

SOUTHERN BAPTIST
TEXAN

VOLUME 25 | NO. 2



*GOSPEL
OPPORTUNITIES
ABOUND AS
SBTC CHURCHES
SADDLE UP TO
REACH THEIR
NEIGHBORS &
THE NATIONS*



Here to serve

EACH MORNING when I pull into the parking lot of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention building, I am reminded of how God has blessed me to be able to serve here. I would have never imagined this being my life's calling, yet I am beyond thankful that it is.

The SBTC has incredible churches seeking to make a difference across our state. Our staff is willing and ready to serve you every day. While our convention offers many areas of ministry assistance, I want to use this space over the next few issues of the *Texan* to highlight some of our incredible ministries.

Children & Family Ministry

Karen Kennemur leads our Children & Family Ministry. She has a wealth of knowledge and experience in these areas. She also serves as professor of Children's Ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Children are such a blessing for a church to reach, and Karen and her team are eager to assist you. If you are looking for help in reaching children in your community, contact Karen and let the SBTC serve you as you move forward.

Women's Ministry

As we see throughout Scripture, women play a crucial role in the advance of the gospel and the ministry of the church.

THE SBTC HAS INCREDIBLE CHURCHES SEEKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE ACROSS OUR STATE. OUR STAFF IS WILLING AND READY TO SERVE YOU EVERY DAY.



Laura Taylor leads our Women's Ministry and is passionate about equipping and encouraging women to serve the Lord. This ministry is also geared to serve pastors' wives. These special ladies are such a blessing to the kingdom. They are a constant source of encouragement to their husbands as they lead. The SBTC seeks to come alongside these women and provide opportunities for networking and fellowship. If there is any way we can serve the women's ministry of your church, or if you are a pastor's wife looking to connect, give Laura a call.

Disability Ministry

This ministry, formerly known as the Special Needs Ministry, is such an important part of how the SBTC can help churches engage and serve churches. Sandra Peoples is one of the top experts in the nation on this topic. She is a leader who desires to see churches serve families with special needs with excellence and understanding. If you are looking to start a disability ministry or have questions about how to serve families well, contact Sandra and she will walk with you through the process.

The SBTC is full of ministries like these. This is why we are here—to serve your church well. Please reach out if we can be of assistance to you. I want you to know that I love you and I am so honored to serve you.

To connect with one of our ministry associates, contact the SBTC at 817-552-2500.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nathan Lorick". The signature is fluid and cursive.

nlorick@sbtexas.com

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST TEXAN

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The power of small things

WE RECENTLY HAD A SMALL CRISIS AT OUR HOUSE: The adhesive glue that bonds our kitchen sink to the countertop stopped adhering, causing the sink to collapse down into the cabinet below and severing the drain pipe in the process. Repairs were delayed for several days due to the lingering effects of the January ice storm, which brought with it below-freezing temperatures for nearly 80 straight hours.

The sunk sink—which left us washing dishes in a bathtub for several days—wasn't the only problem. We still needed to drip that kitchen faucet to keep the pipes from freezing. Since the dripping water had no way to drain, we decided to catch it in a large, plastic storage container that we would just have to empty every few hours.

Dumping that container in the mornings after the faucet had been dripping all night was an especially loathsome task. The water would slosh back and forth and, despite my best efforts, splash over the edge of the container and onto the living room floor as I awkwardly shuffled to the bathroom tub to empty it.

But each time I poured out that water, something occurred to me. The container, now half full and heavy, started with a



single drop. And then another. And then another ... until it was something much more formidable.

Yes, you know where I'm going with this. You should. We all should. It's not rocket science. We know the little things add up. And yet somehow, I continually forget this. I want what I want, and I want it now. I want more money in savings. I want to lose a few pounds. I want to read more books. Unfortunately, now only comes in one size, and it's not little drops.

It's March, which means for many, the goals and resolutions set at the end of December (or on the morning of Jan. 1) have long been forgotten. When this happens to me, I look back and realize some of the goals I set at the beginning of the year weren't as important as I once thought. But others do matter and I want to reclaim them. My sink crisis served as yet another God-given reminder that finding momentum to accomplish my goals and dreams begins not with a downpour, but with a few small drops. It's a dollar in savings. It's one less fast food meal. It's setting a 10-minute timer to finally start chipping away at the book I bought two years ago. These things add up.

I can't help but think about God's Word. For many of us, it feels as unwieldy as trying to walk with a sloshing container full of water. The Bible covers thousands of years of human history and parts can be difficult to understand. And yet, it's miraculously simple and accessible to anybody.

We don't talk about this much, but churches are full of people who are ashamed of what they perceive as their lack of biblical knowledge, and they're scared to death someone will ask them a question they might not be able to answer. I suppose that's just where Satan wants us—intimidated, tentative, and distant from God and His truth.

But it doesn't have to be that way. The reality is, God's Word is for you. Not just the scholars. Not just the experts. It's for you.

All you've got to do to start owning that truth is to drip from the faucet. God will provide the increase.

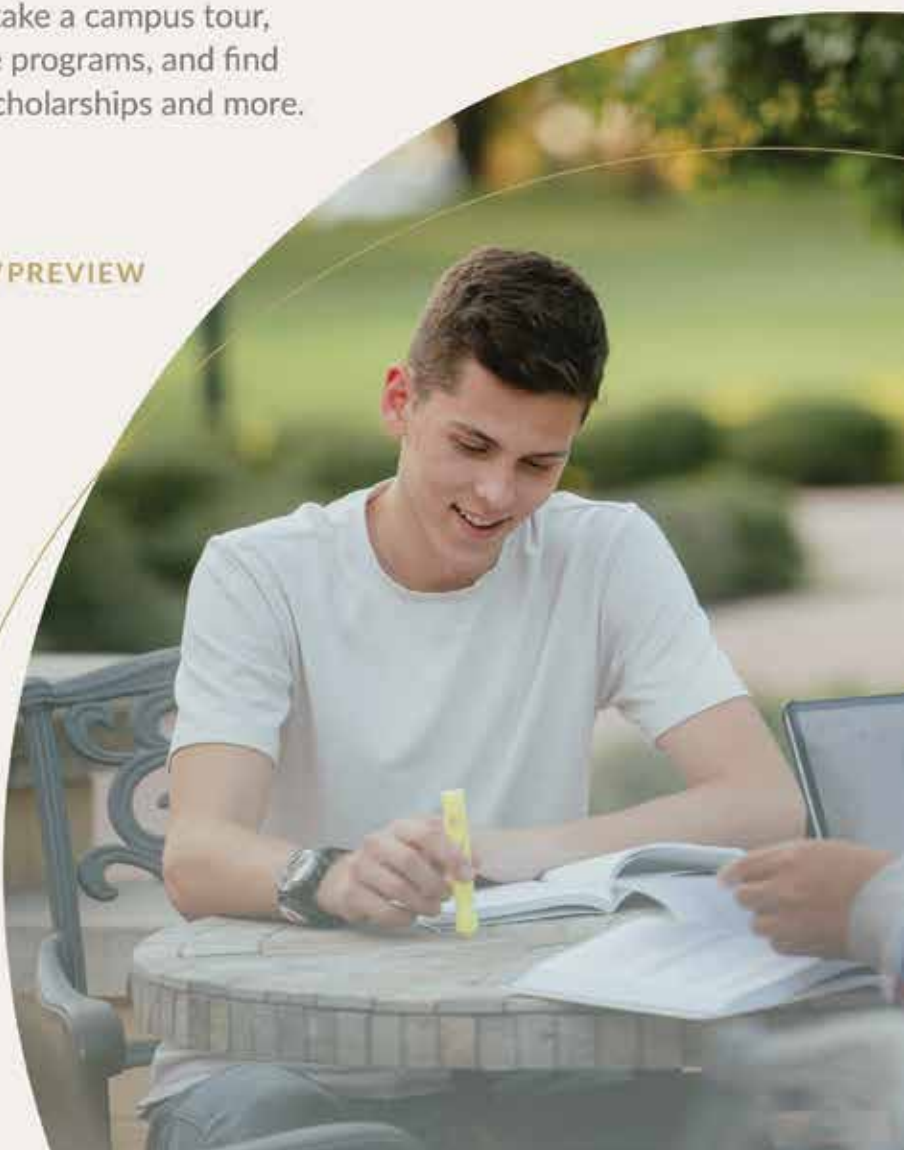


APRIL 10

PREVIEW DAY

Come to Texas Baptist College Preview Day on April 10, and you'll see how TBC is the right school for you. While you're here, you'll get to take a campus tour, learn about the different degree programs, and find out helpful information about scholarships and more. Attending is completely free.

TEXASBAPTISTCOLLEGE.COM/PREVIEW





The gospel is available and at work!

A **LITTLE OVER 15 YEARS AGO**, I was a struggling seminary student. Money was tight, my family was growing, and financial opportunities were limited. In other words, I was broke.

I'll never forget talking to my mother during a commute via the train from my home to downtown Chicago. As I exited my stop and made my way onto the street, there was a man panhandling. Out of all the people leaving, he asked me for money. I told him the truth: "I'm sorry, but I don't have anything to give you."

My mom heard this exchange and told me, "Son, you always have something to give." She then quoted Acts 3:6: "Silver and gold have I none: but such as I have, I give thee" It was such a poignant reminder. Although I may not have had any spare change, I would always have Christ to share.

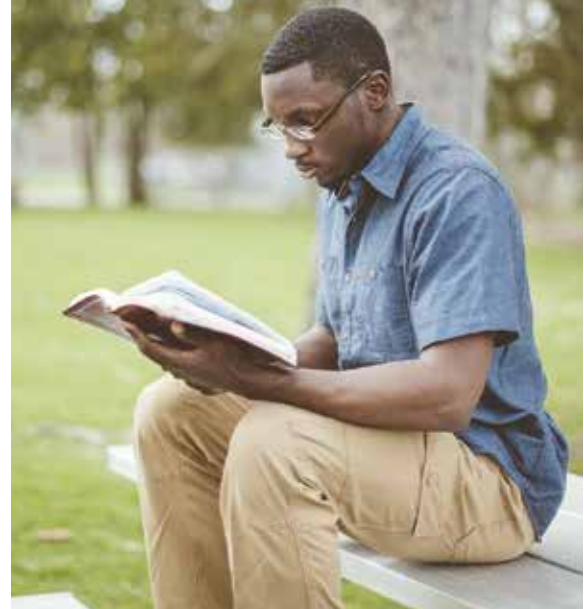
In Acts 3, Peter and John have an encounter with a man who was born lame. The man begs for money, but Peter and John don't have any. However, instead of ignoring the man's pleas, they mimic their master. The Bible says they look at the man and say to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

This miracle does not just change this formerly crippled man's temporary situation; it drastically shifts his eternal trajectory. We must not be short-sighted when eternity is within view. These two disciples remind us not to dwell on what we don't have, but to rejoice in who we do have—Jesus.

Every year, I am grateful for the Empower Conference and what it means for our convention. It's great to



MY AIM HERE IS TO ENCOURAGE THOSE OF US WHO CAN EXPERIENCE BURNOUT FROM TRYING TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX. LOOK INSIDE THE BOOK! THE GOSPEL IS AVAILABLE AND AT WORK.



see friends. I enjoy the speakers, breakouts, and worship. And there's nothing like free swag from the booths.

However, the intent behind this conference, which was held in late February, is to reignite and remind believers that the gospel is the greatest tool available. There is no other catalyst for conviction and conversion than to shine light into the darkness of this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must preach Christ and Him crucified!

We do not need to always look for the latest and greatest church trend. New lights, new buildings, and new music are well and good. However, new stuff bereft of new creations is no more valuable than a whitewashed tomb.

My aim here is to encourage those of us who can experience burnout from trying to think outside the box. Look inside the book! The gospel is available and at work.



Beth Holder and her husband, Phil, have served at Friendship Baptist Church in Beaumont for eight years. Phil is the church's senior pastor. Beth, an elementary school special education inclusion teacher, leads a women's Bible study and is involved with other ministries. The Holders have two married children.



Are you a pastor's wife looking for a safe place to connect with other women who understand the joys and challenges of ministry? Register now for the SBTC's Come Away Pastor Wives Retreat

What's something you are celebrating at Friendship Baptist Church?

We've been praying about an apartment outreach ministry for some time. There are several apartment complexes around our location. We have not had any open doors until this year. In mid-January, we were able to start a Bible study at a complex. The manager has been very helpful and has even promoted it to residents and prospective residents. Adults and children attend, and we have been able to start planting seeds and sharing the gospel. The children have especially absorbed the Bible stories. It is a joy to see their interest and awe in the stories they have never heard before.

What are some things you are praying will happen at Friendship over the next year?

I am praying for God to use the apartment ministry and our food pantry to reach more people and that they will come to know Jesus. I am also praying God will send committed families to our church that are called to join us in the work of reaching our community. I am also praying God will strengthen our members and give them energy and passion to keep working to reach the community around us. They work hard, and I pray God will allow them to see some of the results of their labor.

What are some of the challenges of being a pastor's wife others may not recognize?

I laugh when I am asked this question. I grew up as a pastor's kid and said I would never marry a pastor. Despite being in

a wonderful home with parents who sheltered me and my brother from many church difficulties, I saw challenges that I didn't care to have. God has a sense of humor! One of the challenges others may not recognize is the loneliness of the pastor's wife. So often it seems she has many friends because she interacts with many people, but the reality is that the pastor's wife has few close friends with whom she can be completely open and honest. Another challenge is the assumption she knows everything about the church and its members. She does not. Another of the greatest challenges facing the small church pastor's wife is weariness. She holds many responsibilities, some chosen and some by default. She often works outside the home while still fulfilling church and family responsibilities.

What's the best piece of advice you have received about your calling?

In the midst of an extremely difficult time of ministry, my father said to me, "Don't miss what God has for you, even in this." I have tried to heed that advice in all circumstances—good, bad, hard, easy, etc. That is also advice I have passed on to others, especially fellow pastors' wives. No matter what season we are in, God has something for us. If we aren't focused on Him, we will miss it.

How can SBTC churches be praying for you, your church, and your ministry?

Pray that God will give us strength, energy, and passion to continue outreach efforts, and that God will direct us in those efforts. It is our prayer to experience growth through new believers, be a positive light in our community, strengthen the body we have, and glorify God.

EMBRACING THE PAST, ENGAGING THE FUTURE

Tragedy, triumph propel
New Caney church into
an exciting new season

BY JANE RODGERS



NEW CANEY

July 18, 2020, is a date that still touches Joshua Crutchfield deeply.

It was on that day, he lost his friend, John Powell, Emmanuel Baptist Church's planter and first pastor, who was killed while helping rescue the passengers of a burning vehicle along a North Texas roadway.

Today, Crutchfield, Powell's successor at Emmanuel, continues to lead a church that honors its planting pastor's contributions while also focusing on the future. Last November, Emmanuel broke ground on its own worship facility after meeting for years in the New Caney High School annex. Fittingly, Powell's family attended the ceremony.

"The church took time to remember John, to remember his family ... to honor them and appreciate them," said Crutchfield, who became Emmanuel's pastor in December 2020.

New Caney is located in Montgomery County, a booming area considered one of the fastest-growing in the nation, Crutchfield said. After years of searching for the right property and repeatedly encountering soaring land costs, the church acquired five acres adjacent to a middle school along a main thoroughfare.

Crutchfield first noticed the acreage while dropping off his son at the school. It was a prime location at the right asking price. New homes and subdivisions, he noted, crop up constantly.

"We moved forward on it very, very quickly," Crutchfield said. "We are building right in the middle of everything."

The church prayerfully moved through each phase of the construction project: dreaming, designing, and developing a financial plan for a facility that will seat 325 with space for a nursery and children's Sunday school.

"Our children worship with us from kindergarten up," he said. "We think it's important for them to worship be-



side their families, parents, and grandparents. We treasure this.”

Connect groups will meet in the middle school, he added, noting the ongoing strong relationship between the church and New Caney ISD.

Kevin Carlton, 62, a founding Emmanuel member who teaches a connect class and works with the youth, is a fan of the location.

“I am most excited about our opportunity to be able to really do more in our community,” Carlton said. “We do quite a bit, but there’s something about four walls that just helps the community go, ‘Oh yeah. They’re the real deal.’”

Prayer and planning

Long before the land’s acquisition, the church had set up an intentional strategy: pray daily, fast weekly, report monthly.

Crutchfield also credits the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention for resources and support as Emmanuel experiences steady growth. The pastor was involved in a Send Network SBTC cohort formed in 2022 and led by Aaron Clayton and Steve Cochran. He also noted the support

“WE ARE BUILDING RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF EVERYTHING.”

JOSHUA CRUTCHFIELD

of Jason Crandall, Send Network SBTC’s director.

Last year, Emmanuel averaged 170 in attendance; in July 2025, the church broke the 200 threshold.

“We have grown quite a bit since this summer,” Crutchfield said, adding that more than 220 now regularly attend. More importantly, they have seen 17 salvations since last July, with 13 baptized to date in a portable baptistry provided through Send Network SBTC.

“The baptistry is a wonderful resource that I am thankful we have had to use quite a lot,” the pastor said. Typically, the entire congregation surrounds the baptistry, which is set up outside or in the high school foyer so the whole

Emmanuel church leaders participate in a groundbreaking ceremony last year. The new facility is being built on a prime piece of land close to a local school. **SUBMITTED PHOTO**

congregation can experience a “truly rich” spiritual moment. It is a practice the church plans to continue in the new facility.

The church also plans to continue its commitment to Raise the Roof, its special needs ministry. “We offer one-to-one interaction in unique spaces that help with sensory needs but still provide inclusion with other kids,” he said. Emmanuel plans to incorporate Raise the Roof in its VBS this year, as well. Nearly 150 kids attended last year at a local elementary school, sparking connections with families.

The church’s fall fest outreach also attracts kids and parents. Its Disciple Now weekend sees more than 100 students stay in members’ homes and enjoy group activities at a nearby encampment.

In addition to those outreaches, Emmanuel also does door-to-door evangelism, Crutchfield said.

“We equip people to share their faith” and knock on 200-

300 doors per month, he said. “We give people a chance to hear the gospel and pray. We don’t always see people respond at the door, but we have had people show up at church almost a year later.”

Door-to-door evangelism grows the church in boldness, Crutchfield said. “It’s not flashy, but the approach is certainly biblical.” Church members go out in teams on the second or third Saturday every month.

Looking back

Crutchfield recalled that when the Powells and 60 members from Northeast Houston Baptist Church planted Emmanuel in 2017, he and his family came over from First Baptist Church in Madisonville to help.

“Our church supported EBC,” said Crutchfield, who pastored the church in Madisonville at the time. “My family came over one Saturday and went



door to door with John and his people in New Caney. We were good friends.”

As he continues Powell’s work, Crutchfield is grateful for what his friend started years before.

“Our [church] name means ‘God with us,’” he said. “We are living in that reality. Our aim is to glorify Him

Church members are in the regular habit of knocking on doors to share the gospel with their neighbors. The pastor estimates church members knock on as many as 300 doors per month. **SUBMITTED PHOTO**

and see lives changed by the gospel of Christ, one person at a time.”



The SBTC is committed to assisting churches, associations, and individuals with tools to help share Jesus, multiply disciples, and much more.

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SPEAKER

Mike Goodwin
Comedian, America's Got Talent Contestant

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REFRESHED. EMPOWERED. MOBILIZED.

Annual SBTC evangelism conference highlights gospel urgency, cooperation

Editor's note: The 2026 Empower Conference was held Feb. 23-24 at the Irving Convention Center. For full Empower 2026 coverage, visit [Texan.Digital](#).

In 3 John 5, John commends Gaius for his generosity to brothers and sisters in the faith.

Some 2,000 years later, standing behind a podium at the Irving Convention Center, West Conroe Baptist Church Senior Pastor Jesse Payne referenced that passage of Scripture and echoed John's words before a ballroom filled with hundreds of believers representing Southern Baptists of Texas Convention churches from across the state.

Payne, the keynote speaker at this year's Cooperative Program luncheon held Feb. 24 during the annual Empower Conference, thanked SBTC churches for their generous giving while issuing a stirring challenge.

"Kingdom cooperation is in our DNA as Southern Baptists and more so as New Testament Christians," Payne said. "It is worth your church's continual investment. It is one of the



Jesse Payne

greatest tools to see the kingdom advance. ... This goal, this vision, [should not be] the last item that is budgeted if there are a few dollars left over at the end of the month," but instead "an item of high priority."

Earlier, SBTC Associate Executive Director Joe Lightner explained the Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists' unified giving model for fulfilling the Great Commission. As churches give through the Cooperative Program, 45% remains in Texas to mobilize SBTC churches, and 55% is forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention for national and international ministry and missions. Those churches are mobilized on three pathways: resourcing churches, networking leaders, and advancing mission.

"CP maximizes a church's return on kingdom investment," Lightner said. Later, SBTC Executive Director Nathan Lorick added that the Cooperative Program "is still the most effective financial means for churches to cooperate to see the world won for Christ."

— Jane Rodgers

Wilkin urges crowd to press in to God's Word at Women's Session

Women of all ages flocked to the Irving Convention Center on Monday, Feb. 23, to hear author and Bible teacher Jen Wilkin at the Empower Conference Women's Session.

Wilkin entertained and informed in two sessions filled with humor, amusing family anecdotes, a lengthy Q&A time, and Scripture. Worship was led by Cody and Anna Kujawa and Summer Franklin from First Baptist Church in Celina.

For her main message, Wilkin focused on John 14:12-14, where Jesus promises believers they will do greater works than even He has done and reveals the importance of praying in His name. John 14 is the reason Christians



pray in Jesus' name, she explained.

Wilkin also lamented a dearth of biblical literacy and biblical fluency. Quiet times are good, she noted, but "quiet time culture" can be toxic, with devotionals often lacking depth. If we are to fulfill the Great

Commission, we must be disciples and make disciples, defined not as converts but learners, she said. Jesus walked the earth only 33 years. Current life expectancy in the U.S. is 80. We have more earthly time than the Lord did, she noted. We must not waste it.

"Discipleship takes a lot more time and a lot more work than converting. So does sanctification," she said. "It's a big book," she said of the Bible. "But we have been given way more time than other generations ... a wealth of ways to amplify the message."

— Jane Rodgers



JESUS

LIVES CHANGED AT FOURTH ANNUAL STUDENT RALLY

More than 400 students and leaders gathered on Feb. 22 to have a little fun, worship, and hear the gospel during the fourth annual Empower Conference Student Rally.

The rally featured Portraits Worship, comedian and illusionist Jared Hall, and Daniel Ritchie, a motivational speaker and evangelist born without arms. Grant Byrd, Southern Baptists of Texas Convention student ministry associate, also used the occasion to announce upcoming student opportunities including M3 Camp, a mission trip to Budapest, Hungary, and a Following Your Calling

workshop for students who may feel called to ministry.

"We are not here by accident. Nobody in this room is here by chance. God has orchestrated this moment," said Ryan Fontenot, an SBTC evangelism consultant who emceed the rally.

Later, Byrd noted those in the crowd who, upon Ritchie's invitation, had professed faith in Christ, saying that it was the chief purpose of the evening: to show the Savior to students who had not known Him.

— Jane Rodgers

Network events underscore the value of connections

Over the course of two days, pastor and seminary professor Robert Smith Jr. poured out his heart to other pastors and shared the experience he has gained over decades of ministry.

Beginning Sunday, Feb. 22, Smith led a preaching summit hosted by the Shepherds Collective, speaking about the Holy Spirit's central role in the proclamation of God's Word. The next day, on the official start of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention's annual Empower Conference, he participated in a question-and-answer session that covered topics ranging from his advice to younger pastors to the importance of maintaining personal spiritual disciplines.

The events illustrated the value of SBTC networks that offer not only a venue for information and ideas to be shared, but for connections to be made. Networking leaders is one of the SBTC's three pathways, and as such, networks exist for children's, student, and collegiate ministry leaders, pastors' wives, executive pastors, and many more.

Josh Fields, lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Iowa Park, said he has been a member of the Shepherds Collective since its inception and, before that, the Young Pastors Network. He said the network brings value to his life and ministry through the friendships he has built with people who can relate to his calling.

"They understand the joy, the toil, and the burden of pastoral ministry," Fields said. "We are all doing the same basic work which, by nature, creates a camaraderie. ... I'm

convinced that lifelong ministry is fueled by long-term friendships that encourage and strengthen you. Shepherds Collective has created more opportunities for these."

— Jayson Larson

Hundreds challenged with clear message at Apoderados

Apoderados, the Spanish-language evangelism event organized by the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and held in conjunction with the annual Empower Conference, brought together Hispanic leaders from across the state with a clear message: Evangelism is not optional—it is the very essence of the church.

Approximately 175 pastors and their wives gathered for a special dinner on Friday night, Feb. 20, followed by 520 attendees on Saturday for general sessions and practical workshops. Worship during the conference was led by the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Cántico Nuevo praise team.

Included in the conference was a panel discussion on the topic, "Exercising evangelism and mission in today's world." Panelists agreed that although culture changes, God's message does not. The gospel remains the power of God for salvation. However, the church must communicate it with clarity, conviction, and cultural sensitivity. Speakers emphasized that evangelism cannot be limited to special events, but a call for every believer to share their faith.

— Arlene Sanabria

READY & AS URBAN GROWTH REACHES INTO RURAL SPACES, SANTA FE CHURCH RECALIBRATES AND REFOCUSES WAITING

BY JANE RODGERS

→ FBC Alta Loma created the Invite 52 initiative with the goal of inviting 5,200 people to the church this year.



SANTA FE

JAKE BIGFORD KNOWS HIS TOWN will likely become a suburb of Houston during his lifetime. Sandwiched between Houston and Galveston, Santa Fe—named after the railroad—boasts small-town charm and just over 13,000 residents.

“We are quickly seeing Houston knock on our doorstep,” said Bigford, pastor of First Baptist Church in Alta Loma, a southwestern Galveston County neighborhood that became part of Santa Fe in 1978.

For Bigford, Santa Fe and FBC Alta Loma have always been home. His mother still lives in town. He married Laurin Finley, a local girl from the church during college in East Texas.

“We grew up in youth group together,” Bigford said.

Following Bigford’s college graduation 15 years ago, the couple returned to Santa Fe when he accepted a position as youth pastor at their home church. There wasn’t a budget for the job, but church volunteers began mowing the lawn so the money that would have gone to landscapers paid Bigford’s modest salary. The church provided the young couple with an apartment and agreed to augment the salary once another staff member retired.

“We prayed about it,” Bigford recalled. “If this is what the Lord wants, then the money doesn’t matter. He made it happen.”

When the church’s senior pastor left in 2019, the search team decided it didn’t need to look very far. Deacons approached Bigford to gauge his interest.

“It took me by surprise,” he admitted. “We started praying about it.”

By the end of that year, on the church’s 124th anniversary, Bigford preached in view of a call.

“It’s been wonderful,” he said. “It’s been a great journey.”



Breathing new life

The journey has not been without challenges. Through COVID-19 and other circumstances, FBC Alta Loma experienced what Bigford called a “fairly drastic change in families and faces and attendance” after his arrival.

Bigford’s interest in the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention was piqued while attending the annual evangelism-focused Empower Conference.

“I fell in love with what the convention stood for. I learned a lot,” he said. “A big part of it for me was the [SBTC’s stance] on inerrancy. ... I got fully involved with the SBTC.”

Wondering if FBC Alta Loma needed revitalization, Bigford later attended a SBTC Regenesi One-Day intensive workshop in 2024 focused on church health and renewal and was sold on the idea of joining a cohort.

“Even if our church wasn’t necessarily declining, there were ways the Lord could breathe new life,” he realized, concluding that most churches could benefit from similar help.

Among his favorite parts of the Regenesi process was gathering a team from the church and having conversations about where FBC Alta Loma was headed.

Pictured left to right and back to front are Brett Ford, Julie Mahoney, Nathan Berry, Jay Blackwell, Sherri Kuehl, Kristin Mayberry, and Jake Bigford.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

“REGENESIS CHALLENGED US TO LOOK AT OUR MISSION AND COME UP WITH AN INITIATIVE TO ACCOMPLISH IT.”

JAKE BIGFORD

“We picked people from different walks of life, ages, and generations,” he said. This core group examined what the church was doing and why. “We were actually already talking about the issues, but Regenesi led us to think about our vision, our mission,” solidifying the direction they wanted to go to reach their town with the gospel. He added that his team was encouraged as it saw how God was faithful throughout the church’s history.”

Bigford said Regenesi was “challenging and affirming,” helping the church prioritize areas it had not

considered—including the location, gifts, and abilities of the congregation.

“Regenesis challenged us to look at our mission and come up with an initiative to accomplish it,” Bigford said. The team determined culture shifts needed in the church and set goals.

Invitation to transformation

The weakest pillar in the church was engaging people with the gospel, they decided. Discussions ensued and resulted in the Invite 52 initiative with the goal of inviting 5,200 people to the church during 2026.

“It may sound too lofty. But that’s 100 people inviting one person per week to church,” Bigford said. They realized that even if they only invited 4,000, that would be a success.

Business cards with the church’s contact information and service times have been created to help members with the task. “We ordered 10,000 of these cards, 20 pounds [in weight],” Bigford said. After generating anticipation in late 2025, they began the project in full on the first Sunday of 2026.

“If you will invite people to come, I will preach the gospel every single week,” Bigford promised.

The congregation was encouraged to be intentional, not just leaving the card somewhere but handing it to individuals and inviting them to be their guest, promising to meet them in the parking lot and sit with them. Evangelism training scheduled for May will enhance the congregation’s comfort in witnessing to those they invite.

“The incredible thing is people have done it,” Bigford said. “So far, they have distributed more than 400 cards. Every single week we have had first-time guests, 40 in the first five weeks of the initiative.”

“Even the kids are doing it,” said church member Susan Ford, whose third grader has taken cards to school to invite her friends. “It should be easy for us to invite people to church but it’s not. Having a challenge to invite somebody each week is good.”

Megan Williams, a member since childhood who directs the church’s mothers’ day out and homeschool support programs, said she is inviting MDO teachers and parents. She explains to them that since her husband is a firefighter who often works Sundays, she

sits alone in church and would love for visitors to sit with her.

Megan asks those who have expressed interest in visiting and sends gentle reminders to encourage them to give the church a try. Several have come, and some have stayed.

Attendance has risen by about 30, Bigford said. A typical Sunday will see 120-130, reflecting steady growth. All who have come even once have heard the gospel.

‘Seeing the first fruits’

Another change in the church began before Regenesis, Bigford said. Through meeting with SBTC prayer consultant Keeney Dickenson and after attending an SBTC pastors’ prayer retreat led by Texas pastors Nathan Lino and Todd Kaunitz, he realized FBC Alta Loma needed to be a house of prayer.

FBC Alta Loma started designating a time during the Sunday service to stop and pray, the process aided by prayer prompts on the screens. Names of lost people were added to a large bulletin board visible to everyone. Quarterly prayer meetings, prayer walks around the property, and other prayer events now occur.

“I am happy to say today that because of all these things, we are much more prayer dependent than ever before,” Bigford said, adding that prayer was essential before beginning Invite 52.

Word is spreading. Recently at a fast-food restaurant, an employee and church member introduced Bigford to an older couple seeking a church for their grandson. The young man has started attending.

Cards have been distributed to the waitress at the local fish place, customers at the nearby convenience store, and local schools.

“We are seeing the first fruits now and can’t wait to tell the stories later,” Bigford said. “We all need new life from the Lord in our churches. It only comes when we are dependent on Him.”

“SO FAR, THEY HAVE DISTRIBUTED MORE THAN 400 CARDS. EVERY SINGLE WEEK WE HAVE HAD FIRST-TIME GUESTS, 40 IN THE FIRST FIVE WEEKS OF THE INITIATIVE.”

JAKE BIGFORD



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Frustrated with youth sports, pastor? Consider Cyprian's example ...

Editor's note: Each issue of the *Texan* this year will include a column written by a member of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention's Shepherds Collective.

CYPRIAN, AN EARLY CHURCH FATHER, pastored during a period known for the “lapsed controversy.” During the rule of Rome’s emperor, Decius, many Christians renounced their faith under threat of persecution or death. When peace returned, these believers sought to be readmitted to the church—which was deeply divided on how to respond.

A different issue has many modern pastors wondering how to respond: how to minister and guide families who are incredibly busy—and often absent from church—due to youth sports. Though Cyprian wouldn’t have understood our relationship between sports and the church, I believe his pastoral approach offers valuable insights for how we shepherd families navigating the world of youth athletics today.

Strive toward the goal

When confronted with two extremes regarding how to deal with the lapsed church members—either excommunication/abstinence or not holding them accountable at all—Cyprian considered *telos*, a Greek word that means goal or purpose. The purpose of the church’s pastor is to care for the flock (1 Peter 5:2–3). Cyprian wanted the lost sheep to return—not cheaply, but authentically. He also wanted the church to welcome them back.

Challenge your families to think about *telos*. Many parents, including those with children in sports, have never thought about what the goal of such an overcommitted life is or whether it’s good or bad. This busy stage of life may be a great opportunity to pastor them toward God’s goal.

Know your players

How did Cyprian resist both extremes? He emphasized discernment regarding the lapsed church members on a case-by-case basis. In our modern context, some absences from church may stem from family pressure, lack of spiritual maturity, or cultural expectations. A wise pastor discerns individual motives and applies compassion while maintaining truth.

Many parents have been deceived by the promise of a scholarship that coaches promise to young athletes who are fully dedicated. Others just enjoy the thrill of watching their child—it truly is a joy. Regardless, it is our job as pastors to guide them. We should insist that absence from church is not good for them, but at the same time, not lash out at them from the pulpit.

Emphasize teamwork and unity

Cyprian understood the church is a visible and unified body. He taught reconciliation not just for individuals, but for the health of the whole community. He believed that when true Christians are apart from the church, it hurts both them and the church. “Think not that you are thus maintaining the gospel of Christ when you separate yourselves from the flock of Christ,” he once said. He strove for unity by bringing back those who were absent and by softening those who opposed their return.

If you have a hard heart toward those missing from your church, pray for them. If you don’t see anything wrong with long sports absences, think about the unity of Christ’s church and the sheep for whom He died.

Practice gentle correction

Like Cyprian, a pastor must remind absent members of the importance of worship and fellowship with their local church. The lessons learned in sports are valuable, but the local church is God’s Plan A. There is no substitute. Roll up your sleeves and do the hard work of shepherding your individual members. Be patient with them, but be firm.

Cyprian’s world and ours are very different, but his pastoral heart remains a model worth following. He led with conviction, compassion, and clarity—holding fast to truth while never giving up on those who strayed.

In a culture where Sunday games compete with Sunday worship, pastors must do the same.



Matt Bowles is lead teaching pastor at Ovilla Road Baptist Church in Ovilla.



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A glorious work in progress

GOD CONTINUES TO PROVE FAITHFUL TO GROWING CHURCH IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY

BY ARLENE SANABRIA

EDINBURG

FROM THE SECOND FLOOR of the new building under construction, Gerardo Lorenzo watched the progress of the work with gratitude. What was once a prayer was now taking shape in steel and concrete. As he stood there talking with a fellow pastor, a man approached from the street.

“Are you the pastor?” he asked.

The man explained that he passed by that route every day on his way to work. Seeing the progress of the church filled his heart with joy—so much so, he felt God was moving him to help.

He took out a check for \$1,000.

The man was not a member of the church. In fact, he was not even a believer. But God was using that moment to show once again that this work in the Rio Grande Valley was not the result of human effort, but of His provision.





“God has blessed us with a beautiful church, made up of kind and faithful brothers and sisters who remain encouraged and eager, working hard to continue building this work.”

◀ GERARDO LORENZO

Stories like this have become part of the ongoing testimony of Memorial Baptist Church in Edinburg, where Gerardo has served as senior pastor since February 2008. What began as a small congregation has now become a vibrant and growing church. They started with just 12 people. Today, more than 200 gather for worship, a visible testimony to God’s faithfulness.

That faithfulness is as apparent through Gerardo’s own story as it is the church’s.

A near-tragedy that became a turning point

Gerardo was born in Tampico, Tamaulipas—a coastal city in northeastern Mexico—and into a home that was spiritually divided for a time. His father, José Lorenzo, raised in the Catholic tradition, felt a void every time he attended mass. Convinced that there must be something more, he began to search until one day he walked into an evangelical church in the city center. There he heard the gospel and gave his life to Christ.

José’s wife, Irene, strongly opposed his conversion.

One day, when Gerardo was just six months old, José suggested to Irene that the family attend a service at his church. Irene, filled with anger, responded with

chilling words, telling José she would rather the children not be alive than to let him “take them to that church.”

José calmly asked Irene to repent of her harsh words and told her he was confident God would show her that He truly exists. Neither could have known how soon the Lord would show Himself apparent.

Hours later, while José was at church, one of Gerardo’s older brothers was playing with him when Gerardo began to choke on a piece of metal that fell into his throat. By the time Irene arrived, Gerardo was purple and struggling to breathe. She desperately tried to help him, but couldn’t get the object out of the child’s throat. She ran out of the house screaming for help. When she returned, her son was already lifeless.

Holding his little body, Irene remembered the words she had spoken hours earlier and her husband’s call to repent and turn to God.

In the midst of her deepest pain, she cried out to the Lord. She asked for forgiveness and begged Him to save her son. She promised that if God brought her son back to life, she would follow Him.

Minutes later, baby Gerardo made a sudden movement. He expelled the piece of metal and began to breathe. God had answered.

That day, Irene gave her life to Christ. Over time, she became a fervent evangelist, sharing the gospel with many. Gerardo, who was once lifeless, was now alive by God’s grace—and with a purpose yet to be revealed.

‘What God begins, He finishes’

Years later, while studying accounting in Mexico, Gerardo began to feel God’s call to ministry. Although he wanted to respond immediately, a brother in the faith advised him to finish his degree.

“What God begins, He finishes,” he told him.

In 1991, Gerardo trained at a Bible institute to prepare for ministry. Over time, God led him to pastor churches and serve congregations seeking spiritual direction. Finally, the Lord brought him to Memorial Baptist Church in Edinburg, a congregation that had dwindled over the years and whose future seemed uncertain.

But God was not yet finished with His work.

Since Gerardo’s installation as pastor in 2008, the church has experienced steady growth. Families have arrived, lives have been transformed, and the gospel has continued to advance.

In 2010, the congregation began praying for a new sanctuary. For years, they gave sacrificially, saved, and worked together. Families organized food sales, events, and other activities to raise funds.

God also provided in unexpected ways. One company donated all the work to prepare the building's foundation. Another donor contributed \$25,000 at just the right moment to allow construction to continue.

"God has blessed us with a beautiful church, made up of kind and faithful brothers and sisters who remain encouraged and eager, working hard to continue building this work," said Dalia Lorenzo, Gerardo's wife.

Even during the pandemic, when many churches faced challenges, attendance at Memorial Baptist Church tripled. Today, the new building stands as visible evidence of God's faithfulness. Although the work still requires finances and prayer to be completed, the church continues to move forward in faith, trusting in the one who has provided at every step.

For Gerardo, the church building represents much more than a physical structure. It represents transformed lives, answered prayers, and the faithfulness of a God who keeps His promises.

The same God who restored Gerardo to life as a baby in Tampico continues to give life to His church in Edinburg.

The church's prayer is to be able to complete the last stage of construction and eventually begin an English-language service. They also want to establish an elementary school with kingdom values.

"The work," Gerardo says, "is not yet finished."

Una gloriosa obra en progreso

DIOS SIGUE DEMOSTRANDO SU FIDELIDAD A IGLESIA EN CRECIMIENTO EN EL VALLE DEL RÍO GRANDE

POR ARLENE SANABRIA

EDINBURG

DESDE EL SEGUNDO piso del nuevo templo en construcción, Gerardo Lorenzo observaba con gratitud el progreso de la obra. Lo que antes era una oración ahora tomaba forma en acero y concreto. Mientras estaba allí hablando con un compañero pastor, un hombre se acercó desde la calle. "¿Es usted el pastor?", preguntó.

El hombre explicó que pasaba por esa ruta todos los días de camino al trabajo. Ver el progreso de la iglesia llenó su corazón de alegría, tanto que sintió que Dios lo impulsaba a ayudar.

Sacó un cheque por mil dólares.

El hombre no era miembro de la iglesia. De hecho, ni siquiera era creyente. Pero Dios estaba usando ese momento para mostrar una vez más que esta obra en el Valle del Río Grande no era el resultado del esfuerzo humano, sino de Su provisión.



Historias como esta se han convertido en parte del testimonio continuo de la Iglesia Bautista Memorial en Edinburg, donde Gerardo ha servido como pastor principal desde febrero del 2008. Lo que comenzó como una pequeña congregación se ha convertido ahora en una iglesia vibrante y en crecimiento. Empezaron con sólo 12 personas. Hoy en día, más de 200 se reúnen para adorar, un testimonio visible de la fidelidad de Dios.

Esa fidelidad es tan evidente en la historia de Gerardo como en la de la iglesia.

Una casi tragedia que se convirtió en un punto de inflexión

Gerardo nació en Tampico, Tamaulipas, una ciudad costera del noreste de México, en un hogar que estuvo dividido espiritualmente durante un tiempo. Su padre, José Lorenzo, criado en la tradición católica, sentía un vacío cada vez que asistía a misa. Convencido de que debía haber algo más, comenzó a buscar hasta que un día entró en una iglesia evangélica en el centro de la ciudad. Allí escuchó el evangelio y entregó su vida a Cristo.

La esposa de José, Irene, se opuso firmemente a su conversión.

Un día, cuando Gerardo tenía sólo seis meses, José le sugirió a Irene que la familia asistiera a un servicio en su iglesia. Irene, llena de ira, respondió con palabras escalofriantes, diciéndole a José que prefería que los niños no estuvieran vivos antes que dejar que los llevara a esa iglesia.

José le pidió con calma a Irene que se arrepintiera de sus duras palabras y le dijo que estaba seguro de que Dios le mostraría que Él realmente existe. Ninguno de los dos podía saber cuán pronto el Señor se manifestaría.

Horas más tarde, mientras José estaba en la iglesia, uno de los her-

“Lo que Dios comienza, Él lo termina.”

manos mayores de Gerardo estaba jugando con él cuando Gerardo comenzó a ahogarse con un trozo de metal que se le había atascado en la garganta. Cuando Irene llegó, Gerardo estaba morado y luchaba por respirar. Intentó desesperadamente ayudarlo, pero no pudo sacar el objeto de la garganta del niño. Salió corriendo de la casa gritando y pidiendo ayuda. Cuando regresó, su hijo ya había fallecido.

Sosteniendo su pequeño cuerpo, Irene recordó las palabras que había dicho horas antes y el llamado de su esposo a arrepentirse y volverse a Dios.

En medio de su profundo dolor, clamó al Señor. Pidió perdón y le rogó que salvara a su hijo. Prometió que, si Dios le devolvía la vida a su hijo, ella lo seguiría.

Minutos después, el bebé Gerardo hizo un movimiento repentino. Expulsó el trozo de metal y comenzó a respirar. Dios había respondido.

Desde entonces, Irene entregó su vida a Cristo. Con el tiempo, se convirtió en una ferviente evangelista, compartiendo el evangelio con muchos. Gerardo, que una vez estuvo sin vida, ahora estaba vivo por la gracia de Dios, y con un propósito aún por revelar.

“Lo que Dios comienza, Él lo termina”

Años más tarde, mientras estudiaba contabilidad en México, Gerardo comenzó a sentir el llamado de Dios al ministerio. Aunque quería responder de inmediato, un hermano en la fe le aconsejó que terminara su carrera.

“Lo que Dios comienza, Él lo termina”, le dijo.



En el 1991, Gerardo comenzó su formación en un instituto bíblico para prepararse para el ministerio. Con el tiempo, Dios lo llevó a pastorear iglesias y a servir a congregaciones que buscaban orientación espiritual. Finalmente, el Señor lo llevó a la Iglesia Bautista Memorial en Edinburg, una congregación que había disminuido a lo largo de los años y cuyo futuro parecía incierto.

Pero Dios aún no había terminado su obra.

Desde la instalación de Gerardo como pastor en el 2008, la iglesia ha experimentado un crecimiento constante. Han llegado familias, se han transformado vidas y el evangelio ha seguido avanzando.

En el 2010, la congregación comenzó a orar por un nuevo santuario. Durante años, oraron, dieron sacrificialmente, ahorraron y trabajaron juntos. Las familias organizaron ventas de comida, eventos y otras actividades para recaudar fondos.

Dios también proveyó de maneras inesperadas. Una empresa donó todo el trabajo para preparar los cimientos del edificio. Otro donante contribuyó con 25,000 dólares en el momento justo para que la construcción pudiera continuar.

“Dios nos ha bendecido con una hermosa iglesia, formada por hermanos y hermanas amables y fieles que siguen animados y entusiasmados, trabajando duro para continuar construyendo esta obra”, dijo Dalia Lorenzo, esposa de Gerardo.

Incluso durante la pandemia, cuando muchas iglesias se enfrentaron a retos, la asistencia a la Iglesia Bautista

“Dios nos ha bendecido con una hermosa iglesia, formada por hermanos y hermanas amables y fieles que siguen animados y entusiasmados, trabajando duro para continuar construyendo esta obra”

GERARDO LORENZO

Memorial se triplicó. Hoy en día, el nuevo edificio es una prueba visible de la fidelidad de Dios. Aunque la obra aún requiere financiación y oración para completarse, la iglesia sigue avanzando con fe, confiando en aquel que ha provisto en cada paso.

Para Gerardo, el edificio de la iglesia representa mucho más que una estructura física. Representa vidas transformadas, oraciones contestadas y la fidelidad de un Dios que cumple sus promesas.

El mismo Dios que devolvió la vida a Gerardo cuando era un bebé en Tampico sigue dando vida a Su iglesia en Edinburg.

La oración de la iglesia es poder completar la última etapa de la construcción y, finalmente, comenzar un servicio en inglés. También quieren establecer una escuela primaria con valores del reino.

“La obra”, dice Gerardo, “aún no ha terminado”.

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Not just helpful, but essential

Women's ministry networks create stronger churches, healthier leaders, and deeper support for those they serve

ONE OF THE GREATEST LESSONS I've learned through serving in women's ministry is this: We were never meant to do it alone.

Women's ministry is a beautiful calling, but it is also a weighty responsibility. It involves planning, organizing, leading, encouraging, praying, and often carrying the burdens of others—sometimes while quietly battling personal burdens of our own. Over time, I've come to deeply value women's ministry networks because they remind me that ministry is not meant to be isolated. It is meant to be shared.

When women's ministry teams connect with one another, something powerful happens. It strengthens relationships, sparks new ideas, and creates a support system that extends beyond a single church. It builds unity in the body of Christ and reminds us we are part of something much bigger than our own ministry calendar. Scripture confirms this truth in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, which says, "Two are better than one ... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up." That is the heart of women's ministry networking—women helping women, leaders supporting leaders, and teams strengthening teams.

Our church recently hosted a women's one-day conference called Renew, and it was a perfect example of why women's ministry networks matter so much. We had ladies from another women's ministry team attend—not simply as guests, but as fellow ministry leaders who wanted to observe how we planned and carried out the day. Their purpose was to learn,

gather ideas, and take inspiration back to their own church so they can build something similar for the women they serve.

I loved that. I loved that their presence wasn't about competition. It wasn't about comparison. It was about collaboration and encouragement. Too often, ministries can fall into the trap of feeling like we have to outdo one another, but that was not the spirit in the room. Instead, it felt like a picture of what the church is supposed to be—united, supportive, and joyful in one another's victories.

Even more meaningful was the encouragement they gave us. They spoke life into our team by noticing the details, the organization, and the excellence of how everything came together. Their support reminded me that encouragement is not a small thing—it is fuel for ministry. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 tells us, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up ..." and that is exactly what happened through their words and presence. They didn't just observe; they strengthened us.

Women's ministry networks also help us grow by sharing practical ideas and strategies. Sometimes as leaders, we can feel stuck. We may repeat the same event formats, struggle to find fresh themes, or feel overwhelmed by the planning process. But when we connect with other teams, we learn from their experiences. We discover what worked for them, what didn't, and what they would do differently next time. It saves time, reduces stress, and helps us minister more effectively to the women in our churches.

This kind of connection also reflects what Scripture teaches about the body of Christ. Romans 12:4-5 says, "For just as each of us has one body with many members ... so in Christ we, though many, form one body." Women's ministry networks are a beautiful reminder that we are not separate parts working independently—we are connected. We are meant

to share wisdom, serve together, and build one another up.

But what I appreciate most about networking with other women's ministry teams is that it goes beyond events and planning. It becomes personal. When women connect through ministry, they don't just share schedules and decorating ideas—they share prayer requests, struggles, victories, and real-life moments. They understand the pressure of leadership and the emotional weight that can come with caring for others. They also understand that ministry leaders need ministry too.

There are times when women's ministry leaders are pouring into everyone else while quietly feeling tired, discouraged, or stretched thin. That's why relationships with other women in ministry are so important. They become a reminder that we are human, that we need support, and that it's OK to lean on someone else. Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Women's ministry networks help us do exactly that—carry burdens together, not just in public ministry moments, but in personal life as well.

Networking also creates unity and spiritual strength. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." When we connect with other ministry leaders, we sharpen each other through shared wisdom, honest conversations, and encouragement. We become stronger leaders and more compassionate servants.

Events like our Renew conference remind me that women's ministry is not a solo mission—it's a shared calling. We

need other women and other teams to help us do what God has called us to do. We need fresh ideas, prayer, support, and relationships that strengthen us when we feel tired. Most importantly, we need one another because God designed us for community.

When women's ministry teams come together, we don't just create better conferences and events—we create stronger churches, healthier leaders, and deeper support for the women we serve. In the end, women's ministry networks are not just helpful—they are essential.

I believe the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention does a great job at providing network opportunities by hosting leadership summits, conferences like Equip and Empower, retreats, connect nights, and other events throughout the year for us to network and be reminded we are here for each other. I have participated in several of these events, both as an attendee and as a speaker, and have seen the outcome of what networking can do.

I pray you will join us as we all work toward growing together in our ministries and in our personal lives, too. We truly are better together.



Rhonda Hinote is a pastor's wife and educator who loves connecting with women. She serves on the women's ministry team at her church, as well as with the women's ministry team and the pastor wives team of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.



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‘DEVOID OF GOD’

IN FRANCE, FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE PRAYING FOR LONG-TERM PARTNERS TO REACH ONE OF THE MOST SECULAR COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD

BY JAYSON LARSON



NICE, France

SOUTHERN FRANCE is, in a sense, paradise. The region includes the French Riviera, a global epicenter of leisure and wealth. Think Cannes, home of the world-renowned film festival. Think Monaco, where the Formula One Grand Prix winds through city streets. To the north rise the majestic Alps; to the south sits the Mediterranean Sea.

What more could anyone want?

But beneath its gilded veneer, a quiet absence exists among those sitting in this lap of luxury, says Patrick, an International Mission Board missionary who has been serving in Southern France since 2024 after spending more than a decade planting a church in New York City.

“IN NEW YORK, WE FELT THE CITY WAS DISTANT FROM GOD. YOU KIND OF HAD TO LOOK FOR HIM, BUT HE WAS THERE. IN FRANCE ... IT FEELS DEVOID OF GOD.”

PATRICK, IMB MISSIONARY

“In New York, we felt the city was distant from God. You kind of had to look for Him, but He was there,” Patrick said. “In France, especially in the south area, it feels devoid of God.”

Patrick said France is a constitutionally defined secular country. What that means is, the government not only avoids endorsing religion, but actively restricts its expression in certain spaces. Strict limits or outright prohibitions constrain religious symbols or dress in public schools, and prayer is barred in state-run institutions. Christianity—or the practice of any religion, for that matter—isn’t rejected as much as quietly sidelined.

When Patrick and his wife, Kathryn, were learning French in language school a couple years ago, they shared with their tutors



Patrick and Kathryn are IMB missionaries in France. Their ministry thrives on making personal connections that can lead to gospel conversations. **SUBMITTED PHOTOS**



◀ Because of France's culture, having spiritual conversations in public—even with other Christians—can present difficulties.

▼ Patrick and Kathryn have seen fruit from their ministry in France, where there is less than one evangelical church for every 29,000 residents.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS

their background: that he was a pastor in New York and they were in France to help churches. A noticeable, awkward hush fell over the room, illustrating the culture in which they were immersing themselves—one where religion is personal and not talked about in the public realm. That kind of chill exists even among many of the Christians Patrick and Kathryn have connected with.

“If we go out and we’re having coffee and we begin talking about things going on at church, or we ask how we can pray for you, it’s like, ‘Let’s talk about that in a different place,’” he said. The government’s stance on religion has affected the cultural psyche of the French people, he added, making evangelistic conversations in the public arena difficult.

And yet the gospel work happening in this region with nearly 3 million people is promising for those willing to invest their time and resources. Less than one-half of 1% of the people are evangelical Christians. Those numbers are slightly worse than all of Europe, a continent of 820 million people with only 1.1% evangelical residents.





“I THINK THE OTHER COMPELLING PART IS, WE’VE SEEN LOST PEOPLE DIE WITHOUT CHRIST, AND IT HURTS.”

PATRICK, IMB MISSIONARY

The IMB considers Europe not only an unreached people group, but the most lost continent on the planet. The National Council of French Evangelists report there is approximately one evangelical church for every 29,000 inhabitants in France, Patrick noted, and many smaller towns have no gospel influence at all.

The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention’s Reach Europe ministry partnership with the IMB aims to reverse that trend of lostness. Last May, SBTC pastors were led on a vision tour that spanned seven countries where partnerships are being formed. The tour, in addition to France, included Athens, Greece; Bucharest, Romania; Budapest, Hungary; Copenhagen, Denmark; Leeds, England; and Ljubljana, Slovenia. Two more vision tours, one in the late spring and another in the fall, are scheduled. Several SBTC churches have already made return trips to some of those cities.

Colin Rayburn, the SBTC’s missions mobilization associate, said he is excited about the opportunity to mobilize churches to develop long-term partnerships in France—where he once served as a missionary himself.

“Europe is not only lost, but it’s more often than not anti-religious,” Rayburn said. “But what makes France so interesting is that, while the French are famously anti-religious, there is rapid growth in gospel acceptance and church growth.”



And that’s one of the things that’s most compelling for Patrick, who has immersed his family into a secular culture—as uncomfortable as that might be—for the greater cause of Christ.

“To stay in places of comfort felt disobedient to us,” he said. “To step out in faith and go places where we are the only Christians in the room the majority of the time is actually the place we find the most peace because we know we’re right at the center of what God’s calling us to do.

“I think the other compelling part is, we’ve seen lost people die without Christ, and it hurts. It breaks your heart. To know there are people dying every day who have not had an accurate representation of the gospel shared with them and not had a chance to respond compels us to go wherever we can. ... As Christians, it’s tempting sometimes to be people of condemnation and look around the world and say what’s wrong. But we can be people of redemption and go try to take the hope of Christ where there are people in need of it. That’s what drives us.”



Scan the QR code to learn more about Reach Europe and to sign up for the fall vision tour.



CHASING THOSE CHASING THE DREAM

Many Chinese come to America to find wealth.
This Plano church wants them to find Jesus.

PLANO

WHEN JACK TAI WAS A PASTOR IN CHINA, he thought the U.S. had so many Christian churches that surely most Chinese immigrants would be reached with the gospel.

“To my astonishment, in the state of Texas, the Chinese population is still largely unreached,” Tai said. He estimates 100,000 Chinese live in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, and 90% of them are nonbelievers.

In China, hearts are hungry for hope, making people desperate for the gospel message, Tai said. But in the U.S., many Chinese immigrants are wealthy and their focus is on the American dream.

“When they become believers here, it’s hard for them to commit to live for God,” he said. “Definitely, the challenge is a comfortable life.”

Tai grew up in northeast China and studied English at a university where he befriended a couple that turned out to be International Mission Board workers. God saved him through their witness and then opened doors for him to study at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

After earning an M.Div., Tai moved back to China in 2012 as a church planter. In 2023, he moved with his family to start Joy Church in Plano.

“Our strategy is very simple. It’s basically biblical hospitality. We meet new friends and then invite them to our home for a meal,” Tai said.

Because of the unique cultural background they share

with Chinese immigrants, Joy Church leverages holidays to meet people. They hosted a Chinese New Year party this year and saw 200 people attend in space borrowed from a nearby church.

“We had a big Chinese meal, and kids and families sang songs,” Tai said. They had games and a raffle with prizes, as well as a gospel presentation. “It was basically a night of fun,” but it fostered new connections.

Other Chinese holidays used as outreach include the Dragon Boat Festival in May and the Mid-Autumn Festival around Thanksgiving.

Joy Church has about 20 people meeting in Tai’s home each week for two main gatherings. On Friday nights, they’re going through an 11-week series covering the basics of the gospel. “That’s geared toward nonbelievers,” Tai said.

On Saturdays, Joy Church hosts a worship service with a sermon, songs, prayer, and giving. In two years, God has used the church to help 10 people receive Christ as Savior. Their congregation has baptized eight people.

Another way the church forms connections is through the school community. “I have four boys, and they all attend public schools. That allows us to meet parents, friends, and classmates,” Tai said. They meet people at parks and are intentional about creating a community of possible disciples.

“My wife is leading a book club. She gathered a group of Chinese ladies, and they all have kids of different ages,” Tai said. “They read a Christian parenting book together. The

◀ Joy Church aims to reach the estimated 90% of Chinese people in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex who do not know Jesus. **SUBMITTED PHOTO**

majority of the group is nonbelievers, but they have a felt need, and we are able to create a community that way.”

The immigrant community in general is very lonely and kind of a closed group, Tai said. Since some of them struggle with learning the local language, English as a Second Language classes at churches are an excellent outreach.

“For any American believer who is willing to stop to talk to them, to open up their home for a meal or to invite them to coffee or tea, the intentional friendship is very much needed,” Tai said. “We come here as strangers in a strange land, so local Christians can really welcome the immigrant community just by extending friendship—a helping hand, a smile.”

Joy Church recently launched a new youth outreach by renting a local elementary school gym on Friday

nights and inviting middle school and high school students. “Mostly they are nonbelievers and have had very little exposure to the gospel. Some are from Hindu backgrounds, even Muslims,” Tai said.

The students speak English well, and Tai hopes local churches will volunteer to help lead Bible studies to keep the effort going long term. Joy Church also could use volunteers to serve meals or help children with crafts during their holiday parties.

The Vietnamese population in DFW exceeds that of the Chinese, Tai said, mostly because of refugees resettled during the Vietnam War. Much of that population is second or third generation by now and very much Americanized, he said. The Korean community is more broadly reached with the gospel because of many Korean churches in the area.

An Asian community still largely unreached, in addition to the Chinese, he said, is the Indian population. Many have moved to DFW for the IT industry. If Southern Baptists

notice immigrants have moved to their neighborhood, Tai recommends sending them a note or a gift.

“In the Chinese culture, gifts are a huge thing. My family moved to a new home recently, and some neighbors sent us cookies,” he said. “Try to intentionally welcome them, and then talk to them. They may not speak good English, but be patient and try to understand even using Google Translate.”

Tai is able to serve in the U.S. because he is sponsored by Glen Meadows Baptist Church in San Angelo.

“While reaching the Chinese people in China remains critically important to us as we have adopted a Chinese [unengaged unreached people group], we also recognize that God, in His sovereignty, has brought many from the nations into our own communities,” Glen Meadows Senior Pastor Mack Roller said. “When the nations are in our backyard, we believe we have a clear responsibility to engage them with the gospel.”



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PLAINS CHURCH,
GENERATIONAL
IMPACT OF
COLLEGE
STUDENTS IS
PRIORITIZED

BY ERIN ROACH



Lubbock
COUNTY LINE

AUSTIN

LUBBOCK

REDEEMER CHURCH recognizes the strategic impact of reaching college students. Church leaders know those young Christ-followers will plant churches, raise families, and strengthen congregations for generations to come.

“You’re affecting whole trajectories of future children and spouses,” said Dusty Thompson, Redeemer’s lead pastor. “It’s just so strategic for the kingdom of God to reach a college student today.”

Redeemer began in 2008 with a goal of leading college students to Jesus. Thompson estimates there has never been a time in the church’s history when less than 40% of the church has been college students. Last year, Redeemer baptized a record 60 people in that demographic.

“We try to tell our college students that we’d love to see them do one of three things,” Thompson said: be an “all-in” church member wherever they go, participate in a Redeemer church plant, or be an international missionary. “We’d love everybody to fit into one of those three buckets by the time they leave us.”

For the past five years, Redeemer—with about 2,200 in attendance on Sundays—has focused on planting churches in college towns, including Doxa Church in Tucson, Ariz., with more than 500 in at-



tendance. In about a year, they plan to launch Sowers Church in Norman, Okla. The University of Oklahoma has more than 30,000 undergraduates in Norman, and the church planting team estimates only about 1,200 of them are involved in any church or campus ministry, Thompson said.

“That would be even more pressing at a school like the University of Texas,” he said. “You’ve just got incredible need on these campuses.”

To reach students in Austin, Redeemer sent a couple of its church planting residents and about 25 people as a core group to start New City Church, and in September one of Redeemer’s own, Mitchell Johnson, will launch The Way with a focus on young adults downtown.

Johnson accepted Jesus as a student at Texas Tech and got heavily involved in the college ministry at Redeemer, even serving as its director before leaving to work with another church in Austin.

“A Barna study found young adults are spiritually open but not religious,” Johnson said. “People are open to different forms of spirituality and spiritual experiences, but they are less likely to set foot in a church on Sunday. That’s why the mission of our church is that we’re sent to the heart of Austin to help every person find their way back to God.”

The Way is a hybrid plant of Redeemer, Send Network, and The Salt Company, Thompson said.

Redeemer Church in Lubbock baptized 60 college students last year and prioritizes reaching that demographic.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

CAMPUS CRUSADE

EST. 2008 Redeemer Church launches with a focus on college students

60 College students baptized in 2025

2,200 Attendance on Sundays

FOCUSED ON PLANTING CHURCHES IN COLLEGE TOWNS

DOXA CHURCH Planted in Tucson, Ariz., with more than 500 in attendance

SOWERS CHURCH in Norman, Okla., plans to launch in about a year

◀ Redeemer Church’s commitment to being a sending church has helped pave the way for Mitchell Johnson (seen at far left) to plant The Way church in downtown Austin this coming fall. **SUBMITTED PHOTO**

“YOU CAN’T JUST CARE ABOUT THE CAMPUS. YOU HAVE TO CARE ABOUT THE CITY THAT YOU LIVE IN, AND THAT MEANS YOU CAN’T JUST IGNORE ADULTS.”

DUSTY THOMPSON

Downtown Austin has a high percentage of young adults and college students drawn by the university and by large companies such as Google, Meta, and Deloitte.

Johnson and his core team recently started two prayer rooms, one on the UT campus and one at the top of a high-rise workplace. Their hope is that they can meet people where they are and offer an opportunity to “experience what it would mean to pray to God.”

Prayer rooms are useful evangelistic tools, Johnson said, given the spiritual openness among this generation. He feels particularly supported by Redeemer’s impact on his ministry.

“They believed in me even before I could believe in myself,” Johnson said. “Dusty is the type of pastor who sees the giftings in people and will call them out quickly, not for his benefit or any selfish gain, but for the kingdom.”

Focusing on college ministry can be a challenge, Thompson noted. Students and other young adults of that age often are not naturally inclined or able to financially participate in the ministry of the church. That challenge, however, provides an opportunity for discipleship.

“You just have to prioritize it like anything else,” he said, adding that the church is intentional about discipling people on generosity. “Our college students are learning to be generous with their funds, too.”



For a college ministry to be sustainable, a church must have committed adults who will give and serve faithfully. “You can’t just care about the campus,” Thompson said. “You have to care about the city that you live in, and that means you can’t just ignore adults.”

College students, if reached for Christ, can have a significant godly impact on generations to come, Dusty Thompson of Redeemer Church said.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Redeemer has an advantage now of being “an established player” when a Christian student starts at Texas Tech. “We’re going to be one of two or three churches they’re going to hear about, just word of mouth,” he said. “We’re well-known. We weren’t well-known at the beginning.”

With a goal of continuously multiplying, Redeemer’s 12-year-old church planting residency has trained more than 10 men. The church guides in solid theology for the first year, and the second year moves to more practical application.

“The Redeemer Network has over 30 churches that have planted or replanted,” Thompson said. “Those are just multiplying churches from churches we planted that have now planted and replanted other ones.”





This summer, Dallas and Houston will host the largest sporting event in the world, the FIFA World Cup.

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‘The right now of the church’

At BT Church, ministry effectiveness is measured not only in the numbers of those who show up, but in how they connect with other generations



Danny Rangel serves as young adults pastor at BT Church in McAllen, ministering to 18-29-year-olds during a critical stage of their lives. Prior to that, he served for seven years as the church’s student pastor. Rangel, who will be among the speakers at this year’s Collegiate Roundup conference, recently spoke with the *Texan* about what it takes to reach the next generation for Christ and how they aren’t just the future of the church, but, as he calls them, the “right now of the church.”

What is it about ministering to the younger generations that compels you to pour your life into this ministry?

DANNY RANGEL: I think they’re obviously the future of the church, but they’re also the right now of the church. Young adults are in this season of life where they’re trying to figure out a lot about who they are, what they actually believe in. I came to know Jesus when I was 17 years old, so right before that young adult stage, I was really exploring a lot about faith. I was trying to figure out what I was going to do with my life, which is already an anxiety-driven question. So, when I get to pour into Next Gen, whether it’s youth or the collegiate space or the young adult space, it just feels like I’m pouring into the person that I was as I was growing up and trying to figure out my life and my faith.

When you say young adults are not only the future of the church, but the “now” of the church, what do you mean?

DR: I’ve heard people say that when you believe in Jesus, the younger generation is not given a JV version of the Holy Spirit. They get the same Holy Spirit that an adult gets. [Related to] that is one of my passions—I don’t see young adult ministry as a church within a church. They are a part of the whole church.

So how can we provide young adults with very tangible opportunities to use the gifts and talents God has given them through the Holy Spirit to serve the church right now? Not just in areas that a lot of times young adults are thrown into because they’re available or because they’re energetic, but how can we put them in places that provide ownership of the larger aspect of church on Sunday mornings, whether that’s leading worship or teaching or overseeing teams?

Our church is called BT Church. Our ministry is called BT Young Adults, and I always tell them, “BT Young Adults is a ministry of BT Church, so you guys are a part of BT Church as a whole.” We meet weekly on Tuesday nights, and I always tell them that if this is their only church time, I would rather them come on Sunday mornings than on Tuesday nights because on Sunday mornings, we have a diverse group of young kids, young families, older families, older married couples, and I want them to be a part of that diverse room—not just a part of people who are in their same season of life.

What kinds of ministry opportunities do you see based on what young adults are talking about or what they're concerned about in this season of life?

DR: I think a big aspect they're worried about is obviously mental health. Mental health is just a really big reality of this generation right now. Avoiding that conversation is not going to help them.

We try to tackle tough questions within [the church] because they're getting answers from outside the church. If we can be a young adult ministry that responds to those big cultural questions and issues, then I think the church becomes a place they can trust to seek answers.

One of our practices when we want to tackle cultural moments is we do "Pastor and a Microphone" time and allow them to ask questions. We want to try to create that safe space to get answers to questions they're wrestling with about calling or purpose or whatever. For us, a big cultural moment that happened not long ago was the assassination of Charlie Kirk. It was big for our young adults because he was such a prominent figure on social media. So that evening, we just passed around a microphone and said, "What questions do you guys have?" Right now, we're doing a series on relationships and dating. They have a lot of questions about that. How can you be faithful to Jesus when you're pursuing a relationship?

We allow them to bring those questions here. We're going to answer them as best as we can through different channels of communication, whether it's a Tuesday night sermon, a social media post, or a podcast, something like that.

How do you know when next gen ministry is actually working? What are some of your personal measures or mile-markers?

DR: Obviously, salvations and baptisms are always incredible. One thing we say a lot to our young adults is, "We want to journey with you." Alongside that phrase, we have three pillars that define our ministry: follow Jesus, find purpose, make friends. Everything we do, whether it's a Tuesday night worship service, a conference we're hosting, a retreat we'll lead—whatever—we try to decide how the things we do in our ministry fulfill one of those aspects. How is it helping young adults follow Jesus? How is it helping young adults find their purpose? How is helping them make friends? That keeps us laser-focused on our mission.

I would also add, when young adults are showing up Sunday morning—that, to me, is a big marker of success. And not just showing up Sunday morning, but serving.

The other day, our main church Instagram page posted a picture promoting Sunday morning and the picture grabbed my attention. It was two greeters at the door standing side by side smiling. One of them was one of our senior adults who's been a greeter for decades at this church, and right next to him was one of our young adults. I just thought that picture was incredible because it's showing a faithful servant of BT for decades alongside a young adult person who just started serving. That, to me, is what the church is all about. It's generations coming together. So, the more we can see young adults serving, showing up Sunday morning, I just think is a powerful thing. To me, that's a marker.

What's the best advice you've been given, heard, or read regarding ministering to the next generation that you're applying to your own ministry?

DR: As a student pastor for about seven years and now as a young adult minister for three years or so, I think it's been the understanding that Gen Z really prioritizes authenticity. One of the best pieces of advice I've been given is don't try to be someone you're not. I think Gen Z can really sniff out fake. Just be your genuine self. You don't have to dress like them or look like them or talk like them. Just be yourself. I think that's going to be the best way you're going to reach the next generation.



Roundup is a three-day collaborative equipping event for church-based college ministry teams focused on reaching students with the gospel, developing them into disciples, and sending them into strategic kingdom places. Scan the QR for more information.



THE IDEA IS TO REMAIN FAITHFUL

Editor's note: Ken Wells is senior pastor of Northview Baptist Church in Lewisville. He recently shared part of his testimony with the Texan's Gary Ledbetter.



**JESUS IS
WRITING
MY STORY**

IN 1980, I WAS WORKING in a grocery store when I got a call from my wife's home church asking if I would preach for their homecoming. I said, "Sure." I did, and then a few months later, the pastor came into the store where I was assistant manager, saying, "Hey, would you fill in for me this coming Sunday? I'm going to go hunting." I'd been to Bible college and was comfortable doing that. It turns out his hunting trip was hunting a new church.

Well, he came back, resigned, and took a church in Oklahoma. The church immediately called me, and I was just 23. I'd only been married for a few months, and I had been on a staff in a small church. I probably had more students in my student ministry than in that little church [Northview Baptist Church in Lewisville] had counting everybody. I said, "Well, y'all need to find somebody older." I figured somebody like who I am now, in their 50s or 60s.

The church had been through some rough times, so they did look at some other men. They had two or three other pastors come in and preach for them. Finally, about January of '81, they called me and said, "Look, we knew back in August you'd be our next pastor."

Well, now I had 20 people, and they handed me a lot of keys that nobody knew what they went to. They said, "We think this one opens the front door." They said yes, I said yes. Then I said, "By the way, am I going to get paid? I hadn't asked the question; I just assumed God was going to take care of me. They said, "Well, we have \$50 a week and there's an old house down the street, but we don't have any money to fix it up. If you want to fix it up, you're welcome to move into it, but we do have \$50 a week. We suggest you keep your full-time grocery job." The 20 people at Northview were doing all they could just to keep the doors open. The bank was even threatening to foreclose.

But by May, we had raised the money to pay off the loan and burn the note. Our next highlight was to begin giving to missions, just 3% to the association at first. But from that business meeting, for

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“My ministry verse is 1 Timothy 1:12: ‘I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service.’ I think the idea is to remain faithful.”

the next 13 weeks in a row, we had somebody saved, baptized, or join the church. They had not seen that in years and years. I credit the fact that we stepped out in faith and said, “We’re going to support missions.” We did, and God blessed it.

It was very exciting during those times. Obviously we didn’t just grow by leaps and bounds. As you

hear at some churches, the pastor gets there and it goes from 0 to 200 people in a year. We didn’t do that, but we got to where we were hitting 30 and 40 and 50 and 60 pretty regularly. We were bumping that 100 mark—that magic 100 mark. But we were starting to do that fairly regularly. It was good.

It got so that I had to quit my grocery store job, my main source of income. At that point, I began to substitute in the local school system until the church was ready to support us full time.

That was 45 years ago this February. This is the only church I’ve pastored. We’ve seen Northview go through a lot of changes. Through the years, we’ve added a 500-seat auditorium. We’ve finished, a few years ago, 25,000 square feet of education space. I remember when I came, the church was looking for \$500 or \$600 a Sunday to keep the budget going.

We’ve also added a Hispanic church

that is running around 250 each Sunday—I think they baptized more than we did last year. Our church reaches probably 700 families though a ministry that provides clothing and food that started in a house we bought across the street and now has spread to five locations in Denton, Carrollton, and our own Lewisville.

In February, I announced my retirement to be effective in May. My wife Teresa and I are staying at Northview—our kids are here, our grandkids (three, with one on the way), my mother-in-law lives right next door to the church, and Lewisville is our hometown. I hope to continue as chaplain for our fire and police departments, a role I’ve enjoyed for nearly 45 years as well.

My ministry verse is 1 Timothy 1:12: “I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service.” I think the idea is to remain faithful.



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A LIFETIME OF SERVICE, AN ENDURING LEGACY

LATEST ROUND OF RICHARDS ENDOWMENT RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

Recipients have been announced for the Jim and June Richards Endowment for Kingdom Advance.

The endowment's purpose is to support individuals or organizations which promote kingdom causes through religious ministry consistent with the doctrinal statements of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. It was established by the Southern Baptists of Texas Foundation in 2021.

Richards said he and his wife made the decisions for the latest recipients after much prayer and consideration. The recipients are:

- ◆ The National Hispanic Baptist Network, led by former and longtime SBTC staff member Bruno Molina. Richards said he was excited when Molina accepted the role as the NHBN's executive director, adding, "He is in a strategic position to influence millions for the cause of Christ."
- ◆ The La Chapelle Church Planting Network, a movement that has planted numerous churches in Montreal, Canada—one of the largest unreached places in North America. "June and I have a special place in our hearts for Montreal," Richards explained, noting that David Pothier, pastor of La Chapelle Church, has labored to bring the gospel to that area "with integrity and sacrifice."
- ◆ The June Richards Scholarship Endowment at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which

will be disbursed to support other women to faithfully fulfill the roles to which God has called them as Mrs. Richards has done in her own life. "June—my wife and ministry partner for 52 years—is a Proverbs 31 woman," Richards said. "She served with me when I was a pastor, church planter, director of missions, and at the SBTC. Her prayers have impacted untold numbers of lives."

Richards, the convention's founding executive director from 1998 through 2021, now serves as executive director emeritus. The SBTC grew from 120 churches to more than 2,600 churches during his tenure. Prior to coming to Texas, he pastored for 21 years in Louisiana and then served as an associational executive director in Northwest Arkansas.

June is a faithful pastor's wife, mother, and grandmother who assisted her husband through decades of ministry. She is widely known among SBTC staff members and church leaders as a constant prayer warrior and encourager.

"SBTF formed the Richards ministry endowment to acknowledge the continuing legacy of Jim and June Richards and to honor their years of service to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention," SBTF Executive Director Bart McDonald said. "I am excited to oversee distributions that will continue Dr. Richards' legacy."



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September 10 Amarillo Paramount Baptist Church

September 17 Conroe West Conroe Baptist Church

One generation shall commend your works to another. [PSALM 145:4](#)

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4.10 Regional First Baptist Church, Odessa

4.11 Regional North Oaks Baptist Church, Spring

4.18 Regional Cross City Church, Euless

4.25 Regional Flint Baptist Church

5.2 State Finals SWBTS, Fort Worth

BACK TO THE BASICS

South Texas church's devotion to God's Word,
the community drives its resurgence

BY ERIN ROACH



SOMERSET

WHEN PASTOR NICK MARNEJON looks around Somerset Baptist Church, a 168-year-old congregation near San Antonio, he sees not only numerical growth, but spiritual growth.

That growth was facilitated by a church full of “generous, loving people” who hold a high view of Scripture and were willing to return to their roots upon Marnejon’s arrival a little less than a year-and-a-half ago.

“Let’s get back to basics,” Marnejon said. “Let’s get in our Bibles. Let’s have a prayer life. Let’s get to church.”

Worship attendance at Somerset has grown to an average of 150, with about 125 of those also attending Sunday morning Bible study.

“I just think people have been hungry for God’s Word,” he said. “I’ve taught how-to-study-the-Bible classes recently, and that was well-attended and well-received. Our women’s ministry has been up and going. We’ve had various outreach things that the church has been doing historically that we’ve kept up.”

The student ministry has grown to about 70. Kasey Hobbs was hired to lead students about a year ago, Marnejon noted. Though he works full time in the oil field industry, Hobbs “gives himself as much as he absolutely can to these teens,” Marnejon said. “[He is] dogged about preaching and teaching God’s Word.”

“For this school year, he’s been just slowly working through the gospel of John with the teens on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings,” Marnejon said. “Just systematically going through the Bible has been reaping dividends, as well as I just think he loves the teens genuinely, and they’re responding to that.”

Most of the influx of new teens is from the local school through connections, the pastor said: “Most of our kids are either non-Christian or maybe grew up Catholic or have some type of Catholic influence.”

Wednesday nights take on an evangelistic feel with “lots of kids coming who don’t know Jesus yet,” Marnejon said. They’ve done See You at the Pole, and Hobbs spoke at a worship night at the school organized by a student and attends as many football games as possible.

A force for good

As for Marnejon, he grew up in Ohio in a Baptist church that changed to nondenominational during his teenage years. After earning his master’s degree, he moved to Seattle to serve as a youth pastor for six years. It was a healthy church, and he grew a lot there, he said. He met his wife in Washington, and his pastor trained him by including him on pastoral visits, giving him funeral and wedding opportunities, and generally teaching him how to shepherd a flock.

Ultimately sensing God’s call to serve as a lead pastor himself, Marnejon found Somerset through the Southern Baptist Convention’s job board. He said he has been encouraged by his involvement in the SBC, agreeing

with SBC Executive Committee President Jeff Iorg that “Southern Baptists are a force for good.”

“On the whole, I’ve been just thoroughly impressed, and I’ve enjoyed getting into Southern Baptist life,” Marnejon said. “I’m really impressed with their seminaries—thriving seminaries. I’m looking at them for my Ph.D. in this coming year. I feel good and happy about being a part of the Southern Baptist Convention.”

What he particularly likes about the Cooperative Program—Southern Baptists’ primary giving model—is that until Somerset can “put some missionary faces to our dollars too someday,” their 5% already supports missions through the North American Mission Board and International Mission Board.

Said Marnejon: “It’s encouraging to know that the thousands of dollars that we’re sending every year are going to really tangible things that I can see as a Southern Baptist.”



(Top) The women’s ministry at Somerset Baptist Church near San Antonio hosted a painting party at Christmas and saw a great turnout.

(Bottom) The church’s student ministry has grown from 25 to 70 in recent months. **SUBMITTED PHOTOS**

Church Positions



PASTOR

First Baptist Church in Point is seeking a FT pastor. For questions or to submit a resume, contact David Frost, 903-408-0365, gunsmith75440@yahoo.com.

Shirley Creek Baptist in Etoile is prayerfully seeking a FT or bivocational pastor. We are looking for a man who is ordained, affirms the BF&M 2000, and who possesses the biblical qualifications to lead and teach our church family. Please submit resume to scbc133@outlook.com.

First Baptist Church in Springlake is seeking a FT Southern Baptist pastor for Christ-centered preaching, teaching, and pastoral care, along with administrative leadership and community engagement for our rural congregation. Please submit resume by email to kentparish422@gmail.com.

First Baptist Church in Hull is seeking a PT lead pastor. Please send resume to fbchullpastorsearch@gmail.com.

First Baptist Church in Alvarado is seeking a senior pastor. Please send resume to First Baptist Church of Alvarado, 207 Hwy. 67, Alvarado, Texas 76009, or email to office@fbcalvarado.org.

First Baptist Church in Lytle is seeking a FT vocational or bivocational pastor. For questions or to submit a resume, contact Steven Huntsucker at shuntsucker16@gmail.com.

West Sherman Baptist Church is seeking a FT senior pastor. westshermanbaptistchurch.com. 1830 W. Washington St., Sherman, Texas 75092. wsbcpastorsearchteam@yahoo.com.

First Baptist Church in Louise is seeking a FT pastor to lead our small congregation. Affiliated with the SBTC. Send resume to Traceylyn Courville at pastor@FBCLouise.com or mail to P.O. Box 368, Louise, Texas 77455.

First Baptist Church in Donie is seeking a pastor. Candidates must meet biblical qualifications per 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and believe and teach the Bible per Revelation 22:18-19. Must not believe or teach any philosophy or doctrine created by man per Colossians 2:8. Submit resume with references and contact information to pastorsearch.doniefbc@gmail.com.

First Baptist Church in Stinnett is seeking a FT pastor prepared to minister to all age groups and become an active part of our community. We hold that the Word of God is our authority, and we seek to glorify Him. Email resumes to fbstinnettpsc@gmail.com.

First Baptist Church in Batesville is seeking a FT bivocational/bilingual pastor. Contact Jerry Fortune at 832-600-7741.

MUSIC

Southview Baptist Church in Iowa Colony is seeking a music and worship minister. For questions or to submit an application, contact Frances Underwood, fcu@msn.com, text 281-798-9807.

The Heights Church in San Angelo is seeking a PT worship leader to cultivate a meaningful worship experience during our Sunday morning service (can be combined as a FT youth/worship leader position). Please contact our committee chairman at 325-277-7288, The Heights Church, San Angelo, Texas 76901.

First Baptist Church in Queen City is seeking an associate pastor of worship. Submit resume to musicsearch@fbqc.org. Visit fbqc.org for church insights.

First Baptist Church in Sherman is seeking our next FT worship minister. Send resume to searchteam@fbcsherman.org.

Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler seeks a FT worship pastor with benefits and retirement—a pastor/shepherd who will lead and supervise the worship and broadcast ministries and help the church fulfill its vision of transforming lives with the truth of Jesus Christ. Visit gabc.org/jobs for full job requirements and to apply!

Nolan River Road Baptist Church in Cleburne seeks a PT music minister. Experience leading a blended but contemporary leasing service preferred. To apply, send cover letter and resume to office@nrbc.org.

First Baptist Church in Alto is seeking a PT music director/worship leader responsible for coordinating, encouraging, and supporting the glorification of God through music and song. The position reports to the pastor. \$15,000 annual budgeted salary. Apply online on the SBTC job board or email altofbc.psc@gmail.com.

First Baptist Church in Georgetown seeks an interim worship

leader (15-20 hours/week) for a 9-month season. Lead our band, choir, and winds with a shepherding heart and contemporary excellence. We need a collaborative leader to navigate this transition. Send resume and video to msawyer@fbg.church. Visit fbg.church for church details.

Coastal Oaks Church in Rockport is seeking a FT worship leader to lead us in a modern worship context. Submit your resume to cirving@coastalokschurch.org.

Northway Baptist Church in Angleton is seeking a bivocational worship leader. Please send resume to Jeff Powell at northwayworship@northwaybaptist.com. 979-849-1253.

Chapel of the Hills Baptist Church in Buchanan Dam is seeking a PT (25 hours per week) worship leader. Please contact Billy Dye at billy.dye77@gmail.com.

Southcrest Baptist Church in Lubbock is seeking a FT venue worship pastor to lead two of our five weekend services and collaborate with our worship volunteers and residents for our weekly college and student worship gatherings. For more information, contact katrinab@southcrest.org or visit southcrest.org/workwithus.

STUDENTS

The Heights Church in San Angelo is seeking a PT youth leader who is a growing disciple of Christ (can be combined as a FT youth/worship leader position). Please contact our committee chairman at 325-277-7288, The Heights Church, San Angelo, Texas 76901.

First Baptist Church in Pampa is seeking an associate pastor of student ministries. Qualifications: Seminary preferred, bachelor's minimum, plus 5+ years ministry experience, or substantial leadership experience in another capacity. Please submit a resume, as well as video or website link of speaking, preaching, or worship leadership to Byron Williamson, senior pastor, byron@firstpampa.org.

First Baptist Church in Sherman is seeking a FT student minister. Send resume to searchteam@fbcsherman.org.

First Baptist Church in Corinth is seeking a FT student pastor to provide leadership and direction in ministering to our students and parents. Resumes or questions regarding the position may be sent to Bruce Larson at bruce.larson@fbccorinth.org.

East Side Baptist Church in Haskell is seeking a FT youth pastor. pastor@esbchaskell.org.

Shady Oaks Baptist Church in Hurst is seeking a FT minister to students. Contact Lead Pastor Jay Fannin at jayfannin@shadyoaks.org. 817-874-5741.

Cross Community Church in Northeast Houston is seeking a FT youth director/missionary. We are a 4-year-old, gospel-centered church plant. Contact del@crossforall.com.

Parkside Baptist Church in Denison is seeking a FT pastor of student ministry to work with students in grades 7-12. Please send resume to resume@thepark.org.

Calvary Baptist Church in Nacogdoches is seeking a FT youth pastor. 3732 NE Stallings Dr., Nacogdoches, Texas 75964. 936-564-4539. mike@cbcnac.com.

First Baptist Church in Eustace is seeking a FT (preferred) or bivocational youth pastor to lead our student ministry, grades 6-12. If you are interested and/or have any questions, send resume and questions to stnorrell@gmail.com, subject "Youth Pastor Search."

Cross Community Church in Houston is a growing church plant seeking a PT youth ministry resident for 2026. This is an excellent opportunity for someone to evaluate FT vocational ministry. Contact Del Traffanstedt at del@crossforall.com.

CHILDREN

San Saba's First Baptist Church is seeking a FT children's minister. For questions and to submit a resume, contact searchcommittee@sansabafbc.org.

First Baptist Church in Sherman is seeking our next FT kids minister. Send resume to searchteam@fbcsherman.org.

First Baptist Church in Porter is seeking a FT director of children's ministry. Must have a minimum of a bachelor's degree from a recognized university and a minimum two years

of ministry experience. Contact Pastor Rob Ray, 281-354-3339, rob@porterfirst.org, or visit porterfirst.org.

Vansickle Baptist Church in Greenville is seeking their next children's ministry director to lead and disciple VBC kids. They are located just east of Rockwall. Apply by sending a cover letter and resume to kidssearch@vansickle.org.

Hope Church in Montgomery is a six-year-old church plant looking for a PT children's minister. We have 50-100 kids on Sundays. The candidate should be fun, mature, experienced, and love discipling kids and families. Contact Justin Dancer, 936-777-0009, justin@hopemontgomery.com.

LifeBrook Church in Houston is seeking a PT kids minister. We're looking for a passionate leader to build a fun, engaging, and spiritually rich kids ministry. Join us in shaping young lives as our church continues to grow! Contact Zach Brackett at zach@lifebrook.com.

First Baptist Church in Academy is seeking a PT children's minister. We are looking for someone gifted by God to lead in children's ministry and have a heart to reach our community with the gospel. Resumes will be received through the end of March 2026 at personnel.fbca@gmail.com.

Cross Community Church in Houston is seeking a PT (12-month, paid) children's ministry resident. If you are in the Houston area and interested in vocational kids ministry, please contact Del Traffanstedt at del@crossforall.com.

Chapel of the Hills Baptist Church in Buchanan Dam is seeking a PT (20 hours per week) children's director. Please contact Billy Dye at billy.dye77@gmail.com.

COMBINATION

Second Baptist Church in Amarillo is seeking a FT associate pastor of worship and discipleship. Candidate must affirm Baptist Faith & Message 2000, meet 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 qualifications, and lead worship and discipleship ministries. Send resume to Pastor Larry Davis at connect@sbcamo.org, sbcamo.org.

First Baptist Church of Alta Loma in Santa Fe is seeking a man with a pastor's heart to serve in a FT associate/student pastor role. This position would include overseeing students, but would also have other pastoral roles. Email jakebigford@fbcal.net for more info.

Lake Church in Arlington is seeking FT accounting & office manager. Send resume to Pam Mason at pmason@lakechurchdfw.org.

First Baptist Church in Springtown is seeking a FT pastor/minister of music & media to help us continue to grow through Jesus-exalting gatherings. The position opens in May 2026. Send resume to bobbycates@fbctown.org.

The Hill Church in Liberty Hill (a suburb of Austin) is seeking a FT worship/student pastor. We are looking to hire a pastor with a heart to make disciples among the next generation and lead our congregation in worship. Please send resume to daniel@experiencethehill.church and gerry.hoerster@gmail.com.

OTHER

Southcliff Baptist Church in Fort Worth is seeking a financial administrator (30 hours). For questions and to submit a resume, contact Executive Pastor Elliott Higgins, elliot@southcliff.com, 817-924-2241.

Houston's First Baptist Church seeks FT visionary executive chef. Complete job description can be found at houstonsfirst.org/jobs or by contacting Gen.Roach@Houstonsfirst.org.

First Baptist Church in Glen Rose is seeking a well-qualified media/communications director to join our team. Information is posted at fbcclenrose.org. Please send cover letter and resume to Gary Whittle, business administrator, gary@fbcclenrose.org, 254-897-2351.

Del Rio Uvalde Baptist Association is seeking a director of missions. A job description and information can be found on our website, druba.net. For more information, please call our office at 830-278-5351.

Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving is seeking a FT business administrator for our growing church. Interested applicants should email mhenslee@plymouthpark.org.

Event Calendar



For more information about SBTC events, visit sbtexas.com/events or scan the QR code

APRIL



29-5/8 Reach Europe: Spring Vision Tour

- 6-10** Reach Puerto Rico: Vision Tour
- 7** Regenesis One-Day, Terrell
- 7** Regenesis One-Day, Claude
- 9** Regenesis One-Day, Wichita Falls
- 9** Send Network SBTC One-Day, Georgetown
- 10** Regional Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament, Odessa
- 11** Regional Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament, Spring
- 11** Intro to DR & Phase 1 Training, Bellville
- 14** Evangelism Connections (online)
- 16** Make Disciples Like Jesus Workshop, Lufkin
- 17-18** Retiro de Mujeres Florece, McAllen
- 18** Regional Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament, Euless
- 18** World Soccer Championship Outreach Training, Arlington
- 20** Groups Matter, Lubbock
- 21** Groups Matter, Pittsburg
- 21** Regenesis One-Day, San Antonio
- 21** Regenesis One-Day, San Angelo
- 21** Regenesis One-Day, Palestine
- 21** Send Network SBTC Sending Lab, Georgetown
- 23** Legacy Builders Training, Fort Worth
- 23** Send Network SBTC Sending Lab, Pearland
- 25** Regional Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament, Flint
- 25** World Soccer Championship Outreach Training, Houston
- 28** Regenesis One-Day, White Oak
- 30-5/2** Come Away Pastor Wives Retreat, Princeton
- 30-5/2** Ven y Reposas, Waxahachie

MAY



13-15 Collegiate Roundup, CrossCreek Church, Colleyville

- 5** Regenesis One-Day, Spicewood
- 5** Evangelism Connections (online)
- 6** Regenesis Online Interest Meeting
- 12** Regenesis One-Day, Alvin
- 12-14** Pastor Prayer Retreat, Longview
- 14** Send Network SBTC Sending Lab, San Antonio
- 14-16** Breathe Deep Retreat, Austin
- 26** Regenesis Online Interest Meeting
- 28-6/1** M3 Camp, Mt. Lebanon
- 30** Send Network SBTC Sending Lab (bilingual), Odessa

JUNE



7-10 SBC Annual Meeting, Orlando

- 2** Regenesis One-Day, Pittsburg
- 7-8** Pastors' Conference, Orlando
- 21-29** Students Mission Trip, Budapest, Hungary
- 24-7/3** Pastor Israel Trip



ADVANCING MISSION

Mobilizing churches with giving opportunities that multiply impact.



COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

The Cooperative Program is the SBTC's primary funding source. As churches give, 45% remains in Texas to help fund SBTC's mission, and 55% is forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention for national and international ministry and missions.

Reach Texas OFFERING

The annual Reach Texas State Missions Offering fuels ministries that advance the Great Commission efforts of SBTC churches. 100% of the offering is used for missions and evangelism.

sbtexas.com/advance

