



THE BAPTIST MESSAGE

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John 3:16

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Easter outreach: 'Find one, invite one, bring one'

By Brian Blackwell
Message staff writer

TIOGA, La. (LBM) – Clark Palmer has encouraged his members to “find one, invite one and bring one” to Palm Sunday or Easter Sunday services at Faith Baptist Church in Tioga.

He said he is praying the effort will yield much spiritual fruit, including additional baptisms at a church whose post-pandemic Sunday morning worship attendance is 70. Palmer is hopeful they will soon return to their pre-virus average of 80 to 90.

“We all know the number one

way that people come to church is by someone inviting them,” Palmer told the *Baptist Message*. “Lots of people are waiting to be invited. If 30 people are invited and five come, and one develops a long-term relationship with Christ because of it, then it would have been worth the effort. We are

not responsible to make results happen, but we are responsible to invite, encourage and make an appeal to people.”

The effort is part of the “Increase Challenge,” a five-step action plan in effect through May 31

See **EASTER**, page 2



HURRICANE RAVAGED SWLA ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

By Norm Miller, Message special assignments reporter

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM)--Two hurricanes, each as devastating as Katrina, were more than a one-two punch to Calcasieu Parish, according to Carey Association Director of Missions Bruce Baker.

Recovery from the cataclysmic storms may take as many as eight years, and FEMA research estimates the overall cost of the damages at \$40 million in the area, Baker said. There are 100,000 homes and 85 percent of them have roof damage; eight percent of the structures are uninsured.

“Homes in our area are still badly damaged, but we are beginning to claw out from under it all,” Baker said.

“Disaster Relief teams and others who came to help us – they were spectacular. They are the heroes,” he said. “We are grateful for the hard work they gave us. It

was a gospel effort. It was a kingdom effort.”

Local government and community leaders know who the yellow shirts are, Baker added. “We have a fabulous reputation for service and caring. When the mayor needs disaster recovery help, he calls me.”

Baker recalled that Jesus tells us to love our neighbors. “A great way to love them is to show up with a chainsaw crew and a skid steer.”

FROM RELIEF TO RECOVERY

Houston Response is a group of churches that partnered together after Hurricane Harvey devastated Texas and this ministry model has inspired the formation of Southwest Louisiana Response, churches who have come together to share the love of

See **RECOVERY**, page 5

St. Tammany leaders vote to let casino project proceed

By Will Hall
Message executive editor

SLIDELL, La. (LBM) – The St. Tammany Parish Council voted 11-1, Feb. 8, to allow legislators to submit bills that would allow

the construction of a \$250 million casino complex, planned for the area east of the I-10 interchange in Oak Harbor.

Essentially, this allows state lawmakers to introduce a bill that will need

to pass committees in each chamber of the legislature and then a vote of both chambers as well as the signature of the governor to hold a special fall election.

See **CASINO**, page 2

Casino from page one

A similar effort failed 25 years ago, but a recent referendum for sports betting passed in the parish with 67 percent of the vote.

The Slidell project is being proposed by Peninsula Pacific Entertainment, also known as P2E, which obtained one of the 15 approved riverboat casinos permitted in Louisiana.

Although proponents are promising big returns in terms of jobs, economic development and tax revenue, the project faces numbers of hurdles.

Three years ago, the Los Angeles-based P2E failed in the legislature in their bid to move their Shreveport riverboat casino to Tangipahoa Parish. The project faced opposition from Harrah's Casino in New Orleans, which did not want any competition in siphoning away Louisiana gamblers from Mississippi casinos.

For that matter, a \$1.2 billion mega-casino resort was announced in June for Biloxi, Mississippi, just 60 miles away.

But, equally important, already there is a broad religious coalition against the casino that is being led by the Slidell Minister's Association and the greater St. Tammany Ministerial Alliance.

Then there is the failing health of the gambling industry.

The Louisiana Gaming Control Board annual reports show that total tax revenues generated from

all forms of gambling in the state are in a 10-year slide:

-- Twelve of Louisiana's riverboat casinos are losing money, and the three in Lake Charles that are making money draw patrons from Houston and are in peril if Texas approves gambling. To demonstrate the vulnerability of these three casinos, the Shreveport casinos used to draw patrons from East Texas

until new tribal casinos opened in Oklahoma, which now captures this market.

-- Additionally, Harrah's in New Orleans once produced more than \$90 million in taxes per year, but that amount dropped to \$64 million last year.

-- Overall, Louisiana tax revenues from gambling have dropped from \$738 million (2009) to \$706 million (2019).

Easter from page one

that Palmer, who is moderator for the CENLA Baptist Association, has issued to member pastors. He is encouraging them to find a way to focus on actions that can move people to understand the Gospel clearly and then respond in faith.

So far, 11 pastors have accepted the challenge and agreed to have a Gospel basics class or event, hold a membership

or baptism day, preach one sermon on the New Testament practice of baptism, conduct at least one outreach event off campus and share the Gospel in a conversation on at least three separate occasions.

Faith Baptist has already baptized two new converts since the launch of the association-wide challenge, Jan. 11, and Palmer believes all the combined planned activities could increase that number to even more.

Other churches are reporting progress, too: Trinity Baptist Church, Pineville (four baptisms), Calvary Baptist Church, Gardner (Gospel basics class), Lakeside Baptist

Church, Pineville (community-wide distribution of hand-made crosses for display in front yards).

Palmer said when he was elected moderator, he did not want just to coordinate meetings. Rather, he wanted to help other churches increase Gospel outreach to their respective communities.

While praying about direction for the association during an afternoon walk in his Pineville neighborhood, Palmer said this idea for a focus came clearly to mind.

"We've seen a decline of baptisms in the state and national convention that is startling," he said. "We need to focus on the basics."

LOUISIANA BAPTIST MESSAGE

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Baptism, entirety of Hebrews mark anniversary

By Brian Blackwell
Message staff writer

BERNICE, La. (LBM) – Scott Scallan recently celebrated his 10-year anniversary at Shiloh Baptist Church in Bernice, honoring God through the church’s first baptism of 2021 and with a recitation from memory of the book of Hebrews.

“It’s always a blessing to have a baptism; to have someone publicly declare their faith this way,” Scallan said of the special day, Feb. 28. “One of the themes of Hebrews is the importance of faith. I can’t think of a better way to introduce the book of Hebrews than to baptize someone to bring home the message of faith and Christ’s sacrifice for us all.”

GRACE THROUGH BAPTISM

Two months before the service, Adelynn Franks, 7, shared with her parents Kimberly and Daniel, how she was a sinner and needed Christ to come into her life.

Kimberly Franks noted that several years of sowing biblical truths into her

daughter resulted in reaping the hoped-for spiritual fruit in the youngster’s life.

“Our hearts are filled with so much joy,” Kimberly Franks said. “As a parent, one of my responsibilities is to raise her in a godly way so at one point she will hopefully make that decision to accept Christ. Seeing that fulfilled through her and knowing what God is doing already in her life is very fulfilling and rewarding. Adelynn wanted to do this so she could show others she was a believer; in turn, I was encouraged in my own faith.”

GRACE THROUGH WORDS

Following Franks’



Submitted photo

Scott Scallan baptizes Adelynn Franks during a service, Feb. 28, at Shiloh Baptist Church in Bernice. Scallan also recited, from memory, the book of Hebrews during the service which marked his 10th year at the church.

baptism, Scallan recited all 13 chapters of Hebrews.

It was his special way to honor God in celebrating the 10th anniversary of his serving as pastor of the congregation. He prayed about the anniversary for several

months, and he kept thinking about multiple messages he had preached about Hebrews, several years ago. He felt compelled to memorize the entire book and began systematically learning this large portion of Scripture by heart in August 2020.

He teased his plans to congregants on Facebook; stating he was going to do “something big.”

“The only thing I told them at the beginning of

February was to invite someone to come Feb. 28 because it was going to be something they wouldn’t have seen before.”

He said he did not want simply to repeat the words, but to be more honoring to God.

“My goal was always not to mechanically recite Hebrews but to understand it in order to deliver the book just like a sermon,” he said, adding that, at times, he was tempted to reverse course and stop memorizing Hebrews, but the Holy Spirit gave him the energy to press forward.

“I developed a greater appreciation of Christ, the new covenant and the promise of the new blessing,” he said. “One of the main messages of Hebrews is endurance and staying in the faith. There were points over the last few months where I got to certain chapters and wondered if I would quit. To be memorizing a book about perseverance and endurance and to keep that mindset and lean on Him for the strength to keep pressing on and running the race before us was a

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Four Lake Charles congregations, one facility

By Norm Miller
Special assignments reporter

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM)—University Baptist Church in Lake Charles escaped the brunt of Hurricane Laura’s wrath and has since become a haven for three other congregations who were not spared.

“We saw the needs of other churches that were damaged beyond use,” said UBC Pastor John Astling. “And we wanted to help them get back to worshipping again – get back to some sense of normalcy.”

At staggered times every Sunday, UBC opens its facilities to three other Lake Charles churches: Emmanuel Baptist and its Hispanic mission, as well as Calvary Baptist Church.

UBC also hosts services by Johnson Funeral Home, which Laura demolished.

“Zeb Johnson has done so much for our commu-

nity that I just jumped at the chance to help him,” Astling explained. “His benevolence toward law enforcement and the fire department and others is well-known in the community.”

Astling told the Baptist Message it is a tremendous opportunity because people are coming into UBC that congregants have not had a chance to touch with ministry before.

“The funerals have given us the chance to talk to people, witness to them, and to build relationships in the community,” he said.

Others are reconnecting with the church.

“We are seeing people in our church that we saw when we did disaster relief ministry,” Astling said.

“This has made for great outreach in the commu-



Norm Miller photo

Pastor John Astling shares this Bible map with funeral attendees who sometimes tour the church facilities; each encounter opens conversations for him to share the Gospel.

See FACILITY, page 5

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Recovery from page one

Christ though caring for those who continue to live in the aftermath of Hurricanes Laura and Delta.

Braylon Harris, who is pastor of Mount Olive Baptist Church in Lake Charles, is also director of SWLA Response. "We're not observing spring break because enough has been broken around here. Instead, we're launching spring build," Harris quipped.

The spring build effort already has 700 volunteers lined up for recovery ministry beginning in March. "But we need 100 teams of 8-to-10 volunteers each who have the ability or the willingness to handle roof repairs," Baker said. "Our triage for that starts with families that have no insurance, followed by those who are aged or have health is-



Pastor Braylon Harris

sues." Mud-out teams are in demand as well. The infrastructure to house and feed volunteers already is in place.

Teams from World-Changers are scheduled to help, Baker said. SBC Disaster Relief teams are welcome to join the effort, too.

With his voice and email inboxes constantly filled, Baker said mission teams and others "from across the country are asking how they can help.

The priority is for money to funnel toward pastors, church staffers, and churches; supplies; and volunteers." People have responded generously, he said, with church-to-church gifts exceeding \$250,000.

RESOURCES TO REBUILD

Baker serves on a Long-

Facility from page 4

nity by deepening relationships. It's helped us see beyond our own needs and see the needs of others."

UBC housed Disaster Relief volunteers in Laura's aftermath; distributed 400, 35-pound food boxes; and gave more than two large trailer loads of bottled water to the community. Smith said the ministry efforts opened the door to share the Gospel, too, and several people accepted Christ.

Astling urged other churches to consider opening their facilities not only to churches that may need them, but to civic groups as well. He said there is a Gospel opportunity because of the lack of meeting spaces in some parts of the state due to last year's natural disasters.

"We've had various groups request to use the building, and we want to accommodate people as much as possible," Astling said. "I'd definitely encourage this as a way to make inroads into the civic

community that a church might not otherwise reach."



term Recovery Committee (LRC) – an amalgam of local charitable organizations and churches – a civic organization guided by FEMA regulations.

Baker estimates that \$500,000 are needed for roof repair materials in an area he has targeted for ministry. Sixty percent of that is already committed by the United Way, and he expects additional funds will be forthcoming from the LRC.

The United Way, Catholic Charities and the Community Foundation are among those invested in the rebuild as part of the influential LRC. "We're able to partner with community leaders and other groups while maintaining our gospel witness. We never compromise that," Baker said.

In a recent LRC meeting, one man offered to underwrite the purchase of three gooseneck trailers

for use in debris removal. Baker mentioned that the trailers are of no use without a sizeable diesel truck to pull them.

In addition to a large truck, the list of needs identified by Baker include two tool trailers stocked with air hoses and compressors, nail guns, large tarps, and other wherewithal to support roof repairs and replacements.

PASTORAL CARE

The homes of 17 pastors in Carey Association were uninhabitable, and the association assisted them with \$5,000 to \$6,000 dollars each to help defray repair costs and insurance deductibles. Damage at 19 pastors' homes exceeded the deductible, but the homes were livable. Those pastors received \$2,000 to \$3,000.

Some of our churches

have closed, Baker said, and others will "need a God-sized miracle to re-open. I mean, a real miracle."

Importantly, Baker is grateful for how Louisiana Baptists have cared for their sister churches, and particularly how Louisiana Baptist Convention leaders have undergirded the Carey Association's work.

"I give the highest marks to Dr. Horn, John Hebert, Gibbie McMullan, the Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief workers, and many more," Baker said. "I want Louisiana Baptists to know that our state convention gets the job done. They get an A+ in my book."

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LOUISIANA BAPTIST FOUNDATION

Baby bottle fundraiser on record pace

By Brian Blackwell
Message staff writer

ALEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) – CENLA Pregnancy Center supporters are celebrating a successful start to the annual baby bottle fundraiser, buoyed by the news of a record pace in giving.

Since January, 19 churches and groups have raised \$38,000 through donations collected in baby bottles, surpassing last year's

total of \$25,000. Another 11 churches and groups indicated they, too, will participate this year, causing CPC Director Claire Lemoine to suggest that donations could exceed the all-time high of \$50,000 that was collected in 2018, the first year CENLA Pregnancy Center was fully operational.

Lemoine told the Baptist Message she briefly considered opting out of the baby bottle fund-

raiser this year because so many people are struggling financially due to the pandemic's economic impact. Instead, she said, she was moved to proceed, and since her staff began reaching out in December, the response by churches has been overwhelming.

"The Lord showed me late last year that people were ready to do something because so much has been absent from their lives that they knew before the COVID protocols set in," Lemoine said. "Once the donations started coming in, God was affirming that we had persevered and He was rewarding us."

Lemoine said during the last 12 months the pregnancy center has faced multiple challenges because of the pandemic: a state mandated two-week closure in March (while abortion centers were still operating); extra safety protocols after

reopening in April; and fewer volunteers for most of the spring and summer. However, donations have remained steady; and the center has been able to continue providing compassionate support to women and men faced with difficult pregnancy decisions.

Though the pandemic canceled the annual Gift of Life Banquet last year, the pregnancy center's largest fundraiser will return on Sept. 14. Additional details will come later, Lemoine noted.

"This past year has affirmed God's presence and protection on this ministry," Lemoine said. "And it has also affirmed the importance of our existence, which is to show women the hope they



have in Jesus Christ and he values the life of them and their child."

Pineville Park Baptist Church in Pineville is among the churches and organizations collecting baby bottles. Pastor

Jeremy Shepherd said his congregation raised 800 dollars in their campaign.

"Many on the pro-choice side often criticize pro-life movement as only caring about babies up until the time they

See BABY, page 13

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Baptist Camp relies on ‘act of God’ after disasters

By Norm Miller
Special assignments reporter

DRY CREEK, La. (LBM)—Many people refer to Hurricanes Laura and Delta and the coronavirus pandemic as “acts of God.” Combine these with a hotel fire, and the subsequent revenue losses from the several calamities have slammed Dry Creek Baptist Camp in Beaufort Parish. But Director Todd Burnaman remains undaunted, saying God is acting now, after the disasters.

“I trust that God has a plan to renew us, give us new tools, better tools, for ministry to attract people,” he said. “James chapter one says that trials develop perseverance, and that brings us to completion. We’ve definitely experienced those trials. But without the bat of an

eye, we understand God’s faithfulness.”

Burnaman estimates that losses for the last 12 or so months approach \$2 million. The recent fire that consumed the White House lodge, an old school building transformed into a hotel for camp leaders, accounts for about \$1 million of that total.

“That was a real gut punch,” he said, noting the significant loss of the asset and future revenue source. The cause of the fire is not yet known; regardless, Burnaman said he finds solace in “God’s decision that our time with the hotel was up.”

The turn-of-the-century structure usually housed 40–60 people per week of camp. “We still haven’t figured out an alternative for this loss,” he said.

Hurricane Laura topped more than 500 trees within the common areas

of the camp. Some fell on buildings, electrical lines, and outdoor activity resources.

Burnaman estimates that tens of thousands of labor hours have been invested in recovery and repair efforts, so far. Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief, Campers on Mission, and other volunteer groups have come from ten states. More are on the way in coming weeks.

Many roofing, plumbing, electrical work, interior finish carpentry and tree removal projects are completed, he said. But more of the same kinds of repairs remain.

Other than mitigation of hurricane water damage to the old hotel, roofing is the only other repair the camp has had to underwrite.

Financial projections at mid-March last year were that the camp had enough



Submitted photo

The White House Lodge, an old school building transformed into a hotel for camp leaders at Dry Creek Baptist Camp, went up in flames during the recent snow and ice event. The 100-year old structure was just one of many mishaps the camp has had to endure since since Hurricanes Laura and Delta.

budget to last six weeks. “But we’re still here,” Burnaman said. “Our contribution line item was up more than 700 percent. God has worked in the hearts of people to support us: nearly \$400,000 came

in.” Those funds were used to pay for insurance and to help keep the doors open. Such generosity “is a testimony to God’s faith-

See DRY CREEK, page 14

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Maplewood FBC razes building; raises up Christ

By Norm Miller
Special assignments reporter

SULFUR, La. (LBM)-Despite the double calamities of a hurricane and the coronavirus, Maplewood First Baptist Church is rebounding.

“We’ve been seeing quite a few visitors – new people we’re trying to get to know,” said Pastor Jeremy Blocker.

Some had moved to the area before Hurricane Laura and are now looking for a church home, Blocker told the *Baptist Message*. “Some of them in these hard times -- when things opened back up -- they started searching; we’ve tried to help them find Jesus. Worship’s been awesome, and we’re seeing a lot of answers to prayers.”

Blocker said the congregation’s passion for doing ministry never wavered, but “it’s just kind of crazy trying to decide when do

we restart and what and how do we restart it.” Such decisions would be easier if the church still had its 13,000 square-foot building that housed its Hope Christian School. Considered irreparable from water damage, all that remains of it after demolition is a concrete slab.

The church likely will not rebuild where the school once stood but is looking to maximize their existing footprint. “We’re not going to rebuild for 1950. We’ll use this as an opportunity to build for the future.”

The issues of available space are compounded with the school now meeting inside the church’s educational facilities. “The things that a church might focus on one at a time – we’re having to focus on all at once,” he said. Blocker said the congregation is discussing how to conduct ongoing children’s minis-



Norm Miller photo

This steeple may not be re-installed per the insurance company’s recommendation, said Pastor Jeremy Blocker. Both Hurricanes Rita and Laura ripped it from the roof.

try while the educational spaces are in use by the school. They also are dealing with architects and vetting general contractors for construction.

Before the hurricane, the church was engaged in

a 5-year vision plan.

“Now, we’re looking back at last February’s notes while dealing with new questions related to the virus,” Blocker said. “It’s not a bad thing, it’s just a lot at one time. So,

we’re squeezing about five years’ worth of decisions into about 10 months.”

Among the good things to occur, he said, is “We will be better stewards of the space we have; and we’ve gotten a deeper appreciation for sharing.”

Blocker gave serious props to Church Mutual Insurance Company: “The adjuster was here the day after the storm.” Within days the company installed a 500-kilowatt generator with the determination to get the church back to worship. “They’ve been great, absolutely incredible for us. They’ve been awesome from day one.”

“Our immediate need is our people’s desire for fellowship,” Blocker said, noting an upcoming get-together for the church. “Getting back to ‘normal-ish’ includes so many decisions right now. We just need to spend more time together.”



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After the storms, Louisiana Baptists come back strong in SWLA

By Norm Miller

Special assignment editor

DERIDDER, LA (LBM) -- New Life Baptist Church in DeRidder suffered no damage from Hurricanes Laura or Delta but had to meet without electricity for several weeks. But, acting as a hub for responding to others' needs, the church opened its doors to host four church groups that came to serve the community with food and other supplies.

Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Jonesville, La., sent about 20 members who spent just one day to gut out the home of New Life's worship leader, Jennifer Stark. The roof was destroyed, and the interior was completely soaked. Still wrestling with their insurance company, the Starks' home is not yet completely repaired.

Pastor Keith Manuel expressed deep gratitude for all the churches that sent help. "We are thankful for those who came into this devastated area to give their time and resources to help people who were suffering through the most desperate days of the disaster. They helped our community, and they shared the Gospel."

Manuel said the church saw four professions of faith from among five unexpected visitors to the church in January. A mother and her son committed their lives to Christ. Three teens who work at a local pizza restaurant owned by a church staffer visited New Life. Two of them also professed Christ as Savior.

Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church, Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM)--Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church in Lake Charles had just completed construction of a youth center when Hurricane Laura blew through. The new structure survived, but the other church facilities



Brian Blackwell photo

Two youngsters wait near the entrance to New Life Baptist Church, DeRidder, as motorists make their way onto the church parking lot in September to receive supplies in the aftermath of Hurricane Laura. Countless churches and other organizations have ministered to residents impacted by Hurricanes Laura and Delta.

were all damaged.

"We saw that as a mandate from God to use the building as a conduit to serve our community," said Pastor E.J. Kemper, who cited this verse as a motivating factor: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction," Genesis 41:52.

From August to December, Mount Pilgrim served as a center for hot meals and cleaning supplies almost every weekend. "Many churches saw what we were doing, and they helped us serve our community," Kemper said.

The Louisiana Baptist Convention helped provide three tractor trailer loads of disaster relief supplies, he said, and it was DOM Bruce Baker of the Carey Association who allocated funds for the church to rent a forklift for offloading pallets. "We used the forklift for almost four months," said Kemper, who also noted how indispensable the forklift was for ministry.

"Mount Pilgrim had

never experienced one of the best parts of Southern Baptists, and that is bringing resources to meet needs," Baker said. "This was the first time this pastor and church saw that happen."

"Bruce also connected us with pastors. He advocated for us among others who came to help us, too," Kemper said. These connections reached all the way to a

Texas church that sent a \$1,000 gift to a Mount Pilgrim family that had lost everything. Kemper said a daughter of this family moved to Texas and was seeking a church to join. She joined the very church that had sent the gift: First Baptist Church in Pearland.

Mount Pilgrim returned to in-person worship services not long after the hurricane. Twenty-five of the 75 who attended were first-time visitors. "When we had conversations with them, they said the reason they visited was because of the tangible and visible presence of the

love of Jesus Christ; that's why they responded to us," Kemper said.

The church has since shifted to on-line ministry, and 12 people have become members through that medium. "We have seen a side of God that many of us never would have seen if it weren't for hurricanes and the pandemic," Kemper said. "We saw how God provided through the

Carey Association and though others who were just as needful as we were. These are kindnesses we will not soon forget."

Cherry Grove Baptist Church, Dry Creek

DRY CREEK, La. (LBM)--An engineer's report detailed the damage to the roofs of the auditorium and educational building of Cherry Grove Baptist Church: both were rendered unsound by Hurricane Laura. Then Hurricane Delta unleashed 100 mph gusts on the roofs and dumped

hundreds of gallons of water into those facilities through the porous roofs.

Pastor Josh Eubanks told the Baptist Message that members voted Feb. 14 to build another auditorium, and he believes new construction will enhance church ministry that has been trending in the right direction, but slowly.

Worship services in the church's family life center are also broadcast via outdoor speakers and on the radio so that those who attend but remain in their cars due to coronavirus concerns. "This seems to be working well," Eubanks said. "I spend most of the song service in the parking lot talking with the people."

About 50-to-75 worshippers are evenly split between the two venues, he said. Longtime members have returned, and some new people are attending, too. But the loss of the worship center and the lack of facilities to care for children are hindering attendance.



Pastor Josh Eubanks

"The people who attend enjoy a sweet fellowship, a solid fellowship. God is doing a good work among them," Eubanks said. "We are enjoying some of the best times of ministry ever."

The Eubanks live temporarily in the church parsonage in Dry Creek because their home in DeRidder is uninhabitable; and insurance negotiations are ongoing. "This has been one of the most challenging times in our lives," Eubanks said.

"Still, church ministry has not added any stress," Eubanks said. "The folks are not burdensome with their expectations. Instead, they make ministry easy and fun, and that's a rare find these days. I can't say enough positive things about the folks at Cherry Grove. They are amazing people."



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TEMPLE BAPTIST CHURCH in DeRidder, LA is seeking a **bi-vocational pastor**. Please send resumes to P O Box 404, DeRidder, LA 7-634 or email to bigdaddy_6554@yahoo.com.

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Send résumés to: EBC, P.O. Box 417, Bunkie, LA 71322 or e-mail résumés to mouliere_ms@yahoo.com

SEEKING AN ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONARY
Northwest Baptist Association is accepting résumés thru April 30 for an Associational missionary. Please send résumés to P.O. Box 2120 Bentonville, AR 72712 or amresume@nwbaptist.net.

SEEKING A PART-TIME MINISTER OF STUDENTS
First Baptist Church in Arcadia, LA is seeking a part-time Youth Minister to work with grades 7-12. Please email résumés to fbcofarcadia@bellsouth.net.

SEEKING A FULL-TIME OR BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR
Trinity Baptist Church in Oakdale, LA is seeking a bi-vocational or full-time pastor. Please send résumés to: Pastor Search Committee, P O Box 748, Oakdale, LA 71463.

SEEKING A FULL-TIME YOUTH MINISTER
New Zion Baptist Church, 17387 New Zion Church Road, Covington, LA 70435; is seeking a full-time youth minister.
Email résumé to david@newzion.net or mail to above address: Attention Personnel Committee.

SEEKING A PART-TIME WORSHIP LEADER
Bethlehem Baptist Church in Albany, LA is searching for a part-time worship leader, capable of leading various worship styles. Email résumé to searchteam@bbcalbany.com.

BI-VOCATIONAL PASTOR
Pelican Baptist Church in Pelican, LA, is seeking a bi-vocational pastor. Please send résumés to Pelican Baptist Church, P.O. Box 108, Pelican, LA 71063 or email to henrytouchton@gmail.com. Parsonage is available.

SEEKING A DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS
The Baptist Association of Southeast Louisiana (BASELA) is looking for a Director of Missions to serve as a catalyst for strategic planning, guiding the individual associations within BASELA to develop their own identity, purpose, and strategy for doing associational mission work. Visit basela.org for more information about BASELA. Please send resumes and inquiries to résumés@basela.org

SEEKING A PART-TIME MINISTER OF YOUTH & RECREATION
Hillcrest Baptist Church in Franklinton, LA is seeking a part-time Minister of Youth and Recreation. The candidate should have a ministry degree or be pursuing a masters. They will be responsible for the church's Upwards basketball and flag football programs as well as a very active youth ministry. Please email résumés to tommy@hbcfranklinton.com.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: *Do you have a Revival, Homecoming, a new pastor, a community outreach or a concert? The Baptist Message would love to share your church news with the rest of the state. It is very easy to do, just send in your information (who, what, where and when) to philip@baptistmessage.com or call 318.449.4345. To get your event in the paper, please submit your information three weeks prior to the event.*

ON THE MOVE

- **Katy Baumgardner** is the new youth ministry associate at Summer Grove Baptist Church, Shreveport.
- **Tim Patrick** will conclude duties as Director of Missions for Beauregard Parish in April.
- **Byron Comish** is the interim pastor at First Baptist Church, Springfield.
- **Nick (wife Kara) Watts** is the new student minister at First Baptist Church, Lafayette
- **Trey Miller** is the interim director at Bethany Camp & Conference Center.
- **Chris Young** is the new associate pastor at Calvary Baptist Church, Shreveport.
- **Danny (wife JoDee) Taylor** is the new pastor at Ida Baptist Church, Ida.
- **Chris Young** resigned as pastor at South Bossier Baptist Church, Bossier City.
- **Daniel Martin** has been called to Midway Baptist Church, Livingston as pastor.
- **Carl Sullivan** is the new interim pastor at Satsuma Baptist Church, Livingston.

HOMECOMING

■ **Beech Springs Baptist Church, Minden: 150 Anniversary**, September 2021. The church is in the process of looking for prior/current members for whom they have lost contact in preparation for its anniversary celebration.

Please send name(s), address, phone and email to beechspringsbs2@sudenlink.net.

REVIVAL

- **Wilda Baptist Church, Boyce: Revival**, March 21 - 24, Sunday 10 am & 6 pm, Monday - Wednesday 7 pm. Evangelist: **Todd Allen**. Music: **The Allen Family**. Pastor: **Joey Rudisill**.
- **Antioch Baptist Church, Minden: Good Friday revival**, April 2. Pastors will preach on a theme during the revival's three worship services - 10:30 a.m., **The Garden, Casey Johnson**; 2 p.m. **The Trials, Chad Evans** and 7 p.m., **The Crucifixion, Jonathan Bucklew**. An **Easter egg hunt** also is scheduled for 4 p.m. at nearby McClanahan Park at Dixie Inn. Lunch and dinner will be provided. To RSVP for meals, please text 318.505.5954.
- **Gray Baptist Church, Jefferson, TX (NWLBA): Revival, Easter SOnday**, April 4 - 7, Sunday 11 a.m. and Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Chalk Artist Scotty McDowell**. Pastor: **Roy Davis**.
- **Hodge Baptist Church, Hodge: Revival**, April 11-14. Evangelist: **Sam Moore**. Pastor: **Keith Thomas**.
- **North Shreve Baptist Church, Shreveport: Revival**, April 11-14, Sunday, 11 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.; Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Bill Britt**. Pastor: **Cecil Marr**.
- **New Ramah Baptist Church, Castor: Revival**, April 15-18. Evangelist: **Sam Moore**. Worship: **The Mackey Willis Family**. Pastor: **Steve Palmer**.
- **Esler Baptist Church, Pineville: Revival**, April 28-May 2, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Brian Crain**. Worship Leaders: **Mike and Debbie Cinereski**. Pastor: **Joshua Timothy**.

LAGNIAPPE

■ **A.F. Ott Jr**, who recently retired after

- 48 years preaching, is available for supply, revivals, interim past in West Central Louisiana. Please call 337.789.0514.
- **Earnest Little** available for supply and interim in the Central Louisiana area. Please call 318.663.2770.
- **Under shepherd** seeking a church body to love and care for. Please call **David Cox** at 318.461.2526 or 318.461.9388.
- **First Baptist Church, Mandeville: Easter Egg Hunt**, March 28, 4 p.m. in the field behind the church. There will be lots of Easter eggs, candy and fun for the kids. Pastor: **Corey Fontan**.
- **Longview Baptist Church, Deville: Easter Egg Hunt**, March 28, 11:30 a.m. All children are invited to an Easter egg hunt on Palm Sunday following morning services. There will be dinner on the grounds and then the Easter Egg hunt. Pastor: **Robby Poole**.
- **First Baptist Church, New Orleans: Annual Easter Egg Hunt**, March 28, 4-5:30 p.m. The children will hear the Easter story, have crafts and then hunt for 3,000 Easter eggs. This is for children birth through sixth grade and their parents. Pre-registration is required. Register online at www.fbno.org/events. Pastor: **Chad Gilbert**.
- **Esler Baptist Church, Pineville: Community Easter Egg Hunt**, April 3, 10 a.m. - noon. Children, age pre-school to sixth grade will do crafts, hunt Easter eggs and follow with a hot dog lunch. Pastor: **Joshua Timothy**.
- **First Baptist Church, Haynesville: Easter Egg Hunt**, April 3, 10:30-

- noon. Pastor: **Jeff Tinsley**.
- **First Baptist Church, Bossier: Easter extravaganza**, April 3, 10:30 a.m. to noon. Come enjoy this event designed for kids and families to have a safe, fun and memorable experience featuring Easter Egg hunts for children of all ages (more than 40k eggs), inflatables, fun photos, face painting, candy, music and more. Pastor: **Brad Jurkovich**.
- **First Baptist Church, Haughton: Community Easter Egg Hunt**, April 3, 10 a.m. - noon at Haughton High School. There will be inflatables, ice cream, face painting, balloons and 10,000 filled eggs. Bring your friends, your baskets and join the fun. The egg hunt begins at 11 a.m. Pastor: **Gevan Spinney**.
- **First Baptist Church, Moss Bluff: Easter Weekend 2021**, April 3, 6-7 p.m. Celebrate victory with FBC Moss Bluff this Easter, April 4. If you can't make it to campus, FBC will stream its 9 a.m. service on Sunday morning. Only preschool activities are available this weekend. Pastor: **Steve Bennett**.
- **First Baptist Church, Lafayette: Resurrection Sunday**, April 4, 8 a.m. Traditional service, 9:30 & 11 a.m. **Easter Resurrection Service**. There will be no Sunday School. Pastor: **James Pritchard**.
- **First Baptist Church, West Monroe: Easter Services**, April 4, 10:30 a.m. Join us Easter Sunday at West Monroe High School Rebel Stadium for an Easter service with your family, Easter eggs, and celebrating the Resurrection! We

- will be outdoors and social distancing for your safety while worshipping the Risen King as a community. Special Guest: **Doug Pederson, former ULM and NFL quarterback Super Bowl winning head coach**. Pastor: **Michael Wood**.
- **First Baptist Church, Calhoun: Easter Services**, April 4, 9 & 10:30 a.m. Join us Easter Sunday at the Calhoun Campus to worship the Risen King as a community. Pastor: **Jason McGuffie**.
- **First Baptist Church, Fairbanks Campus: Easter Services**, April 4, 9 & 10:30 a.m. Join us Easter Sunday at the Calhoun Campus to worship the Risen King as a community.
- **Unity Baptist Church, DeRidder: Recharge**, April 8, 6 p.m. Cost: \$5 per person which includes the workbook "Return to Me" by Claude V. King. Register your church with either the Vernon (337.238.0442) or Beauregard Baptist Association (337.202.4043) offices in order organizers can provide enough materials. Follow social distance guidelines. Please RSVP by April 1.
- **First Baptist Church, Haughton: Bass Tournament**, April 17, safe daylight. A registration banquet will be held on April 16 at 6 p.m. in the Family Life Center. Tickets are available for purchase at the Information Center in the foyer. The FBC Haughton Recreation Team will host a fishing tournament on Lake Bistineau on April 17. For more information, please contact **Danny Campbell** at 318.465.7424. Pastor: **Gevan Spinney**.

Apply now for summer Leadership Academy

By Staff
Baptist Message

BAKER, La. - Joseph Backholm, a senior research fellow for biblical worldview and strategic engagement at the Family Research Council, will be the keynote speaker at the upcoming Louisiana Family Forum Leadership Academy.

Scheduled June 6-8 at Timothy Retreat Center in Baker, the intensive training program will equip young adults, ages 16-22, with leadership skills, life-purpose strategies, advanced communication

techniques, public speaking skills, counter-culture methods, and a biblically based perspective on government. By the end of the weekend, attendees will be able to answer, "What is my life's purpose?"

An early registration cost of \$250 is available through May 1. Afterward, the cost will increase to \$300.

Scholarships are available for those with financial hardships.

For more information on attending, or to donate funding for scholarships, visit lafamilyforum.org/2021academy/.

Scripture Crypto

The Scripture Crypto is a Bible verse in which one letter has been substituted for another, thus encoding the verse. To find out what the verse is, you must determine what each letter is a substitute for. An "a," for example, may stand for a "t" in this week's issue of the ScriptureCrypto. Next week, "a" could stand for a "d." Each week, each letter is different. Solve by trial and error. The answer will be given next week. Note: All numerals, such as those in the scripture reference after the verse, are spelled out.

PWO RNU KUSWPWR DX EPGDH VNPYY HU FW RNU SFOVR

DX SPWA CUDCYU PV P OUQ XKDS RNU YDKO, PV RNU

VNDQUKV JCDW RNU TKPVV, RNPR RPKKFURN WDR XDK RNU

SPW, WDK QPFRURN XDK RNU VDWV DX SUW.

SFGPN XFIU:VUIUW

Clues:
S = M; U = E

Answer to February 25 Scripture Crypto:
First Peter four:ten

Basketball goal a slam dunk gift for Upward player

By Brian Blackwell
Message staff writer

PINEVILLE, La. (LBM) –For several months Jeremiah Williams had used a makeshift goal to train for Upward basketball games at First Baptist Church in Pineville, but a passerby who drove by the young man's home in mid-February decided he needed a real hoop to call his own.

Devin Hinkston first met Williams, 9, on Feb. 13 as he was driving around Alexandria and noticed the youngster was shooting the ball into a trash can. After a brief conversation with Williams, Hinkston pur-

chased a basketball goal at a nearby store and surprised him with the gift.

"Ma'am, I saw your little boy shooting the ball in the trash can earlier and so I bought him a basketball goal," Hinkston, a member of New Scott Olly Baptist Church in Alexandria, told the boy's grandmother, Patricia Williams.

The gesture prompted Williams to share the news on her Facebook page, which since Feb. 13 has generated 13,000 likes and 20,000 shares and prompted stories by numerous local and national media outlets. The Kelly Clarkson Show is scheduled to air the story,

March 30, and Hinkston and Jeremiah Williams are scheduled to fly to New York City to appear on Good Morning America later this summer.

"I got emotional and teared up when he showed up at our front door with the new basketball goal," Patricia Williams, a member of Zion Hill Church Family in Pineville, told the Baptist Message. "Once Devin did that, I knew this was some good news that had to be shared in a time when there is so much negativity. Only a week earlier I had thought of getting him a goal and here it was that God provided through Devin. It was truly an answer to my prayer."

Since receiving the gift, Jeremiah has used the goal to hone his basketball skills; and he is grateful for the friendship formed with Hinkston.

"I thank God for him," Jeremiah said. "It was his moment to shine."

Hinkston, who was honored during the Upward closing ceremony, Feb. 28, at FBC Pineville, said the experience has led him to start Jeremiah's Dream, a non-profit organization that will help others like Williams. He hopes the



Submitted photo

Devin Hinkston gifted Jeremiah Williams a new basketball goal on Feb. 13 after noticing the youngster was using a trash can as a makeshift goal. Williams uses the goal to improve his skills he uses on the court during Upward basketball games at First Baptist Church in Pineville.

organization will fund a recreational center in the Alexandria-Pineville area that will offer after-school tutoring and a gymnasium with amenities such as pool tables and ping pong.

"It's pretty cool and sometimes overwhelming,"

he said. "I never expected this but I'm glad God gave me the light I need to shine on these kids. I just want to bring all kids together of all kinds and just shed the light back on what's the future. It should be a major success."

Kim Aguillard, children's director at First Pineville, said the event reiterates the mission of Upward.

"Upward basketball and cheer is a wonderful program that not only teaches children basketball and cheer skills, but also teaches them how to play with a purpose and to live their life with a purpose," she said. "That purpose is to share the love of Jesus with everyone we come in contact with. It is awesome that Jeremiah, one of our Upward basketball players, got to be on the receiving end of a community member's generosity. Devin didn't have to buy Jeremiah a basketball goal, but he lives his life with purpose and he desires to help others with the resources he has been blessed with. It is awesome to see how God is using Devin's generosity here in Pineville, Louisiana, to make a difference literally around the world."

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LC signs articulation agreements with SWBTS, SEBTS

By Staff
Baptist Message

PINEVILLE, La. (LBM) – Louisiana College has entered into agreements with Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary that will allow students to apply college credits toward a seminary degree.

Brewer, during the

school's chapel services, signed agreements with SWBTS President Adam Greenway March 4 and SEBTS President Daniel Akin, March 18.

"This partnership adds credibility to the quality missions and ministries program we have at LC," Brewer told the *Baptist Message*. "We hope to partner with all the Southern Baptist seminaries to save students,

who are planning to pursue a graduate degree at seminary, time and money."

The memorandums of understanding between the institutions will allow LC graduates to earn their seminary degrees more quickly to pursue God's calling on their lives, Brewer said. He explained that students who successfully complete certain senior-level courses in LC's missions and ministries

program may receive at least 15 credit hours toward a Master of Divinity at the two seminaries.

Justin Langford, interim dean of the School of Missions and Ministries, said many LC graduates with a B.A. in Missions and Ministries go on to seminary to further their theological education.

"These students benefit from the robust design of our B.A. degree by having their master's program shortened," Langford said. "I am personally grateful for this articulation with

our seminaries because it demonstrates a mission-minded cooperation that has long characterized Southern Baptists. Our Lowery Scholarship recipients at LC are the direct beneficiaries of these articulations."

Since 2015, the missions and ministries program has grown from 15 students during its initial year to 55 enrollees for the 2021 spring semester.

A similar agreement was signed with New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 2018.

Baby from page 6

are born," Shepherd said. "CENLA Pregnancy Center is our opportunity to demonstrate to the world that we not only care about babies, pre-birth, but we care about the spiritual, physical, and mental well-being of their entire family. Most importantly, every woman who comes through the door hears the Gospel. The money donated by your church also allows mothers and fathers the ability to take classes and gain items for their baby, post birth. We have a tremendous opportunity to impact some of the most vulnerable people at a time where

many would shun them. You will not regret supporting this incredible ministry."

Located at 1254 MacArthur Drive in Alexandria, next to the Louisiana Baptist Building, the center since it opened Dec. 4, 2017, has served 827 women through pregnancy decision coaching by trained advocates, free pregnancy tests, free ultrasounds, information about pregnancy options, maternity and physical resources and post-decision support including parenting education and abortion recovery groups.

Churches, other or-

ganizations as well as individuals interested in participating in the baby bottle campaign can visit the CENLA Pregnancy Center office, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Donations to the pregnancy center can be made at cenlapc.com or by mail, P.O. Box 13907, Alexandria, LA 71315.

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Susan Nolan at
snolan@lbch.org
or LBCH,
PO Box 4196,
Monroe, LA 71211.





Norm Miller photo

Mark Harpham (L) and John Janes are Baptist laymen from Missouri who volunteered to help repair roof damage at Dry Creek Baptist Camp.

Dry Creek from page 7

fulness and provision,” said Burnaman, noting that a significant financial gap remains. “We’ve been on financial life support since last March.”

Prayer support is vital, Burnaman said. “Louisiana Baptists need to know that we are looking to the future and seeking God’s vision. We ask for prayers that we will have the faith to follow Him. It’s an uphill rocky climb; please pray that we’ll have the courage to continue following him day-in and day-out.”

Dry Creek Baptist Camp plans to operate at 50 percent capacity this summer with virus precautions in place, although

facilities are not yet 100 percent of what they were.

“But our message and our passion -- they’re at 110 percent,” Burnaman declared. “We trust that people will continue to believe in the ministry of Dry Creek and send their kids. We will take excellent care of them, and they will hear the Gospel when they’re here.”

The camp’s phone system is not operational: Those who want more information about summer camps, or who want to contribute funds to support the camp or volunteer for recovery efforts, should contact Dry Creek Baptist Camp through Facebook Messenger.



Norm Miller photo

Dry Creek Baptist Camp Director Todd Burnaman surveys a remodeled bathroom in the residence for female camp counselors.

Mike Stone: Grassroots Southern Baptists must vote in Nashville

By Will Hall
Message executive editor

DEVILLE, La. (LBM)—“The president of our Convention is an important job. The way to affect significant change in the Southern Baptist Convention starts by electing the president,” said Philip Robertson, March 16.

Robertson, pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church, Deville, with a campus in Alexandria, made the statements as part of his promotion of the Conservative Baptist Network, of which he leads the Louisiana chapter, and in presenting Mike Stone, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, Georgia, who is a candidate for president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Stone was at PBC, Deville, as speaker for a luncheon that was open to area pastors and church members. It was one of three regional events he headlined in the state, March 15-16. He is the immediate past chairman of the SBC Executive Committee and chaired a task force for them that found Russell Moore and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission had negatively impacted the Cooperative Program (last year, in 15 state conventions that responded to a survey, a loss of \$1.5 million to the International Mission Board and a drop of \$4 million to state work).

The 10,000-member CBN seeks to halt a leftward drift in the SBC, according to CBN leaders.

HIS PLAN

Stone said he felt called by the Holy Spirit to seek to lead Southern Baptists out of the downward spiral – marked by dwindling numbers and increasingly progressive ideology -- that has cast a pall on the work of the denomination during the last decade or so.

Moreover, he outlined a three-pronged plan to help turn around the denomination from the ground up.

ONE

Noting that baptisms had dropped continuously in the last number of years to levels last seen in 1939 (when baptisms were on the way up), Stone said his top priority would be evangelism.

“You would expect somebody running for president of the SBC to talk about evangelism, but I want to propose a very specific

Baptism from page 3

growth experience.”

Scallan said his congregation, which averages 35 worshipers on Sunday mornings, has treated his wife and children like extended family. Together, they have pressed on and reached out to the community through the best and worst of times.

Their ministry efforts have included partnering with other churches in the area to provide meals for needy families and joining with other congregations for community worship services.

He also shared that he is excited about what lies ahead for the next 10 years

and more.

“It’s been sweet to have them accept us into their fellowship and watch my family grow up,” he said. “God has been good to us and given us a true family to share the Gospel with our neighbors and beyond.”



Brian Blackwell photo

Mike Stone, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, Georgia, who is a candidate for president of the Southern Baptist Convention, speaks to the crowd at Philadelphia Baptist Church in Deville March 16. Standing in the background is Philip Robertson, pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church.

plan,” Stone said. “If I am elected in June, I will immediately hit the ground running ... with an evangelism strategy that we would begin implementing in the spring of 2022.” He said Southern Baptist would gather at the annual meeting in June 2022 to celebrate what the Holy Spirit did in the spring. Then a second round of simultaneous evangelistic events would be launched in the fall.

TWO

His second focus would be to establish the sufficiency of Scripture in how Southern Baptists respond to moral, political, and social issues.

“We have some troubling trends, philosophies, ideologies, and ‘analytical tools’ (a reference to the controversial Resolution 9, which approved of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, that was passed by messengers in Birmingham at the 2019 SBC Annual Meeting) that are making their way into the blood stream of Southern Baptist thought,” Stone said.

“I believe what Jesus taught in John 16:13 that ‘When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth,’” Stone emphasized.

“If you have the Word of God in your hand and the Spirit of God in your heart,

See STONE, page 19

SBC EC ousts four churches, hears trustee matters at LW, SWBTS

By Will Hall

Message executive editor

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (LBM) —During executive session, Feb. 23, the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee voted to remove four churches reported by the Credentials Committee to be "no longer in friendly cooperation" with the SBC.

Meanwhile, the Executive Committee took no action against LifeWay regarding violation of SBC Bylaw 15.F. by a trustee but set up a task force in response to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's suspension of trustees elected by SBC messengers.

OUT OF FELLOWSHIP

Towne View Baptist Church, Kennesaw, Georgia, and St. Matthews Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, were removed from fellowship with the SBC for affirming homosexuality. TVBC voted to admit a male homosexual couple as members and SMBC was disfellowshipped by the Kentucky Baptist Convention in 2018 because the congregation supported the homosexual-affirming Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Meanwhile, Antioch Baptist Church, Sevierville, Tennessee, and West Side Baptist Church, Sharpville, Pennsylvania, were ousted for charges of indifference to addressing sexual abuse. The Credentials Committee said ABC employs a pastor who confessed to two counts of statutory rape and WSBC employs a registered sex offender as pastor.

The decisions were announced in a plenary session the same day.

SBC messengers agreed to repurpose the Credentials Committee in 2019 as the permanent body to address any issue that might call into question a church's relationship with the SBC according to Article III of the SBC Constitution.

LOSS OF TRUST

The Committee on Mis-



Kyle Cochran photo

SBC President J.D. Greear addresses the plenary session of the SBC Executive Committee February 22. The meeting was held in a large hotel ballroom to allow for social distancing. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee had not met in person since last February.

sions and Ministry heard two reports regarding controversies about trustees elected by SBC messengers.

LIFEWAY

LifeWay trustee Jimmy Scroggins, pastor of the Family Church, formerly the First Baptist Church, in West Palm Beach, Florida, was serving as trustee chairman when he was the only trustee to approve a one-year, \$1 million "retirement" salary for former LifeWay CEO Thom Rainer.

Lifeway, the \$500 million publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, experienced eight consecutive years of multiple million-dollar losses prior to Rainer announcing in 2017 his intention to resign in 2018. He stayed in leadership through February 2019, the month before the announced closing of all 170 LifeWay bookstores. A Baptist Press analysis of LifeWay's 2010-2017 audits showed "total operating expenses exceeded sales," growing in deficit each year from \$2.3 million to \$35.5 million.

The \$1 million deal was slated to run through October 2021.

Meanwhile, Scroggins, a trustee since 2014, began receiving book deals from LifeWay in 2015, with his third work to hit the shelves in 2021, according to a LifeWay online ad.

The SBC EC Committee on Missions and Ministry

heard LifeWay's lawyers deny any conflict of interest because such allowances are made in LifeWay's bylaws. But lawyers for the SBC were absent and so SBC EC members were not able to challenge whether the behavior was a violation according to SBC gov-

erning documents -- given that Scroggins was elected by SBC messengers.

SBC Bylaw 15.F. states that no person or that person's spouse may serve as a trustee of an entity "from which the person receives, directly or indirectly, any form of payment or finan-

cial benefit" except reimbursement for reasonable expenses authorized for serving as a trustee.

In a Baptist Press report about LifeWay's Jan. 26 online trustee meeting, the findings of a LifeWay special audit committee were cited as claiming "that all advance monies and royalties from Scroggins's books going back to 2015 have gone to his church and not to him personally."

SWBTS

Meanwhile, the SBC Executive Committee established a task force to examine whether an entity can suspend an SBC elected trustee, which was described as removing the trustees.

The SBC is the sole member of each of its respective entities.

The action was taken because of a dispute with Southwestern Baptist

See EC, page 16

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Executive committee releases task force report on ERLC

By Will Hall

Message executive editor

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (LBM)—The Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention released its task force report about the impact of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission on the funding of cooperative missions and ministries of Southern Baptists.

The yearlong investigation found that ERLC actions had caused a \$1.5 million loss to the International Mission Board, \$700,000 loss to the North American Mission Board, \$700,000 loss to theological education at the six seminaries and \$100,000 loss to the Executive Committee, according to Mike Stone, chairman of

the seven-member task force, immediate past SBC Executive Committee chairman and pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, Georgia. But there was a loss of \$4 million to state conventions, too, he said.

Stone formally presented the report to the SBC Executive Committee during its Feb. 22-23 meeting in Nashville, Tennessee.

The published report set the framework for Stone's comments by sharing that 15 of the 41 state Baptist conventions had responded to a survey from the task force. "These 15 conventions serve 28,379 congregations, or 60 percent of the churches in friendly cooperation with the SBC," the report stated. Import-



Baptist Press photo

Executive Committee chairman Mike Stone presents the findings of an SBC task force that "reviewed the past and present activities" of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. The task force presented five findings and six recommendations to the Executive Committee.

tantly, these churches also represent 74 percent of the gifts to SBC national causes, or \$139,799,636 of \$187,806,636 of the Cooperative Program funds distributed at this level.

The report also shared examples of how "a perceived leftward or liberal drift generally," which includes concerns related to the ERLC" has led to withholding of Cooperative Program gifts and even departure of churches from state and national conventions -- affecting 250 churches in one convention, 94 in another and 46 in a third, for instance. Churches reported con-

cerns such as the "silence" of the ERLC "during the violent and destructive protests that swept the entire nation for months beginning in the summer of 2020."

Meanwhile, the report noted ERLC's "posture of non-cooperation with this task force" regarding an error-filled amicus brief the ERLC filed with the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the lawsuit, *McRaney v. North American Mission Board*. The legal brief wrongly described the SBC as a "hierarchy" that serves as an "umbrella Southern Baptist governing body over all the various groups of churches."

The report further stated that the ERLC's ef-

forts "to begin correcting this error with the court came 117 days, nearly four months after the ERLC knowingly filed an erroneous brief" and added that the ERLC did so "only after substantial pressure from this task force and others."

The 11-page document concluded with five "findings" and six "recommendations."

The task force found that: there was confusion among Southern Baptists about increases and decreases in CP giving; the ERLC is both "appreciated" and a source of "significant distraction"; ERLC's handling of the controversial amicus brief was "unacceptable"; without quick and significant changes by the ERLC, there is "the potential for a measurable [CP] decline in the near future and beyond"; and, there is "considerable conversation ... as to whether the ERLC is the most effective and efficient structure and means for addressing the public policy concerns of Southern Baptists."

They recommended: the SBC Executive Committee provide "clarity about Convention-wide giving trends"; the ERLC "focus, where possible, on speaking where the Southern Baptist Convention has already spoken";

See ERLC, page 18

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EC from page 15

Theological Seminary regarding the treatment of two trustees.

The school settled a lawsuit, Feb 8, which resulted in the two trustees resigning. But beforehand, the trustees were suspended because of alleged "misconduct."

According to a *Baptist Press* report, in exchanges of letters, SBC attorneys argued that only messengers to an SBC annual meeting can take such action, and SWBTS pushed back that the action was allowed in the seminary's bylaws and accused the SBC EC of overreach in its

pursuit of the matter on behalf of the SBC.

The discussion during the SBC EC's Committee on Missions and Ministries meeting was equally spirited.

In the end, the issue with SWBTS was declared moot by the SBC EC CMM chairman because the two trustees had resigned. However, during the plenary session that followed, the task force was announced and assigned the mission to study whether an entity can suspend any SBC trustee without permission of SBC messengers during an annual meeting.

Beth Moore announces she is parting ways with LifeWay

By Will Hall
 Message executive editor

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (LBM)—After at least two tumultuous years marked by her strident opposition to President Donald J. Trump and increasing bitterness toward Southern Baptists who voted for him, Beth Moore, the former top selling Bible study writer announced she is parting ways with LifeWay Christian Resources.

Moore also announced to the *Religion News Service* that she no longer considers herself a Southern Baptist.

She and her husband are changing churches, they were once members of Houston's First Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, but RNS hinted that the new church they are visiting may be Southern Baptist, just "not tied closely

to the SBC."

From 2001-2016, Living Proof Ministries built its assets from \$1 million to \$15 million. But RNS reported LPM lost "more than \$1.8 million" from 2017-2018.

In 2019 Moore became increasingly critical of President Trump and his Southern Baptist supporters.

She jumped on the bandwagon with other Trump critics in January 2019 to accuse a group of MAGA-hat-wearing students of racist hatred. The teens were in Washington, D.C., to participate in the annual March for Life. A video clip emerged that made it appear that after the event the teens were taunting a group of Native



American adults.

For her part, Moore tweeted, "To glee in dehumanizing any person is so utterly anti-christ it reeks of the vomit of hell." Later, a lengthier version of the video showed the American Indian group actually was harassing the students, and the kids were trying to be respectful. Moore subsequently deleted her quick-to-the-draw tweet.

Months later, in May, she began to argue that biblical prohibitions against women preachers should be grappled with "alongside other words Paul wrote" that were "equally inspired." Moreover, she insisted that these examples needed to be balanced against

"the attitudes & practices of Christ Jesus ... toward women," noting that "He had women followers! Evangelists!"

She took her point further by accusing Southern Baptist leaders of wrongdoing because of their votes for then-candidate Trump, and tied this to opposition to women preachers.

"I had the eye opening experience of my life in 2016. A fog cleared for me that was the most disturbing, terrifying thing I'd ever seen. All these years I'd given the benefit of the doubt that these men were the way they were because they were trying to be obedient to Scripture ... Then I realized it was not over Scripture at all. It was over sin. It was over power. It was over misogyny. Sexism. It was about arrogance. About protecting systems. It

involved covering abuses and misuses of power. ..."

R. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, who once advocated for the ordination of women, was one of those who argued against women preachers by citing Paul's words against a woman having authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:12). In a podcast, Mohler said, "This is where you go back to the original controversy in evangelicalism and in Southern Baptist life ... biblical authority. Did the Holy Spirit inspire Paul to say that or not? If the Holy Spirit did inspire Paul to say that, then it's the Word of God."

LifeWay will continue to carry Moore's books and study resources and she is listed as a speaker for "A Cruise with LifeWay" in October.

'Equality Act' threatens First Amendment rights

By Will Hall
 Message executive editor

WASHINGTON (LBM)—The Equality Act that was passed by the U.S. House, Feb. 25, threatens a direct assault on religious liberty unlike any other legislation proposed in the history of Congress, say opponents.

Specifically, the bill, which awaits action by the Senate, would amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act to add gender identity and sexual orientation as protected classes.

Moreover, it would give these rights a superior position to freedoms established in the U.S. Constitution, impinging on the "free exercise" of religion and "freedom of speech" that are established in the First Amendment.

Specifically, the legislation contains Section 1107, which removes protections for such freedoms as religious speech, church assembly and ministry hiring, for instance, by stating that the Restoration

of Religious Freedom Act of 1993 "shall not provide a claim concerning, or a defense to a claim under,

See EQUALITY ACT, page 18

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Equality Act from page 17

a covered title, or provide a basis for challenging the application or enforcement of a covered title.”

The RFRA was passed to allow religious believers to challenge laws that affect the ability of an individual to live out his or her faith in accordance with the First Amendment.

Conservative observers

of Congress have warned that H.R. 5 means churches and religious charities could be forced to hire homosexuals in opposition to beliefs relating to human sexuality (“male and female He created them,” Gen. 1:27c) and could face prosecution for promoting a biblical definition of marriage (“For this reason

a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh,” Gen. 2:24).

Congressman Mike Johnson, a member of First Baptist Church, Bossier City, called the bill “unprecedented” during a speech on the House floor, Feb. 25. “It’s dangerous; it’s an attack on our first freedom, the first freedom listed in the bill of rights, religious liberty. This is

something that our faith communities are deeply concerned about and all of us are as individuals.”

Steve Horn, executive director for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, told the Baptist Message that H.R. 5 was a brazen attack on Christianity.

“Christians have always faced criticism and adversity from within the culture,” he said. “Additionally, in our country we have seen some bold

legislative attacks against certain cherished beliefs like the protection of the unborn.

“Yet,” Horn emphasized, “I cannot recall any other such intentional and sweeping assault on religious liberty from the U.S. government.

The Equality Act also takes aim at pro-life beliefs, removing legal protections that previously shielded individuals and institutions, including states, from having to pay for elective abortions.

The bill now moves to the Senate, where it faces a more difficult vote because of the possibility of a Republican filibuster against which 60 votes would be needed to override. The Senate is split 50-50 between Democrats and Republicans, thus H.R. 5 would need at least 10 Republicans to vote in favor of it if all 50 Democrats (at least three are declared “pro-life Democrats”) support the legislation.

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Amy’s experience also includes working with a Christian continuing care retirement community as well as serving on the Speakers Bureau for the Alzheimer’s Association. She has written a number of articles on older adult ministry and she is the author of the book, *Baby Boomers and Beyond: Tapping the Ministry Talents and Passions of Adults over 50*.

ERLC from page 16

the ERLC “refrain from opposing specific candidates for public office”; the ERLC “be more responsive to requests from Southern Baptists”; the ERLC “demonstrate a greater appreciation for how its positions, including social media usage, affect the spirit of cooperation in the SBC”; and, that all entities submit legal briefs, “about the nature and work of Southern Baptists, to Convention attorneys, prior to their being filed.”

The task force report concluded the third investigation of the ERLC by the SBC Executive Committee. Two study groups also were formed in 2017 regarding concerns about the ERLC’s impact on the cooperative missions and ministries of Southern Baptists.

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Mt. Olive ministers to hurricane-ravaged community

By Norm Miller
Special assignments writer

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM)—With more than \$1 million in hurricane damage, Mount Olive Baptist Church in Lake Charles began “Live on the Lawn,” an outdoor Sunday worship service, as weather permits.

“It’s an exciting and engaging time for our congregation and community,” Pastor Braylon Harris said. “Ministry opportunities are unique and prevalent in this season.” Harris is director of Southwest Louisiana Response, a multi-church group cooperating to offer ongoing disaster recovery ministry.

Mount Olive has had several families join the church, and others who were passersby have begun attending. “We have neighbors across the street who’ve never attended our

church, but every Sunday they come out and sit on their porches for the service,” Harris said.

A 10-year-old girl was riding her bicycle past the church and decided to join the service. She enjoyed one song so much that she began dancing. After the service, the girl said, “I love this. I’m bringing my momma and daddy back here next Sunday,” Harris noted.

Post-hurricane church ministry is thriving, mem-

bers also are worshiping via social media, and giving has sustained itself, Harris said. “God has been gracious and kind to us.”

Harris is no stranger to disaster relief ministry. At age 16 he and his family were evacuated to Tioga, La., where Harris involved himself with Red Cross on-site relief efforts. “That’s where the disaster relief bug bit me,” he said.

Responding to disaster relief needs in Lake Charles, Harris and

Mount Olive members sought partners who helped distribute supplies every day for about six weeks, as well as serve 30,000 meals.

Director of Missions Bruce Baker of the Carey Association said, “My friend Braylon has been one of the most active pastors in disaster relief. He’s very much in the mix of all that goes on.” Harris is on the Long-term Recovery Committee, which is a civic/religious group of

charitable organizations.

Baker and Harris met during disaster relief ministry in the wake of Hurricane Harvey.

“No one does disaster relief like Southern Baptists, and that’s a fact,” Harris said.

Baker said that Harris has arranged for a group of about 100 volunteers to come help in the ongoing recovery. “I am grateful that he has extended the LBC’s kingdom influence in this region.”

Stone from page 14

you have enough,” he said, to discern every matter in life.

Stone defined Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality (Marxist and atheistic ideas) in detail, lamenting that they are infiltrating SBC churches and seminaries. He said both these schools of thought basically assign guilt based on skin

color, and both push the idea that the Bible should be interpreted through personal experience.

“I think that is a dangerous road; it is a dangerous trajectory for the future,” he said.

THREE
“Finally, I would seek to have an emphasis on greater

involvement of grassroots Southern Baptists,” Stone said.

“There is one group that has the microphone. There is another group that has the pulpits and the pews,” he said, adding that those in control of the microphone are causing “most Southern Baptists in the pew” to be

“deeply troubled” and feel “alien in their own SBC.”

He would work through direct contact to get grassroots Southern Baptists engaged, he said, and appoint them “to serve on the Committee on Committees” with hopes of getting even more to serve as trustees on SBC boards.

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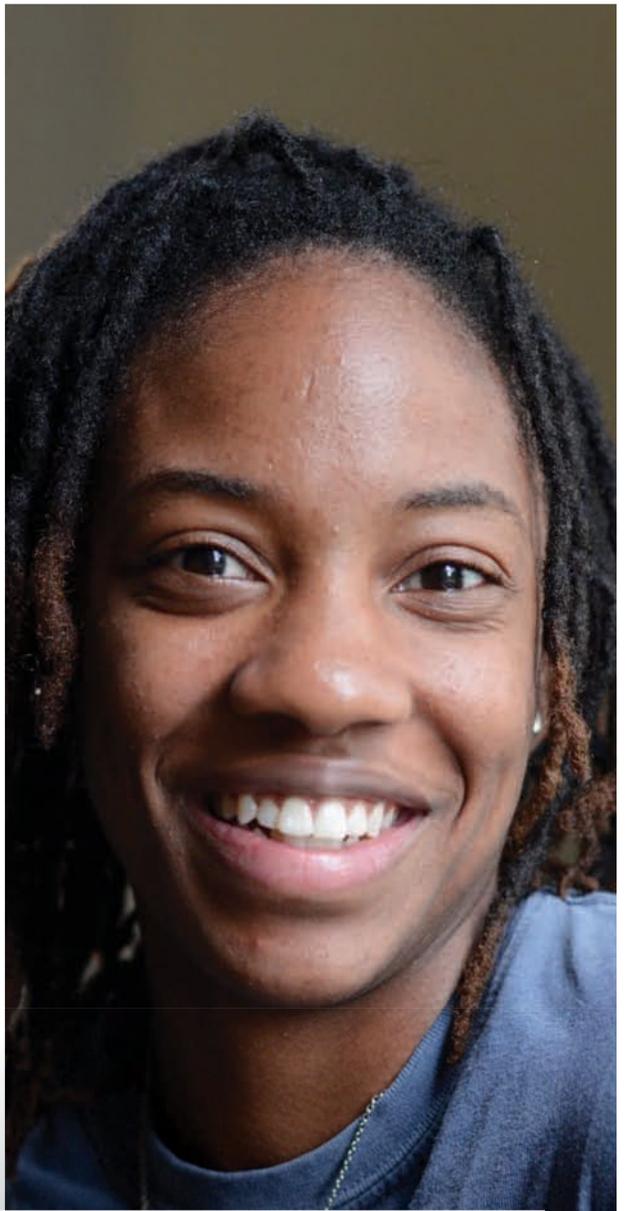
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