



# Asking for directions

by Tim Patterson

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – One day during this past crazy year, Sabrina said, “I feel like I am trapped in the Bill Murray movie, “Groundhog Day.” I’m stuck in the same day, over and over again!”

I believe we all understand how she feels. I have felt like I took a wrong turn somewhere in March 2020, and I can’t find my way back to the right road.

Lost is a good word for what many of us are experiencing. Trying to find our purpose. Trying to find our place. Trying to find a way forward. Trying to find peace. Trying to find some semblance of normalcy. Trying to find a sliver of sanity. Trying to find a way through the lunacy and discord of an absolutely insane political season. The real problem is that many of us are lost, and refuse to ask for directions. Of course, I am speaking from a man’s perspective.

One of the genetic faults within the male species that has been passed on since the first human couple walked in the cool of the garden is still extant in the genetic makeup of every man that is alive today. Most men have a great sense of direction, but on those rare occasions when we do get lost it is embedded deep within our DNA not to ask for directions. We just can’t do it!

One would just as well ask us to soar into the heavens by flapping our arms than to hope that a lost man would ask for directions. We are men and we know it. We know who we are and are proud of it. Pride being the operative word.

Another aspect of this malady of mankind is that when we are lost, we immediately go into a state of mind that is as absolutely involuntary and natural as is the process of breathing. We begin to act as if we know where we are, and give forth the impression that we are in total control. To admit otherwise would go against our inbred programming. As one fellow told me, “It just ain’t natural.”

A story that has been passed on for several decades reinforces the fact that even the most intelligent of our species still gets lost. As you may know, Albert Einstein, the great physicist, was one of the greatest minds the human race has ever birthed. His achievements in quantum physics and his understanding of the atom advanced us light years (no pun intended) into the future of scientific knowledge. He was such a great thinker that Time magazine honored him as the Man of the Century.

Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of each passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn’t find his ticket, so he reached into his other pocket. It wasn’t there, so he looked in his briefcase but couldn’t find it. Then he looked in the seat beside him. He couldn’t find it.

The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.' Einstein nodded appreciatively.

The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket.

The conductor rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are. No problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.' Einstein looked at him and said, 'Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going.'

Most of us know who we are, but like the genetically faulty male, when we realize we are lost and don't know where we are going, we are hard pressed to admit it. Dr. Billy Graham made reference to this same story in a message he was delivering and at the conclusion of his address said, "I want you to remember this: I not only know who I am, I also know where I'm going."

2020 – The year we lost and were lost. The year when so many could not find their way. I am so glad to see it in my "rearview mirror." May 2021 be the year of asking directions. The year of knowing the Way. All we have to do is ask.

***Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."***

*John 14:6 (NKJV)*

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tim Patterson is Executive Director/Treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Elected unanimously in May of 2015, Patterson formerly served for 9 years as pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla. He also served as trustee chair and national mobilizer for the North American Mission Board.

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## **On-the-job-training in church**

by Tony Lynn

- Sitting with a family and their loved one in Hospice care
- Leading a small group Bible study
- Sharing the Good News of Christ with last Sunday's visitor to church
- Assisting with a memorial service
- Preparing and preaching a sermon

- Coordinating food distribution
- Leading a session of premarital counseling
- Assisting with the Lord's Supper
- Attending church leadership meetings

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – Could you imagine what would happen if a nine-month, on-the-job-training was set-up in your church? More people would serve if they could explore ministry. How many more might respond confidently to a call to ministry because they understood the role better? Adults have flexible work hours. Retired adults have time and health that could be put to good use. Young adults might consider a lifetime call to service if they could experience ministry first-hand in their local church, alongside people in whom they have confidence. On-the-job-training or residencies in at least half of the churches in Michigan could make an enormous difference.

During 1974, I called every architectural & engineering company in Flint, Michigan asking for a chance to work as a draftsman. I discovered my love of design and drawing during high school classes. As a teen, I thought it was time I tested myself to see if I wanted to spend my life at that work. I landed a job working with Samborn, Steketee, Otis, and Evans (SSOE). The company has been around since 1948 and currently has 20 locations in 4 countries. I worked for the firm until I graduated high school in 1977. While my classmates worked fast food and retail, I walked through Buick plants, AC Delco Parts additions, schools, businesses and churches that I helped draw.

As I worked at SSOE, every adult took interest in me. Creative architects let me make changes on their original drawings. Electrical engineers showed me how to use formulas to calculate the correct number and location of light fixtures in each room. Mechanical engineers explained to me why air ducts gradually become smaller the further they are from the initial air system. Everyone in the firm poured their knowledge and experiences into me. It was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my teen years.

Envision what it would be like if there was a pathway, created in your church, customized by you to welcome seekers who wanted to explore Christian service. You design the content. You set-up the calendar. You interview the candidates. You select the promising servants who will enthusiastically serve alongside you increasing the strength of the church. Do you have goosebumps yet?

A proponent of residencies put it like this, "Why not look around the church and watch for those persons who already serve their families and friends in a pastoral way. Approach the guy and say, 'Jim, I've been watching you and I love the way you generously help others. Would you consider working alongside me for 9-months just to become more familiar with how the church assists people?' It might be that Jim could sense a call to ministry while working alongside you rather than waiting for Jim to discover his calling without first experiencing it."

An effective residency is an intentional effort to discover, develop, and deploy church leaders. A residency creates an opportunity where participants review and readjust their convictions, their

character and their competencies so they can become more effective in God's kingdom. A residency with a cohort component where participants learn with peers and coaches, doing real life ministry, offers accelerated growth and allows everyone to see if participants create good chemistry working with others.

May I encourage you to discuss this potential game-changer with church leadership? What have you got to lose? Absolutely nothing. What have you got to gain? Lifetimes of service from those already in your church who want to know how they can help.

By the way during the seventies, at the same time professional engineers and architects were pouring themselves into my life, my pastor was doing the same. He would pick me up and then pick up my girlfriend in his blue Jeep without the canopy taking us on church visitation where we learned how to share the Good News of Christ. He encouraged us to lead out in the youth group. We made phone calls when people were absent. We enlisted teen volunteers to help at church. We took on ministry roles on Youth Sunday. Little did I know back then that our pastor's informal residency would be the stronger experience that would direct my girlfriend (who is now my wife) and me to our life's calling of international missions and ministry.

Call me and let's talk about a residency for your church before it leaves your mind and your heart: 734.770.0608. I'm convinced this manner of increasing effective leaders has been on the mind and heart of God a very long time.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Tony Lynn is the State Director of Missions for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before coming on staff at the BSCM, Tony served as lead pastor for more than six years at Crosspoint Church in Monroe, Michigan. He and his wife, Jamie, also served with the International Mission Board in Africa and in Europe.

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## **An example of prayer**

by Mike Durbin

**PLYMOUTH, MI** - Jesus lived a life of prayer. We see Him praying over and over again in the Gospels, especially before critically important decisions in His life. We watch Jesus pray at His baptism, as He chooses the 12 apostles, in the Garden of Gethsemane as He seeks God's will, and on the cross as He dies for our salvation to name a few.

His prayer life is so powerful that one of the disciples asks Him, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11:1). It is because of this request we have the great model prayer that begins: “Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Luke 11:2).

Jesus demonstrates the importance of prayer over and over again in His life. His prayerful communion with the Father is an example for all of us that we need God!

Michigan Baptists are commencing a five-year emphasis to have **500 churches in 2025** in partnership with us. It’s a God sized goal - one that we will only see accomplished as we prayerfully depend on God. Five themes will guide us as we move forward together: Praying, Thriving, Equipping, Engaging and Celebrating. Praying is not only the beginning of the emphasis; it is vital through every moment. We work best when we work together and praying draws us closer to God and each other.

Over the course of **500 Churches by 2025**, we will direct Michigan Baptists to various resources that will help us on this mission. One of my favorite resources for this year’s theme of prayer is Bless Every Home. It’s simple to use, free, and can be used by an individual or as part of a church wide emphasis to blanket your community in prayer.

Every morning, Bless Every Home sends me the names of five of my neighbors to pray for in an email. Some on the list, I already know. Some, I have yet to meet. All of them are loved by God and need Him in their lives. There are days when I know exactly how to pray for my neighbors.

Shar and I recently met up with one of our neighbors on our walk. She brought us up to date about her husband’s health. He had spent several weeks in the hospital, but was at home recovering. All the stress, worry, and running of the last few months left her exhausted. The next morning her and her husband’s names were on my email list sent by Bless Every Home. I knew how to pray specifically for their needs. I prayed for his continued healing and for strength, peace, and rest for his wife as she cares for him. I also prayed and asked God to draw them to Jesus through all of this, and to use me in whatever way He needed to share His love with them.

There are times when I’m not sure how to pray for my neighbors. This happens most often when I have not had the opportunity to get to know them personally. Sometimes I use the suggested prayer that comes with my daily prayer list. Here is the prayer that came today:

“Bless my neighbors with freedom from worry. May we determine to turn every anxious thought into prayer with thanksgiving. May Your peace that is beyond understanding guard our hearts and minds as we live in Christ.” This prayer is based on the Apostle Paul’s teaching on prayer in Philippians 4:6-7.

Bless Every Home is a daily encouragement that God calls us to be lights for Christ. It helps us live on mission in our neighborhoods. It gives us tools not only to pray, but to care, share, and

disciple those who live closest to us. It is also a resource that we can use as individuals, or for a church wide emphasis to blanket our communities in prayer. It's an effective resource Michigan Baptists can use to punch holes in the darkness as we begin **500 Churches by 2025!**

Go to [bscm.org/500](https://bscm.org/500) to sign up to be a "Champion of Prayer" and learn more about "Bless Every Home" or contact [mike@bscm.org](mailto:mike@bscm.org) for more information.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Mike Durbin is the State Evangelism Director for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan. Before joining the state convention staff, Mike served as Church Planting Catalyst and Director of Missions in Metro Detroit since 2007. He also has served as a pastor and bi-vocational pastor in Michigan, as well as International Missionary to Brazil.

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## **Champions of Prayer**

by Staff

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – January 2021 officially kicks off a five year emphasis for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM). The BSCM has set a goal of a total of 500 churches across the state convention. There are currently about 300 churches in the BSCM so to meet the goal nearly 200 churches will need to be added over the next five years. Those additions will come through starting new churches, or through existing churches joining the state convention.

There are five themes the BSCM will emphasize in leading up to 2025. They are; praying, thriving, equipping, engaging, and celebrating. The emphasis for 2021 will be prayer. The BSCM believes a foundation of prayer needs to be laid before anything else can be done. BSCM Executive-Treasurer Tim Patterson says, "We believe that when we pray and gather together, God can do great things."

The first step in gathering Michigan churches to pray is what the BSCM is calling "Champions of Prayer." "Champions of Prayer" are leaders in each congregation who will commit to be the contact point in each church for the mission to pray. State convention staff will provide these leaders with the tools and encouragement to inspire believers to ask God to give Michigan more churches.

The BSCM theme for most everything they do is "Punching Holes in the Darkness." They believe that the more churches there are stretched across Michigan, the more light will pour across the

state, and the more holes will be punched into the darkness. Patterson adds, “When you have healthy people and healthy churches, you are going to have a healthy community.”

BSCM unveiled this video to share their vision for reaching the state over the next five years.

If you would be interested in becoming one of Michigan’s “Champions of Prayer”, or you know someone who would be a strong advocate for prayer in your church. Visit [www.500churchesby2025.com](http://www.500churchesby2025.com) to sign up.

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## What are you laying aside in 2021?

by Dr. Michele White

**INKSTER, MI** – Two years ago, God allowed me to experience a milestone birthday. The big 5-0! Since my birthday was at the end of the year in December, I decided to set a physical fitness goal for myself. I wanted to run/walk 50K before I turned 50. I vividly remember my first race. It was a very crisp morning that captured my breath by making circles in the air. Due to the cold, I was dressed from head to toe in winter attire.

As the race began, I became immediately distracted. I began noticing the droves of people passing me. I remember feeling like a hamster on a wheel, not progressing like everyone else. I was also becoming overheated because I had put on way too many layers of clothing. During the race, I had to slow down to remove my heavy coat. Praise God that I finished that first race.

Now, fast forward to my last and final race held in December, when the weather was quite cold. I came prepared very differently than my first race. I had minimal layers of clothing, and remember being quite uncomfortable at the start of the race due to the frigid temperature. However, as I began to run, two amazing things happened. As I ran, I understood that if I kept looking forward, the finish line would be within my eye’s view. I was so fixed on the finish line that I did not pay attention to anyone running in front of me or in back of me. Also, as I ran, I became quite comfortable having the minimal layers of clothing.

In Hebrews 12:1-2, we see a very similar picture in God's Word. God has given us amazing encouragement, and instructions on how to live daily. This particular passage is a rich theological gold mine that I encourage you to dig further and mine for Biblical treasures.

In Hebrews 12:1, God is telling us to lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and run with endurance the race set before us. The word encumbrance here means anything that hinders you from running the race.

Earlier, I mentioned that I was uncomfortable starting the race because I had laid aside my heavy clothing. In our Christian walk, the same thing occurs. At the start of where God calls us to begin the race, we want to hold on to all of our “heavy clothing”. We want to hold on to our own knowledge, our education, our titles, etc.

Sometimes our pride in these areas can be the very sin that entangles us, and prevents our endurance because we become self-reliant and not God-reliant. Have you ever looked at the clothing that marathon runners wear? They wear the lightest articles of clothing, so that they are not hindered in their running. For my Baptist State Convention of Michigan (BSCM) brothers and sisters, today is an opportunity to become uncomfortable and let God direct your race path.

In verse 2, we are told to fix our eyes on Jesus. Wherever God has called you to be in the race, you are to fix your eyes on Jesus and not pay attention to the race of others who are before you or after you. If your eyes are so fixed on Him, your peripheral vision becomes blurred and you can't pay attention to those things that hinder your focus on Him.

Now that we are in 2021 and your race is before you, the question is.....What are you laying aside in 2021 to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, as you run your race?

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Michele White currently serves in leadership as a Deaconess, Finance Chair and Praise Team member at Middlebelt Baptist Church in Inkster, MI. She resides in Ypsilanti, MI and is married to her best friend Paul for 27 years. They have 5 children and 1 grandchild. Dr. White is a licensed Psychologist and Counselor and is the owner of WBC Counseling in Ann Arbor, Flint, Southfield, and Livonia.

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## **Christmas shoe boxes**

by Stan Parker

**LANSING, MI** – The Michigan African American Fellowship (MAAF) joined forces with Samaritan's Purse to participate in Operation Christmas Child Shoe Box gift giving. Some of the youth within the MAAF churches took on the project, and began filling shoe boxes with gifts for children. These shoe boxes will be shipped all around the world. The mission behind the shoe boxes goes far beyond just giving material gifts. They will also serve as tools for evangelism, discipleship, and multiplication.

Each year children in need around the world are recipients of these shoe box gifts. Michigan African American Fellowship has used the project to teach their kids about giving and evangelism. Many of the boxes contained special messages of the salvation of Jesus Christ, Christian tracts, or personal testimonies from some of the youth who packed the boxes.

In the past, reports have been given where some of the children received Jesus Christ as their Savior, and began to share their testimony with other children in their villages or towns. The material gifts bring happiness to many of the children, however, the spiritual gift of receiving Jesus Christ brings everlasting joy for now and throughout eternity. We have had missionaries from Michigan travel to other countries, and are told how the shoe box gift giving has caused a life changing impact on not just the children who receive the shoe boxes, but also their parents.

Our youth were so excited this year to participate, they have requested to take on this project again in 2021. They have already begun making plans to make the project bigger next year. Jacob, one of the youth, stated that the Christmas Mission project helped him focus on the real meaning of Christmas. He believes it is important for us to give to others since Jesus gave Himself for us all. Giving to others is a great way to model what Jesus did for all of mankind. We must never lose focus on the fact the very best gift was not found in a shoebox, but a manger.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr Stan Parker, Pastor of Faith Fellowship Baptist Church Lansing, current President of the Michigan African American Fellowship, and married to Charlotte.

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## **Six pastors in four months**

by Harold Raymond

**DUNDEE, MI** – If you ever wondered how God calls people into a new ministry, here's one example.

Late one Saturday, about 11:30 pm, our phone rang. It was one of the teenage girls who attended a Bible Study I taught. She was crying and it took me a minute to understand why. Her little country church was going to be without a Pastor the next morning because their sixth Pastor in four months had just quit.

I told her I would be praying for her church.

"You don't understand," she said, "I was thinking you would do a great job if you came and preached."

"No!" I said. "I'm too young, just a college kid."

"No?" she said through a big sob. "Please!"

"Like I said, I'll be praying for you, but, well, I've never preached to adults before, just kids."

Through new tears, she said, "Oh, please help us. I don't know anyone else to call."

How could I say no? Especially when I finally prayed and said, "Lord!" I really meant, "Lord, who can I call to help them?" I didn't hear any spoken answer from the Lord, but before I hung up, I told the girl I would be there in the morning . . . and the morning came quickly!

I barely had time to be nervous as I prayed, worked on a message, and tried to sleep. When the service started, three old men in the back pew kept talking, and ignoring everyone else. I was used to working with kids, so naturally I asked the three men if they would listen with everyone else. Little did I know that they were the three life-time Deacons who ran the church.

My words caused one man that I met later to tell me what his first thought was when I asked the Deacons to pay attention. "That will be our seventh pastor in four months! They might even stop the service and kick him out right now."

But they didn't, and I made it through a pre-printed order-of-worship, complete with the prayers typed out in their bulletin. I read their prayers, but prayed my own words afterwards.

When the service finally ended, I was expecting the three Deacons to meet me before I stepped down from the pulpit, but the Deacons couldn't get past the three old Grannies heading up the aisle toward me, all three of them shaking their pointing fingers at me.

I was looking for a back door and quick escape, but the first Granny surprised me. "It's about time someone prayed in this church!" she shouted. The other two Grannies echoed her, "We want you to be our Pastor."

This wasn't just a surprise. I was in total shock! In one year, I would graduate from college to become a high school teacher, and I had never even considered being a pastor. I figured the only way to escape was to stall them by telling them I would pray about it, and hoping they would change their minds. But, yes, I promised to return the next Sunday because I knew it would be impossible to get someone for them on such short notice.

The scary part was, even the three Deacons asked me to come back. How about you? Has God ever surprised you, and called you to new service to Him when you weren't expecting it? There's a simple solution to these fears. Trust Jesus and step out in faith.

*"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ."*

2 Corinthians 2:14

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Harold Raymond serves as Pastor of Dundee Baptist Church in Southeastern Baptist Association. God is still using him in the Pastorate 49 years after the miracle that happened in this article.

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## **NAMB keeps mission moving forward during year of challenges**

by NAMB staff

**ALPHARETTA, GA** – With nearly every aspect of life and ministry impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) adjusted its priorities to ensure that the mission of sharing the gospel would move forward.

In the face of the challenges brought on by travel restrictions, economic shutdowns and church closures, NAMB [took financial steps](#) to support missionaries and keep them on the field while they served and shared the gospel with their neighbors through church planting and compassion ministry. Evangelism initiatives continued through Who's Your One, and NAMB provided resources designed to help pastors in the area of leadership and evangelism.

The International Mission Board (IMB) and NAMB announced in February that they would coordinate compassion ministry efforts through Send Relief. A few short weeks later the COVID crisis generated needs in North America and around the world (*See related [Send Relief 2020 highlights story](#)*). Thousands of NAMB-endorsed chaplains also stepped into much needed ministry spaces as spiritual and physical needs increased during the pandemic.

### **Send Network**

With the obstacles brought on by the pandemic, NAMB's priority centered on supporting church planting missionaries to make sure they were able to stay on the field and help newly-planted churches weather the crisis. For both established and new churches, for pastors and church planters, [NAMB produced a number of webinars and other resources](#) to help leaders adjust to the new normal.

A number of [churches launched in 2019](#) embodied the principles of Send Network, NAMB's church planting arm, and embraced the challenges posed by COVID, [sharing the gospel and serving their communities](#).

As New York City became the epicenter for COVID-19 in the United States, [Send Network church plants](#) were on the front lines [serving communities that were hardest hit](#). Churches also took opportunities to serve [in Denver](#), [New Orleans](#), [Phoenix](#) and [across North America](#) as the disease spread and needs increased.

The Send Network also deepened its relationship with Southern Baptist state convention partners, including the [Baptist Resource Network of Pennsylvania/South Jersey](#) and the launch of [Send Network Oklahoma](#). NAMB also joined New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary [to develop a church planting center on their campus](#).

For churches seeking to launch in 2020, the pandemic made it difficult if not impossible for many, especially in major cities. Many new churches were planted, however, and Send Network assessments and orientation transitioned to a virtual format so that hundreds of missionaries could continue entering the pipeline and prepare to launch new churches in 2021.

## **Evangelism and Leadership**

To assist with evangelism on and around college campuses, NAMB [announced the hiring of Paul Worcester](#) as its national director of collegiate evangelism. Worcester will serve alongside Shane Pruitt, NAMB's executive director of next gen evangelism, and work through on-campus and church-based ministries.

NAMB also began [a partnership with Will Mancini](#) to make [Next Step Leader](#) available to pastors. Next Step Leader is a proven process that helps pastors increase their leadership capacity and enables them to maximize their church's evangelistic effectiveness.

The Who's Your One evangelism emphasis [marked its first anniversary](#) in February after the initiative launched in cooperation with J.D. Greear, current Southern Baptist Convention president and pastor of Summit Church in Raleigh, N.C.

While the pandemic caused a number of Who's Your One Tour events to be postponed, several were conducted safely in the late spring into the early fall. To help with churches that may have been struggling financially, NAMB also [offered free evangelism kits to pastors and churches](#).

One of NAMB's first events of the year was the official [launch of the Timothy + Barnabas Institute](#) (TBI), a two-year coaching and mentoring program for pastors. The TBI launched ahead of one of the [more turbulent years in recent memory](#), and several participants said the timing was providential. Along with the TBI, NAMB hosted several Timothy + Barnabas Retreats, a getaway designed to encourage and instruct pastors in their gospel ministry.

## Replant

Churches that were struggling to stay afloat before the pandemic encountered significant challenges when the dangers of the coronavirus pandemic forced them to close their doors. Many wondered whether or not they would ever be able to reopen again, but NAMB's Replant team helped [a number of churches find their feet again](#).

Mark Clifton, the senior director of Replant at NAMB, and his team were able to [host their annual Replant Summit in-person](#) in the Kansas City area. In August, a group of experienced practitioners [shared what they had learned](#) during the process of replanting and revitalizing struggling or dying congregations.

The Replant team also [maintained a Replant cohort](#) designed to encourage and equip pastors to stay strong and avoid burnout during the season of COVID-19 and beyond.

## Chaplaincy

In the early days of the pandemic Southern Baptist military chaplains were some of the first to navigate the ministry challenges, [especially as South Korea and Italy became hotspots](#).

For military chaplains, 2020 became a banner year. NAMB and the Canadian National Baptist Convention (CNBC) partnered together to start [endorsing chaplains for the Canadian Armed Forces](#), and the U.S. Senate confirmed a Southern Baptist chaplain as [the Air Force's Deputy 27th Chief of Chaplains](#). Military chaplains also recognized the [70th anniversary of significant stages of the Korean War](#).

Southern Baptist chaplains in [the National Guard](#), [healthcare centers](#) and [assisted living facilities](#) were on the front lines providing spiritual care with those most affected.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The North American Mission Board communications team compiled this report.

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## How Would You Rate 2020?

by Billy Walker

**SOUTHGATE, MI** – If you rated the past year of 2020 - on a scale of 1 (being the worst year ever) to 10 (it was covered with awesome sauce) - what kind of a rating would you give it?

Thinking that probably most of you are not going to be giving this year high marks, and rightfully so. We did this exercise in church a couple years ago. While there are always those on the extreme high or low end, the average – even in a normal year - was just over a 6, definitely room for improvement. Thinking if we took the average of all those reading this, it would be considerably lower than that. Here's the question; is it possible to have a year that gets a 10, and even of more importance, is there any way to have a serious rebound from this past year? Now let's be honest, some of you could win the Billion-dollar Powerball Lotto and you still wouldn't rate the year a 10 because it's just not in your nature to give *too* much credit to anything or anyone! And hey, money doesn't make you happy (at least that's what everyone without a lot of money says.)

Also... parenthetically, I have bought Powerball Lottery tickets. Maybe we will cover this at another time - but I wanted you to know, I only bought one \$2 ticket, did not wait in any line, and my criteria is it has to be more than 1 billion dollars to make it worth my time. Okay, back to the regularly scheduled article.

But what if we just went on the premise that we'd like to improve on the rating we gave this past year. We'd like to take 2021 up a notch or two. I know, I know, "How can it get any worse?"

Here's the deal, regardless of the circumstances that led us through a year of isolation, disconnection, closures, cancelations, and loss without a plan, human nature will pull us in the same direction unless we are purposeful to make it different. You have heard of 'atrophy.' It's what happens in your garage or basement after about 6 months – all of a sudden you are surprised by the mess you have on your hands and you have to prioritize cleaning it up. Doctors tell us it is what happens with any type of hospital stay. After one week, even healthy college students lose a high percentage of their muscle capacity. Why? Atrophy.

First of all, we have to BELIEVE that it can happen. This sounds so common and cliché, but Scripture reminds us in Proverbs 23:7 that "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he!*" **We BECOME what we BELIEVE!** Doesn't it stand to reason, if we go into this new year already concluding that it will NOT be better than the last, there's a pretty good chance it won't be. However, if we start to believe that the next 52 weeks will be better in every way than what was, your mind begins to move you down the path to make it happen! We often say "I'll believe it when I see it!" Unfortunately, we have difficulty coming to grips with the fact that seeing *isn't* believing, but believing *is* seeing.

Second thing we then need to do is **change the BEHAVIOR to accommodate the BELIEF! This involves BREAKING and BECOMING!** There were certain things you did last year, things you experienced, you were part of and they held you back from making your year better than it was. While much of it was out of your control, some of it was by choice. What are those things, and can you begin the process of breaking away from them, and not allowing that to happen again this year? Hebrews 12:1 tells us "*Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of*

*witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us.”*

It could be a habit you developed that you need to remove. A time waster you'll have to get rid of. Maybe even a relationship that you have that is toxic to becoming all God wants you to be (maybe your relationship to the 24/7 news or social media? I know, now I'm meddling)!

On the positive side of the ledger, what are the things that you need to BECOME so that what you BELIEVE will happen? **Just like we develop negative traits that need to be removed, we have to develop positive traits to be improved!** Then narrow down those traits. You have 12 months ahead, so what can you do on a monthly basis, a weekly basis, and a daily basis to BECOME the best you.

Praying for God's blessing is first and foremost, but then taking steps in the direction He desires for you to head is next. Putting feet to our faith is always a high priority with a God who is pleased and moved by that (Hebrews 11:6). **The BELIEF that God can has to be accompanied by the BEHAVIOR that God will!** BELIEVE it, then BEHAVE like it by BREAKING AND BECOMING!

2020 has been a year filled with changes and challenges; there is no way to minimize its effect on all of us. But let's not just presume that the coming 12 months will be better – **let's pray as if it all depends on God and then work as if it all depends on us**, believing that the Holy Spirit will lead us to becoming the best we can be in 2021. Praying with you to that end.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rev. Billy Walker is the Lead Pastor of Calvary Church in Southgate, MI, the Vice President of the Billy Walker Evangelistic Association and a leader with the Church Strengthening team for the BSCM. He and his wife Laurie have two daughters and are lifetime residents of the downriver area.

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## **Michigan Disaster Relief**

by Bob Kiger

**PLYMOUTH, MI** – Bob Kiger, Michigan Disaster Relief Director, was asked about both his 2021 vision for Disaster Relief (DR) efforts with Michigan volunteers and practical ways for people in Michigan churches to get involved.

**What is the most distinctive thing about participating with Disaster Relief?**

KIGER: *"The most distinctive thing about participating with Disaster Relief is the fact that you are part of a larger organization that is recognized around the world as being one of the largest trained volunteer disaster relief efforts."*

**Why do you think a wide variety of people in churches love to participate in Disaster Relief?  
What do you think is their reward?**

KIGER: *"I think we have so many church members volunteer because deep in their heart they want to help their fellow man, especially when someone is suffering, and Disaster Relief is an organized effort that they can join and do just that. Most feel their reward is Jesus' command 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.' Matthew 25:40"*

**What are your hopes for Michigan Disaster Relief in 2021?**

KIGER: *"Because 2020 was such a different year, in 2021 I am looking forward to all our volunteers being healthy and able to assist in disaster callouts. We have had to cancel trips because of health issues, and even postponed training. We will continue to provide support to disaster victims in Michigan and across the country. We will add additional training opportunities around the state to prepare new volunteers. We will also train additional chaplains which are becoming more in demand during these times."*

**What are the major ways that DR teams help people in crisis?**

KIGER: *"The most obvious way that DR helps is in the physical recovery effort. Whether it is a tornado, hurricane, flood, or fire, we help them recover their property that is salvageable, and then we prepare their house, so it is ready to be remodeled or rebuilt. But this is only the physical. The most important help we give is the spiritual compassion that we share. Disaster victims need to know God still is in control and He has not forgotten them. This is why we need to add more chaplains that can fellowship with homeowners while volunteers work on their homes."*

**What kind of travel, lodging and meals are set up for the DR volunteers that go to help in a crisis?**

KIGER: *"DR teams travel as a group in DR supplied vehicles, and house in churches on the way if it takes more than one day to arrive. Once the team arrives at the disaster area, volunteers are housed in a local church. They must take their own bedding (cots, air mattresses, etc.). During a response to a disaster, a feeding team will be housed at the church and will feed not only the DR volunteers, but in some cases, the public too if it is a major disaster."*

**What are the steps someone needs to take to participate with DR?**

KIGER: *"For those that are interested in joining DR, you must attend Basic Training which is offered throughout the year. Different Unit Training is offered depending on someone's personal preference. Training is offered in Flood Recovery, Chainsaw and Feeding. You can be trained in all three if desired. Once someone has been trained and has participated in a disaster callout, they can then be trained as a Chaplain."*

### **If someone wants to develop a DR team in their own church, how can you help them?**

KIGER: *"The best way for a church to establish a team of their own is to attend Basic Training and then decide which Unit they are interested in forming. They will then be trained in that discipline and participate in a callout with experienced volunteers and then they can respond to any future callouts as a team."*

### **What is one of your most memorable moments you experienced during 2020?**

KIGER: *"The floods in the Midland area were such a devastating event that affected so many people. The Michigan DR team spent several weeks helping homeowners recover from the damage. As we were in the middle of responding, governmental agencies were contacting us and asking what they should be doing, and how they could help us. This was so rewarding because we were recognized for the knowledge and skill that our volunteers possess. Our volunteers don't look for recognition, but when they are noticed, they know they are doing what God has asked them to do."*

The latest 2020 national Disaster Relief numbers are in from President/CEO Ronnie Floyd, SBC Executive Committee. Southern Baptists have the third largest disaster relief organization in America, only following the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Through the ministries of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief:

- 753,977 meals prepared for survivors of national disasters
- 668,687 hours of work were given by volunteers
- 7,975 recovery jobs were completed by volunteers, which includes chainsaw jobs, as well as flood, fire, and debris removal
- 6,813 Gospel presentations were made
- 875 people made the decision to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord

Michigan Disaster is a part of these national numbers. Won't you volunteer and join Michigan Disaster Relief in 2021? There are a lot of hurting people that need your help. For more information about Michigan Disaster Relief, visit [bscm.org/dr](https://bscm.org/dr) or contact Bob Kiger at [bob@bscm.org](mailto:bob@bscm.org).

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Bob Kiger became a Christian at age 12. He and his wife Rose have been married for 46 years, have 3 adult children and 5 grandchildren. Bob retired from Ford Motor Company as a Senior

Partner and then began using his talents in Disaster Relief efforts all around the nation. Bob is the Director of Michigan Disaster Relief.

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## **Laundry ministry is labor of love for WMU volunteers**

by Trennis Henderson

**LUMBERTON, NC** – Washing piles of muddy clothes and cleaning bathrooms may not sound like the most glamorous missions project available, but it's a labor of love for Woman's Missionary Union volunteers from Robeson Baptist Association in Lumberton, North Carolina.

Working behind the scenes at the Baptist Rebuild Center in Lumberton, women from several area churches regularly do laundry; put fresh mattress covers on rows of bunk beds; clean sinks, showers, and commodes; sweep and mop floors; and sort and deliver donated food items.

The Rebuild Center, a ministry of North Carolina Baptists on Mission, is equipped to house and feed up to two hundred volunteers from across the state and beyond. The volunteer teams continue to help area residents rebuild from two devastating hurricanes that hit the region: Matthew in 2016 and Florence in 2018.

"As the volunteers would come, we wanted it to be a clean, inviting, comfortable place for them," explained Deborah Taylor, president of WMU of North Carolina. She noted that the volunteers typically work long hours removing moldy insulation; installing new wiring, plumbing, and roofing; hanging drywall; and painting.

Taylor, whose husband Alan is the mission strategist for Robeson Baptist Association, contacted area churches and WMU groups about adopting the laundry and cleaning ministry.

"We saw that there were people who were trained a lot better than me in painting and pulling insulation out of houses and rebuilding those floors," Taylor said. "But they still needed food, they still needed their clothes washed, especially after being out in the field all day and coming in with the mud. And so I called and asked our ladies, 'How about if we do this?' . . . I felt like that was the little bit that we could do."

### **MINISTRY OFFERS ENCOURAGEMENT**

That "little bit" has grown into a well-organized ministry that involves various WMU groups taking responsibility for laundry and cleaning duties on different days of each month. The rebuild teams put their dirty clothes in bags that the WMU volunteers collect. As they wash,

dry, and fold the loads of laundry, they also attach thank you notes and Bible verses to the bags and pray for each of the workers.

“We knew that they were gone all day working,” Taylor pointed out. “It’s a joy to see when they come back in and pick up their clean laundry and read those Bible verses and be encouraged through that too.”

Amid all the projects the volunteers tackle at the Rebuild Center, “the laundry has kind of become our home,” Taylor said. “I believe that God has given each of us gifts and that we use those gifts at different times in different places.

“I’ve tried to help our youth and our ladies to see that when we’re washing those clothes, we may not know who José is, or who Jimmy is, or James, or where they have been,” she added, “but we know that they have been in touch with someone from our community, someone who had a need.”

Jay Baugham and his wife Ashley have served since spring 2019 as the site coordinators at the Baptist Rebuild Center in Lumberton. While they often host hundreds of volunteers each month, the coronavirus pandemic has significantly reduced those numbers this year. Volunteers still are needed to help complete extensive repairs due to hurricane-related devastation ranging from roof damage to massive flooding.

As they coordinate logistics on behalf of volunteer teams, “one of the great partnerships that we have locally is the WMU,” Baugham affirmed. “They play a big, key role in how the Rebuild Center can actually run and operate. . . . They’re open and flexible to doing whatever is needed.

“Our focus here at the Rebuild Center is to house volunteers, churches, just really any organization that would want to come and work,” he explained. As workers are oriented and assigned to dozens of work sites throughout the area, “we get to see hands-on how God can work in these volunteers.”

## **SHARING THE GOSPEL IS MAIN GOAL**

Beyond the coordination and construction, Baugham emphasized that the ministry’s primary goal is sharing the Gospel with the families they serve. Workers at each job site pray with the homeowners and pray for their house and community so that when the crew leaves, the family continues to feel the presence of God in their home, he said.

“We’ve seen some families come to Christ just because of the volunteers that come down and pour into their lives and do what they need,” he reflected. “It’s just been amazing to see.”

Betty Britt was among the recipients of the Rebuild Center’s ministry as three volunteers worked to replace a damaged, leaky shower in her bathroom. “I had tried to do as much as I can on my own,” she noted, “but I could not put in a shower stall.”

Acknowledging that she “had given up hope” before she got a call from the Rebuild Center, Britt said, “It’s just wonderful to see the Lord working. There are so many people involved and you can see the Lord working in them. It’s just been such a blessing.”

Another major project the Baughams have coordinated through the Rebuild Center is distributing USDA “Famers to Families” produce boxes. Each week, the center’s parking lot is abuzz with activity as staff and volunteers load hundreds of boxes of fresh produce into waiting trucks and vans. Area churches and organizations, in turn, distribute the fruit and vegetables to people in their communities who are stuck at home due to COVID restrictions or other limitations.

“It’s just amazing to be able to see the churches’ stories when they come back to us,” Baugham noted. He said each of the volunteers is able to pray with the recipient and ask if the church can assist with any other needs.

“It helps that church and that homeowner connect,” he said.

### **INVOLVEMENT MAKES SPIRITUAL IMPACT**

As ministry efforts from shower repairs to produce boxes to personal witnessing opportunities multiply across the hurricane-scarred region, WMU members have the satisfaction of knowing that their behind-the-scenes involvement is helping make a spiritual difference.

“You know, there’s no glory in cleaning bathrooms, but here it has actually been a glorious thing,” said Sara Lovett, a member of Robeson Association’s WMU leadership team. “It’s been a blessing that we could all come together and do this kind of work together to help others.”

Along with the laundry and cleaning ministry, WMU members also help coordinate an annual Christmas toy store for hundreds of needy children, and often deliver fresh milk and other donated items to senior citizens and an area children’s home.

Sandra Terry, assistant WMU director at Great Marsh Baptist Church in St. Pauls, noted that as volunteers visit with recipients, “we ask them if they need prayer, minister to them if we can, encourage them as much as we can. Sometimes just a smile helps in the long scheme of things.”

“I don’t think my life would be the same without WMU,” Deborah Taylor reflected. “WMU always wants people to be on mission—to be radically involved in the Great Commission.” Describing WMU’s ongoing partnership with the Lumberton Rebuild Center as “a natural fit,” she said their motivation is clear: “If we’re doing it for God and for His glory, we want it to be the best that it can be.”

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Trennis Henderson is a freelance national correspondent for the Woman's Missionary Union.

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# Send Relief announced joint IMB, NAMB ahead of making worldwide impact in 2020

by Brandon Elrod

**ALPHARETTA, GA (BP)** – Send Relief began 2020 with the [historic announcement](#) that the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the International Mission Board (IMB) would begin coordinating compassion ministry efforts. That news was followed shortly by word that [Bryant Wright](#), longtime pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta and a past President of the Southern Baptist Convention, would lead the effort.

A few weeks after those announcements in February, the COVID-19 pandemic began to envelop the globe in a health and economic crisis.

Immediately, doors opened up for ministry as needs rapidly increased in North America and around the world. Send Relief, through various partners around the world, conducted more than 700 projects in nearly 10,000 communities, and the work helped 1.4 million people.

Outside North America, half a million people heard the Gospel with more than 15,000 people coming to faith in Christ, which led to the creation of more than 380 new churches.

“In my first week as president, COVID shut down the world,” Wright said. “As we focused on building out the Send Relief team, I was amazed by what God did during the pandemic. Even though the whole world was paralyzed, a lot of great things have still happened on the field, most of all, the number of people who came to Christ.”

Wright said Send Relief has been a natural continuation of his ministry.

“Global missions was the heartbeat of Johnson Ferry, and the highlight of pastoring that church,” Wright said. “So, when IMB president Paul Chitwood reached out to me about an opportunity to serve in global compassion ministry, I was excited.”

So right away, Send Relief became a worldwide ministry, utilizing the partnerships and ministries NAMB had developed in North America as well as those cultivated through IMB to serve people in need and bring the Gospel to them.

## COVID-19 Response

Send Relief was promptly tested as ministry partners on multiple continents served the vulnerable who were most affected by the coronavirus pandemic. When personal protective equipment (PPE) started becoming scarce in the early weeks of COVID-19, Send Relief and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR) [sent more than 228,000 sets of PPE](#) to medical professionals and first responders serving on the front lines.

Send Relief keys in on five focus areas of ministry: strengthening communities, caring for refugees, protecting children and families, fighting human trafficking and responding to crisis.

The aim of Send Relief compassion ministry is to do more than provide handouts. Send Relief missionaries and ministry partners strive to help those in need make lasting change, all while bringing the eternal hope of the Gospel.

During the pandemic, part of that effort involved [providing education about COVID-19](#) to remote areas that had little information about the virus. In the immediate aftermath of the economic upheaval, missionaries and ministry partners provided food in North America, in places like [New Mexico](#), [Puerto Rico](#) and several other locations throughout the U.S., as well as in [remote parts of the world](#).

Send Relief also sought to empower people with long-term solutions, such as [building a rice mill](#) or teaching farmers [to plant, harvest and sell tea](#). For one ministry that has been helping to get needed medicine to remote people groups, their efforts in [creating portable pharmacies in South America](#) could not have been more timely.

Where possible, Send Relief also encouraged people to view [foster care as an opportunity to share the Gospel](#) and to [care for the elderly](#), especially during COVID-19.

The travel restrictions implemented due the pandemic prevented many mission trips in 2020, but the legacy of GenSend's development of young adults to live on mission was felt through stories like [ICU nurse Lexie Green's](#).

### **New Send Relief Ministry Centers launched**

One of Send Relief's key strategies in North America is to create Ministry Centers where Southern Baptists can serve alongside missionaries and learn about best practices in compassion ministry so that they can implement similar outreach strategies in their own communities.

The number of ministry centers [grew to 12](#), including new centers in [South Dakota](#), [Puerto Rico](#) and Valdosta, Ga. In 2021, Send Relief expects the total to grow to 20 ministry centers across the United States.

### **Crisis Response, historic hurricane season**

If not for the global pandemic, 2020 may have been remembered in history as the [year of the hurricane](#), with a record 30 named storms and 13 hurricanes, six of which developed into major hurricanes. Storms battered the Gulf Coast of the United States, including Hurricanes [Laura](#), [Sally](#), [Delta](#) and [Zeta](#). Send Relief [delivered supplies to assist several SBDR partners](#) in their disaster relief efforts.

Central America also endured a battering from [tropical storms and hurricanes](#), and typhoons in the Pacific also brought extreme damage to Asian nations as well.

The multiple hurricanes were not the only responses carried out by SBDR. Wildfires ravaged the western United States, including [California](#), [Colorado](#) and the [Northwest](#).

In total, SBDR conducted 7,975 recovery jobs in the United States, prepared more than 750,000 meals and distributed more than 10.4 million pounds of food in response to the pandemic. Volunteers presented the gospel more than 6,800 times and reported 875 professions of faith.

On Aug. 4, a devastating explosion rocked Beirut, Lebanon, killing hundreds of people, injuring thousands more and destroying or damaging millions of dollars' worth of property. [Send Relief prepared a response](#), and ministry partners on the ground [shared their experiences in the aftermath of the blast](#).

For more information and details about how you can serve through Send Relief, visit [sendrelief.org](https://sendrelief.org).

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Brandon Elrod writes for the North American Mission Board.

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## **Here for the long haul: Missionaries stay committed to difficult field**

by Meredith Flynn

**UGANDA** – When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down much of the world, residents of remote islands in Lake Victoria got the latest news from the village loudspeaker. One pastor seized the opportunity to preach over that loudspeaker twice a week, to around 700 people within earshot.

A Muslim man who heard the sermons told the pastor not to come back to him with the gospel again. But the pastor kept preaching, and the man kept listening. Eventually, he came back.

“I want your God,” he said. “I want your Jesus.”

James and Sonya Herron have served with the International Mission Board in Uganda for 11 years. They have seen 15 churches start on seven islands. They have seen unbelievers like the Muslim man transformed by the gospel. The Herrons and their fellow Christians on the islands preach one true God in a land of many “little gods,” James said.

“Africans, they know there’s a God,” he said. Spiritual concepts like good and evil are woven into the culture. They’re open to the gospel.

“The thing is to get people to turn from their old ways, and to fully engulf and fully receive and allow Christ to change their lives.”

### **‘This is where God sent us’**

As members of First Baptist Church in O’Fallon, the Herrons went on mission trips to Africa for years before relocating full-time to Uganda. James served on IBSA’s church planting team, helping facilitate new African-American and African congregations in Metro East Illinois.

They moved to Uganda in 2010 to help start new churches and disciple believers. Over more than a decade, they have facilitated medical clinics, Vacation Bible School, training programs for farmers, and more initiatives to point people to the gospel.

The Herrons spent their first five years in Uganda sleeping in tents. (They now live on a compound with their daughter, Madison.) They had their first stateside assignment back in the U.S. in 2014, and when they got back to Uganda, people were surprised to see them.

“They were happy, but they were surprised we had come back to them,” James said. Life is hard in the region. Island self-esteem is low. The average income of most people they work with is less than \$300 a year. Life is less expensive on the islands, but the people they serve are considered expendable, underserved by the government and everyone else.

“We told them this is where God sent us,” James said, “and we’ll be here until he moves us.”

Spiritually, Sonya said, it’s easy for their people to accept that there is another God active in the world, but they may take Jesus and add him to their other beliefs. “Even those in the church, those who say they have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, for many of them it is what we consider hedging your bets,” she said.

“You have to untease the true and living God from what they believe and what they understand about the power and the importance of gods in their lives.”

The Herrons have found a hearing for the gospel on the islands, including among Muslims. They’re even welcome to share in local schools, Sonya said. The believers they work with are quick to share Jesus with others, but the larger challenge is helping them shore up what they

believe and why they believe it. Toward that end, James teaches *The Baptist Faith and Message*, Southern Baptists' statement of faith.

The lessons are helping believers refute false teaching, he said. Herron recounted how a Ugandan church member recently encountered a false teacher. The church member was able to point out that the Scripture the teacher was using was being taken out of context. "I believe that we're seeing people making drastic changes in their presentation of the gospel and what they're preaching," Herron said. In one three-month period this year, five Muslim men came to know the Lord.

Their desire is for people to love Jesus to the point that when they see inconsistencies between the gospel and their traditional beliefs, James said, they abandon the tradition and hold onto Christ.

### **Fishers of men**

The isolated islands have not been immune from COVID-19 and restrictions to prevent its spread. Officials instituted a shutdown immediately following the first case in the country, resulting in even more difficult circumstances for many, Sonya said. Not only were families of six or eight confined to a small hut, but they were unable to shop for food on their way home from work as they normally would. In a culture where you use your daily wage to buy food for that evening, people were hungry.

The Herrons had access to funds to provide emergency food for some of the pastors and churches. In one congregation, everyone took smaller portions so that the food would stretch farther. "To me, that's the church being the church," James said.

The couple has been back in Illinois on stateside assignment since the summer but will return to Uganda in January. In their absence, the work has continued through local pastors and the work of Austin Lee, an IMB Journeyman also from FBC O'Fallon.

When they get back, James said, they will pick back up on training from *The Baptist Faith and Message*. They will continue to disciple new believers who may leave their islands one day. After all, James said, fishermen follow the fish.

"As long as they are carrying Christ with them, that's what we want to happen."

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Meredith Flynn is the managing editor for [Illinois Baptist](#).

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# LifeWay donates nearly 30,000 Spanish Bibles to struggling Venezuelan communities

by Joy Allmond

**NASHVILLE, TN** – Somewhere in a Venezuelan prison, \*Luis, a 26-year-old inmate, recently received new life after placing His trust in Christ. And his newfound faith has been bolstered in large part due to a new Bible he received through a partnership with LifeWay and an organization that has been mobilized to distribute copies of God’s Word throughout the country.

In August 2020, LifeWay Christian Resources donated nearly 30,000 copies of Spanish “Reina Valera” (RVR) Bibles of nine different types for distribution across Venezuela through the global ministry partner. Some of these types of RVR Bibles include large print, reference and “Colormax” — a more visually dynamic version suited for students.

This mission wasn’t without its challenges in a country already suffering from decades of dictatorial regimes. Fuel shortages and COVID-19 lockdowns hindered the distribution. Even still, hundreds of ministry partners were mobilized to transport Bibles through 2,200 churches in 19 Venezuelan states between October and December 2020, primarily to citizens who did not previously own a Bible — people like Luis.

“I had no Bible and it is a gift I never expected to receive,” wrote Luis. “It is something marvelous that I will truly cherish. I am moved as I see the hand of God operating through your ministry, which I realize is the result of much effort. The attention you give us here in prison seems incredible to me, because I know God is able to change lives.”

Because of the varied economic vulnerabilities Venezuela faces, most of its citizens can’t afford a Bible. The cost of a single Bible can set the average Venezuelan back about six months’ worth of wages.

“A very important part of our work since the beginning of LifeWay as an organization has been serving the church wherever the church is located, searching for the best way to serve their needs and to help with the realities of the local communities,” said César Custodio, LifeWay’s Spanish sales and marketing director.

“Over the years we have served countries such as Venezuela, through our commercial partners. However, this has been a mission that has been complicated because of the situation that this beautiful country has gone through in the last few years.”

This mission to get Bibles into the hands of Venezuelans began by selecting trusted local church partners in consultation with the Evangelical Council of Venezuela (CEV). Church leaders from the states that received Bibles compiled lists of beneficiaries divided into five categories:

- Church members who did not own a Bible
- New believers who didn't own a Bible
- Elderly church members (for the large-print Bibles)
- Pastors who did not own a reference or study Bible (for the reference Bibles)
- Youth aged 10-18 years, of economically vulnerable believing families or new believers, who did not own a Bible (for the "Colormax" Bibles)

Local church leaders distributed the Bibles to beneficiaries in their respective churches and parishes using Bible fairs and special "Bible Month" events. Thousands of church leaders who had never owned a reference Bible, or whose old Bibles were well worn after years of use, received new ones to assist them with their sermon preparation and personal discipleship.

Teens walked miles due to transportation challenges to receive their first Bibles. In the States of Zulia and Amazonas, two indigenous groups — the Wayuu and the Piaroa — were able to receive Bibles.

Church leaders from all states expressed their appreciation for these Bibles that arrived just as the humanitarian crisis deepens in Venezuela and inflation rates skyrocket.

"We can see the current worldwide crisis, such as COVID-19 and the way it has expanded throughout the country of Venezuela, imposing great challenges that grow every day and affect the local churches," said Custodio.

"We pray the church in Venezuela knows that LifeWay supports the great mission they undertake during these difficult times. It is with great joy that LifeWay and the Spanish resource team get to know that our work out of Nashville, Tenn., can bless the lives of the Venezuelan people. Our hearts and our prayers are united with the church in Venezuela."

As the economic crisis deepens and the COVID-19 pandemic spreads in the country, these Bibles provide churches with a tool to reach their neighbors and friends with the hope that can only be found in Jesus Christ — the same hope that will sustain Luis as he begins his personal ministry in a Venezuelan prison.

"How could I imagine starting a new life in this prison?" he wrote. "It was a fantasy. But when I came to Christ and came to know Him, He gave new meaning to my life. ... Thank you for the food and medicine you provide, and for this Bible. I have felt loved by Jesus and I know that other colleagues of mine here in prison have felt the same."

*\*Name has been changed for anonymity.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joy Allmond is a writer for LifeWay Christian Resources.

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# Group of Southern Baptists opposes those who ‘distract’ from racial reconciliation

by Scott Barkley

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** – Citing “recent events [that] have left many brothers and sisters of color feeling betrayed and wondering if the [SBC] is committed to racial reconciliation,” a cross-ethnic group of Southern Baptists released a statement today (Dec. 18) titled [“Justice, Repentance, and the SBC.”](#)

The statement comes one week after [another issued](#) by the National African American Fellowship of the SBC and its president, Virginia pastor Marshal Ausberry, who also serves as SBC first vice president. That one came in response to a statement issued Nov. 30 [by the Council of Seminary Presidents](#) of the SBC reaffirming the Baptist Faith and Message while labeling Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality as “incompatible” with the BF&M.

Today’s statement was issued, its authors note, on the 155th anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude.

“We are all sinners in need of God’s grace, and as such, justice is something that tends to elude us,” it reads. “We often allow preconceptions and opinions to cloud our judgment. True justice is exemplified by hearts, lives, and actions staying in line with God’s vision for the world through the Gospel.”

The concept of injustice was present at the SBC’s founding, the statement says, with Southern slaveholders appointing and supporting missionaries. “This historical reality is neither disputed, nor can it be ignored,” it adds.

At its 1995 annual meeting, the SBC issued [a resolution](#) on racial reconciliation, acknowledging the role of slavery in its founding. However, the “Justice, Repentance, and the SBC” statement warns of an undercurrent that nevertheless seeks to ignore the generational effects of that history. In addition, it calls into question the practice of purposely mislabeling Southern Baptists and their theology.

“... [W]e see attempts to downplay this historical reality. Many people deny the existence of systemic injustice as a reality. Many who recognize systemic injustices are labeled as ‘Marxists,’

'Liberals,' and 'Critical Race Theorists,' even though they are theologically orthodox and believe in the total sufficiency of Scripture.

"While God desires us to continue growing in the area of racial justice, the actions of some in the SBC appear to be more concerned with political maneuvering than working to present a vibrant, gospel-loving, racially and culturally diverse vision. While some progress has occurred, some recent events have left many brothers and sisters of color feeling betrayed and wondering if the SBC is committed to racial reconciliation."

Marshall Blalock, pastor of First Baptist Church of Charleston, S.C., said he signed the statement because of the need to listen closely to African American Southern Baptists regarding the current discussions over race.

"They love the Lord, believe the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, faithfully preach the Gospel, and are part of our SBC family," Blalock said. "Half the battle is trying to get together on these critical issues and hear the heart and voices of those in our fellowship. The kingdom of God can bring unity, reconciliation, and hope across racial barriers."

New Orleans pastor Page Brooks, an author of the document, [told the Biblical Recorder](#) of North Carolina that its release grew from the seminary presidents' earlier statement as well as a growing concern over labels such as "Marxist" for those wanting to discuss race relations.

Other signatories of the "Justice, Repentance, and the SBC" statement include Fred Luter, former SBC president and senior pastor of Franklin Ave. Baptist Church in New Orleans; Ed Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala.; Dwight McKissic, senior pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas; and Alan Cross, pastor of Petaluma Valley Baptist Church in Petaluma, Calif.

SBC President J.D. Greear, [in a post on his website](#), urged Southern Baptists to consider the message of today's statement.

"The SBC was founded with the unjust and ungodly assumptions about race, and even though we have acknowledged and repudiated these injustices, we recognize sin, being a reproach to any people, leaves a long tail of destruction," Greear wrote. "It corrupts our institutions and subtly shapes our perspectives in ways that deserve careful introspection and humble listening."

Recognizing Critical Race Theory as connected to worldviews contrasting that of Southern Baptists', Greear stated there can be value in "questions raised and observations made."

"These are things we can discuss openly and learn together," he said. "As we do, we remain committed to judging all things by the Scriptures and bringing every thought captive to Christ. We must not default to labeling believers who parse certain questions differently 'Marxist' or

‘racist.’ This uncharitable spirit is not only intellectually lazy, it is a sin against the body of Christ.”

SBC Executive Committee President and CEO Ronnie Floyd said understanding the SBC’s past is important, but so is the way Southern Baptists respond to each other in the present.

“Southern Baptists have acknowledged and spoken very clearly about the roots of our convention and against the sinful rot of racism that has no place, no welcome, and no future in the SBC, biblical Christianity, or the Kingdom of God,” Floyd said.

“Southern Baptists were clear in 1995 when we apologized to all African Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime and when we committed ourselves to eradicating racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry.

“Southern Baptists were clear in 2000 when we stated that ‘through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherited a nature and an environment toward sin,’ and when we proclaimed that ‘in the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism.’”

In response to the ongoing conversation, Floyd has scheduled a meeting in early January with NAAF officers, the Council of Seminary Presidents and Greear.

“We have been clear in what we have said to a watching world, but now it is time for us to focus on our actions, specifically in how we relate to each other,” Floyd said. “Without relationships and conversations, we will not understand each other. Until we repent and change the way we are looking at one another, talking to one another, and treating one another, spiritual revival and awakening will not come.

“It is time for the church of Jesus Christ to do what it professes to do – live and act like Christians, be the salt and light for our society, and make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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# SBC entities see God's faithfulness in difficult year

by BP Staff

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** – Virtually nothing was left untouched by the interruptions and dangers caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. SBC entities grappled with stay-at-home orders, financial uncertainty and mandated safety protocols – all while continuing to carry out their ministry assignments. Below are reports from the entities about how they navigated a strange year. BP will also publish separate reports covering the International Mission Board, the North American Mission Board and Send Relief, Southern Baptists' compassion ministry.

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## Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

by ERLC Staff

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** – Throughout 2020, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission has continued to partner with churches to provide resources that equip Southern Baptists to engage some of the most difficult and pressing issues of the day with the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On ethical issues ranging from religious liberty and abortion to technology and sexuality, ERLC has sought to be a reliable and consistent voice in the public square and to partner with Southern Baptists in reaching a world in need of Christ.

As Southern Baptists continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, the ERLC has sought to be a leading help for churches – providing resources and recommendations on everything from church safety to children's ministry to analysis of SBA Loans. Additionally, the ERLC has been in regular contact with civic leaders and even courts – working to defend against any erosion of religious liberty, while insisting that churches should be seen as key partners in combating this virus.

The ERLC remained tireless in its efforts to stand up for the lives of the preborn as fellow image-bearers and worked to develop several new initiatives to be announced in the coming year. Throughout 2020, the ERLC provided regular pro-life resources and advocated for pro-life policy at the state and federal level. Additionally, the ERLC worked to secure a major increase in its ultrasound-placement ministry, The Psalm 139 Project, and will be placing 10 ultrasound machines across the country over the first six months of 2021.

ERLC welcomed three new executives, including new Executive Vice President Daniel Patterson, Chief of Staff and Vice President for External Affairs Brent Leatherwood, and Vice President of Operations and Life Initiatives Elizabeth Graham.

For church resource, visit [ERLC.com](https://www.erc.org).

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## GuideStone Financial Resources

by Roy Hayhurst

DALLAS (BP) – While 2020 has been unprecedented on so many levels, GuideStone President O.S. Hawkins, who announced his retirement in September, said the year has held its share of blessings for the ministry and its participants.

### **Growth of Mission:Dignity**

Mission:Dignity is on pace for a record year in 2020, likely exceeding \$10 million in gifts. In response to large numbers of churches not meeting earlier in the summer, Mission:Dignity Sunday, on the SBC calendar for the fourth Sunday in June, was moved to August this year. Southern Baptists responded with more than \$1 million given — a record.

Another record set this year came on the annual [#GivingTuesday](#), when almost \$900,000 was received from donors.

One hundred percent of gifts to Mission:Dignity goes directly to the aid of a retirement-age pastor or his widow. Administrative costs are funded from an endowment established many years ago. The ministry is funded by gifts from individuals, churches and Sunday school classes. It receives no Cooperative Program gifts.

### **Focus on inclusion and diversity**

GuideStone continues its work to reflect the ethnic diversity of the Southern Baptist Convention and recognizes the inherent strength of a diverse workplace. At the end of 2020, non-Anglo employees account for about 20 percent of GuideStone employees, up from 9.8 percent at the beginning of this millennium. Kasan Boyd, a 14-year veteran of GuideStone with experience in training and Human Resources, has moved into a new role to lead these intentional efforts. GuideStone currently has six African American trustees, including the first African American woman to serve as chair of an SBC entity trustee board.

### **Addition of new chief insurance officer**

Chu Soh, a retired U.S. Air Force officer and health care industry executive, and a native of South Korea, joined GuideStone as chief insurance officer in June. Prior to joining GuideStone, Soh served as chief operating officer for a large health sharing organization, growing it from 23,000 households in 2013 to more than 150,000 households last year.

[Read the full story here.](#)

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## LifeWay Christian Resources

by LifeWay Staff

**NASHVILLE, TN (BP)** – As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world in early 2020, LifeWay quickly moved to better serve churches and church leaders trying to minister in unforeseen circumstances.

As the coronavirus continues to impact congregations into the new year, Ben Mandrell, LifeWay president and CEO, says the organization “wants to do everything we can to help churches sustain their vital ministries during this time. Because of this, we have been working on solutions for supporting local churches as they seek to grow together as disciples during this season and walk with them as they begin rebounding.”

In the spring, LifeWay provided church assistance packages, low-cost books and Bible studies, as well as numerous free resources including digital giving plans, curriculum, at-home children’s ministry kits, student discipleship packages, and a tool for reopening churches.

Some of the most difficult pivots centered around events and camps, but LifeWay worked to provide safe alternatives for churches and church leaders.

“Reach” was the theme of this year’s ETCH Conference, held Oct. 13-14, which brought together online more than 900 ministry leaders of kids and students for training and virtual fellowship. ETCH – hosted by LifeWay Christian Resources – stands for equipping the church and home.

More than 700 women gathered physically and online for the 2020 LifeWay Women’s Leadership Forum Nov. 12-13 at Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn. For COVID-19 safety and compliance reasons, in-person attendance was capped at around 250, which included women spanning 21 states and seven denominations.

Throughout the year, LifeWay reached more than 40,000 women with a number of digital events hosted by hundreds of churches and streamed by more than 27,000 individuals. More than 100,000 women also joined one of the LifeWay Women’s online Bible studies in 2020.

More than 6,000 people tuned in for the 2020 Black Church Leadership and Family Conference, held July 20-24 as an online-only event during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Read the full story here.](#)

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## Gateway Seminary

by Gateway Seminary Staff

**ONTARIO, CA (BP)** – Though the COVID-19 pandemic presented numerous challenges, Gateway Seminary has thrived.

“Decades of economic, social and spiritual challenges prepared the seminary to effectively overcome those presented by the pandemic,” Gateway President Jeff Iorg said.

“We have faced many obstacles over the years – the financial realities of doing ministry on the West Coast, pressure from local communities to abandon biblical positions on social issues, and the difficulties of bringing the Gospel to very secular culture. Frankly, Gateway staff and students have developed strong constitutions, and that allowed us to withstand the pandemic.”

All face-to-face classes were moved to online delivery formats starting on March 16. That temporary change became permanent for the spring 2020 semester as state and local restrictions continued to develop. Though Gateway classes continued with little interruption, events such as spring commencement were canceled. After a summer of preparation, on-campus classes resumed in fall 2020. More than 60 percent of Gateway students opted for online or remote access courses.

Stay-at-home orders in California required much of the staff to work remotely. In light of the complications of remote work, staff were paid regardless of the hours they worked, and underworked staff were temporarily assigned to other offices. There were no layoffs.

In September, two vice presidents announced plans to retire. Michael Martin, vice president of academic services, and Tom Hixson, vice president of business services (VPBS), will retire in 2022 and 2021 respectively. Both have committed to aid in the transition by taking on new roles when their successors have been hired.

Glenn Prescott, director of theological field education and professor of ministry leadership, and Bob Philipps, director of library services, also announced retirements in 2021.

At their spring meeting in April, trustees approved a reduced budget of \$11,500,000. The approved budget represented a reduction of \$250,000 from the previous year’s budget. By October, trustees approved a budget increase to \$12,000,000 in light of enrollment numbers and Cooperative Program funding that exceeded projections.

On April 2, Gateway announced a \$250,000 gift designated for student scholarships. Donors also raised more than \$85,000 in April to assist students during the pandemic. In December, the seminary raised more than \$108,000 to fund the Hoff House, a home for future professionals-in-residence at Gateway. The Hoff House is named in honor of Lisa Hoff, former director of the Kim School of Global Missions, who passed away Sept. 21 of this year.

“This has been a difficult year, but students and staff at Gateway have responded with strength and grace,” Iorg said. “Though the pandemic challenges are new, our response has been the same, consistent one we have had through our history – we focus on the mission, work hard, and trust God for the rest.”

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## Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

by Michael S. Brooks

**KANSAS CITY, MO (BP)** – While collectively, people have grown familiar with the reality of “unprecedented times” and “new normal,” one aspect of life within the Midwestern Seminary and Spurgeon College community has remained constant: the opportunity to render time, effort and resources toward equipping the church for maximal impact in Gospel ministry.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated several significant changes on the ground. 2020 saw a transition to full-time virtual learning in the spring and, later the creation of [“Residential Plus”](#) — a new hybrid course-delivery system that permitted students to return to campus for in-person learning this fall. Elsewhere on campus and in keeping with local and state health guidance, precautions were set in place across the seminary’s Kansas City campus to allow for social distancing and decreased in-person contact.

In Spring 2021, online students will benefit from the new classroom technology as [a slate of “Online Plus” courses](#) will be offered featuring live virtual lectures with MBTS faculty.

Amid difficult circumstances more broadly, the seminary experienced a number of positive developments as well. The trend of increasing year-to-year enrollment growth continued in 2020. [President Jason Allen reported to Trustees](#) a 12 percent increase in hours taken for the fall 2020 semester compared to fall 2019 and a 9 percent increase in the total number of students enrolled. Additionally, the academic committee announced a number of promotions among the seminary faculty, along with the addition of Geoffrey Chang as assistant professor of historical theology; Andrew King as assistant professor of biblical studies; Patrick Schreiner as assistant professor of New Testament and biblical theology; and Charles Smith as assistant professor of Christian leadership.

Expressing gratefulness and trust in God for the days ahead, President Jason Allen exhorted the seminary community in one of several presidential updates earlier this year: “I encourage you to frame all of this with biblical wisdom. As men and women of God, we are to be wise, but not fearful; vigilant, but not unnerved.

“We trust in our sovereign God, His kind providence, and in the power of prayer. Moreover, this is a time for a Christian community, such as Midwestern Seminary and Spurgeon College, to radiate Gospel hope, fervent prayer, and a confidence in our Redeemer.”

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## **New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary**

by NOBTS Staff

**NEW ORLEANS, LA (BP)** – COVID-19 presented its share of challenges for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College in 2020. The pandemic made life harder for students and professors alike. With all the difficulties brought on by COVID guidelines and social distancing, new initiatives and partnerships brought welcomed news to the seminary community.

Leavell College launched a “house system” to promote fellowship, community, and discipleship and promote a well-rounded experience for students. Patterned after the college systems at Oxford and Cambridge, the houses – Elliot, Bonhoeffer and Moon – are named for historical Christian leaders that exemplify the values listed in the school’s mission statement. In addition to the house system launch, Leavell College also received newly renovated offices in the Hardin Student Center and unveiled a new logo early this spring.

Financial gifts to the school made a big impact during COVID-19. This year’s Giving Tuesday Dec. 1 saw record giving: \$253,000 raised with a \$100,000 matching gift, benefitting the school’s Providence Fund. And during the height of the COVID-19 surge in Louisiana, special student scholarships provided for the summer term helped offset the financial burden for students impacted by COVID-19 and drew a record summer registration in total credit hours.

A new partnership designed to promote church planting and missions was approved in the spring. The partnership between NOBTS and the North American Mission Board will result in a new church planting center on the NOBTS campus to coordinate and enhance church planting assessment and training. The center will train church planters to serve throughout North America as well as in New Orleans.

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# **Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary**

by SEBTS Staff

**WAKE FOREST, NC (BP)** – Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary’s (SEBTS) mission of serving the church and fulfilling the Great Commission endures in a remarkable way despite a year of significant challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic.

For SEBTS, 2020 is marked by the Lord’s grace and guidance as the school has continued to experience growth and new ways of providing for its students, faculty and staff.

## **Institutional Growth**

SEBTS experienced record numbers of enrollment for both the 2019-2020 academic year and the fall 2020 semester. Student enrollment at SEBTS has increased for 12 consecutive years, with an enrollment of 5,273 at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year. Likewise, SEBTS continues to see an influx in applications to the seminary and college. Our enrollment continues to hold steady outperforming general trends within higher education. Additionally, SEBTS is continuing to see great progress in its financial campaign, For the Mission, which has reached 59.2 percent of its \$20.5M goal. These increases are a testimony of God’s grace in the midst of a global crisis.

## **COVID-19 response**

This fall, SEBTS resumed in person classes. Students were required to wear masks in class, indoors, and any time social distancing was not possible. SEBTS also provided different formats to help students attend classes, including 7-week courses and live, synchronous courses. This fall, faculty were also required to record all in-person lectures for students who were unable to attend class due to COVID-19.

In light of the pandemic, student tuition was reduced by five percent. This reduction assisted students financially during the pandemic, in addition to the nearly quarter of a million dollars in student financial aid that was made available at the start of the pandemic. A 2020-2021 budget reduction allowed SEBTS to achieve its goal of not laying off full-time staff members during the pandemic. In order to maintain all employees, full-time staff received a reduction in pay, led by President Akin and the members of the cabinet. Southeastern is grateful for the Lord’s direction in navigating this year of challenges without layoffs and continued investment and innovations in the school’s programs and resources for students and for the church.

[Read the full story here.](#)

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## **Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**

by SBTS Staff

**LOUISVILLE, KY (BP)** – Over against the dark days of the COVID pandemic, the light of God’s grace shone clearly at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary during the recently completed fall semester.

In 2020, the seminary’s enrollment reached an all-time high, allowing the school to educate more students – both in person and online – than at any time in its history. When the pandemic hit last spring, leadership opted to cut tuition by 15 percent, which helped stabilize and strengthen enrollment at both Southern and its undergraduate school, Boyce College.

In the weeks following the COVID shutdown, SBTS reduced its budget by 30 percent, and the school’s financial health has increased all year enabling the school to sustain financial strength throughout the year. In his fall convocation address, SBTS President R. Albert Mohler Jr. said the pandemic is merely one obvious example of myriad dangers that lurk in a fallen world every day, dangers that always surround Gospel ministers as they carry out their work.

“We will never be surrounded by anything less than deadly dangers,” Mohler said. “And we are preparing those who will serve Christ in the church and in the world by sending them out into a world which is even more dangerous.”

Earlier this month, the seminary graduated 236 during its fall commencement. By God’s grace, the seminary and college held on-campus classes – with proper masking and social-distancing policies in place – and performed more than 4,000 COVID tests with only 32 positives (an infection rate far lower than that of the community at large), the vast majority of which were asymptomatic.

Mohler told students and faculty in his convocation address that the opportunity to meet at all during a pandemic was a precious gift from God.

“Right now, I seize with you the opportunity to enjoy, appreciate, and be found faithful in this academic year we had no right to expect, but is now God’s gift to us,” he said.

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## **Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary**

by SWBTS Staff

**FORT WORTH, TX (BP)** – Even in 2020, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary remained true to its mission, adapting to changing circumstances in order to commission 638 graduates in

an in-person commencement in December, strengthen its academic offerings, hire new faculty, and continue its emphasis on both academic output and evangelistic outreach.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, precautions were taken by the seminary, including closing the campus and moving all courses to solely online platforms in March through the spring and summer semesters.

“The coronavirus pandemic has not lessened the urgency of theological education; indeed, it has only heightened that urgency,” President Adam W. Greenway said.

After the Texas stay-at-home order expired in April, Greenway announced that the campus would reopen for the fall semester with extensive safety measures.

During the fall semester, 594 new students enrolled, an increase of 29 percent over the prior fall. The school experienced a 14.9 percent revenue increase during the 2019-2020 fiscal year, including a 14.6 percent increase in tuition revenue; and a 215 percent increase in donations to the school’s annual fund.

During two meetings, trustees approved 10 new degrees. Southwestern also launched eight-week courses for online students to expedite their path to graduation and partnerships with Oklahoma Baptist University and Dallas Baptist University to provide advanced standing and joint degrees, respectively. Through elections and appointments, 15 faculty were added across academic disciplines.

Southwestern Journal of Theology, under the leadership of editor Davis S. Dockery, launched its Book of the Year Awards. Dockery also was appointed interim provost. Faculty authored or contributed to 10 books, and Seminary Hill Press released three new titles.

Even during the pandemic, faculty and students’ ongoing commitment to sharing the Gospel with the lost continued utilizing preexisting relationships, technology, and even, in some cases, socially distanced door-to-door efforts.

[Read the full story here.](#)

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