

SOUTHERN BAPTIST
TEXAN

DECEMBER 2023 | VOL. 22 | NO. 12



O COME LET US ADORE HIM



"BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY, WHICH SHALL BE TO ALL PEOPLE" —LUKE 2:10

+

What happens when this church reads entire Bible every December? 'It changes people'

+

Adoption leaves North Texas family with full hearts, full house just in time for Christmas

+

Brownsville congregation uses holiday season to share love of Christ with the community



From Executive Director Nathan Lorick and the entire staff of
the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, we pray you have a

Merry Christmas!

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Encourage.
Equip.

VOLUME 22 NUMBER 12 DECEMBER 2023

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Obituaries, memorials, and classified advertisements listing items and services for sale will be published at a cost of 30 cents per word with a minimum of \$10. Copy is limited to 100 words and must be submitted within three months of death or event. Submit information to jlarson@sbtexas.com and mail check for full amount.

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LOOKING BACK AT WHAT WAS, DREAMING OF WHAT IS TO COME

I've made it a practice to use the end of each year to look back on the stories we've told in the *Texan* about all that God has done over the previous 12 months. They are different in so many ways, but the same in one main aspect: They all tell the stories of how God is moving through our family of churches.

As we say goodbye to 2023 and begin to look ahead to what God will do in the year to come, here are just a few of our favorite stories from the past year:

A long journey, paved with steps of faith (April)

What comes to mind when you think of the first day of school? Back-to-school shopping? School buses? High school football? Misael Rodríguez, Hispanic pastor of Hillcrest Español in Cedar Hill, described his upbringing in Cuba in our April issue and presented a different back-to-school routine with which he became familiar.

At the beginning of each school year, the principal of his school would walk past every classroom, identify the Christians, and ask them to stand up so they could be teased and taunted by their classmates. "I remember one time we were put in front of 500 students on campus so they could boo all the religious kids," Rodríguez recalled, "but I didn't give up my faith."

Rodríguez's brave tale provided a sad-but-powerful reminder we often take for granted: There are countless people in this world who are truly persecuted for their faith in Christ.

'God's moving on campus' (June)

The collegiate ministry of Fredonia Hill Baptist Church in Nacogdoches took a spring break mission trip to New York City to participate in community outreach and a vacation Bible school. One of the young women on the trip—who would later admit her

motive for going had more to do with experiencing New York and less to do with service—ended up giving her life to Christ.

Now on fire for Jesus, the young woman returned home and shared with her small group what God had done for her on the trip. As a result of her testimony, two people were saved. Another trip participant led someone to the Lord via text message. The gospel continued to spread and, before long, 17 students at nearby Stephen F. Austin State University were baptized. God can take something so small and turn it into something truly great.

'Not defective, but effective' (June)

I rarely read something that freezes me in my tracks, which is why the story of Whick Turner, pastor of First Baptist Church in Christine (about an hour south of San Antonio), was so memorable for me. In our monthly What's Your Story feature in June, Turner's testimony began with him describing how he went from temporarily filling the pulpit at the church to becoming its full-time pastor. Then old Whick drops the following bomb out of nowhere: "Some church members say they can hardly tell I'm blind."

Wait ... what?

The article filled my mind with wonder ("How difficult must his sermon prep be?"), but it challenged me. We can be so good at coming up with excuses not to serve the Lord. Instead of using his blindness as an excuse, Turner not only serves faithfully, but uses his circumstances to encourage others to do the same.

Our prayer is that these stories—and the ones to come—not only encourage you, but bless you as you consider the work of our mighty God during this holiday season.



COMING SOON!

The TWELVE DAYS of CHRISTMAS

MIDWESTERN SEMINARY is excited to announce our 7th annual 12 Days of Christmas giveaway. We love celebrating the Christmas season and giving away prizes, that's why we're back for another year of holiday cheer. December 13-24, we will give away twelve different prizes, from sets of books to branded apparel, conference tickets to a free class, and more!

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FULL HEARTS full house



Ennis family prepares to spend Christmas
with adopted daughter they'd always prayed for

ENNIS

Brent and Michelle Bratcher love their two sons, but they also wanted a daughter ... or two.

So the Bratchers turned to the foster system, seeing God grow their family through a whole lot of prayer and the assistance of the Texas Baptist Home for Children.

Michelle and Brent's journey to faith is as inspiring as their willingness to help children. Both grew up in Ennis, although Michelle moved there from Duncanville before sixth grade.

"I was not allowed to attend church as a child," Michelle said. Friends kept inviting her to church, which finally led to her salvation at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Ennis as a high school senior. Shortly after, Brent rededicated his life to Christ.

The pair began dating as high school sophomores and married in June 2001. They were blessed with two sons: Andrew, now 15, and Nathan, 13. Life was good. They longed for more children, yet Michelle's health precluded this.

"Coming from a big family myself, I knew I wanted four kids," Michelle said, explaining that she had undergone five hip surgeries. The couple considered adoption, but a financial crisis hit.

"We were scammed by a builder and lost over \$100,000 [trying to build] a home in Ennis," Michelle said. "We knew we'd never have the funds to adopt."

Discouraged, they learned from friends about fostering to adopt, which can often be a lower-cost alternative to traditional adoption.

A battle to adopt

The Bratchers became certified to foster in 2021 and had their first placements—including Isabel, the daughter they would eventually adopt—in July of that year. For a short time, they also fostered Isabel's biological sister.

Counselors warned the family the sisters would fare better if they were split up and that separation might help with healing, but because the Bratchers were "adoption-minded," both sisters were allowed to stay with the family. For a variety of reasons, Isabel's biological sister eventually went to live with another family.

Meanwhile, the Bratchers started the process of adopting Isabel—who is lovingly also called Izzy. "This began our fight," Michelle said. The process stalled in court. The couple's attorneys eventually sought a trial, hoping a jury might see the

“common sense” behind allowing the adoption of a girl who was already so loved.

“The system refused to listen to what was best for Izzy, until one month prior to trial,” when the district attorney intervened and allowed the adoption petition to proceed, Michelle said.

“We gave all glory to God, that even in the tenuous waiting, insane stress, constant prayers, He still came through like our knight in shining armor! It wasn’t in our timing; it was in His,” Michelle said.

“TBHC was right there with us the entire time, holding our hands, and staying steadfast in prayer. We waited over two years to adopt Izzy,” Michelle said. The adoption was formalized in September 2023.

Love of a family

The Bratchers also currently foster another girl, age 11.

“We adore [our foster daughter] and will adopt her if ... it’s God’s will. Our human nature thought we would adopt sisters, but the love of a family, no matter what it looks like, will always win,” Michelle said.

Isabel’s biological sisters—the older one fostered by the Bratchers and a baby sister—have fared well, adopted by other families in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Michelle said the families will keep in contact and the girls will see one another regularly.

Challenges remain. The stresses of regular family life and too little time are to be expected. But Isabel and her foster sister have suffered past trauma and need plenty of rest. The family frequently declines invitations and curtails plans because Izzy, in particular, must be in bed by 7:30 p.m.

Andrew and Nathan also have made adjustments to the changes in their family dynamic. The Bratchers seek help when needed and keep the doors open for honest conversation.

They have run into criticism from some people advising them to quit fostering, as many families do, after a year. “We have to remind ourselves that we aren’t living for those people, even though we love them dearly,” Michelle



(Top) The Bratchers finally formally adopted their former foster child Isabel on Sept. 29, 2023. (Bottom) A family friend recently presented Isabel and the Bratchers with a Christmas ornament commemorating her adoption. **SUBMITTED PHOTOS**



said. “We are living for God. He has called us to this, and He calls all His children to spread the gospel to the world.” To date, they have fostered four children, including Isabel. They have seen two trust Christ as Savior.

Tabernacle Baptist and fellow parents have been a great source of comfort and help, Michelle said. Likewise, she credits TBHC as an integral part of their successful adoption.

“They never judged,” Michelle said. “They provided support with books, groups, and training to help us. Our case manager checked on us all the time. If it weren’t for TBHC, we most likely would have quit.”

This Christmas promises to be “amazing,” Michelle said. “We have an official daughter to celebrate His birth with. Izzy is so thankful to be a Bratcher at last. She doesn’t have to fear moving anymore. We get to spoil and love on our foster daughter this year, too. We will help her see her family as she wishes for the holidays and support her in any way we can.

“Life is so full,” she added. “We are so thankful for God’s love and His expanding His kingdom. Our house is full, our hearts are full.”

COVER TO COVER

What happens when Wichita Falls church reads the Bible aloud every December? 'It changes people'

WICHITA FALLS

Members of Western Hills Baptist Church in Wichita Falls know firsthand the truth of Romans 10:17: "Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ." For the third consecutive year, the church will read the entire Bible aloud between Christmas and New Year's Day.

"The Word of God will not return void," said Patricia Ackley, who spearheaded the original effort with her husband, Lee, the church's associate pastor.

The reading begins on Dec. 26 and ends either late Dec. 31 or sometime Jan. 1, running daily from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. and taking about 100 hours total. The church's sound system amplifies voices so all can hear throughout the fellowship hall, where the reading occurs.

Participants sign up for time slots or to read certain books of the Bible, either using their preferred translations or Bibles supplied by the church. Members gather to support the effort. Visitors are welcome, too.

When certain time slots go unclaimed, others in the room step in, taking turns reading individually

or in small groups, Ackley said. Those who feel less comfortable reading aloud may use Bible apps to read their sections of Scripture. Others simply sit quietly, listening and encouraging the readers.

"It's important for a church undertaking this to be flexible regarding the needs of the congregation. We have some who cannot read due to vision problems or for other reasons," Ackley said. "We never pressure anyone to read but encourage them to use audio Bibles or sit and listen."

Sometimes whole families sign up for a chunk of time to read. The youth have a yearly midweek lock-in and participate, as well.

'Great encouragement and great learning'

The Bible-A-Thon, as the church calls it, becomes a time of fellowship, with church members providing three free meals per day plus homemade snacks and treats. Churchwide response has been positive, with multigenerational participation, something member Jim Mitchell praised. Known to tear up at the event's conclusion, Mitchell said the reading "crossed all generations—children, teenagers, middle-aged parents, and senior adults" and provided a "great time of fellowship."

Reena Brookins brought her teen girls Bible study group to read for hours last year. Carl and Kym Thomas and their entire family attended most of the 2022 reading. "It was

beautiful,” Ackley said of the family’s participation.

Methods vary. Some younger kids perform skits. Last year, member Ross Prebish even sang Obadiah to the tune of the Gilligan’s Island theme song, while his wife, Jennifer, not only paired up with another member to read Genesis but also prepared lunch.

Enthusiasm continues to grow, but the focus remains the same.

“That first year, we stepped out in faith ... stressing that God’s Word will go forth as long as we have breath in our lungs,” Ackley said. Often in the early days, a solitary reader kept the narration going. God will bring participants, she added, but “even when you are tired or alone in the sanctuary or surrounded by 60 people, it is about His Word.”

Said Western Hills Pastor Richard Allen: “It benefits the members. They really enjoy listening to the Word being read audibly all day. There’s great encouragement and great learning.”

The effect can be hard to explain, Allen said, but “14 hours a day hearing the Word of God encourages you. It changes people. A week of hearing nothing but the Bible read changes you.”

Allen estimates that 70 percent of his congregation, which runs 75 on Sundays, participates at some level in the Bible-A-Thon.

‘A great movement for years to come’

Ackley said couples, youth, families, and Sunday school teachers began talking about the Bible-A-Thon in early fall.

“We are excited to read the Word this year, and seeing others tell new members and visitors about the event is a blessing,” Ackley said, adding that the church will again announce the Bible-A-Thon on the local Christian radio station. Members will prepare extra food, welcoming anyone who wants to “experience the Word of God in a powerful way.”

Ackley, a 52-year-old medical student, has long been involved at Western Hills, doing everything from directing vacation Bible school and authoring curriculum, writing Christmas plays and Easter programs, coordinating block parties, teaching adult Sunday school, starting the church’s Wednesday night meal program, and spearheading a special holiday meal and program for widows and widowers.

Now with a busy medical school schedule, she has passed on most of those duties to others, except the widows’ banquet and the Bible marathon—the latter of which she said she hopes catches on in other locations.

“It would be great if this year, between Christmas and New Year’s, there were a lot of churches reading [through] the Bible,” she said, noting that God’s Word has the power to “spark a great movement this Christmas and for years to come.”

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FROM CHRISTMAS ROBBERY TO REDEMPTION

Austin pastor's book chronicles tale of bank robber who later turned to Christ

EASTLAND COUNTY

Many Central Texas natives know the story of the infamous Santa Claus Robbery that took place two days before Christmas 1927 in the Eastland County town of Cisco.

Thomas Goodman, pastor of Hillcrest Church in Austin, was pastoring an Eastland church in the 1990s when he heard the tale of four bandits—one disguised as Santa—who robbed the First National Bank of Cisco, briefly escaping with two young female hostages.

The job was supposed to be “easy in, easy out,” Goodman tells congregations and audiences in a message called “The Parable of a Texas Crime.” The crime, however, became anything but easy. As word spread of the robbery, 1,000 armed citizens surrounded the bank—many hoping to claim the reward offered by the Texas Bankers Association promising \$5,000 for a dead bank robber and “not one cent for a live one.” The controversial reward was a response to an epidemic of bank robberies in the 1920s. In today’s dollars, the amount would equal a staggering \$85,000.

The manhunt was the largest in Texas history to date and the first to involve air reconnaissance, Goodman noted.

Of the four bandits, one would suffer fatal injuries during the getaway; one would die in the electric chair; one would be lynched by an



Eastland mob. And one would serve 15 years of a life sentence and become a Christian whose life was so radically changed he would earn a conditional pardon from Gov. Coke Stevenson and later a full pardon in 1964 from Gov. John Connally.

It's that last man who inspired the title of Goodman's recently released novel, *The Last Man: A Novel of the 1927 Santa Claus Bank Robbery*.

Goodman is far from the first to chronicle the crime. Numerous nonfiction books and articles in *Texas Monthly* and *Texas Highways*, among other magazines, tell the tale. But all accounts stop at the violent lynching. Goodman found the rest of the story more compelling: a changed life thanks to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A prolific writer, the pastor decided to try his hand at fiction, running the idea past his deacons, who supported the venture.

"I get up at 6 a.m. and write till 8:30 when the church office opens and I feel I am on the clock," Goodman said. "I write on my own time, whatever that means for a pastor."

Writing the novel has given Goodman opportunities to speak not just in churches, but also at western festivals and for civic organizations, settings that are not explicitly religious. "It's not a 300-page sermon, but it is overtly Christian," he said of the book. "The story itself is fascinating, with a redemptive element. By the time the last man dies in his 90s, he has been a God-fearing, church-going man for 50 years."

The pastor likens the story to Jesus' parable of the sower and the seeds, noting parallels between the parable's "four patches of ground" and the crime's "four men." Though the seed and the sower were the same, only one patch of ground yielded fruit. Similarly, although all the robbers had opportunities to respond to the gospel, only one did.

And that is a Christmas story worth telling.



Goodman has had the opportunity to speak and sign books at church and civic events, like Eastland's fall festival. **SUBMITTED PHOTO**

The Last Man is available online and at brick-and-mortar booksellers. For more information, visit thomasgoodmanwrites.com.



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'TIS THE SEASON

Brownsville church uses holidays to share Christ's love with community

BROWNSVILLE

It's Christmas Eve morning, and a group of families from Ecclesia Community Church is working its way through a series of parking lots, making visits to local businesses, offices, and restaurants.

The church members are carrying with them two gifts for each place they stop: sugary-good donuts and the sweetness of Christ's love. Before they leave each location, they sing Christmas carols and invite the people they have blessed to church.

"People greet us with great joy, and some ask us why we are doing this or why we chose them," Pastor James Martinez said.

The answer is simple: Ecclesia Community Church wants to impact lives and take advantage of every opportunity to share God's love—even if that means going out into the community on a holiday morning.

Holiday seasons provide one of the best opportunities for Ecclesia to do this, according to Martinez. Around Thanksgiving, the church forgoes a traditional Sunday service and instead hosts what it calls "Friendsgiving," where a meal is served and members can invite their unchurched friends to share physical and spiritual nourishment with them.

Christmastime brings multiple outreach opportunities. Church members work together to prepare gift boxes for underprivileged children around the world through Operation Christmas Child. In the week leading up to Christmas, church families gather at the local Chick-fil-A to sing Christmas carols to those eating at the restaurant and to invite them to their Christmas Eve service.

Martinez said he approached several businesses about caroling at their location, but all of them said no. One day,

Members of Ecclesia Community Church use the holidays to reach out to people in their community. Sometimes they deliver donuts to local businesses, while other times they are permitted to sing Christmas carols at a local eating establishment.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



Pastor James Martinez says people in the Brownsville community are aware of Ecclesia Community Church because of its many outreach efforts. **SUBMITTED PHOTO**

he was eating at Chick-fil-A and decided to ask the manager if he would be open to the opportunity. The manager agreed, saying he had already been looking for someone to sing at one of their Christmas activities.

Such opportunities give Ecclesia Community Church more visibility in the community which, in turn, provides members with more chances to share words of encouragement and invite people to church.

“People know who we are because of what we do in the community to reach out to them,” Martinez said. “Many of those who are coming to the church are coming because they know who we are and that we are there for them.”

All things to all people

Ecclesia Community Church has been rooted in community service since beginning as a plant in 2020. That was also the year something else started—COVID-19. So just as the church was starting up, everything began to shut down.

Undeterred, Martinez led the church to use its facility to start a food distribution ministry. God opened the doors for Ecclesia to receive a large supply of food each week that not only provided for the community, but also for other churches to distribute.

“Every week, there were about 3,000 families who came to get food and hear the gospel,” Martinez said. The food ministry is still going strong today, holding monthly food distributions and even partnering with an aid organization in the Central Texas city of Waco.

The food ministry was just the beginning for a church that has continually made necessary changes to better suit the specific needs of its community. For example, Martinez planted Ecclesia with the idea that it would be an English-language church. However, God showed him that to be relevant to the diversity of families in a community on the Mexico border, the church would need to be bilingual.

Even so, the church has learned that while many adults speak Spanish, their children communicate better in English.

“We see more and more families [that speak] multiple languages,” Martinez said, “and the church is called to reach them.”

Another adjustment Ecclesia was willing to make to better suit the community was to host its main weekly service on Sunday night rather than Sunday morning. That accommodates the large number of people in the community who work long Saturday night shifts or those who work Sunday mornings.

About 80 people are attending Ecclesia each week, Martinez said. He prays for more to come as the church continues to reach outside its walls. His latest outreach—opening a coffee shop—is scheduled to begin this month.

Martinez, who was the manager of a well-known coffee shop for 10 years, saw a need in the area for a similar establishment with an accessible location and affordable prices that would likewise open its doors to share Jesus with every cup of coffee served. His desire is for the coffee shop to be a place where the community can come for prayer, food, and provision. The name of the shop will be 2:42 Coffee House—named for Acts 2:42, which states, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.”

“We exist to help people know God, love God, and serve God,” Martinez said, “so we are willing to do all we can to fulfill that mission.”



LLEGÓ LA TEMPORADA

Iglesia en Brownsville aprovecha las fiestas para compartir el amor de Cristo con la comunidad

BROWNSVILLE

Llega la mañana de Nochebuena, y un grupo de familias de la iglesia Ecclesia Community está recorriendo una serie de estacionamientos visitando negocios, oficinas y restaurantes locales.

Los miembros de la iglesia llevan consigo dos regalos para cada lugar en el que se detienen: donas azucaradas y la dulzura del amor de Cristo. Antes de despedirse de cada lugar, cantan villancicos e invitan a la iglesia a las personas a las que han bendecido.

“La gente nos recibe con gran alegría, y algunos nos preguntan por qué lo hacemos o por qué los escogimos a ellos”, dijo el pastor James Martínez.

La respuesta es sencilla: Ecclesia Community Church quiere impactar vidas y aprovechar cada oportunidad para compartir el amor de Dios, incluso si eso significa salir a la comunidad en una mañana festiva.

Las temporadas festivas ofrecen una de las mejores oportunidades para que Ecclesia haga esto, según Martínez. En torno al Día de Acción de Gracias, la iglesia prescinde del tradicional servicio dominical y en su lugar organizan lo que denominan un “Friendsgiving”, donde se sirve una comida y los miembros invitan a sus amigos que no asisten a una iglesia a compartir con ellos el alimento físico y espiritual.

La Navidad trae consigo múltiples oportunidades de alcance. Los miembros de la iglesia colaboran en la preparación de cajas de regalos para niños desfavorecidos de todo el mundo a través de Operación Niño de la Navidad. En la semana previa a la Navidad, las familias de la iglesia se reúnen en el Chick-fil-A local para cantar villancicos a los clientes del restaurante e invitarles a su servicio de Nochebuena.

Martínez comparte que él se había puesto en contacto con varios establecimientos del área para cantar villancicos en sus locales, pero todos le dijeron que no. Un día, estaba comiendo en Chick-fil-A y decidió



El pastor James Martínez dice que la gente de la comunidad de Brownsville conoce a Ecclesia Community Church gracias a todos los esfuerzos de alcance que realizan. **FOTO COMPARTIDA**

El ministerio de alimentos fue sólo el principio de una iglesia que no ha dejado de hacer los cambios necesarios para adaptarse mejor a las necesidades específicas de su comunidad. Por ejemplo, Martínez plantó Ecclesia con la idea de que sería una iglesia en inglés. Sin embargo, Dios le mostró que, para ellos poder ser relevante entre la diversidad de familias en una comunidad fronteriza con México, la iglesia necesitaría ser bilingüe. Aun así, la iglesia ha aprendido que, aunque muchos adultos hablan

español, sus hijos se comunican mejor en inglés.

“Vemos cada vez más familias [que hablan] varios idiomas”, dijo Martínez, “y la iglesia está llamada a alcanzarlos”.

Otro ajuste que Ecclesia estaba dispuesta a hacer para adaptarse mejor a la comunidad era celebrar su principal servicio semanal el domingo por la noche en lugar del domingo por la mañana. De este modo se adapta al gran número de personas de la comunidad que trabajan largos turnos los sábados por la noche o que trabajan los domingos por la mañana.

Alrededor de 80 personas asisten a Ecclesia cada semana, dijo Martínez. Él ora para que vengan más a medida que la iglesia sigue alcanzándolos fuera de sus paredes. Su último proyecto, la apertura de una cafetería, está previsto que comience este mes.

Martínez, que fue gerente de una conocida cafetería durante 10 años, vio la necesidad en la zona de un establecimiento similar, con una ubicación accesible y precios asequibles, que también abriera sus puertas para compartir a Jesús con cada taza de café servida. Su deseo es que la cafetería sea un lugar donde la comunidad pueda acudir en busca de oración, comida y provisión. El nombre de la tienda será 2:42 Coffee House, por Hechos 2:42, que dice: “Y perseveraban en la doctrina de los apóstoles, en la comunión unos con otros, en el partimiento del pan y en las oraciones”.

“Existimos para ayudar a las personas a conocer a Dios, amar a Dios y servir a Dios”, dijo Martínez, “así que estamos dispuestos a hacer todo lo posible para cumplir esa misión.”

preguntar al gerente si estaría dispuesto a hacerlo. El gerente aceptó, diciendo que había estado buscando a alguien para cantar en una de sus actividades navideñas.

Tales oportunidades dan a Ecclesia Community Church más visibilidad en la comunidad, lo que, a su vez, proporciona a los miembros más oportunidades de compartir palabras de ánimo e invitar a la gente a la iglesia.

“La gente sabe quiénes somos por lo que hacemos en la comunidad para llegar a ellos”, dijo Martínez. “Muchos de los que llegan a la iglesia vienen porque saben quiénes somos y que estamos ahí para ellos”.

Todo para alcanzar todos

Ecclesia Community Church ha estado arraigada en el servicio comunitario desde que comenzó como una plantación en el 2020. Ese fue también el año en que algo más comenzó, COVID-19. Así que justo cuando la iglesia estaba empezando, todo comenzó a cerrarse.

Sin inmutarse, Martínez llevó a la iglesia a utilizar sus instalaciones para iniciar un ministerio de distribución de alimentos. Dios abrió las puertas para que Ecclesia recibiera un gran suministro de alimentos cada semana que no sólo abastecía a la comunidad, sino que también servía para que otras iglesias los distribuyeran.

“Cada semana, unas 3,000 familias venían a recibir alimentos y a escuchar el Evangelio”, dice Martínez. Hoy día, el ministerio de alimentos sigue funcionando, distribuyendo alimentos mensualmente e incluso uniéndose a una organización que provee alimentos de la ciudad de Waco, ubicada en el centro de Texas.

MAKING A SPLASH

A photograph of two men in a river. The man on the left, who has a beard and tattoos on his arms, is holding the other man's hand. The man on the right is being baptized. They are both wearing black t-shirts. The background shows a river with trees on the banks.

GROWING CHURCH IN TINY TOWN IS EXPERIENCING EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

LINGLEVILLE

If you've ever driven through Lingleville, you probably weren't there long.

Located about 85 miles west of Fort Worth and 85 miles east of Abilene, this tiny Erath County town is home to fewer than 100 residents and features a small country store, a volunteer fire department, a post office—and not much more.

That's what makes the work God is doing at Lingleville Baptist Church all the more exciting.

The church grew from the 55 people who called Ryan Hurt as pastor in 2015 to a congregation of 250 by late 2019. COVID hit in the spring of 2020, leading the church to temporarily meet online. Before long, in-person worship resumed, the church continued to offer its services online, and now, several hundred

people watch via the web each week in addition to the explosion of people attending onsite, according to Hurt.

"We went from 55 folks in 2015 to now running 700-plus between two services. It's been the craziest thing I've ever seen," Hurt said. "We are building a 1,200-seat auditorium to accommodate the growth. Talk about the Lord moving on this little hill."

Until construction is complete on the new worship center and education space, the church will continue to worship in its Family Life Center—where services were moved after it outgrew its sanctuary. Growth continues week after week, Hurt said, as members of the congregation use word of mouth to tell others about the gospel and the church.

"We have a whole section of people out there because I've invited them," said Curtis Green,



**“THE HOLY SPIRIT
IS IN THE BUILDING.
IT’S AMAZING.”**

—CURTIS GREEN

a mechanic who has been attending for two years. “I tell them if you don’t know Jesus, you need to come to Lingleville Baptist Church. The Holy Spirit is in the building. It’s amazing.”

Rancher Gary Clayton, a member for six years, said he invites people to church everywhere he goes—grocery stores, gas stations, banks. Clayton said the church hosts events frequently, including crawfish boils, father/son campouts, crochet clubs, and family nights, making it a popular center of activity in such a small community.

The church offers the ministry for people in their 20s and 30s, a ministry called Overcomers for those recovering from life-limiting choices, a marriage ministry called Reengage that meets on Sunday nights, and vibrant opportunities for men, women, students, and children.

“It’s such an easy church to fall in love with,” Clayton said. “We have a pastor who is on fire for God and the Holy Spirit just moves in our church. It’s a phenomenal place.”

The church’s ministry area spreads out 11 miles south to Dublin, 10 miles west to Desdemona, and 10 miles north to Huckabay. Hurt said the church’s “come as you are” atmosphere has drawn people from all walks of life to hear the gospel.

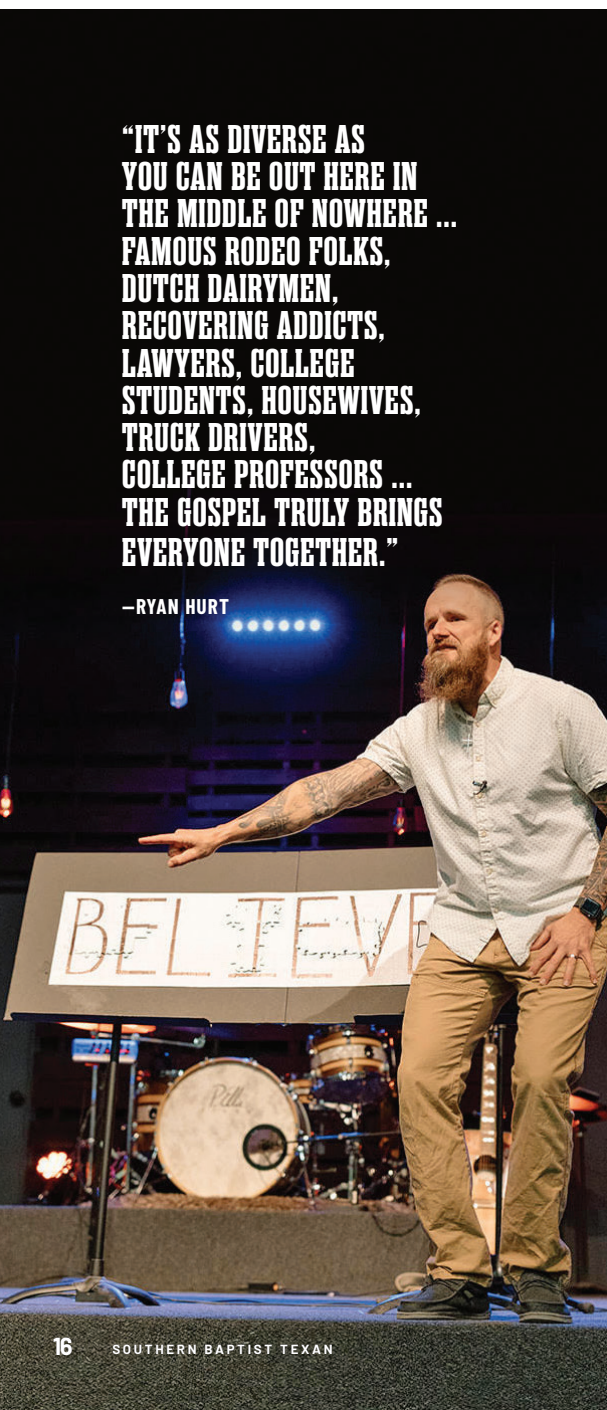


Lingleville Baptist Church has become a center of activity in such a small community, providing plenty of opportunities for people of all ages. Most importantly, the church is using its influence to deliver the gospel to people beyond its city limits. **SUBMITTED PHOTOS**



THERE'S NOTHING TO FEAR NOW
FOR I AM SAFE WITH YOU

Jesus IS
LIFE



**"IT'S AS DIVERSE AS
YOU CAN BE OUT HERE IN
THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE ...
FAMOUS RODEO FOLKS,
DUTCH DAIRYMEN,
RECOVERING ADDICTS,
LAWYERS, COLLEGE
STUDENTS, HOUSEWIVES,
TRUCK DRIVERS,
COLLEGE PROFESSORS ...
THE GOSPEL TRULY BRINGS
EVERYONE TOGETHER."**

—RYAN HURT



Hurt was once one of those people. He had a 12-year career in country music before a near-fatal car crash redirected his life back to his early Christian roots. Though his wife, Melissa, was not raised in church, she knew their lives needed something different following the wreck. "We've got to do something different," Hurt recalled his wife saying to him, suggesting they go to church.

God took care of the rest, calling Hurt to ministry and allowing him to lead a congregation in Lingleville that welcomes all comers.

"It's as diverse as you can be out here in the middle of nowhere ... famous rodeo folks, Dutch dairymen, recovering addicts, lawyers, college students, housewives, truck drivers, college professors, and lots more," he said. "The gospel truly brings everyone together."

Local ministry focuses on once-a-month meals for the faculty and staff at the Lingleville Independent School District. A live nativity production tells the whole story of Jesus, from His birth to the empty tomb, at Christmastime. The three-day production saw about 1,200 people come through this past December, the pastor said.

Reaching beyond Lingleville, the church has taken mission trips to do maintenance work at a small associational camp in Oklahoma.

"The main thing [we tell people] is who they are in Christ, how important our relationship with the Lord is, that we're never so far gone God can't meet us where we're at, and the importance of going and sharing the good news," Hurt said. "It's the Great Commission. The people here, when they see—when they understand—what the Lord is doing, what He's done, what He wants to do in and through us as faithful followers of Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit, it changes everything."



Find your community, get off 'ministry island'

In early 2019, I was serving in my first pastorate after nearly 18 years of youth and family ministry. My wife, Kristy, and I were exhausted—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The difficulties of pastoring, parenting, marriage—of life—threatened to put us out of ministry.

So when we saw a mailer advertising a Pastor and Wife Date Night hosted by the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention, we signed up immediately. To that point, I had not had much personal involvement with the SBTC despite pastoring an affiliated church, so I did not know what to expect. Nothing could have prepared us for how God would use this night as a turning point in our lives and ministry.

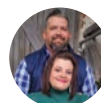
The date night was hosted by two couples who formerly served with the SBTC and have since been moved by the Lord to serve in other locations across the country—Tony and Vanessa Wolfe and Shane and Kasi Pruitt. These couples, who shared their life experiences, were in the same life

stage as Kristy and me. Their stories had us laughing at times, crying at times, shocked at times, and often nodding our heads in complete agreement. We so often had felt like we were living on an island with few who understood what we were going through. Hearing the Wolfes and Pruitts tell their stories encouraged us and let us know we were in good company with other broken individuals being used by God to work for His glory.

At the end of the night, Kristy and I struck up a conversation with Vanessa that led to us sharing our family's recent struggles with Tony and her. Over the next hour and a half, they listened to us as we poured out our broken hearts. They cried with us and encouraged us. Never before had two strangers been so instrumental to us. We are now proud to call them friends.

Had we not attended this date night, I am convinced we would have continued on the road of depression and likely abandoned our call to ministry. Instead, through the critical connections we made at this event, God encouraged our souls and led us onto a path of healing. No longer do we allow ourselves to live and minister on an island. Instead, we actively seek community with our brothers and sisters in Christ. No longer do we try to ignore our pain for the sake of those we're called to minister to. Instead, we are intentional about sharing our pain in a way God has used to bless and heal us so we can be more effective in ministering to others and reaching a lost and broken world.

Since that night in 2019, I have made it a point to be as actively involved as I possibly can in our state convention. Pastor, I want to encourage you to do the same. The SBTC offers many quality events at little to no cost to the participant. Whatever the event, I know you will be blessed in many ways—including having great conversations over great meals with great people who, merely through showing they understand what you're going through, may breathe new life into your family and ministry.



Dusty Smith is lead pastor of Waddill Street Baptist Church in McKinney and a member of the SBTC Executive Board.



‘We must move forward together’

LORICK CASTS NEW VISION FOR SBTC TO ATTACK GROWING LOSTNESS IN TEXAS

EULESS

When the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention was founded 25 years ago, Texas had a population of 19 million people. A quarter-century later, it's estimated that's how many lost people there are—19 million—among the state's 30 million residents.

SBTC Executive Director Nathan Lorick likens it to a mountain of lostness—one of Mount Everest-sized proportions—but one that can be scaled as convention churches strategically work together.

“What we’ve seen time and time again over the past 25 years as a convention [is this]: what seems like an insurmountable mountain to the world becomes a God-sized opportunity to reach every person and place God sends us.”

—NATHAN LORICK

On Nov. 13, during the opening night of the SBTC Annual Meeting at Cross City Church, Lorick cast a new vision that aims to reverse the growth rate of lostness in Texas and the world. That vision, developed over the past year through a prayerful collaboration among SBTC leaders across the state, calls for a united front among the convention's 2,700-plus churches.

“This is a daunting reality—one that ought to move our hearts to action,” Lorick said of the growing number of lost people in Texas. “What we’ve seen time and time again over the past 25 years as a convention [is this]: what seems like an insurmountable mountain to the world becomes a God-sized opportunity to reach every person and place God sends us.

“So how do we climb this mountain and reverse the rate of lostness in our state and the world? Just as we have for the past 25 years ... we must move forward together.”

Lorick described the new vision as a “refocus” for the SBTC, one anchored upon its longstanding core values of being biblically based, missionally driven, and kingdom focused. The refocus provides a framework to drive the SBTC's mission over the next 25 years: to mobilize churches to multiply disciple-making movements in Texas and around the world.

These disciple-making movements can be identified and measured by five markers: prayer-energized, evangelism-prioritized, disciple-making normalized, sending-maximized, and partnerships-synergized. Lorick noted all five markers are found throughout the New Testament.

Mobilization of the markers will take place on three strategic pathways that resource churches with tools and training, network leaders with relationships and partnerships, and advance mission through giving and sending opportunities. As examples, Lorick noted continued growth among SBTC networks including the Black Church Network, Young Pastors Network, and Bivocational Pastors Network. He also lauded Regenesi, a revitalization process SBTC leaders project will have been completed by 500 pastors and leaders from 72 churches by May 2024.

Lorick said implementation of the convention's new vision "won't happen overnight," noting that it will begin to be integrated into the SBTC's ministries and marketing objectives over the next year. The vision will be "fully optimized" in three years, he said, leading the SBTC to resource 1,000 churches, revitalize 350 churches, connect 1,000 leaders to 75 networks, and connect 1,200 churches to support 120 church plants. In 2023, Send Network SBTC, the convention's church planting partnership with the North American Mission Board, expects to start 50 churches—which would be the most in a single year for the SBTC since 2005.



SBTC messengers conduct significant business at meeting

EULESS

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention met for its annual meeting Nov. 13-14 at Cross City Church in Euless. The event drew 925 registered messengers and 247 registered guests, a total of 1,172 people. Messengers conducted significant business that facilitates the convention's ministry for the coming year:

Forshee, Lopez, Cooper elected to serve as officers

Austin pastor Danny Forshee was elected SBTC president by acclamation on Nov. 14, the final day of the meeting.

Forshee has served as lead pastor at Great Hills Baptist Church for more than 13 years and as president of the Danny Forshee Evangelistic Association for nearly 20 years. From 2018-2020, he served as chairman of the SBTC's Executive Board.

Rounding out the convention's elected leadership is Eddie Lopez, pastor of First Baptist Forney En Español, who was elected as vice president, and Sharonda Cooper of Emmaus Church of Georgetown, who was elected convention secretary. Both were also elected by acclamation.

\$27.8 million budget approved

Messengers approved a \$27,833,488 budget for the next year. This amount is the same as the 2023 budget. The convention's business and financial plan prohibits raising a budget for the next fiscal year above the current year, beyond receipts in the prior year.

Sexual abuse awareness, prevention resources made available to churches

Messengers were informed of resources being made available to raise awareness and help prevent sexual abuse at SBTC churches during the Nov. 14 afternoon session.

A membership to MinistrySafe—an organization whose mission is to protect children and those who serve them through training and resourcing—will be provided at no cost for the first 500 churches (first-time users) that sign up. SBTC churches interested in learning more are being urged to text PROTECT to 469-727-7272.

Additionally, SBTC Executive Board Chairman Caleb Turner reported to messengers that a licensed therapist specializing in



▲ Send Network SBTC Director Julio Arriola (standing at left podium) speaks during a commissioning time for church planters during the 2023 SBTC Annual Meeting on Nov. 14. Visit texanonline.net for more annual meeting coverage. **SBTC PHOTO**

trauma and sexual abuse has been retained by the convention as a resource for churches.

Effective date for 2022 motion extended

At the 2022 annual meeting in Corpus Christi, messengers approved a motion to interpret the SBTC's constitutional affiliation requirement that the "office of pastor be limited to men" to apply "not only to the titles of senior pastor or lead pastor, but to any role designated by the noun 'pastor.'"

Referencing a request by SBC President Bart Barber that state conventions "pause" actions they may be considering that involve the nature of cooperation, the SBTC Executive Board recommended the date for implementation of the 2022 motion for presently affiliated churches be moved to Jan. 1, 2025. After a time of discussion at this year's annual meeting, the board's recommendation was approved by a hand vote of messengers.

Messenger intends to propose constitutional amendment in 2024

Messenger Rob Collingsworth of Redemption Story Church in Fort Worth reported his intent, in accordance with Article IX of the SBTC Constitution, to propose two constitutional amendments at next year's annual meeting. Collingsworth is proposing the following amendments (in red):

Article III. Doctrinal Statement

"The Baptist Faith and Message, adopted in 2000 **and amended in 2023** by the Southern Baptist Convention, shall be the doctrinal statement for the Convention."

Article IV. Affiliation

Section 1 "(d) affirms the **church-wide authority and oversight** office of pastor/**elder/overseer** to be limited to men."



Next year's annual meeting will be hosted by Sagemont Church in Houston on Nov. 11-12.

SBTC 25-YEAR ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION

Check out a few of the sights at the
SBTC's 25-year anniversary reception
held Monday, Nov. 13, in conjunction
with the annual meeting.





SCOTTIE STICE



Scottie Stice has headed Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Disaster Relief since 2014, when he became interim director. In January 2015, he assumed the position permanently. Previously, Stice served as an SBTC DR volunteer, a senior pastor, missions pastor at First Baptist Dallas, an International Mission Board missionary in El Salvador, and director of missions for the Del Rio-Uvalde Baptist Association. A graduate of Criswell College, he has earned a Master of Arts in Missions and a Master of Theology from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Stice and his wife, Judy, have four adult children and five grandchildren.

Where has SBTC DR deployed this year?

We have had a relatively slow year with 19 deployments. Among these, volunteers have served in migrant ministry in Brownsville, responded to Hurricane Idalia in Perry, Fla., assisted storm survivors in Millington, Tenn., and served tornado survivors in the Texas communities of Perryton, Winnsboro, Bloomburg, and the Gulf Coast, plus Little Rock, Ark., and Shawnee, Okla. Volunteers have ministered to the homeless in Texarkana, responded to fires in Jasper County, assisted victims of storm and wind events in Spring and Kountze (Jefferson and Hardin counties), and ice storms in Round Rock and Austin. They have removed mold from a flooded church in Sheffield and participated with the Salvation Army in a training event in Grand Prairie.

What has been the most meaningful moment for you as DR director in 2023?

It is hard to choose a single event. What is meaningful to me is when SBTC DR volunteers go to a disaster-stricken community and meet the needs of the survivors. The tornado near Little Rock does stand out this year, as SBTC DR teams responded at the request of Arkansas Baptist Disaster Relief. The Arkansas teams were busy serving in Mississippi when the storm hit Little Rock. Our teams deployed very quickly, traveled to Little Rock, and went operational within 24-36 hours.

What are some of the blessings of involvement in DR ministry?

Ministry to survivors of storms. We minister to many believers who grow stronger in their faith after a disaster. We are also able to share the gospel with and minister to many unbelievers.

What are the most pressing needs of SBTC DR?

We always need more volunteers who will deploy and the resources to support them while they are in the field. Transportation, food, and equipment are expensive. God has been faithful to provide what we need just as we need it.

How can the churches of the SBTC pray for SBTC DR this coming year?

Pray for more workers for the harvest. We are perpetually short-handed. Pray for the resources to send the teams of volunteers that make a difference in disaster-stricken communities.

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING KICKS OFF WITH NEAR-RECORD GIFT

RICHMOND, Va. The 2023 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering received a big boost toward meeting a hefty goal of \$200 million for international missions. Paul Chitwood, International Mission Board president, received a check in November for \$4.84 million from the Joy Ledbetter Trust. It was the second-largest individual gift in the history of the International Mission Board.

The \$200 million goal for this year's offering is the largest one ever. At the IMB's annual LMCO kickoff event, Chitwood said Southern Baptists exceeded last year's goal of \$190 million with \$196.1 million. Because of big and small churches working together to generously give last year, missionaries and their local partners shared the gospel with 728,589 people.

"Tell your churches that heaven increased this year with 178,177 new believers who will spend eternity with Jesus. You had a gospel presence in 122 countries last year," he said, directing comments toward generous Southern Baptists.

Chitwood said he hopes the generosity of people like Joy Ledbetter will encourage others to consider how we work together through big and small financial gifts to impact the nations for Jesus Christ.

—BAPTIST PRESS

WORKMAN, FOUNDING SBTC BOARD MEMBER, PASSES AWAY AT AGE 85

LUBBOCK Almeida "Skeet" Workman, a founding Southern Baptists of Texas Convention board member, died Nov. 3. She was 85.

Workman was a board member for the convention's precursor group, the Southern Baptists of Texas, Inc., and then joined the new convention's executive board in 1998. She also served the Southern Baptist Convention in key roles during and after the denomination's Conservative Resurgence (1979-1995).

She was a member of the SBC denominational calendar committee when that body debated adding a Sanctity of Human Life Sunday to the convention's list of emphasis Sundays. In what



she later described as her most memorable role in the SBC, she cast the deciding vote in favor of the addition. She was later a member of the boards for the Christian Life Commission (now called the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission) and the International Mission Board.

"We have lost a champion for salt and light in this world in the passing of Skeet Workman," SBTC Executive Director Emeritus Jim Richards said. "She was indefatigable in her stand for the Word of God. Skeet was a voice for the unborn and the model of a prayer warrior. We have few of her courage today."

In addition to her husband, Don, she is survived by two sons and four grandchildren.

—GARY LEDBETTER



STUDY: NIGERIA, NORTH KOREA AMONG WORST PERSECUTORS OF CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD

Nigeria—a nation the U.S. Department of State has failed to designate as a Country of Particular Concern—is among the worst persecutors of Christians, an international religious freedom watchdog group reported.

"Nigeria is arguably the most dangerous place to be a Christian in the world today," International Christian Concern stated in its 88-page 2023 "Persecutors of the Year" report.

The report points to terrorist groups in Nigeria such as Boko Haram that have been responsible for more than 38,000 deaths in the past 12 years and the enforcement of Sharia law in 12 northern states as sources of persecution.

"NIGERIA IS ARGUABLY THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACE TO BE A CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD TODAY."

—International Christian Concern

ICC documents 55 attacks in Nigeria resulting in the deaths of 549 Christians from March 4 to July 6, the burning of a Catholic seminary and killing of a seminarian in Kaduna State, and the overnight murder of more than 20 people in a Plateau State village by radical Fulani militants in August.

"Whether the world acknowledges the plight of Nigerian Christians or not, the country has become a burial ground for Christians," the report stated.

Other countries on ICC's top 10 list of oppressive nations are North Korea, India, Iran, China, Pakistan, Eritrea, Algeria, Indonesia, and Azerbaijan.

—BAPTIST PRESS



Back in 2012, I felt like I had hit rock bottom. I'd suffered from serious back pain for years, and it was diagnosed as herniated discs in my lower back. I did all the things they told me to do, but the pain always returned.

In 2011, my husband, Michael, and I moved to Lewisville. During the move I damaged my back even more. I was only able to walk short distances at a time and was entirely dependent on pain medications to function in a job that required that I move around a lot. As I moved around less because of the pain, I'd gain weight, and

that made the pain worse. All that, in addition to moving away from family and friends back in Lubbock, brought on a dark pit of depression like I'd never experienced before.

I felt like a complete failure and my mind was swirling with terrible thoughts about how I was of no use to anyone—that there was no reason for me to exist. For too long, I listened to all those lies that the enemy wanted me to believe, including the one that said, “Hey aren’t you a Christian? Christians shouldn’t have depression!”

I believed in God, and I was saved through faith in Christ Jesus, but I was not joyful. I had little peace, and my spiritual life was suffering from a lack of prayer and a lack of being in God’s Word. By 2012, I had undergone back surgery, and while much of the pain subsided, I was still in that dark pit that I could not climb out of.

In 2016, I got to attend a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Women’s Ministry Forum, a forerunner of the She Stands conferences. During one of the sessions, a passage in Psalm 51 began to speak directly to my heart and it became my desperate prayer: “Lord, restore to me the joy of your salvation!”

So, I began to pray, I got back into the Word, and I asked God, “How do I have your joy restored to my life? Lovingly and gently, the Savior began lifting my face so I could see others who needed help, who needed prayer, who needed to be ministered to. It was as if I was having a conversation with the Lord:

“Lindsay, do you love me?”

“Yes Lord, I do love you.”

“Feed my sheep.”

We were members of Lakeland Baptist Church in Lewisville at that time, and God surrounded me with wonderful Christian women—just dear friends, great encouragers. And one of them really encouraged me to get back into Scripture and to start serving in the church in different ways. For me, the thing that helped most with my depression was helping other people and not focusing on myself. When I started to focus on my own problems, that was just a downward spiral. As I began to get out of myself and focus on God—what He has given me and what He’s gifted me to do and how that can be used to help other people—all of that just lifted so quickly.

**"In my weakness, He is strong.
My depression and sadness were
lifted and replaced with peace,
patience, and joy. The joy of the
Lord has become my strength."**

—LINDSAY SCOTT

In 2020, my husband's company moved him to South Texas. We found out about a week after the pandemic took hold. Even though my company had no work-from-home policies, as most companies didn't, I was basically able to keep my job. Now I work as a senior financial analyst in the same department, but I work from home in San Antonio.

When we moved to San Antonio, and as soon as we found a church home [Mission City], it was like, "Let's put down roots, let's start serving." That was just not even a question. It was funny and ironic to me that the first ministry I served in was with kids because we don't have children. A lot of people who know me know I wouldn't look for that kind of ministry, but that's kind of how God works. Sometimes He puts us in places we would never expect or choose to be, but I was able to serve our kids.

I was in the kids check-in area, an administrative role. I checked families in and helped them feel that their children were safe when they entered the church. I was the first face of hospitality as they came in. I so loved that.

About three months ago, our church launched a new campus location. My husband and I are on the trailer team. Our team drives in four 24-foot portable church trailers to a middle school where our new church meets every Sunday. That's where I help now.

I partner with another lady on the team, and we set up the kids area while our husbands set up the auditorium. Because of how God works, I had this background of knowing how our church children's database works and I've been able to help them understand how to do the kids check-in at the north campus. God prepares us for things in very interesting ways.

So what's my story? In my weakness, He is strong. My depression and sadness were lifted and replaced with peace, patience, and joy. The joy of the Lord has become my strength.

WOMEN'S
Roundtable
CONVERSATIONS

**Looking to connect with
other ministry-minded
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Sign up for one of our Women's Roundtable Conversations scheduled for January.



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PASTOR

FBC Rio Grande City is seeking a FT pastor to lead our small church in deep South Texas. A bilingual (Spanish) pastor would be a plus, but not required. We are a simple/casual church eager for a pastor to lead our biblically conservative congregation. Contact blgmusicstudio@earthlink.net.

Hillcrest Baptist Church in Big Spring is seeking a FT pastor. Applicants may contact mcjbkh@outlook.com. We are in the process of creating a website. Find us on Facebook at facebook.com/HBCBigSpring.

Tye Baptist Church is seeking resumes for a FT pastor. Parsonage (3/2) next to church. Mail resumes to Tye Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Tye, Texas 79563 or email tbchurch207@att.net. We are 6 miles west of Abilene. Attendance is 60-70 on Sunday morning.

Winfree Baptist Church in Orange is seeking a FT or bivocational pastor. We are affiliated with the SBTC and affirm The Baptist Faith and Message 2000. We are seeking a man with proven experience in ministerial leadership skills who has a heart for evangelism, outreach, and missions. Send resume to pastorsearch@winfreebaptist.org.

Calvary Baptist Church in Cleveland, located 45 miles north of Houston, is seeking a FT senior pastor to replace our retired pastor. Please send resumes to calvarypastorsearchteam@gmail.com. Please include links of past sermons when sending resume.

Crescent Valley Baptist Church in Victoria is seeking a FT or bivocational pastor. Please send resume to CVBCPastorSearch@gmail.com or mail to CVBC Pastor Search Committee, 6679 State Hwy. 185, Victoria, Texas 77905. For additional information about our church and the community, visit our website at CVBCVictoriaTX.org.

Fitzhugh Baptist Church in Austin is seeking a FT senior pastor. We are a declining church in need of revitalization in the growing West Austin area. Submit resumes to fitzhugh.search.2023@gmail.com.

Bethel Baptist Church in Appleby is seeking a bivocational pastor who possesses the biblical qualifications to lead and teach our church family. This man will share his love for Jesus along with his passion for enthusiastically preaching God's Word in truth. Please submit a resume along with cover letter to bethelbaptistchurchappleby@gmail.com.

East Side Baptist Church in McCamey is seeking a bivocational pastor. Parsonage and utilities included. Mail resume to East Side Baptist Church, Box 786, McCamey, Texas 79752, or email to angelawrighteastsidebaptistchu@gmail.com.

Calvary Baptist Church in Aransas Pass is seeking a bivocational senior pastor. Our church family places great value on biblical preaching, Spirit-led worship, and being engaged in the Great Commission as given by Christ Jesus. Mail resume to Calvary Baptist Church, 210 W. Myrtle Ave., Aransas Pass, Texas 78336, or email CalvaryBaptistChurch.sbtci971@gmail.com.

New Hope Baptist Church in Big Sandy is seeking a PT senior pastor. Please email resume to Mike at nhbcbcs@gmail.com or call and leave a message with our church secretary at 903-636-4711.

MUSIC

FBC Fredericksburg is seeking a FT music minister. Mail resume to First Baptist Church, 1401 E. Main, Fredericksburg, Texas 78624 or call 830-997-9511 for more information.

Cedar Valley Baptist Church in Elgin is seeking a PT music/worship director, less than 20 hours/week, to coordinate and lead the music for Sunday morning worship services, special events, Easter, and Christmas. Salary up to \$18,000 annually depending on qualifications. Additional benefit includes two Sundays paid leave per fiscal year.

Lake Church in Arlington seeks a PT contemporary worship associate. Send resume to pmason@lakechurchdfw.org.

Faith Baptist in Chandler is looking for a PT bivocational worship leader for a single blended service on Sunday mornings. Email resumes to office@faithbaptistchandler.org.

Trinity Hills Baptist Church in Benbrook is seeking a PT interim minister of music. Pay is \$20 per hour.

Email resume to pastorsearch@trinityhills.org.

FBC Crystal Beach is seeking a PT worship minister. Call 409-684-4413 or send resume to fbcryystalbeach@gmail.com.

STUDENTS

FBC Fredericksburg, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is seeking an experienced FT youth minister. The youth minister is responsible for evangelism, discipleship, ministry, missions, fellowship, and worship opportunities for middle school and high school youth. Send resume to youthsearch@fbcfbg.com.

Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth is taking resumes for a FT minister to students. If interested, please send your resume to jeff@wedgwoodbc.org.

Second Huntsville is seeking a FT student pastor. Our church is a young, vibrant, growing community of believers located in Huntsville. If you feel you would be a great candidate, please check our website at SecondHuntsville.org or email your resume to Garrison.Pastor@gmail.com.

FBC Odem is searching for a FT youth pastor. Responsibilities include organizing and implementing outreach ministries to local youth and teaching/discipling 6th-12th grade students. Salary: \$31K-\$33K, plus 3/2 family home. Mail resume to First Baptist Church of Odem, P.O. Box 550, Odem, Texas 78370 attn: Pastor Terry Little. 509-999-2187.

FBC Mesquite is seeking a PT student minister whose primary responsibility will be to minister to students and their families to help them be faithful followers of Jesus Christ by sharing the gospel with those who do not know Him and discipling those who do. Please email fbc127email@yahoo.com.

FBC Queen City is seeking a FT youth minister. Submit resumes to youthpastorsearch@fbcqc.org. Visit nextstep.sbtexas.com to view job posting and description.

CHILDREN

The Church at Quail Creek in Amarillo is looking for a FT children's minister. This individual needs to have experience serving in children's ministry and have a calling of the Lord on their life to serve in this area. Email resume to kclayton@tcqc.org.

Trinity Hills Baptist Church in Benbrook is seeking a childcare worker to help in nursery 3 hours a week. Salary will be \$15 an hour. If you have any questions or interest, please email Kyle Harris at youth@trinityhills.org or call 817-249-0704.

COMBINATION

FBC Centerville is in search of a FT youth/worship pastor. This includes all aspects of 7th-12th grade ministry, along

with our Sunday morning worship programming. We are also willing to split the positions into FT youth and PT worship pastor. If interested, please send resume to Tony at decree777@yahoo.com.

Macedonia Baptist Church in Longview is searching for a FT worship & discipleship pastor. If interested, please send your resume to search@macbc.org.

OTHER

Coggin Avenue Baptist Church in Brownwood is seeking a FT pastor of leadership & missions. Position will provide leadership in missions, church goals, staff & operations. College degree required. Graduate degree & at least 5 years ministerial experience preferred. Email resumes to kathyp@cogginchurch.org.

Redeemer Church of Lubbock is seeking a FT/onsite family ministry associate to support the implementation of Redeemer's family ministry vision and strategies, encompassing tasks ranging from Sunday morning services to event planning and execution. Additionally, they will partner with parents to facilitate the discipleship of children. Email marci@redeemerlubbock.org.

Cowboy Fellowship in Atascosa County is seeking a FT director of media and technology. Visit cowboyfellowship.org/jobs for online job description and online application.

Kentuckytown Baptist in Whitewright is seeking a FT family pastor. Salary, housing allowance, and other benefits included. Please send resume to kbc Travis@gmail.com.

Cross City Church in Euless is searching for a FT art & design director to create, commission, & approve design work. Please submit your portfolio & resume to hr@crosscity.church.

The Corpus Christi Baptist Association is searching for the man whom the Lord has chosen to serve our churches in a FT role as the director of our association. Please submit a resume via email to info@ccbaptistassociation.org.

First Baptist Church of Lakeside is seeking a FT (40+ hours/week) church business administrator to assist the senior pastor with overseeing the business and finances of the church and ensure staffing, facilities, and programs are aligned to meet our strategic goals. Email resume to ron@fblakeside.net.

Woodridge Baptist Church in Kingwood is looking for a FT visual storyteller. Email resumes to Ed Hancock at ehancock@woodridge.org.

FBC Sherman is seeking recommendations and/or resumes for interest in a newly redesigned, FT minister of church life. The ideal candidate will have experience in developing and managing a full-scale discipleship ministry within the church. A job description with instructions for submitting resumes is posted on our website at fbcsherman.org.

Fellowship Church in Nederland is seeking a FT associate pastor responsible for overseeing fellowship groups, discipleship groups, guest assimilation, and our facilities team, all of which play a crucial role in nurturing spiritual growth and fostering community engagement. For more information or to apply, send resume to daniel@fellowshipptx.org.

FBC Huntsville is seeking a PT pianist. Email resume to linda.webb@fbchuntsville.org; mail resume attn. Linda Webb, First Baptist Church, 1229 Avenue J, Huntsville, Texas 77340, or call 936-291-3441.

Paid Classifieds

For the latest listings, visit texan.digital/church-positions

PASTOR

First Baptist in Roswell, N.M., is seeking a FT lead pastor who is bold in principle, gifted in preaching, and strong in leadership. Submit resumes or questions to pastorsearch@fbcroswell.org.

FBC Independence in Kansas seeks FT salaried senior pastor. Church has 155 Sunday worshippers, is elder-led, and has deacons/deaconesses. Our church was founded in 1872, is debt-free and in good financial condition, and has many younger families. Staff includes FT salaried family pastor and two-thirds-time administrative assistant. Candidate needs some senior pastor experience. Email resumes to pastorsearch@webmail.org or call Gary Follmer, elder, at 620-330-4906.

YOUTH

FBC Hollis is prayerfully seeking a FT youth minister. Church is located in a small town close to Amarillo, OKC, and Lubbock. Parsonage provided. Please send

resume to FBC, P.O. Box 589, Hollis, Okla., 73550 or email fbchollis@pldi.net.

FBC Ruston in Louisiana is seeking a FT youth pastor for a great opportunity leading a large youth ministry with lots of potential. Please send resume to Ed Colvin at ed@fbcruston.org or brenda@fbcruston.org.

COMBINATION

Calvary Baptist Church in Tishomingo, Okla., is seeking a pastor whose primary responsibility will be to lead our youth, with secondary responsibilities as a worship leader. For more information, call 580-371-9296 or 423-217-5570. Email resume to secretary@cbctish.org.

OTHER

FBC Ruston in Louisiana is seeking a FT young adult pastor to lead a large young adult group with lots of potential. Please send inquiries to Brenda Martin at brenda@fbcruston.org.

First Baptist Church in Erick, Okla., is seeking compassionate, outgoing person to serve as bivocational pastor. Parsonage provided. Candidate will be able to relate to all ages and be willing to visit community members. Email resume to mdurham@dobsonteleco.com, or mail to Pastor Search Committee, Box 664, Erick, Okla., 73645.

DO YOU NEED A PIANIST? Try piano accompaniment CDs and hymn DVDs from Worship Service Resources. Each song has an introduction and is easy to follow. Hymns, choruses, lyrics, gospel—hundreds of songs! Get a FREE DEMO and try before you buy! Call 877-977-6800 or visit wsrpianocds.com.

FBC Mansfield has a portable building (90'x25') for sale. Beige and brown trim color, concrete siding, used as youth ministry building. Two entrance doors on side and end entrance. Windows in unit. Insulated with lighting. Two HVAC units. Front and side entrance doors with entrance ramp and steps. \$19,500 OBO. Please direct inquiries to our facilities director at tray@firstmansfield.com or call FBC Mansfield at 817-473-1161.



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History's first Christmas gift

One Christmas, my wife, Janet, had a necklace made from a broken piece of my grandmother's china. These necklaces were made by broken women in a local women's shelter that our church supported financially. Their jewelry is a wonderful reminder of how God can bring beauty into brokenness. These necklaces remind us of history's first Christmas gift.

For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

One of the first people to hear about this gift was a top-level leader in Jerusalem named Nicodemus. He was an expert in religious and civil law, but tensions were high between the authorities and Jesus, so he visited Jesus at night to ask Him about eternal life. Nicodemus had a hard time wrapping his sharp mind around this simple, generous gift—and so will some of our lost friends, family, and neighbors. Nevertheless, our job is to share the gift, not sell it.

We are all objects of God's love and the intended recipients of history's first Christmas present. The Christmas story is a true love story of rescue and redemption that deserves to be both celebrated and shared this month with anyone who is willing to listen. "For God so loved the world" means that every person in our family, neighborhood, school, and or workplace is someone worth saving.

Janet and I live in a very diverse international city, which makes sharing history's first Christmas gift a challenge. Manger scenes are great reminders for me of the diversity of people who eventually came to visit the newborn King—Jewish shepherds and Iranian magi. Even today, as hostilities rise between Iran and Israel, the Prince of Peace came to rescue all their people from sin and death.

As recipients of this grace-filled gospel gift, we have the privilege and responsibility of regifting it. This month provides us with many organic opportunities to do this. Some families celebrate Christmas each year by singing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus and baking a cake. At one such home, as Christmas day was winding down, someone asked a 5-year-old if she had gotten everything she wanted for Christmas. The little girl paused and then said, "No, but it wasn't my birthday." Christmas is a birthday party for Jesus, yet this party is unique in that the guest of honor brings the gifts. More accurately—the guest is the gift.

Nicodemus found out that night that his works just weren't working. As a Pharisee serving on the ruling Sanhedrin, he was used to fasting, giving, praying, and memorizing Scripture. He was very religious, yet he was sitting on death row. Nicodemus could try to serve out his sentence on parole, but what he really needed was a pardon. So do we. Jesus took our sin by taking our place on the cross.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23)

God did more than simply send an angel or prophet; He sent His only begotten Son to rescue us. So, what are you going to do with that gift? If you have personally received history's first Christmas gift, December is a great time to regift it.

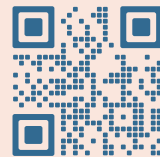


Mark Dance is director of pastoral wellness for Guidestone Financial Resources.



WHAT'S UP NEXT?

2023 CALENDAR



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SBTC EVENTS, VISIT [SBTEXAS.COM/EVENTS](https://sbtexas.com/events) OR SCAN THE QR CODE ABOVE



DECEMBER

6 Evangelism Connections, Forney

JANUARY

8 Evangelism Connections (online)

12-13 M3 WKND, DFW/Euless

22 Regenesis One-Day, Abilene

23 Virtual Tax Seminars (online)

25 Virtual Tax Seminar (online)

26-27 M3 WKND, East Texas/Marshall

27 Women's Roundtable Conversations (multisite)

29 Bivo Pastors Network Regional Gathering, DFW

29 Regenesis One-Day, Diboll



COLLEGE DISCIPLESHIP CONFERENCE

JAN. 4-6 Houston

sbtexas.com/collegiate



EMPOWER CONFERENCE

FEB. 26-27 Irving

sbtexas.com/empower

FEBRUARY

2-3 M3 WKND, Austin

5 Bivo Pastors Network Remote Gathering (online)

9-10 M3 WKND, Amarillo

12 Regenesis One-Day, San Angelo

12 Evangelism Connections: Carl Bradford (online)

19 Regenesis One-Day, College Station

23-24 Empower Spanish Session (Apoderados), Irving

25 Empower Conference Student Rally, Irving

26 Interim Pastor Equipping, Irving



EMPOWER

Conference

FEB. 26-27, 2024



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Vocal Band



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