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Families relocating to Texas find a place at Currey Creek



Children make up a significant portion of the attendance each week at Currey Creek Church, located in a fast-growing area northwest of San Antonio. PHOTO BY GINA HANCOCK

By Erin Roach | TEXAN Correspondent

BOERNE

As thousands of people relocate to Texas, some are finding a new church home at Currey Creek Church in Boerne, a growing Southern Baptist congregation about half an hour northwest of San Antonio on I-10.

“They Google ‘great places to live in Texas,’ and Boerne comes up,” John Free, pastor of Currey Creek, told the TEXAN.

See CURREY CREEK, 6

87th Texas Legislature wraps up till fall sessions



By Bonnie Pritchett
TEXAN Correspondent

AUSTIN The 87th Session of the Texas Legislature closed at the end of May but unfinished business will draw lawmakers back to Austin in the fall for two more sessions. New laws protecting unborn babies from abortion and promoting criminal justice reform highlight some of the pro-life, SBTC-backed legislation. But key bills failed to get a hearing and must be addressed in one of the upcoming special sessions according to Cindy Asmussen, an SBTC advisor.

See LEGISLATURE, 5

WRAP-UP: SBC elects Litton, takes control of EC investigation



By David Roach
Baptist Press

NASHVILLE From the moment the gavel dropped—or actually, with the gavel that dropped—calling them to order, it was clear messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting June 15-16 in Nashville were ready to make changes and challenge traditions in the name of advancing the gospel.

SBC President J.D. Greear had previously retired the Broadus Gavel, which was named for slaveowner John Broadus and had been used continuously at annual meetings by SBC presidents since 1872. Instead, he gaveled the conven-

See SBC, 8

FROM THE EDITOR Gary Ledbetter

What happened in Nashville?

It's been a while since a meeting of the SBC garnered so much interest from outside press. For that reason, convention goers heard from friends and family asking, "I heard (insert dire and distorted report) happened at the SBC!" This interest from those who didn't attend, or who aren't even Southern Baptists, was keener this year, and it was driven by non-Baptist media. I'd even go so far as to say that some outlets tried to put a finger on the scales of a deliberative body in which they had no personal investment. Here are some things you might have heard:

The SBC elected a liberal as president. Nope. Yes, "liberal" is a relative term, but it is also very loaded. In the SBC, in my lifetime, we've had professors teaching in our schools who denied the deity of Christ and the truth of Scripture. That is a fair definition of "liberal." Ed Litton is not a liberal. He is an inerrantist, a complementarian and an evangelistic pastor. Yes, he has a different view of some convention issues than many of us, but his is an arguably biblical viewpoint. I can't imagine how it can be helpful to throw that term around as if the SBC is over. It's not. More on that later.

The SBC has been saved from Philistines. Again, this is unhelpful rhetoric that tempts us all when we win a vote. Several votes were very close, usually indicating a difference in two reasonable ideas, and most of us lost one or two. Those votes we lost were not the end of the world; neither were the ones we won the answer we've all been waiting for. In a year when it's common to speak about unity, I find it unbecoming to speak of half of our fellow conservative, inerrantist, mission-loving brothers and sisters as the problem we came here to solve. Maybe we've



all done it, but that doesn't make it right. We're not Democrats and Republicans for those two days each year.

The convention wavered in its opposition to abortion. In an unusual event, a resolution was brought from the floor and placed on the agenda. You can read the details here in the July TEXAN, but the debate highlights a divide concerning strategy among those passionate to see the horror of abortion ended. Those who did not favor the "abortion abolitionist" resolution were not guilty of compromise with the abortion industry. The debate was over a strategy that has seriously curtailed the number of abortions over the past 40 years. One pro-life group wanted us to abandon the strategy of making abortion rarer by insisting we go "all or nothing"—making all abortions illegal becoming our only strategy. A small wording edit gave us a strong but confused pro-life resolution that allows us to continue to work alongside other pro-life Christians in the fight to end abortion.

The convention was contentious. In a sense it was—people contended strongly for more than one way of accomplishing agreed-upon goals. One article referred to a "vicious" debate going on between Southern Baptists. It wasn't that. If by "contentious" you mean that we were ugly to one another, that was rare and not encouraged. I heard booing a couple of times, but it was quickly reproved. The hallways were crowded; the food lines were long; the convention center was very large and spread out so that everyone was a little stressed by the context. But the crowd was also polite and good humored. You will almost never see a sporting event of any size where the people are this nice. And we were discussing things far more important than a ball game. I am not ashamed of my brothers and sisters after spending too much time with them in Nashville.

Messengers came to do business. I don't know if you've heard this anywhere, but it's true. It's been a while since we had this much time devoted to business. The moderator and committee leaders bent over backward to allow folks time to talk, add items to the agenda, extend the time for discussion and amend anything they wanted to. These things plus an unusual number of candidates for elected office blew some of our agenda items out of the water. Albert Mohler, in his interview with the TEXAN last year, said that we have shortened the program so much that people don't have time to hang out and eat together. I'm sympathetic with that point but was surprised this year to see that maybe we have shortened the program so much that we are not prepared for people to be active in convention business. It might be good to build into the program more time than we need for messengers' participation and then let us out early for lunch if we don't need the time.

A final note: The Southern Baptist Convention is more durable than one year's business can permanently fix or break. I guess we're a little like the U.S.—presidents and congresses come and go, never making as much impact as they threaten or promise. I've found it helpful to remember that when I'm in the minority. If the other guys are wrong, they won't be as wrong as I fear. If I'm right, it won't matter as much as I'd hoped. Perhaps you disagree, but that perspective helps me grant others the grace to outvote me from time to time.

If you want a good report on SBC business, read Baptist Press or the TEXAN. Maybe the outside media is doing their best, but your Southern Baptist journalists are the gold standard for the story of our convention. 📰

gledbetter@sbtc.com
@sbtc



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Nathan Lorick, Executive Director
Gary K. Ledbetter, Editor
Jane Rodgers, Managing Editor
Gayla Holt, Circulation Manager
Russell Lightner, Designer

Correspondents:
Michael Foust
Bonnie Prichett
Erin Roach

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What's Next?

sbtc.com/events



July

Full calendar, use your phone's camera to scan QR code. →



5-9 *m3 camp* Highland Lakes, Spicewood

9-10 **Capacitarte Regional Conference**
Iglesia Bautista Trinidad, Laredo

11 **Special Needs Ministry Sunday**

13 **Evangelism Roundtable, Online**

15-19 *m3 camp*
Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, OK

26-30 *m3 camp*
Camp Zephyr, Sandia

28 **SBTC Chapel Grapevine**

All in-person events subject to change based on COVID conditions.

August

For more details on SBTC events visit sbtc.com/events

2-6 **Youth Week**
Riverbend Retreat Center, Glen Rose

13 **Interim Pastor Equipping**
Lazybrook Baptist Church, Houston

14 **EQUIP conference**
Champion Forest BC, Houston

25 **SBTC Chapel**
Grapevine

26 **RevTalks Online**
Zoom

Supreme Court to hear the 'most important abortion-related case' in years

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a major abortion case this fall that pro-lifers hope leads to the dismantling of *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 decision that legalized abortion nationwide.

At issue is a 2018 Mississippi law that prohibits abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy except in cases of a medical emergency or severe fetal abnormality. Although lower courts struck the law down as unconstitutional under Supreme Court precedent, the high court agreed to take the case and consider a single question: Are all laws restricting pre-viability abortions unconstitutional?

If the law is upheld, it would be the biggest pro-life legal victory in more than a decade and potentially



since the *Roe* decision itself.

"This is the most important abortion-related case in a very long time," said Lila Rose, president and founder of the pro-life group Live Action.

It is, she said, "long overdue" for the Supreme Court "to revisit" *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, a 1992 case that upheld *Roe*. Both cases, she said, "have led to the death of over 60 million innocent children and led many women and men to lifelong regret."

"A 15-week old baby has a face, fingernails, eyelashes, a heartbeat, and brain waves," Rose said. "The Supreme Court should grant equal protection under the law to all humans, even from the very beginning of every human's life."

The Mississippi legislature drew the line at 15 weeks due to a common procedure used in late-term abortions. According to the law's text, the majority of abortion procedures after 15 weeks use a procedure known as dilation and evacuation that

involves crushing and tearing the unborn child apart "before removing the pieces of the dead child from the womb." The law calls the procedure "barbaric" as well as "dangerous" to the woman.

Elizabeth Graham of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) applauding the Supreme Court for taking the issue, saying it "could be a generationally significant case for the future of abortion in America."

"All Americans of goodwill want the state to protect their neighbors from harm, and yet, just as Jesus told us, we will argue among ourselves about who really counts as our neighbor," said Graham, the ERLC's vice president of operations and life initiatives.

"The question our nation must wrestle with is whether or not a child in the womb is, indeed, a preborn child and, therefore, our neighbor," she said. "As Christians, knowing the answer is not a reason to feel moral superiority, but to lament the abortion industry's legal lies and to work to undo them. This case could be instrumental toward that end."

—LIVE ACTION, NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE, BAPTIST PRESS

Poll: Pastors overwhelmingly value role of denominations

Protestant pastors whose churches are in denominations see great value in denominations, although they aren't certain about their future, according to a new Lifeway Research survey.

An overwhelming majority (78 percent) of Protestant pastors whose churches are in a denomination or denomination-like group say they personally "consider it vital" to be part of a denomination, with 53 percent strongly agreeing, according to the poll, which was released in June.

A similar percentage (77 percent) say they believe their congregation considers it vital for their church to be part of a denomination, though fewer strongly

agree (44 percent).

The numbers are similar to a Lifeway poll in 2010, when 76 percent of such pastors considered denominations to be vital and 77 percent said their congregations believed denominations are vital.

But pastors in the poll are uncertain about the future of denominations, with 63 percent believing their importance will diminish over the next 10 years. Pastors in the 2010 survey had similar beliefs, with 62 percent in that earlier poll believing the importance of denominations would diminish over the following decade.

Young pastors ages 18-44 in the new survey are the least likely (54 percent) to say identifying with a denomination will diminish in importance in the next decade.

—LIFEWAY RESEARCH

SCOTUS rules unanimously for Catholic Social Services

The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously delivered an important victory for religious liberty June 17 by upholding a faith-based adoption and foster-care agency's right to carry out its ministry according to its beliefs.

In a judgment that spanned the ideological spectrum, the nine justices agreed Philadelphia violated the First Amendment's protection of the free exercise of religion by refusing to contract with Catholic Social Services (CSS) for foster care services. The city halted referrals to the agency for foster homes it licenses in 2018 because CSS does not place children with same-sex couples based on its beliefs about marriage and sexuality.

Daniel Patterson, acting president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), called the ruling a "decisive" victory for religious freedom.

"The government has many God-given duties but punishing a group for its theology is emphatically not one of them," Patterson said in a written statement. "It's important to note as well that this decision prohibits no one from serving children—it simply ends state discrimination against religious groups."

CSS—which does not place children with same-sex or unmarried heterosexual couples based on its belief about marriage—had worked with Philadelphia for more than 50 years to help provide foster care before the city said in 2018 it would no longer refer children to the agency because its refusal to certify gay couples violated non-discrimination requirements. CSS had never been approached by a same-sex couple and said it would refer such a household to an agency that provides placement with same-sex couples. Nearly 30 agencies work with the city on foster care.

The Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia affirmed in 2019 a lower-court opinion, ruling the city had not violated CSS' freedom of religion or speech.

In the court's opinion, Chief Justice John Roberts said CSS "seeks only an accommodation that will allow it to continue serving the children of Philadelphia in a manner consistent with its religious beliefs; it does not seek to impose those beliefs on anyone else."

Philadelphia's refusal to contract with the Catholic agency to provide foster care services unless CSS "agrees to certify same-sex couples as foster parents cannot survive strict scrutiny, and violates the First Amendment," Roberts wrote.

—TOM STRODE, BAPTIST PRESS

Southwestern Seminary's Greenway announces 3 new appointments

Southwestern Seminary President Adam W. Greenway announced in June his appointment of three individuals to key institutional leadership roles. Travis H. Trawick is now associate provost, F. Edward Upton is now interim vice president for institutional advancement, and Lucas Hahn has been named director of admissions.

"These exceptional leaders will help Southwestern Seminary in delivering the very best theological education at every level for the current and next generation of Southwesterners," Greenway said. "Travis Trawick, Ed Upton, and Lucas Hahn each bring proven experience and great skills to these offices,

which will richly benefit our institution in every area these leaders steward."

As associate provost, Trawick, who served as vice president for institutional advancement since 2018, will provide oversight for the areas of institutional effectiveness, assessment, and the work of the office of the registrar, while also serving as the liaison for the seminary with the accrediting agencies. In partnership with the deans, he will also oversee the work of the library.

Upton, who will be considered for election to his position by the board of trustees during its fall meeting, came to Southwestern Seminary in 2020 as associate vice president for institutional relations.

With the naming of Hahn, the office of admissions is now part of the Institutional Advancement division of the seminary, Greenway announced.

—SWBTS

Diver is swallowed by a whale and survives: 'I was completely inside'

A Massachusetts lobster diver in June survived being swallowed by a humpback whale in an incredible tale that some Christian leaders compared to the biblical story of Jonah.

Michael Packard, a 56-year-old diver whose job is to pluck lobsters from the ocean floor, said he was about 45 feet below the ocean surface off Cape Cod when the humpback whale swallowed him.

"All of a sudden I just felt this huge bump, and everything went dark. And I could sense that I was moving," he told CBS Boston. "And I was like ... did I just get bit by a shark? And then I felt around and I realized there was no teeth. And I felt really no great pain. And then I realized ... I'm in a whale's mouth and he's trying to swallow me. And I thought to myself, Okay, this is it. ... I'm going to die."

Packard told the Cape Cod Times, "I was completely inside."

The diver, still breathing and wearing his scuba gear, began fighting the whale. He estimates he was inside the whale for at least 30 seconds.

"All of a sudden, he went up to the surface, and just erupted and started shaking his head, and I just got thrown in the air and landed in the water," Packard said. "And I just floated. And I was just, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe I got out of that. I'm here to tell it. I thought my legs were broken but I'm [only] all bruised up. I made it."

His crewman, Josiah Mayo, watched Packard surface and rescued him.

Jooke Robbins, director of Humpback Whale Studies at the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, Mass., said the whale likely swallowed Packard by accident. Whales are not aggressive animals toward humans, Robbins said.

Several Christian leaders highlighted the news story.

"Anyone who has doubts about the Jonah & the whale story in the Bible needs to read this article," tweeted Hugh Ross, president and founder of the Christian ministry Reasons to Believe. "Note the comment about the altruistic behavior of whales toward humans and the whale surfacing before spitting out the diver."

"I'm wondering if the former president of a Baptist university who told me that no one still believes Jonah was swallowed by a whale has seen this?" tweeted Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board.

—CBS BOSTON, CAPE COD TIMES, CBN



GRATEFUL FOR MY FAMILY



Nathan Lorick
Executive Director

nlorick@sbtxas.com
@NathanLorick

I am grateful for my family. Yes, of course I am grateful for my wife and kids and extended family. However, the family I am referring to is my SBTC family.

I still remember hearing about the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention back in 2001 when I went on staff at First Baptist Church of Waskom. Though somewhat still a new convention, the SBTC was well on its way to becoming the incredible family of churches it is today. Eventually as I became a pastor at Martin's Mill Baptist Church, I knew I wanted my first church to be fully engaged in the life of the SBTC. Af-

“
WHAT I WOULD COME TO LEARN AND TO LOVE ABOUT THE SBTC WAS NOT WHAT I THOUGHT WHEN I FIRST BEGAN ENGAGING IN THE CONVENTION.
”

ter we uniquely affiliated, I immediately began seeking out opportunities to be involved as a pastor. What I would come to learn and to love about the SBTC was not what I thought when I first began engaging in the convention.

I did not take the traditional seminary route. Therefore, I did not get the opportunity to live on campus and begin developing ministry friendships and relationships. I knew I needed to find a network in which I could build those relationships. What I found at the SBTC would forever change my life and ministry. While I knew the convention would provide assistance in ministry, funding, strategy, care, encouragement and all kinds of other things I needed as a pastor, the one thing I didn't expect was to find a family.

For me, the SBTC has gone far above and beyond the usual ex-



Nathan Lorick discusses his new SBTC position in a Vision panel at the SBC annual meeting in Nashville on June 15. PHOTO BY JANE RODGERS

pectations of a convention. This body of churches has been such a blessing to me.

On one occasion about 15 years ago, I remember walking into a room full of pastors. Those in the room ranged from bi-vocational pastors to pastors you see on TV. There were rural pastors and urban church planters. There were small and mega-church pastors, all in the same room. I felt somewhat honored yet unworthy to be there. As I scanned the landscape of that room, although I didn't know many people there, it felt like home.

It wasn't home because of where the meeting was being hosted. It wasn't home because of those on the program or even the theme. It was home because I knew I was in a room full of like-minded believers with a common

purpose to serve Christ and his Church. The thing about families is that we stick together. We are better together. Through the good and bad times, we are family.

Fast forward 15 years and I am in awe that God allows me to serve our family of churches in this new capacity. I want you to know that I will give it all I have and will pour out my life to serve you and your church, to the glory of God. It's my desire that you will also find family in the SBTC, if you haven't already. I encourage you to reach out to fellow pastors, engage in our ministries and attend our events. The SBTC desires to come alongside you in ministry.

I want to thank you, my SBTC family, for this opportunity. I consider it the greatest ministry privilege of my life. I love my family! 🙌

A tribute to a friend



Kie Bowman
SBTC President

kbowman@hpbc.org
@KieBowman

I am personally grateful for Jim Richards. His retirement affords me the opportunity to pay him tribute for his leadership, and thank him publicly for his friendship. For the last 10 years, I've served on the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention board, and in that time I've worked closely with him. I have known many outstanding leaders in Southern Baptist life, and I rank Jim Richards among the best.

I met Jim Richards in the early 1990s when neither of us lived in Texas yet, and I served on the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention while he was on the Christian Life Commission. Then, later, when the SBTC was forming, and I was already the pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church, I invited him to

Austin to visit with me about the future, and the formation of the new state convention. (He only half-jokingly reminds us today that in those earliest days, the SBTC office was the front seat of his car and the switchboard was his cell phone.) His tireless efforts on behalf of our convention since its inception have produced nearly miraculous results. His convictional leadership has helped make the SBTC what I believe is the best state convention of them all.

When the time was right for our church to examine our state convention alignment, our leaders interviewed two state convention executives representing different bodies. Both made appealing arguments about why we should align with their conventions. For us, however, the decision was made easier when our church leaders asked the two executives one simple question: Do you believe in the inerrancy of Scripture? One executive said he could not commit to that.

Jim Richards, on the other hand, enthusiastically assured us of his personal convictions about biblical inerrancy, and of the doctrinal conviction of the SBTC concerning inerrancy, which is woven into our founding documents and our statements of who we are and why we exist. Our church enthusiastically decided to align with the SBTC because they represent our beliefs about the Bible and the Great Commission. Executive Director Richards was a powerful and persuasive voice in helping our leaders know where the SBTC

“
OUR CHURCH ENTHUSIASTICALLY DECIDED TO ALIGN WITH THE SBTC BECAUSE THEY REPRESENT OUR BELIEFS ABOUT THE BIBLE AND THE GREAT COMMISSION.
”

stands, and we have never regretted our decision.

Jim Richards is, in some ways, a local church pastor at heart. He has preached for us at Hyde Park Baptist Church and will again. He has led conferences which our people have loved. His book on Revelation ought to be on every believer's library shelf. His commitment to personal evangelism and the proclamation of the gospel in his frequent preaching opportunities is representative of where we should all be. He has been the consummate leader of the SBTC and its ministry to our churches because he understands our churches.

He has called me on confidential and sensitive matters over the years related to convention business, and I've always admired his clarity of thought, and precision in decision making, backed by a spine of steel. I once heard a

preacher describe another leader he trusted as “12 inches to the foot and 36 inches to the yard.” I trust Jim Richards like that. He's the real deal. I'm certain the blessing of God has rested on our Southern Baptists of Texas Convention in part because Jim Richards has those remarkable leadership qualities that have gotten us here.

One day, he told me in confidence he was considering retirement. I had hoped it wouldn't have come as soon as it did. He later made that public announcement while the SBTC Board was meeting at Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin. If anyone is keeping score, please don't blame me that I've been SBTC president during a global pandemic and while Jim Richards retired. It just happened that way.

I'm a big Nathan Lorick fan, too. I was on the search team that recommended him. He is the best man to lead us into the future. I'm here to assist him in any way, and I'm excited about what God wants to do through all of us in the days ahead.

So as I look forward, I feel a lot of confidence because of what I see when I glance back. Jim Richards has done the impossible in one sense. From leading the SBTC in its infancy, less than 25 years ago, to the day when he passed the baton to Nathan Lorick, the SBTC has become, in one generation, the greatest state convention of them all.

Thank you, Jim Richards. You are a blessing to many and a leader with a lasting legacy in Texas and beyond. 🙌

LEGISLATURE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As of June 9, Gov. Greg Abbott had not set a date for either special session.

During one of the upcoming sessions lawmakers will redraw voting district boundaries based on data from the 2020 U.S. Census. That information has been delayed due to modifications in data processing. But, according to the U.S. Census press office, “states are expected to receive redistricting data by August 16, and the full redistricting data with toolkits for ease of use will be delivered by September 30.”

After studying the data, Texas lawmakers will meet, possibly in October, to draw voting districts.

When the regular session ended May 31 without passing bills related to bail bond reform, social media censorship and election reform, Abbott pledged to call a special session to finish that work.

A special session lasts 30 days and the governor determines what bills will be addressed. But Asmussen, SBTC advisor to the Texas Ethics and Religious Liberty Committee, urged Texans to contact the governor to press for consideration of life-affirming, religious liberty and transgender bills that failed in the regular session.

Bills failed

High on the TERLC priority list are bills addressing the rapid, unchecked promotion of transgender ideology by medical associations, public schools and influential corporations.

Texas lawmakers introduced bills as proactive measures against the Equality Act looming in Congress. If passed, the law would add gender identity and sexual orientation to the list of protected classes in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Equality Act includes no provisions for religious or conscience objections—in contravention to the First Amendment.

“That’s what’s so egregious coming out of this session,” Asmussen said. “We need freedom of conscience bills. [Bills] protecting girls sports and protecting children, protecting against gender modification procedures on minors. We need these things protected in Texas law from what we’re being threatened with on the federal level,” she said.

Some bills sought to protect people who could lose their professional licenses and their jobs for not affirming the gender identity of children and adults.

“



We need freedom of conscience bills. [Bills] protecting girls sports and protecting children, protecting against gender modification procedures on minors. We need these things protected in Texas law from what we’re being threatened with on the federal level.”

Cindy Asmussen, SBTC advisor

Other potential losers this session include female athletes forced to compete against biological males who identify as female. House Bill 1458, the Fair Play in Women’s Sports Act, is comparable to laws passed in seven states and would have required public school and university athletes to compete on teams based on their biological sex. The measure had 77 co-authors yet failed to pass.

“This is a no-brainer,” said Asmussen. “Other states are blazing a trail in front of us and we’re not even pulling up the rear on this.”

Asmussen questioned whether pressure from outside Texas stopped the bill in its tracks.

“I think we need to go back and look at bills like this and we need to look at campaign donations,” Asmussen told the TEXAN.

Her suspicion is not unfounded.

Days before the Texas legislature gaveled to a close, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill protecting female athletes from competing against biological males despite warnings from the National Collegiate Athletic Association. In April, the NCAA reaffirmed its commitment to transgender athletes and threatened to direct championship tournaments away from locations that “cannot commit to providing an environment that is safe, healthy and free of discrimination” and “welcoming and respectful of all participants.”

One bill that would have prohibited the medical “transition” of minors was House Bill 68, the Innocence Protection Act. It also labeled as “child abuse” the prescription of puberty blockers to children and the surgical re-

moval of children’s and teenagers’ healthy reproductive organs.

House Bill 1424 would have provided protection for doctors who refuse to provide such gender treatments. The measure failed.

Asmussen was grateful for the demise of some bills. Dozens of lobbyists wagered their influence could influence lawmakers to legalize casino and online gambling in Texas. Their efforts failed.

What passed

Despite the demise of some key legislation, Asmussen and Rep. Scott Sanford, R-McKinney highlighted TERLC-supported bills that made it to the governor for his signature.

Most notably, Abbott signed Senate Bill 8, the Heartbeat Bill. The law prohibits abortions once a baby’s heartbeat is detected. Several states have passed similar bills in hopes of challenging *Roe v. Wade* at the Supreme Court. The Texas law’s unique enforcement mechanism allows private citizens to file complaints against abortionists for violating the law.

The Trigger Abortion Ban will ban the procedure in Texas if the Supreme Court overturns all or part of *Roe v. Wade*. That ruling began as a Texas lawsuit when “Jane Roe” challenged the state’s abortion ban. The high court’s 1972 ruling effectively abolished laws against abortion nationwide.

In an effort to usurp the controversial ideology of critical race theory making its way into public school curriculum, lawmakers passed House Bill 3979. The law shores up the required social studies curriculum with writings and documents representing the historical figures and significant events in American history without glossing over the nation’s troubled history regarding race and women’s suffrage.

“The bill is substantive enough that they can’t teach the critical pieces of critical race theory. The whole idea of the bill was to say ‘No’ to critical race theory, however, teach the complete and unvarnished truth of history,” Sanford said.

Pandemic push-back

Early in the pandemic, local and state authorities hastily drafted COVID-19 mitigation rules that ran afoul of state and federal constitutions, particularly as they relate to the freedom of worship. In

response, Texas lawmakers passed House Bill 525.

The law states: “Notwithstanding any other law, a religious organization is an essential business at all times in this state, including during a declared state of disaster, and the organization’s religious and other related activities are essential activities even if the activities are not listed as essential in an order issued during the disaster.”

A joint resolution sent to the Office of the Secretary of State proposes a constitutional amendment essentially codifying House Bill 525 in the Texas Constitution.

An especially draconian rule enacted by long-term nursing care facilities barred all but staff from entering those facilities during the pandemic. The rule separated ailing—and sometimes dying—patients from family members.

Bills offered by Democrats and Republicans sought to remedy this problem. Senate Bill 25 is the result. It ensures patients have the right to “essential caregiver” visits.

“It is the intent of the legislature to ensure that residents of long-term care facilities and other residences have a guaranteed right to visitation by family members, friends, caregivers, and other individuals. The legislature expects facilities and program providers to ensure that the guaranteed visitation rights are available to residents every day of each year, consistent with existing resident rights,” the law states.

Those visits can be limited, but not disallowed, during a declared public health crisis.

Senate Joint Resolution 19 was also sent to the Secretary of State’s office for a vote by Texans.

Lawmakers came together for a majority of the bills, Sanford said.

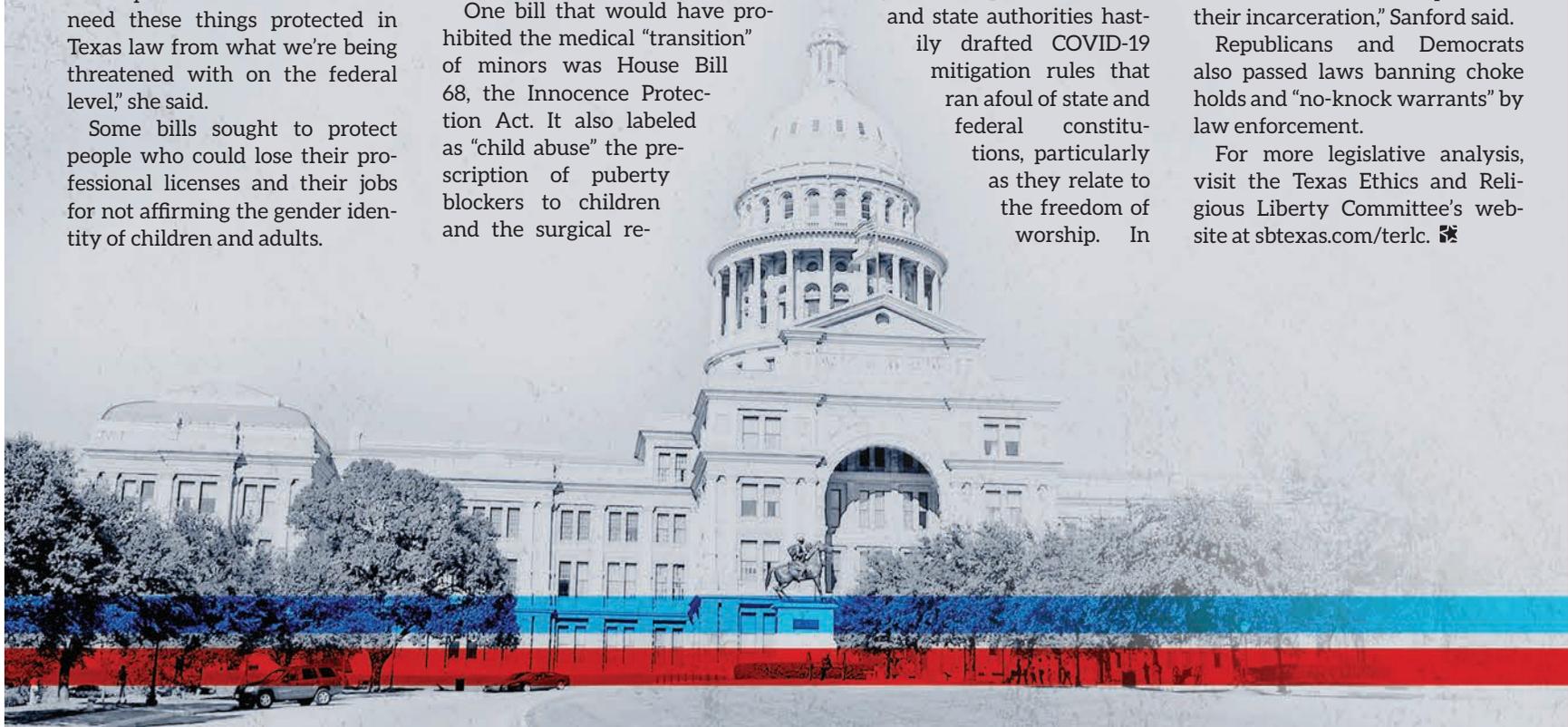
“The ones that are of particular interest to Christians, I think, are coming together for criminal justice reforms,” he said.

Sanford’s bill, the Bonton Farms Act, eliminates many of the fees and fines that accumulate over the years while someone is in prison.

“And when they get out, they’re not able to get those paid off in order to get a drivers license, in order to get a job. And so, they will get credit for time served against those fees and fines that accumulated from warrants that preceded their incarceration,” Sanford said.

Republicans and Democrats also passed laws banning choke holds and “no-knock warrants” by law enforcement.

For more legislative analysis, visit the Texas Ethics and Religious Liberty Committee’s website at sbtexas.com/terlc. ❏



“
WE BELIEVE THAT THROUGH COOPERATIVE PROGRAM GIVING WE’RE GOING TO BE A PART OF REACHING PLACES IN THE WORLD AND IN NORTH AMERICA THAT WE COULD NEVER DO AS A SINGLE ENTITY. WE TAKE VERY, VERY SERIOUSLY THE MANDATE OF CHRIST TO GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES.
 ”

JOHN FREE, PASTOR OF CURREY CREEK CHURCH IN BOERNE

CURREY CREEK

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“It’s mind-bending that one guy from California said, ‘We knew we were moving. We’ve been watching you online for a year and a half,’ Free recounted. “They were involved in their church, but they would watch Currey Creek online, so when they moved here they knew this was where they wanted to go to church without ever attending.

“So then they attended for three or four weeks and a membership class comes up, and they’re in,” he said. “It’s a phenomenon that would have been very unlikely 10 years ago in our ministry context.”

In a recent class for potential new members, about half—30 people—were from out of state. Several were from the West Coast, and the top two reasons given for moving were to escape the deteriorating culture and to be closer to family, Free said.

Boerne appeals to families because of its highly-rated public school system and because it’s in the Hill Country. Though it’s close enough to San Antonio to serve as a bedroom community, it maintains a flavor of its own, the pastor said. “It’s picturesque.”

Currey Creek is a strong supporter of the Cooperative Program in part because Free’s ministry began thanks to the generosity of Southern Baptists, he said. A graduate of Texas A&M, Free earned a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1990 and then served as a church planter in New Mexico through the Home Mission Board, funded with CP dollars, he noted.

After pastoring a small church in East Texas for a few years, Free answered the call from First Baptist Church in Boerne to plant what would become Currey Creek in 2001. When it was time to build a campus, God provided space one mile from the interstate with prime visibility.

“The Lord is just way ahead of us. He knows what’s best, and here we are in the middle of all this growth,” Free said, referring to thousands of new homes going up fast on previously undeveloped ranchland.

“It’s wonderful to be situated where the Lord is bringing people to us.”

The area is growing so rapidly, and the church planting conviction is so strong at Currey Creek

that they recently sent 300 members out to plant The Bridge Fellowship, also in Boerne.

Before COVID, Currey Creek’s attendance had pushed 1,500 for three Sundays, Free said, and now, despite sending out a core group and weathering the pandemic, attendance is “well over 1,000 again.”

In addition to giving through the Cooperative Program because their pastor is a product of it, Currey Creek gives because they believe strongly in its power to reach unreached people groups.

“We believe that through Cooperative Program giving we’re going to be a part of reaching places in the world and in North America that we could never do as a single entity,” Free said. “We take very, very seriously the mandate of Christ to go and make disciples.

“We feel a need to be a part of the Cooperative Program for that reason—because we’re going to reach people and have an impact on people that we would not even know about unless we were cooperating through giving.”

Currey Creek has established missions partnerships with workers in Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Moldova, Nepal, Poland, Kosovo and India, among others. They partner with Northeastern Baptist College in Vermont, and they helped start a church in Abilene called The Well, Free said.

The pastor commended an associate pastor, Eric Cate, who was in the business world before Currey Creek asked him to be on staff as an administrator.

“He really has a heart for the world, and he oversees all of our missions partnerships, and that ministry really keeps the world in front of our people, especially during the COVID year when everything seemed self-preserving,” Free said.

Last year, at the height of COVID, Currey Creek took up a special missions offering to distribute to their ministry partners for hunger relief, “and it was a quarter of a million dollars,” the pastor said, marveling at the provision. “That’s the generosity of God’s people here at Currey Creek.”

As Free is halfway through a doctoral program at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, he said he feels “very connected to Southern Baptist causes in a lot of ways because they’ve been committed to the authority of God’s Word and committed to sharing the gospel. Those are non-negotiables for Currey Creek.”



Pastor John Free founded Currey Creek Church in Boerne 20 years ago after serving in East Texas and New Mexico. PHOTO BY GINA HANCOCK



Children’s ministry is active and varied at Currey Creek as kids of all ages stay engaged. PHOTO BY GINA HANCOCK

Familias mudándose a Texas encuentran un lugar en Currey Creek

Por Erin Roach
Corresponsal del TEXAN

BOERNE Mientras miles de personas se mudan a Texas, algunas encuentran un nuevo hogar en la Iglesia Currey Creek en Boerne, una creciente congregación bautista del sur a media hora al noroeste de San Antonio en la I-10.

“Buscan en Google ‘lugares fantásticos para vivir en Texas’, y aparece Boerne”, dijo John Free, pastor de Currey Creek, al TEXAN.

“Es impresionante que un señor de California nos dijera: ‘Sabíamos que nos íbamos a mudar. Hemos estado mirando su programación en línea por un año y medio,’” nos contó. “Ellos estaban involucrados en su iglesia, pero veían Currey Creek en línea, así que cuando se mudaron aquí, sabían que esta era la iglesia que querían ir, a pesar de que nunca habían visitado en persona.

“Así que fueron durante tres o cuatro semanas, luego asistieron a una clase de membresía, y ya son miembros”, dijo. “Es un fenómeno que hubiera sido muy poco probable hace 10 años en el contexto de nuestro ministerio”.

En una clase reciente para nuevos miembros potenciales, aproximada-

mente la mitad (30 personas) eran de otros estados. Varios eran de la costa oeste, y las dos principales razones dadas para mudarse fueron escapar de la cultura en deterioro y estar más cerca de la familia, dijo el pastor Free.

Boerne atrae a las familias debido a su sistema de escuelas públicas altamente calificado y porque está en la región de Hill Country. Aunque está lo suficientemente cerca de San Antonio como para servir como una comunidad dormitorio, mantiene un sabor propio, dijo el pastor. “Es pintoresco”.

La Iglesia Currey Creek apoya firmemente el Programa Cooperativo (PC), en parte porque el ministerio del pastor Free comenzó gracias a la generosidad de los bautistas del sur, dijo. Graduado de la Universidad de Texas A & M, el pastor Free obtuvo una Maestría en Divinidad del Seminario Teológico Bautista Southwestern en el 1990 y luego sirvió como un plantador de iglesias en Nuevo México a través de la Junta de Misiones, financiado con fondos del PC, dijo el pastor Free.

Después de pastorear una pequeña iglesia en el este de Texas durante algunos años, el pastor



Currey Creek Church in Boerne is a new home to some of the families relocating to Texas from places such as the West Coast. The Southern Baptist congregation is a strong supporter of the Cooperative Program. PHOTO BY GINA HANCOCK

“**CREEMOS QUE A TRAVÉS DE LAS DONACIONES DEL PROGRAMA COOPERATIVO VAMOS A SER PARTE DE LLEGAR A LUGARES EN EL MUNDO Y EN AMÉRICA DEL NORTE QUE NUNCA PODRÍAMOS LLEGAR COMO UNA SOLA ENTIDAD. NOS TOMAMOS MUY, MUY EN SERIO EL MANDATO DE CRISTO DE IR Y HACER DISCÍPULOS.**”

JOHN FREE, PASTOR OF CURREY CREEK CHURCH IN BOERNE

Free respondió al llamado de la Primera Iglesia Bautista en Boerne para plantar lo que se convertiría en Currey Creek en 2001. Cuando llegó el momento de construir un campus, Dios proporcionó espacio a una milla de la interestatal con excelente visibilidad.

“El Señor nos lleva la delantera. Él sabe lo que es mejor, y aquí estamos en medio de todo este crecimiento”, dijo el pastor Free, refiriéndose a las miles de casas nuevas que se están construyendo rápidamente en unas tierras de un rancho que antes no estaban desarrolladas.

“Es maravilloso estar situado donde el Señor nos está trayendo gente”.

El área está creciendo tan rápidamente, y la convicción de plantar iglesias es tan fuerte en la iglesia Currey Creek, que recientemente enviaron a 300 miembros para plantar la iglesia The Bridge Fellowship, también en Boerne.

Antes de COVID, la asistencia de la iglesia Currey Creek estaba cerca de los 1,500 durante tres domingos, dijo el pastor Free, y ahora, a pesar de enviar un grupo central y sobrellevar la pandemia, la asistencia es “más de 1,000 nuevamente”.

Además de dar a través del Programa Cooperativo porque su pastor es un producto de él, la iglesia Currey Creek da porque creen firmemente en su poder para llegar a grupos no alcanzados.

“Creemos que a través de las donaciones del Programa Cooperativo vamos a ser parte de llegar a lugares en el mundo y en América del Norte que nunca podríamos llegar como una sola entidad”, dijo el pastor Free. “Nos tomamos muy, muy en serio el mandato de Cristo de ir y hacer discípulos.

“Sentimos la necesidad de ser parte del Programa Cooperativo por esa razón, porque vamos a

llegar a las personas y tener un impacto en las personas que ni siquiera conoceríamos a menos que cooperemos a través de donaciones”.

La Iglesia Currey Creek ha establecido alianzas misioneras con trabajadores en Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Moldavia, Nepal, Polonia, Kosovo e India, entre otros. Se asociaron con Northeastern Baptist College en Vermont y ayudaron a iniciar una iglesia en Abilene llamada The Well, dijo el pastor Free.

El pastor elogió un pastor asociado, Eric Cate, el cual estaba en el mundo de los negocios antes de que la iglesia Currey Creek le pidiera formar parte del personal como administrador.

“Él realmente tiene un corazón por el mundo y supervisa todas nuestras asociaciones misioneras; y ese ministerio realmente mantiene a nuestra gente conectada con el mundo, especialmente durante el año de COVID cuando todo parecía estar en modo de supervivencia”, dijo el pastor Free.

El año pasado, en el apogeo de COVID, la iglesia Currey Creek recolectó una ofrenda de misiones especiales para distribuir a sus compañeros ministeriales para aliviar el hambre, “y fue un cuarto de millón de dólares”, dijo el pastor, maravillado por la provisión. “Esa es la generosidad del pueblo de Dios aquí en Currey Creek”.

Como el pastor Free está a mitad de camino para completar un programa de doctorado en el Seminario Teológico Bautista Midwestern, dijo que se siente “muy conectado con las causas bautistas del sur de muchas maneras, porque han estado comprometidos con la autoridad de la Palabra de Dios y comprometidos a compartir el evangelio. Cosas que no son negociables para Currey Creek”. ✠



Currey Creek Church is committed to missions through the Cooperative Program and through various missions partnerships worldwide. They take seriously the Great Commission, the pastor said. PHOTO BY GINA HANCOCK



Currey Creek's attendance is well over 1,000 again, from its pre-pandemic highs of 1,500. PHOTO BY GINA HANCOCK

SBC

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tion to order with the Judson Gavel, named after Baptist missionary Adoniram Judson.

The convention's 15,726 messengers—the most since 1995—seemed to follow Greear's lead, taking action to protect victims and hold leaders accountable even when it meant overturning the decisions of convention committees—especially the Executive Committee.

Messengers called for creation of a task force, appointed by the new SBC president, to oversee an independent review of the Executive Committee over allegations of mishandling reports of sexual abuse. They overwhelmingly defeated a revision of the SBC Business and Financial Plan proposed by the EC.

Ed Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Ala., was elected SBC president in a runoff with a 52 percent majority over Georgia pastor Mike Stone, immediate past chairman of the SBC Executive Committee and a steering council member for the Conservative Baptist Network, a group alleging leftward drift in the convention. Litton has suggested the CBN is unnecessary because Southern Baptists are unwaveringly conservative.

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Albert Mohler and Northwest Baptist Convention executive director Randy Adams also were nominated for president but failed to make the two-person runoff.

Southern Baptists "are a family, and at times we may seem dysfunctional," Litton told reporters after his election. "But we love each other."

Messengers presented 32 motions from the convention floor, the most since 2010.

While at times tense, the debate was punctuated with moments of unity. A day after the presidential election, Litton took a floor microphone as a messenger to commend Mohler as a "statesman" and "gift of God" to Southern Baptists during Mohler's Southern Baptist Theological Seminary report. Mohler responded by congratulating Litton publicly on his victory.

Committees face resistance

The Executive Committee (an 86-member body charged with acting on the SBC's behalf between annual meetings) drew opposition at multiple junctures, with messengers claiming the EC had too much authority and needed to be held accountable.

Tennessee pastor Grant Gaines moved that the new SBC president appoint a task force to oversee a previously announced investigation into alleged EC mishandling of sexual abuse claims. Initially, the motion was referred to the EC by the Committee on Order of Business, but messengers overturned the ruling by a two-thirds vote and overwhelmingly adopted the motion on June 16.

The EC had voted June 14 not even to consider a similar proposal by one of its own members, Jared Wellman, pastor of Tate Springs Baptist in Arlington, Texas.

EC President Ronnie Floyd said in a statement following the convention's action, "Today's decision, in whose outcome we are confident, will have the ultimate blessing of re-

moving all doubt in the minds of our community of Southern Baptists allowing us to chart a more confident future, together."

The EC encountered an overwhelming defeat in a proposed revision to the SBC's Business and Financial Plan. EC officer Robyn Hari said the proposal sought to strike a balance between accountability and autonomy of the SBC entities. But messenger Vance Pitman of Nevada called the proposal "an unprecedented expansion of the Executive Committee powers." The recommendation failed on a raised-hand vote.

The convention approved Vision 2025, a five-year plan setting a series of goals for Great Commission advancement. Messengers added to the EC's five proposed Vision 2025 goals on missions, evangelism and CP giving a sixth stating the convention's intent to eliminate all incidents of racism and sexual abuse. They also amended a goal placing emphasis on reaching teenagers to those under age 18.

Another EC recommendation rejected by messengers was a proposed revision of Lifeway Christian Resources' Mission and Ministry Statement. The proposal, initiated at the request of Lifeway trustees, was defeated on a ballot vote after messenger Michael Schultz of Kentucky spoke against its adoption due to a proposed deletion of Lifeway's responsibility to assist churches with "homeschool ministries."

The EC also lost an officer when Tom Tucker, a vocational evangelist from South Carolina, was not given a second term by messengers, who voted against an attempt to overturn the Committee on Nominations, which had declined to renominate him. Tucker, a member of the CBN steering council, had been reelected as vice chairman June 14 by the EC, which acted despite the knowledge that while eligible to serve, his term was expiring and he was not among nominees to the EC for the coming year, and that he could only fulfill the post if messengers amended the 2021 Committee on Nominations report to include Tucker among nominees.

Tucker's term was originally set to expire in 2020, but was extended a year by the cancellation of the 2020 SBC Annual Meeting because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Tucker was then elected EC vice chairman in June 2020.

Messengers accepted EC proposals granting the second of two required approvals to an SBC constitutional amendment listing racism and mishandling sex abuse as grounds for disfellowshipping a church.

The EC was not the only committee to have a recommendation overturned by messengers. The Resolutions Committee declined to bring to the floor a resolution submitted by Oklahoma messenger Bill Ascol that called for abolishing abortion, but messengers voted by a two-thirds majority to consider it. Then they adopted the resolution after a one-word amendment to soften its initial rejection of any "incremental approach to ending abortion."

Diversity

The SBC constitutional amendment against racism was among several ways messengers attempted to catalyze ethnic diversity in the convention.

Juan Sanchez, pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin,



On June 14, the SBC Executive Committee recognized June and Jim Richards for the outgoing SBTC executive director's service with a resolution of affirmation. Here Ronnie Floyd, EC president, makes the presentation as retiring North Carolina executive Milton Hollifield, who was also honored, looks on. PHOTO BY GARY LEDBETTER

Texas, became the first Hispanic elected convention preacher. He will deliver the convention sermon next year in Anaheim, Calif. Messengers also elected a Hispanic first vice president, Ramón Medina, lead pastor of the Spanish ministry at Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston. Medina was elected in a runoff over another Hispanic nominated for the post, Georgia pastor Javier Chavez.

Southern Baptists tapped to serve on committees likewise were diverse. A majority (51 percent) of Greear's presidential appointments to committees were non-Anglo, as were 30 percent of those elected to serve on boards and committees.

In his final presidential address, Greear drew a standing ovation when he addressed racial tension within the SBC and told "people of color": "We need you."

Critical race theory—the subject of a 2019 SBC resolution that has sparked controversy over the past two years—drew several mentions during the convention, including messenger motions and resolution submissions calling for its denunciation as well as questions to SBC presidents during their reports. Yet no official convention action addressed CRT by name.

Instead, messengers adopted a broad resolution regarding race and racial reconciliation. The resolution repudiated "any theory or worldview that denies that racism, oppression, or discrimination is rooted, ultimately, in anything other than sin." It also reaffirmed a resolution regarding racial reconciliation on the SBC's 150th anniversary in 1995 in which messengers apologized to African Americans for "condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism."

Other resolutions adopted by messengers covered, among other topics, the Equality Act, the Hyde Amendment and permanent disqualifica-

tion from the pastorate of those who have committed sexual abuse.

In other business:

In addition to electing Litton and Medina, messengers elected Lee Brand Jr., a Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary administrator, as first vice president over California pastor Anthony Dockery. Brand is a member of the CBN's steering council. Missouri Baptist Convention executive director John Yeats was reelected recording secretary for the 24th time over Virginia pastor Adam Blosser.

Don Currence, administrative pastor at First Baptist Church in Ozark, Mo., was reelected registration secretary by acclamation. He was nominated by Kathy Litton, wife of Ed Litton, who was elected registration secretary over Currence in 2019 but stepped down when her husband's candidacy for SBC president was announced.

Sixty-four new International Mission Board missionaries were appointed June 14 in a Sending Celebration. They will join 3,631 IMB missionaries already on the field around the world. The vast majority of the new missionaries stood behind a screen during the service, as they could not be identified due to security concerns in their locations of service.

The North American Mission Board reported that Southern Baptists have planted more than 8,200 churches in the past decade. They comprise nearly 17 percent of all Southern Baptist churches and represent nearly 19 percent of all baptisms reported in the SBC.

Florida pastor Willy Rice preached the convention sermon, urging Southern Baptists to avoid factions and build their testimony on the gospel.

Next year's SBC Annual Meeting is slated for June 14-15, 2022, in Anaheim, Calif. ☞

2021 annual meeting

november 8-9 Flint Baptist Church

sesión en español 7 de noviembre



SBC 2021 messengers affirm resolutions targeting racial reconciliation, abortion, Equality Act

By Tom Strode / Diana Chandler
Baptist Press

NASHVILLE Messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting approved a broad resolution on the Bible's sufficiency regarding race and racial reconciliation on June 15, choosing not to address specifically the contentious issue of critical race theory.

Among nine resolutions passed, messengers also overwhelmingly endorsed statements on government policies that included denouncing the Hyde Amendment and the Equality Act.

Because of a lack of time, the committee tabled a resolution that would have affirmed the "Christian ideal of citizenship" under the Lordship of Jesus and would have condemned the January invasion of the U.S. Capitol as "inconsistent with faithful Christian citizenship."

On racial reconciliation

The Resolutions Committee chose not to address the issue of critical race theory (CRT) in the first SBC annual meeting since the passage of a 2019 resolution on CRT and intersectionality developed into a divisive point of contention during the last two years.

Critics within the convention who have decried CRT's use and have labeled it as Marxist have warned it has gained influence in Southern Baptist institutions and churches, while other Southern Baptists have disputed these charges.

The resolution quoted from Scripture and the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, the SBC's confession of faith, regarding race and racial reconciliation before affirming the Bible's adequacy on the issues.

It said SBC messengers "reject any theory or worldview that finds the ultimate identity of human beings in ethnicity or in any other group dynamic" and "reject any theory or worldview that sees the primary problem of humanity as anything other than sin against God and the ultimate solution as anything other than redemption found only in Christ."

The resolution also repudiated "any theory or worldview that denies that racism, oppression, or discrimination is rooted, ultimately, in anything other than sin."

It reaffirmed the resolution regarding racial reconciliation on the SBC's 150th anniversary in 1995 in which messengers apologized to African Americans for "condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism."

The Resolutions Committee's decision not to confront CRT explicitly met with brief opposition from the floor.

Kevin Apperson, pastor of North Las Vegas (Nev.) Baptist Church, said the resolution consisted of "nebulous, unclear and ambiguous language that speaks concerning the content of critical race theory but never has the courage to address it by its name. If we do not have the courage to call a skunk a skunk, let's not say anything."

James Merritt, chairman of the Resolutions Committee, replied by

saying, "It's time to find out who we are and where we are headed."

"[W]e are not the 2019 Resolutions Committee. We are the 2021 Resolutions Committee," said Merritt, pastor of Cross Pointe Church in Duluth, Ga., and a former SBC president. "What we have done in this resolution is say, 'You know what, let's just [settle] this once and for all, yesterday, today and forever.'"

The committee rejects any theory that says "our problem is anything other than sin and the solution is anything other than" the gospel of Jesus Christ, Merritt said.

Todd Benkert, pastor of Oak Creek Community Church in Mishawaka, Ind., immediately called for a vote from the floor, and messengers agreed by the two-thirds majority required. Messengers then approved the resolution by a strong majority.

The 2021 Resolutions Committee's report showed it received 10 proposed resolutions on various theories regarding race, but it chose to combine them into a general statement.

On the Equality Act

In strongly opposing the Equality Act, messengers approved language that described the proposal as "one of the greatest threats to religious liberty in our nation's history."

The bill, which has already gained approval by the U.S. House of Representatives, would add "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to the classifications protected in federal civil rights law. "Sexual orientation" includes homosexuality, bisexuality and pansexuality, while "gender identity" refers to the way a person perceives himself regardless of his biology at birth.

The Equality Act fails to protect the freedom of religion and conscience of faith-based adoption and foster-care agencies, as well as religious hospitals and health-care workers, the resolution said in echoing warnings already issued by the ERLC. It also would threaten the Hyde Amendment and erode civil rights protections for women and girls, according to the resolution.

In addition to opposing the Equality Act, the resolution encourages "love and compassion" toward those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus to them.

On the Hyde Amendment

The messengers' passage of the statement on the Hyde Amendment was the latest in a four-decade-old series of resolutions opposing abortion and federal funding of the procedure.

The resolution served as a response to President Biden's budget proposal issued in late May that failed to include the 45-year-old Hyde Amendment and other pro-life policies in federal programs. If Biden's proposal succeeds, it would mark the first time since 1976 the Hyde Amendment has not been enacted.

The Hyde Amendment, which must be approved each year as a "rider" to a spending bill, prohibits



James Merritt, Resolutions Committee chair, is flanked by committee members. PHOTO BY ADAM COVINGTON

"I BELIEVE IT'S VERY IMPORTANT FOR SOUTHERN BAPTISTS TO SPEAK UNEQUIVOCALLY, AND WE'D LIKE EVERYONE TO UNDERSTAND THIS, THAT WE BELIEVE THAT SEXUAL ABUSE IS A DISQUALIFYING FACTOR FOR ANYONE WHO WOULD SERVE IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP"

**—BART BARBER
RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE**

federal funds in Medicaid and other programs from paying for abortions. The ban is estimated to have saved the lives of more than 2.4 million unborn children.

The resolution urged Biden and Congress to preserve Hyde and all other pro-life amendments. It also urged Southern Baptists to "work through all available cultural and legislative means to end the moral scourge of abortion as we also seek to love, care for, and minister to women who are victimized by the unjust abortion industry."

On abolishing abortion

On June 16, a day after overruling the Resolutions Committee, messengers to the 2021 SBC Annual Meeting adopted a resolution calling for "abolishing abortion immediately, without exception or compromise."

The resolution on abolishing abortion was revived Tuesday in a motion by Bill Ascol, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church of Owasso, Okla., who had initially submitted the resolution. It is perhaps the strictest anti-abortion statement messengers have adopted in nearly 50 years. A resolution adopted in the 2018 SBC Annual Meeting reaffirming the full dignity of every human denounced "every act of abortion except to save the mother's physical life."

The Resolutions Committee originally declined the 2021 resolution, reasoning that the issue of abortion was addressed in the resolution condemning the repeal of the Hyde Amendment.

But after one of the resolution's nine co-authors spoke to the motion June 15, messengers brought it to the floor with a two-thirds vote.

It was adopted with an amendment softening its language.

The resolution drew several minutes of contentious debate Wednesday, even as each messenger who spoke affirmed a pro-life position. Critics said the resolution was poorly written and would discredit all attempts to restrict but not eliminate abortion - such as bans on partial-birth abortion and so-called "heartbeat" laws.

On sexual abuse

Building on the momentum of the SBC measures to prevent sex abuse in churches and protect vulnerable populations, messengers approved a resolution encouraging churches to permanently disqualify sex abusers from serving as pastors. The resolution also asks churches to apply the standard to all positions of church leadership.

"I believe it's very important for Southern Baptists to speak unequivocally, and we'd like everyone to understand this, that we believe that sexual abuse is a disqualifying factor for anyone who would serve in church leadership or be in a position where they were commended to vulnerable populations in the church," said committee member Bart Barber, pastor of First Baptist Church of Farmersville, Texas.

Committee member Nathan Finn said the resolution supports other measures the SBC has taken to prevent sex abuse in churches, including an amendment to Article III of the SBC Constitution supporting the disfellowshipping of churches that don't act to prevent sex abuse.

Other resolutions

In other resolutions, messengers:

- Encouraged Southern Baptists to pursue holiness and brotherly love in their speech and conduct, and not permit "personal, social, theological or political interests to supersede" the urgency of fulfilling the Great Commission.

- Urged the Chinese Communist Party to end the genocide of Uyghur Muslims and encouraged the U.S. government to prioritize the admission of Uyghurs to the U.S. while continuing sanctions punishing China for its persecution of Uyghurs.

- Mourned lives lost to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Expressed appreciation to the Lord, the city of Nashville and all those who contributed to the annual meeting's success. ✝

New SBC president Ed Litton calls for 'humility,' 'honest discussions'

By Bonnie Pritchett
TEXAN Correspondent

NASHVILLE In a close election that illustrated some of the divisions within the Southern Baptist Convention, messengers to the annual meeting elected Ed Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Saraland, Alabama, as the convention's next president. This year's convention saw the highest recorded number of messengers—15,726—in a quarter century.

The June 15 vote began as a four-man contest that came down to a run-off election between Litton and Mike Stone, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Blackshear, Georgia. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Seminary and Randy Adams, executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention, earned 26.3 percent and 4.7 percent, respectively, of the 14,300 votes cast in the first balloting.

Before announcing the runoff results, registration secretary Don Currence reported there were 15,691 messengers, with 13,131 casting ballots. Litton received 6,834 votes to Stone's 6,278, winning the runoff by a margin of 52 to 48 percent.

During a press conference shortly after his election Litton addressed discord within the SBC, including calls for an investigation of the Executive Committee, unresolved sex abuse allegations, concerns over perceived influence of secular ideology within the convention and how that impacts race relations.

"The greatest need is humility—to humble ourselves, to listen and to ask God for grace to hear what people are actually saying. And even if we disagree, we come back to the foundational principle of Scripture that we are to love each other even if we don't see eye-to-eye," he told reporters from secular and religious news outlets.

He said, "Part of what I feel like God has called me to do in this run for this office is to help us remember again why we're a family and what the focus and objective of our family is, which is to get the good news of the gospel of Jesus. This is a family. Sometimes families argue in ways the neighbors get to see it. And that's kind of what you've been witnessing."

On the Executive Committee investigation

Litton takes leadership of the convention only days after Ronnie Floyd, president of the SBC Executive Committee, announced that the EC had secured the services of GuidePost Solutions to conduct an independent review of the EC's alleged mishandling of sexual abuse allegations within SBC churches. Messengers to the 2021 SBC annual meeting approved the appointment by the new SBC president of a task force to oversee this investigation.

Litton agreed the investigation is necessary and urged it be completed "in a timely manner" because "we want to bring all this out and expose it to the light."

“
THE GREATEST NEED IS HUMILITY—TO HUMBLE OURSELVES, TO LISTEN AND TO ASK GOD FOR GRACE TO HEAR WHAT PEOPLE ARE ACTUALLY SAYING.

—ED LITTON
SBC PRESIDENT

He also urged churches to develop pastoral care for victims and incorporate security protocols that protect their members from victimization.

“
PART OF WHAT I FEEL LIKE GOD HAS CALLED ME TO DO IN THIS RUN FOR THIS OFFICE IS TO HELP US REMEMBER AGAIN WHY WE'RE A FAMILY AND WHAT THE FOCUS AND OBJECTIVE OF OUR FAMILY IS, WHICH IS TO GET THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS.

On race

Messengers tried several times—unsuccessfully—to pass motions or resolutions directly refuting critical race theory as incompatible with Scripture and the Baptist Faith and Message. They did pass a resolution called "On the Sufficiency of Scripture for Race and Racial Reconciliation."

Did that quell the debate?

"That's a prediction I can't make," Litton said. "I would hope that we would understand that CRT is a reality in our culture and I think people are afraid. I don't think they need to be afraid within the Southern Baptist Convention. It is not taught. It is not believed among our seminaries, our professors. No one is endorsing it. What we're saying is it's a reality in our culture. We need to understand that."

He posited whether CRT could be used as a tool to the benefit of those "suffering injustice."

"We have a higher tool and the higher tool is the gospel," he said. "The gospel is the tool we use to seek justice."

He called for honest discussions, not allegations, going forward.

Asked how he plans to address concerns among some SBC African American pastors who feel disenfranchised, Litton touted the growing ethnic diversity within the SBC in its churches and leadership, which are growing at a faster rate than Anglo congregations, which are "in decline."



"I'm just so grateful for my brothers and sisters in Christ of color. I'm so thankful for them. We have much to learn from them," he said.

On the ERLC

Litton defended another SBC entity that has come under fire in recent days. The sudden resignation of Russell Moore as president of the Ethics and Religious Commission—and the leaked letters he wrote critical of some Executive Committee members—drew fire from some messengers.

"I would like to remind us that the ERLC is critical to the convention—primarily for religious liberty purposes. I don't want to see them defunded. I want to see them supported and encouraged."

Navigating differences over CRT

and with the Conservative Baptist Network also presents challenges for Litton and the leadership team he will appoint.

"I need wisdom from the Lord to be able to do that. But I believe we continue on the same course. I believe our unity is, ultimately, the gospel. And if we can't see eye-to-eye on that then its going to be very difficult to find unity."

But he has seen God do the impossible. As a child he watched his alcoholic father give his life to Christ after the faithful, persistent witness of a Southern Baptist pastor. It wasn't until later that Litton recognized his dad's transformation for the miracle that it was.

"It put me in the position of seeing what I now believe is true: There's nothing God can't do." ❏

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Churches minister to varied community needs in pandemic, rising to challenge

By Jane Rodgers | Managing Editor

HOUSTON and EL PASO

Pandemic ministry can assume varied, often unconventional forms. After all, what is conventional in a worldwide crisis when the old nor-

mal is eclipsed? Southern Baptists of Texas Convention congregations have risen to the challenge by ministering to their communities in unique ways across Texas.

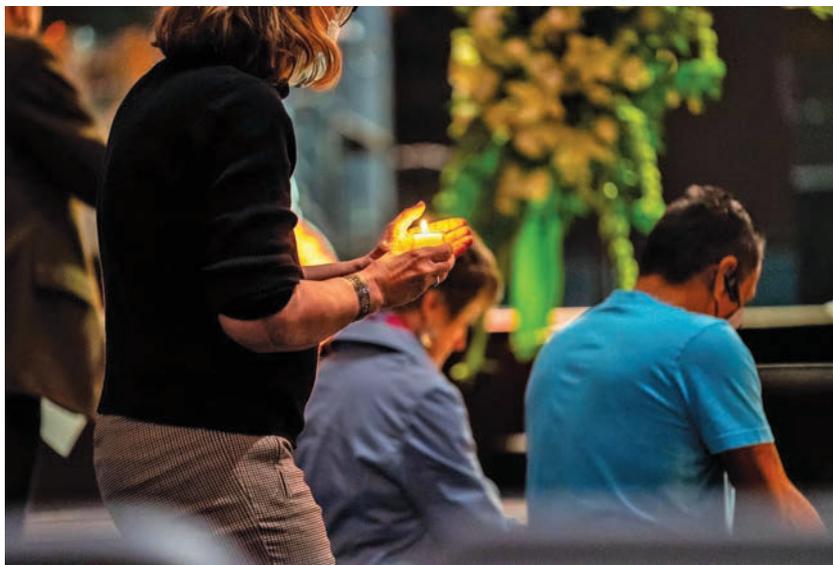
Churches have opened their facilities as food distribution cen-

ters, often in partnership with local food banks. Grounds have been made available for vaccination clinics. Some congregations have contributed funds to erase the medical debt of survivors. And almost every church has upped its

online presence.

Many have developed creative ways to move ministries outside, where viral spread is more difficult.

Throughout, the name of Jesus has been proclaimed in diverse and creative ways. ✚



The COVID service of remembrance at Houston's Champion Forest Baptist Church allowed community members to light candles and mourn those lost during the pandemic. FACEBOOK PHOTO

Service of Remembrance

In a somber mode, Champion Forest Baptist Church of Houston hosted a COVID service of remembrance for those in the community who had lost loved ones to the disease. The livestreamed and in-person April 18 service lasted just over an hour and featured worship, prayer, Scripture reading, shared stories and a message from Pastor Jarrett Stephens. Those grieving were invited to light candles in memory and honor of those lost.

"Jesus has such a tender heart for people. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus. Many in our community are grieving and could not hold services because of COVID protocols," Stephens told the TEXAN prior to the service, which was open to the public and announced via social media and a press release.

"Six weeks ago, I lost my dad. My hero," Mike Haney told those in the sanctuary and online watching the service. Haney's father, a 42-year Houston police veteran, developed COVID symptoms just after receiving the second dose of a vaccine.

"It didn't seem fair that my dad, who had helped so many others, would have to die alone," Haney said, describing his family's final visits with his father via Zoom and then in-person. COVID had hit much of the family by then. Haney's siblings, who had contracted the virus, were allowed on the COVID ward of the hospital to visit their dad while Haney donned a hazardous material suit to do so.

Still, good had come from the sorrow, Haney told the congregation, describing restored relationships and spiritual growth that had occurred in his family.

"God can take the mess of something and turn it into a masterpiece if you will allow him," Haney said.

Some 200 candles illuminated the sanctuary, each representing a soul lost physically to the coronavirus. The service was covered by local media outlets, including the Houston Chronicle, which posted a story on it. ✚

Gospel Fest

Realizing that the community needed an outlet not just to mourn, but to relax, Immanuel Baptist in El Paso sponsored Gospel Fest this spring. About 550 attended the March 13 outdoor event which was held on the church's parking lot and featured a day-long car show and competition combined with music, testimonies, skits and Christian rappers.

Proud owners showed off their cars' battery-powered hydraulic lifts as onlookers witnessed a "car jump" in mid-afternoon.

As events wound down by 4 p.m., trophies were awarded by judges in various categories such as best paint job, best-looking car, most original car—in addition to the "car hop" prize.

Such competition is a "cultural thing," Immanuel Pastor J.C. Rico told the TEXAN, adding with a chuckle, "Sometimes they pay more attention to their cars than to their girlfriends."

Around 60 car owners paid a small fee to enter the show while attendees came for free to walk among the fancy cars and visit with the competitors.

Besides enjoying the car show, rappers and other entertainment, attendees also partook of free hot dogs, chips and water.

The event's purpose was to "reach unchurched people and present the gospel of Jesus through messages, testimony and music they connected with," Rico said.

Testimonies from ex-gang members, car club officers and others resonated with the crowd. Eight people trusted Christ for salvation, Rico noted.

The spring event will be repeated in October, Rico added, urging churches to think "outside the box" in these challenging times. In the case of Gospel Fest, Rico said the church had planned the event earlier, only to cancel because of COVID. By spring 2021, "they just wanted to get out," and Gospel Fest was one of the few events available then, he said. ✚



El Paso's Immanuel Baptist Church sponsored an outdoor car show and Gospel Fest event that allowed the community a time of recreation and gospel-sharing. Eight trusted Christ. PHOTO SUBMITTED



The Gospel Fest at Immanuel Baptist included a car competition: judges selected winners in a variety of categories, including best design and a car "jump." PHOTO SUBMITTED



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Churches host Rockdale's first multiracial baccalaureate to 'focus on unity'

By Jane Rodgers
Managing Editor

ROCKDALE The Rockdale High School class of 2021 expected to graduate on the football field, but the ceremony was moved inside Tiger Gymnasium because of inclement weather. The May 28 event capped typical senior festivities like the senior parade, senior fun day, awards and scholarship assemblies, and the time-honored tradition of a church baccalaureate service.

This year's May 16 baccalaureate service featured a twist for the seniors who call the Central Texas town—population just over 5,500 in 2019—home.

The 3A school's Facebook page posted photos of the service with the banner: "Had a great time at Springfield Baptist Church with a focus on Unity!"

It was the first time in the community's history that a multi-racial baccalaureate ceremony was held, to the knowledge of Steve Ammons, pastor of Meadowbrook Baptist Church.

"As far as I have been told, Rockdale has always had two baccalaureate services for the graduating seniors," Ammons told the TEXAN, explaining that one service had traditionally been sponsored by the Rockdale Ministerial Alliance with a separate service put on by local African American churches.

After an allegedly racist incident at the high school prompted the Rockdale student body to organize a march in support of Black Lives Matter, local pastors decided something had to be done.

"We knew we needed to see a change," Ammons said.

As a start, Ammons met with Pastor Shawn Hancock of Springfield Missionary Baptist Church to plan the combined baccalaureate.

"We wanted to show these students, parents and the community that we are one in Christ. It does not matter what your skin color is; as long as you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, you are our brothers and sisters," Ammons said.

The "deep dividing line" that has characterized parts of Rockdale has improved in recent years, Ammons added, a trend he hopes the unified ceremony will help continue.

"If we are going to get our town united and break the racial barrier, the churches are going to have to do it," Ammons said, expressing sentiments shared by both Black and White pastors.

Hancock agreed, telling

the TEXAN: "We wanted to show if there's going to be unity and peace, it has to start in God's house first."

Ammons said he met with Brent Hasselbach, Rockdale High School principal, to discuss the event and found the administration supportive.

An afternoon of unity

The pastors decided that this year, the combined afternoon service would be held at Springfield, traditionally the site of the Black ceremony. Ammons would give the keynote address. Next year's baccalaureate will likely rotate to Meadowbrook, with Hancock addressing attendees and parents.

"We are already making plans to continue this and not let this be a one-time thing," Ammons said.

In addition to Ammons, this year's baccalaureate featured Royal Johnson, pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church and Rockdale ISD Superintendent Denise Monzingo as speakers.

"We thank you, God, that you have pulled us together as one body as believers," Hancock opened, welcoming families and graduates and asking the Lord to watch over and care for the seniors.

Clara Brooks of New Jerusalem church, wife of Pastor Dennis Brooks who was unable to attend because of illness, cautioned graduates that "words are powerful" and urged them to be careful about what they say, see and hear.

Ammons reminded those attending that Rockdale had previously held separate services and that "It doesn't matter who you are, what you look like, how much is in your bank account, if you have a relationship with Christ."

As applause and amens rippled through the sanctuary, he said, "No matter how we divide ourselves, there's one banner under which we can stand. And that is a banner that reads, 'Child of God,'" citing Galatians 3:26-28.

Students also spoke, giving testimonies and reading Scripture. A representative of the Gideons distributed Bibles to the graduates. The event was livestreamed on the Springfield Facebook page.

"Be blessed and do your best, in Jesus' name," Johnson exhorted the graduates as the service drew to a close.

The in-person turnout was smaller than expected with about 12 percent of the graduating class attending. Ammons admitted that COVID may have played a role in attendance.



The Rockdale High School graduation was moved inside Tiger Gym on May 28. The baccalaureate was held on May 16. FACEBOOK PHOTOS



Feedback has been encouraging, Ammons and Hancock both confirmed.

"It's been awesome ... everybody had a great time when we came together" Hancock said, noting that Ammons was the first pastor of another race to preach at Springfield.

In comments to the TEXAN, Monzingo said the district was "thrilled to have a united baccalaureate this year. She called the ceremony "amazing, as churches from around the community came together to show

our students what unity looks like." Finding "common ground" is important for students, she added.

The combined service also marked the start of a "lifelong relationship between the churches and the pastors," Hancock said. "Whether Black pastors or White pastors, our job is to build the kingdom of God."

Hancock predicted future benefits of the combined service: "God is moving in a direction, with this baccalaureate service, to be able to help the community

come together."

Ammons said church-led work toward unity will continue in Rockdale, adding that Meadowbrook has been invited to join in Juneteenth celebrations this year. Other multiracial ministry events—including outreaches and shared pulpits—are in the works, he said, adding that he has already been invited to speak at another Black church.

"We're going to keep pushing. We started and we're not going to let up," Hancock said. 

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Church Positions

PASTOR

- ◆ Hillcrest BC in Jasper is seeking a FT senior pastor. Send your resume, ministry philosophy and sermon links to searchcommittee@hbcjasper.com or to Hillcrest Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, 3196 US HWY 190 West, Jasper, TX 75951 by August 2.
- ◆ The Hills Church in San Antonio is seeking a FT lead pastor who is comfortable in an ethnically diverse community. He must also be committed and willing to serve with a plurality of elders who share leadership responsibilities. Seminary and Spanish are desired. Please indicate your interest at thehillssa.org/pastorapplication.
- ◆ FBC De Leon is searching for a FT pastor. Send resumes to Pastor Search Committee, First Baptist Church, PO Box 228, De Leon, TX 76444 or fbdeleon@cctc.net.
- ◆ Westside Baptist Church of Crockett is prayerfully seeking a FT pastor who has a Christ-centered theology. Accepting resumes until July 31 at PO Box 1364, Crockett, TX 75835 or westsidebaptist.crockett@gmail.com.
- ◆ Lifeway BC in Edna is seeking a conservative pastor for a small SBTC congregation with growth potential. Send resume to Lifeway Baptist Church, PO Box 1144, Edna, TX 77957 or Lifewaybaptist.edna@gmail.com.
- ◆ FBC Rocksprings is searching for a FT senior pastor. There is a 3 bedroom/2 bath parsonage on the church grounds. Send resume to fbc@swtexas.net or FBC, PO Box 438, Rocksprings, TX 78880. For more information, call 830-683-5186.
- ◆ New Hope BC in League City is seeking a FT pastor. We are a SBTC church that adheres to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. Send Resumes to PSCNHBBC@gmail.com.
- ◆ FBC Madisonville is seeking a FT senior pastor. Submit resumes to pastorsearch@madisonvillefbc.org.
- ◆ Antioch BC in Lovelady is now accepting resumes for a senior pastor position. Lovelady is a rural community located approximately 100 miles north of Houston. Average worship is currently 80 to 100. Pastoral experience, college degree and seminary graduate preferred. Parsonage available. Send resume to r_dgunnels@yahoo.com.
- ◆ Greenfield Acres BC in Odessa is seeking a bivocational pastor. We are affiliated with the SBTC and adhere to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. Parsonage is available. Please send resume to Greenfield Acres Baptist Church, 2114 W Yukon, Odessa, TX 79764 or gabsearch@gmail.com.
- ◆ Patillo BC in Lipan is seeking a FT/PT or bivocational pastor. Send resume to Patillo Baptist Church, 4791 FM 2803, Lipan, TX 76462 or floyd@floydhendrick.com.
- ◆ Burkeville BC is looking for a FT or bivocational pastor. Please email resume to burkevillebaptistchurch2@yahoo.com.
- ◆ West End BC in Beaumont is seeking a FT or bivocational pastor. Financially secure, loving congregation of 50 average attendance, traditional worship service. We are affiliated with the SBTC. Send resume to webcbeaumont@gmail.com.
- ◆ FBC in Crane is prayerfully seeking a senior pastor. Interested candidates should send a cover letter and resume to kelly@shaffer-nichols.com.
- ◆ Campground BC in Woodville is accepting resumes for a bivocational pastor for a medium-sized congregation in a country setting. Email resume to Nick Toparcean at ae5vvradio@gmail.com.
- ◆ FBC Boyd, affiliated with the SBTC, is receiving resumes for a bi-vocational southern Baptist pastor. Send resumes to PST2021@FBCBOYD.org before Aug. 31.

MUSIC

- ◆ First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT worship minister with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is a domestic and international church planting network. Other cities are available. Please email a video of you leading worship to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.
- ◆ Westside BC in Corsicana is accepting resumes for a PT music minister for Sunday morning and evening. Email resume to westside.church@sbcglobal.net or mail to Westside Baptist Church, 1522 N 24th St., Corsicana, TX 75110.
- ◆ Trail of Life Cowboy Church in Conroe is seeking a PT worship leader to lead the worship band in a growing and active congregation. Please submit resumes to Pastor Josh Henry at tolcowboychurch@yahoo.com.
- ◆ Crossroads Church in Rowlett is looking for a worship pastor with a strong desire to lead a team spiritually. While this person will certainly lead on stage, their heart should be to equip, empower and platform others. This person should see their role more through the lens of discipleship than music. We are open to considering this position as both FT and PT. Email resume to jcollins@crossroadsrowlett.org.
- ◆ FBC Denison is seeking a PT worship pastor. We are a church in one of the fastest growing areas of Texas, looking for a disciple and disciple-maker who loves to lead others in worship on Sundays, develop a worship team, and fully partner in carrying out the vision of the church. Two years' experience of leading worship and five years of active church membership required. Itinerant worship leaders will be considered. Resumes and questions to ssuffron@fbcdenison.org.
- ◆ River of Life Christian Fellowship in Adkins is interviewing candidates for a worship leader. Send resume to riveroflifeadkins@gmail.com or River of Life Christian Fellowship, PO Box 453, Adkins, TX 78101. Call 210-649-2600 or Pastor Joe Stansell at 210-414-9930.
- ◆ FBC of Kennedale is looking for an enthusiastic PT worship pastor to lead the church in engaging worship and reach our growing community with the gospel. Send resume to bryaneason@sbcglobal.net.
- ◆ Forest Avenue BC in Sherman is in search of a PT music minister. Submit resume to Charles Herndon at alybre01@gmail.com.
- ◆ FBC Murphy is seeking a PT worship pastor who desires to glorify & magnify God. Primary responsibilities include equipping & leading worship team to use gifts & talents & work with the senior pastor to plan blended contemporary services on Sundays that engage the congregation to worship in spirit and truth. Submit resume to ben@fbcmurphy.com.
- ◆ Point View BC seeks a minister of music for both contemporary and traditional music styles and work with the ministry team to achieve church mission/objectives. Person must lead weekly rehearsals to prepare for upcoming services/events. Email resume to patty@pointviewbaptist.org.
- ◆ Travis Avenue BC in Fort Worth is in search of a PT Spanish-speaking worship minister to lead worship for the Spanish service. Se busca un ministro de alabanza part-time que dirija la adoración para el servicio de español. Send resume to jose.arzate@travis.org.
- ◆ River of Life Christian Fellowship, on the east side of San Antonio (inside Loop 1604), is seeking a PT worship leader for Sunday morning and Wednesday evening services. Send resume to brian.kent@amjill.com or River of Life, PO Box 453, Adkins, TX 78101.

STUDENTS

- ◆ FBC Mt. Vernon is seeking a FT minister to students. 7th - 12th grade ministry. Email resumes to: shannon@fbcmv.com or mail to: Personnel Team FBC Mt. Vernon P O Box 637 Mt. Vernon TX 75457
 - ◆ Pine Island Baptist Church in Hempstead is currently seeking a FT youth/associate. Submit resume to pastor.tom@picb.church.
 - ◆ Myrtle Springs BC in Hooks is seeking a FT pastor of student ministry. Duties include leading the student ministry on a weekly basis, teaching weekly, planning student activities, etc. Send resume to kpeters@myrtlesprings.org.
 - ◆ GracePoint Fellowship BC in Magnolia is seeking a FT director of youth ministry (Grades 7-12). For a full job description and/or to submit a resume, please contact ndladd@outlook.com or call the church office at 832-934-2900.
 - ◆ Southmont BC in Denton is seeking a FT minister to college students to equip and disciple students both on and off campus. Coordinate opportunities to connect with students with BSM leaders. Prefer church staff experience. Resumes to jdooley@southmont.org.
 - ◆ Spring Baptist Church is looking for a FT minister to students (junior high and high school) and college-aged people at its Klein Campus. Prefer at least two years of prior experience working with students. See job posting at springbaptist.org/jobs.
 - ◆ FBC, De Leon, is accepting resumes for a FT minister of students. Send to Minister of Students Search Committee, First Baptist Church, PO Box 228, De Leon, TX 76444 or e-mail to fbdeleon@cctc.net.
 - ◆ First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT student pastor with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is an international and domestic church planting network. Other cities are available. Email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.
 - ◆ FBC Smithfield, a multi-ethnic, multi-generational church located in North Richland Hills is prayerfully seeking a PT student pastor. We average 50-100 in worship attendance. All interested candidates are invited to view the open ministry position description and complete the employment application process at: fbcsmithfield.com/jobs.
 - ◆ FBC of Owentown has a bivocational youth ministry position available. Interested candidates should request complete job description and/or forward their resume or curriculum vitae to scottymwiles@gmail.com.
 - ◆ CrossRoads Covenant Church in Desoto is searching for a PT high school ministry director. Email resume to Kroyster79@gmail.com.
 - ◆ FBC Wills Point is currently searching for a PT minister to students. The ministry schedule is designed to work with someone pursuing education goals. Wills Point is a small community 45 minutes East of Dallas. Please submit resumes to search@fbwp.org.
 - ◆ Valwood Park BC in Farmers Branch is looking for an energetic student director to help build a thriving student ministry. We have great resources available and a supportive senior leadership team that will help grow this ministry. Send resume to valwood@valwoodparkchurch.com.
- ### CHILDREN
- ◆ Bear Creek BC in Katy is searching for a FT children's director. Email resume to mitchroyer@gmail.com.
 - ◆ Lamar BC in Arlington is seeking a FT children's minister. Submit resume to Lamar Baptist Church, 1000 Lamar Blvd, Arlington, TX or charles@lamarbaptist.org. See our website at lamarbaptist.org.

- ◆ FBC Huffman (near Houston) is searching for a FT children's pastor to serve children and families. Men and women considered. Medical included. Submit resumes to personnelteam@fbchuffman.org.
- ◆ Westbury BC in Houston is seeking a bivocational children's ministry associate. This is a highly relational position which focuses on building deep and intentional relationships with children, grades 5 and below, and their parents. The associate will serve alongside our family ministries pastor, student ministry associate and discipleship pastor and in partnership with the other ministry areas of the church. Send resume to brandonwebb@wbchouston.org.
- ◆ The Church at Quail Creek in Amarillo is searching for a FT children's minister. Resumes should be submitted to kclayton@tcqc.org.
- ◆ Lamar BC in Arlington is seeking a PT children's minister. lamarbaptist.org. Send resume to charles@lamarbaptist.org.
- ◆ Huntington FBC is hiring someone to direct children's ministry activities. See job description at huntingtonfbc.org/hiring. Email resume to byron@huntingtonfbc.org.

COMBINATION

- ◆ First Baptist Pampa is a healthy church (avg. att. 600) in the TX panhandle with a history of strong family & children's ministry. This staff position provides comprehensive leadership over ministries to birth-5th grade and young adults. Website: www.firstpampa.org. Excellent compensation package provided, commensurate with experience. Submit resume to byron@firstpampa.org.
- ◆ FBC of Cooper is seeking a FT highly motivated person with a heart for students and their families to fill the position of student/music pastor. Go to www.cooperfbc.com for job description. Email resume to Johnny Witherspoon at fbccooper@gmail.com.
- ◆ Western Hills BC in Wichita Falls is searching for a FT worship (blended service with hymns/contemporary) and youth leader. If you feel God calling you to minister in this way, send your resume to whbcwf@gmail.com.
- ◆ FBC Terrell is looking for a FT minister of children and senior adults. Primary role will be leading our children's ministry. Email resume to john@fbcterrell.org.
- ◆ FBC Taylor is looking for a FT minister of children and families. Interested applicant should apply at fbctaylor.org/employment.
- ◆ Peachtree BC in Jasper is searching for a FT youth and music minister. Must be able to teach and

lead our youth in Sunday School and Wednesday evening Bible studies and lead our youth in a camp experience once a year during the summer. The worship minister will lead in a blended worship style and be able to play would be helpful. We currently have piano, bass, and drums as part of the Sunday worship team. Send resume to gweaver.1@outlook.com.

- ◆ First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT kids and family minister with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is an international and domestic church planting network. Other cities are available. Email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.

OTHER

- ◆ Crossroads Church in Rowlett is a growing, creative, relationship-driven church. We are looking for someone to come sit in a "second chair" role to our lead pastor to share the responsibilities of leading the church, teaching, and equipping. Email questions and resume to Jason Collins at jcollins@crossroadsrowlett.org.
- ◆ Deer Park FBC is searching for a FT associate pastor. Email resume to dpfbcsearch@gmail.com.
- ◆ First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT lead planter with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is a domestic and international church planting network. Other cities are available. Please email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.
- ◆ First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT pastor of community engagement with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is an international and domestic church planting network. Other cities are available. Email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.
- ◆ Crossroads Church in Rowlett is a growing mission minded church who seeks an executive pastor/associate pastor to help with the needs of our growing church. Being a part of our staff means a desire to work collaboratively with our staff and teams to live the mission God has given Crossroads Church and assisting the lead pastor in leading the ministries of the church. Email resume to jcollins@crossroadsrowlett.org.
- ◆ First Colleyville Church is seeking a FT pastor of spiritual development with CrossCreek Network in Colleyville. CrossCreek is an international and domestic church planting network. Other cities are available. Email resume to Sarai Harding at saraih@firstcolleyville.com.

Paid Classifieds

- ◆ Seeking a director of worship arts at First Southern Baptist Church, Lawrence, Kansas. Job description posted at www.fsbfamily.com. Resumes should be submitted to search@fsbcfamily.com.
- ◆ Baker Book House pays cash for pastoral and academic religious libraries, large or small. Email quotes@bakerbookhouse.com or call 866-241-6733.
- ◆ Parkway Baptist Church in Creve Coeur, MO, is accepting resumes for a full-time student/collegiate minister who would be responsible for leadership in a well-established junior/senior high youth program, as well as begin a new collegiate-focused ministry in the area. A bachelor's degree in biblical studies and/or 3-5 years' experience in youth ministry is preferred. Position includes a competitive compensation package with benefit

options. Interested applicants should send a letter of interest, resume, references, and statement of faith to studentsearch@parkwaybaptist.net or by mail to Student Search Committee, Parkway Baptist Church, 12465 Olive Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141-6499.

- ◆ Are you looking for a place to do missions? We have wonderful opportunities in Port Arthur, Texas to reach people who desperately need Christ, such as conducting Backyard Bible Clubs, VBS, Kidz Musik Clubs for Children, door-to-door outreach and flyer distribution in the community, block parties, etc. We also have the need for skilled laborers to make repairs on our buildings damaged by hurricanes (drywall, painting, etc.). Your team could come for a day, a weekend or a week. Facilities provided to accommodate your group for 30+ volunteers. Contact Bill Brazell at 409-983-5654 or goodnewsbill@gmail.com.

SBTC DR crews—with COVID survivor—serve in flooded Louisiana where ‘everybody needs a hug’



SBTC DR volunteer Vince Rowe talks with a Lake Charles woman whose car became stuck on a concrete curb. Rowe helped the woman dislodge the vehicle safely and prayed with her.

PHOTO BY DEBBY NICHOLS



Vince Rowe presented the gospel to Mike and his friend Skillet outside a convenience store on the return trip to Texas. Mike trusted Christ. PHOTO SUBMITTED

By Jane Rodgers
Managing Editor

LAKE CHARLES A few months ago, Shirley Mills would never have imagined deploying with a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Disaster Relief team to Louisiana. The 73-year-old from Redwater, Texas, was having trouble just walking and breathing.

Mills spent three months in Christus St. Michael hospital in Texarkana battling COVID from October through December 2020, including nine weeks on a ventilator. Her doctor called her his “miracle lady” after she was taken off the machine, telling Mills’ husband he had not expected her to survive.

Rigorous physical and occupational therapy followed. Mills recalled not being able to do more than sit on the edge of the hospital bed in tears as a therapist reminded her of Philippians 4:13, that she could do “all things through Christ.” At first she was only able to drag a leg. The next day she took a step. The following day she managed three steps. Then five. Then nine.

After her discharge, therapy continued at home for months.

When Mills’ friend Debby Nichols asked her to deploy with SBTC DR in early June following record

floods in Northwest Louisiana, Mills knew she could not work on a feeding team as she had before. That would be too strenuous.

But she could walk and accompany Nichols as a chaplain and assessor.

Mills and Nichols teamed with Vince Rowe of Gladewater to assess damaged homes off Louisiana Avenue in Lake Charles after massive rainfall generated flooding, deluging an area still reeling from 2020 hurricanes Laura and Delta.

Hard-hit area

It was not a typical deployment, Nichols told the TEXAN. Southwest Louisiana Recovery established a clearinghouse, assigning homes for assessment and distributing work orders. An SBTC DR recovery crew from Bonham, led by Monte Furrh, was already busy mudding out homes.

Some of the requests for help dated back to Hurricane Laura, Nichols said. When Nichols, Mills and Rowe ran out of homes to assess, they were instructed by the Louisiana Baptist DR incident commander to walk the neighborhoods and offer chaplaincy services.

Assisted by two Michigan Baptist DR volunteers, Carla Strunk and Anita Parks, they began to do just that on June 1, continuing the next

day after the Michigan volunteers departed for home.

Instructed not to knock on doors, the teams drove around and walked through neighborhoods, looking for people to talk to.

“We just went down the street. If we saw anyone sitting outside or walking, we stopped and visited with them,” Nichols said.

Bringing hope

The team’s first stop on June 1 proved surprising.

A man and woman sat under their carport, looking at their debris-laden yard filled with items dragged outside to dry. Nichols approached with a few plastic bags containing snacks and bottled water.

“Can I bring you something?” Nichols asked.

“Yes, you can bring me some hope,” replied the woman, whose name was Janice.

“I can bring you hope,” Nichols answered, holding up SBDR’s “Hope in Crisis” tract she pulled from a snack bag.

Janice was stunned. The family had suffered damage from Laura, burst water pipes from the winter freeze and now water damage from the floods. The woman’s father had died in December; she had lost her job. Although she was a believer, she admitted that she was struggling.

“This is a God thing,” Janice said. “I can’t believe you brought me this thing that says hope when I need hope.”

Nichols assured Janice that her hope was in Christ as they prayed together.

Balloon animals and the gospel

That day, the teams prayed with 28 people.

“We prayed with everybody. Nobody turned us down,” Nichols said, noting that many were already believers.

Vince Rowe’s talent in making balloon animals attracted the interest of young and older alike.

Intrigued by Rowe’s artistry, two African American men in their 20s walking down McCall Street stopped to chat. Rowe, a church planter and former pastor, had been presenting the gospel using balloon animals since 1999, when he first employed the method on a mission trip to Honduras.

“I jumped out of the truck and asked the guys if they wanted a balloon,” Rowe recalled. He handed the young men a deflated balloon, and one jokingly asked why it hadn’t come with any air.

Rowe replied, as he inflated and then began to twist the balloon into a puppy shape, that people go through twists and struggles in life. Each time he made a twist in the balloon, Rowe mentioned a trial: Hurricane Laura, Hurricane Delta, floods, and so forth.

Finally, displaying the finished animal, Rowe explained that after life’s twists and trials, we can “step back and see how God has shaped and molded us into something he can use.”

Rowe presented the plan of salvation and “both guys got saved

in the street.” The young men said they occasionally attended church with their mothers and grandmothers, and Rowe expressed confidence they would now make church-going a habit.

The balloon animals also attracted young Landon and his little sister. Rowe visited with the boy during the morning of June 2. When Rowe asked him who God was, Landon replied, “God is my Father,” and then corrected himself, “God is my first Father.”

Later that afternoon, Landon found the DR volunteers again after school, this time bringing several young friends to get animals.

As Rowe worked with balloons and talked about Jesus, an 11-year-old girl expressed a desire to be saved. After two of her girlfriends explained the gospel further, she prayed to receive Christ.

‘Now she’s a child of God’

It wasn’t just the chaplains who made a spiritual difference in the lives of survivors.

When Furrh’s recovery team muddled out the homes of police officers, one woman, a 28-year-old recent college graduate with a degree in law enforcement, admitted to the volunteers that she had been thinking about the Lord for some time but didn’t know what to ask or what she needed to do to be saved.

“We prayed with her, and she asked Jesus into her life,” Furrh said. “Now she’s a child of God.”

So too is Mike, a homeless man that Rowe met when stopping outside a convenience store on the way back to Texas.

Spying Mike on the sidewalk, Rowe sat down and spoke to him, asking if he knew where he’d spend eternity.

Mike admitted he knew the choices he’d have after death.

“Would you like heaven to be the choice you get?” Rowe asked, explaining the gospel after Mike said yes. Tears streaked the man’s face, flowing down over his tear-drop tattoos, as he placed his trust in Jesus.

Mike’s friend Skillet wasn’t so receptive. He told Rowe he had been raised in a Christian home and his family lived into their nineties, so he believed he had time. Rowe gave Mike a Bible and prayed for the young men before getting back into the vehicle to head home.

SBTC DR Director Scottie Stice confirmed that the Bonham team arrived in Lake Charles on May 23 and stayed till June 1, while the chaplains returned home on June 3.

“We expected a longer deployment, but the work went fast, and Louisiana Baptist DR advised our recovery crews to stand down,” he said, adding, “We were pleased to go to Lake Charles and help the people. It’s been difficult to be a resident of western Louisiana with so many dangerous weather events.”

Of her post-COVID first foray into DR chaplaincy, Mills said, “God places us where we need to be,” adding, “I was not formally trained in chaplaincy, but I am fixing to get trained in it. If [survivors] just get a hug, it helps them. Everybody needs a hug.”

IMB joins Japanese Christians for Olympics outreach, despite reduced crowds

By Caroline Anderson
IMB Writer

TOKYO Every four years, athletes and spectators descend on the cities hosting the Olympic games. Historically, volunteer teams from U.S. churches have also journeyed to the Olympics and played active roles in both the summer and winter Olympics ministry strategies of IMB missionaries and national partners.

IMB missionaries in Tokyo, Japan, developed evangelism and outreach plans utilizing both volunteers and Japanese churches and believers. These plans required adapting, first with the postponement of the 2020 Olympics and second with the news that international spectators would not be permitted to attend the games in 2021.

IMB missionary Scott

Bradford said they remain committed to engaging the Japanese with the gospel. Their ministry strategy is evergreen, and they've adapted to the changes in the summer Olympics.

"Our vision, our focus as a Tokyo team, is first and foremost the Japanese," Bradford said.

IMB missionaries shifted their efforts from being event-oriented to strategy-oriented with a focus on utilizing events to enhance their outreach. Their strategy is two-fold, Bradford said. They will be planting churches and supporting Japanese believers and churches.

Bradford explained that's not to say they won't be using events as an entry point for evangelism.

"What we want to do is utilize whatever event is happening, whether it's the

Olympics, whether it is an earthquake or any kind of event," Bradford said.

"How do we come alongside our local churches in the midst of the event and support them and utilize this event to enhance opportunities for people to have a chance to hear the gospel and to be exposed?" Bradford said their team has been asking themselves.

IMB missionaries are encouraging Japanese believers to not rely on pastors and missionaries to share the gospel—it is every Christian's job to share their faith.

"We're trying ways to help them, encourage them, come alongside them, support them and work hand in hand with them to help them engage their community and help the community to see the church in a different way," Bradford said.

Rick and Hiromi Price are IMB missionaries in Tokyo and are leading the ministry before, during and after the Olympics this summer. The Prices are encouraging Japanese churches to take an active role in reaching out to people at the Olympics.

Technology is one way the Prices and Japanese Christians hope to minister during the Olympics. Rick said they are looking into using QR codes that Christians will distribute in front of venues and inside parks. Scanning the QR codes will open websites with Christian material.

During the Olympics, missionaries and Japanese Christians will be offering

conversational English practice in areas where college students congregate.

One part of the initial 2020 Olympic strategy involved renting space in front of an Olympic venue that would be a central outreach hub. The area would have offered sports fans a reprieve from the heat and included a pop-up coffeehouse, a stage, a play area and a space to trade Olympic pins.

While this might not be feasible anymore during the Olympics, the Prices and Bradford said it is a strategy that can be utilized in the future, for instance, using a mobile cart stationed in a park where Christians pass out refreshments and talk to people.

Daniel and Tara Rice, also IMB missionaries in Tokyo, and the Prices investigated community-based activities to introduce people to church in a non-threatening way.

Hosting community festivals is one avenue they are pursuing to minister in communities.

The Prices said their plans for festivals and outreach in parks will continue after the summer Olympics.

Once Japan opens for travel, Bradford said they look forward to utilizing volunteers.

The Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention, the Northwest Baptist Convention, the California Baptist Convention and the South Carolina Baptist Convention partner with the IMB in East Asia. Several of the conventions planned to send volunteer teams to min-

1 Rick and Hiromi Price are IMB missionaries in Tokyo, Japan.

2 Scott and Julie Bradford are IMB missionaries in Tokyo, Japan. The Bradfords, their teammates and Japanese Christians are involved in ministry before, during and after the Olympics.

3 A Southern Baptist volunteer listens to a Japanese man at a Rugby World Cup viewing party at Tokyo Baptist Church in Tokyo, Japan. Japanese churches and IMB missionaries have used sporting events as opportunities to share the gospel. While travel during the Olympics is not possible for international visitors, Southern Baptist volunteers plan to journey to Japan to partner with missionaries when travel resumes.

ister alongside IMB missionaries and Japanese Christians during the Olympics.

Various leaders in the conventions and churches told Bradford and the Prices their commitment to serving in Japan does not center on or around the Olympics—their commitment is to the Japanese people.

"That was really encouraging because that's really what our focus on the Olympics truly is—it's on the Japanese people," Bradford said.

Churches in the conventions plan to send teams once it is possible. The Prices' home church, The Summit Church in North Carolina, plans to send a volunteer team this fall. 🇺🇸



Texas-based ministry partners with IMB to virtually mobilize workers for Japan

By IMB

In June and July, International Mission Board missionaries in Japan are partnering with Mobilize Japan in a virtual mission trip involving participants from across the U.S.

Mobilize Japan was founded by four graduates of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary—Brit Redfield, Ariel Lee, Ines Chien and Vanessa Lim. The alumni planned a vir-

tual mission trip to allow Christians to serve among the Japanese despite the COVID-19 travel restrictions surrounding the summer Olympics.

The virtual mission trip began on June 1 and continues through the end of July. It includes three events each week—Training Tuesday, Mission Prayer Friday and Outreach Saturday.

For more information, visit mobilizejapan.org.

Atheist accepts Jesus in public confession of faith in Kenya



By Diana Chandler
Baptist Press

NAIROBI, Kenya "Praise God. God is good all the time," Seth Mahiga proclaimed at the altar of Life Church International in Nairobi, Kenya. Just two days earlier he announced his resignation as general secretary of the Atheists in Kenya Society.

"I'm just grateful to tell

you I was the ... general secretary of the Atheists in Kenya Society. It is the largest in Africa. ... It represents more than around 5 million atheists in Africa," Mahiga said in the Apostolic church. "I think a couple of days ago I've been going through some difficulties in life, and then I decided to resign as the secretary. I'm so happy to be here."

Mahiga is now in the majority in the country of about 55 million people. More than 85 percent of Kenyans are Christian, according to 2019 numbers from Statista, with more than 20 percent of Chris-

tians there described as evangelical, with more than 33 percent identifying as Protestant. Statista counted 1.6 percent of Kenyans as "nones."

Mahiga's May 30 profession of faith was broadcast live on the church's Facebook page and Elevate TV, which regularly broadcasts the church's services.

As the church prayed for Mahiga, Pastor Mark Mutinda described Mahiga as "a point of contact [for] all those people who are in darkness and all the atheists who say there is no God," and encouraged prayer that "the grace of

God reach out to wherever they are."

As Mahiga prayed the sinner's prayer, led by a member of the church's pastoral staff, he described himself to God as "a new creature no longer doubting about your existence. Indeed you are my God, and I will forever confess you are God. In Jesus' name I accept you and I give my life to you."

Atheists in Kenya was formed in 2016 in Nairobi, but suspended for two years after Christians complained. It regained active status in 2018 and describes itself as an organization of

secularists who believe no deity exists.

The secular group announced Mahiga's resignation in a press statement, including a link to a portion of the May 30 worship service.

"Seth's reason for resigning is that he has found Jesus Christ and is no longer interested in promoting Atheism in Kenya," group chairman Harrison Muma said. "We wish Seth well in his newfound relationship with Jesus Christ. We thank him for having served the society with dedication over the last one and a half years." 🇰🇪

Lifeway's 2022 VBS theme sparks kids' creativity

By Aaron Wilson
Baptist Press

NASHVILLE Next summer, kids will let their imaginations and ingenuity run wild at "Spark Studios," Lifeway Christian Resources' 2022 Vacation Bible School theme that explores the creativity of God and his image bearers.

At "Spark Studios" kids will learn how they were created in Christ and designed for God's purpose. Throughout the week, kids will sample different forms of creative expression—from painting and sculpting to robotics and inventing—to explore ways they can use their own talents to bring God glory.

"God's creativity didn't stop in Genesis. He is redeeming and reclaiming his creation and gives us an incredible gift in allowing us to be creative too," said Melita Thomas, VBS and

kids ministry specialist for Lifeway. "There's something for everyone in this theme because every person is creative in some way or another. That's one of the ways we are made in God's image."

Thomas said "Spark Studios" has a broad appeal across the gamut of creative expression, including classic fine arts like painting and sculpting, creative and dramatic arts like playing instruments and produc-

ing music, STEM-related arts (science, technology, engineering and math) like bringing inventions to life, and more.

"Spark Studios' is home to every creative outlet and is a place where kids, and adults too, can get their creative juices flowing and enjoy the process of making something incredible," Thomas said. "Along the way, they will learn that God is the infinitely creative

master artist who is transforming his creation."

"Spark Studios" uses the motto, "Created! Designed! Empowered!" and features Ephesians 2:10 as its theme verse, which refers to Christians as God's workmanship, created for good works. The weekly Bible lessons will explore the life of David, both before and after he became Israel's king.

"David was known as a mighty warrior and king, but he was also a musician and poet. He wrote psalms proclaiming the majesty and glory of God the creator," Thomas said. "God gave David the talents and skills he'd need when he was king, and David used them throughout his life to bring glory to God."

As kids learn about David they will also be introduced to stories about Jesus—God's forever king—with nods to David's lineage and writings interspersed to

help kids connect threads between the Old and New Testaments. They will discover that people in the Bible had expectations for a kind of king they thought they wanted, but that God had his own creative plan in sending his Son as the king who would lay down his life and pick it up again to save sinners.

"Spark Studios' will help kids see that becoming a Christian is not the end of a journey, but the beginning," Thomas said.

VBS remains one of the most popular church programs in the U.S., Lifeway Research shows. Six in 10 Americans say they went to VBS growing up, and 95 percent of parents whose child attended VBS say it provided a positive experience.

"Spark Studios" was revealed through a Facebook Live event on June 8. More information can be found at lifeway.vbs.com. ❧



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