

# The Alabama Baptist

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## INSIDE

# Carter receives pastoral ministry award

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**D**aniel Atkins said at the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on Monday, Nov. 14, that Charles T. Carter needed no introduction — not to anyone really, but especially not to those at the conference’s host church, Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

### ‘Tremendous impact’

Carter served as pastor there for 26 years before he retired in 1998, and he mentored pastors during those years and in the years since, said Atkins, pastor of Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery and incoming conference president.

“Dr. Carter has made a tremendous impact for many generations as he is certainly one of the greatest pastors to pastors in our state,” Atkins said. “The many meals, phone calls and meetings of encouragement and mentoring have shaped young pastors for many years. His positive spirit and encouraging nature have led to a lifetime



Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist  
Charles T. Carter receives the second annual Fred Wolfe Lifetime Pastoral Ministry Award at the 2022 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham on Nov. 14.

of incredible influence in the area of pastoral ministry.”

On behalf of the pastors conference, Atkins presented Carter with the second annual Fred Wolfe Lifetime Pastoral Ministry Award, named in honor of the longtime Alabama Baptist pastor and SBC leader who died in 2021.

Last year, the award was given to beloved Alabama Baptist evangelist Junior Hill.

### ‘Especially honored’

Carter said knowing Hill as he does and Wolfe as he did, he was “especially honored and gratified to be a recipient of this very special award.”

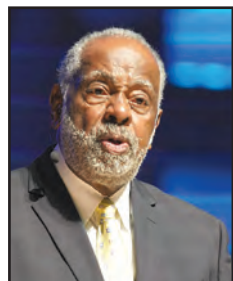
“Thank you from the depths of my heart,” he said.

The honor capped off a day of messages on the theme of “In Courage, Encourage!” — pastors encouraging pastors to stay the course and cling to their relationship with Christ as they persevere in ministry. (See ‘Encouraged,’ page 9)



Alabama Baptist State Convention Sexual Abuse Task Force Report

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Robert Smith and others share how God is at work through Alabama Baptists

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Messengers adopt resolutions dealing with social issues

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## Alabama Baptist messengers approve \$37 million budget

By Shawn Hendricks  
The Alabama Baptist

**A**labama Baptists approved a \$37 million Cooperative Program budget for 2023, maintaining the same structure as 2022, and

continuing the 50/50 allocation of funds between Alabama Baptist missions and ministries and national efforts through the Southern Baptist Convention.

Gathering in their 199th session of the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting Nov. 14–15 at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, messengers also heard plans to celebrate 200 years of cooper-

ative ministry work, approved funds to help struggling retired pastors and wives through Mission:Dignity and honored ministry volunteers.

Regarding a lawsuit involving the financial challenges and closing of Judson College, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions executive director Rick Lance assured messengers SBOM attorneys are managing the situation well. He also noted legal fees

would not involve any Cooperative Program dollars.

SBOM, the state convention, Lance and others are among those named in a lawsuit involving the college.

### Representing you

“There is no need for the convention to take any action whatsoever,” said Lance, noting SBOM is “in a wait and see” posture. “We will represent you well,” he noted.

(See ‘Plans,’ page 12)



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# Celebrate

## Rick Lance reflects on Alabama Baptists' impact

By Shawn Hendricks  
The Alabama Baptist

As the Alabama Baptist Convention begins to celebrate 200 years of ministry, Rick Lance took time in his annual meeting report to touch on “significant points of focus” worth celebrating.

His report highlighted evangelism, ministry training and mentoring for young people who are discerning God’s call on their lives, serving people in times of need, race relations and helping churches better protect their ministries.

Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, kicked off his report spotlighting The Gospel to Everyone, a statewide effort to reach every home in Alabama with the gospel and help churches better connect with their communities.

“Evangelism is important — we know that,” he said. “We want to do as much as we can to reach as many and teach as many in order that the Kingdom might advance.”

Lance reflected on when he was younger and how he would have loved to have had access to some of the training and resources available today.

### Resourcing next generation

In an effort to help more young people understand their calling to ministry, Lance referenced two efforts currently in the works — the Called conference and the Timothy Initiative, which focuses on raising the next generation of ministry leaders.

Two Baptist leaders who have helped provide training and mentoring are Jeff Iorg, Gateway Seminary president, and Jim Shaddix, professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Lance also encouraged Alabama Baptists to sign up for Send Relief’s Serve Tour scheduled for March 10–11. This coming spring, he noted, there will be opportunities to serve communities in the Montgomery area through partnerships between SBOM, directors of missions and the North American Mission Board.



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist  
Rick Lance addresses messengers at the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting, his 25th meeting as executive director of the State Board of Missions.

“Clearly we want to meet the needs of the underserved and those who are in the greatest need,” he said.

“We know that in Alabama we are not a wealthy state. ... There are places where the people are food insecure. ... It will help us identify those needs.”

MinistrySafe is another key area of focus, Lance said. He encouraged more churches to be trained on how to better protect the vulnerable from sexual abuse.

For the first 1,000 churches that sign up for MinistrySafe training, Lance said, SBOM will cover \$200 of the \$250 annual fee during the first year.

### Religious liberty concerns

Shifting to another area of concern, Lance mentioned the threat on religious liberty.

The Alliance for Defending Freedom, Lance said, is an organization which has helped provide counsel to individuals and ministries with religious liberty cases.

He urged churches to consider contacting the group to review their church documents.

By going through SBOM, ministries can get a 20% discount, Lance noted.

“The day is coming when we will have to defend ourselves, and one way to get ready for it is [through] preparation of our documents,” said Lance, noting religious liberty is “far more than what you do on Sunday morning.”

Lance also noted the importance of disaster relief work and referenced meeting with the Alabama African American Fellowship for a Nov. 13 dinner event at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham (see story, page 13).

“Our diversity is reflecting the population around us, and we want to continue to make sure that our brothers and sisters who are of ethnic backgrounds of all kinds are part of the family of faith we call Baptists — Southern Baptists and Alabama Baptists.”

Lance, who is celebrating his 25th annual meeting in his role as executive director, closed his report with a word of gratitude for Alabama Baptists.

“This is my 25th convention and I want you to know that I’ve become more grateful to the Lord and also to Alabama Baptists,” he said.

“You continue to be a pacesetter in the SBC by giving through the Cooperative Program, the No. 1 state convention in that effort — Lottie Moon, Annie Armstrong, the Myers-Mallory Offering ... you’ve been so special even in the worst of times and COVID and economic uncertainty,” he said.

“I want to thank you personally for allowing me to serve with you as one of your state missionaries.”



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 19.

## The Alabama Baptist

“If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31–32

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**ENTITY REPORTS**

**“You are why we exist. You make it possible, and it is our pleasure and privilege to serve you.”**

**JENNIFER DAVIS RASH**

*President and editor-in-chief, The Alabama Baptist*



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

With the cooperation of her friends on stage, Jennifer Davis Rash of The Alabama Baptist pulls off a selfie Tuesday, Nov. 15, during the morning report time to messengers attending the state convention annual meeting.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

John Ashworth (center) of The Baptist Foundation of Alabama shares with messengers during the Tuesday morning entity report time. Also reporting were (l to r) Bill Morgan, Christian Life Commission; Greg Davis, ALCAP; Lonette Berg, Alabama Baptist Historical Commission; and Jennifer Davis Rash, The Alabama Baptist.



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Candace McIntosh, Alabama WMU, updates messengers during the Tuesday afternoon entity report time. Also, sharing were (l to r) Marie Cook, Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers; Russell Klinner, Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center; and Rod Marshall, Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

During the Wednesday entity report time, SBOM executive director Rick Lance (right) prays for Beck Taylor (second from right), Samford University, and Lonnie Burnett (second from left), University of Mobile. Randy Johnson, Board of Aid, also shared about recent scholarships.

**Keep “praying for our children, praying for our families, praying for our ministry.”**

**ROD MARSHALL**

*President and CEO, Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries*

# Your Voice



## Champion challenges Alabama Baptists to be kind, speak with love

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Pastor Buddy Champion said as his church — First Baptist Trussville — was preparing for its 200th anniversary in 2021, some interesting tidbits emerged from the minutes of past business meetings.

The church has gone through its share of big dust-ups, and some were about inconsequential things, he said.

“There was a major confrontation at First Baptist Church on whether you could play marbles on Sunday,” Champion, president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, shared during his president’s address at the annual meeting Tuesday, Nov. 15. “And for goodness’ sake, don’t get in a fight, or we will kick you out of the church.”

Finding those old stories led him to ask Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, about things other churches have had conflict about through the years.

She gave him a long list of possibilities from stories she has seen in the minutes of other church meetings from over the centuries — things like walking hand in hand at church picnics, making off with a stray hog, distilling “spirituous” liquors, dancing and attending Methodist meetings.

### ‘Truth after truth’

He said it reminds him of what Paul said to his brothers and sisters in Ephesus. Paul urged them not to be like the Gentiles, but to speak truthfully, to not sin when they were angry and to stay away from a host of other sins.

“He’s giving them truth after truth after truth of how you live your life,” Champion said. “But all of a sudden, right in the middle of all that, he said, ‘Could you be kind? Be tenderhearted, compassionate to one another? Would you forgive each other just as Christ Jesus forgave you?’”

Preaching from Ephesians 4:32, he said kindness means to be sensi-



### PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS

Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

“We can go through life doing all kinds of things in the name of the Lord, and if we don’t do it with love, we’re just a clanging cymbal. We’re just nothing,” Champion says during the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

tive to the needs of others, to have tenderhearted emotion for that other person.

“We can get sideways on a lot of things, can’t we? We can get turned around on a lot of different things, but Paul looked at the sins in that port city and said, ‘Oh, would you please be kind to one another,’” Champion said.

He said it is important to speak the truth as Paul says in Ephesians 4:15, but it’s equally important to do it with love — to not leave a trail of carnage behind you from your sharp words.

### ‘Give grace’

“Be gracious and loving; have a heart that freely desires to give grace to other people,” Champion said.

He said it reminds him of 1 Corinthians 13, which says speech is nothing but a clanging cymbal if it’s done without love. To illustrate his

point, he pulled out some cymbals and hit them together.

“We can go through life doing all kinds of things in the name of the Lord, and if we don’t do it with love, we’re just a clanging cymbal. We’re just nothing,” Champion said.

The sound of cymbals “gives a beautiful picture of God looking down on my heart,” he said.

“‘Buddy, I don’t care what you do. I don’t care what your numbers look like. I don’t care what you think you’re doing for Me. Buddy, if you don’t operate in love, you’re just making a bunch of racket, just like a clanging cymbal.’”

Champion said remembering the message of the gospel — that no one is good enough on their own to earn God’s favor — helps a person extend grace to others.

“Be kind, be compassionate, be forgiving, just like Christ forgave us,” he said.



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

A group of music ministers who have served in churches with Buddy Champion over the years gathered as a group called the Grand Staff to sing a couple of songs before Champion’s president’s address Nov. 15.

# To whom will you hand the baton?

## Carwile challenges Alabama Baptists not to lose next generation

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Joel Carwile, pastor of First Baptist Church Athens, said it can be easy to lose the next generation — all it takes is not doing the next right thing.

He pointed to Israel, the “beloved chosen people” of God, and how after being delivered from Egypt and given the promised land, they still fell away from God one generation after Joshua.

Carwile, who gave the convention sermon during the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 16, said he thinks often about his children and wonders what their generation will be taught.

### ‘Know the Lord’

“I’m just praying that here in America, here in Alabama, that next generation will know the Lord because you and I were faithful in the present,” he said. “I believe we all should have great dreams and visions for the generations to come. But ... in just one generation, those people who came after Joshua did not know the Lord or the work that He had done for Israel.”

The era that came next — Judges — was a fiasco, Carwile said. And after that, the people of Israel demanded that they wanted a king rather than to be ruled by God alone. They wanted to be like the kingdoms around them.

### ‘Be distinct’

“Israel wanted to be like everybody else,” Carwile said. “I pray that Alabama Baptists don’t want to be like everybody else.

“I pray that as we move forward,” he noted, “we want to be unique, we want to be distinct and follow Christ in a culture that doesn’t.”

He said he hopes that is the focus of Alabama Baptist churches and institutions of higher learning.

“So I’m asking us as Alabama Baptists, that as we move forward for the next 200 years, that we don’t want another king — we want King Jesus,” Carwile said. “And if we stay focused on Him, He will continue to pour out His blessings upon our state, upon our convention, upon our associations and upon our local churches.”

He challenged those present to learn from the mistakes of the past



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

Joel Carwile, pastor of FBC Athens, preaches the convention sermon during the Wednesday morning session of the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

— like the Israelites who didn’t pass down their faith to the ones who came after them.

“We are 199 years strong as a convention,” Carwile said. “So what will we do? What will be our next right step?”

He said people are going to

reach the next generation — why shouldn’t it be Alabama Baptists?

“Are you thinking of the future, to whom you will hand the baton?” he asked. “If we want a glorious future, serving the purpose of God in our own generation is a worthy goal.”

## Champion to serve 2nd term as president of Alabama Baptist State Convention

Officers for the Alabama Baptist State Convention for 2022–23 were elected Wednesday, Nov. 16.

Messengers reelected Buddy Champion (center) to serve a second term as president of the convention. Champion is pastor of First Baptist Church Trussville. He was nominated by Robert Mullins, pastor of and messenger from Crossroads Community Church in Elmore.

Also reelected were first vice president Morgan Bailey (second from left), pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranburne, and second vice president Jarman Leatherwood

(second from right), founding pastor of House of Hope and Restoration Church in Huntsville.

Bailey was nominated by Kyle Sullivan, pastor of and messenger from Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Hueytown. Leatherwood was nominated by Craig Carlisle, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association and messenger from First Baptist Church Gadsden.

Debbie Oliver (left) was elected as the new recording secretary.

Mike Jackson (right) was reelected statistical secretary and registration secretary. (TAB Media)



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

## ALABAMA BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION

## Sexual Abuse Task Force Report

Respectfully submitted November 15, 2022

## INTRODUCTION

Last year, at the 2021 annual meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention in Huntsville, Alabama, a motion was made and unanimously approved by the convention that a Sexual Abuse Task Force be appointed by the newly elected convention president for the purpose of:

**“Review(ing) the policies and practices of our Cooperative Program-funded state Convention entities and auxiliaries, including the State Board of Missions, related to sex abuse, and report back to the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention.”**

In January 2022, convention president Buddy Champion appointed an eight-member Sexual Abuse Task Force to carry out this assignment. The Sexual Abuse Task Force members are:

**Dr. Craig Carlisle, Director of Missions, Etowah Baptist Association, Chair**

**Melissa Bowen, Attorney, Vice Chair**

**Kaye Farrow, Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, Retired**

**Abigail Jackson, Public Relations Specialist**

**Dr. D’Linell Finley, Senior Pastor, Southlawn Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama**

**Dr. Blake Kersey, Senior Pastor, FBC Decatur, Alabama**

**Dr. Daven Watkins, Senior Pastor, FBC Pelham, Alabama**

**Dr. Daniel Atkins, Senior Pastor, Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama**

Every member of this Task Force has brought valuable contributions to our discussion. Some of our team were, themselves, victims of abuse and harassment in their churches and workplaces. We worked as a team with like-minded unity and passion for the assignment we were given. As the chair, I am personally grateful to each one for their commitment to our task and their insights to the report we are presenting today.

Let us be clear, the issue of sexual abuse is something that is morally repugnant in the eyes of God. When we

talk about abuse we are talking about sin. Let’s be reminded of what the Bible says:

First of all, it is a clear sin for anyone to use their power to mistreat people made in God’s image. *“The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates” (Psalm 11:5)*. It is at odds with the character of God to harm weak people. That means that any Christian, especially any Christian leader, who engages in any act of sexual abuse misrepresents the character of God they claim to serve.

Secondly, violence against the weak and needy is abhorrent to God, and so Christians have a much higher calling than merely not abusing people. We are also called to protect those who are potential victims of abuse, *“Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:4)*. The call to protect the weak is a mandate for all of us in church leadership to employ the highest standards in protecting the children and the vulnerable in our ministries.

Thirdly, as Christians, we are called not only to avoid abuse and to protect people from abuse but to refuse to conceal abuse when we know it is happening or has happened. *“Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence” (Proverbs 10:6)*. These words of God make it a sin to encounter abuse and look the other way, blame the victim, help the abuser exit quietly or else feel more compassion for guilty predators than the innocents they abused.

Fourthly, we live in a sinful world where abuse is happening. There is a high likelihood that someone who has been abused is already a part of your congregation, no matter the size of your church. As leaders, we must be doggedly determined to care for these people who are struggling. *“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3)*. Alabama

Baptists desire to be Christlike. One of the ways we can demonstrate our conviction is to establish safeguards and systems in our churches to assist abuse victims in finding community, a place to express their grief, to help them understand their shame, and discover the hope and healing that is found in Jesus Christ. Perhaps we are never less like God than when we turn our backs on victims of abuse and expect them to work out their own problems.

Over the last several months we have met with all 10 of the leaders of our Alabama Baptist State Convention entities and auxiliaries. We met with the following:

**Alabama Baptist Historical Commission (Lonette Berg)**

**ALCAP (Joe Godfrey and Greg Davis)**

**Shocco Springs (Russell Klinner)**

**Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries (Rod Marshall)**

**The Baptist Foundation of Alabama (John Ashworth)**  
**Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers (Dwain Kinard)**

**Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union (Candace McIntosh)**

**University of Mobile (Lonnie Burnett)**

**The Alabama Baptist (Jennifer Rash)**

**Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (Rick Lance)**

At times, the process of meeting with our entities was very challenging and emotional. We were reminded of the personal nature of this issue as some leaders shared their own stories from the past. Their experiences moved us to tears and touched our hearts in very real ways, making us realize the importance and necessity of what we are doing.

In the meetings with each entity leader, our Task Force committee was presented with detailed policies and procedures for the training and accountability of entity employees and volunteers. Our conversations were productive, and the members of the

Task Force were all encouraged by the lengths to which our entities are going to ensure the protection of those to whom they minister. While some entities work more directly with minors than others, we found, again, that all entity leaders take the issue of sexual abuse seriously. We were encouraged by the reports from each entity that they either had been implementing in-depth sexual abuse training for their employees or were taking steps to do so. Members of the Task Force shared thoughts and suggestions for further training and development with each entity leader, and these leaders received our suggestions humbly and proactively.

In summary, after meeting with our Alabama Baptist entities, the Sexual Abuse Task Force is unanimous in our encouragement and endorsement of the measures they are taking in training in and prevention of sexual abuse. Our Task Force is comprised of pastors and ministry leaders serving Alabama Baptist churches, and we pray that our fellow Alabama Baptists share our confidence in the competency of our Alabama Baptist entities in the area of sexual abuse prevention.

While our task was to audit the policies of our entities and auxiliaries, we feel the need to appeal to our churches to take this issue seriously. We encourage each church to have effective policies in place. We further encourage our Directors of Missions to do all they can in assisting their churches to develop the policies necessary to accomplish our goal of our churches being as safe as they can possibly be. During these last several months we have been made aware through the media of multiple stories of abuse taking place in churches, church daycares, and workplaces.

While serving as the chair, I have personally been called by pastors seeking advice concerning situations in their churches. Ultimately, our church leaders will be on the frontlines of seeking to prevent sexual abuse in our churches and families. With that in mind, we want to make you aware of important information that you need to know as you address this issue in your church.

— “ —

**“Unanimous in ... our confidence in the competency of our Alabama Baptist entities in the area of sexual abuse prevention.”**

SEXUAL ABUSE TASK FORCE REPORT

## REPORTING

### Child Abuse

Reporting suspected abuse is a necessary part of protecting children in our churches. Only through consistent policies of reporting any suspected abuse, whether it occurs at church or in the home of a child who attends one of our churches, can we hope to help prevent the cycles of abuse and despair that plague too many of the children in our care. Many institutions already have these policies. Schools, camps, children's organizations, and others have already come to the realization that this is a necessary part of protecting children. Investigations are carried out confidentially and professionally. The process can simply become part of the plan for keeping children safe.

Alabama is a mandatory reporting state for all forms of child abuse and neglect. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and child neglect. Mandatory reporters include ministers, childcare workers, whether paid or volunteers, and any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child. If you work with or are in contact with a child or children at your church, you are a mandatory reporter.

The law requires that any person who knows or has reasonable cause to believe or suspect that a child has been abused or neglected or who observes any child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in abuse is required to report either by telephone or in person immediately to the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR), law enforcement, or the District Attorney, followed by a written report. DHR in every county has a telephone number for reporting child abuse and neglect that is answered 24 hours a day. A list of numbers for every county can be found at [dhr.alabama.gov/county-office-contact](http://dhr.alabama.gov/county-office-contact).

**A MANDATORY REPORTER MUST NOT INTERVIEW THE CHILD OR INVESTIGATE THE ABUSE.** These matters are difficult to investigate and special training is necessary in order that accurate information may be obtained from the child. In our state, there is a network of more than

40 child advocacy centers where children can be properly interviewed and supported when child abuse or neglect is suspected. Every county in Alabama has access to one of these centers. The centers work closely with DHR and law enforcement to find the truth about suspected child abuse and neglect.

In order to protect the children of your church, it is important to take care of them by reporting any abuse or neglect. It is also permissible to call DHR to ask if certain behaviors or signs are indicative of abuse or neglect. The employees of DHR have the expertise in recognizing child abuse and neglect and can often ease your mind about situations that you encounter. Not every report results in a finding of child abuse or neglect. A report is a way to determine if there is a problem. The identities of the people who report abuse are confidential and cannot be discovered even by a subpoena issued by a judge. There are brochures containing this information about reporting available from DHR and online if you would like to provide them to your church.

Once abuse reports have been made, DHR makes a finding concerning each report. The possible findings are "indicated," "not indicated," and "reason to suspect." Indicated reports against a particular individual can be discovered by making an application to DHR on form **DHR-FCS-1598**. This form can be found online at: [dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/form1598.pdf](http://dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/form1598.pdf), but must be filled out as a paper form and presented to DHR at least 90 days in advance of when the information is needed. Instructions for filling out the form can be found at: [dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Form-1598-B-Instructions.pdf](http://dhr.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Form-1598-B-Instructions.pdf).

These reports will provide information about individuals who may not have been criminally charged with sexual abuse or child abuse, but who have been reported to DHR for suspected abuse and an investigation has shown that there is reason to believe that abuse has occurred. This is another layer of protection for children. Both Shocco Springs and the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries screen employees

and volunteers using this tool.

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions can assist churches in learning about and setting up a plan for training staff and volunteers about reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. Your local DHR office can also help with this process. There may be teachers and DHR employees familiar with the reporting process who are part of our churches and who can assist church leaders in this matter. Protection requires that we all are observant and tireless in our care of the children entrusted to us. Reporting cases of suspected abuse is part of protecting our children.

### Abuse of Impaired Adults

Any person under the age of 19 is legally considered a minor in the State of Alabama. Mandatory reporting applies only to individuals who are under the age of 19. If abuse is suspected concerning someone 19 or older, the victim of abuse should make a report to law enforcement on his or her own behalf. This does not mean that an adult victim does not need ministry or support. It means that the victim makes his or her own decision about reporting. The exception to this is an adult who is not able to care for himself or herself due to mental or physical infirmity.

The Alabama Adult Protective Services Act protects such individuals from exploitation, neglect, abuse, and degrading treatment. It establishes protective services and assures availability of these services to all persons who need them. An adult in need of protective services is:

- A person 18 years of age or older
- Behavior indicates that he or she is mentally incapable of adequately caring for himself or herself and his or her interests, or who
- Because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others, and
- Who has no guardian, relative, or other appropriate person, able, willing, and available to provide the kind and degree of protection and supervision required under the circumstances.

## ABUSE OF POWER

While child sexual abuse is often more heart wrenching, sexual abuse of adults is also a tragedy and must be addressed within a church. Adult survivors of sexual abuse are sometimes alienated from their churches, disgraced or even asked to leave their churches, or worst of all, hindered in their walk with their Lord and Savior because of the damage to their understanding of God's love and care for them due to the abuse.

Relationships between ministers and church members cannot be fully consensual. This is due to the imbalance of authority between the two people in the relationship. Ministers are traditionally viewed as having more expertise and knowledge about the Scripture and spiritual matters. For many people of faith, ministers serve as God's representatives on earth. This clouds the less-powerful person's view of the relationship, making them unable to truly enter into a consensual relationship. Even if the person with less power suggests or pursues a sexual relationship with the more powerful person, it is always the person with more power who has the responsibility of setting the boundaries in the relationship. Relationships between ministers and church members should be seen as an abuse of power. Oftentimes, these relationships are characterized as "affairs." An affair implies mutual consent, abuse of power does not.

Although clergy are capable of any kind of abuse, including children, teens, men or women, it is estimated that 98% of victims of sexual exploitation by ministers are adult women. (*Dr. Gary Schoener, Executive Director, Walk-In Counseling Center. Consulted on over 2,000 cases of clergy sexual abuse.*)

How do we respond?

- The church should have a clear cut and well-known process for making church leadership aware of incidents of sexual abuse in the church. This process should include a provision for reporting the abuse to someone other than the pastor, in the case the abuser is the pastor.

- In cases where abuse has taken place and a crime has been committed, the incident should be reported to law enforcement immediately, without question. The goal is to protect the victim from further harm.

- If there is no crime, the church must still act quickly.

- Remain open-minded. The natural human instinct is to recoil from alleged horror and to immediately assume the allegations are false. The overwhelming majority of abuse disclosures prove to be true. In every case, the proper and Christian response is to remain open minded.

- Pray for all parties involved. Every person involved deserves and needs prayerful support.

- Once a determination has been made, appropriate action should be taken.

(continued on page 8)

**RESPONSIBILITIES**

As Alabama Baptists, among our core tenets are a commitment to the Great Commission and our strong belief in the sanctity of human life. The issue of sexual abuse is, at its core, an issue of the sanctity of human life. The Bible clearly defines human personhood as being created in the image of God. Since every human bears the image of God, abuse in every form is an assault on the image of God. The way in which we, as the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, address sexual abuse, advocate for victims, and protect the vulnerable, is a testimony to the world of the gospel. Our desire is to represent the name and heart of God in such a way that all will see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

While we, as a Task Force, understand and affirm the uniqueness of Baptist polity, in that each of our Southern Baptist churches, including Alabama Baptists, practices autonomy, we do believe that, together, we can take steps to create and maintain safe environments for all in our care. We desire our testimony and the reputation of our churches to be above reproach. Therefore, in light of all we know, we make the following suggestions to our Alabama Baptist family of churches:

1. Let us reinforce the seriousness of all sexual abuse by utilizing and implementing resources, such as MinistrySafe, for equipping church staff and volunteers to prevent sexual abuse in our ministries.

2. Let us reinforce the seriousness of all sexual abuse by creating and implementing policies and guidelines for ministering to minors. Let us commit to communicate and train church staff and volunteers in sexual abuse training and awareness.

3. Let us reinforce the

seriousness of all reported sexual abuse by taking appropriate action. Sexual abuse is always immoral — it is often criminal. In the event that pastors and/or church staff are made aware of sexual abuse accusations, we reemphasize that you are considered “mandatory reporters.” Therefore, internal investigations are ill-advised and should, under no circumstances, be conducted. Local law enforcement or DHR should be contacted immediately and the investigations be conducted by third-party agencies.

As people of the Bible our goal is healing and restoration. Therefore, passages such as Matthew 18:15–20 should not be utilized as a rationalization for the use of internal investigations or as a replacement for reporting.

4. Let us reinforce the seriousness of all sexual abuse by having a ministry plan to address the needs of the victim. Our responsibility goes beyond reporting to law enforcement. It must include caring for the one who has been violated and abused. An excellent resource for caring for victims is the Caring Well curriculum provided by the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. These resources can be found at [caringwell.com](http://caringwell.com).

In summary, throughout this process, our Task Force has become increasingly aware that the best way to protect those we serve is to prepare those who minister and serve. Our desire is that all Alabama Baptists will be proactive in the education and training of each mem-



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Craig Carlisle shares a report on behalf of the full Sexual Abuse Task Force, the rest of whom are standing behind him, at the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting in Birmingham on Nov. 15.

ber of your church staff and every volunteer, both in preventative and process measures.

We encourage policies and procedures that are active and verifiable. We encourage the intentional appointment of safe and trustworthy individuals to ensure that these policies and procedures are carried out to the fullest extent. We desire that every victim or potential victim has a sense of safety and protection, from reporting to final action.

Together, we as Alabama Baptists, can be a part of the healing process by creating opportunities for growth and change in our churches. Let us not be naïve in thinking that this issue is not real and can be ignored.

As your Task Force, we thank you for allowing us to serve in this capacity. We appeal to you to take the issue of sexual abuse seriously by taking every precaution to protect your people, but especially your children, from sexual abuse.

We would also ask that you include, on your church calendar, the newly created “Caring Well Sunday.” The purpose of this day will be to highlight sexual abuse awareness. This day will be added to the Southern Baptist Convention calendar beginning on September 24, 2023, and will be observed on the last Sunday of September in the future. All of us on this Task Force

consider this assignment one of the most important ministries we have offered in service of our Alabama Baptist family.

We believe in you, Alabama Baptists. We believe that you are going to respond to this report and take the necessary steps to ensure your churches are safe places, and because of that, we have hope for a better future.

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# ‘Encouraged’

## Pastors Conference strives for attendees ‘to leave refreshed by the Spirit’

*(continued from page 1)*

Robert Mullins, 2022 Pastors Conference president and pastor of Crossroads Community Church in Elmore, told those present he wanted them “to leave refreshed by the Spirit of God.”

“We want you to be encouraged in your calling,” he said.

Fred Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, preached the final message of the day, encouraging pastors from Psalm 34:19 that even though the afflictions of the righteous are many, God has promised deliverance is coming.

“Trouble, trials and tribulations are part of the Christian life,” Luter said. “Fears, frustration and foes will happen somewhere along the Christian journey. ... Setbacks, sickness, storms and suffering will come your way. No one is exempt.”

All of this is the other side of Christian ministry, the opposite of the moments where pastors joyfully celebrate souls coming to faith in Christ, he said.



**MULLINS**

### God’s promises

He challenged them to remember the promises of God written in the script of their life by the word of



**CLIFTON**

God — that God is their light and salvation, that they will renew their strength if they wait on the Lord and many more.

“Your affliction is just for a specific season and a specific reason,” Luter said. “Remember, it’s only a test. It’s the other side of ministry. This too shall pass.”

Earlier in the day, Mark Clifton reminded pastors that discouragement and depression are weapons of the enemy, but as believers they have what they need to defend themselves — the gospel of Jesus Christ.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist  
Fred Luter, pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, preaches the final message of the Pastors Conference.

“When you become despondent, realize you’re part of a larger brotherhood,” said Clifton, pastor of Linwood Baptist Church in Linwood, Kansas, and senior director of replanting for the North American Mission Board. “Think about the hope of future glory, talk to one another and pray with one another. ... Find your purpose and your meaning in the risen Christ.”

Preaching from 2 Corinthians 1, he talked about Paul’s battle with despair. He also pointed to biblical figures like Elijah, as well as more contemporary giants of the faith who also struggled with depression.

“In the case of Elijah, in the case of Charles Spurgeon, in the case of (Adoniram) Judson, in the case of (Martin) Luther, God was not through with them,” Clifton said.



**ADAMS**

“The spirit of God returned to them and restored them.”

Ken Adams, lead pastor of Crossroads Church in Newnan, Georgia, encouraged pastors to not get so busy they neglect the source of their passion — their relationship with Christ.

Preaching from Mark 1:35–39, Adams encouraged pastors to follow

the model of Jesus, who drew away to spend time with the Father. That helped Him to respond to the priorities of the Father rather than the pressure of the people, Adams said.

“When you live your life by priority, you will always know what you need to say no to,” he said. “Maybe there’s something you need to say no to. If you’re not saying no to some good things in your life, you can’t be saying yes to some of the best things that God has for your life.”

### ‘The driving force’

Sterling Lee, pastor of First Baptist Pearl City, Hawaii, also challenged pastors to abide in Christ.



**LEE**

“Jesus can’t be just another member of our team,” he said. “He must be the driving force ... so evident in and through the lives of believers that people won’t have to ask if Christ is in them.”

Speaking from John 15:1–8, Lee urged listeners to remember the True Vine — “it isn’t us,” he said — and to remain in Him. “If we don’t re-

main in Him, the results are devastating.”

Jeff Iorg, president of Gateway Seminary, encouraged pastors to stay rooted in Christ and lead with courage when change is necessary in their churches.

“When we introduce major change and people respond to it in all kinds of different ways, they’re spiritually growing, and we thrive in that



**IORG**

environment because it gives us the opportunity to show pastoral care to people and use it as a disciple-making moment,” Iorg said.

Leading major change “is not for the fainthearted, the quick to leave or those looking for a greener pasture,” Iorg said. “It’s for those who say, ‘Here’s where I’m going to stand until we get it done.’”

Michael Adler, worship pastor at Shades Mountain Baptist; Ricky Kennedy, associate pastor of worship at Crossroads; and the Shades Mountain worship team provided special music for the conference.

Also during the day, pastors conference officers for next year were announced (see photo below).



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

The 2023 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference officers are (l to r) Daniel Atkins, president; Matt Haines, pastor of Central Park Baptist Church in Decatur, president-elect; Richard Richie, pastor of Blue Springs Baptist Church in Somerville, secretary treasurer; and Chad Hess, pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence, vice president.

## THEME INTERPRETATIONS

# ‘God is at work’



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

## Alabama Baptists have ‘laser-sharp focus on winning people to Christ’

By Shawn Hendricks  
The Alabama Baptist

In his message during the Alabama Baptist State Convention, Willie McLaurin urged those gathered to not lose sight of all the Lord has done for them and through them in their efforts to reach their state — and the world — for Christ.

In keeping with the annual meeting theme, “Celebrate,” the interim president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee shared a long list of reasons Alabama Baptists have to be thankful as they kick off the cel-

bration of 200 years of cooperative ministry and missions work.

“When you and I look at the long-cherished history of Southern Baptists, we have so much to celebrate,” he said. “When we tell and celebrate what the Lord Jesus Christ is doing among us, it builds our faith. It builds belief that God is able to do anything, anywhere, anytime — with anyone.”

So what do Southern Baptists have to celebrate? An incredible story, McLaurin said, noting the SBC started from humble beginnings in 1845 with just 293 messen-

gers, representing nine Baptist state conventions, gathered in Augusta, Georgia. Today, some 14 million members and 50,000 churches make up the SBC, the “largest evangelical network in the United States.”

Other highlights McLaurin listed:

- ▶ Today, 3,600 missionaries are serving overseas with their families to reach unreached people groups around the globe with the gospel.

- ▶ Churches are being started “from Alabama to Alaska, from Maryland to Montana,” he said.

- ▶ Southern Baptists display a wide variety of skills and talents, he noted.

- ▶ The SBC Disaster Relief network of more than 70,000 trained volunteers is another area to be thankful for, McLaurin said.

- ▶ The Cooperative Program, which combines the resources of Southern Baptist churches, is also worth celebrating, he said.

“Right here in the great state of Alabama, every dollar given through the Cooperative Program goes toward lifting high the name and the fame of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- ▶ While Alabama is not the largest state convention in terms of the number of people, McLaurin said, Southern Baptists in the state have continued to make missions giving a priority. In the 97-year history of CP, Southern Baptists have given \$20 billion. Of that amount, Alabama is

the top state in giving through CP with \$1.5 billion.

Through the years, the churches of Alabama have consistently led the country in giving. Last year, Alabama led in giving to both the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

Alabama also gave \$1.5 million to its own state missions offering, he added.

- ▶ Missions giving goes hand-in-hand with missions living, and McLaurin said Alabama Baptists have shown a “laser-sharp focus on winning people to Christ.”

“What about those churches that only

baptized one person last year? Well, what if that one person was your son?” he asked. “That one person matters. The reality is this, the Lord used one person to reach Billy Graham, and God used Billy Graham to reach millions.”

- ▶ McLaurin also noted diversity within the convention. The SBC is the most racially and ethnically diverse network of churches — 23% of SBC churches are non-Anglo, he said.

“God is at work, and what God is doing is bigger than all of us,” he said. “Brothers and sisters, I’m simply trying to say we’ve got a whole lot to be thankful for. ... I’m convinced and I’m convicted that there is so much more God wants to do in us and through us.”

### What God has done, is doing and can do



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

To celebrate what God has done, what God is doing and what God can do through Alabama Baptists, the music and media teams of the State Board of Missions recruited volunteers such as Taylor Watkins (left) and Emma Grace Hyche to participate in a variety of creative productions throughout the Nov. 15–16 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting. In this moment, the presentation represents a passing of the gospel light from generation to generation.

# Gratitude to God

## Alabama Baptists celebrate God's work through His people during Nov. 15 evening session

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

**M**att Daniels said there's a lot to celebrate at the University of North Alabama, where he serves as Baptist campus minister.

One of the most recent examples is this — a student approached him and his wife, Morgan, a few weeks ago and said she was struggling.

"We met with her, and she began to pour out doubts of her salvation," Daniels said. "Through that conversation, Morgan and I began to realize she needed Jesus, and we began to walk with her down that path. At Baptist Campus Ministries that day, she surrendered her life to the Lord Jesus."

That's worth celebrating, and so is the domino effect it created, he said. The student immediately began sharing her story, and another student heard it and "became broken and realized the lostness in her life" and accepted Christ. Another student did the same thing.

"That's all happened in the last two weeks," Daniels said. "We've had six salvations this semester [because of] students sharing the good news of Christ."

Celebrating how God is at work through Alabama Baptists around the state was the theme of the



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist  
Matt Daniels, BCM campus minister at the University of North Alabama in Florence, shares how God is working in the lives of students through Baptist Campus Ministries during the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

Tuesday, Nov. 15, evening gathering of the Alabama Baptist State Convention at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

### Other testimonies

In addition to Daniels, other state missionaries, church planters, Disaster Relief volunteers, a Deaf ministry catalyst and an intercultural ministry team member shared

testimonies of needs met, the gospel shared and lives changed.

Those stories were followed by a message from Robert Smith Jr., professor of Christian preaching and Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School.

Preaching from Psalm 116 and focusing on verse 12, Smith spoke on the convention theme "Celebrate-

ing What God is Doing Through His People."

"To God, who owns everything and owes nothing, we as believers — who own nothing and owe everything — must render to Him, in the Spirit of Christ, thanksgiving for all of His benefits," he said.

### Vastness of God

The Bible is dripping with passages about the vastness of God and all that He is, has and does, Smith said. "God is trying through His word to stretch our mind and deepen our heart so that we appreciate God more and love God more and celebrate more authentically about what He has done and who He is."

He challenged Alabama Baptists to give their whole life in gratitude to God, asking, "Is anything too much to give?"

Smith recited lines from the hymn "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," noting that the focus of the song is that children of God can never have enough gratitude and praise to match what God has done for them.

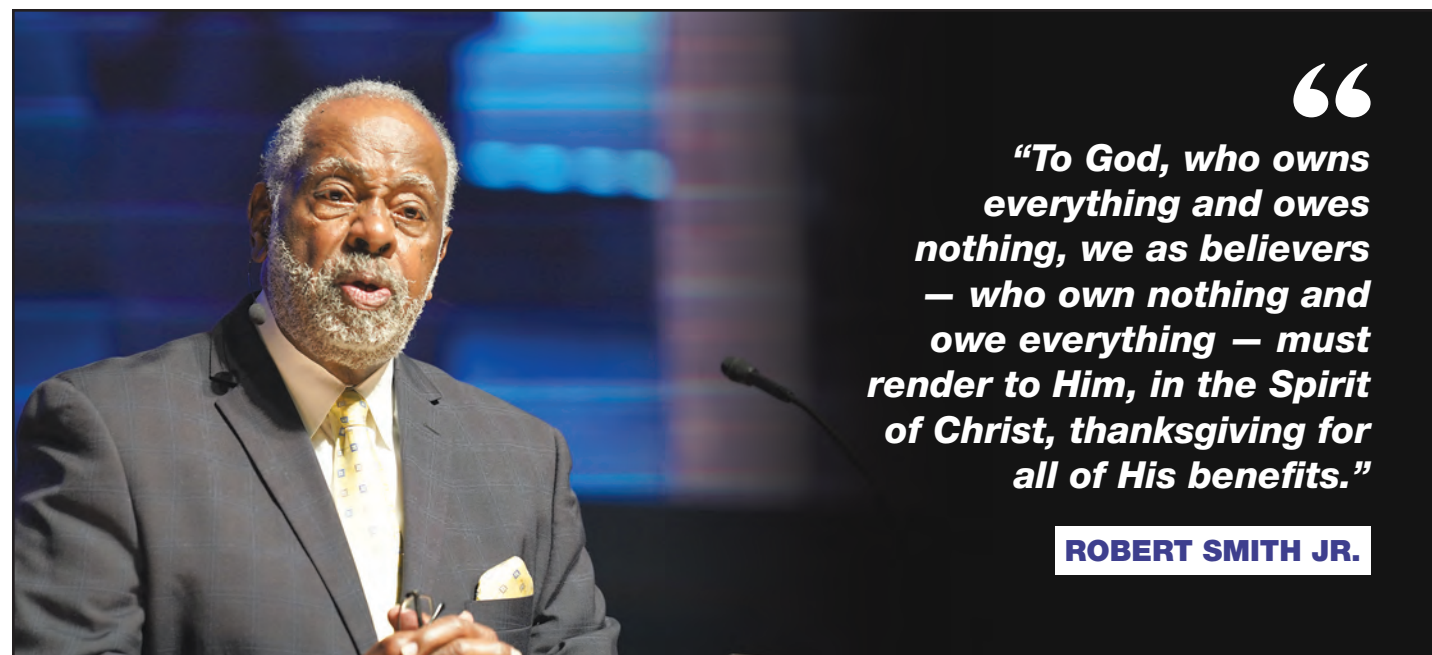
"In other words, I wish I could give more. If I just had a thousand tongues to sing," he said. "Brothers and sisters, we don't have a thousand, but we must use the one we have because what God has done demands a response."

Smith told Alabama Baptists they have much to celebrate and recounted some of the dates of the founding of Baptist colleges and ministries over the past 199 years.

### 'By His Spirit'

"The fact that you've been faithful to God, you've been generous in giving and you've been loyal to the cause — you ought to celebrate," he said.

"You're not the biggest convention, you're not the largest churches, but you led the Southern Baptist Convention over the last decade in missions and missions giving," he noted. "You ought to celebrate because it's not by numbers, it's not by might, it's not by power, but it's by His Spirit."



**"To God, who owns everything and owes nothing, we as believers — who own nothing and owe everything — must render to Him, in the Spirit of Christ, thanksgiving for all of His benefits."**

**ROBERT SMITH JR.**

Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

# Plans are underway for Alabama Baptists' bicentennial celebration

(continued from page 1)  
 "This is something your State Board of Missions will handle on your behalf."

With plans underway to celebrate 200 years of cooperative ministry in the state, Greg Corbin — chair of the Alabama Baptist Bicentennial Commemoration Task Force — shared plans for 2023. See full story at [tabonline.org/bicentennial](http://tabonline.org/bicentennial).

The first in a series of monthly articles on the bicentennial appeared in the Nov. 17 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*.

The bicentennial commemoration and celebration will culminate at next year's annual meeting at First Baptist Church Montgomery, Nov. 14–15.

"Unfinished" is the theme for the 2023 meeting.

Several awards also were announced during the SBOM report.

## DR award

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief strategist Mark Wakefield announced Cookie Baker as the recipient of this year's Tommy Puckett Award.

The award is presented annually to someone who contributes both practically and strategically to Alabama disaster relief efforts.

"It's my ministry. It's my heart. It's what I do," said Cookie Baker, a member of First Baptist Church Glencoe who has been volunteering with ABDR since 2005.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Greg Corbin, pastor of Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham, provides an update on the Alabama Baptist Bicentennial Commemoration Task Force during the annual meeting Nov. 15.

"I try to be available, and as long as the Lord wants me, He will keep me healthy enough to go," she said. "As long as the Lord leads me, I will go."

## Missions volunteer

Scotty Goldman, director of SBOM's office of global missions, presented this year's Missions Volunteer of the Year Award to Barbara Kay Edwards, a member of Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Deatsville, in Elmore County (see story, page 15).

## CP giving awards

Jay Stewart, director of SBOM's office of Cooperative Program and church financial resources, also presented three awards during the annual meeting:

**Largest gift given through CP:**

Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, led

by Pastor George Wright, \$1,034,986.65.

**Largest average gift per resident member given through CP:**

Midway Baptist Church in southeast Alabama, led by Pastor David Stewart, \$486.72.

**Largest percentage of undesignated receipts given through CP:**

Mountain View Baptist Church in Cullman, led by Pastor Dale Banks, 36.7%.

## In other business

► Messengers voted to accept the 2021 audit report for SBOM as prepared and printed by Jackson Thornton & Co., found on pages 24–32 in the 2022 Book of Reports.

► Messengers approved the special offering goals for 2023 (see list, this page).

► Messengers approved SBOM's participation in GuideStone's Mission:Dignity with additional funds being designated for former Alabama Baptist pastors and ministry wives who are receiving Mission:Dignity funds.

SBOM has earmarked funds for this purpose, and the amount needed is approximately \$110,000. This participation will be reviewed annually by the executive director of SBOM.

## TAB CLASSIFIEDS

### CHURCH POSITIONS

#### PASTOR

First Baptist Church Rogersville is in search of a senior pastor. Interested candidates may email their resumé to: [seniorpastorsearch@fbcrogersville.com](mailto:seniorpastorsearch@fbcrogersville.com) or mail a resumé to: First Baptist Church Rogersville, 222 College Street, Rogersville, AL 35652, ATTN: Senior Pastor Search Committee.

#### PASTOR

Newbridge Missionary Baptist Church in Asheville, North Carolina, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, prayerfully seeks a man who will preach the inerrant word of God and has a heart for missions. Email resumé to: [NewbridgePST@gmail.com](mailto:NewbridgePST@gmail.com).

#### PASTOR

First Baptist Childersburg is in search of a full-time pastor. If interested send resumé to the following — email: [childersburgfbcworship@outlook.com](mailto:childersburgfbcworship@outlook.com); mail: 200 8th Ave. SW, Childersburg, AL 35044.

#### WORSHIP LEADER

Hopewell Baptist Church near Andalusia, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a part-time worship leader. Please send resumé to: [barryandlaura2000@gmail.com](mailto:barryandlaura2000@gmail.com). Resumés will be accepted until Dec. 5.

#### MINISTER OF WORSHIP & FAMILIES

First Baptist Church of Atmore, Alabama, is realigning ministry positions. The church is seeking a full-time minister of worship and families to lead the worship ministry and serve as "second chair" to the pastor in a church undergoing an exciting revitalization. The church is also seeking a co-vocational minister to students. Resumés may be sent to: [keving@fbcatmore.org](mailto:keving@fbcatmore.org).

#### DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND/OR PRESCHOOL

Parkview Baptist Church in Decatur, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time and/or part-time director of children and/or preschool. Send resumés and questions to: [search.committee@parkviewdecatur.org](mailto:search.committee@parkviewdecatur.org).

### OTHER POSITIONS

#### WMU FOUNDATION PRESIDENT

The WMU Foundation, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, benefiting the work and mission of Woman's Missionary Union is seeking a president to lead the organization. The candidate must be a Christian who is actively involved as a member of a local Southern

Baptist church with evidence of and commitment to the purpose and work of WMU. Candidate's job location will be from the WMU building in Birmingham, Alabama. Successful candidate qualifications are a bachelor's degree with a master's degree in business or finance, preferred; five to eight years progressive work experience in development and investment/trust management; excellent interpersonal, written/verbal communication skills; technical expertise in the area of planned giving. Interested candidates should submit an email and resumé to the search team at this email address: [WMU-Foundation-Search-Team@outlook.com](mailto:WMU-Foundation-Search-Team@outlook.com) on or before Nov. 30.

#### CHILD CARE CENTER DIRECTOR — VESTAVIA HILLS BAPTIST CHURCH

Vestavia Hills Baptist Church Child Development Center is seeking an enthusiastic and skilled full-time director to manage the day-to-day operations of our center. The VHBC CDC provides quality care for babies through pre-K within a nurturing Christian environment. Bachelor's degree in education or related field required. To learn more about VHBC CDC, visit <https://www.vhbc.com/child-development>. How to apply: please send your resumé to: [cdcdirector@vhbc.com](mailto:cdcdirector@vhbc.com).

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## Special offering goals for 2023

- Lottie Moon Christmas Offering — \$12 million
- Annie Armstrong Easter Offering — \$6 million
- Children's Homes & Family Ministries — \$3 million
- Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering — \$1.2 million
- World Hunger Offering — \$800,000

# African American Fellowship chapter launches in state

By Grace Thornton

The Alabama Baptist

The new Alabama African American Fellowship held a kickoff banquet Monday, Nov. 14, the start of an effort Terrence Jones said he hopes will bring cooperation and collaboration in missions and ministry.

“We are here tonight for two reasons, and two reasons only — we want to advance God’s kingdom, and we want to do that together,” said Jones, pastor of Strong Tower at Washington Park in Montgomery. “There are problems facing our community that we need to be at the forefront of fixing. There are conversations we need to have to be the most effective in our communities. There are a lot of gifts and talents in this room that need to be shared with the group so that the churches can be strong and healthy together. That’s why we’re here.”

The AAAF group will be a state chapter of the National African American Fellowship in partnership with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

The banquet, held at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, brought together seasoned pastors of traditional churches and new church planters, something Jones said was by design.

“To me, our best route forward is to combine the wisdom of the generation before me that has so much experience of how to do things and how to persevere, with the creativity of the church planters who are coming behind us and doing fresh and new things,” he said. “There’s room at the table for all of us.”

Jarman Leatherwood, pastor of House of Hope and Restoration Church in Huntsville, said he felt that vision taking shape at the banquet.

“You could really feel the presence of God,” he said. “By the end of the night the fellowship and collaboration was evident as everyone pledged their commitment to advance our efforts all to the glory of God.”

As the AAAF chapter gets started, it will be a quarterly Zoom call with an annual banquet and potentially



Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

Jarman Leatherwood (left) and Fred Luter speak during the Alabama African American Fellowship dinner Nov. 14 at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

other opportunities for resourcing and equipping.

“One thing I’ve learned during my short time here in the Southern Baptist Convention is the power of working together and not doing everything as an individual,” Jones said. “What we can accomplish together is so much greater than what any one of us could accomplish on our own, and our desire is that African American churches within the Alabama Baptist State Convention would work together in greater detail and more closely together and communicate with each other.”

As an example, he mentioned one resource churches could tap into — a mobile dental clinic offered by the North American Mission Board.

“One of the major issues in Alabama is that people can’t get quality dental care, and the health departments are backed up,” Jones said.

## Partnership

By working together with NAMB and in partnership with The Church at Liberty Park in Vestavia Hills, Jones’ church has given \$140,000 in free dental care over the past several years.

Pooling resources can make a big impact, he said. “We want to see a great movement in the African American community, and we believe that the power to do it is in this

room and in the churches that are not here tonight.”

Leatherwood said he and Jones are “grateful for the love and support of Dr. Rick Lance (SBOM executive director) and our State Board of Missions family for not only praying for us but encouraging us every step of the way.”

Through that partnership, “the love of Christ is felt in a very real way,” he said.

## Recognitions

Also during the banquet, Jones and Lance presented AAAF’s first award for Significant Kingdom Impact in the African American Community in Alabama to nine individuals:

▶ Lemuel Taylor Jr., pastor emeritus of Highpoint Baptist Church in Eight Mile.

▶ Willie Hinton, pastor of West Mastin Lake Baptist Church in Huntsville.

▶ D’Linell Finley, Southlawn Baptist Church in Montgomery.

▶ Charles Autery, pastor of Christian Way Baptist Church in Camden.

▶ the late John Thomas Porter, retired pastor of Sixth Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham.

▶ Willie Alexander, former longtime campus minister at Alabama A&M University.

▶ John King, church and community relations consultant for Bir-

mingham Metro Baptist Association.

▶ John Davis, pastor of Wine-wood Baptist Christian Fellowship Church in Birmingham.

▶ James Dixon, Birmingham native and pastor of El-Bethel Baptist Church in Fort Washington, Maryland.

Dixon also shared a message during the banquet from Acts 2:42 and talked about what fellowship should look like.

## Collaboration

“I must declare to you that in order to encourage Kingdom growth through collaboration, we must create an environment for God,” he said. “God’s presence must be the centerpiece before there will be a divine collaboration. We must invite God’s wisdom, knowledge and understanding into the room — God Himself.”

Dixon said the Holy Spirit presents a different agenda than the world, and that agenda involves partnership and participation in a joint effort.

“The only way this is going to take place is for Christ to be in the center of the environment,” he said. “He has to be the main focal point, because it’s not about us — it’s about Him. God of glory is the power that works within the body of Christ.”

Ken Weathersby, mid-south region director for NAAF and an adviser for the AAAF steering committee, affirmed that message.

“We’ve heard a great word tonight about creating an atmosphere, an environment where more people will come to know Jesus through church planting, through missions engagement around the world. It’s about cooperation,” he said.

When NAAF started in 1993, there were around 500 African American churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, Weathersby said. Now there are nearly 4,000.

“That happened because of the Cooperative Program, working cooperatively together to be able to give the fuel that is necessary to plant the gospel in all communities,” he said.

Around 20 churches have committed to join the Alabama chapter so far.

**For information on how to join, email [terrence@strongtowerawp.com](mailto:terrence@strongtowerawp.com) or [jleatherwood7@gmail.com](mailto:jleatherwood7@gmail.com).**

**To view photos from the AAAF banquet, visit [tabonline.org/aaaf](http://tabonline.org/aaaf).**

# Boards and commissions

## Trustees, board members elected to serve State Board, other entities

### Report of Committee on Boards and Commissions

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Messengers voted to elect or reelect the following during the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention. An asterisk (\*) before the name indicates a layperson. The executive committee and State Board of Missions members are grouped by associations while board members of convention entities are designated by church membership.*

#### Executive Committee

\*Julia Ford, Skip Parvin, Ben Hayes, Barrett Long, Jim Graham, Chris Kynard, Kevin Moore, Bill McCall, \*Beth Baldwin

#### State Board of Missions

*Terms to Expire 2025:* Kenneth Fuller, Bibb; Larry Byrd, Rosevelt Morris, Jacob Simmons, Steven Weems, Birmingham Metro; \*Ross Smith, Blount; Bill Cannon, Bullock; Cody Hale, Derek Staples, \*Wayne Rawlings, Calhoun; Jerome Key, Chilton; \*Wade Rolison, Choctaw; Danny Wiggins, Coffee; Seth Hood, Colbert-Lauderdale; Bill Hart, Dale; Andy Brown, DeKalb; \*Leah McRae and David Chambers, East Cullman; Randy Gunter and Becky Luther, Etowah; Chuck Oliver, Fayette; Les Hughes, Geneva; \*Judy Wesson, Mobile; Neal Hughes, Montgomery; Bob Fitzgerald, Mud Creek; Charles Autery, Pine Barren; Daniel B. Wiggins, Pleasant Grove; \*Alexa Andrews, Randolph; James Preachers, Sardis; Chris Jones, Shelby; John Thweatt, St. Clair; Joseph Fain and Jeff Redmond,

Tuskegee Lee; Guy Anderson, West Central; Brad Philbeck, West Cullman; Nathan Carroll, Winston

#### — Convention entities —

#### The Alabama Baptist

*Terms to Expire 2026:* Ben Bowden, FBC Enterprise; John Brock, Highland, Florence; \*Sallie Bryant, Lakeside, Birmingham; Jeff Gardner, FBC Trussville

#### Board of Aid

*Terms to Expire 2026:* Jason Smith, FBC Sumnerdale; Ben Stubblefield, Spring Hill, Mobile

#### Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries

*Terms to Expire 2026:* \*James Bearden, Valley Grande; \*Amy Corbin, Chapel Hill, Northport; \*Helen Fisk, Dawson, Homewood; \*Ray Hammock, Spring Hill, Mobile; Taylor Rutland, FBC Dothan; \*Lori Whitcomb, Lakeside, Birmingham; \*W. Alan Wilks, Henagar

#### Christian Life Commission

*Terms to Expire 2026:* \*Melissa Bowen, FBC Prattville; Kenny Hatcher, FBC Guin; \*Joan Jenkins, Mount Zion, Huntsville; Lee Tate, Westwood, Selma

#### Education Commission

*Terms to Expire 2026:* Travis Coleman, Jr., FBC Prattville; Rick Marshall, Eastern Hills, Montgomery, John Nicholson, Siloam, Marion

#### The Baptist Foundation of Alabama

*Terms to Expire 2026:* \*Sidney Sim Crosby, FBC Jackson; W. Robert Dubois, Heritage, Montgomery;

\*Donald E. Lambert, Highland, Florence; \*Vicki M. Martin, FBC Dothan; \*Larry Newman, Dawson, Home-wood; \*Boles Pegues, III, FBC Opelika; \*Alan Taylor, FBC Trussville; \*Thomas E. Watkins, Jubilee, Daphne

#### Alabama Baptist Historical Commission

*Terms to Expire 2026:* Wendell Dutton, Slackland, Leesburg, \*Bridgett Junkin, FBC Pell City; \*Calvin Milford, FBC LaFayette; Roger Willmore, Meadowbrook, Oxford

#### Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers

*Terms to Expire 2026:* Billy Dickey, Eastmont, Montgomery; \*Harold J. Hammond, FBC Prattville; \*Janice Hull, FBC Clanton; George King, Dawson, Homewood; \*Eileen Mitchell, FBC Montgomery

#### University of Mobile

*Terms to Expire 2026:* Scott Dawson, Valleydale, Birmingham; Daven Watkins, FBC Pelham; \*David Conner, Redemption, Mobile; \*James Counselman, Eastern Shore, Daphne

#### Shocco Springs Conference Center

*Terms to Expire 2026:* \*Katy Langley, FBC Trussville; Jarman Leatherwood, House of Hope and Restoration, Huntsville; Daniel R. Reeves; Whitesburg, Huntsville; Stephen Stroud; Dawson, Homewood

### Report of Committee on Committees

#### Committee on Boards and Commissions

*Chairperson 2022–2023:* Joel Carwile, FBC Athens

#### Chairperson 2023–2024: Mat Alexander, FBC Gadsden

*Terms to Expire 2024:* \*Joan Jenkins, Mount Zion, Huntsville; Mat Alexander, FBC Gadsden; \*Judy Conaway, FBC Wedowee; Chase Clower, Hillabee, Alexander City; \*Judy Gay, FBC Headland; Nathan Daniels, Bethany, Andalusia; Derek Allen, FBC Tillman's Corner, Mobile; \*Sally McGuire, Greensboro; \*Claren Dease, Pleasant Hill, Aliceville; John Brock, Highland, Florence; \*Kim Thweatt, FBC Pell City; Trish Jackson, Glynwood, Prattville

#### Audit Committee

*Chairperson 2022–2023:* \*Rick Gibson, FBC Tuscaloosa  
*Terms to Expire 2025:* \*Rick Gibson, FBC Tuscaloosa; \*Ben Kelley, FBC Montgomery

#### Insurance Committee

*Chairperson 2022–2023:* W. Robert DuBois, Heritage, Montgomery  
*Terms to Expire 2025:* W. Robert DuBois, Heritage, Montgomery; Chris Britton, County Line, Prattville; William E. Davis, Bethsalem, Clanton

#### Committee on Time, Place and Preacher

*Chairperson 2022–2023:* Mel Johnson, FBC Prattville

*Terms to Expire 2023:* Mel Johnson, FBC Prattville; Nicholas Gandy, Elkdale, Selma; Marc Hodges, FBC Thorsby; James Jackson, Glynwood, Prattville; Danny Courson, Cropwell, Ashville; Keith Ray, Carrville, Tallassee; Michael L. Mynatt, Hillcrest, Enterprise

#### Memorials Committee

*Chairperson 2022–2023:* Rick Marshall, Eastern Hills, Montgomery

*Terms to Expire 2023:* Rick Marshall, Eastern Hills, Montgomery; Harrell Cushing, FBC Montgomery; Kenny Hoomes, FBC Montgomery, Herman Pair, Lakeside, Birmingham; \*Eileen Mitchell, FBC Montgomery

#### Committee on Order of Business

*Chairperson 2022–2023:* Chip Starnes, FBC Bay Minette

*Terms to Expire 2025:* Chip Starnes, FBC Bay Minette; Peyton Hill, FBC Prattville; Rusty Sowell, Providence, Opelika

#### Committee on Resolutions

*Chairperson 2022–2023:* \*Melissa Bowen, FBC Prattville

*Terms to Expire 2023:* \*Melissa Bowen, FBC Prattville; Britney Gardner, FBC Montgomery; Chris Jones, Meadow Brook, Birmingham; Jesse Reeder, Moulton; Ben Bowden, FBC Enterprise; Rosevelt Morris, Sr., Sixth Avenue, Birmingham; \*Kaye Farrow, Westwood, Alabaster

#### — President's nominees —

#### Committee on Committees

The President of the State Convention nominates the following for three-year terms (expiring in 2025) on the Committee on Committees:

*Chairperson 2025:* Jim Graham, Coosada

Blake Kersey, FBC Decatur; Earl Mitchell, FBC Attalla; Kevin Ward, FBC Athens

# Edwards receives Missions Volunteer of the Year Award

By Leisl Lemire  
The Alabama Baptist

Barbara Kay Edwards has a burden for women of all ages, backgrounds and cultures, and that call has led her to serve in a variety of missions fields.

Edwards was this year's recipient of the Missions Volunteer of the Year Award.

Scotty Goldman, director of the office of global missions for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, presented the award Nov. 15 during the state convention annual meeting at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

The annual recognition highlights someone who exemplifies the Acts 1:8 strategy for missions involvement, having served in associational, state, North American and international missions. It's not hard to see why Edwards was chosen.

Her day job as ministry assistant at Elmore Baptist Association keeps her busy, and as president of the board for the Elmore County Pregnancy Center, she is no stranger to meeting women at a point of need.

God has opened door after door of opportunity for Edwards to walk through over the years, she said.



wellwornpaths.com  
Barbara Kay Edwards ministers to children during a trip to Central America.

Edwards first experienced an "arrested heart" for women in Nicaragua while on a missions trip. They had very little and were doing their best to survive. Edwards describes feeling their lack of joy and their desperation to the point that she prayed, "God send someone to minister to these women."

She realized almost immediately the answer to her prayer. She heard God whisper to her, "I sent you."

## Devotional books

Edwards also began to write, focusing on memories of her own conversion at the age of 15. Using those memories as a catalyst, she began writing her first devotional book, "Well Worn Paths." A second volume came later.

The book also led to the founding of a disciple-making ministry of the same name.

More recently, she au-



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist  
Scotty Goldman presents the Missions Volunteer of the Year Award to Barbara Kay Edwards.

thored a study of the Book of Ephesians called "Daily on My Path."

## Speaking ministry

The partnership between Alabama Baptists and churches in Alaska led to an opportunity for Edwards and a team of eight women to go to Alaska to conduct a

women's retreat in a remote area of the state.

While the hunger for the Word in Guatemala was overwhelming, Edwards describes the attitudes in Alaska as matching the climate: in many ways cold and hard.

One thing she has learned along the way in women's ministry is the value of bringing small gifts such as bracelets and bags for the women to whom the team will be ministering.

The trip to Alaska was followed almost immediately by a church planters' wives retreat in Phoenix, Arizona.

"God has three different demographics with these groups of women, and our prayer is that in each case, their roots grow deep and they understand how far and wide God's love is. That looks different in each place," Edwards said.

Visit [wellwornpaths.org](http://wellwornpaths.org) for more information.

## WMU FOUNDATION

**The WMU Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, benefiting the work and mission of the Woman's Missionary Union is seeking a President to lead the organization.**

Candidate will lead a team by providing leadership, direction, and control to all aspects of the WMU Foundation (WMUF) at the direction of the Board of Trustees, Articles of Incorporation, and corporate bylaws. The candidate must be a Christian who is actively involved as a member of a local Southern Baptist church with evidence of and commitment to the purpose and work of WMU. Candidate's job location will be from the WMU building in Birmingham, Alabama.

Key responsibilities include, but are not limited to, managing and providing direction to WMUF staff, along with planning, analyzing, executing, managing and evaluating fund raising activities and planned giving programs. The candidate must also coordinate the formulation of financial development programs in order to se-

cure gifts from individuals and other mission minded organizations with special focus on deferred giving through wills, gifts, gift annuities, charitable trusts, and other instruments for the purpose of increasing the financial support of WMU through the WMUF.

As part of the financial responsibilities, the candidate must also be able to keep up-to-date on current fund raising and planned giving practices and procedures used within the nonprofit sector, and inform the Board and WMU Foundation staff of matters that would benefit their work.

Candidate would research and initiate contact with current and potential individuals, corporate, and foundation donors recommended by Board members, staff members, and other interested entities. The candidate would also oversee asset management relationship with the trust company while giving specific attention to detailed accounting for all funds and endowments.

Candidate will represent the WMUF in national

and state WMU events, churches, associations, and applicable meetings. Reporting to the WMU Executive Board meetings and other WMU Committees as requested is also a key responsibility.

Essential responsibilities: ability to travel; work on a regular and consistent basis; completing assigned tasks; providing oral and/or written reports on projects as requested; and upholding WMU Foundation and national WMU company policies while working in a cooperative manner with team managers, co-workers, customers, and the public.

Successful candidate qualifications are a Bachelor's Degree with a Master's Degree in Business or Finance, preferred; five to eight years progressive work experience in development and investment/trust management; excellent interpersonal, written/verbal communication skills; technical expertise in the area of planned giving.

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**INTERESTED CANDIDATES SHOULD SUBMIT AN EMAIL AND RESUMÉ TO THE SEARCH TEAM AT THIS EMAIL ADDRESS: [WMU-Foundation-Search-Team@outlook.com](mailto:WMU-Foundation-Search-Team@outlook.com) on or before November 30, 2022.**

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# Myers-Mallory

## State Missions Offering

### State Goal: \$1,200,000

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FROM THE STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

# Happy Thanksgiving

*"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"*  
2 CORINTHIANS 9:15 (NIV)

Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for your gifts through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, which allow more and more people every year to experience the "indescribable gift" of grace and salvation through Jesus Christ!

# Convention messengers adopt 7 resolutions

By **Carrie B. McWhorter**  
The Alabama Baptist

Resolutions on marijuana legalization and protecting children were among the seven resolutions adopted by messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention held Nov. 15–16 at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

**Resolution No. 3**, “On Calling for Repeal of Legalization of Medical Marijuana in Alabama,” urges cities and counties in the state to refuse to pass resolutions permitting the opening of medical cannabis dispensaries within their jurisdictions.

The resolution passed after Derrick Brown, a messenger from Southside Baptist Church in Ozark, questioned whether total opposition to medical cannabis is the right move. Brown said the issue is personal because his daughter has recently been prescribed CBD oil by her physician.

Resolutions committee chair Roger Willmore addressed Brown’s concerns,

noting the committee was aware of mixed feelings among Alabama Baptists and others on the use of medical cannabis.

“I want to assure you that the committee members have spent quite a bit of time discussing this topic of recreational versus medical marijuana,” Willmore said. “The conversation could go on for a long time, and I’m not sure it would really resolve [all the] questions and concerns.”

The resolution comes as the Alabama Medical Cannabis Commission begins the process of licensing businesses for the production, processing, transportation and sale of medical marijuana. Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey signed the state’s medical cannabis law into effect May 17, 2021.

**Resolution No. 4**, “In Support of the Vulnerable Child Compassion and Protection Act,” expresses support for legislation that protects minors from transgender medical procedures and treatments and encour-



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist  
The resolutions committee and chair Roger Willmore (right) present proposed resolutions to the messengers of the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

agement for elected officials who have passed and defended such bills.

Other resolutions approved include:

**Resolution No. 1**, “On Appreciation for the Overturning of Roe v. Wade,” which expresses gratitude for the Dobbs decision, which declared states have the right to protect the unborn by prohibiting abortion.

**Resolution No. 2**, “On Commendation of the Alabama Baptist Children’s

Homes & Family Ministries in its Response to the Overturning of Roe v. Wade,” pledges support for ABCH in its efforts to minister to pregnant mothers, children and families following the Dobbs decision.

**Resolution No. 5**, “On Reaffirmation of Christian Parenting for All Children,” notes a weakening of the two-parent family structure and urges fathers and mothers to prioritize the well-being and spiritual health of their children.

Messengers approved an amendment to the original text of the resolution offered by messenger Zach Van Gieson, pastor of Lakeview Baptist Church in Oxford.

The amendment added language urging Christian parents to make Sundays a priority.

Speaking for his amendment, Van Gieson said “every pastor in this room feels the tension” between secular pursuits that keep families away from church. “A faithful Christian should not forsake the Lord’s Day gathering,” he said.

Messengers declined two amendments to Resolution No. 5 offered by A.J. Smith, a messenger from Hope Mountain Baptist Church in Calera. Smith said his proposed amendments sought to draw attention to child-custody issues in Alabama.

Willmore said he and other committee members have “compassion for parents who feel they don’t have appropriate time with their children” but asked messengers to adopt the text of the resolution as presented and amended.

**Resolution No. 6**, “On Appreciation to the Sexual Abuse Task Force,” commends members of the Alabama Baptist task force for their work over the past year.

**Resolution No. 7**, “On Appreciation,” thanks Shades Mountain Baptist Church for its hospitality in hosting the annual meeting.

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NMLS #207518

# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For November 27

## Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Historical Theology, University of Mobile



### HOPE FOUND Micah 7:1–10, 18–20

#### Reality Defined (1–6)

Micah had been preaching repentance, yet it seemed to have no impact. He likened himself to one who goes to eat food of the harvest only to find the fruit is no good. Despite his warnings and chastisement, the people's behavior did not change. Instead, those in power in Israel seemed to grow even more despicable. Government officials took bribes instead of being concerned for justice. Even family members turned on one another, dividing households.

Today we can tell people about Jesus and try to persuade them to repent and turn to the Savior, but it often seems to fall on deaf ears. One look at our society shows our circumstances aren't very different from Micah's day. All we can do is ask God to change the hearts of people and to help us remain faithful. We can ask Him to help us represent Him well, living out our Christian worldview and showing people who He is and what He is like. Maybe the people of our country will repent, unlike Micah's audience.

#### Salvation Discovered (7–10)

At this point in the chapter, Micah turned his attention from his circumstances to God, asserting he would wait for God regarding Israel.

This is a valuable lesson. When we look at our circumstances, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and hopeless. Ungodly things are all around us: Crime rates are up; the media seems to silence the righteous; and the government often seems to care more about virtue signaling than for the governed.

How do we respond? We look to God. First, God is the only One that can change hearts. For a person to see their depravity and need for a Savior, the Holy Spirit must convict them. It is our duty to pray that others' hearts will be softened as we plead with God to change them.

Second, we can have hope because God is in control. No matter

our environment, God knows what we are going through. We also know that in the end, we will stand before a Holy God clothed in the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

Nonbelievers will stand before a Holy God clothed only in their own righteousness, which appears as filthy rags. They will stand condemned and face an eternity apart from God. Therefore, we pray God changes hearts, while also knowing He will bring about justice. It is not in our hands.

This is a great relief as we can rest in God instead of striving to force others to change. This does not mean we do not fight for biblical justice, caring for the poor, the down and out, etc., but the change we desire is not up to us, it is up to God.

#### Forgiveness Celebrated (18–20)

The Book of Micah ends with praise to God for His character — He is forgiving, compassionate, faithful and loving. These characteristics are a wonderful way to see the book end. Despite the impiety and wretchedness of the Israelites, there is hope in God. The reader receives abiding hope and joy in seeing God's character.

As we turn our eyes to God and away from our circumstances, we look clearly at ourselves and God's relation to us. Despite our sinfulness, God is quick to forgive. He doesn't hold grudges. He does not hold our sin against us when we repent.

The best expression of this is found in Christ. As Paul says in Romans 5:8, "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This shows God loves sinners who don't love Him and gives us hope that God can change the hearts of men. We need to be faithful representatives of God, loving our neighbors as ourselves, presenting the gospel to others, and showing them the love of Christ in everyday interactions.

## Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



### THREE REASONS FOR GIVING THANKS Psalm 107:1–9

#### Give thanks because God redeems us. (1–3)

Psalms 104–106 recount Scripture's story. Israel's God is the Creator of the world. His works demonstrate His wisdom and power, and the earth should praise Him (Ps. 104).

God made a covenant with Abraham, and He was faithful to His promise, rescuing Abraham's descendants from Egypt, leading them to the promised land and giving them His laws to keep (Ps. 105). In contrast to God's faithfulness to His promises and covenants, Israel was unfaithful (Ps. 106).

The consequences of Israel's transgression of the covenant God made with them at Sinai were that Israel would suffer devastation at the hands of foreign nations and be exiled from the promised land. Psalm 107 lists the various curses that fell upon Israel for breaking the covenant. They were thrust out into the harsh wilderness, which threatened their lives, and some were taken captive and imprisoned.

In Psalm 107, the psalmist thanks God for delivering Israel from exile. He thanks God for His love toward His people, for rescuing the exiled people and for returning them to the promised land. We also thank God for rescuing us from the kingdom of darkness, for forgiving our sins and for gathering us into the kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ (Col. 1:13).

#### Give thanks because God leads us. (4–7)

The people of Israel are outside their promised land. We can remember their wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. They are pictured as lacking food and water. They are subject to the harsh climate of the wilderness, and they are without the necessities they would readily find in established towns. They were in deep distress and on the verge of death.

In the depth of their despair and suffering, they appealed to the

Lord to rescue them, and He intervened. He led them through the wilderness.

He straightened their paths and led them to a town where their hunger and thirst could be satisfied.

Likewise, when we are in despair and see our spiritual poverty apart from God, and when we cry out to God to deliver us, we can know He will straighten our crooked paths of sin and lead us into His kingdom.

#### Give thanks because God gives us everything good. (8–9)

According to His steadfast love, God rescued Israel. He gave food and drink to the hungry. He liberated the prisoners (vv. 14–16). And He healed their sicknesses (v. 17). All these consequences are the curses of the covenant that fell upon Israel for breaking Sinai's law.

The ultimate root of Israel's and humanity's devastation is that Israel and all the nations "rebelled against the words of God" (v. 11), and all humanity suffers distress because of our iniquities (v. 17).

The Son of God, Jesus Christ, entered a world that was hungry and thirsty, a world that was imprisoned by sin and the spiritual forces of evil. And Jesus saw us in distress.

Through His death and resurrection, He defeated the root of our oppression — sin and death. We look forward to the Day of the Lord, when Jesus returns and finally vanquishes our oppressors. This is the day when we will never again hunger or thirst or be subject to darkness — when the Light, the Bread of Life and the Living Water returns.

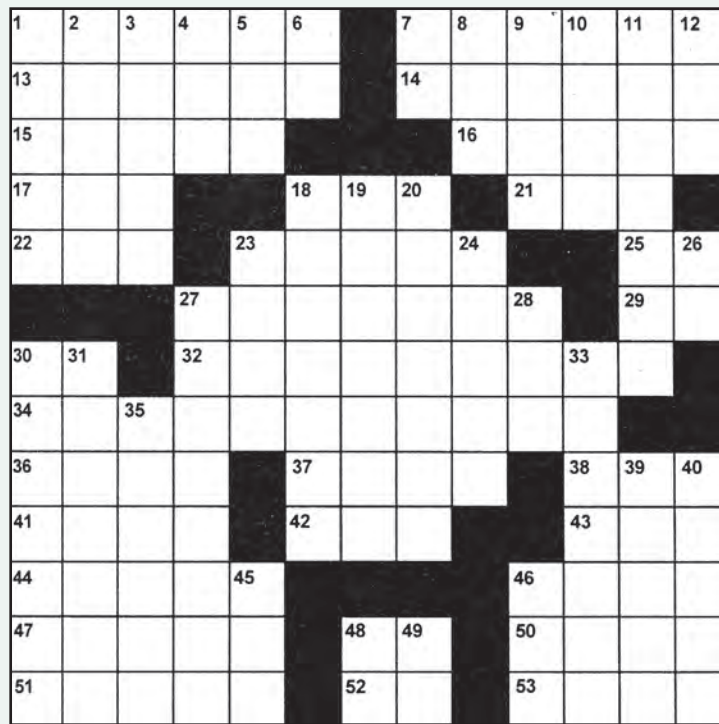
As the true Light, Bread of Life and Living Water, Jesus will not only remove our suffering, He will cause us to flourish with abundance when He returns (vv. 33–38).

We can thank God now for His love for us and offer songs of thanksgiving that Jesus has defeated sin and death. We can joyfully anticipate His return to rescue us from all the corruption that sin has worked.

# CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

**ACROSS**

1. I will raise unto David a righteous \_\_\_\_\_. (Jer. 23:5)
7. If any be a \_\_\_\_ of the word. (James 1:23)
13. An ocean-edge lake.
14. \_\_\_\_ for thy life. (Gen. 19:17)
15. Ivory and \_\_\_\_\_. (Ezek. 27:15)
16. Of \_\_\_\_ shall there be \_\_\_\_ like weight. (Ex. 30:34; 2 words)
17. That I might not \_\_\_\_ against Thee. (Ps. 119:11)
18. Who walk in the \_\_\_\_ of the Lord. (Ps. 119:1)
21. Pay \_\_\_\_ view.
22. Temporary duty. (abbr.)
23. Could not drink of the waters of \_\_\_\_\_. (Ex. 15:23)
25. And I will walk \_\_\_\_ liberty. (Ps. 119:45)
27. Accompanied him into Asia \_\_\_\_ of Berea. (Acts 20:4)
29. Delayed not \_\_\_\_ keep Thy commandments. (Ps. 119:60)
30. Thy law \_\_\_\_ my delight. (Ps. 119:77)
32. \_\_\_\_ Naomi's husband died. (Ruth 1:3)
34. And \_\_\_\_ them, and \_\_\_\_ them down with ease. (Judg. 20:43; 2 words)
36. Halah, and Habor, and \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Chron. 5:26)
37. \_\_\_\_ Jerusalem ... as a \_\_\_\_ doth gather. (Luke 13:34; 2 words)
38. And Peleg lived after he begat \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 11:19)
41. \_\_\_\_, and Shema, and Moladah. (Josh. 15:26)
42. Nickname for Edward.
43. \_\_\_\_ and feather.
44. They assigned \_\_\_\_ in the wilderness. (Josh. 20:8)
46. Three wise men of Christmas.



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13. \_\_\_\_\_. (Jer. 23:5)
  14. \_\_\_\_ for thy life. (Gen. 19:17)
  15. Ivory and \_\_\_\_\_. (Ezek. 27:15)
  16. Of \_\_\_\_ shall there be \_\_\_\_ like weight. (Ex. 30:34; 2 words)
  17. That I might not \_\_\_\_ against Thee. (Ps. 119:11)
  18. Who walk in the \_\_\_\_ of the Lord. (Ps. 119:1)
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  42. Nickname for Edward.
  43. \_\_\_\_ and feather.
  44. They assigned \_\_\_\_ in the wilderness. (Josh. 20:8)
  46. Three wise men of Christmas.
- DOWN**
1. Made holy. (archaic)
  2. Furious.
  3. And being in an \_\_\_\_ He prayed. (Luke 22:44)
  4. Prefix meaning "not."
  5. Shy.
  6. Head nurse. (abbr.)
  7. And \_\_\_\_ heard me. (Ps. 120:1)
  8. East-southeast. (abbr.)
  9. Not a hat, but \_\_\_\_ baseball \_\_\_\_\_. (2 words)
  10. The \_\_\_\_ is not to the swift. (Eccles. 9:11)
  11. Caleb took unto him \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Chron. 2:19)
  12. Rural Electrification Administration. (abbr.)
  18. Deborah ... the wife of \_\_\_\_ h. (Judg. 4:4)
  19. Geshur, and \_\_\_\_, with \_\_\_\_ towns. (1 Chron. 2:23; 2 words)
  20. And \_\_\_\_ the whole face of the ground. (Gen. 2:6)
  23. The snail, and the \_\_\_\_\_. (Lev. 11:30)
  24. Eliab the son of \_\_\_\_\_. (Num. 2:7)
  26. \_\_\_\_ day.
  27. Child's TV program. (abbr.)
  28. Bright color.
  30. Eli's grandson. (1 Sam. 4:21)
  31. Whither shall I cause my \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_? (2 Sam. 13:13)
  33. A \_\_\_\_ man had two sons. (Luke 15:11)
  35. Not come \_\_\_\_ upon mine head. (Judg. 16:17; 2 words)
  39. Doth the \_\_\_\_ mount up? (Job 39:27)
  40. That had been the wife of \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 1:6)
  45. Kanga's child.
  46. Sound made by a cow.
  48. Thy word have I hid \_\_\_\_ my heart. (Ps. 119:11)
  49. Make me \_\_\_\_ understand. (Ps. 119:27)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

## Church planters urged to 'keep the faith'

Pastor Ivan Montenegro said he began his Christian journey in a unique way when a missionary came to his homeland of El Salvador.

"The missionary didn't speak our language, so he hired me as his translator," Montenegro said Sunday, Nov. 13, during the Church Planter Network meeting.

The group met at Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in Homewood for worship, fellowship and inspiration leading up to the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting Nov. 15-16.

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions lead church planting strategist Brian Harper served as host.

Montenegro shared how he was only 7 years old when he translated for the missionary "but I heard what he said, and I accepted Christ as my Savior. I didn't know at the time my missionary friend was also training me how to be a church planter."

Montenegro eventually moved to the U.S. and

worked for American Airlines and as a government official. Now he's with the Northwest Baptist Convention, which includes Washington, Oregon and parts of Idaho and California.

### 'More than a building'

Preaching from 1 Thessalonians 1, Montenegro said, "The church in Thessalonica was a church plant. It was [young] when Paul wrote to them about ... the church.

"The church is much more than a building or a sound system," he explained. "Paul said it's a community of believers who share God's grace and peace."

The gospel isn't merely words but evidence of God's power through the Holy Spirit, Montenegro added.

"We don't work alone, but we have the promise of God's power to change lives," he said.

"We must keep the faith. Without faith, there is failure, Without faith there is discouragement. Keep the faith." (Michael J. Brooks)

## Looking back, looking ahead

**2022 ANNUAL MEETING**  
**685 REGISTERED MESSENGERS**  
**99 REGISTERED GUESTS**  
**387 CHURCHES REPRESENTED**

► **2023 Alabama Baptist State Convention** will be Nov. 14-15 at FBC Montgomery.

► **Jarman Leatherwood**, founding pastor of House of Hope and Restoration Church in Huntsville, and second vice president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, will be the convention preacher.

► **2023 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference** will be Nov. 13 at Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery.



Photo by Dianna Cagle/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

**Above:** Worship during the Tuesday evening session of the 2022 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham was led by Michael Adler and the Shades Mountain worship team and choir.

**Above, left:** Amy Hacker serves coffee for TAB Media in the exhibit hall at the Pastors Conference. **Above, right:** Matt Daniels, BCM campus minister at UNA, enjoys time with students Nov. 14 at the Timothy Initiative luncheon. TI seeks to mentor young adults discerning a call to ministry. Alabama Baptist college ministry leaders also met at Shades Nov. 14 for Unite.

# Life at convention



Photo by Michael Brooks/The Alabama Baptist

**Left:** Pastor Ivan Montenegro (right), church planting catalyst with the Northwest Baptist Convention, and Leon Miller, pastor of Kingdom Family Christian Fellowship in Center Point, meet at the Nov. 13 Alabama Church Planter Network dinner and worship celebration at Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham.

Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist



**Above:** Karen Goselin, SBOM coordinator of worship resources, leads a time of celebrating what God has done in Alabama Baptist life during the Nov. 15 morning session of the convention. **Below:** Mark Wakefield presents the Tommy Puckett Award to Cookie Baker (left) for her work with disaster relief.



Photo by Debbie Campbell/The Alabama Baptist

**Above:** Jim Hill, associational missionary of Dale Baptist Association, and his wife, Robin, explore the exhibit hall at the Pastors Conference.

**Right:** Dewayne Rember (left) reacts as James Dixon preaches at the Alabama African Fellowship Nov. 14 at Shades Mountain.



Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

# 'My Creator has a PLAN'

By Grace Thornton  
The Baptist Paper

## WMU Foundation scholarships, Christian Women's Job Corps provide help, hope

**B**rianna Watts was stuck in a cycle. After growing up in foster homes, and then being adopted by an aunt as a teenager, she became pregnant at 17.

"I thought I knew what I was doing, and I didn't," she said. "I started partying and soon turned to drugs."

Over the next seven years, she dealt with abuse "of every kind." She became homeless, and she had more children who were taken from her.

"I wanted to get out, but I just didn't have the resources and was extremely scared," Watts said.

She cried out to God, and she felt Him prompt her to talk with someone who connected her with a rehab facility and drove her there.

"That next week I found out I was pregnant once again," Watts said.

But this time, she had help. Gateway of Hope, the rehab program, helped her get clean, and she took classes and graduated from Transformation Pathway Christian Women's Job Corps of Dublin, Texas. She has custody of two of her children, joint custody of another two and is able to periodically see a son who was adopted by a family.

"I am doing so much better in life. And now I want to pursue college while I have two more years left at Gateway of Hope. That way when I graduate, I will have a career laid out for me and be able to provide for my family and finally gain some independence in life with a great support team for whenever I need them," Watts said.

One way she's able to do that is through the Faye Dove scholarship recently awarded to her by the WMU Foundation. The foundation has several annual scholarships that help CWJC students and graduates take the next steps in their education.

Catalina Cormack, another Transformation Pathway graduate, also received a Faye Dove scholarship.

Cormack migrated to the U.S. from Mexico at age 21 and raised her son, who is now a Marine. She's still raising her two youngest children. Now she is preparing to attend Ranger College.

### Recent graduate

"This fall I graduated from CWJC, and I know my mother would be proud of me," Cormack said. "I know that my Creator has a plan for me."

Two Tennessee women also received scholarships from the WMU Foundation this year — Margareth Caballero, another Faye Dove scholarship recipient, and Laurien Assis, who received the CWJC Academic scholarship.

### Overcoming obstacles

Assis moved from Brazil to Tennessee to become an au pair and arrived with little English and no knowledge of the culture. Her host family helped her, as did Begin Anew, a CWJC site that provides education, mentoring and resources for individuals who need help to overcome the obstacles caused by poverty. The scholarship is helping her pursue a college degree in business administration.

Caballero said Begin Anew also

impacted her life and gave her the opportunity to earn a high school diploma online.

"To this day, they keep providing me with support and resources to make my life easier," Caballero said. "I have always believed in God and that He has a purpose for me, but Begin Anew made me believe in people again. I had lost faith in people, and it was hard for me to trust that there were still good people out there."

Her desire is to use the funds from the scholarship to help pay for cosmetology school, which will help her have a more flexible schedule as she works and cares for her two children.

All the support Caballero has received "gave me hope again," she said.



Photo courtesy of Begin Anew of Middle Tennessee  
Laurien Assis was awarded the Academic Scholarship from WMU Foundation to pursue a college degree in business administration.



Photo courtesy of Transformation Pathway  
Catalina Cormack (second from left) and Brianna Watts (third from right) were recently awarded the Faye Dove Scholarship by the WMU Foundation to further their education. The two are graduates from Transformation Pathway in Dublin, Texas.

# VBS 2023

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Always True to the Word

# A purpose

By Grace Thornton  
The Baptist Paper

## Las Vegas church planter says God's grace helped build community

Joseph Gibbons said you never know what someone's story is going to be in Las Vegas. Any person you meet could be a blackjack dealer or a businessperson, a "cirque" dancer or a gondolier.

Maki is an Ultimate Fighting Championship fighter. When his family started attending Favor City Church in Henderson, Nevada, where Gibbons is pastor, Maki could tell something changed in their home.

"After seeing his family come to Christ, he said, 'My whole home is different, my family is different, things are really great. It's a good season,'" Gibbons recalled. "And I said, 'Man, that's Jesus. That's why they're able to have better attitudes and all that.'"

### 'Trusting Him'

"And he said, 'I'm ready,' and gave his life to Christ right there on his back porch."

Maki shared his testimony at Favor City's first anniversary

service Oct. 2, alongside his wife, Chas.

"God gave us a purpose in this church, and it all started with us surrendering it all to Him and taking the leap," Maki said. "Trusting Him, we have a stronger family, a beautiful community that we can surround ourselves with, and we are not alone in this journey of following Christ."

### Story repeated

Gibbons noted he and his wife, Kristen, have seen that story repeated since they moved from Alabama in August 2020 to start building relationships and laying the groundwork to plant Favor City Church a little over a year later.

Since getting started, they've seen 23 people baptized and 30 decisions for Christ. One of those was a man named Fernando from Puerto Rico who said when he heard Gibbons speaking about Jesus he heard it "in my heart like you were speaking in my heart language."

Fernando's baptism started a



Photo courtesy of Favor City Church  
Favor City Church member Maki gets baptized in October 2021 during the church's grand opening service.

string of others coming to Christ, and Gibbons said it's been "a cool journey to see such a diverse church."

The congregation has a large group of Hawaiians and also sees a lot of Hmong families come through the doors.

"You walk in our church, and you see Las Vegas, which is beautiful," Gibbons said of the diversity. "A lot of that is God's hand of grace being able to plant in the pandemic."

The Gibbons started the church by talking with people in the community while they shopped, got haircuts and went for walks in the park, building relationships as they went. It took 18 months with one of Kristen's friends before the young mom was ready to believe in Jesus. With others, like Maki and Chas, it was faster.

"God has just set up divine appointments," Gibbons affirmed. "We've seen people find community and fall in love with Christ."

Some of those have been youth — around 25 or 30 attend any event the church holds.

### Heart for youth ministry

That makes the Gibbons excited, because youth ministry was one of the things that took the couple there in the first place.

He had been a youth minister in Alabama. On a vision trip to Las Vegas his wife's heart had been broken learning the city was the capital of teenage homelessness.

"It's been cool to see those types of things that were dreams in our heart that God had put there, to see them come to life and the stories that come from that," Gibbons said.



Photo courtesy of Favor City Church

Favor City Church celebrates its first anniversary Oct. 2. Since getting started, the church has seen 23 people baptized and 30 decisions for Christ.

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