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PARAMOUNT AMARILLO SEES MARKS OF VITALITY

“WE’VE SEEN GOD DO SOME REALLY NEAT THINGS IN TERMS OF BRINGING PEOPLE TO FAITH IN CHRIST, PEOPLE BEING DISCIPLED AND LEADING THEIR FRIENDS TO CHRIST. I THINK GOD HAS DONE SOME PRUNING, AND WE’RE SEEING ... FRUIT.”

—ANDREW HEBERT, PASTOR OF
PARAMOUNT BAPTIST CHURCH IN AMARILLO

By Erin Roach
TEXAN Correspondent

AMARILLO Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo has given more than \$1 million through its world missions offering in the past five years; God is moving among young adults and a Hispanic ministry is thriving—all these circumstances prompt pastor Andrew Hebert to say the church is moving forward. “Like a lot of other churches, our attendance is not what it was prior to the pandemic. We’re certainly down in our attendance, but I think that we are as healthy as we have been since I’ve been the pastor,” Hebert, pastor since 2016, told the TEXAN.

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Julio Arriola to serve as director for Send Network SBTC church planting partnership

By Jayson Larson
TEXAN Correspondent

FLINT Julio Arriola is returning to a familiar landscape. Once he officially puts his feet back on Texas soil, he will find the need for the gospel is greater than it has ever been. Arriola, 45, has accepted the call to serve as the first director of Send Network SBTC—a church planting partnership between the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC). The SBTC Executive Board voted unanimously to approve the partnership with NAMB in August and Arriola was introduced to the board at the Executive Board’s Nov. 10 meeting. Arriola will be employed by NAMB but will work out of the SBTC offices in Grapevine. The new partnership will allow the SBTC to lean on NAMB’s extensive knowledge and experience in the areas of church planting coaching, care and training for planters and funding.



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FROM THE EDITOR Gary Ledbetter

It all comes back to this

My final, foundational point about the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention is this: The convention is here because our churches believe the Bible is true in all that it affirms, on every subject it addresses.

This is a simple thought, but not so simple in its implications.

God has spoken. When we affirm the authority of Scripture, we are saying that God's expression (inspiration) of his will is authoritative. The converse is true—if the Bible is not accurate or authoritative then God has not spoken authoritatively. It goes to the nature of God; denying a thing he has said in Scripture undermines even the things we choose to not deny.

God's authority is thorough. This impels our relationship with schools like Criswell College and Jacksonville College. Those who teach math or biology in these schools have affirmed the same statement of faith affirmed by the theology professors. The converse is true—the SBTC has no working relationship with institutions that teach in any discipline that the Bible is only partly or mostly true. Our fellowship of churches and the staff that serves this fellowship are likewise committed to honor the authority of Scripture in every outgrowth of ministry. This is why we have not maintained the affiliation of churches that have female senior pastors or affirmed any other doctrine clearly against the teaching of Scripture.

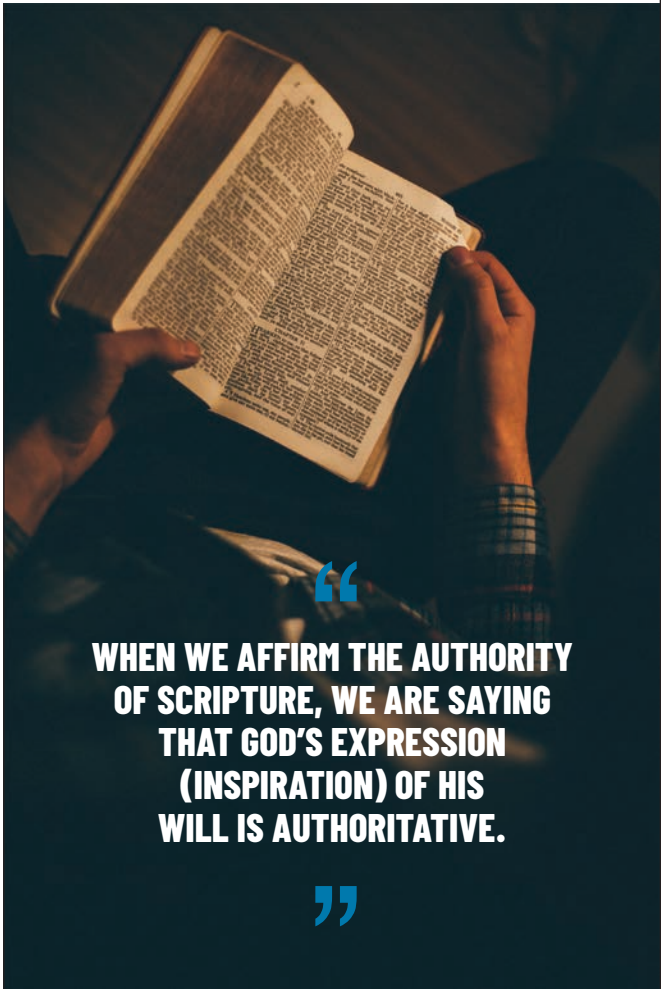
God's Word is objective. It is not provable to a skeptic's satisfaction—our trust in God's Word is our trust in God. Belief in God is a matter of faith, an assumption from which we see all other things. But God's written Word protects us from mystic, subjective nonsense. "I think God wants me to rob a liquor store." He doesn't. He has said so clearly in his Word, no

matter what you think about it. The same is true of many other things we must or must not do.

Objectivity also protects us from thinking that our opinion of the Word is decisive. It is not pertinent if I decide to sign each page of the Bible or only most of them. Some things God says won't fit my preferences or my understanding. Doesn't matter. God has spoken.

Objectivity also speaks to the truth of a biblical teaching. Bible verses have a single meaning, say a thing that is true. They also have many applications for our diverse lives. The Bible objectively says that children are a blessing from the Lord, for example. Nothing makes having children as such a bad thing, then. But how this verse affects your life may be different from how it affects mine. Does this mean you should marry and have a bunch of kids? Adopt? Stay single and affirm families larger than yours? Your application may vary but none of us can pass judgment on the truth of what God has said. Submitting to the truth of inerrancy is more than an academic exercise; it has daily implications.

Inerrancy is denominationally significant. It is the story of Christianity to see churches and groups of churches struggle to define orthodoxy. At almost every juncture of a denominational split, there is a group or person trying to replace biblical authority with something lesser and another group unwilling to do that. As Jim Richards says in his interview, the battle for the Bible is never over until we see Jesus. So inerrancy is crucial



to the idea that churches will join together for gospel reasons. Your fellowship, just like your church, will become something more akin to Habitat for Humanity if biblical authority is not your standard for belief and order. Denominational groups that tolerate or justify unbiblical doctrine soon become irrelevant to our Great Commission work.

After 23 years of growth and work, the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention is in essence where it started—a fellowship of churches that takes its marching orders from God's written Word. May our Lord find us in this same place at his return.

... and a personal note

This is my last column as editor, although you may see my byline from time to time throughout 2022. It's been an honor and a pleasure to tell the stories of churches doing well for the past 21 years. Thank you!

I want to mention some outstanding managing editors who made the TEXAN grow and develop: Tammi Ledbetter (two times!), Melissa Deming, Jerry Pierce, Keith Collier, Josh Owens and Jane Rodgers. These talented folks served us all well.

I commend our new editor, Jayson Larson, to you. The new format will be attractive (Russ Lightner will continue to do his stellar work), and the content will be practical. Jayson is the man to lead the TEXAN into the future. I'll be pleased to assist in an advisory role as the new TEXAN develops.

God bless you all,
Gary



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What's Next?

sbtxas.com/events

December

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



- 2-4** Student Ministers Getaway, Lone Star Court, Austin
- 24-31** Christmas SBTC office closed

January

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

- 1-3** New Year's holiday SBTC office closed
- 12** Chapel, SBTC sbtxas.com/live
- 17** Martin Luther King, Jr. Day SBTC office closed
- 18** Tax Seminar Online Event

- 19** Tax Seminar Online Event
- 21** Pastor+Wife Date Night Rockpointe Church, Flower Mound
- 17** Bible Drill/Speakers Retreat SWBTS, Fort Worth
- 25** Tax Seminar Online Event
- 27** Tax Seminar Online Event

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

Northpoint Burleson holds dedication service for children



On Nov. 14, Northpoint Baptist Church in Burleson dedicated 10 infants to the Lord, and their parents and the church committed to pray and raise these infants to love and honor God.

Pastor Landon Dees, who also has young children, supports infant dedications as a way to reinforce and support parents' commitment to guiding their children to faith in Christ. He encouraged the congregation by saying, "When it comes to kids, we are sinners parenting little sinners, and we need to depend on him to raise them dependent on him." Dees preached from James 4:13-17 and emphasized the importance of parents depending on God, making their future plans in submission to God's purposes for their life, and the lives of their children.

Jeremy Dooley, Northpoint's administrator and student pastor, who guided the ceremony, said that dedications are important because this is the time when, "parents commit to raising and training their children up in the Lord, and we as a congregation commit to supporting them." He also added, "It is our prayer that one day each of these children would put their faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation."

After having parents and the congregation commit with a public proclamation, Dooley charged the parents of the 10 infants to teach their children the word of God as indicated in Deuteronomy 6:6-7; "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up."

—CLARA MOLINA



Hillcrest Cedar Hill pays off pastor's mortgage

Hillcrest Baptist Church feels their pastor, Mike Simmons, has been faithful and recently showed their appreciation in a significant way.

At a banquet marking 30 years of service to Hillcrest by the pastor and his wife, Beverly, church leaders honored the couple by paying off their home mortgage. Bruno Molina, representing the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, also presented Simmons with an appreciation plaque recognizing his work in the community.

Simmons has served as a trustee for the International Mission Board for nine years. He has also led Hillcrest in numerous endeavors to reach the lost and bring them to Christ. He emphasizes church planting and has led his church to being known as a grandfather of various churches that have, themselves, gone on to plant churches in Romania, Egypt and Thailand.

Under his leadership, Hillcrest has sent 95 missionaries to spread the gospel globally, including throughout North America.

Simmons is married to Beverly, and they have three grown children and two grandchildren.

—BAPTIST PRESS



West Brownsville Baptist ministry to 'landslide' of migrants ongoing

Pastor Carlos Navarro and Golan Ministries of West Brownsville Baptist Church are continuing their long ministry to migrants crossing into the U.S. at the border between Texas and Matamoros.

Migrant numbers ebbed during the Trump administration and coming of COVID-19 but have increased to what Navarro calls "a landslide" since January 2021, when the Biden administration entered office.

Navarro described the way things work in Brownsville now.

Migrants are tested for COVID by ICE and border authorities. Those testing negative and with sponsors in the United States are then sent to the local bus station to await transportation. When ICE is about to release a group of 75-100, Navarro receives a phone call. He and volunteers head to the bus station with water, food and sundries. He preaches the gospel and church members distribute backpacks full of Bibles, tracts and helpful items.

Migrants testing positive for COVID are quarantined in an area hotel, Navarro added.

Lately, the migrants have come mostly from

Haiti, Navarro said. Also coming, in descending order of frequency, are Venezuelans, Cubans and Nicaraguans. Others are arriving from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Columbia, the Dominican Republic, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.

Navarro stresses that those the church is serving have been admitted to the country legally. The city of Brownsville and Cameron County are not allowing them to stay overnight, so they depart for other areas of the U.S., mainly Florida.

Navarro estimates some 5,792 decisions for Christ have been made by migrants under the church's ministry since April 2019. As hundreds of new believers head to Florida, he not only gives them his business card, but tells them to contact him when they are settled. He recommends churches they might attend to continue their new walk with Jesus in the Sunshine State.

Florida pastors have noticed the increase in numbers. On the recommendation of 38 Florida Baptist pastors, Navarro was invited to Lakeland, near Orlando, to address groups at the Florida Baptist State Convention at its annual meeting Nov. 7-9.

Since April 2019, Navarro estimates that the church has ministered to nearly 17,000 migrants, given out 7,255 Bibles and served 28,000 meals.

—TEXAN

Todd Gray assumes pulpit at Brownwood's Coggin Avenue Baptist

Todd Gray will begin his role as pastor of Coggin Avenue Baptist Church in Brownwood on Dec. 5. For the past decade, Gray has pastored Tabernacle Baptist Church in Ennis, where he was also chaplain for the Ennis High School football team.

Gray and his wife, Tammy, both served as captains in the United States Air Force before entering the ministry. Todd graduated from Angelo State University in 2002 and earned a Master of Divinity (2011) and Doctor of Ministry in expository preaching (2017) from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Tammy Gray is also a Christian romance novelist who has published 12 books.

The Grays have three children.

Coggin members voted unanimously following Sunday services on Oct. 24 to call Gray.



Pastor Gray told Brownwoodnews.com, "I am grateful and humbled by the Lord that he is going to allow me to serve at Coggin Avenue Baptist Church. Brownwood and Brown County is a wonderful community that makes me feel like I am heading back home. I am filled with expectation about what God is going to do in and through Coggin for the sake of the gospel and his glory!"

—BROWNWOODNEWS.COM



First Pflugerville calls Wilkinson as pastor

Wes Wilkinson, formerly college minister at Central Baptist in Bryan/College Station, began his service as the pastor of First Baptist Pflugerville on Oct. 26. This is Wilkinson's first senior pastorate. He also formerly served as the student pastor at First Baptist Carrollton from 2011-2016. He is married to Bethany, and they have one daughter.

—FIRST PFLUGERVILLE

A NEW YEAR, A NEW LOOK



Nathan Lorick
Executive Director

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@NathanLorick

For many years the Southern Baptist TEXAN has been an incredible source for news across Texas and the SBTC. For 20 years, the TEXAN has been in a tabloid newspaper format. It has served us well for those two decades, and we are grateful for all who have contributed to it.

In January, the TEXAN will be transitioning to a magazine format.

This will be a first-class magazine that offers opportunities to celebrate what God is doing across Texas and the world. It will be packed with practical articles that are helpful tools for ministry, stories of how God is moving among SBTC churches, some newsworthy items, and ways in which you can be involved in all that God is doing in our state. We are praying this will be a fresh resource for you as you serve the Lord.

While we believe you will love the new TEXAN, we do have one request of you. We need your stories! In fact, we cannot do what we do without you. Our convention of Southern Baptist churches is 2,684 affiliated churches strong here in the Lone Star State. That's a lot of ground to cover. To give you some perspective, if we reached out to one SBTC church per day every single day trying to find out what God is doing in your area, it would take us more than seven years to talk to each affiliated church just once.

So what are we looking for? Has God answered a prayer at your church that you and your congregation have been praying over for years? Is a ministry evangelism effort beginning to yield fruit? Is there a faithful servant in your church who is modeling the life of

Christ in a way that sets a godly example for another generation? We want to tell those stories, and in doing so, partner together in fulfilling to command of Psalm 96:3: "Declare his glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples."

Help us to tell the story of what God is doing across Texas. We believe the TEXAN will serve as a great tool of encouragement for SBTC churches and leaders. Be on the lookout in January as we make the shift and you receive a magazine rather than a newspaper in your mailbox and at your church.

There are multiple ways you can share with us the stories of what God is doing in your church. Scan the QR code at the right to be taken to a page where you can submit your stories, send an email to TEXAN editor Jayson Larson at jlarson@sbtexas.com, or follow the "What's Your Story?" link on our website at texan.digital.

My family and I wish you a blessed Christmas season as we celebrate the birth of the Savior. To God be the glory! Great things he has done and is doing through the SBTC and you, our faithful readers and fellow followers of Christ. I love you and I'm honored to serve you. ✨

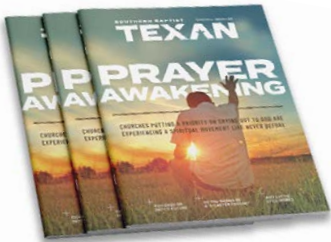


Share with us the stories of what God is doing in your church. Three ways to connect:

Scan this QR code to submit your stories

Send an email to TEXAN editor
Jayson Larson at jlarson@sbtexas.com

or visit texan.digital/story



In January, the TEXAN will be transitioning to a magazine format.



MERRY Christmas

FROM NATHAN AND JENNA LORICK,
AND YOUR SBTC STAFF!

Praying for revival



Todd Kaunitz
SBTC President

tkaunitz@nbbctx.org
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I am grateful and humbled that you have elected me as president of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. It is an honor to serve you in this capacity. I want you to know that I covet your prayers as we seek to expand the kingdom together in the coming year.

I am thankful for the leadership of Dr. Lorick and consider it a privilege to join him in this season of transition. I truly believe that God is at work across our state, and I have never been more excited to partner with the greatest missions organization in the world. I also believe

that the SBTC has the opportunity and responsibility to lead the way as we prayerfully pursue reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus.

This year, God has been moving in my life in ways he has never moved before. I am overwhelmed by his grace and willingness to break areas in my life that have needed to be broken for years. He has revealed to me just how desperate I am for his power and presence in my life and church. I am convinced now more than ever, that if we are going to advance the gospel of Jesus and reach a lost and dying world, we need more than fleshly innovation. We need a holy desperation for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

My singular desire as the president of this great convention is to build upon the prayer focus of Kie Bowman and lead our churches to pray like never before! To call upon the name of the Lord, asking him to send revival and spiritual awakening to our churches, communities, state, nation, and world. Listen, what we need, more than larger budgets, bigger buildings and greater attendance is a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit in our churches. We need him to sweep through our communities, state, and nation. I don't want you to miss the two-fold request in the statement above: We are asking God to send revival AND spiritual awakening. While these two

“
**LISTEN, WHAT WE
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OUR CHURCHES.**
”

works of the Spirit are often linked together, they are not the same. In fact, I believe that we cannot have the second (spiritual awakening) without the first (revival).

You see, revival is what happens to believers when God brings us to a place of brokenness. This leads us to repentance, resulting in a fresh outpouring of his Spirit in us. Pastor Bill Elliff says, "To 'revive' literally means to 'bring to life again.' It is a word for the church, for you cannot 're-vive' what has not once been 'vived!'" This is absolutely true! Revival is the by-product of the Holy Spirit bringing back spiritual vitality to the church. J.I. Packer said it like this: "Revival is the visitation of God which brings to life

Christians who have been sleeping and restores a deep sense of God's near presence and holiness."

What is spiritual awakening then? Spiritual awakening is what happens to unbelievers when the Holy Spirit moves in power through his church. It's when he moves with such a manifestation of his presence that unbelievers are supernaturally and powerfully awakened to the saving power of Jesus and their need for him. When a spiritual awakening occurs, you see lost people in a geographical region come to saving faith in Jesus in exponential numbers, resulting in a rapid expansion of God's kingdom. It should be the heart cry of every follower of Jesus to see God move in power like this. Without a revived church we will not see a spiritual awakening in our culture. Andrew Murray, the great prayer warrior, said, "A revived church is the only hope of a dying world."

This is why I am inviting the nearly 2700 churches that make up the SBTC to join me in praying like never before. Together, let's call upon the name of the Lord and ask him to send revival. Revival in our hearts, revival in our churches, revival in our denomination, revival in every denomination. Let's ask him to move with such power among him people that it leads to the next great spiritual awakening in our nation! ✨

'Stay faithful! Jesus is coming!'



Jim Richards reflects on the convention he led for over 22 years

By Gary Ledbetter
Editor

GRAPEVINE Jim Richards became executive director of a new fellowship of 120 churches 23 years ago. The convention has grown phenomenally in the intervening years until it has become a leading state convention in size, giving and ministry innovation.

Earlier this year, Richards welcomed his successor, Nathan Lorick, who became executive director in July. Dr. Richards serves Dr. Lorick in an advisory capacity currently and will become executive director emeritus Jan. 1, 2022. The Richards recently moved to East Texas, nearer their kids and grandkids, and Jim is keeping a busy preaching schedule.

The TEXAN asked Richards a few questions about his time leading the SBTC and his thoughts about the current and future of Southern Baptist cooperation.

SOUTHERN BAPTIST TEXAN: WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPIEST ABOUT THE TIME YOU LED THE SBTC?

Richards: The most rewarding part of my service for the SBTC was seeing churches being convictional about the Word of God and affiliating with the convention. Each autonomous local church had to make a decision: "Are we going to identify with a confessional fellowship of churches or remain in something less?" Normative size churches and large churches came in huge numbers to be together for missions and ministry in Texas, America and the world. From 120 founding churches to now nearly 2,700 churches, the SBTC is comprised of congregations that love the Lord Jesus and his Word.

ARE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS HEADED FOR ANOTHER BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE? ANOTHER CBF-TYPE FRACTURE?

Every day is a battle for Bible because Satan never rests. There are always people in the church leading people astray. We never can hang a banner that says "mission accomplished" until we see Jesus.

All the identified groups [within the SBC] I know of affirm biblical inerrancy. I don't see a departure. I do think there are subtle indicators that culture is influencing the direction of interpretation. In order to maintain some interpretations, biblical inerrancy will be undermined. We have to stay on guard.

[A fracture] is more likely to happen if [dissenters] coalesce around more than one or two social issues. Commonality over a broader base of issues is necessary to form a group that survives. In 1998, when the SBTC began, there was a problem with whether or not the [existing] convention was going to affirm biblical inerrancy. That was a no-brainer that provided a stack pole for churches to rally around. At that time, the current social issues were not as prominent. Because of that one clearly defined issue, it was easier for hundreds and even thousands of churches to come together.

CAN YOU THINK OF ONE OR TWO THINGS THAT SURPRISED YOU AS THE CONVENTION GREW AND MATURED?

After 51 years in the ministry, little surprises me. I did find one of the most

“
IT HAS BEEN MY PRIVILEGE TO WATCH THE FAITHFULNESS OF PASTORS IN OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACES SERVE JESUS AND PROCLAIM GOD’S WORD.
”

difficult tasks was to serve the SBTC while the SBC and other factors out of our control impacted our ministry. Being supportive of the SBC while doing what was best for the SBTC at times was a balancing act.

On a positive note, through more than two decades, I was able to see a new generation of leaders grow up. There are some extremely gifted young leaders who are committed to cooperative work. Pundits had predicted the demise of convention ministry; the young leaders will prove them wrong.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE ON THE HORIZON FOR SOUTHERN BAPTISTS?

In one word, "unity," we find the greatest challenge for Southern Baptists. The SBC is made up of a wide diversity of constituents. With the BF&M2000 as a basis, churches must be willing to tolerate one another on a number of issues beyond the faith statement. There are danger signs about matters that fall outside the BF&M2000 in the SBC. Valid concerns have to be addressed. Unfortunately, at times when these concerns are confronted, it is the right message but the wrong messenger. If I had a solution on how to bring the varying agenda-driven groups together, I would do it immediately. It is sad to see the greatest missionary force for the gospel threatened by infighting.

HAVE DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO OUR STRONG CONNECTION WITH THE SBC BEEN A CHALLENGE TO OUR UNITY?

When the SBC sneezes, we catch a cold. When there is a policy misstep that is unacceptable to local pastors and congregations, we are so closely identified with the SBC that the repercussions fall on us. Even when SBTC leaders would disagree with an SBC position, it still adversely affects the state convention. We are inextricably tied together—not just in giving, though that is a major portion of it—but through our vision for national and international missions. We are sometimes caught between the churches that generally appreciate how the SBTC has helped local churches, and churches that are disenchanted with an SBC action or leader.

WHAT’S THE MOST ENCOURAGING THING YOU SEE HAPPENING IN THE SBTC?

Nothing excites me more than our new leadership in the person of Dr. Nathan Lorick. He is connecting



with pastors and churches all across our convention. His winsome ways and strong convictions are the tools God will use to continue building the SBTC. He sees the landscape with fresh eyes. He brings new energy to the same task of keeping the churches moving forward together. He is leading well.

I believe the SBTC, not only in Nathan Lorick, but in other leaders of his generation, has a bright hope and future. This is true of the SBC as well. These young men and women, if they'll stay of the course, and not deviate from who we are, and keep our core values, the future of the SBTC is bright.

WHAT VALEDICTORY CHARGE WOULD YOU MAKE TO OUR FELLOWSHIP?

The apostle Paul, in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders [Acts 20], captures some of my feelings. He loved the leadership and the church. It has been my privilege to watch the faithfulness of pastors in out-of-the-way places serve Jesus and proclaim God's Word. My heart is knitted to them. Seeing churches determine that their beliefs align with the confession of the SBTC has blessed me beyond words. Having relationships with great leaders has been equally rewarding. Echoing Paul's concerns to the Ephesians, I caution the pastors and churches about those who would lead the churches away from this strong fellowship. Stay faithful! Be courageous! Keep serving! Jesus is coming! 🙌

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PARAMOUNT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We've seen God do some really neat things in terms of bringing people to faith in Christ, people being disciplined and leading their friends to Christ. I think God has done some pruning, and we're seeing ... fruit."

Seventy-five percent of Paramount's world missions offering goes to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for international missions, and 25 percent goes to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American missions.

In addition to giving, the church has a partnership in the Middle East and has sent teams multiple times a year for the past five years, except during the time interrupted by COVID. Paramount also has worked with the North American Mission Board to plant a church in Denver most recently.

A neighborhood church with an international reach

Paramount began as a plant of First Baptist Church in Amarillo in 1958 when neighborhood churches were the norm, and the Paramount neighborhood was drawing young families. The founding pastor was Chester O'Brien, who went on to serve as executive director of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico. Hebert is only the fourth pastor, demonstrating the church's long-tenured leadership.

Through the years, "looking to the least of these, people who are kind of on the margins or maybe forgotten by a lot of people," has been part of Paramount's DNA, Hebert said. The church started a deaf church about 20 years ago when it noticed a growing need.

Before COVID, as many as 300 students a year were learning English at all levels through Paramount's English as a Second Language classes. That number has fallen to around 100, but Hebert expects it to rebound.

"We have one of the largest per capita refugee populations in the state of Texas in Amarillo, and it's a great way to reach people from all kinds of nations," the pastor said. "Often times we'll have 30-plus different languages represented in our ESL ministry."

Another compassion ministry at Paramount is disaster relief, and the church sends out a team that includes other churches in the Texas Panhandle almost monthly, Hebert said. Nearly 30 people came to faith in Christ through the group's recent efforts in Louisiana with SBTC Disaster Relief.

A unique ministry at Paramount is Doxa, the largest dance studio in the Panhandle, which was drawing well over 500 students for ballet

THERE WERE A COUPLE OF OTHER HISPANIC BAPTIST CHURCHES THAT CLOSED DURING THE PANDEMIC, SO NOW IF YOU SPEAK SPANISH AND YOU WANT TO GO TO A BAPTIST CHURCH, PARAMOUNT EN ESPANOL IS YOUR ONLY OPTION.

—ANDREW HEBERT

THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM IS REALLY A WISE WAY OF LEVERAGING OUR RESOURCES SO THAT WHETHER YOU'RE A LARGE CHURCH OR A SMALL CHURCH YOU CAN BE PART OF SOME REALLY SIGNIFICANT THINGS IN TERMS OF GETTING THE GOSPEL TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.

—ANDREW HEBERT

pre-pandemic. The wife of Paramount's worship pastor has a professional dance background and a heart for worshiping God through dance. Each Christmas and each spring, "several thousand people" see a biblical story—such as the life of Daniel or Joseph—portrayed and "also hear a very clear gospel presentation," Hebert said.

Amarillo's sole Hispanic Baptist ministry

Paramount has now what Hebert called "the only Hispanic Baptist work in Amarillo."

"There were a couple of other Hispanic Baptist churches that closed during the pandemic, so now if you speak Spanish and you want to go to a Baptist church, Paramount en Espanol is your only option," he said.

Sixty to 70 Hispanics attend the Spanish language service, which meets at the same time as the Eng-



God is moving in the student ministry as well as the college and young adult ministry at Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo. During the summer, about 25 junior high and high school students came to faith in Christ and were baptized. PHOTOS SUBMITTED



Sixty to 70 Hispanics attend the Spanish language service at Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo. The church, which hosted a recent Hispanic heritage festival, has a Hispanic student ministry and a fulltime pastor of Hispanic ministries.

lish service at Paramount. The church has a Hispanic student ministry and a fulltime pastor of Hispanic ministries.

"With the immigration trends being what they are in the state of Texas, our state is becoming a majority Hispanic state, and that's going to be a trend that increases," Hebert said, "so we want to make sure that we're doing everything we can to reach our neighbors for Jesus."

Of students and CP

God is doing something special with Paramount's

student ministry as well as the college and young adult ministry, Hebert said. During the summer, about 25 junior high and high school students came to faith in Christ and were baptized.

"We're not doing what I would call anything fancy in terms of our ministry. It's not a show. There's not lights and fog machines and stuff like that," he said. "We preach the Bible. We stress things like evangelism and discipleship and missions and prayer, and God is

just moving among young people."

Cooperative Program giving is a priority at Paramount because it's "the best thing going," Hebert said, adding that it's "one of the reasons that I am enthusiastic to be a Southern Baptist."

"The Cooperative Program is really a wise way of leveraging our resources so that whether you're a large church or a small church you can be part of some really significant things in terms of getting the gospel to the ends of the earth," Hebert said. ✕

Por Erin Roach
Corresponsal del TEXAN

AMARILLO La Iglesia Bautista Paramount en Amarillo ha dado en los últimos cinco años, más de 1 millón de dólares en ofrendas para las misiones mundiales. Dios se está moviendo entre los adultos jóvenes y un ministerio hispano que está prosperando - todas estas circunstancias hacen que el pastor Andrew Hebert diga que la iglesia está avanzando.

“Al igual que muchas otras iglesias, nuestra asistencia no es lo que era antes de la pandemia. Ciertamente ha disminuido la asistencia, pero creo que estamos tan saludables como lo hemos estado desde que soy el pastor”, dijo Hebert, pastor desde el 2016, al TEXAN.

“Hemos visto a Dios hacer algunas cosas realmente asombrosas en términos de llevar a la gente a la fe en Cristo, personas que están siendo discipuladas y llevando a sus amigos a Cristo. Creo que Dios ha hecho algo de poda, y estamos viendo... fruto”.

El 75% de la ofrenda para las misiones mundiales de la Iglesia Paramount se destina a la Ofrenda de Navidad Lottie Moon para las misiones internacionales, y el 25% va para la Ofrenda de Resurrección Annie Armstrong para las misiones norteamericanas.

Además de las ofrendas, la iglesia está en colaboración en Oriente Medio y ha enviado equipos varias veces al año durante los últimos cinco años, excepto durante el tiempo interrumpido por COVID. La Iglesia Bautista Paramount también ha trabajado con la Junta de Misiones Norteamericanas para plantar una iglesia en Denver más recientemente.

Una iglesia de barrio con alcance internacional

Paramount comenzó como una plantación de la Primera Iglesia Bautista en Amarillo en 1958 cuando las iglesias de barrio eran eficaces, y el barrio de Paramount estaba atrayendo a las familias jóvenes. El pastor fundador fue Chester O'Brien, quien llegó a ser director ejecutivo de la Convención Bautista de Nuevo México. Hebert es sólo el cuarto pastor, lo que demuestra un liderazgo de larga duración en la iglesia.

A lo largo de los años, “mirar a los más vulnerables, las personas que están marginadas o tal vez olvidadas por mucha gente”, ha sido parte del ADN de Paramount, dijo el pas-

“**EN AMARILLO, TENEMOS UNA DE LAS MAYORES POBLACIONES DE REFUGIADOS PER CÁPITA EN EL ESTADO DE TEXAS, Y ES UNA GRAN MANERA DE LLEGAR A PERSONAS DE TODO TIPO DE NACIONES. A MENUDO TENDREMOS MÁS DE 30 IDIOMAS DIFERENTES REPRESENTADOS EN NUESTRO MINISTERIO DE ESL (INGLÉS COMO SEGUNDO IDIOMA)”.**

—ANDREW HEBERT

tor Hebert. La iglesia creó una iglesia para sordos hace unos 20 años, cuando se dio cuenta de la creciente necesidad.

Antes de COVID, hasta 300 estudiantes al año aprendían inglés en todos los niveles a través de las clases de inglés como segundo idioma que ofrecía la Iglesia Paramount. Ese número ha descendido a unos 100, pero el pastor Hebert espera que se recupere.

“En Amarillo, tenemos una de las mayores poblaciones de refugiados per cápita en el estado de Texas, y es una gran manera de llegar a personas de todo tipo de naciones”, dijo el pastor. “A menudo tendremos más de 30 idiomas diferentes representados en nuestro ministerio de ESL (inglés como segundo idioma)”.

Otro ministerio de compasión en la Iglesia Paramount es el de ayuda en caso de desastres, y la iglesia envía un equipo que incluye otras iglesias en el Panhandle de Texas casi mensualmente, dijo el pastor Hebert. Casi 30 personas vinieron a la fe en Cristo a través de los esfuerzos recientes del grupo en Luisiana con SBTC Disaster Relief.

Un ministerio único en la Iglesia Paramount es Doga, el estudio de danza más grande en el Panhandle, que estaba atrayendo a más de 500 estudiantes de ballet antes de la



Before COVID, as many as 300 students a year were learning English at all levels through ESL classes at Paramount Baptist Church in Amarillo, and more than 30 languages were represented. PHOTOS SUBMITTED



Andrew Hebert has been pastor of Paramount Baptist Church since 2016 and cites the Cooperative Program as one of the reasons he is “enthusiastic to be a Southern Baptist.”

pandemia. La esposa del pastor de alabanza de Paramount tiene una formación profesional en danza y un corazón para adorar a Dios a través de la danza. Cada Navidad y cada primavera, “varios miles de personas” ven una historia bíblica -como la vida de Daniel o José- representada y “también escuchan una presentación muy clara del evangelio”, dijo Hebert.

El único ministerio bautista hispano de Amarillo

La Iglesia Paramount tiene ahora lo que el pastor Hebert llamó “la única obra bautista hispana en Amarillo”.

“Hubo un par de otras iglesias bautistas hispanas que cerraron durante la pandemia, así que ahora si usted habla español y quiere ir a una iglesia bautista, Paramount en Español es su única opción”, dijo.

Entre 60 y 70 hispanos asisten al servicio en español, que se reúne al mismo tiempo que el servicio en inglés en Paramount. La iglesia tiene un ministerio de jóvenes hispano y un pastor de ministerios hispanos a tiempo completo.

“Con las tendencias de inmigración siendo lo que son en el estado de Texas, nuestro estado se está convirtiendo en un estado de mayoría hispana, y eso va a ser una tendencia que aumenta”, dijo Hebert, “por lo que queremos asegurarnos de que estamos haciendo todo lo posible para llegar a nuestros vecinos para presentarles a Cristo.”

Los Jóvenes y el Programa Cooperativo

Dios está haciendo algo especial con el ministerio de jóvenes de la Iglesia Paramount, así como con el ministerio de universitarios y de jóvenes adultos, dijo el pastor. Durante el verano, unos 25 estudiantes de secundaria y preparatoria llegaron a la fe en Cristo y fueron bautizados.

“**HUBO UN PAR DE OTRAS IGLESIAS BAUTISTAS HISPANAS QUE CERRARON DURANTE LA PANDEMIA, ASÍ QUE AHORA SI USTED HABLA ESPAÑOL Y QUIERE IR A UNA IGLESIA BAUTISTA, PARAMOUNT EN ESPAÑOL ES SU ÚNICA OPCIÓN.**

—ANDREW HEBERT

“No estamos haciendo lo que yo llamaría algo elegante en términos de nuestro ministerio. No es un espectáculo. No hay luces ni máquinas de niebla ni cosas por el estilo”, dijo. “Predicamos la Biblia. Hacemos hincapié en cosas como el evangelismo, el discipulado, las misiones y la oración, y Dios simplemente se mueve entre los jóvenes.”

Las donaciones al Programa Cooperativo son una prioridad en la Iglesia Bautista Paramount porque es “lo mejor que hay”, dijo el pastor Hebert, y añadió que es “una de las razones por las que me entusiasma ser bautista del sur”.

“El Programa Cooperativo es realmente una forma sabia de aprovechar nuestros recursos para que, tanto si se trata de una iglesia grande como de una pequeña, se pueda participar en algunas cosas realmente significativas en términos de llevar el evangelio hasta los confines de la tierra”, dijo el pastor Hebert. ✠

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SBTC AM 2021 messengers affirm Texas Heartbeat Act, condemn sexual violence, pass \$26.5 million budget

By Jane Rodgers | Managing Editor

"SOUTHERN BAPTISTS OF TEXAS, WE MUST DIVE IN AND WE MUST MOVE FORWARD—FORWARD IN REACHING THE LOST, FORWARD IN PLANTING CHURCHES, FORWARD IN REVITALIZING CHURCHES, FORWARD IN ENCOURAGING AND EQUIPPING CHURCHES, FORWARD IN MOBILIZING CHURCHES, FORWARD IN MISSIONS."

—SBTC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NATHAN LORICK

FLINT The 2021 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention met Nov. 8-9 at Flint Baptist Church, south of Tyler, to celebrate the many "But God" moments (referencing Ephesians 2:4-7) experienced by churches and individuals who have weathered challenging circumstances by the strength of God's faithfulness in recent years.

President Kie Bowman presided over the twenty-third SBTC annual meeting, the first with Nathan Lorick as executive director. The Flint Baptist Church choir and orchestra provided music over the two days, and a special Tuesday evening worship and prayer event was led by Lorick and Matt Boswell and band.

Budget and business

Messengers approved a 2022 total budget of \$26,555,573, reflecting a 1.51 percent increase from the preceding year. The SBTC will continue its practice of forwarding 55 percent (\$14,385,565) of all Cooperative Program funds to the Southern Baptist Convention, while retaining 45 percent for in-state ministries.

Joe Davis, SBTC senior strategist in business, presented the results of last year's audit. He noted that CP receipts as of Sept. 2021 were \$870,000 ahead of the year's prorated budget, including a \$391,000 in-state overage as of the end of the third quarter. The convention also underspent its prorated budget through that period, Davis added, noting that net income at the end of the year will fall into the reserves and will be available to the executive board for "allocation for ministry purposes."

Across the Southern Baptist Convention, the SBTC ranks second in total national CP allocation dollars given for the 2021 offering year, Davis said.

"This means in addition to work in Texas, you continue to strongly support missions in North America and around the world through your Cooperative Program gifts," Davis told messengers.

Regarding special offerings, Davis noted that Lottie Moon receipts increased by \$525,000 to \$8,069,000 and Annie Armstrong offerings likewise increased by about \$523,000, ending 2021 at "a little over \$2.9 million." The Reach Texas state missions offering increased with receipts through Aug. totaling \$1.5 million, reflecting a \$239,000 increase over the prior year and the highest Reach Texas offering year yet.

Resolutions and motions

Ten resolutions approved by messengers included those affirming the convention's continued commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission during COVID, encouraging the promotion of the Annual Church Profile, affirming the Baptist Faith & Message 2000's definition of pastor as a position for men, and urging prayer and aid for refugees.

Resolution 8 condemned all forms of sexual violence and called upon church leaders to be proactive to prevent sexual violence in their churches and communities and to support victims.

An effort by several messengers to replace Resolution 9, a commendation of the Texas Heartbeat Act, with a resolution decrying incremental legal efforts to end abortion and calling for the abolition of abortion "without exception or compromise," failed after a lengthy discussion.

SBTC messengers approved resolutions of appreciation for host Flint Baptist Church, outgoing SBTC President Kie Bowman, Executive Director Emeritus Jim Richards and his wife, June.

Messengers also approved a motion by Michael Criner, pastor of Rock Hill Baptist Church in Brownsville, calling for newly elected SBTC President Todd Kaunitz to form a team to work alongside convention leadership on the SBTC's sexual abuse prevention and response. Criner emphasized that he was not asking for an investigation or formation of a task force, but rather a study of how the convention can "better serve and be steadfast in equipping our churches to righteously" handle any allegation or instance of abuse and prevent "to the best of our ability" any future instances of abuse.

Criner said he desired messengers "speak with a loud and unanimous voice that the gospel demands we do everything in our power to care for those who have been sexually abused."

Passing the mantle of SBTC leadership

The 2021 meeting marked the formal passing of the mantle from Richards to Lorick, who assumed his new role this summer.

Monday evening, Richards preached from Joshua 4 in his "valedictory" address as the convention's executive director and Lorick gave his inaugural sermon on the transition from the leadership of Moses to



SBTC President Kie Bowman (left) prays for SBTC Executive Director Nathan Lorick after Jim Richards (right) placed a ceremonial mantle on him during the SBTC annual meeting Monday evening, Nov. 8. SBTC PHOTOS



Todd Kaunitz (right) speaks during the "Keeping the Basic: Evangelism and Prayer" panel as (from left) Kie Bowman, Nathan Lorick, Sam DeVille, Jason Paredes, Damon Halliday and Nathan Lino listen.



Ed Johnson III, pastor of Harvest Fellowship of DeSoto, called on AM messengers to "shelter in God."

that of Joshua. "The SBTC is always ready to change," Richards said. "We can never get tied to something that hinders our collective work. We must always be looking for better ways to accomplish gospel advance."

He noted the need to "reinforce the values" of the SBTC for the next generation—many of whom were children or teenagers when he became executive director.

Lorick urged messengers to both remember God's past faithfulness and, as a new generation, to "rise up and advance" with the "mission that God has always had us on."

Three pillars, Lorick said, set the SBTC apart: 1) a theological position anchored in inerrancy and the Baptist Faith & Message 2000; 2) a missiological strategy that focuses not only on Texas but also the world; and 3) a methodological approach that focuses on the local church.

"Southern Baptists of Texas, we must dive in and we must move forward—forward in reaching the lost, forward in planting churches, forward in revitalizing churches, forward in encouraging and equipping churches, forward in mobilizing churches, forward in missions," he said. "This is who we are, this is who we will be, [and] this is who we have been in the past. This is where we're going—forward, together, for the glory of God."

AM sermons

Four additional annual meeting sermons focused on God's continuing work.

Tuesday morning featured Joe Lightner, president of Jacksonville College, who preached on Mark 10:46-52. Lightner reminded listeners that "Jesus calls out for sinners, and he expects us [as Jesus followers] to introduce them to him."

"JESUS CALLS OUT FOR SINNERS, AND HE EXPECTS US [AS JESUS FOLLOWERS] TO INTRODUCE THEM TO HIM."

—JOE LIGHTNER, PRESIDENT OF JACKSONVILLE COLLEGE

"YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW WHY GOD HAS YOU WHERE HE HAS YOU. ALL YOU AND I NEED TO KNOW IS WHOSE WE ARE."

—KIE BOWMAN, BOWMAN, PASTOR OF AUSTIN'S HYDE PARK BAPTIST

"WE GET SO BUSY, DON'T WE? DEMANDS, SCHEDULES, COUNSELING, ELDERS [AND] DEACONS MEETINGS—ALL OF THAT. CAN WE TAKE THE TIME TO HAVE BREAKFAST WITH THE SAVIOR?"

—LAKAN MARIANO, PASTOR OF COLLEGE HILLS BAPTIST CHURCH IN SAN ANGELO

Underscoring the compassion of the Savior, Lightner noted that blind Bartimaeus asked Jesus for sight and mercy. This was the "But God" salvation moment for Bartimaeus, Lightner said. The beggar was no longer blind physically or spiritually after meeting Jesus. Lightner challenged listeners to "keep the main thing the main thing" by taking heart what God has assigned us to do by telling the good news, even though we may be weary.

Bowman, pastor of Austin's Hyde Park Baptist, who ended his second year as SBTC president at the annual meeting, spoke from John 1:19-23. Despite ceaseless noise inundating the culture, Bowman noted the need for one more voice: that of John the Baptist, the voice of "one crying out in the wilderness." We need John the Baptist's "voice of confidence," "voice of conviction," and "spirit of boldness," Bowman urged.

"You don't have to know why God has you where he has you," Bowman said. "All you and I need to know is whose we are," allowing God to define our roles as John allowed God to define his.

Tuesday afternoon, Lakan Mariano, pastor of College Hills Baptist Church in San Angelo, delivered a sermon from John 21, saying it's easy for pastors to get so busy that they jettison their regular one-on-one time with God. Mariano read from John 21:12, where Jesus told the disciples, "Come and have breakfast."

"Would you regularly just have breakfast with our Savior? Get to

know him," Mariano said. "We get so busy, don't we? Demands, schedules, counseling, elders[and] deacons meetings—all of that. Can we take the time to have breakfast with the Savior?"

Ed Johnson III, the pastor of Harvest Fellowship Baptist Church in DeSoto, rounded out the sermons by preaching from Psalm 91, calling the passage a "clarion call to shelter in God."

God's faithfulness, he said, "turns down the fear" for pastors about personal finances, declining attendance and a multitude of other church-centric issues. The person who shelters in God, Johnson said in summarizing the passage, "finds safety in God."

Panels

Also on Nov. 9, four panels discussed areas of concern to messengers and churches. The mainstage Tuesday morning panel, "The Persecution of the Church in America," was moderated by Nathan Loudin, pastor of Austin's Milwood Baptist and chair of the Texas Ethics and Religious Liberty Committee. Panelists included Bart Barber, pastor of First Baptist Farmersville; Bob Fu, Tiananmen Square survivor and president of ChinaAid; Keisha Russell, attorney with the First Liberty Institute; and Juan Sanchez, pastor of Austin's High Pointe Baptist Church. Attendees received a copy of the *Persecution Journal*, a resource published by the SBTC to which Barber, Fu, Loudin and Russell contributed.

Two lunchtime presidential panels included "Keeping the Basic: Evangelism and Prayer," moderated by Bowman and featuring Todd Kaunitz, pastor of New Beginnings Baptist Church of Longview; Jason Paredes, pastor of Fielder Church, Arlington; Nathan Lino, pastor of Northeast Houston Baptist Church in Humble; and Damon Halliday, pastor of The Key church in Fort Worth. Lorick and Sam DeVille, pastor of Flint Baptist, joined the panelists on the platform.

"After COVID: Rebuilding the Pastor and the Church," moderated by Tony Wolfe, SBTC associate executive direc-



Todd Kaunitz, pastor of Longview's New Beginnings Baptist Church, was elected president at the annual meeting. **SBTC PHOTOS**



The Jimmy D. Pritchard family assembled onstage as the late pastor was named the first recipient of the Leadership Legacy Award.

tor," featured Ed Johnson III; Ramon Medina, Spanish pastor at Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston; Danny Forshee, pastor of Great Hills Baptist Church of Austin; and Jacob Fitzgerald, pastor of Lufkin's Denman Avenue Baptist Church.

A Young Pastors Network panel on "The Church and Worship: A Conversation with Matt Boswell," also held during one lunch session, was emceed by Spencer Plumlee, pastor of First Baptist Church Mansfield. Boswell, founding pastor of The Trails Church in Prosper and a hymnwriter whose works include "His Mercy Is More," offered a "theological vision for corporate worship" with music and musicians integral parts of the service.

For complete coverage on the panels, see articles at [Texan.digital](https://texan.digital).

Legacy Award to Pritchard

Mark Hogan, SBTC executive board chair, introduced the family of the late Jimmy D. Pritchard. Pritchard was honored with the first Leaders Legacy Award from an endowment created by the Southern Baptists of Texas Foundation earlier this year.

The award is to "honor individuals who have distinguished themselves by their service to Christ and through the SBTC," Hogan said, adding that the SBTC Executive Board voted unanimously in August to make Pritchard the inaugural recipient.

Pritchard pastored churches in Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas for 39 years, including 27 years at First Baptist Church of Forney. His denominational service included serving as trustee and board chairman of the International Mission Board,

trustee and board chair of Criswell College and president of the SBTC.

With many FBC Forney church members in the audience, Pritchard's family came onstage for the presentation, which included the presentation of a commemorative vase to his widow, Jeannette.

In thanking the convention, Pritchard's son James, said of his father, "He was simply going to be faithful where he was, and let God promote him."

Other items

Hogan responded to a motion presented at the 2020 annual meeting regarding the consideration of a change of DBA to Great Commission Baptists. Hogan noted that 2023 will mark the 25th anniversary of the SBTC and that a change of DBA might be considered at that point or in the future, but for now the executive committee had recommended to the executive board that the motion to change the DBA be declined.

Messengers elected by acclamation the following officers for 2022: president—Todd Kaunitz, pastor of New Beginnings in Longview; vice president—Richard Lewis, pastor of Unity Baptist Church in Copperas Cove; secretary—Moises Molina, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Jerico in Brownsville.

The 2021 meeting registered 807 messengers and 219 guests for a total of 1,026 attendees representing 345 total churches.

The 2022 SBTC annual meeting will be held Nov. 14-15 at the American Bank Center in Corpus Christi. ❖

Michael Foust, Gayla Holt, Jayson Larson and Gary Ledbetter also contributed to this article.



AM 2021 resolutions: A closer look

By Bonnie Pritchett
TEXAN Correspondent

FLINT Messengers to the SBTC 2021 annual meeting passed 10 resolutions with minimal discussion or amendments, with one exception (see sidebar). Debate over Resolution 9 affirming the Texas Heartbeat Bill required extending the allotted time for the resolutions meeting by more than 30 minutes. Measures ranging from reaffirming the convention's commitment to the Great Commission post-pandemic to ministering to refugees making new homes in Texas passed with only minor amendments to the text.

"The resolution by its na-

ture is just the expressed opinion of a group of messengers gathered at one moment in time. It can't call or demand action in any way. They just express an opinion. They encourage something, they rebuke something, or they urge something. That's the nature of a resolution," Tony Wolfe, SBTC associate executive director, told the TEXAN.

New approaches to old debates

Some of the resolutions—like "On Refugees and Human Dignity" and "On Biblical Fidelity"—addressed issues covered during previous meetings. While at first seemingly repetitive, the new resolutions offer new approaches

to old debates, Wolfe said.

"Their whole purpose is to allow the messengers a collective unified voice on a cultural or contextual topic of concern to Southern Baptists of Texas Convention churches and church leaders. So, they're trying to allow the messengers an opportunity to speak collectively with a unified voice to a topic," Wolfe said.

Resolution 7 is an example. "On Refugees and Human Dignity" addresses the Afghani, Haitian and South American immigrants and refugees coming to Texas. Wolfe said the resolution varies from a 2016 measure by focusing more on the Imago Dei and the responsibility of the church to min-

ister to and share the gospel with and disciple refugees in the SBTC churches' respective communities.

Wolfe said Resolution 10 "On Biblical Fidelity" is in response to a current trend in Christian academia that denies the 6-day creation and refers to the Genesis account of creation as myth or mytho-history. The resolution re-affirmed the SBTC's commitment to the "infallibly, inerrancy, perspicuity, sufficiency, authority and necessity of Scripture as defined by the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy."

On sexual abuse

In passing Resolution 8 "On Sexual Violence and

Abuse," the messengers reaffirmed their commitment to preventing "sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse" within their congregations, to bringing to justice those who violate God's standards in these areas, and to providing support and healing for the victims.

Resolution 8 also provided a platform for corporate confession, expressing the voice of churches and messengers in conveying "regret" over "failures to protect the abused within churches," including failures to address specific situations, enact sexual abuse policies, contact proper authorities and care for survivors and families.

Resolution 8 also acknowledged failures by the SBC in its mishandling of sexual abuse reports.

Definition of a pastor

Since resolutions speak to current events, Resolution 6 "On the Office, Title, and Function of Pastor in the Local Church" reiterated SBC and SBTC doctrine that the role and title of pastor is reserved for biblically qualified men.

Allegations earlier in the year that the North American Mission Board had supported church plants with female pastors prompted NAMB to issue letter stating its commitment to the role of pastor as stated in the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. The letter stated, in part, the church planters must "align the practice of the majority of Southern Baptist churches—that only qualified men will hold the office or title of 'pastor/elder/bishop/overseer' and, as such, serve as the communicator for teaching and preaching in their main gatherings or worship services."

Resolution 6 affirmed the NAMB statement and its decision "to remove endorsement and funding from any church plant which insists 'on maintaining a woman in a pastor role or title on staff.'"

The resolution and NAMB letter urged SBTC/SBC churches to encourage men and women in their unique roles as image bearers of God in the church.

ACP and COVID

Declining participation by churches in the Annual Church Profile, especially during the pandemic, prompted the resolutions committee to present Resolution 5, "On the Annual Church Profile." The ACP details a church's attendance, baptisms and financial giving. The reporting rate dropped from 50 percent in the last 10 years to less than 25 percent in 2020.

The resolution said data gleaned from the ACP assists "in the formation of an

Texas Heartbeat Act discussed and 'celebrated'

By Bonnie Pritchett

Messengers to the 2021 SBTC annual meeting had quickly approved eight resolutions before taking up Resolution 9 called "On the Texas Heartbeat Act." The resolution affirmed a Texas law that went into effect Sept. 1 attaching civil liability to those who facilitate an abortion after a heartbeat is detected—at about six weeks gestation.

When SBTC Convention President Kie Bowman opened the floor to discussion, Aaron Wright, pastor of Grace Family Baptist Church in Houston rose to amend the resolution.

"I would like to substitute the language in resolution nine for the resolution that calls for the complete ending and abolition [of abortion] and not just protecting unborn people with heartbeats," Wright said.

He said the amending text is similar to a resolution passed during the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville.

John Turner, executive pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin and chairman of the Resolutions Committee told the TEXAN the proposed amendment was sent to the committee prior to the annual meeting. The committee included some of the language in the Texas Heartbeat resolution. But he said the committee wanted to keep the language gracious.

During floor debate over Wright's amendment, committee member Clara Molina, who introduced the resolution, said Wright's amendment would change the resolu-

tion's purpose.

"The spirit of this resolution is to celebrate the Texas Heartbeat Act," Molina said, noting that the act theoretically will decrease the abortion rate in Texas by 60 percent, a fact that the "vast majority" of messengers believe should be celebrated.

Wright said the law "offers a mirage of justice" and his amendment, and its supporters, argued against what they called "incremental justice." He called affirmation of the Heartbeat Act a celebration of "mirages of victories that are no victories at all," arguing that abortion violates God's standard, the sixth amendment and the guarantee of equal protection under the law.

Messenger Bart Barber, pastor of First Baptist Church Farmersville, took exception to the abolitionists' argument.

"I don't think there's a person in this room who's not in favor of the abolition of abortion totally," Barber said from the floor.

He said the abolitionists' amendment denigrates decades of pro-life work that has, incrementally, reined in the scope of abortion on demand, and, in doing so, saved babies from abortions. The pro-life tactic is similar to the efforts of soldiers and citizens during World War II to save Jews from the Nazi Holocaust.

"It would be insane, to go to them and say, 'Shame on you for simply saving Jews one by one, when you could have been a soldier to come and accomplish the abolition.' Why not do both?" Barber said. "Why not applaud those who are saving babies one by one,



"WHY NOT APPLAUD THOSE WHO ARE SAVING BABIES ONE BY ONE, WHILE ALSO WORKING TOWARD THE ABOLITION OF ABORTION? AND SO, I'M AGAINST THIS AMENDMENT BECAUSE IT GRATUITOUSLY SLAPS DOWN THESE EFFORTS TO SAVE BABIES ONE BY ONE, IN THE NAME OF A GOAL THAT WE ALL EMBRACE—THE ABOLITION OF ABORTION."

—BART BARBER, PASTOR OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH FARMERSVILLE

while also working toward the abolition of abortion? And so, I'm against this amendment because it gratuitously slaps down these efforts to save babies one by one, in the name of a goal that we all embrace—the abolition of abortion."

Nathan Lino, pastor of Northeast Houston Baptist Church, also opposed the amendment. Speaking from the floor, he noted the life-affirming resolutions passed by the SBC and the efforts of churches like his own in opposing abortion by operating pregnancy centers to help women with unplanned pregnancies.

"While I agree with the heart of [the amendment] in that we want abortion ended, the language is

harsh. It is mean and it does not represent the spirit of who we are—that we are a people full of grace and truth," Lino said.

He later told the TEXAN, "The language in the proposed amended resolution calls for anyone who has an abortion to be categorized and labeled as a murderer," adding that we believe, "according to the Scriptures that abortion is murder, to be sure. However, the language in the proposed amended resolution further called for all who commit an abortion, not only to be labeled as a murderer, but to receive the sentence of murderers."

Messengers overwhelmingly rejected the amendment and passed Resolution 9 as submitted. ❧

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Enfatizando la gracia de Dios durante la junta anual de la SBTC-Español

Por Clara Molina
Baptist Press

PITTSBURG, Texas Durante la junta anual de la Convención de los Bautistas del Sur de Texas (SBTC Español), usando el lema “Pero, Dios” basado en Efesios 2:4-10, se hizo énfasis en la gracias de Dios, hubo 3 profesiones de fe y 3 reafirmaciones al ministerio, compromisos para seguir sirviendo a Dios, una comisión al ministerio, reconocimientos a los fieles y tiempo de alabanza por medio del equipo de la iglesia Mobberly en Español dirigido por Ricky Ruíz. La reunión anual tuvo lugar el 7 de noviembre y fue oficiada en la Primera Iglesia Bautista de Pittsburg, donde es pastor el Dr. Juan Puentes.

Rafael Rondón, pastor asociado de la iglesia Fielder Church en Arlington, Texas, basándose en Efesios 2:4-5, hizo énfasis en el amor de Dios por medio de Su gracia. Rondón animó a los participantes a reconocer que, “No hay nada que tu puedas hacer para que Dios te deje de amar”, e hizo énfasis en que por la gracia de Dios, Él “te amó como pecador, te ama, y te seguirá amando”. El acentué que, “el amor de Dios no está conducido por lo que hacemos, sino en quien Dios es”. Rondón les recordó a todos lo que dice Efesios 2:4, “Ciertamente la gracia

de Dios los ha salvado por medio de la fe. Ésta no nació de ustedes, sino que es un don de Dios; ni es resultado de las obras, para que nadie se vanaglorie”(RVC).

El pastor George Levant, de la Iglesia Bautista Nueva Vida en Jesús de Laredo, Texas, usando Efesios 2:6-7, guio a los participantes a reconocer que por la gracia de Dios, “En el cielo no hay invitados ni visitantes, solo la familia de Dios”. Levant dijo que el cristiano no debe de “dejarse llevar por la ira, o la desobediencia, sino apreciar la gracia de Dios”. Él también agregó que los cristianos necesitan compartir a Cristo y no dejarse llevar por la corriente. El usó los peces para explicar que los cristianos como creyentes necesitamos ser diferentes y dijo, “solo los peces muertos siguen la corriente, pero los vivos van en contra de la corriente”. El pastor Levant terminó desafiando a los pastores y creyentes en la reunión diciéndoles, “Dios dio a su hijo Jesús para morir en la cruz pero, ¿está Dios recibiendo un buen retorno de gracia por su inversión?”

El pastor Joshua del Risco, fundador del Ministerio Sobre la Roca (On the Rock Ministries), concluyó la sesión de prédica dando énfasis en la fuerza del amor y la gracia de Dios por medio de Efesios 2:7-10. Él hizo un llamado y tres personas



“EN EL CIELO NO HAY INVITADOS NI VISITANTES, SOLO LA FAMILIA DE DIOS”.

—EL PASTOR GEORGE LEVANT, DE LA IGLESIA BAUTISTA NUEVA VIDA EN JESÚS DE LAREDO

hicieron su confesión de fe aceptando a Cristo Jesús como su Salvador. Muchos rededicaron su vida a servir a Dios. Del Risco explicó que los productos de metal se forman con fuego y martillazos, y de tal manera, “Dios formó algo nuevo con nosotros porque fuimos formados por el martillo divino por la gracia de Dios”. El también agregó que “debemos dejar de calentar bancas en la iglesia e ir a predicar el evangelio” porque “somos un testimonio de la gracias de Dios”.

Estuvieron presentes en la reunión Ramón Medina, el vicepresidente de la Convención Bautista del Sur (SBC), líder del concilio hispano de la SBC y pastor de la iglesia Champion Forest en Español; al igual que el Dr. Jeff Lynn de la SBTC quien es líder de departamento de Salud y Liderazgo en las

Iglesias (Church Health and Leadership). Lynn se dirigió a los participantes en español, ofreció una bienvenida a todos y presentó a Willie Hernández como el nuevo estratega para servir en el sur de Texas.

Durante la junta fueron comisionados Héctor y Damaris Ahumada, y sus dos parejas de mellizos, para comenzar una nueva obra en la ciudad de Pittsburg, Texas. También se le entregó la placa de Reconocimiento de Legado Ministerial Dr. Michael González, al pastor José Luis Cárdenas y a su esposa Rosa por su servicio al Señor por 31 años en la Iglesia Bautista El Calvario en Mount Pleasant, TX. El Dr. González sirvió como director de los ministerios hispanos de la SBTC por muchos años; él y su esposa Dalia fueron misioneros

en España por medio de la Junta de Misiones Internacionales (IMB) por 15 años.

Durante la reunión, Chuy Ávila y el Dr. Bruno Molina celebraron y dieron gracias a Dios por todas las bendiciones experimentadas en el ministerio ofrecido por la SBTC Español durante todo el año. También dieron gracias a los asistentes por su colaboración mediante el Programa Cooperativo a través del cual se pudo facilitar todos los logros reportados. El Dr. Puentes y su esposa Diana leyeron las escrituras y oraron durante la reunión.

El pastor Levant incluyó a Efesios 2:5 en su prédica, enfatizando la importancia de la misericordia de Dios: “Nos dio vida junto con Cristo, aun cuando estábamos muertos en nuestros pecados (la gracia de Dios los ha salvado)”. ☞

RESOLUTIONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

accurate, yearly testimony to the work of Christ in Texas through local” SBTC-affiliated churches according to the resolution. The information aids the convention in assessing the needs of its 2684 churches and directing its assets accordingly.

In addition to the ACP

participation, the pandemic also affected how churches maintain their faithfulness to the Great Commission. Resolution 4 “On a Continued Commitment to the Fulfillment of the Great Commission due to COVID-19” recognized the means of sharing the gospel may have altered during the pandemic but called on SBTC churches to “reaffirm our commitment to the

fulfilling the Great Commission through all biblical means available.”

In appreciation

The first three resolutions gave messengers an opportunity to express their appreciation for the host church, Flint Baptist Church, and the leadership of Kie Bowman and Jim and June Richards. Bowman has served in numerous leadership capacities within

the convention, most recently as convention president.

Richards stepped down this year as SBTC executive director after serving in that role since the convention's founding in 1998. Beginning with 120 affiliated churches, Richards leaves convention leadership with 2,684 affiliated churches and a Cooperative Program budget of \$26.5 million.

Resolution 3 “On Apprecia-

tion for Dr. Jim Richards and Mrs. June Richards” thanks the couple for their service to the Lord and for Richards’ “fidelity to the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible, his capable and godly leadership, and his service to the Kingdom of God and the churches of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.”

Richards was named SBTC Executive Director Emeritus July 1. ☞



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Julio Arriola speaks during the SBTC Executive Board meeting Nov. 10 at Flint Baptist Church. SBTC PHOTO

ARRIOLA

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"We are incredibly excited to welcome Julio to the NAMB family. His extensive experience and leadership in church planting will undoubtedly add momentum to Send Network and SBTC's church planting efforts," said Kevin Ezell, president of NAMB. "In order to produce high-capacity planters, we need high-capacity leaders—like Julio—who will do whatever it takes to ensure church planters are adequately prepared, trained and mobilized."

Arriola will lead a partnership that will allow the SBTC to extend its church planting efforts by utilizing NAMB resources in the areas of assessment, training, coaching, caring for and supporting church planters statewide.

"We are very excited to be back in Texas," Arriola said. "We love Texas. But as great as Texas is, it also has a great need for Jesus, and planting churches is still the most effective way to reach people with the life-giving message of Jesus—the gospel."

The Mexico native brings an impressive—and prac-

tical—set of tools to the SBTC's growing network of church planters. Arriola has vocational experience at churches of varied sizes, he has planted and pastored a church that is now the largest in Guadalajara, Mexico (a city of 1.5 million people), and he is considered an influential leader among a Hispanic population that is one of the fastest-growing demographics in Texas.

Arriola most recently served as executive director for Hispanic relations and mobilization for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee in Nashville, a post he held since December 2019. While there, he worked to develop and implement strategies for maximum involvement and participation of Hispanic churches and church leaders across the SBC and its network of cooperating churches. His duties also included mobilizing Hispanic churches in key areas, including evangelism and church planting—in harmony with NAMB's Send Network and Send Relief strategies.

"In this monumental moment, God is bringing the world to Texas," SBTC Ex-

ecutive Director Nathan Lorrick said. "We are incredibly excited that God led Julio Arriola to come alongside of the SBTC through the Send Network SBTC. I believe we are going to see more churches planted than ever before."

The need for church planting in Texas is immense. Of its 30 million residents, it is estimated that 19 million are lost. According to SBTC figures, 1,000 people move to Austin weekly, nearly 2,000 move to Houston weekly, and the Dallas/Fort Worth

"WE ARE VERY EXCITED TO BE BACK IN TEXAS. WE LOVE TEXAS. BUT AS GREAT AS TEXAS IS, IT ALSO HAS A GREAT NEED FOR JESUS, AND PLANTING CHURCHES IS STILL THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO REACH PEOPLE WITH THE LIFE-GIVING MESSAGE OF JESUS—THE GOSPEL."

—JULIO ARRIOLA

Metroplex sees nearly 3,000 new residents each week.

These new residents are increasingly diverse. Texas is home to more than 400 people groups that speak over 300 languages, making the state one of the most diverse clusters of people in the world. Arriola said he recognizes that the harvest in Texas is plentiful, and yet the workers are still far too few. All the more reason, he said, to "call out the called" and get all ethnicities involved.

"Church planting is challenging—it requires lots of prayer, work, money, planning, training and committed people to do God's work," Arriola said. "So having this partnership will allow us to stand alongside our churches and their planters to provide a path to plant healthy,

biblical churches. NAMB has developed assessments, training and strategies that are second-to-none and we are ready to make all of this available through this partnership."

Arriola's Texas ties are already strong. He and his wife, Carla, were married here and his three children (ages 19, 17 and 15) were born in the Houston area. Arriola was ordained at Segunda Iglesia Bautista in Rosenberg in 2003 and, following a nearly two-year stint serving there as youth pastor, became worship leader at Sugar Creek Baptist Church in Sugar Land. He also became a U.S. citizen while living in Texas and earned his Master of Theological Studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in May 2020. ✝

YEAR-END GIVING REMINDERS

♦ Jan. 7 deadline for 2021 giving with Dec. 31 postmark

Regarding 2021 year-end giving, through Jan. 7, the SBTC will apply gifts postmarked by Dec. 31, 2021 to the 2021 calendar year. After Jan. 7, 2022, all gifts will be applied to the 2022 year.

♦ 2022 Gift Forms

Gift forms will be arriving in your mailboxes in December 2021. The gift form is also available in a downloadable format on our website, sbtexas.com/give.

♦ Online Giving

Give online at sbtexas.com/give. All gifts will be applied according to the date given.

♦ 2021 CP Gifts

CP giving: 55 percent of all CP gifts will go to the Southern Baptist Convention for missions and ministry around the world, while 45 percent will remain in state for work in Texas.



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Executive Board approves new student and spiritual formations associates, Houston catalyst



SBTC Associate Executive Director Tony Wolfe (right) prays for new convention staff members (standing, from left) Phil Todd, Rick Lewis and Brandon Bales, during the Executive Board meeting on Nov. 10. Board chairman Mark Hogan is also seen, seated at bottom left.

By Jayson Larson
TEXAN Correspondent

FLINT The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Executive Board on Nov. 10 hired a trio of staff members they believe will lead key ministry departments into the future.

The board met at Flint Baptist Church the morning after the conclusion of the 2021 SBTC Annual Meeting.

Brandon Bales will be joining the convention as its new student associate. He previously served associate pastor to teens at Northeast Houston Baptist Church in Humble, a position he had held since 2012. Under his leadership, the student ministry there grew from 35 students to 120. He has also led 75 students on international mission trips and seen 70 others make professions of faith while leading that ministry.

Phil Todd will be joining the convention as spiritual formation ministries associate in the Church Health and Leadership Department. Todd has served as executive pastor at PaulAnn Church in San Angelo since 2003. He also has experience pastor-

ing youth and leading small groups. At the SBTC, he will be asked to serve pastors and churches by providing leadership in areas of spiritual formation including discipleship, small groups, Sunday School, and ministries for men, women, children, and senior adults.

Rick Lewis was called for the purpose of serving as Houston regional catalyst working in the SBTC Church Health and Leadership department. A native of Fort Worth, Lewis has spent the past six-and-a-half years in an associate role at Storyline Church in Arvada, Colo. He has also served as the founding executive director of Apostello Mission Network, a non-profit that networked and connected churches to God's global mission, and as a pastor in Ken Caryl Church (Littleton, Colo.), Riverside Baptist Church (Denver, Colo.), Emmanuel Baptist Church (Sterling, Colo.), and Faith Baptist Church (Hugo, Colo.). As a regional church catalyst, Lewis will help promote convention conferences, workshops and training events and provide consultation for local church leadership.

TBHC approved for grant

The Executive Board also voted to approve a grant of \$80,000 to Texas Baptist Home for Children.

The grant was given for the purpose of "developing, promoting, and implementing the remodeling of its campus" in Waxahachie. The Executive Board's administrative committee made the recommendation, and funds will be disbursed from its reserves.

In a letter shared with board members, TBHC President Jason Curry said continual growth and changes over time necessitate a remodeling of its campus. To do so, an architect would need to be hired to establish a plan of action for the remodel, create visual aids to share with donors and help determine the best ways to repurpose already-existing space.

"We are honored to partner with you for the sake of the gospel, to bring attention to our children's needs and make more people aware that they can make a difference," Curry wrote.

Until 2021, TBHC had received a percentage of the SBTC in-state Cooperative Program receipts. Beginning in 2021, the home began receiving an estimated \$90,000 each year, funded from 7.5 percent of the State Missions Offering. SBTC has funded a total of \$1.25 million to TBHC ministry since 2005.

New officers and board members

Mark Hogan, a member at Mission City Baptist Church in San Antonio, was re-elected to another term as board

chairman. He was nominated by board member Robert Slavens. In nominating Hogan, Slavens said, "I can tell you just from personal experience serving with him in this last year, he loves the Lord, he loves his people, he's humble before God and before men, and he's truly a servant with a gentle spirit." Caleb Turner, assistant pastor at Mesquite Friendship Baptist Church, was elected to serve another term as vice chair after being nominated by Todd Kaunitz. Steven Gaither, pastor at First Baptist Church in McAllen, will serve as board secretary after being nominated by Cole Hedgecock. Hogan, Slavens, and Gaither were all approved unanimously.

New board members introduced at Wednesday's meeting are Miles Arnold (member, FBC Prosper); C.W. Faulkner (pastor, FBC Wolf-forth); James Jordan (associate pastor, Northeast Houston Baptist Church, Humble); Drew Rogers (associate pastor, Cedar Pointe Baptist Church, Cedar Park); Dusty Smith (pastor, Waddill Street Baptist Church, McKinney); Anthony Svajda (pastor, Harvey Baptist Church, Stephenville). ❧



The Nov. 8 panel on persecution at the SBTC AM2021 featured L-R: Juan Sanchez, Bart Barber, Keisha Russell, Bob Fu and moderator Nathan Loudin. Pastors must prepare their people for persecution, Sanchez said, adding, "We see ourselves as Israel in Jerusalem. We are more like Israel in Babylon." **SBTC PHOTO**



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Ledbetters leave 'positive truthfulness' legacy

By Art Toalston
TEXAN Correspondent

GRAPEVINE Gary and Tammi Ledbetter, noted journalists in Southern Baptists' conservative movement, have drawn the praise of friends and co-workers as their 21 years of service in the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention ends.

Gary gave direction to the SBTC's news journal, the Southern Baptist TEXAN, as its editor while writing columns that were neighborly in tone but clearly biblical and Baptist in perspective. He will remain in an advisory position with SBTC communications but is stepping down as TEXAN editor at the close of 2021.

Tammi penned an array of stories—covering SBTC annual meetings and Executive Board sessions and recording the witness for Christ of pastors and church members across the state—while also nurturing the TEXAN's cadre of correspondents.

"A 'positive truthfulness' is their hallmark," said Jim Richards, executive director of the SBTC since its founding in 1998, who transitioned from the post in July after the election of his successor, Nathan Lorick.

"They never backed away from putting in print what had to be said," Richards said of the Ledbetters, "but they also did it with grace and dignity."

"Gary set the gold standard for state convention papers over the last two decades" while Tammi conveyed "insight beyond the average news story. Her pursuit of the facts and desire to capture the entire account is unparalleled."

"We got a two-fer with Tammi and Gary," Richards said. "They had traveled the road of the Conservative Resurgence. By life experience they could speak into events and denominational situations with precise acumen."

Lorick, who served as SBTC director of evangelism from 2012 to 2017, said the convention's communications team "would not be where we are today without the faithful ministry of Gary and Tammi. They have set the bar high and created a culture of excellence in telling God's stories across Texas. As we move into the future, the impact the Ledbetters have had will always be evident."

Roots in the gospel

Their native state of Arkansas is where it all began.

"Extended family was a huge influence on my spiritual development," Gary recounted. "The consistent example and daily religious practice of several Ledbetters showed me the gospel."

He turned to Christ during a week of Vacation Bible School at Bethel Heights Baptist Church in Fayetteville between the fifth and sixth grade. "My grandmother was the teacher. I made a public profession the next Sunday and was baptized in a local creek a couple of weeks later."

Tammi is among an estimated 500,000-plus people who made professions of faith under the preaching of Angel Martinez, whose evangelistic ministry spanned six decades.

"He clearly presented the plan of salvation in a way that I could easily understand at a time in my life when the Holy Spirit was working to convict me of the need for a Savior."

They went to high school together and their relationship grew.

"I realized that I not only loved her," Gary said, "but had more in common with her than with anyone."

As for Tammi, "Through years of friendship with Gary, and each of us sensing a call to ministry, we realized God had called us to marry and serve him together."

THEY NEVER BACKED AWAY FROM PUTTING IN PRINT WHAT HAD TO BE SAID. BUT THEY ALSO DID IT WITH GRACE AND DIGNITY.

—JIM RICHARDS

They married in 1976 after Tammi finished a journalism and speech degree at the University of Arkansas. Gary earned a bachelor's degree from Criswell College in 1978 while Tammi edited the school's Shofar magazine. Gary earned a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1981 and a Doctor of Ministry from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., in 2000.

Turning points

Gary recalled "standing under the dome [in Southwestern's flagship building] thinking of my New Testament prof who ridiculed us for believing that God would judge the dead and my ethics prof who advocated for Roe v. Wade. I remember that day as if it was yesterday and had the thought that I could not be a Southern Bap-



tist if this is what we supported."

Tammi had taken theology, church history and evangelism classes at Criswell and became "more aware of the concerns about being faithful to Scripture and the way that our entities were led." The practical outworking of such views "especially in regard to pro-life issues seemed to put the spotlight on that for me."

After Gary worked in college and student ministry at churches in Indiana and Texas, the Ledbetters joined the staff of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, he as editor of the Indiana Baptist newspaper and director of collegiate ministries, and she as the paper's managing editor.

Marty King, a member of the Indiana convention's Executive Board then, noted, "Both had their hands full—Gary in two of the most challenging roles on the small state convention staff and Tammi raising three kids and writing state and national convention stories."

"The Indiana Baptist was, to a great degree, the voice of the Conservative Resurgence in the 1980s. I soon came to see Gary as a calm, thoughtful administrator with a gift for biblically-based editorial writing. Tammi was the bulldog writer the SBC needed at that paper. They were perfect for Indiana Baptists and for the SBC," said King, who later served as director of communications for the North American Mission Board, associate executive director of the Illinois Baptist State Association, and director of corporate communications for Lifeway Christian Resources.

Arriving in Texas

The Ledbetters joined the SBTC staff in 2001 after 7 years with Indiana Baptists and 5 years at Midwestern Seminary, where Gary was vice president for student development and Tammi, director of communications.

With the SBTC, Gary edited the TEXAN and served

THE INDIANA BAPTIST WAS, TO A GREAT DEGREE, THE VOICE OF THE CONSERVATIVE RESURGENCE IN THE 1980S. I SOON CAME TO SEE GARY AS A CALM, THOUGHTFUL ADMINISTRATOR WITH A GIFT FOR BIBLICALLY-BASED EDITORIAL WRITING. TAMMI WAS THE BULLDOG WRITER THE SBC NEEDED AT THAT PAPER. THEY WERE PERFECT FOR INDIANA BAPTISTS AND FOR THE SBC.

—MARTY KING

as staff liaison with the convention's Texas Ethics & Religious Liberty Committee. Tammi, who preceded Gary in retirement in 2020, initially served as managing editor of the state paper and later as news editor, assignments editor and special reports editor.

The couple relocated to the Fayetteville area, close to family in 2021.

The Ledbetters, as part of the Richards-led SBTC staff, have seen the convention grow from 120 affiliated churches in 1998 to nearly 2,700 churches today.

"It's been a joy to see churches doing well, being faithful, [and] for people to see the stories we're publishing issue by issue," Gary said. And in convention affairs, "never having to spin the truth to keep people from knowing what we're doing has been a privilege."

King called Gary's editorials "as applicable in Texas as they were in Indiana"

or anywhere else reflecting on the Christian family, missions, the local church, denominational affairs and biblical ethics. "His pieces always helped his readers think about what it means to be a believer, a parent, a church member and a Southern Baptist," King said.

In an editorial titled "The sting of death," for example, Gary exhorted fellow believers to "listen to a culture that speaks foolishly of ultimate things. Watch those who twitch and fidget at Grandma's funeral. There is no solution to their fear but the gospel we bear. Remember that we will all die either in terror or in bright anticipation of the God we all will meet. ... How can we, believing what we say we believe, be uncaring about the fate of our neighbors?"

On instances of leadership tumult, Gary wrote in 2019, "I deeply regret the details of some of the transitions Southern Baptists have faced in the past couple of years. That does not mean that nothing good can come of the transition—far from it. New faces, new skill sets and new generations in the top slot will be alternately annoying and delightful as our institutions implement new visions. Since new vision is necessary, we can shrug off some of the annoyances. A new slate of leaders committed to innovation and well-versed in the reasons for the things we're already doing sounds like progress for our Great Commission work."

Gary said his mother raised him to be a "voracious reader," spawning an interest in "dabbling in writing because I loved good writers of history, poetry and fiction." Of his editorials, he emphasized commonality of interest with his readers: "I hoped people would think about something that had intrigued me, be convicted or encouraged by something that moved me, knew something that I've had occasion to know and, on occasion, to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

Alabama baby born 19 weeks premature survives, sets world record



An Alabama baby has set the Guinness World Record for most premature infant to survive in an inspiring medical story that could further impact the abortion debate.

Curtis Zy-Keith Means celebrated his first birthday July 5, one year after he was born at a gestational age of 21 weeks 1 day (148 days)—far short of what is considered full term (40 weeks), Guinness said. He was nearly 19 weeks premature. The old record was set just this year by a Wisconsin baby, who survived after being born at a gestational age of 21 weeks and two days.

Curtis weighed 14.8 ounces at birth. His twin sister died one day after she was born.

"The medical staff told me that they don't normally keep babies at that age," Michelle "Chelly" Butler, the mother, told Guinness World Records. "It was very stressful."

Brian Sims, the neonatologist who oversaw the delivery, said Curtis "wanted to survive."

"He showed initially that he responded to oxygen, his heart rate went up, his numbers went up," Sims told Guinness.

Curtis was on a ventilator for three months. He went home in April.

Under the U.S. Supreme Court's tandem opinions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*, abortion is legal through all nine months of pregnancy.

A 2015 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that 3.5 percent of 357 infants born at 22 weeks could survive without severe health problems if they were treated.

"Some people are strongly committed to pro-life, some are strongly committed to the other side," but many Americans fall in the middle, said Burke Balch, director of the Robert Powell Center for Medical Ethics for the National Right to Life Committee, in an interview with *Time*. "The fact that those children could survive will affect those in the middle."

—GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS, TIME

YouVersion Bible app reaches milestone with 500 million installs



YouVersion, a free Bible app that was launched in the early days of the iPhone, set a milestone in November for faith-based organizations when it passed 500 million installs worldwide.

YouVersion was one of about 200 free apps in the iOS App Store when it debuted in 2008 but quickly grew in popularity. The current version offers 2,600 versions of Bible text in 1,760-plus languages.

The eye-popping number represents 500 million unique devices—a record for a faith-based app.

This year alone, about 64 billion Bible chapters have been read or listened to on YouVersion — an increase of 21 percent compared to 2020 and 56 percent compared to 2019.

"While some people claim the Bible is irrelevant and Scripture engagement is declining, these 500 million installs indicate otherwise," said YouVersion founder Bobby Gruenewald. "The Bible continues to be relevant and has the power to transform lives. That's why we're excited to celebrate this milestone. Not just because it's a big number, but because each install represents a chance for someone to go deeper in their faith and grow closer to God."

—YOUVERSION.COM

Biden State Dept. says it's committed to 'promote and protect' abortion around the world

The U.S. State Department in November amended its annual report on human rights to also include a section on "reproductive freedom," saying it remains committed to promoting legalized abortion around the world.

The "Addendum on Reproductive Rights" was made Nov. 4 to the department's earlier report on human rights around the world. The annual report is mandated by law, although the Trump State Department had not included reproductive freedom in its annual examination of countries.

"Reproductive freedom" is a phrase used by the pro-choice community to reference legal abortion.

"We reaffirm our full commitment to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive health of all individuals, recognizing the essential and transformative role they play in gender equality and women and girls' empowerment around the world," said State Department spokesperson Ned Price.

The addendum means that each country now has a section on its abortion record.

Secretary Antony Blinken, in March, signaled that the report would be amended.

"It is one of many steps—along with revoking the Mexico City Policy, withdrawing from the Geneva Consensus Declaration, resuming support for the United Nations Population Fund — that we are taking to promote women's health and equity at home and abroad," Blinken said then.

"Because women's rights—including sexual and reproductive rights—are human rights."

—STATE.GOV

Southern Seminary joins with Methodist seminary to challenge vaccine/testing mandate



Southern Baptist Theological Seminary joined forces with a prominent Methodist seminary in November to challenge the Biden administration's vaccine/testing mandate in federal court.

Under the mandate, employers with 100 or more employees must require their workers either to vaccinate against COVID-19 or to undergo weekly testing and continual masking.

Asbury Theological Seminary, an institution founded in the Methodist tradition, is co-plaintiff with Southern Seminary. Alliance Defending Freedom is representing both schools.

Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler said he supports the vaccine but believes the mandate is government overreach and distracts the school from its ministry.

"It is unacceptable for the government to force religious institutions to become coercive extensions of state power. We have no choice but to push back against this intrusion of the government into matters of conscience and religious conviction," Mohler said. "This

institution exists for the purpose of educating ministers for churches. This seminary must not be forced to stand in for the government in investigating the private health decisions of our faculty and employees in a matter involving legitimate religious concerns.

The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals.

—ADF

China orders pastors to 'support' communism, 'practice' socialism



Christian pastors and other religious leaders in China are facing severe restrictions under a new set of measures that are having "an even greater chilling effect" on religious liberty than was previously the case, according to a religious liberty watchdog.

Under the new requirements, pastors and religious leaders are required to "love the motherland," "support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party," "practice the core values of socialism," "adhere to the direction of the sinicization of religion in China" and "operate to maintain national unity, ethnic unity, religious harmony, and social stability."

"Sinicization" is a term that involves bringing all elements of a society—including religion—under the influence of Chinese culture.

The new measures, approved by the country's State Administration of Religious Affairs, could have a devastating impact on religious leaders and groups, according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

"The new measures on clergy—along with the 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs—could generate an even greater chilling effect, forcing more clergy of state-sanctioned religious groups to openly endorse government policies at the expense of their religious convictions," USCIRF said in an October report.

The measures already are having an effect. In May, a state-sanctioned Protestant pastor in Wenzhou city, Zhejiang, delivered a sermon in which he used the Bible to "publicly promote the CCP's political propaganda and policies during a sermon," USCIRF said.

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