

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

Annual meeting report

Coverage
from the 2026
Southern Baptist
Convention
Annual Meeting
in Orlando



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

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Photo by Marc Ira Hooks/The Alabama Baptist

SBC officers elected at this year's annual meeting in Orlando include (l to r) Don Currence of FBC Ozark, Missouri, registration secretary; Allen Murray of Mount Pisgah Baptist in Supply, North Carolina, second vice president; Willy Rice of Calvary Baptist in Clearwater, Florida, president; Craig Carlisle of Etowah Baptist Association in Alabama, first vice president; and Travis Kerns of Three Rivers Baptist Association in South Carolina, recording secretary.

Alabama's Carlisle elected SBC first vice president; former Alabama Baptist Rice elected president

Alabama's Craig Carlisle was elected first vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention in a runoff vote June 10.

Carlisle, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association, served as SBC second vice president this past year. He won the runoff for first vice president with a vote of 3,338 (65.92%) against Paul Purvis, lead pastor at Mission Hill Church in Temple Terrace, Florida, who drew 1,719 (33.95%). The other candidate was Larry Helms, pastor of Fort Lawn Baptist Church in South Carolina.

University of Mobile president

Charles Smith made the nomination presentation for Carlisle.

Other offices

Also elected to serve was Willy Rice, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Clearwater, Florida, as the new SBC president. A Samford University alum and former Alabama Baptist pastor, Rice won with 5,217 votes (57.56%) against Josh Powell, pastor of Taylors First Baptist Church in South Carolina, who

received 3,821 votes (42.16%).

Also elected were Allen Murray, pastor of Mount Pisgah Baptist Church in Supply, North Carolina, as second vice president, and Travis Kerns, associational mission strategist for the Three Rivers Baptist Association in Taylors, South Carolina, as recording secretary. Don Currence, administrative pastor of First Baptist Church Ozark, Missouri, was reelected registration secretary. (The Alabama Baptist)



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Craig Carlisle, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association, speaks with other board members at the SBC Executive Committee meeting in Orlando, Florida.

Full coverage of the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando is available at thebaptistpaper.org/sbc-2026.

For a gallery of photos, visit thebaptistpaper.org/sbc-2026-photo-gallery.

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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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 11.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief

Email: jrash@thealabamabaptist.org / Social media: @RashionalThts

Can aggressive ‘polity police’ and the Great Commission coexist?

The moment remains seared in my mind, and I’m having trouble letting it go — Wednesday of the SBC Annual Meeting between 11 and 11:30 a.m. That’s when a group of Baptist messengers hurt my heart.

It wasn’t related to the widely discussed vote itself — or even the result of the vote. We’ve got a year to flesh out the full realities and details surrounding the proposed Mohler Amendment, which seeks to revise the SBC constitution to further specify how a cooperating SBC church functions (see page 4). I’ll save those discussions for later.

Emotional experience

For now, I’m attempting to process the emotions from that Wednesday morning and am so grateful I was in the room to experience the striking blow of sadness that hit me unexpectedly.

In what I have to believe was an attempt to assure our female Baptist missionaries serving internationally that they are valued and supported, Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board, commended them during his IMB report to messengers.

IMB currently employs 2,027 women, and 1,803 of that number serve overseas, which is

more than half of IMB’s 3,500 international missionaries.

“No organization or institution in Southern Baptist life employs more females in vocational ministry than IMB. Not one of them is in a pastor/elder role or carries the function of pastor/elder,” Chitwood said.

But noting the recent heightened rhetoric related to women’s vocational ministry roles, Chitwood asked messengers to affirm “female IMB missionaries who have left their country, their culture, their church, their American comforts and for some, their adult kids and grandkids to answer God’s call upon their lives to take Christ to the nations.”

Affirming in this moment meant applause and messengers complied — but not with the enthusiasm I expected.

After all, a mere 24 hours earlier, the beloved Mark Clifton — author, advocate, mentor and encourager of pastors and church planters — shared with convention messengers how at six years old at the SBC Annual Meeting in Detroit in 1960 he became mesmerized with missionaries floating through the halls.

“As a little kid, I would see home missionaries with green ribbons and foreign missionaries with red ribbons. I would look at those missionaries, and I would see them as heroes, and I desired

to be like them,” Clifton said as he moved his point along about bivocational pastors. Maybe they could wear blue ribbons and “we would see them as the heroes they really are,” he said about bivocational pastors.

Beautiful memory

While Clifton’s focus wasn’t technically about missionaries, his memory was genuine and represented so beautifully how we’ve typically referred to our missions force in Baptist life.

In fact, countless Baptists on-site in Orlando referenced with great admiration the IMB Sending Celebration and commissioning of 63 new missionaries that took place about an hour after Clifton’s remarks.

Fast forward back to Wednesday morning. In some sections, several people stood and applauded loudly. But throughout the hall, about the same number or maybe more (at least in the scope of my view) stayed seated and offered what I would describe as mild applause.

Less than a half hour later, a massive roar complete with a whoop and a holler rolled across the convention hall when the vote count on the Mohler Amendment was announced.

“YEAH!” complete with the satisfactory fist shot in the air could be seen and heard clearly.

Competitive, must win, do whatever it takes to win, achieved the win — “YEAH!” — versus what now seems like an obligatory acknowledgment by some toward more than half of our international missionary force.

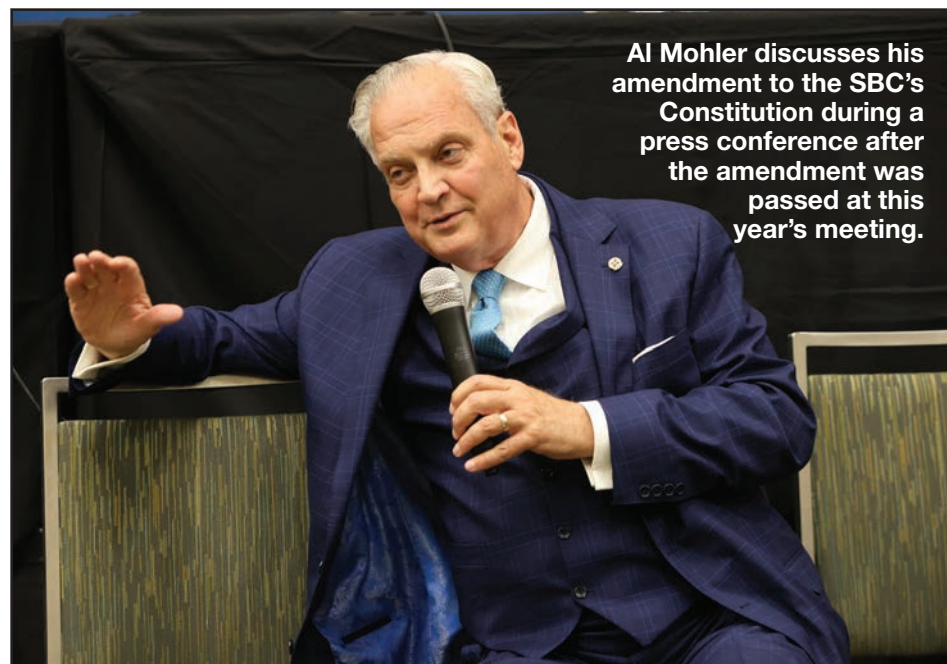
“It feels good to win,” one aggressive advocate for the proposed amendment is quoted as saying, while a few others describe those expressing concerns about it in a negative and potentially derogatory light.

So, is it a competition with winners and losers, or is it a shared mission with some disagreements along the way that won’t interfere with the mission?

As I continue processing the full scope of the experience, I’d love to hear from you about how to reconcile the current conversation in the Baptist ecosystem with the call on our lives as described in the Great Commission (Matthew 28) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22). Email me at jrash@tabmedia.group or give me a call at 800-803-5201.

TAB Media Group’s team will continue research and conversations related to the proposed Mohler Amendment throughout the months leading up to next June’s second and final vote.

'SPECIFICALLY' MEANS 'SPECIFICALLY'



Al Mohler discusses his amendment to the SBC's Constitution during a press conference after the amendment was passed at this year's meeting.

Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Mohler says proposed amendment not to address anything beyond pastoral office and preaching

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Southern Seminary's Al Mohler said he's admittedly frustrated but also understands the questions about his proposed SBC constitutional amendment, including those from a dozen or so reporters meeting with him June 10: How can Baptists be assured this amendment won't be expanded beyond the stated purpose (office of pastor and function of preaching being limited to men as qualified by Scripture)?

Much of the confusion stems from various individuals and groups connected to SBC life discussing publicly their intentions to take the restrictions further. Mohler remains adamant his intention is precisely as he has stated it, however.

The proposed amendment, which will need a two-thirds majority approval by messengers to the 2027 annual meeting in Indianapolis in order to be added to the SBC constitution, states:

A cooperating church "does not act to affirm, appoint or endorse a woman serving in the office or function of a pastor/elder/overseer, specifically preaching to the assembled congregation."

"I've tried to say as carefully as possible, but I'll say it again now. It speaks specifically in terms of function to a woman preaching to the gathered assembly," Mohler said. "I will say that over and over again. You heard me say that 'specifically' means 'specifically.' I also will tell you that I do not believe that the Southern Baptist Convention has shown any evidence of moving be-

yond that specific issue in terms of the function question.

"I don't think it says anything about anyone teaching Sunday School or missionary service. ... And by that I mean it doesn't intend to. It's not addressing those situations at all."

Social media effect

When Southern Baptists' confessional statement, the Baptist Faith and Message, was updated in 2000, the pastoral office section was revised to state the office of pastor is limited to men.

Mohler served on the committee preparing the revision and stated publicly 26 years ago when the BFM 2000 was adopted that the restriction applied only to the senior pastor position.

However, a lot has changed in 26 years, he said, such as social media and the digital revolution, which provides easier access into knowing more about larger numbers of churches.

"I was not honestly aware at the time of all the churches that would show up on a list still identified with the Southern Baptist Convention. So, in one sense, it was something of a wake-up call to a good many Southern Baptists who just kind of assumed that these churches were not considered a cooperating church," he added, referencing without calling the name of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. CBF grew out of the rift among Southern Baptists in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Also, "new to the equation would be the idea that a woman would

preach to the gathered assembly and not have the title pastor. That was really not envisioned in 2000. I was on the committee. I can tell you it never came up. But that's something new."

Mohler confirmed he believed the BFM 2000 and the SBC structure currently in place has worked regarding assessing whether a church can remain in cooperation with the SBC, but he believes the convention would prefer not to deal with it at the annual meeting.

'Visible dividing line'

"We need to say this ... in the right way. ... This is not a new doctrine," Mohler said. "This is not a new understanding. This is something Southern Baptists shouldn't have to deal with over and over again.

"This is concretely perhaps the most visible dividing line between liberal and conservative Christians," he said, adding he does not see any type of crisis nor "fear an army of women preachers in the SBC."

It's strictly for efficiency, consistency and clarity, he said, even though messengers could possibly still need to handle a future situation. Churches deemed not in friendly cooperation by the Credentials Committee and affirmed by the Executive Committee still have the right to appeal their case during the next SBC Annual Meeting.

Mohler emphasized "specifically" means the singular item specified.

"Some of you have known me for decades. You know that I'm very careful with words. And I have to live with a lot of words. I don't want to speak words I don't want to live with," Mohler said.

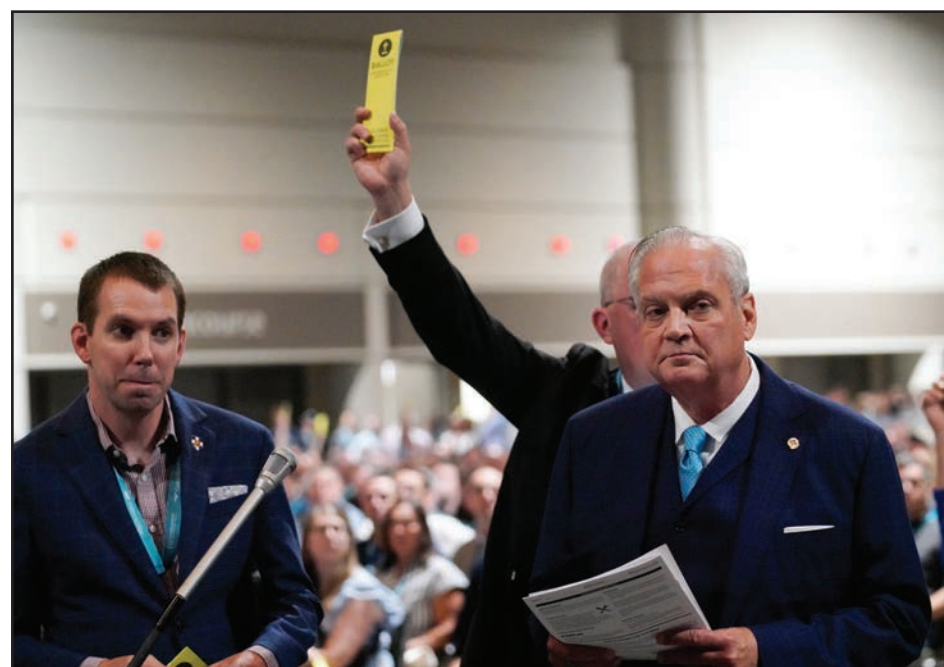


Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Al Mohler speaks for his motion to amend the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention on June 10 at the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida. Former SBC president Bart Barber (behind Mohler) votes against a motion to "call the question" and end debate.

SBC messengers adopt \$186 million CP budget

Nearly 800 of the 890 registered messengers from Alabama picked up their credentials to participate in the SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando, held June 9–10.

With 11,692 messengers registered and another nearly 10,000 family members, guests and exhibitors, this was the largest crowd since the SBC met in Nashville in 2021, the year after the COVID-19 pandemic prevented assembly.

Messengers adopted a \$186 million Cooperative Program Allocation Budget for 2026–27, which is down \$4 million from the current year's budget but does not include a special allocation for the Executive Committee to help with legal expenses. It does include the new 51% going to the International Mission Board (see story, page 12).

A total of 42 resolutions were submitted, and the Resolutions Committee brought 11 out to the floor. All 11 were adopted.

Topics included Baptists' commitment to the sanctity of life through opposing euthanasia and assisted suicide as well as affirming



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Messengers listen to Jeff Iorg, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, give the second report on behalf of the committee during the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida.

the importance of bivocational and volunteer pastors.

Other resolutions affirmed the enforcement of borders as well as the dignity of immigrants and the office of pastor/elder/overseer being limited to men. Others opposed

the rise of antisemitism and political violence.

Find more about the resolutions online at thebaptistpaper.org under the "SBC 2026" tab.

Messengers also heard the introduction of 30 motions, nine of

which were unusually tabled indefinitely by the messenger body. All nine requested the development of a new task force to study a certain topic.

The traditional entity reports, questions from messengers, convention sermon and president's address also moved along as normal.

New officers elected

North Carolina pastor Clint Pressley, who previously served as pastor of Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile, wrapped up his second one-year term as SBC president. New officers were elected (see story, page 2), including Alabama's Craig Carlisle as first vice president.

Baptists nominated to serve on various convention committees and as members of the boards of trustees were also presented and approved for service. A full list can be found in the Tuesday Bulletin, found online at sbcannualmeeting.net.

Next year's SBC Annual Meeting is set for June 13–16 in Indianapolis. (The Alabama Baptist)

National WMU report includes reflection from Wisdom-Martin: 'Together you helped shape my heart'

Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national WMU, began her report to messengers June 10 by introducing Carolyn Fountain, who was elected president of the missions organization June 7 during WMU's Missions Celebration and Annual Meeting in Orlando.

Wisdom-Martin said Carolyn and her husband Leroy were appointed as missionaries with the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) in 1983, and "her life has been one of service to the Lord and others."

Fountain spoke about Royal Ambassadors, the first missions discipleship for children that WMU began for boys in 1908.

In May, WMU announced it acquired Royal Racers, a derby car company based in Tennessee begun by Frank and May Dean Green.

Discipling boys

Keith Gates, national RA consultant, said the cars are part of discipling boys, noting, "men across the world fondly recount how they grew up learning valuable life lessons from godly men while building and racing their derby cars."

Wisdom-Martin and Fountain also explained how Southern Baptist Disaster Relief has ties to RA.

Wisdom-Martin said that in 1956, WMU gifted the Brotherhood Commission with Royal Ambassadors. Bob Dixon, an RA Campcraft instructor, was the first



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Sandra Wisdom-Martin (left), executive director-treasurer of national Woman's Missionary Union, and Carolyn Fountain (right), president of national WMU, give the entity's report.

person called to help organize a response to Hurricane Beulah in 1967. He was returning from a weekend RA Campcraft training session with a load of gear. He cooked meals on the back of his station wagon in the aftermath of that hurricane.

"And thus, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief was born," Fountain said, "a ministry that has touched millions. All can be traced back more than a century ago to a small band of WMU women who were determined to instill missional

disciplines in the lives of boys. And that's still our commitment — to keep the Great Commission front and center of all we do."

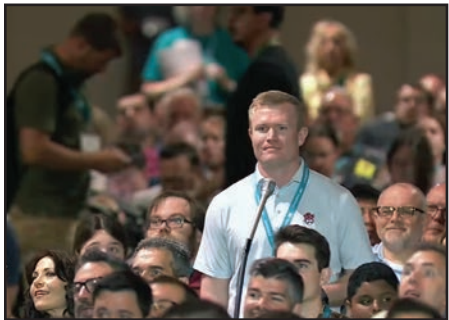
Wisdom-Martin, who plans to retire by January 2027, ended the report with a heartfelt message of thankfulness.

"As I reflect upon my life ... I realize little in my life has made sense but for the grace of God and the collective work of Southern Baptists," she shared. "Together you helped shape my heart, deepen my faith and strengthen my commitment to God's mission in the world. I am profoundly grateful. Thank you, Southern Baptists." (Baptist Press)

2026 SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

ALABAMIANS

Right: Katie Wade (left) and Cierra Genck, both students from the University of Alabama Baptist Campus Ministries, serve as volunteers at the SBC Annual Meeting registration desk. **Below:** Will Spivey, next gen pastor at FBC Opelika, asks a question during entity reports June 9.



Screenshot



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

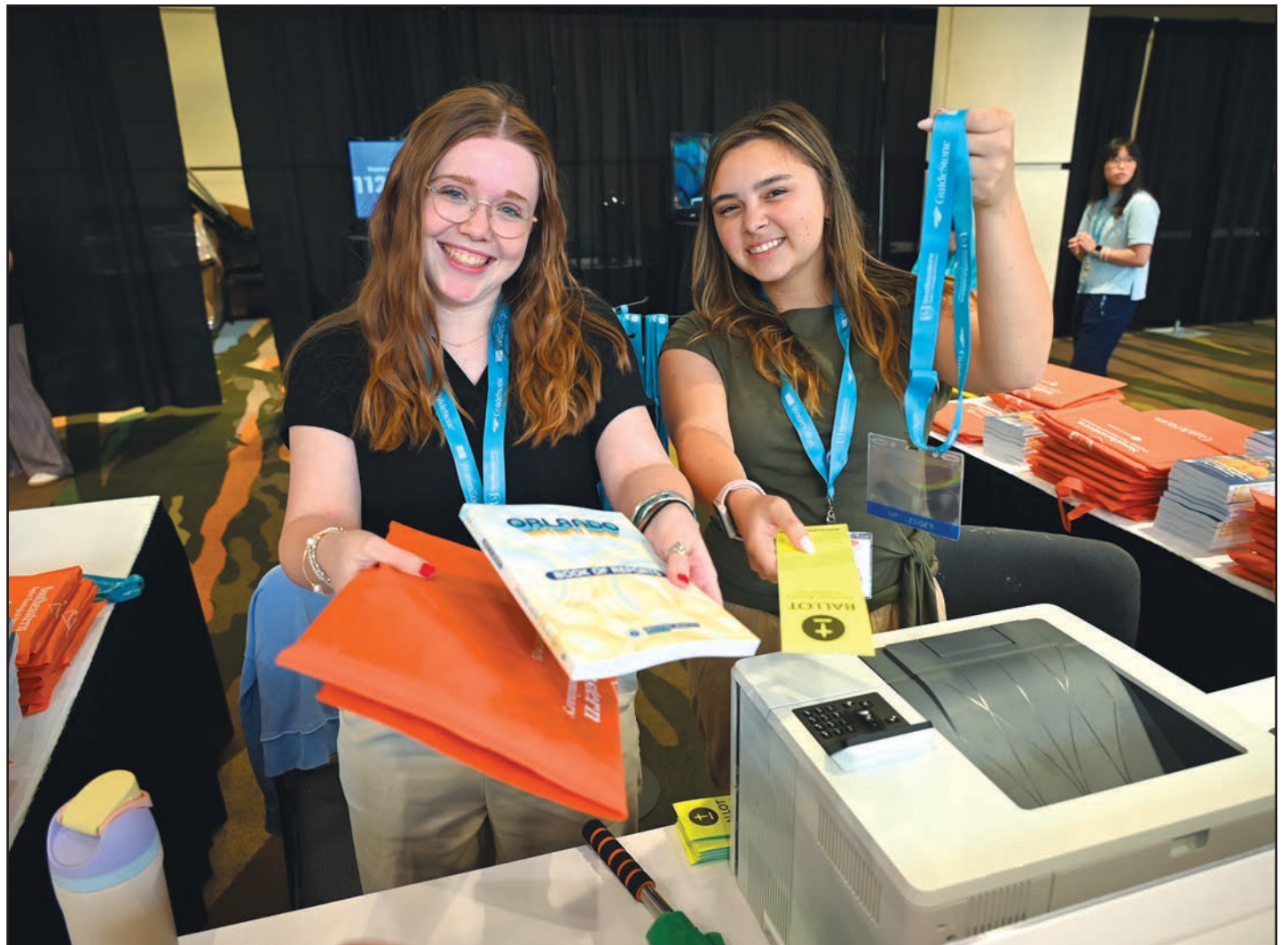


Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Above: Dewayne Rembert (right), pastor of Flatline Church at Chisholm in Montgomery, and his brother-in-law, Huntsville-based minister Darius White, explore the SBC Exhibit Hall.



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Above: Neal Hughes (right), director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association, greets Mitchell Bruce, director of marketing and communications for The Baptist Foundation of Alabama, in the SBC Exhibit Hall.



Photo by Marc Ira Hooks/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Russell Zwerner, pastor of Capitol Heights Baptist Church in Montgomery, and his family stop for a photo near the registration desk at the SBC Annual Meeting.

AT SBC

June • Orlando, Florida

Right: Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, and Jarman Leatherwood, pastor of House of Hope and Restoration Church in Huntsville and president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention. **Below:** Daven (center) and Jane Ellen Watkins of Pelham First Baptist Church visit with Mike Jackson, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions associate executive director, at the ALSBOM booth.



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Above: Chris Crain (center), executive director/associational mission strategist of Birmingham Metro Birmingham Baptist Association, accepts a plaque as AMS of the year. Eric Taylor (right), AMS for Marshall Association, nominated Crain for the award, and he and James Risner (left), AMS for Greater Dayton Association of Baptists, presented it to him at the lunch meeting. **Right:** Timmy Ray, associational missions strategist for Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association, brought his family to the meeting.



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM



Photo by Marc Ira Hooks/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Above: Jeff Gardner (left), pastor of Daphne Baptist Church, speaks with Frank Jones, SBOM senior adult ministry strategist. **Below:** Mark Perry, pastor of Mount Zion Baptist in Brantley, and his sons, Rollin and Reed. **Left:** Tyler Armstrong, a messenger from Woodward Avenue Baptist Church in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, asks a question during the NAMB report.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Above: TAB Media Group's Jennifer Davis Rash and Craig Carlisle, director of missions for Etowah Association, stop for a selfie at the SBC Executive Committee meeting. **Right:** Charles Smith, University of Mobile president and messenger from Redemption Church in Saraland, nominates Craig Carlisle for first vice president of the SBC.



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions gifts Orlando-area church replant with SBC furniture

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Trinity Hill Church in Montverde, Florida, sits about 18 miles northwest of the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando — and the launching members held a preview service June 7.

A church replant, Trinity Hill officially launches Sept. 20, assisted in part by the donation of furniture used for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions booth in the Southern Baptist Convention exhibit hall.

To learn more about the church replant Trinity Hill in Montverde, Florida, visit trinityhill.church.

Rather than haul the furniture back to Prattville and attempt to store it, several weeks ago SBOM missions director Scotty Goldman looked for a church plant or replant near the convention center who could use the furniture.

Connecting with Trinity Hill, Goldman asked Bo Hutchinson, the replant's pastor, to choose some furniture in their preferred style so it not only would be a practical ministry donation but also one that matches the decor of the church.

Partnership

The SBOM purchased the furniture for use in the Alabama space at the SBC exhibit hall, an area where SBC attendees learned about ministries and missions from across the denomination.

The Grove Church in Clermont, Florida, is sponsoring the replant at Trinity Hill, and The Church at South Lake, also in Clermont, is partnering in recruitment and resources.

Trinity Hill is northeast of Clermont and sits between Lake Florence and Lake Apopka.

Three members of The Grove — Christian Ferris (vest), Jackson Fauntleroy (black golf shirt) and Brenda Ferris (right) — helped the Alabama team unpack, assemble and set up the furniture in the exhibit hall June 6.

Goldman, and his wife Rita, who also serves with SBOM, prayed with them while they were together.

New work

According to the church's website, Trinity Hill "will be a new gospel work uniting with previous

Baptist work in this city, which began in 1959. Since that time, a congregation has been proclaiming the good news of the gospel. In June 2025, after a season of decline, the congregation's members stepped out in faith and unanimously



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Members of The Grove Church, which is sponsoring Trinity Hill Church in Montverde, Florida, set up furniture June 6 in the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions booth in the SBC exhibit hall.

voted to partner with a sister church in Clermont. The Lord kindly provided a plan to plant a new church in the fall of 2026."



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Scotty and Rita Goldman (right) pray with the church replant team helping set up display furniture June 6.

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Alabama news

Lass WORDS



BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Lessons on authority

I was playing with my 4-year-old grandson. We had all his race cars out and were pretending to do stunt jumps over a ramp, which was actually an empty water bottle.

The jumps got more and more dramatic, and eventually my grandson — as 4-year-olds are prone to do — got a little carried away and started throwing his cars all over the room.

At first I tried to calmly settle him down, but he was all cranked up now and ignored my low-key admonishments. After several tries I finally raised my voice and sternly told him that if he didn't stop he was going to have to go to his room.

He looked at me with a puzzled expression. I guess I had just gone from being his playmate to being his authority figure. And he didn't like it.

Learning to listen

After a few seconds of thought he made the decision to challenge my authority.

"I don't have to listen to you. I have to listen to mommy and daddy," he said.

Not in a mean, defiant way. His tone was more like he was just trying to explain something I didn't understand.

I didn't get angry. I smiled. He was just doing what we all

do. We all resist ceding control of our lives to someone else.

That can be especially true when it comes to accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. We have no problem with the "Savior" part — we all want to be saved — but surrendering our lives to Him as our "Lord" can be more difficult.

God's best

Psalm 3 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight."

God wants what's best for us, just as I do for my little man.

My grandson was probing to test his boundaries, to see who really had control. Who are the real bosses? We do that with God. We stray from His Word to see if we can find happiness elsewhere. It doesn't work.

And it didn't work for my grandson. He wound up in his room.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Ken Lass, an award-winning columnist for numerous publications and websites, is a retired Birmingham television news and sports anchor.

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispana de Autauga** (The First Hispanic Baptist Church of Autauga), Deatsville, held a special dedication service of its new building May 17. Special guests included Bill Morgan and Mel Johnson, both former directors of missions for Autauga Baptist Association, and Ken Allen, a state missionary with the State Board of Missions. A reception followed the service. The building was con-



Submitted photo

structed by crews from the association and Carpenters for Christ. Carlos Lemus, the association's Hispanic mission strategist, serves as pastor. Travis Coleman is interim associational mission strategist.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla**, will host America 250 Freedom Celebration July 5, 10:30 a.m. The event will feature artist-historian Bobby Horton sharing 250 years of America's songs of faith. Bill McCall is pastor.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

► Members of **First Baptist Church Jacksonville** have been faithfully flexible through nearly four years of selling two campuses, uniting the congregations, purchasing nearby land and beginning the building process for the church's future. A groundbreaking ceremony will be held July 19, 5–7 p.m. Derek Staples is pastor.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **Bruce Williams**, pastor of **Goodman Baptist Church, Enterprise**, for 20 years, retired May 31. He and his wife, Terre, were honored with a special presentation during the service. A luncheon and fellowship followed. The couple has three adult daughters and four grandchildren. He is available for pulpit supply/interim



Submitted photo

ministry. Contact: goodmancat.obi@gmail.com.

SALEM-TROY ASSOCIATION

► **First Baptist Church Troy** marked its 175th anniversary with a two-day celebration, May 16–17. Saturday's events kicked off with a breakfast followed by a walking historical tour of the church campus. The celebration choir presented an evening concert followed by a cake and ice cream social. Sunday morning's celebration began with a breakfast followed by another opportunity for a historical walk. A time capsule was filled and sealed to be opened in 75 years. A historical marker registered with the Alabama Historical Commission was unveiled, and an aerial photo was taken of the congregation. As the service began, pastor Ross Lankford recognized Nicklaus Chrysson, chair of the church's history committee, and the committee members who planned the anniversary. The church was honored by the following special guests: Alabama Secretary of State Wes Allen, who read the proclamation from Gov. Kay Ivey; Jason Reeves, mayor



Photo by Lesley Foster

of Troy; Averyt Walker, the association's director of missions; and Ralph Foster, representing the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pictured are (l to r) Chrysson, Walker, Foster and Lankford. After a responsive reading of the church covenant, the pastor shared a message on the heritage of faith. Lunch was served following the service.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Providence Baptist Church, Opelika**, church choir will celebrate the 250th anniversary of America June 28 at 8 and 10:45 a.m. with a special re-creation of the musical "I Love America" that was presented in 1976 in honor of the nation's 200th anniversary. Twelve of the original singers will participate in this event under the direction of Tom Smith, music minister. Rusty Sowell is pastor.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Alabama news items are compiled by Dianna L. Cagle and Debbie Campbell.

NEWS AND INFORMATION

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Disaster relief training prepares new volunteers

With the official start of hurricane season on June 1, it's good to know that trained Alabama Baptists stand ready to assist in times of disaster. The last several months have been busy for Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief (ABDR), with around 500 volunteers being trained in areas ranging from administration, shower and laundry, and communications, to clean-up and recovery, chainsaw operation, chaplaincy and mass feeding.

Jeff Solomon, a member of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, is a new ABDR volunteer who attended the mass feeding training on April 27.

"I first heard about Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief from some friends at church who were already serving in the mass feeding units," Jeff said.

"I love to serve, and with my retirement coming up, this seemed like the perfect fit for me. I went to the training session, which was all day, and I was amazed



SBOM photo

by how detailed and well-planned everything was! The thought of helping to prepare up to 20,000 meals each day is a bit scary, but after the training, I feel like it's definitely doable. I'm hoping we never have to be deployed, but if we do, I feel better prepared and supported to help those in need."

Sherrie Monaco, another first-time volunteer and a member of Valleydale Church in Birmingham Metro Association, also attended that training.

"This is the most impressive and well-organized association I have ever en-

countered," she said. "Having owned and operated a restaurant, I truly appreciated the measures taken to comply with health and safety codes as well as the seamless flow of operations. The dedication of the staff, trainers and volunteers is incredible."

Becky Noland, state feeding coordinator for ABDR, said, "Our goal is to introduce new volunteers to the basics of mass feeding through classroom time and hands-on experiences in hope that when an opportunity arises, they will feel confident enough to take the next step and deploy. We stress the camaraderie that our volunteers form across the state by deploying with our teams."

For more information about Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, including upcoming training opportunities, visit sldr.org.

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program and to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering.



SBOM photo

WORD search

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| ATTITUDE | GOSPEL |
| BAPTISM | HOSPITALITY |
| BEAUTY | JUDGMENT |
| BLESSING | LOVE |
| CHRIST | PEACE |
| CLOTHES | PERSECUTION |
| COMPASSION | PETER |
| CONSIDERATE | POWER |
| CREATOR | PRAISED |
| FAITHFUL | REJOICE |
| FEAR | REVERENCE |
| FLESH | SERVE |
| FORGIVE | SPIRITS |
| GENTLE | STRENGTH |
| GIFTS | SYMPATHY |
| GLORY | UNFADING |

Q F P D P M L S J N B P B F B
 Z R L E F Y X K E R R E W O P
 R D T E K Q R K L R T R M R Q
 C E J P S Q J O F P V S V G N
 R R T Z T H C H L O V E L I R
 M Y M C G B Y R H G S C E V O
 E H T G N E R T S Y L U P E T
 D N O I S S A P M O C T S N A
 U B W Z L F K P P T N I O G E
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 T R B Z S L L Z R F E A R C A
 S T R E V E R E N C E Y G F R
 L W W R B B E A U T Y H R H P

"Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins."

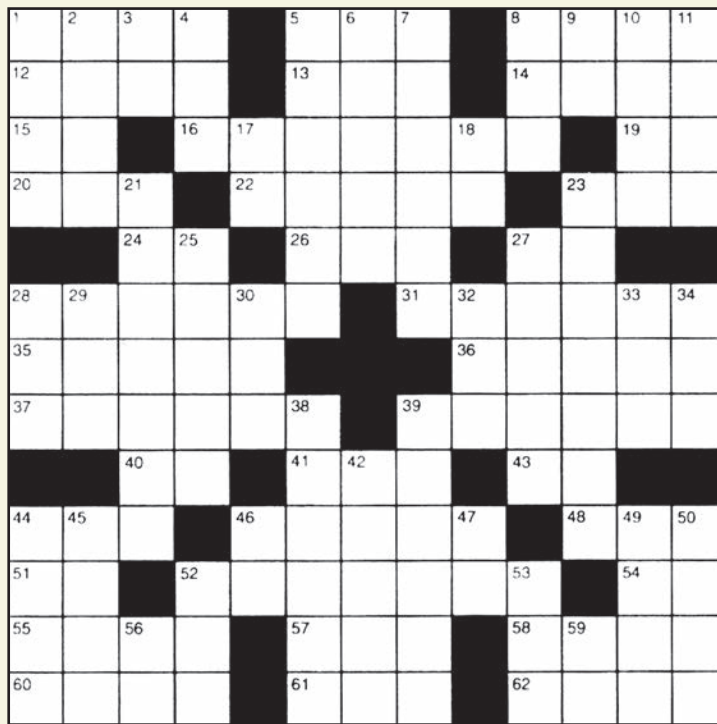
1 PETER 4:8

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. Among all nations, for His _____. (Rom. 1:5)
5. Concerning His _____ Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 1:3)
8. _____, a servant of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:1)
12. Is become like the garden of ______. (Ezek. 36:35)
13. _____ deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, _____, an horror. (Gen. 15:12; 2 words)
14. Son of Helem. (1 Chron. 7:35)
15. The woman which hath _____ husband is bound. (Rom. 7:2)
16. For I _____ in the law of God. (Rom. 7:22)
19. And be not conformed _____ this world. (Rom. 12:2)
20. So they _____ both together. (John 20:4)
22. Favorite dog name.
23. Disk Operating System. (abbr.)
24. For Christ _____ the end of the law. (Rom. 10:4)
26. And when he _____ with us at Assos. (Acts 20:14)
27. Who also were in Christ before _____. (Rom. 16:7)
28. They _____ fools. (Rom. 1:22)
31. I know both how to be _____. (Phil. 4:12)
35. And when king _____ ... And Israel vowed _____ vow. (Num. 21:1, 2; 2 words)
36. Drive out the inhabitants of _____. (Judg. 1:31)
37. Two _____ shall there be in one board. (Ex. 26:17)
39. _____ if _____ be found _____ his hand. (Ex. 21:16; 3 words)
40. Who are _____ note among the apostles. (Rom. 16:7)
41. To point carefully.
43. Wert grafted _____ among them. (Rom. 11:17)
44. The night is _____ spent. (Rom. 13:12)
46. By a foolish nation I will _____ you. (Rom. 10:19)
48. For a voice declareth from _____. (Jer. 4:15)
51. So, as much _____ in me. (Rom. 1:15)
52. I have _____ my cause. (Job 13:18)
54. Do, re, mi, fa, so, _____, ti, do.
55. He received the _____ of



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25. Why is thy countenance _____ ... but sorrow _____ heart. (Neh. 2:2; 2 words)
27. Geuel the son of _____. (Num. 13:15)
28. And the lapwing, and the _____. (Deut. 14:18)
29. Sir, come down _____ my child die. (John 4:49)
30. And thinkest thou this, O _____. (Rom. 2:3)
32. I will break also the _____ of Damascus. (Amos 1:5)
33. Naaman, _____, and Rosh. (Gen. 46:21)
34. Nickname for Donald.
38. Above the _____ of the seas ... young men _____ spoiler at noonday: _____ have. (Jer. 15:8; 3 words)
39. Mete it with an _____ ... had _____ lack. (Ex. 16:18; 2 words)
42. Hattush, and _____, and Bariah. (1 Chron. 3:22)
44. Stand _____ therefore in the liberty. (Gal. 5:1)
45. The churches of _____ salute you. (1 Cor. 16:19)
46. Thou art to pass over through _____. (Deut. 2:18)
47. Do, _____, mi.
49. And said, _____, master! (2 Kings 6:5)
50. For whosoever shall call upon the _____ of the Lord. (Rom. 10:13)
52. So we, being many, are _____ body. (Rom. 12:5)
53. Into the _____ of lions. (Dan. 6:7)
56. General Motors. (abbr.)
59. No man dieth _____ himself. (Rom. 14:7)

DOWN

1. Let us draw _____ with a true heart. (Heb. 10:22)
2. _____, and Chelal, Benaiah. (Ezra 10:30)
3. But sin that dwelleth in _____. (Rom. 7:17)
4. And the _____ everlasting life. (Rom. 6:22)
5. And _____, had bought sweet spices. (Mark 16:1)
6. Being a wild _____ tree. (Rom. 11:17)
7. Make _____ friendship ... and _____ snare to thy soul. (Prov. 22:24-25; 3 words)
8. Out of the _____ wherein is no water. (Zech. 9:11)
9. I _____ a debtor. (Rom. 1:14)
10. Sing _____ thy name. (Rom. 15:9)
11. Southeast Asian country.
17. Son of Judah. (Num. 26:19)
18. _____ Haldeman, Nixon aide.
21. Prochorus, and _____, and Timon. (Acts 6:5)
23. Who shall _____ into the deep? (Rom. 10:7)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

SALT 2026 is coming to a location near you

A few years ago, we created the SALT conference (Senior Adult Leadership Training) — a one-day event to equip the senior adult leaders in our Alabama Baptist churches to be more effective in reaching and ministering to senior adults in their churches and communities. These have been well attended, and

To register, visit alsbom.org/salt or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



JONES

I want to invite you and your senior adult leadership team to be a part of one of our two SALT events in 2026.

► **WHO:** Senior adult ministers, lay leaders and members of your church's senior adult leadership team/committee/council

► **WHEN and WHERE:** Tuesday, Aug. 18, at First Baptist Church Fultondale, or Thursday, Aug. 20, at First Baptist Church Andalusia

► **TIME:** 9:15 a.m.–3 p.m. Check-in is at 8:30. Lunch will be provided onsite.

► **SESSION TOPICS and LEADERS:** "Beyond the Church Walls — Senior Adults on Mission in Your City," Ed Cleveland, minister of senior adults, First Baptist Church Montgomery "Programming That Mat-

ters: Developing a Thriving Senior Adult Ministry," Clay Layfield, minister of senior adults, Central Baptist Church in Warner Robins, Georgia

► **COST:** Good news. It's free, made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

► **HOW TO REGISTER:** Registration is simple. Just visit alsbom.org/salt and click on the date/location of your choice. Please note that registration is required for attendance and participation. Be sure to include the number attending in your group in the appropriate box on the form. The deadline to register is Aug. 14.

Hope to see you at one of these two great events. Frank Jones, senior adult strategist with the office of Sunday School and discipleship of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, is helping facilitate these events.



‘Real dollar sacrifice’

IMB ‘grateful’ to receive 51% of CP budget allocation in upcoming fiscal year

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Inflation and declining Cooperative Program giving have put pressure on the IMB budget, but strong giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and an increase in funding next year will help keep missionary efforts strong, International Mission Board President Paul Chitwood told messengers to the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting.

Thanks to voluntary reductions for other entities, the IMB will receive 51% of the national CP budget allocation during fiscal year 2026–2027, Chitwood said. “It’s a very real dollar sacrifice on the part of ... the Executive Committee, our six seminaries, the ERLC and NAMB,” he said. “These are our close partnering entities, and we are grateful for the way they prioritize a missionary presence among the nations and for the sacrifices they are making.”

Chitwood highlighted the IMB’s ministry impact in 2025, with nearly 200,000 professions of faith, 7,697 new churches planted and work among 2,358 people groups.



Photo by Marc Ira Hooks/The Alabama Baptist
Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board, gives the entity’s report during the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida, on June 10.

He also commended the 1,803 female missionaries serving with the IMB overseas who represent more than half of the approximately 3,500 total missionary force.

Employing females

“No organization or institution in Southern Baptist life employs more

females in vocational ministry than IMB. Not one of them is in a pastor/elder role or carries the function of pastor/elder,” Chitwood said.

Chitwood acknowledged hearing concerns from pastors and missionaries about “extreme positions that have been voiced over the last few weeks,” and he asked messengers

to affirm “female IMB missionaries who have left their country, their culture, their church, their American comforts and for some, their adult kids and grandkids to answer God’s call upon their lives to take Christ to the nations.”

Vaccination policy

In response to a question from the floor regarding the IMB’s vaccination policy, Chitwood said two reviews of the policy have been conducted in the past year due to questions presented at last year’s annual meeting. Chitwood said an internal review from the IMB medical team and a second review by a group of physicians, professors and professionals not connected to the IMB both affirmed its policy on vaccine requirements.

“These are decisions the IMB has been making for many, many decades, since vaccines became available, to preserve not only the lives of missionaries who go into foreign environments, but the lives of those who we bring foreign contagions to,” Chitwood said. “These are not necessarily easy decisions, but these are well-informed decisions.”

Southern Baptists celebrate 63 newly commissioned IMB missionaries

Southern Baptists celebrated 63 new International Mission Board missionaries during the June 9 opening session of the SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando.

As missionaries took the stage and stood on the floor of the Orange County Convention Center, church messengers listened as they described their callings and expressed gratitude for support of their Great Commission work.

Answering the call

IMB President Paul Chitwood announced that the missionary pipeline is “exploding,” noting a 500% increase in recent years.

“With more lost people living on the planet than at any point in human history, now is the time for

more Southern Baptists to answer God’s call to the nations,” Chitwood said.

He thanked the sending churches of the missionaries for discipling, praying and “generously supporting them through your Cooperative Program and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering gifts.”

“Your IMB missionaries don’t go alone,” he said. “You go with them. Together, we send them and sustain them. Together, we trust God to use the gospel to change everything. I want to invite you to join in — not as spectators but as participants — because this story includes all of us.”

The new appointees join more than 3,500 IMB missionaries and their families serving in 155 countries. (IMB)



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist
Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board, leads the IMB Sending Celebration during the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Full-time pastor — Jasper, Alabama. Pastor retired. Prayerfully seeking a pastor to preach the inerrant Word of God and shepherd our flock. (SBC) Resumé: northsidebaptistchurchjasper@gmail.com

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Goodwater Baptist Church, Goodwater, Alabama, is searching for a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumé to: sneighbors52@charter.net.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Perdido Baptist Church, Perdido, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Please email resumé to: smith73477@bellsouth.net or mail to: P.O. Box 136, Perdido, AL 36562.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Shell Banks Baptist Church on Fort Morgan Road is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: shellbanks7136@yahoo.com.

MUSIC MINISTER

Part-time music minister position. Montevallo First Baptist Church, Montevallo, Alabama. Blended service. For more information, contact pastor@montevallofbc.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSION STRATEGIST

The Autauga Baptist Association is seeking a God-called, visionary leader to serve as our next associational mission strategist (also known as director of missions). This full-time position provides spiritual, strategic and relational leadership to approximately thirty-one Southern Baptist churches and one Hispanic mission in Autauga County. Interested candidates are asked to submit: 1) a resumé or curriculum vitae; 2) a cover letter sharing your personal testimony, your call to ministry, your missional experience and your philosophy of associational ministry; and 3) a link to recent sermons (video preferred). Please email your submission to: abasearchcmte@gmail.com or mail to: the Autauga Baptist Association, 326 S. Washington St., Prattville, AL 36067. Submissions will be accepted through July 18.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

The Baptist Churches in Law-

rence County, Alabama (Muscle Shoals Baptist Association), are currently seeking resumé for the position of director of missions. The deadline for submission of resumé is July 15. Please send resumé to: Muscle Shoals Baptist Association, P.O. Box 485, Moulton, AL 35650-0485, or email them to: msbamoulton@bellsouth.net.

OPERATIONS MANAGER

Etowah Baptist Missions Center, located in Gadsden, Alabama, is a faith-based poverty-alleviation organization looking to hire an operations manager. Candidates must be a member of a local church and preferably reside in Etowah County. The role will include facilitating daily processes to run the center, administrative duties, monitoring resources, volunteer oversight and scheduling. The role requires organization along with strong leadership and problem-solving skills. Questions can be directed to the executive director, Lance Hughes, at 256-295-7531 or by email at jobebmc@gmail.com. A more detailed job description will be provided upon submission of resumé.

PIANIST

Piano player needed on Sunday mornings from 11 a.m.–noon. Dozier Baptist Church, 253 School St., Dozier, AL 36028. Call 334-892-2423.

BUSINESS

STEEPLES, ETC.

No job too big or too small. Call for free on-site consultation. Toll-free 1-888-699-9679 or Alabama local 205-699-9679. Ask for the owner, Terry Barnes. Visit gallery at leadsstainedglass.com.

TRAVEL/VACATION

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~A resource for congregational vitality~

Best missional actions are personal and Christlike

When your congregation chooses to reach out to its community context or the people groups God has called you to serve, from a Christ-centered faith perspective, you know your focus is to fulfill the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment.

Your conviction and commitment to these two should be certain, passionate and carried out faithfully.

What is not always clear is the method or manner you use. I advocate an action-then-reflection approach over a focus on delivering congregationally directed ministries. My conviction about method and manner is that soaring congregations are about touching the lives of others within their context in Christlike ways.

These grassroots missional actions involve coming alongside people to reflect Christ's presence. Rather than focusing solely on congregation-directed programs, events and activities, this approach emphasizes humble presence, Christlike service, and the cultivation of authentic relationships, following the pattern of Jesus' life.

Love your neighbor

You start by loving your neighbor enough to be their neighbor. Remember Mister Rogers? He was a Christian minister with the right idea. Being a neighbor is nurturing an authentic, loving presence among people who need the love of Jesus.

The best way I know to illustrate this is through a personal story. I share it with humility, not boasting.

During my seminary years, I served as a community minister and then as a pastor in an inner-city congregation. The neighborhood's economic level ranged from upper-lower class to lower-middle class. It was a rough area with many ministry needs.

Halfway through the years, the pastor was called to another congregation. Within a few months, the church called me to serve as pastor. My wife and I moved into the parsonage, which was eight feet from one side of the church building and connected to the church by a basement passageway.

We did a lot of work alongside other congregations in this community. None of us had all the resources needed to address the many ministry needs, so it took all of us working together.

One activity of our joint ministry with a group of congregations was our annual

joint Thanksgiving worship service, held to thank God for the blessings of our mutual ministry. The service was held at one of the churches, and a pastor from another church delivered the main message that evening. My first year as pastor was my turn.

Deep appreciation

In my message, I talked about moving into the community six months earlier, when I became pastor. I shared how that experience deepened my appreciation for the people and for the most effective ways to reach them with the love of Christ.

At the end of the service, a woman who was a community organizer and a member of one of the congregations approached me with surprise. She said, "I had no idea you had not always lived in the neighborhood. You embraced us and were one of us from the moment we first knew you."

I had not really planned my approach. I just engaged in what I thought was loving and Christlike.

If you know me well, you know I am not a high-touch guy but a high-task guy, so the comment was truly a surprise. I was humbled. I had no idea people always saw me as an insider. I simply tried to do what God wanted me to do.

May your ministry within a community context or among a people group be so meaningful and genuine that your heartfelt compassion is clearly with the people of the community.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Bullard spent five decades in Baptist congregational and denominational ministry. His ministry roles included three churches, three associations, three state conventions and one national entity. In 2022, he began writing as a columnist for TAB Media Group's publication *The Baptist Paper*. Bullard continues to serve as a strategic thinking mentor for Christian leaders through his *ForthTelling Innovation* ministry. TAB Media Group is the publisher for his *ForthTelling Innovation* book series — available on Amazon.

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EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



For July 5

SIN REVEALED Joshua 7:10–23

What a short step there is between a great victory and a great defeat. Such was the case for Israel.

The victory at Jericho was a great victory. That was chapter 6. Joshua 7 chronicles the terrible defeat of Israel by a much smaller city. Sin in the camp is a serious problem.

Covenant Violated (10–15)

Once again Joshua sent men to scout the next target for conquest. The spies returned and reported that Ai was so small that Joshua only needed to send a few thousand men to capture the city. When about 3,000 soldiers attacked Ai, they were soundly defeated.

The people of Israel were devastated. Joshua responded by tearing his clothes and falling down before the Ark of the Lord with the elders of Israel. All of them put dust on their heads to symbolize their mourning before the Lord.

Driven by his frustration and concern, Joshua asked the Lord why He had brought them over the Jordan to hand them over to the Amorites.

He also expressed concern for the Lord's reputation before the nations if His people were defeated by their enemies.

The Lord rebuked Joshua in verse 10. He needed to get up and deal with the problem of sin in the camp. The Lord accused the nation of violating His covenant by stealing from Him.

Joshua had clearly warned the people of Israel not to take any of the things in Jericho that had been set apart to the Lord for destruction. Everything was either to be destroyed or dedicated to the Lord's treasury (6:17–19).

The Lord commanded Joshua to have the people prepare to stand before Him the next day. The guilty man and everything he had would be destroyed.

Achan Revealed (16–19)

The following day Joshua rose early so there would be no delay in obeying God's instructions. He was eager to remove the sin from their midst and restore God's blessing to His people.

Joshua had the tribes of Israel brought near as the Lord had instructed.

The verdict came first to the tribe of Judah, then to the clan of the Zerahites, then to the family of Zabdi and finally from Zabdi's men to Achan.

When the guilty man was identified, Joshua commanded Achan to confess what he had done. He was to give glory to the Lord by making a full confession of his sin.

Confession Made (20–23)

Achan made a full confession of what he had stolen and where it was buried. Messengers were sent to his tent and found the things Achan had stolen. They brought the things to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Ark of the Covenant.

Achan's confession did not nullify God's judgment upon him and his family. Joshua brought Achan, all that he had stolen and his family to the Valley of Achor, where the stolen items were burned and his family was stoned to death.

The family was stoned to death because they were complicit with Achan in his sin. Achan himself had plenty of time to confess but only did so when caught with his hand in the cookie jar. His sin disregarded God's holiness and resulted in the deaths of his family and 36 soldiers.

Secret sins on earth are open scandal in heaven. Sin always has serious consequences — not only to yourself but also to others.

EDITOR'S NOTE — The Sunday School lesson outlines are provided by Lifeway.

For July 12

UNWAVERING DETERMINATION Joshua 14:1–15

In these verses we learn about the distribution of the land west of the Jordan River. The writer highlights the roles of Moses, Eleazar and Joshua as well as the obedience of the people in allotting the land.

Obedience (1–5)

Readers may wonder about the mention of Eleazar and the family heads of the Israelite tribes since they have not been a part of the narrative to this point. We must remember that Moses commanded Eleazar the priest, Joshua and one leader from each of the 12 tribes to be involved in allotting the land (Num. 34:17–18).

The Transjordanian tribes had already received their land as their inheritance from Moses (v. 3). The remaining tribes would be allotted their land based on casting lots (v. 2), which explains the role Eleazar would play since the priests were commissioned to cast lots.

Lots were used to determine God's will in a matter. In the Old Testament, high priests used the Urim and Thummim as sacred lots to discern the will of the Lord. In the New Testament, the apostles cast lots to determine the man God wanted to replace Judas. Much mystery surrounds the casting of lots, but the most important emphasis in Scripture is that the outcome was not random (Prov. 16:33). God was in control of determining the land to be allotted to each tribe.

While the Levites were not given any portion of land, they were given cities to live in along with pasturelands for their cattle and livestock. According to Joshua 21, 48 cities were designated for the Levites.

The people carefully obeyed God's instructions to Moses concerning distribution of the land.

Devotion (6–9)

This section of our lesson focuses on Caleb's faithfulness and devotion to God. Caleb was one of the 12 spies sent to scout the promised land. Along with Joshua, Caleb had presented the minority report to Moses and the people of Israel.

Ten of the spies presented the majority report, declaring that the people in Canaan were bigger and stronger than they were. According to them, there wasn't any way they could take the land of Canaan.

Caleb had urged the people of Israel to trust the Lord and go up and possess the land God had promised to give them. With God fighting for them they would certainly conquer the land.

At this stage of the conquest, Caleb came to Joshua and reminded him of what Moses promised him in Numbers 14:24. Because of their faith and devotion to God, Joshua and Caleb, along with their families, were the only ones from that generation allowed to enter the promised land.

Inheritance (10–15)

Caleb made the point that the Lord had kept him alive through the last 45 years from the events at Kadesh-barnea to their current encampment at Gilgal. All the other spies and people of age — except Joshua — had died in the wilderness before the conquest of Canaan.

Caleb also pointed out that he was just as strong as he had been 45 years earlier. The Lord had blessed Caleb mightily in the past, but he needed that strength in the present as he fought to defeat the Anakim who lived in and around the land Joshua would give him.

Because of his unwavering devotion, Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. We too are to follow the Lord wholeheartedly as we possess our promised inheritance in Christ.

“And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, just as He said, these forty-five years ...”

Joshua 14:10

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By **Scott Bush, D.Min.**

Executive Director, Ministry Training Institute, Samford University



For July 5

SPEAKING TRUTH **Luke 18:18–30**

An old “preacher story” says that trappers once used a jar with a small opening and a treat inside to capture monkeys. The idea was that the monkey could fit his hand into the jar but, once he grasped the object inside, his fist would no longer fit through the opening. As long as the monkey held on to his new possession, he was trapped in the jar. His only hope of freedom was letting go.

A quick internet search will tell you that this story is more myth than fact. Monkeys are actually smart enough to let go. But the point of the illustration is well taken.

We’ve all seen (or maybe even been) people who are captivated by the material world and the things it can offer, stubbornly holding on to wealth and comforts when something far more valuable is being offered.

The way to eternal life is through becoming a follower of Jesus. (18–23)

Luke sets his telling of the story near the end of his travel narrative. As Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem to die for sinners, a man approaches Him with an all-important question — “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Luke describes the man as a ruler — possibly a leader in the local synagogue but certainly a man of influence and reputation.

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus replies, noting that only God is good. In His response, Jesus hints at the answer to the question. The Way was standing right before the man. Following Jesus, who is God (both could be called “good”), would lead to eternal life.

The love of wealth can be an obstacle to receiving God’s grace. (24–27)

“You know the command-

ments,” Jesus answers the man, giving examples from the Ten Commandments.

The man replies, perhaps with some relief, “I have kept all these from my youth.” Jesus responds, “You still lack one thing.”

He instructs the man to distribute his great wealth among the poor and to follow Him.

Jesus addresses the final commandment against covetousness or the love of acquisition. James cautions that breaking the law at even a single point is breaking the whole law (2:10), and Paul equates covetousness with idolatry, a violation of the first commandment (Col. 3:5).

Jesus is not here requiring that all of His followers completely divest themselves of possessions, but He is giving a serious warning about the power of what we own to distract and disorient us.

When we have wealth (and even when we don’t but wish we did), we can easily find our hope in it and not pray as we should.

We find our joy in it, so we don’t worship as we should. We even get our self-esteem from it, and we fail to appreciate the unconditional and costly love of God for us.

Those who choose to follow Jesus receive benefits now and for eternity. (28–30)

In a most pitiful turn, Luke tells us that the man was saddened at Jesus’ invitation because of his wealth. Others who heard this teaching were also perplexed.

Here Jesus uses a delightful illustration. The camel passing through a needle’s eye is not some veiled reference to a low gate into the city; it’s a comical image of the impossible.

It’s God who does the impossible. He changes the worldly, greedy heart and gives greater blessings, both in this life and in the age to come.

For July 12

EXTENDING GRACE **Luke 19:1–10**

People often speak of feeling “seen” whenever others understand or appreciate them. To be “unseen” can be lonely, hopeless, even desperate. Zacchaeus was a man who may have had few real friends and felt little compassion from his neighbors. He may have even felt distant from God. Short in stature and socially despised, Zacchaeus may have been easily overlooked but Jesus saw him and that changed everything.

We must be sensitive to the hearts of those seeking Jesus. (1–4)

Jesus passed through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. An ancient town famous for the fall of its formidable walls, Jericho in Jesus’ day was a center for the production of balsam, a plant extract used in medicine. This made the city a lucrative spot for tax collection. As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus controlled taxation in his area, supervising other tax collectors. This arrangement made him very wealthy but cost him socially. Tax collectors were hated for their service to the Roman authorities and for their exploitation of the Jews they taxed.

Luke adds another detail — Zacchaeus was short. When the excited crowds turned out to see Jesus, Zacchaeus was forced to climb a tree to get a look. Imagine the reactions of his neighbors to this wealthy man who was known for his dishonesty and indifference straining to get a look at Jesus, a teacher known for His compassion. There was likely little sympathy.

In His grace, God seeks fellowship with us. (5–6)

In a most interesting turn, Jesus not only notices Zacchaeus in the tree, but He addresses him. The man who might have been easily

overlooked for his small stature or for his stingy reputation was noticed by Jesus. Even more, Jesus announced plans to eat with Zacchaeus that very day. Table fellowship in that time and culture was far more significant than today. Jesus was often criticized for dining with sinners, so it’s no surprise that the crowds are disappointed that He went home with Zacchaeus.

By initiating fellowship with Zacchaeus, Jesus models what the New Testament consistently teaches. If we are to be saved, God must come to us (19:10). He invites us to Himself (John 6:44, Rom. 3:9–11, 1 John 4:19), overcoming our sinful resistance (Rom. 5:8). And when He does, we can know that He will receive us and never cast us out (John 6:37, Rev. 3:20).

When we are transformed by God’s grace, we treat others with grace. (7–10)

In the company of Jesus, Zacchaeus is transformed. The man who once trusted in his wealth now pledges to give most of it away. Now he loves and trusts in Jesus. He once cared little for his neighbors — except for what he could get from them. Now he plans to meet their needs.

Are we often insensitive to others who, because of their reputation or appearance or demeanor, we deem unlikely to be sincerely interested in Jesus? When Jesus changes a life, the individual reflects His grace.

The Apostle Paul says that, after his conversion, he doesn’t think of Jesus the same way, and he can no longer think of people in the same way (2 Cor. 5:16). My pastor says, “The world tells us to love things and use people but, in Christ, we learn to use things and love people.” We can even use the things we have to love and bless people. Zacchaeus learned and lived this lesson. May we all do the same.

“And [Zacchaeus] was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not ...”

Luke 19:3

Game changer: 'We see you.'

SBC task force urges congregations not to overlook disability ministry

If you took all the people on our planet with disabilities and added them together, you would have the third largest country in the world, just behind India and China," asserted Tom Stolle, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

"It is quite possible that individuals affected by disabilities are the largest lost people group on the planet," he added. "We cannot leave them behind."

On June 10, the Southern Baptist Convention's Disability Ministry Task Force presented its report and recommendations to messengers at the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando.

In response to a 2025 motion by Benjamin Hankin, a messenger from New Jersey, the SBC Executive Committee formed this task force at its September meeting to study the availability of special needs ministry resources for churches.

Stolle, the father of an adult son with special needs, chaired the task force.

In his report, Stolle highlighted a 2020 study by Lifeway Research, which reported that 99% of evangelical pastors believe individuals with disabilities would feel welcome in their churches.

Significant disparity

However, "many people with disabilities and their families have expressed surprise and skepticism at this finding, citing the persistent physical, social and relational barriers they encounter when visiting congregations," Stolle said.

"This disparity suggests that barriers to inclusion remain significant, as evidenced by estimates that only 15 to 20% of evangelical churches



Photo by Van Payne/The Alabama Baptist

Tom Stolle, chair of the SBC's Disability Ministry Task Force and executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, speaks during the second Executive Committee report at the 2026 SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida.

in the United States have any form of disability ministry," said Stolle, sharing some of the common barriers parents and caregivers of individuals affected by developmental and intellectual disabilities face when considering if they should take the "risk" of attending church.

'No one saw us'

"Personally, my family, including my son, have experienced all these stated barriers," said Stolle. "So many other families have experienced the same barriers."

Moreover, recent census data indicates that approximately 2 in 7 U.S. families include a member with a disability, yet this proportion is not reflected in church participation.

During a press conference, when discussing raising his son Jimmy into adulthood, Stolle said the hardest part wasn't the violence. It wasn't the destruction in the home.

It wasn't the "over and over grinding through the same routines." It was "the fact that we felt like no one saw us," he said.

Stolle pointed to Matthew 20, where two blind men cry out to Jesus.

"The crowd tells the men to shut up," Stolle said. "But Jesus hears them. Sees them. Stops for them. Heals them. The men, formerly blind, now follow Him."

He posited, "What would it look like if SBC churches, state conventions and national entities took steps that essentially state, 'We see you. We hear you. We love you. Jesus loves you. There is a place for you at our church.'

"That's a game changer!" he said.

The task force has made requests across the landscape of the SBC — not just state conventions and local churches, but also requests for SBC entities to help the initiative.

Advancing the Kingdom

Some of the recommendations for SBC entities include adding disability ministry specialists and consultants to teams; adding accessibility options and modifications to existing curriculum and writing new curriculum; increasing and promoting resources and trainings in state conventions, mission boards and policy arenas; and offering seminary certificate programs, classes and degrees in disability ministry.

"We believe collectively our work is to advance the Kingdom deeper into the arena of disability and this will result in many coming to Jesus," Stolle said.

To read the full report and recommendations from the Disability Ministry Task Force, visit sbc.net/disabilityministry. (Baptist Press)

Disability Ministry Task Force recommendations for churches

► **Recognize** disability's prevalence (15% to 20% of the population) and the opportunity to reach underserved families with the gospel.

► **Identify** leaders and families affected by disability to address

barriers to church participation.

► **Develop** a disability inclusion plan for evangelism, discipleship, fellowship and service.

► **Build** trust with families affected by disability, meeting needs and pointing them to Jesus.