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BIBLICAL RECORDER

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EC recommends alternative plan for annual meeting

By CHAD AUSTIN | BSC Communications

The executive committee (EC) of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSC) passed a motion recommending an alternative plan for this year's annual meeting that would include an abbreviated one-day meeting to include worship, ministry reports, business sessions and more.

Under the plan approved by the committee, this year's annual meeting would be held Tuesday, Nov. 10, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at First Baptist Church of Charlotte. The meeting had originally been scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, Nov. 9-10, at the Joseph S. Koury Convention Center in Greensboro.

The matter must now go before the convention's full board of directors for consideration after the executive committee endorsed the recommendation during a video conference call held Aug. 25. The board of directors is the only entity that is authorized by the convention's bylaws to change the time or place of the annual meeting.

The convention's bylaws state, "In case of emergency or unusual circumstances, the Board of Directors (the 'Board') is empowered to change the time or place of meeting or cancel the sessions of the Convention."

The board will consider the recommendation during its regularly scheduled September meeting.

Changes to this year's annual meeting became necessary after the convention canceled its

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Trump highlights Baptists on Mission during N.C. stop

Richard Brunson, executive director-treasurer of Baptists on Mission, addresses the crowd Aug. 24 at FLAVOR 1st Growers & Packers in Mills River, N.C., with President Donald Trump and Ivanka Trump sitting on the stage. The president was highlighting the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmers to Families Food Box program. (BSC photo by K Brown)

By DIANNA L. CAGLE | BR Assistant Editor

With a Baptists on Mission truck as a backdrop, President Donald Trump highlighted the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farmers to Families Food Box program Aug. 24.

Trump, along with his daughter, Ivanka, and Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue, toured the FLAVOR 1st Growers & Packers facility in Mills River, N.C.

"Today we're here to celebrate the incredible work of the farmers and faith leaders and amazing volunteers who are caring for their community through our highly successful Farmers to Families Food Box program," Trump said to a crowd gath-

ered on the facility's property.

The president announced an additional \$1 billion for the program, which has distributed more than one million pounds of food in North Carolina since it began.

"Through this program, the Department of Agriculture is purchasing food from farmers, then local distributors pack and deliver the boxes," Trump said. "And families in need get it, and they get to eat very well. We're tremendously grateful for the 185 employees here at this facility who have packed roughly 7,000 boxes a week."

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Evangelical leaders urge Ivanka Trump to help migrant children

By LIZ TABLAZON | BR Assistant Editor

Leaders of 16 evangelical organizations signed a letter to first daughter and presidential adviser Ivanka Trump Aug. 24, asking her to leverage her influence in the Trump administration to protect unaccompanied migrant children from the dangers of child trafficking.

"As Christians who believe the biblical truth that

each human life is made in the image of God and should be treated with dignity, we abhor the crime of human trafficking," the letter read. "We also acknowledge a particular mandate from God to protect children who are uniquely vulnerable."

Earlier this month the Justice Department announced more than \$35 million in housing assistance grants to nonprofit organizations that aid

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Q-Anon: The rise of 'restless evil'

The conspiracy theory “Q-Anon” has been in the headlines lately. A few years ago it was an internet phenomenon known only to those familiar with the web’s most unruly message boards. But today there are people openly flirting with the movement from the country’s highest political platforms.

Recent news stories have noted its growing influence in evangelical circles. I have personally observed Southern Baptists sharing Q-related content on their social media channels, some of them in positions of leadership.

Despite Q-Anon’s stint in the limelight, Christians should reject the movement’s fanatical and dangerous messages. Below is a brief description of Q-Anon followed by four reasons I believe the movement threatens our public witness if Southern Baptists consume and share its content.



SETH BROWN
BR Executive Editor

edly classified information couched in military-like jargon.

These messages are known as “Q drops.” Followers crowdsource interpretations of Q’s revelations in discussions on online forums, social media interactions, YouTube videos and podcasts.

The tangled web of speculation has its origins in the 2016 presidential campaign season.

The most famous Q drop occurred Oct. 28, 2017 under the title “Hillary Clinton Extradition.” The 66-word message was posted on a notoriously uncensored forum called “4chan.” It claimed federal officials were in the process

of arresting then-presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and National Guard troops were mobilizing in major cities across the U.S. to mitigate potential riots.

The false information traveled far and wide as social media users shared the inflammatory rumor with the help of memes. Memes (pronounced “meems”) are pithy, provocative or humorous images with text that can be easily shared on social media.

Q claims to be on a heroic mission to “wake up” Americans to the deep state’s evil plans while rallying “digital soldiers” behind the hope that a “Great Awakening” or “Storm” is coming.

Many Q followers believe President Trump will soon expose the dark conspiracy and oversee mass arrests, vindicating the movement as a patriotic rescue operation.

“Where we go one, we go all” is their mantra, often repeated through the hashtag #WWGIWGA.

Thousands of social media accounts have been created to promote Q-related ideas. Self-styled documentaries on Youtube are commonly used to convert viewers to Q-Anon beliefs.

This process is known as taking the “red pill,” a reference to a well-known scene from the 1999 film “The Matrix.”

Is it a harmless obsession or a real danger?

Engagement with Q ideas may begin as a preoccupation with political nitpicking, but the movement can lure followers into a toxic worldview and lead to potentially dangerous behavior.

The most widespread danger of Q-Anon has been its followers’ ability to effectively spread a high volume of false information on popular websites like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Marc-André Argentino, a scholar who has studied the conspiracy theory since 2018, said Q-Anon content on Facebook has increased more than 650% since March 2020.

Q-related ideas, such as “COVID-19 is a hoax to control the 2020 election,” are often laundered through social media accounts that look relatively normal, sometimes posing as credible news outlets. In other cases, individuals share Q-related content unwittingly, without understanding its origin.

A rumor circulated online earlier this year claiming that a Samaritan’s Purse field hospital in New York City’s Central Park was part of a Trump-led sting operation to rescue children being held in underground tunnels for the purpose of sex trafficking and organ harvesting.

The field hospital was actually part of the organization’s emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A spokesperson for Samaritan’s Purse told Politifact the rumors were “totally false.”

Radicalization is another danger of Q-Anon. Two researchers writing for West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center said, “Q-Anon is arguably no longer simply a fringe conspiracy theory but an ideology that has dem-

onstrated its capacity to radicalize to violence individuals at an alarming speed.” They noted five criminal cases where violent acts were related to Q-Anon ideology.

In December 2016, a 28-year-old man named Edgar Maddison Welch from Salisbury, N.C. drove to a pizzeria in Washington, D.C. in an attempt to raid an alleged child sex ring operated by Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign.

“The world is too afraid to act and I’m too stubborn not to,” he texted a friend two days before embarking on his misguided journey.

Welch entered the Comet Ping Pong restaurant with an AR-15 rifle and a handgun to “self-investigate” the alleged crimes. He was under the impression that enslaved children were being held in the basement of the pizzeria based on videos he binge-watched on YouTube. He fired three shots. Thankfully, no one was injured.

The father of two with reported ties to Baptist life was there to confront evildoers, but discovered the restaurant had no basement and no child slaves. He surrendered peacefully after realizing his error. In 2017 he was sentenced to four years in prison.

Welch believed a conspiracy theory known as “Pizzagate,” a precursor to Q-Anon. Online forum users combed through a massive trove of emails, owned by Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta, that were leaked in 2016 by a group called “Wikileaks.”

Pizzagate followers were convinced they had discovered coded messages that revealed the existence of a child trafficking operation. They interpreted dinner party related conversations about pizza and pasta as pedophilic sexual preferences for young girls and boys.

A memo published by the FBI on May 30, 2019 designated Q-Anon, Pizzagate and similar conspiracy theories

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As annual meeting plans progress, final decision rests with board

BSC Communications

The last time I wrote to you, I shared that Baptist State Convention leaders were exploring various options for this year's annual meeting. Following recent actions taken by our executive committee, I want to provide you with an update of where things currently stand and where we are in the process.

Hopefully most of you have heard by now that the executive committee endorsed a plan during a conference call on Aug. 25 that recommends to the board of directors for this year's annual meeting be a one-day meeting from 1-5 p.m. on Tues., Nov. 10, at First Baptist Church of Charlotte.

Please be advised that those plans remain tentative until the board considers the recommendation at its next meeting, which is scheduled for Mon., Sept. 28. According to our bylaws, any decision related to changing the date, time or location of the annual meeting falls under the governance and authority of the board of directors.

The proposal that the executive committee endorsed had the unanimous support of the execu-

tive leadership team at the state convention, as well as the elected officers of the convention and the elected officers of the board. Convention leaders and officers have explored a variety of options for the annual meeting, had numerous discussions and spent much time in prayer before arriving at a consensus and presenting that plan to the executive committee to consider.



MILTON A. HOLLIFIELD JR.
BSC executive
director-treasurer

During our discussions, convention leaders and officers agreed that there was merit and value for moving forward with plans to conduct an annual meeting this year. While recognizing that attendance will likely be significantly less than what we are accustomed to, some officers expressed that they have heard from numerous N.C. Baptists who are looking forward to attending an annual meeting should one be held.

If the board approves plans for an annual meeting this year, it will look much different than any annual meeting we have had in our lifetimes, but it will contain many of the elements that we are used to seeing.

While there are certain business matters we must attend to, it will be more than just a business

IN FOCUS

A WORD FROM OUR LEADER

meeting. There will be music. There will be worship. There will be preaching. There will be celebrations and reports of what God is doing in and through North Carolina Baptists, even in the midst of a global pandemic. The annual meeting theme of "God's Great Hope," which is based on Romans 15:13, is especially fitting and appropriate this year.

Please continue to be in prayer for the leaders and officers of the convention, as well the upcoming board meeting in September. In addition to a decision regarding annual meeting, the board members will also consider several other important business items on the agenda. Please continue to watch for further updates through the convention and annual meeting websites at ncbaptist.org and ncannualmeeting.org, respectively, and through the *Biblical Recorder*, as well.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" – Romans 15:13 (NKJV).

EDT search team outlines candidate profile

By SETH BROWN | BR Executive Editor

The search committee to find the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina's (BSC) next executive director-treasurer met, Aug. 17 at Caraway Camp and Conference Center near Asheboro, N.C., to develop resources that will help the team communicate its vision for potential candidates.

"We want anybody and everybody to recommend folks they think are qualified," said committee chairman Noah Crowe, who serves as interim pastor at Peachtree Memorial Baptist Church in Murphy.

A statement released by the nine-

member team said the ideal candidate "demonstrates faithful commitment to the absolute authority of the Bible, as well as a faithful walk with God that is reflected in his character, integrity, wisdom and prayer habits."

The message also emphasized their desire to hear from candidates who are devoted to missions, diversity and the Cooperative Program, among other values.

Crowe told the *Biblical Recorder* in a phone interview that the group will develop a more detailed profile and questionnaire for potential candidates in the coming weeks. He welcomed "thoughts, input and especially recommendations" from individuals

across Baptist life, such as laypersons, deacons and associational mission strategists.

Crowe emphasized the importance of hearing from others in a time when traditional "listening sessions" are difficult due to restrictions on large gatherings amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Committee members reaffirmed their Sept. 30 deadline for receiving recommendations during the meeting.

All recommendations must be submitted at ncedt@ncbaptist.org, according to the search committee.

Michael Sowers, pastor of First Baptist Church in Buies Creek, was

selected to serve as the prayer coordinator during the meeting. Each member was asked to select three prayer partners for the duration of the search process. Time is set aside during each meeting for prayer. Sowers will lead that initiative.

The group previously named Allan Blume as vice chairman, Pam Young as recording secretary and Teresa Jones as an alternate recording secretary to fill in if needed.

The search committee's next scheduled meeting will take place Aug. 31 via video conference. Updates on the executive director-treasurer search process can be found at ncbaptist.org/edtsearch.

Rebekah Naylor named first female distinguished professor at SWBTS

By ALEX SIBLEY | SWBTS

Rebekah Ann Naylor, a longtime medical missionary to India, has been appointed distinguished professor of missions in the Roy J. Fish School of Evangelism and Missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), the school's administration announced Aug. 20.

She is the first woman to hold such a

position at the seminary.

"The late Robert E. Naylor, our fifth president, began the tradition of pronouncing upon new students and faculty the worthy name of 'Southwesterner,'" SWBTS President Adam W. Greenway said. "And in my estimation there are few individuals more worthy to wear this distinctive appellation than his own daughter."

After graduating from Baylor University

with a bachelor's in chemistry in 1964, she completed her doctor of medicine degree at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville in 1968. Her surgical training was completed 1973. She was deployed to Bangalore, India, through the International Mission Board as a surgeon, evangelist and church planter. She worked at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas and Baptist Global Response.



REBEKAH NAYLOR

ERLC digital event condemns Muslim oppression in China

By LIZ TABLAZON | BR Assistant Editor

Human rights advocates and Southern Baptist leaders are calling for awareness and tangible action in response to increasing persecution of ethnic and religious minorities in China.

During a webinar on “China’s Rising Threat to Human Rights” hosted by the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) Aug. 21, panelists examined the experience of Uighur Muslims in the western province of Xinjiang. Since 2017, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has detained more than 1 million Uighur and other Muslims in what the CCP calls “educational training centers.”

Panelists described the centers as concentration camps, where Uighurs are kept from practicing their faith, and the CCP enforces government surveillance, ideological reeducation, birth control and compulsory labor.

Samuel D. Brownback, U.S. ambassador at large for International Religious Freedom, called the treatment of Uighurs “the cutting edge of religious persecution.”

“They could now, theoretically, close all the concentration camps, and you would still live in a virtual police state if you were a Uighur in Xinjiang,” Brownback said.

Nury Turkel, an Uighur American attorney and member of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, said the “conduct by the Chinese government” may rise to the level of crimes against humanity. He listed key elements that define such crimes, according to international law: the act must be part of a widespread systematic attack; the attack must be against a civilian population;



and the attack must be launched on discriminatory grounds, including religion and ethnicity.

ERLC President Russell Moore qualified Christian advocacy as support for religious minorities rooted in an understanding of Scripture and human dignity. From the story of Cain and Abel to the Good Samaritan, Christians see the “responsibility to have mercy upon this person as a fellow image bearer of God,” he said.

Moore said totalitarian regimes count on power, wealth and economic consequences to intimidate the rest of the world into silence.

“We ought to be the people who recognize that there are things greater than power and money – the image of God and the humanity of our fellow human beings.”

Rushan Abbas, founder and executive director of the Campaign for Uyghurs, shared her own experiences of family members being taken from their homes and to internment camps. She spoke of the CCP’s oppressive actions toward women in particular, citing data that have shown drops in birth rates because of forced sterilization and abortions.

Many women that do live in their own homes but whose husbands are at a labor camp are vulnerable to sexual abuse and forced marriages, which are designed to assimilate and colonize Uighur communities, Abbas said.

Abbas asked participants to educate others, understand personal complicity and join in directive, specific action to defend Uighur Muslims.

“As an Uighur Muslim, as an Uighur woman, I’m asking Christians and the leaders in your society to help us,” she said.

Authoritarians also count on tribalism, Moore told participants. He cautioned them against ignoring the oppression of religious communities outside their own faith.

“It is our problem,” Moore said. “We have to be the people who recognize the image of God in all of humanity.”

Moore challenged churches to pray together by mentioning Uighur Muslims and other persecuted peoples by name, “not only to appeal to God together, but also to shape and to form the consciences of those who are hearing here.”

The ERLC recently affirmed support of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act introduced by Congress. The legislation would prohibit goods made with forced labor in Xinjiang or by entities using Uighur labor forcibly transferred from Xinjiang from entering the U.S. market. It also instructs the U.S. government to impose sanctions on foreign individuals who knowingly employ or utilize forced labor of Uighurs or other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang.

Travis Wussow, ERLC’s vice president for public policy, moderated the panel discussion. 

N.C. churches utilize facilities for remote learning

By LIZ TABLAZON | BR Assistant Editor

As the 2020-21 school year kicks off with students in and outside of the classroom, North Carolina Baptist churches are opening their spaces to aid with remote learning.

First Baptist Church (FBC) of Cornelius, in partnership with the Make an Impact Foundation in Davidson, N.C., turned its fellowship hall and educational building into one of several sites for Make an Impact’s Camp EDvantage, which provides free and safe access to remote learning.

“Our primary resource is our location – we’re right in the heart of old town Cornelius – and our buildings,” said David Judge, pastor of FBC Cornelius. “We partner with other ministries in order to leverage what we have with what they have to support folks.”

Judge said he was contacted by someone from the community who

wanted to help students without adequate internet access or a safe environment to learn. The church was able to get internet installed throughout the buildings just in time for classes to start Aug. 17.

Seventeen students registered and came to the church when Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools started Aug. 17, and Judge said they expect the group to grow. Camp EDvantage volunteers oversee registration and provide support for students, though they do not teach or tutor. They follow all recommended guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to reduce the risk and spread of COVID-19, including providing hand sanitizer, requiring masks and seating children or families at tables at least six feet apart.

FBC Cornelius is also partnering with Angels and Sparrows Soup

Kitchen to provide free lunch for the students every day. In March, the church worked with the Neighborhood CARE Center in Cornelius, which distributed free lunches for as long as schools were closed. Church members prepared sandwiches, which the care center then delivered to students. Angels and Sparrows then continued providing meals throughout the summer and now, through the school year.


Judge, whose children attend Cornelius Elementary School just blocks away from the church, said his family was quickly able to transition to online learning when schools first closed in the spring.

“We know there’s a great number of kids out there, somewhere around 10% of the school population, who fell off the grid when the schools closed in March,” he said. “Those are the kids we’re hoping to reach.”

In nearby Matthews, Team

Church announced on its website that it opened its auditorium to offer WiFi and a chance for some socialization for middle and high school students Aug. 31. Church volunteers will serve as room monitors. Cost is \$20 per student for the semester.

First Baptist Church of Hendersonville launched Remote Learning Camp Aug. 24. The church will open one week after classes start to give students and parents time at home to get set up online and understand expectations from teachers, according to a Facebook post. Cost is \$10 per student per day.

Pilot Mountain Baptist Association recently received information from Forsyth County schools about the need for volunteers and host facilities for remote learning. A staff member wrote in an email to the *Biblical Recorder* that the association is reaching out to local churches about the opportunity. 

State conventions work together to offer one-day women's training event

By TESS SCHOONHOVEN | Baptist Press

In light of COVID-19, many Baptist state conventions have canceled onsite women's training events. But seven conventions have joined together to develop a virtual event this fall to provide encouragement and training for women in ministry.

The result – a training event called “One Day. One Focus.” – will be held Oct. 29 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. CST.

“We want women to recognize God has gifted them to serve just as it says in Ephesians 4, for the equipping of the saints,” event co-coordinator Ashley Allen said.

“It's for the unity of the body. So regardless of where we serve, we are to be unified in accomplishing one goal, and that's making disciples. Every part of the body is needed. We need every woman serving as God has gifted her, in order to make disciples.”

Allen, who works in women's ministry for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, joined



other leaders Simone Lake with the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention, Beverly Skinner with the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, Carmen Halsey of the Illinois Baptist State Association, Amy Cordova with Oklahoma Baptists, Melanie Ratcliffe of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, Laura Taylor with the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention and others to plan the event.

Registration is \$10 per person.

This includes access to all the sessions, led by more than 15 different women's ministry consul-

tants from various state conventions. Sessions will be available for the remainder of 2020 through the website.

The theme scripture for the event will be Ephesians 4:1-16, with an emphasis on discipleship.

Author Susie Hawkins will deliver the keynote address; Emily Rhyder of Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., will lead worship.

Wives of North American Mission Board (NAMB) church planters and women serving with the International Mission Board (IMB) will also hold breakout sessions.

The registration fee will be waived for up to 500 women from each of these groups.

While the majority of the event will be pre-recorded, Allen said speakers will be available for live chat with attendees during their breakout sessions, and there will be a live “exhibit hall,” which will include SBC seminaries, NAMB and IMB participating from respective cities.

To register or to find out more details, visit accevents.com/e/onedayonefocus.

IMB issues statement regarding Aderholt investigation

Baptist Press

The International Mission Board (IMB) has issued a statement which it says clarifies and corrects previous statements made by the IMB that appeared in articles published in July 2018 in Baptist Press.

The articles, published July 16, 2018, and July 18, 2018, concerned sexual

crimes committed by former IMB missionary Mark Aderholt against a teenager in 1996-'97, before Aderholt joined the IMB.

Aderholt pleaded guilty in July 2019 to assault causing bodily injury crimes that occurred in 1996 against Anne Marie Miller, who was 16 at the time. She testified in court that she met Aderholt while searching AOL

for help organizing a See You at the Pole event during her junior year in high school. Aderholt, then a 25-year-old Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary student, responded to her online search.

Aderholt was employed by the IMB from 2000-08. The IMB currently employs more than 3,600 personnel worldwide. Aderholt later was a staff member at two Arkansas churches. He was arrested in the Miller case in 2018 in South Carolina, where he had served on staff at the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

In 2018, then-IMB President David Platt issued a public statement of apology to Miller. At that time, an IMB spokesperson said Platt had also spoken privately with Miller

before releasing the statement. Platt also announced two independent investigations of IMB's handling of any past sexual abuse allegations and its policy of zero tolerance for sexual abuse. In May 2019, current IMB President Paul Chitwood reported he also apologized to any victims of sexual abuse perpetrated by “anyone associated with IMB.”

The statement acknowledged the organization did “not do all we could do to support Mrs. Annie Marie Miller and take action to report, or encourage her to report.”

The IMB asks any victims to contact its confidential hotline at (855) 420-0003 or email advocate@imb.org.

The full statement is available at BRnow.org.

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pcozadd@ncbaptist.org

LifeWay cuts budget, plans for ‘bridge year’ in 2021

By CAROL PIPES | LifeWay Christian Resources

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, trustees of LifeWay Christian Resources unanimously approved a \$210 million budget Aug. 25 for the 2020-2021 fiscal year that includes reductions of 17% year over year.

LifeWay President and CEO Ben Mandrell told trustees that because of declining sales and loss of revenue related to cancellation of summer camps and women’s events, LifeWay projects missing its budgeted revenue for the 2019-2020 fiscal year by \$61 million, which would result in a net loss of \$21.7 million.

In April, LifeWay instituted spending reductions of approximately 10%, which included staff reductions, a freeze on all hiring and discretionary spending, and suspension of salary increases and matching 401K contributions for all employees. In addition, members of the executive leadership team gave up one month’s salary beginning in May.

Mandrell noted that cost savings enacted in April have somewhat mitigated the impact to LifeWay’s bottom line. Still, the organization will end the year with a significant net loss, he said. Mandrell reminded trustees that LifeWay had been on a growth trajectory prior to the impact of COVID-19.

“We did not see this season coming, but we are responding as we

should with cost-saving measures in place, with a close eye on our cash position, preserving the future of the company,” Mandrell said. “We’ve been serving the local church for 129 years, and we are making plans to be around at least 129 more.”

Despite a challenging year, LifeWay’s cash position remains strong and the organization is nearly finished with paying off the leases from the stores.

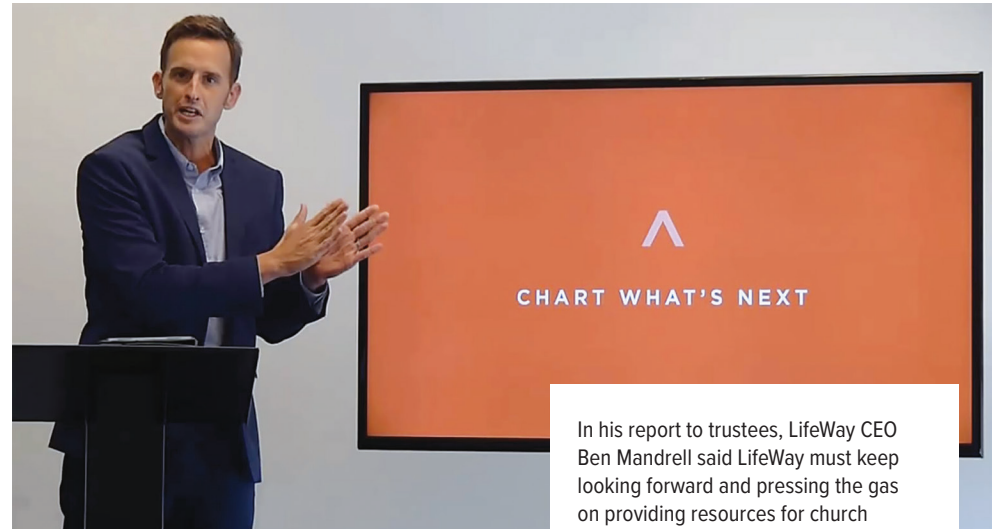
Mandrell said the organization is planning for the negative impact from COVID-19 to stretch into the first two quarters of FY21.

“It is a wait-and-see situation, but this hasn’t stopped us from looking down the road and plotting the course for the future,” Mandrell said. “Jesus said that even the gates of hell could not hold back the advance of the local church. As long as LifeWay remains close to the body of Christ, adapting to her needs, there is a future for us.”

As for what’s in that future, Mandrell sees a revived church, an acceleration of online products and services from LifeWay, as well as a laser focus on the organization’s core customer: church leaders.

Mandrell told trustees that the COVID-19 crisis had pushed churches to move online and utilize technology like never before.

“In the coming years, church leaders will conduct far more ministry



In his report to trustees, LifeWay CEO Ben Mandrell said LifeWay must keep looking forward and pressing the gas on providing resources for church leaders that help fuel their ministries. (LifeWay photo)

online, unafraid to harness the technology that got us through a global pandemic,” Mandrell said.

“LifeWay must press the gas to the floor when it comes to developing digital products as well as creating a frictionless online experience. These discussions are top-priority for our team and now is the season to pour great energy into *lifeway.com* – improving the look, feel and functionality.”


During the meeting, trustees approved a budget for FY21 that has revenue of \$210 million and a net loss of \$8.6 million. CFO Joe Walker explained to trustees that they are budgeting FY21 as a “bridge year” to FY22 and will be closely monitoring expenses and revenue.

Mandrell also shared an update on the sale of Ridgecrest Conference Center and Camps reporting that LifeWay had received several proposals by potential buyers. They have narrowed the offers down to

three finalists – each of which have stated their intention to build on the legacy of Ridgecrest and continue the ministry.

“We are very grateful to God for bringing such wonderful groups to us,” Mandrell said. “We are more convinced than ever that this decision will result in a greater kingdom impact for both LifeWay and Ridgecrest.”

The executive leadership team is continuing the feasibility study on the future use of the corporate office building begun in mid-April, Mandrell told trustees. He said a final decision to downsize LifeWay’s headquarters had not yet been made. “I believe passionately the people we serve and the churches we supply must be the driving force for this decision.”

The next LifeWay trustee meeting is scheduled for Jan. 25-26, 2021. 

Townes announces retirement from SBC Executive Committee

By JONATHAN HOWE | Baptist Press

William “Bill” Townes, CFO of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee (EC), announced his retirement from the post effective Dec. 31. Townes and his wife DeAnna will relocate to Georgia to assist with care for their special needs grandson who faces significant life challenges due to his genetic conditions.

“I have had the honor of serving Southern Baptists for nearly 30 years both in my local church and denominationally, including the Georgia Baptist Mission Board, the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board, before coming to work with the SBC Executive Committee nearly a decade ago,” Townes said in his resignation letter. “During that time, I have had the privilege to stand on the shoulders of faithful servants who came before me and work alongside dedicated men and women who love the Lord and love serving Southern Baptists.”


In his role as CFO, Townes’ duties included oversight of the financial operations of the EC and the organization of the SBC annual meeting.

“The loss of Bill Townes on our team is challenging for everyone here and also for the SBC,” said Ronnie Floyd, EC president and CEO. “He is a trusted, proven leader God used in so many ways – always doing his job with excellence, integrity and the highest competency. I will miss working with him as he has become a dear friend and partner in ministry to me. Please pray for Bill as he transitions to giving his focus on his calling to his family, but also pray for the Executive Committee as we seek the Lord for who God is preparing to assist us with this great need in our Convention.”

Townes joined the EC in December 2010 and was named vice president for convention finance in February 2011. During his time with the EC, Townes

has been the lead innovator for the SBC annual meeting. He led the expansion of the exhibitor policy resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings for the EC. He launched an app for the event, negotiated new contracts with host cities, and oversaw the development of updated technology used at the event.

He brought that same innovation to the workplace with new travel management, human resources and expense reporting systems, which came online in the past year. Townes also provided counsel to several SBC entities and state CFOs throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the related time of financial uncertainty.

Born in the Central African Republic to missionary parents, Townes is a licensed Certified Public Accountant and an ordained Baptist minister. Prior to his time with the EC, he served as an interim pastor, college professor and camp and conference center director. 



BILL TOWNES

Send Relief delivers supplies for Hurricane Laura response

By **BRANDON ELROD** | North American Mission Board/Baptist Press

Send Relief, the compassion ministry of Southern Baptists, spent Aug. 28 delivering food and supplies for Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDR), beginning the morning in Beaumont, Texas, and making a final stop in Lake Charles, La., in the early afternoon.

Once Hurricane Laura made landfall early Aug. 27, Lake Charles endured the brunt of winds that reached 140 miles per hour. Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief will station some of their operations at Trinity Baptist Church in the heart of the town.

“There is no electricity anywhere in the city,” said Sam Porter, national director for SBDR with Send Relief and the North American Mission Board. “Some have said it looks like a hundred tornadoes landed in Lake Charles two nights ago. As we drove in with the truck from Send Relief, we had to dodge debris on the main road in to the church.”

Before arriving in Lake Charles, Send Relief stopped at North Orange Baptist Church in Orange, Texas, to drop food and supplies for Texas Baptist Men, the SBDR team for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Carolyn Berry, an Orange resident, stopped by the church to request help from SBDR while Send Relief dropped off supplies. She and her family evacuated to Houston before Laura made landfall. She returned Aug. 28 and surveyed several downed trees in her yard, one of which landed on her roof.

“To come home and actually see the devastation, not only at my house, my house compared to some others is probably nothing,” she said. “I’ve seen trees actually through houses. I’ve seen trees blocking roads. There is a lot of devastation.”

Hurricane Laura was not the first major storm Berry had experienced.

“I recovered from Harvey just a couple months ago,” Berry said of the hurricane that hit the Texas Gulf Coast in 2017. “I just got my house straight from Harvey, and now I have this. It’s disheartening but thank God we have life.”

The rainy morning began with the Send Relief semi-truck pulling into Liberty Baptist Church in Bridge City, Texas. The Southern Baptists of Texas Convention will use the church as a hub for disaster relief ministry to the surrounding community.

Lee Jackson, pastor of First Baptist Church Cansonsburg, Ky., has a commercial driver’s license, which he earned during a stint between ministry positions. He drove the truck from a Send Relief ministry center in Ashland, Ky.

Jackson said that while he’s been on the road, he filmed a quick, livestream Wednesday night Bible study for his church, going through Baptist distinctives.

“This week just fell on evangelism and missions,” Jackson said. “So, it just worked out perfectly. I did a short video, short enough that I could post it to Facebook without a Wi-Fi connection. I did it from the cab of the truck.”

Send Relief stationed the truck in Ruston, La.,

Aug. 26 before traveling to Vidor, Texas, on Aug. 27 to begin delivering supplies from west to east, later arriving in the highly afflicted areas of southwest Louisiana and Lake Charles.


SBDR launched its relief efforts over the weekend, including providing meals and sending out chainsaw and rolled-roofing crews to help repair homes.

Baptists on Mission (BOM) sent a potable water tanker to Lake Charles Aug. 30 with a volunteer driver. The North Carolina organization thanked many volunteers who have expressed willingness to respond to this recovery effort.

The BOM’s Facebook page indicated Aug. 30 that it will likely be at least a week before it will be able to send teams.

“We think in a week we will be able to send teams to do chainsaw and roof tarping,” the post said. “Please be patient as the infrastructure to handle teams is being set up and operational. Right now there is no electricity or water which is hampering the set up of operation centers. Thanks for your understanding and patience as this is a slow process.”

Until volunteers can go from N.C., BOM officials invite people to donate online at baptistsonmission.org/donate. Checks may be mailed to Baptists on Mission, P.O. Box 1107, Cary, NC 27512. Please designate where you want the funds to be used.

For more information or to donate to overall Southern Baptist relief efforts, visit: sendrelief.org/Laura/. 

Virtual town hall highlights diverse African American perspectives in the SBC

Baptist Press

New York pastor Frank Williams sees in God’s pastoral call a broader application with the advent of COVID-19 and renewed cries for racial justice.

“This was the first time in all of my years of pastoral leadership that I felt the urgency to go beyond the preaching moment, in terms of addressing justice and issues of racial disparities in our city, in our country, and just being a voice and being a part of local protests as the church. I found that ... being a steward of justice is a pastoral responsibility and a church responsibility, that we are also stewards of justice.”

Williams, senior pastor of the Bronx Baptist Church and Wake Eden Community Baptist Church in Bronx, N.Y., shared the revelation during a virtual town hall hosted by the National African American Fellowship (NAAF) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Aug. 25.

“As focus shifted from the pandemic to the racial crisis in our land at the end of March, that compounded on top of the pandemic really created this kind of a moment and a season in our country that I have never experienced before,” said Williams, who also serves as NAAF vice president.

Addressing justice and racial disparities was one of many topics discussed during the town hall, including racism in the church and society, maintaining Christian behavior while engaging in politics, equity within the SBC, and the work and survival of the church during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NAAF President Marshal Ausberry, senior pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Fairfax Station, Va., and SBC first vice president, facilitated the town hall showcasing diverse insight and experiential wisdom from Williams and other African American leaders in various SBC posts.

Speakers included Jason Lumpkin, campus pastor of Woodstock Church

in Austell, Ga.; Fred Luter Jr., pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans and SBC president from 2012-2014; Connia Nelson, senior vice president of human resources for LifeWay Christian Resources; Trillia Newbell, director of community outreach for the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, and Kevin Smith, executive director of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

Luter, in addressing racism among Southern Baptists, recalled his election in 2012 as the first Black president of the SBC. Shortly after his election, ABC News featured him as Person of the Week, and President Barack Obama called to congratulate him.

“I’ve never said this publicly, but when I was elected as the president of the SBC, there were churches across the country that got out of the convention, that sent their letters in, and said that, ‘We will never be a part of convention where a black man is


president.’ That’s just crazy, yet these people say they’re going to heaven. So, it’s something that needs to be dealt with,” Luter said.

Lumpkin, the youngest pastor on the panel, said the perceived lack of a gospel witness to racial inequality threatens to distance younger pastors from the denomination.

“It seems like the denomination as a whole seems to look at the issue as maybe more of a passing project for some individuals and it’s kind of optional overall,” he said.

Newbell addressed Christian behavior in politics.

“Unfortunately, the two-party system has infiltrated the church, and it’s been ... idol worship for many of us. We’ve got to ask ourselves, are we bowing to the Lord or bowing to a political system,” Newbell said. She sees the gospel as politically transcending. “We need to buckle up because November’s going to be hard,” she said.

The full town hall is available at NAAFtogether.org/resources. 

Meeting Continued from page 1

contract with the Koury Convention Center on Aug. 7. That decision came two days after N.C. Gov. Roy Cooper issued an executive order that extended Phase 2 of the state's reopening plans until Sept. 11. The order limits attendance at mass gatherings to no more than 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors.

The extension of the order and lingering uncertainties related to when it would be relaxed or lifted made it infeasible to host this year's annual meeting at the Koury Center. The convention did not incur any penalties for canceling its contract with the Koury Center.

Following the cancellation of the contract, convention officials began exploring alternative options for this year's meeting. They consulted with several churches that would enable the convention to hold an annual meeting while maintaining social distancing and other health and safety measures.

After a series of prayerful conversations and conference calls, state convention officers, board officers and BSC executive leaders endorsed the recommendation for a one-day meeting that was presented to the executive committee.

Convention officials said if the plan is approved by the board, the annual meeting would include times of worship, preaching, ministry reports and business sessions. The meeting would include time to recognize BSC Executive Director-Treasurer Milton A. Hollifield Jr., who earlier this year announced his plans to retire effective Feb. 28, 2021.

This year's meeting would not, however, include an exhibit hall or special ancillary meetings normally held in conjunction with the meeting.

The annual meeting schedule and agenda is determined by the convention's Committee on Conventions Meetings, which is scheduled to meet Sept. 4 by conference call to formulate an alternative schedule based upon the executive committee's recommendation to the board.

"There are some things that we have to do in terms of business, but I believe that we can have a spiritually uplifting time," said convention president Steve Scoggins, who pastors First Baptist Church of Hendersonville.

"I believe the meeting program will be one that encourages people."

Micheal Pardue, convention first vice president and pastor of First Baptist Church of Icard, added, "There are a number of Baptists around the state who are really looking forward to (having an annual meeting)."

The annual meeting schedule has been altered at least one other time in history. According to convention records, the 1918 annual meeting was rescheduled from Dec. 5-7, 1918, to Jan. 14, 1919, "on the account of the influenza epidemic." The 1918 flu pandemic spread worldwide from 1918-19 and was first identified in the United States in the spring of 1918.

2021 budget proposal

In other business, the committee approved the proposed 2021 Cooperative Program (CP) budget totaling \$27 million that was presented by the Budget Committee at the July board of directors meeting. The proposal reflects an overall decrease of nearly 11.5%, or \$3.5 million, from the current 2020 budget.

The committee also approved a "challenge budget" that would direct any proceeds in excess of the 2021 CP budget amount to be allocated at 50% to the Southern Baptist Convention and 50% to state convention ministries.

The committee also approved a goal of \$2.1 million for the 2021 North Carolina Missions Offering (NCMO) and recommended that offering allocations remain unchanged from 2020. Those allocations include: 41% to N.C. Baptists on Mission, also known as N.C. Baptist Men; 28% to church planting; 15% to mission camps; 10% to associational missions projects; and 6% to mobilization ministry projects.

The full board of directors will consider the 2021 CP budget, the challenge budget, and the NCMO goal and allocations at its September meeting before those items go before messengers at this year's annual meeting, if the meeting is held.

Financial update

Beverly Volz, BSC director of accounting services, reported to the committee that churches have continued to remain faithful in their support of missions through the CP throughout the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. She also said the convention continues to operate in the black.

Volz said total CP receipts totaled

more than \$15.6 million as of July 31, which is about 14% behind the budget to date.

However, Volz added that total giving is only about 7.5% below gifts received through the same time period as last year.

Volz also shared updated giving receipts for special offerings. Through July 31, gifts to the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American missions totaled more than \$4 million, gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for international missions totaled more than \$9.8 million and gifts to the NCMO totaled more than \$551,000. September is the emphasis month for the NCMO.

EDT search update


Executive committee member Noah Crowe thanked the committee and N.C. Baptists for their prayers so far during the early stages of the search to identify the next BSC executive director-treasurer. Crowe is chairman of the search committee and also serves as intentional interim

pastor of Peachtree Memorial Baptist Church in Murphy.

Crowe said the committee has already received several recommendations to consider. The deadline for individuals to make a recommendation is Sept. 30, and recommendations must be submitted by email at ncedt@ncbaptist.org. More information may be found at ncbaptist.org/edtsearch.

Next meeting

The committee also voted to amend the schedule of the next board of directors meeting, which had been scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, Sept. 28-29 at Caraway Conference Center near Asheboro.

The board will now meet in an abbreviated one-day meeting on Monday, Sept. 28, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. During the meeting, the board will consider the recommended change to the annual meeting schedule, consider the 2021 CP budget, elect new board officers and elect new committee chairs. 

2020 N.C. Pastors' Conference canceled

Biblical Recorder

The 2020 North Carolina Pastors' Conference has been canceled, according to president Ronnie Parrott, lead pastor of Christ Community Church in Huntersville, N.C.

The event was scheduled for Nov. 8 at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, N.C., to occur in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Convention staff announced Aug. 7 that the annual meeting will not be held at the Koury Convention Center due to ongoing uncertainties about large gatherings related to COVID-19. N.C. Baptist officials are in the process of exploring alternative options for this year's annual meeting.

N.C. Pastors' Conference officer elections usually take place two years in advance of the term. However, due to this year's event cancelation, 2022 officer elections are now expected to occur at the 2021 N.C. Pastors' Conference.

The event's 2021 officers are president Roger Barnes, vice president Allen Murray, and treasurer John Campbell. 

ADVERTISE in the Recorder
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Stop Continued from page 1

Trump thanked Baptists on Mission (BOM) for its 200 pickup locations “across your great state.”

Richard Brunson, BOM executive director-treasurer, thanked all the many volunteers who have been coordinating and handling boxes at 200 N.C. sites.

“God is a good God, and God is always working for good,” he said, referring to Romans 8:28. “And God calls us to work for good in the lives of hurting people.”

COVID-19 caused many families to struggle “to meet basic needs, including putting food on the table,” he said.

“Being involved in the Farmers to Families Food Box program has given me a much greater appreciation for our farmers and what they do to feed us all. They’re some of our most essential workers.”

The boxes are helping so many people: “those that are shut-ins; those that are economically challenged; those who’ve lost a job; those who are suffering in so many different ways; a waitress who had lost her job; grandparents raising their grandchildren who are able to feed their family because of this program,” Brunson said.

“For many, it’s not just a box of food. It’s not just a box of produce. It’s a box of hope and love.”

In a statement to the *Biblical Recorder*, Brunson expressed appreciation for the president as well as Perdue for making the program possible.

“We have tremendous elected officials in our state and country on both sides who care deeply about hurting people and work with us to serve hurting people after a disaster,” he said.

“We must treat all people and all elected officials with respect, honor and kindness.”

Brunson said the organization has “always welcomed and been thankful for all elected officials who have visited our disaster relief sites. We have had tremendous support from elected leaders in our state and country, and we should never take this for granted.”

Ivanka Trump, senior adviser to her father, called the Farmers to Families program “truly a win-win-win program. Incorporating American farmers and ranchers, empowering our workforce, and serving families in need is – is about as good as it gets.”

She mentioned her visit after Hurricane Florence where she met volunteers serving through BOM. She “got to see firsthand the unbelievable work being done to take care of people in a time of need, which is not dissimilar to what this program was designed and intends to do and has been doing.”

BOM serves in many different capacities including disaster relief, medical/dental, agriculture, church renewal, missions, compassion ministries and more.

Visit baptistsonmission.org. 

NEWS BRIEFS

Webb to lead new Send Relief crisis response team

(Baptist Press) Coy Webb, longtime director of Kentucky Baptist Disaster Relief, has been selected to take the helm of Send Relief’s new crisis response arm.



COY WEBB

In February, the International Mission Board (IMB) and North American Mission Board (NAMB) announced a partnership to provide compassion ministry around the globe under the banner of Send Relief.

Webb, 63, has led Kentucky Baptist disaster relief efforts for more than 12 years. He previously served as pastor at churches in Tennessee, Kansas and Kentucky.

IMB President Paul Chitwood said a long-term relationship with Webb helped him know Webb was right for the role. “Having known Coy as a local church pastor and from working with him at the Kentucky Baptist Convention, I know well his love for the church, his passion for showing the love of Jesus to people who are hurting and his commitment to Southern Baptist cooperative missions,” Chitwood said.

Webb’s role begins Oct. 1.

‘Cares Well’ handbook now available in Spanish

(Baptist Press) Felix Cabrera’s wish for a Spanish edition of a resource for caring for the abused is now a reality among the churches he serves.

The handbook *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused* is newly available in Spanish. The 244-page book is part of the comprehensive training curriculum on preventing sexual abuse and ministering to survivors that also consists of 12 video lessons from experts in a variety of areas.

The curriculum is the result of a cooperative effort by the Sexual Abuse Advisory Group – established by Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear in July 2018 – and the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in collaboration with LifeWay Christian Resources.

“The Spanish-speaking churches in our convention need to learn how to avoid the abuse but also to create an environment to assist and serve the victims of abuse,” said Cabrera, executive director of the Convention of Southern Baptist Churches in Puerto Rico. Visit churchcares.com/.

Children Continued from page 1

human trafficking survivors. While announcing the awards, Ivanka Trump called human trafficking “the gravest of human rights violations.”

The signatories asked her to help ensure the provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) are again enforced. Passed in 2008, the TVPRA required that unaccompanied children apprehended at the U.S. border be transferred from the custody of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Signatories explained that the TVPRA ensured migrant children would be placed under temporary care and protected from threats of exploitation.

In March DHS suspended the protections, citing concerns related to COVID-19.

“Instead of being referred to the custody of HHS, which has trained capacity to care for traumatized, vulnerable children, unaccompanied children are being summarily expelled to their countries of

origin, sometimes after brief, unregulated stays in hotels,” the leaders wrote.

“These children are returned to situations where, tragically, many are at high risk of trafficking, violence and exploitation. Several of our ministries operate in Central America, addressing the root causes of migration such as violence, poverty and lack of opportunity.”

The leaders said they “believe our government can take appropriate precautions to minimize any public health concerns without disregarding the life-saving protections guaranteed by the TVPRA.”

Briana Stensrud, director of Women of Welcome and one of the leaders that signed the letter, told the *Biblical Recorder* human trafficking is “inextricably linked” to migration.


“Migrant children are especially vulnerable because vital community protections and family support systems are not present to ensure their safety and well being,” Stensrud said.

“Forced migration is usually a dangerous journey where families are dispersed and separated. The infrastructures that would normally protect children are fragile and broken down.

“This appeal for action and recognition of harmful border policies is incredibly important in order to re-engage our care and protection of vulnerable children who are seeking safety in the U.S. Evangelicals are pro-life people.

“This means migrant heartbeats matter just as preborn heartbeats do.

“We are compelled to lead on this issue from a biblical perspective, and we hope the Church will continue to join us.”

Other signatories included Scott Arbeiter, president of World Relief; Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals; Philip Langford, president of International Justice Mission U.S.; and Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. 

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Honor God

September 13

**Focal Passage: Exodus 20:7-11;
Psalm 145:1-7**

The clock hit zero, I looked around the room and everyone was in complete shock. No one was talking, but we all asked ourselves what just happened. It was April 4, 2016, and for some, you will remember what just happened. Villanova shot at the buzzer to beat Carolina in the National Championship game.

I remember in the aftermath of the game that no Duke fans felt bad for Carolina friends. I have not lived in North Carolina for very long, but I know this, Duke and Carolina never pull for each other. Why? We cannot label ourselves one thing and pull for something else.

The same is true when it comes to our Christian walk with God. When we look at the fourth and fifth commandments in Exodus we see that

we must “not take the Lord’s name in vain, and to remember the Sabbath.” Last fall we did a lesson on Sabbath rest. Let us look more at how do we not take the Lord’s name in vain.

When we think of this commandment, we normally think of it with regard to making sure we do not use God’s name in an unholy manner. Yet, it goes much deeper than that. We are to honor God’s name and everything about Him. We take the Lord’s name in vain if we call ourselves Christian and live differently than what He called us to live.

We are to honor God through our testimony and actions.

A true Child of God lives a life that honors God in the way he or she lives.

**Focal Passage: Exodus 20:12;
2 Samuel 15:7-14**

Funerals bring out the best and worst in families. One thing funerals often have in common is a time when a child speaks about their deceased parent. Normally they talk about his or her life, career and funny stories. The speaker does not usually share flippantly. They take time to prepare their words. Why do we put so much care into the eulogy? It’s a way of honoring our loved ones.

Many of us want to honor our parents when they pass away. I think that is why we need to understand the fifth commandment: “You shall honor your father and mother.”

There are many ways we are called

to honor them. For starters we are to honor them even after we have grown up and left the house, before they pass away.

Honor for parents is demonstrated through words and actions. In this lesson we will see the complete opposite of what we are called to do. King David had a son named Absalom; his son did many things that did not honor his father. He lied to his father to be able to kill Amnon.

In 2 Samuel 15 we see some crazy things taking place in this relationship. Absalom comes to his father and lies to him saying he needed to go out of the city. His father allows it, but Absalom goes out and gathers a large sum of men to come back into the city and overthrow his father.

David had to flee.

Honor acts with truthfulness towards parents. We need to be honest with our parents.



MATTHEW JACOBS
associate pastor, First Baptist Church, Crossnore

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

God Sends

September 13

Focal passage: Isaiah 6:1-13

When I was growing up, I loved to play all kinds of sports, even simple pick-up games. In those pick-up games, two captains would be chosen who would pick their own teams from the players who were available. You always knew the best players – those that could help a team win – were going to be picked first. Inevitably, there were those who were picked last. They were the ones with little ability and who were likely to hold the team back, or even cause the team to lose.

God did not choose Isaiah to serve His mission because Isaiah was sinless and strong. Isaiah wasn’t a holy man that God would send to wicked Judah. Isaiah was a sinful man that needed to be cleansed by a holy God. Isaiah needed God’s cleansing to be useful for God’s mission.

When God cleanses and transforms our lives, we are walking demonstrations of His power and glory at work in and through us. He then sends us, not in our ability and strength, but in His.

I’m afraid many Christians today, when it comes to being sent on God’s mission with God’s message (see 2 Corinthians 5:11-20), see themselves as those picked last. They think they are not nearly smart enough, or strong enough, or whatever, to be used by God. We fail to realize that God doesn’t send us on His mission because of our strength or ability. He sends us, knowing what He has done, and can do in and through us. The question is, in faith and surrender, will we say with our lives, “Here am I, send me.”



RANDY MANN
pastor, Central Baptist Church, Henderson

God Promises

September 20

Focal passage: Isaiah 7:7-17

“We will go tomorrow, I promise.” How many times have you said something like that to your children? In some cases, the statement may have been more of a diversion than a declaration, simply to get them off your back, at least for the moment, about something they wanted to do. It might have been, however, that you had every intention of making good on that promise, only to have something completely out of your control come up and prevent it from taking place.

In either case, the end result was the same – you did not see your promise through.

Such is never the case for God. Throughout the Old Testament, He

called His people to “remember” His past faithfulness as an encouragement to trust Him today.

God called Ahaz to remember His promises. He even gave Ahaz the opportunity to ask for a present sign that would ensure God’s faithfulness to fulfill His future promise of protecting Judah. But in pride and unbelief, Ahaz refused God’s offer. So, God responded by announcing a sign that would ensure the fulfillment of His ultimate future promise – the promise to send His Messiah, the Savior, who would be none other than the virgin-born Son of God.

When considering my promises to my children, I hope they remember and grade me on a curve. God’s track-record is perfect, as He is.

We can today, by faith, trust Him to do all He has promised to do. Will we, and will others see our trust in Him?

Q-Anon Continued from page 2

as domestic terror threats. Since then, social media outlets like Twitter and Facebook have been cracking down on accounts that spread such material.

Why should we denounce Q-Anon?

Southern Baptists should remain diligent and careful when sharing posts on social media or promoting certain causes because Q-Anon followers spread false information about issues that matter to our churches.

Here are four Q-Anon themes that overlap with genuine concerns for Southern Baptists:

Pedophilia & Human Trafficking

Q-Anon followers believe many of America's rich and famous secretly engage in child sex abuse.

They promote hashtags such as

#savethechildren and speak against human trafficking in ways that normalize their agenda and appeal to new recruits. Southern Baptists care about biblical sexuality and human dignity. We have developed initiatives and passed resolutions to speak to those issues. We must speak up for biblical values with wisdom and competence so that our message is not entangled with the baseless ranting of Q followers.

Moral Leadership

Southern Baptists have long called for character and integrity in the public square. We should continue to advocate for high moral standards from Hollywood to Capitol Hill. It's our responsibility to hold influential leaders and institutions to account when they fall short, but we cannot participate in spreading scandalous, conspiratorial

lies about public figures, even those we may oppose politically.

Media Fairness

Many Southern Baptists and other conservative evangelicals lament the way our worldview is represented in popular culture, especially in the news and entertainment industry. Too often liberal progressive views on issues like sexuality and gender are promoted while traditional and biblical views are mocked. That leaves some Southern Baptists with a general distrust of mainstream media outlets.

We should be careful, however, not to let our critiques of the media industry become enmeshed with those who make wild claims about worldwide schemes lurking behind every journalistic slight. Using slurs about mainstream media can blur the lines between substantive critiques and Q-Anon nonsense.

Truth

Q-Anon proponents claim to pres-

ent truths that have been hidden or covered up. A common refrain among followers is "do your own research." Yet, the supposed evidence presented is usually speculative at best and immediately falsifiable at worst. As Southern Baptists, we stake our reputation on the truth of scripture. To mix our messages with those that weaponize falsehoods for a political fantasy is devastating to our witness in society.

We must stand as Christians who care about truth and denounce conspiracy theories as a dangerous waste of time.

"For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." (James 3:7-10 ESV)

CLASSIFIEDS

Denomination

North Carolina EDT Candidate Search. The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina (BSCNC) is looking for the best person to lead the convention after the retirement of the current Executive Director-Treasurer (EDT), Milton Hollifield, on February 28, 2021. The EDT Search Committee welcomes the résumés of candidates by email. Recommendations must be submitted to ncedt@ncbaptist.org no later than September 30, 2020. The ideal EDT candidate demonstrates faithful commitment to the absolute authority of the Bible, as well as a faithful walk with God that is reflected in his character, integrity, wisdom and prayer habits. His ministry values must exemplify a clear vision for the Great Commission and a record of leadership that will motivate North Carolina Baptists to reach all generations and all ethnicities represented in the state. His commitment to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the Cooperative Program and the mission offerings of the SBC and BSCNC must be unquestionable.

Association

Neuse Baptist Association, serving the counties of Wayne, Lenoir, and portions of Greene and Duplin, is in search of a new **Director of Missions (DOM)**. Candidates should email a résumé with cover letter to the Neuse Association office at sec@nbachurches.com by the end of September 2020. Candidates must have pastoral and/or mission experience and a love for God's church. They must have a Southern Baptist background and affirm the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000. A master of theology or MDiv degree is preferred but not required.

Carolina Baptist Association in Hendersonville, NC, is searching for a **full-time Director of Missions**. Must meet biblical qualifications and hold to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. Résumés will be accepted until September 15, 2020. Email to cba1877@gmail.com or mail to 601 Hebron Rd., Hendersonville, NC 28739.

Pastor

Rutherford Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a **full-time/bivocational pastor**. We are a small, conservative, Southern Baptist church in Boone, NC. Rutherford is a friendly mission-minded church. We are seeking the man God has called and prepared for our church. Résumés should be sent to Rutherford Baptist Church, Attn: Pastor Search Committee, 142 Don Hayes Rd., Boone, NC 28607, or rutherford@bellsouth.net. Please include sermon links also.

Hallsville Baptist Church, Beulaville, NC, is prayerfully seeking a **pastor** to faithfully preach and teach the Word of God and lead our congregation. We are a mission-minded Southern Baptist church located in rural Duplin County. We have traditional Sunday School and worship services with average attendance of 50-70 with expectation to grow. The pastor will lead three services each week (Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday evening). Please send résumés to: Hallsville Baptist Church, c/o Pastors Search Committee, 1291 Hallsville Rd., Beulaville, NC 28518.

Church staff

El Bethel Baptist Church of Morganton, N.C., is seeking a **full-time Associate Pastor of Worship and Youth**. We are a Southern Baptist church who wishes to know Christ and to make Him known. We affirm the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and are looking for a leader with the ability to read music, lead a choir and lead a blended style of worship. Candidates should also be able to relate well with students and their families. Please send a résumé to worshipleadersearchbbc@gmail.com.

New Hope Baptist Church is receiving résumés for a **full-time Youth & Children's Pastor**. Send résumés to: New Hope Baptist Church - Attention: Search Committee, PO Box 116, Earl, NC 28038, or russandmo@aol.com.

Miscellaneous

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Falwell resignation made official after back and forth with Liberty board

By GEORGE SCHROEDER | Baptist Press

Liberty University's board of directors formally accepted the resignation of president Jerry Falwell Jr. on Aug. 25. The board's action brought closure to a public back-and-forth that occurred the day before as Falwell and board members released what appeared to be conflicting information to news outlets.

After multiple news reports on Aug. 24 said he had agreed to resign his position, Falwell denied the reports, calling them "completely false" – and the school followed late that evening with an email saying Falwell "agrees to resign ... then reverses course."

Liberty released a statement Aug. 25 saying the board had acted to ratify the resignation effective immediately.

Reports of Falwell's exit came amid allegations that he condoned an affair between his wife and a man described by Falwell as a family friend. The man, who was also a business partner, told Reuters that he had a sexual relationship with Becki Falwell from 2012-18, and alleged that Jerry watched their encounters.

In an interview Monday evening with *Virginia Business*, Falwell called the allegations "90% false."

"I call upon the University community and supporters to be in prayer for the University and for all its leadership, past, present and future, as we walk with the Lord through this stormy time of transition," said Jerry Prevo, Liberty's acting president.

Falwell, son of Liberty founder Jerry Falwell Sr., had been on indefinite leave since Aug. 7 after criticism for posting a photo to social media that showed him on a donor's yacht with his pants unzipped and his arm around a female Liberty employee. He told a local radio station the photo



JERRY FALWELL JR.

was taken during a costume party while he was on vacation.

The evening of Aug. 23, Falwell released a statement to the *Washington Examiner* claiming Becki had an "inappropriate personal relationship" in the past with a family friend who had threatened to go public. Falwell said he and his wife had faced "increasingly threatening behavior" including extortion. In the statement, Falwell also denied being involved in the sexual relationship. He described the situation, even after the relationship had ended, as "like living on a roller coaster" and a "'fatal attraction' type situation."

"Over the course of the last few months," Falwell said in the statement, "this person's behavior has reached a level that we have decided the only way to stop this predatory behavior is to go public."

Less than 24 hours later, the Reuters report was published.

Hours after that, several news outlets reported Falwell had agreed to resign – and shortly afterward, he denied it to *Virginia Business*.

Falwell became Liberty's president after his father's death in 2007 and presided over an era of tremendous growth for the university. Enrollment has grown from 38,000 to 100,000, and the school's athletics program has moved to the top level of NCAA competition.

The school's endowment grew to more than \$1.7 billion under Falwell's leadership, and he oversaw approximately \$1 billion in ongoing or planned construction on the 7,000-acre campus.

Prevo, who had been the chairman of the board of trustees, was named acting president Aug. 10. On Aug. 21, the board of trustees met and released a statement saying "the decision whether to retain Falwell as president has not yet been made," and requesting "prayer and patience as they seek the Lord's will and also seek additional information for assessment."

But in the email Aug. 24, Lamb wrote that since Falwell went on indefinite leave, the board of trustees had determined he should not return, writing that "additional matters came to light that made it clear that it would not be in the best interest of the University for (Falwell) to return from leave and serve as President."

(EDITOR'S NOTE – George Schroeder is associate vice president for convention news with the SBC Executive Committee. Biblical Recorder staff contributed reporting.)

NAMB asks full court to review panel's decision in McRaney case

By GEORGE SCHROEDER | Baptist Press

Citing a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board (NAMB) has asked the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for a hearing by the full court in order to reconsider a ruling in a lawsuit filed by a former executive of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

Last month, a three-judge panel of the 5th Circuit remanded the case to a district court, reversing a dismissal decision from April 2019 that stated the court could not consider Will McRaney's claims because of First Amendment legal precedent protecting churches and religious organizations from government interference.

McRaney was the executive di-

rector of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware from 2013 until June 2015. He filed suit in 2017, alleging that NAMB had intentionally defamed him and wrongly influenced his termination after a dispute over collaborative missions efforts in the region.

Hiram Sasser, executive general counsel for First Liberty Institute, which is representing NAMB, said the Supreme Court's decision in July in *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru* "made it clear that the Constitution protects religious organizations' independence and their right to choose their own leaders and ministers."

"There should be no doubt that religious denominations have the freedom to choose who is best suited to lead their organizations and ful-

fill their religious missions," Sasser said in a news release announcing the petition for a rehearing en banc (full court). "The 5th Circuit should dismiss this case immediately."

First Liberty Institute, the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious liberty, and Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr, a full-service international law firm, filed the petition on behalf of NAMB. Both law firms have extensive experience in defending religious liberty and are working pro bono.

"We hope that the 5th Circuit as a whole will take another look at this case because it will impact church autonomy," George McCallum, NAMB's legal counsel, said in a statement. "Religious organizations – whether NAMB or a state Baptist convention

or the local First Baptist Church – should be able to choose the leaders they believe are best suited to fulfill their religious mission."

NAMB has consistently disputed McRaney's claims, as has the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, which wrote in March 2016 that "any suggestion that the North American Mission Board or any of its officers influenced the separation of Dr. McRaney's employment from (the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware) is false."

Senior Judge Glen Davidson of the U.S. District Court Northern District of Mississippi dismissed the lawsuit in April 2019, ruling that courts did not have jurisdiction because of the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine.

McRaney appealed to the 5th Circuit.