.

"Do you still need a building?" Newman asked. "Come talk to me."



Robert Cortez, pastor of Thrive Family Church in Lubbock, hosts a radio show on 87.7 FM The Fountain, a Spanish language radio station operated out of the church. PHOTO BY JANE RODGERS



(Left) 87.7 FM Morning Buzz hosts Scott and Laura Bailey (Lolli and Pop) talk with Thrive Family Church pastor Robert Cortez. (Right) Cortez is hugged by Earl Dickey of the Children's Home of Lubbock after donating backpacks to the orphanage. PHOTOS BY JANE RODGERS



Cortez hung up the phone and headed to Southcrest without telling Sylvia why. It turned out Southcrest had received a church facility as part of an estate.

"Pastor [David] Wilson thought it would make a great Hispanic church," Cortez explains. In a two-hour meeting, Cortez explained his church's revamped strategy, plans for English language services, and a name change to Thrive Family Church. Southcrest presented him the keys to the building.

Cortez assembled his few congregants that evening and told them, "God has smiled on us." The men rushed home for equipment and returned to cut the grass. Remodeling, painting and refurbishing followed. Before the transfer was finalized, Southcrest replaced the church's aging HVAC system.

"God covered our mouths and filled our eyes with tears this morning," Cortez told Sylvia. "He saw this coming. He didn't let us quit."

Today Thrive's congregation numbers 175, filling the building. A praise band plays contemporary music. Sunday school is held on Wednesday nights. Sundays are devoted to the worship service and begin with fellowship over doughnuts and coffee at 9:30.

Cortez's sermons are shorter, cut to 25 minutes. Worship begins at 10 a.m. and ends a little after 11 a.m. Eighty percent of the members have been believers under five years.

Each fall the church holds a backpack drive, complete with bounce houses, hot dogs and a praise band at the school playground next door. This year, in partnership with Southcrest, Thrive distributed 500 backpacks containing Bibles and school supplies.

When Earl Dickey from the Children's Home of Lubbock stops by the church to pick up 100 extra backpacks for the orphanage, he hugs Cortez and says, "Y'all are living out what is written in James, caring for widows and orphans in their affliction."

The children's home also benefitted from Thrive's 2016 Christmas toy drive. With 500 dollars donated by members and help from a major toy retailer, Thrive purchased thousands of dollars of toys for neighborhood kids. The surplus went to the children's home.

Cortez calls the toy experience a "modern day loaves and fishes story."

Something similar happened the first year of Thrive's existence, when they invited the surrounding neighborhood for Thanksgiving dinner. They planned for 125, fed 200, and somehow had food leftover for members to take home.

Cortez's journey between altars also included retail stints. In the 1990s he managed Family Christian stores in El Paso and San Diego, pioneering the purchase of Spanish product, becoming the chain's first executive head of Spanish purchasing in Grand Rapids. Family Christian went from \$250,000 in Spanish sales to 1.9 million his first year.

Returning to Lubbock when his wife's father grew ill, he opened a Spanish language Christian bookstore, and after a "long sabbatical" from church involvement, found his way back into the pastorate.

Radio remains a constant. Today, FM 87.7 The Fountain—the third station Cortez has operated—broadcasts 24 hours a day from Thrive Church.

Cortez beams as a pastor fulfilling his calling as he leans forward and speaks into the microphone, "This is 87.7 The Fountain ... thank you for making us part of your day!" 📻

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'PREPPERS' EVENT EQUIPS SURVIVALISTS FOR CATASTROPHE AND ETERNITY

By Morgan Collier
TEXAN Correspondent

ORANGE, TEXAS Most people think of "preppers" as doomsday prophets who live off the grid with gas masks and a three-year supply of food rations waiting for the apocalypse. However, one Southeast Texas church sees value in emergency preparedness while using this niche as a mission field among the "preppers" community.

Little Cypress Baptist Church in Orange, Texas, hosted their seventh annual "Crisis Preparation and Sustainable Living Expo" Feb. 18 to train members of the community on planning for natural disasters or major catastrophes, while also sharing the gospel with attendees.

The idea for the ministry stemmed from the church's participation in disaster relief, pastor David Turner told the TEXAN. Due to previous natural disasters around the country—including severe flooding last year in Southeast Texas and parts of Louisiana—several LCBC members started volunteering with Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams to help revitalize the affected communities.

"We have guys who are a part of these teams and come back saying, 'We get

there, and nobody was prepared. Nobody had any food or water, or anything to sustain themselves,'" Turner said.

Although natural disasters are prevalent, Turner says the event is also designed to prepare for other catastrophic threats such as economic collapse, a terrorist invasion, electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack or nuclear destruction.

"People want to take care of their family," he said. "People need to know what to do to survive in these types of events. ... The most incredible spiritual awakening could happen after any major catastrophe."

Classes offered at the event included beekeeping (for beginners to advanced), getting started with chickens, basic homesteading, soap making, planting, growing medical herbs, why to prepare and

how to get started, low cost radio communication, and more.

Church members not only teach skills, but they also use the event as an evangelistic outreach.

"A lot of people who are involved with this aren't Christians," Turner said. "That is why several of the people teaching are members of the church [who] share their testimony during their class time."

"People want to take care of their family. People need to know what to do to survive in these types of events. ... The most incredible spiritual awakening could happen after any major catastrophe."

—DAVID TURNER, PASTOR, LITTLE CYPRESS BAPTIST CHURCH IN ORANGE



Bonnie Childress (standing), a member at Little Cypress Baptist Church in Orange, teaches a group how to grow citrus trees. PHOTO BY MORGAN COLLIER

Outside of the various classes to attend, an expo hall was set up with vendor booths that ranged from iron casting to radio communication, from beekeeping—for uses such as making wax, hand scrubs, soap and honey—to growing a garden.

"One gentleman that joined our church, who is a prepper, is here doing a wheat grinding display in the expo hall," Turner said.

Turner said the event is completely free to the public, vendors and teachers.

"It is all grassroots volunteer work," he said. "Anybody anywhere can do this. It is

a matter of asking God if this is something he wants you to do and be a part of."

In the case of a hurricane or a tornado, Turner pushes the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) statement: "Everyone should have enough food and water for themselves to last at least a month."

The hope for the future is for "Preppers" to grow in numbers with more vendors, classes offered and attendees, Turner says. The event is held every year on the third Saturday of February.

For more information visit the church's website: LittleCypressBaptist.org. 📧

Encourager Conference designed to help pastors and wives recharge

By Keith Collier
Managing Editor

COLLEGE STATION Pastors and pastors' wives know the roller coaster that can be ministry, days filled with extreme joys and debilitating lows. Pastoral ministry can test the mettle of a man and a marriage.

For this reason, Central Baptist Church in College Station is hosting the Encourager Conference April 21-22 to help pastors and their wives find renewal and joy in life and ministry.

Five Texas pastors and their wives will lead main sessions and breakout sessions designed to provide both personal and practical ministry encouragement. Each of these couples has experienced challenges and victories, and their desire is to remind others that "we can be ordinary pastors' wives and pastors and experience fruitful, satisfying ministries."

Leading the sessions will be Chris Osborne, pastor of Central Baptist in College Station, and his wife, Peggy; Nathan Lino, pastor of Northeast Houston Baptist Church in Humble, and his wife, Nicole; Matt Carter, pastor of The Austin Stone Community Church, and his wife, Jennifer; Kevin Ueckert, pastor of First

Baptist Church in Georgetown, and his wife, Lynlee; and Josh Smith, pastor of MacArthur Blvd Baptist Church in Irving, and his wife, Andrea.

"Most conferences focus on church growth and how to build a big church. We want to focus on the pastors who are out there and need to be encouraged, rather than discouraged, because they aren't drawing a massive crowd. That is the heartbeat of our conference," Osborne told the TEXAN.

Separate breakout session options will be available for a pastor and his wife, addressing common struggles such as jealousy, resentment, loneliness, extraordinary personal trials, and maximizing the final years of ministry. Specific pastor breakout sessions will also give encouragement and best practices on preaching, handling criticism and conflicts, managing workflow, casting vision, and leaving well.

Couples can register for the conference at sbtxas.com/encourager. Cost is \$25 per person (\$50 per couple), with an optional dinner on Friday night for an additional \$10 each. A limited number of scholarships from the SBTC Pastor/Church Relations department are available through April 14. Call 817-552-2500 for more information. 📧

ENCOURAGER CONFERENCE

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OSBORNE**
Central Baptist Church

**NATHAN AND NICOLE
LINO**
Northeast Houston Baptist Church

**JOSH AND ANDREA
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MacArthur Boulevard Baptist Church

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