

Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist

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Plans for Empower 2021 include simulcast, in person meeting

ROCHESTER, Minn. — Empower is on for this year, at a new location, offering an in-person meeting for those who can come, but also a virtual experience for those who can't.

“Living from the Overflow: Serving Out of Your Intimacy With God” is the theme of the Mar. 12-13 event which will be at the Great Wolf Lodge in Wisconsin Dells, Wis. The first session begins at 1 p.m. Friday and the last session ends at 11

a.m. Saturday.

All previous Empower conferences have been at Green Lake (Wis) Conference Center, including last year's event which was canceled at the last minute as government officials suddenly began imposing restrictions on large gatherings due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Empower planners have added a virtual option this year to avoid another cancellation as the pandemic continues.



Blackaby



Hunt

“Given the uncertainty of restrictions required by the pandemic, plans are being made for both an in-person socially-distanced meeting and a simulcast,” said Clint Calvert, church leadership catalyst for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention. “The simulcast will happen regardless. Even if the governor cancels large gatherings again, we can manage to pull off the

simulcast.”

The simulcast will include the three main conference sessions at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Friday and 9 a.m. on Saturday. In addition to making the conference accessible to those not attending in person, the simulcast will be shown in multiple areas at Great Wolf Lodge, increasing the event's capacity to 250 persons. For

See **EMPOWER** page 12

Date night checks coming in lieu of Pastors and Wives Retreat

ROCHESTER, Minn. — The annual Pastors and Wives Retreat is taking a year off because of COVID, but the state convention is sending pastors a little something to encourage them to do their own personal marriage enrichment.

“We will be sending out a check to every senior/solo pastor in the convention,” said

Leo Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention. “It is a gift of \$100 to help fund a special evening as a couple.”

The gift is provided through MWBC Cooperative Program gifts and through the generosity of Texas Baptists through their Mary Hill Davis State Missions Offering, he

said.

“Hopefully, next year, post COVID, we will be able to resume the retreat where we get away for rest, refreshment and encouragement,” he said. “Thank you Minnesota-Wisconsin pastors and wives for your ministry among us. We are grateful for you and will be praying for you!”

State Missions Offering
Goal: \$74,000

received
\$94,916

We've met our goal for the
first time in over 25 years!

Many of our smaller churches
gave huge gifts!

A retired MWBC staff person
gave \$1000

One small church gave \$5000!

One church gave over \$38,000

Hundreds of you made
sacrificial gifts

As a result, we will be able to
partially fund ministries that were
defunded last year by our partners

THANK YOU

FIRST-PERSON: Five things I learned from reading the Bible through in a year

DAVIS, Okla. (BP) – In 2019, I bought the CSB Day-by-Day Chronological Bible and attempted to begin in late March only to find myself lacking discipline, focus and good tactics. At the end of 2019, I knew I needed to read the whole Bible in 2020 and resolved that I was going to stick with it – a decision that changed my life.

Through reading the whole Bible, I realized many things about it and about myself that I would not otherwise have seen. If you're thinking about reading the Bible in 2021, or you've already started, here are five things I learned that might be an encouragement to you.

The Bible is long

In college, I read Les Misérables and deemed

it one of the greatest accomplishments of my life, but now I sit here having completed the world's greatest masterpiece, and I found the length of it, spread out over 52 weeks, completely manageable. For a society inundated with short, concise, dramatically flippant messages, reading through the Bible faithfully in a year takes discipline.

"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11, ESV).

The Bible is one big story

From Creation to New Jerusalem, through the law, prophets, poetry, gospels and letters, there is one



story: Christ Jesus and His mission to redeem creation. Jesus was foreshadowed by Adam and Isaac and Boaz and Elijah, and each, while sinful, raised anticipation for the fully perfect Christ to come. While inside the covers you'll find 66 books, they serve as one large picture of God's redemp-

tion plan for mankind.

"Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being;' the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45, ESV).

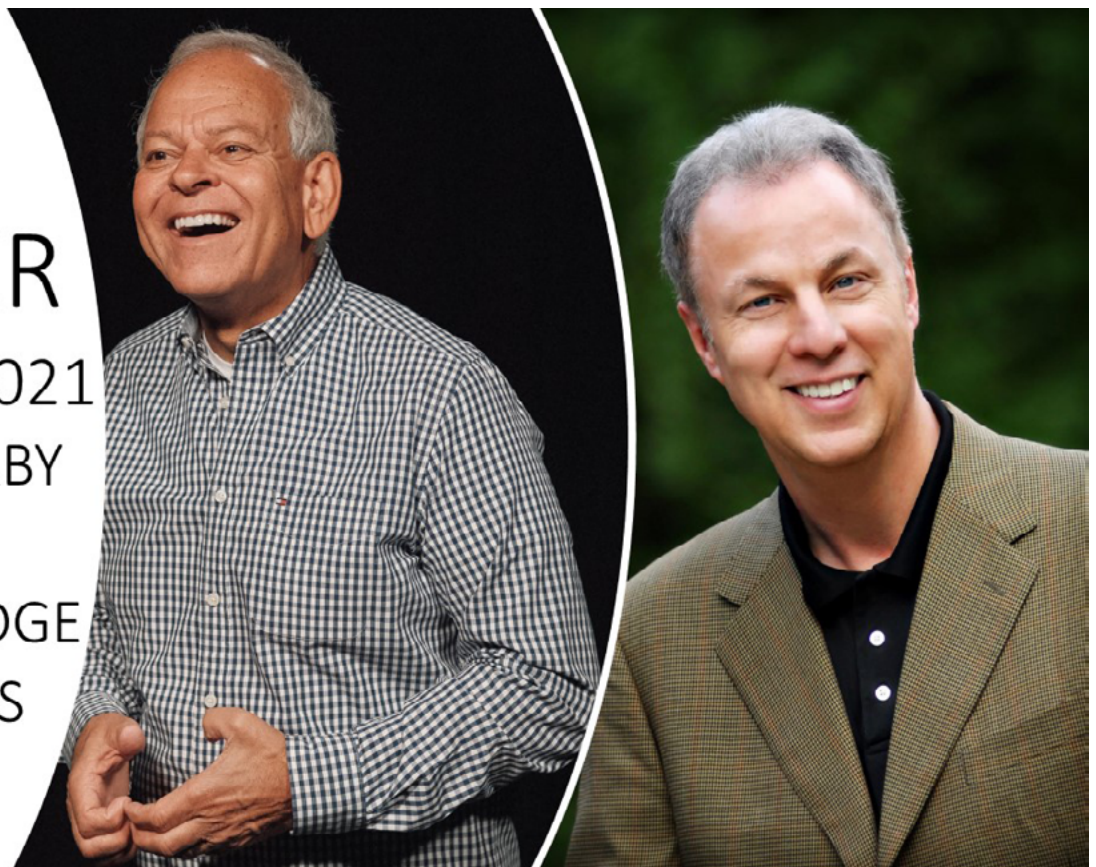
The Bible isn't arranged chronologically

If you're new to the

Bible, it's helpful to know that the Bible is not laid out chronologically. In fact, one of the things I liked about the Day-by-Day Chronological Bible is that as I read 1 and 2 Kings I was also reading 1 and 2 Chronicles where their content matched.

See **BIBLE** page 15

EMPOWER
March 12-13, 2021
RICHARD BLACKABY
JOHNNY HUNT
GREAT WOLF LODGE
WISCONSIN DELLS



Where do we go from here?

I thought I had an original title for my book but since its release in August I've noticed others have discovered the power of the question, "Where do we go from here?" Both LifeWay and Ronnie Floyd are using it to describe the crossroads at which we find ourselves in 2021.

It is difficult to know



Perspectives
Leo Endel

what is going on in the church today. Many churches in Rochester have not held public, in-person worship services since March. Nobody knows for sure how many people remain plugged in to churches like these. Barna

reported in July that "one in three practicing Christians has stopped attending church during COVID-19," citing a survey showing 32 percent of practicing Christians have neither attended live worship nor participated in online worship since March.

A lot has changed, and we're not sure what the impact of these last ten months will be. Where do we go from here?

Though I have no solid statistics on the subject,

the collective voice of my contacts within our churches is that these numbers do not accurately assess our churches. Perhaps smaller churches are more cohesive due to intimate personal relationships? Perhaps biblically committed believers, regardless of church size, understand the value and purpose of being committed to a biblical church? If this is true in your church, you may have a unique opportunity to reassess what you are doing and retool to reach your community for Christ as the COVID-19 restrictions ease.

Since the August release of my book, "Where Do We Go from Here?" I have seen a significant number of churches recognize the need to assess what they are doing and begin to make plans and implement strategies to reach their communities with

the gospel. The process is ultra-simple and is based on the biblical model, Acts 2, of what the biblical church is supposed to be doing. It is amazing what can happen when God's people take a serious look at the biblical model and compare it to their church.

Such a comparison helps us see what we are doing well and what we are not doing well and then think through different approaches for engaging our communities with the gospel.

I am not talking about a huge, overwhelming process! Old planning models are often aimed at large churches and take months to work through. Many times churches use up all their energy in

the planning process and then never do what they planned. The process I suggest is not formulated to help large, complex churches—it is formulated to help churches of 400 and under do a quick survey, formulate a proposed strategy, engage

that strategy, and then evaluate what happened. It keeps us from doing nothing and helps us try something to see if we can make a difference.

Too many

churches live within a seven-day cycle. We live and minister week by week doing the same things regardless of the fruitfulness. Too few of us break out of this

See **BOOK** page 10



The Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist:

- The state paper and official publication of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

- A Christian newsjournal with a focus on Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptists—their interests, churches, and partners.

- A digital only publication, the PDF emailed free to all who subscribe and posted on MWBC's website and Facebook page.

- Formatted for letter size paper for those who want to print a copy.

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A new year – Finally!

No year in my lifetime has been welcomed more than 2021.

Multiple vaccines have been approved with the promise that we will be able to put the COVID-19 threat behind us by mid-summer. Businesses are making plans to gear up for the recovery. Jobs are expected

to return. By fall we should be able to pack our stadiums and cheer on our favorite sports teams.

Once again, we will be able to travel. Family vacations, reunions and gatherings for Thanksgiving and Christmas

should return to normal by year's end.

A year ago, in this column, I wrote, "2020 rings

with the hope of perfect vision and a perfect year. But we already know it will have its challenges. . . 2020 will not be easy. It certainly will not be perfect."

To say that 2020 would not be easy and that it certainly would not be perfect proved to be a vast understatement. None of us could have predicted the pandemic that would shock and stun the world. This has been an unusually difficult year. While some have prospered, many have lost their jobs, strug-

gled with isolation and separation from family and friends. Restaurants, the travel industry, and live entertainment have especially been hit hard. More than 340,000 have died of COVID-19 related causes.

We still have a long way to go. The earliest vaccines are just now being administered, but we are hopeful. We have not given up. People remain resilient, perseverant, ready to pitch in and help those who

See **NEW YEAR** page 7



Reflections
Bill Tinsley

Is God calling you to be a missionary?

While COVID-19 continues to disrupt global travel, I am optimistic that our mission trip to Thailand in July will go on as planned. As of this writing, we have seven

individuals from four different churches committed to going.

I believe we will see great revival in Thailand. In these times of uncertainty, more and more people are looking for hope.

In the last decade, over a thousand new churches were started in Thailand.

However, the majority of the Thai people still do not live anywhere near a church. Please pray for more churches to be started so that the gospel can spread even beyond the borders of

Thailand.

The deadline for the Thailand trip is Jan. 31 with a \$250 deposit. If you are unable to go this time but would like to go on a future trip, please sign up for the prayer newsletter. You can apply or sign up for the prayer newsletter online at www.mwbc.org.

[org/sea-harvest](http://www.mwbc.org/sea-harvest). I am planning a second trip in 2022 to Thailand, as well as a separate trip to another Southeast Asian country. This country cannot be named for security reasons, but revival is also happening there.

The IMB has a goal to increase their missionary force by 500 fully funded missionaries in five years. My prayer is that our convention can contribute to this goal. Is God calling you to be a missionary? One way to find out is to go on a short-term mission trip with us.

Na Herr is intercultural catalyst/team facilitator for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.



Intercultural
Na Herr

The kintsugi of prayer

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together with lacquer dusted with gold or silver. It is based

on the idea that in embracing flaws and imperfections, you can create an even stronger, more beautiful piece of art. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kintsugi>)

We live in a culture that is broken – lives that are empty, marriages that are

wrecked, homes that are fragmented, relationships that are strained, politics that are polarized, society that is damaged. Every aspect of life today needs to be restored and renewed.

Perhaps through the art of prayer, aspects of life can be restored and renewed as well. Accepting our brokenness as a part of who we are, prayer can begin to repair and revitalize the fragments to make us “a new creation.”

In 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 we see that God has given us (and the church) the ministry of reconciliation: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:17-18, CSB)

Reconcile means to restore to harmony and to resolve differences. This is what is needed in our world today – the ‘kintsugi’ of prayer.

Steve Melvin is partnership and prayer catalyst for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.



Partnership and Prayer
Steve Melvin

Jumping hurdles in 2021

As we enter into 2021, leaving 2020 behind, we are faced with some new changes in the way that we minister through disaster relief. As always, change comes with its own hurdles. What has worked so well in the past must give way as we move forward in a different style.

The first hurdle will be our finances for this ministry. As the North American Mission Board has defunded states from their bud-

get, we must partner with our own churches for support of DR and every other mission that the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention supports.

The State Missions Offering is an important channel of support and I am excited to see that we have surpassed our initial goal for this year! That will provide us a foundation to build upon in the upcoming months.

Our second hurdle is the way we enlist and train volunteers.

Understandably, many are wary of traveling and meeting outside of their “bubble” due to COVID. This means that we are working with other state conventions to develop online training and certifications. Field trainings will be the most challenging.

Third is our administrative effectiveness. Kayla and I work from our home in Reedsburg, Wis., and our lifeline is in Rochester, Minn. Simple logistics are challenging. Mailers, forms, and other publications must continue to improve as we make the above changes. Your prayers, as always, are greatly appreciated for these needs.



Disaster Relief
Ben Seamans

In 2020, amidst COVID and other crises, MWBC responded to events in Minneapolis, Missouri and Louisiana. We also were able to disperse PPE supplies across Minnesota and Wisconsin to non-profits, ministries

and other VOAD partners. Pray as we prepare for 2021's needs through MWBC disaster relief.

Ben Seamans is co-director of disaster relief for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

The preventable tragedy of suicide

By Steve Dyess

Every suicide surprises us.

However, when a well-known pastor or any Christian public figure takes his or her own life, we move beyond surprise to shock. But the reality is that even pastors struggle emotionally and spiritually and sometimes feel so hopeless and helpless that they begin to see suicide as a solution.

If even our spiritual leaders are not exempt from suicide, then we must take the possibility of suicide very seriously.

Did you know that:

- Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death

overall in the United States, claiming the lives of over 47,000 people per year.

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 34, and the fourth leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 35 and 54.

- In 2018 there were more than twice as many suicides (47,173) in the United States as there were homicides (19,510).

- Suicide occurs across all age, economic, social, racial, and ethnic boundaries.

- In a recent year 1.3 million people attempted suicide but 9.8 million others also had

serious thoughts about committing suicide.

The most important fact about suicide is that suicide is preventable. Most suicidal individuals desperately want to live; they are just unable to see alternatives to their problems. What they need is for someone to help them find the alternatives.

Most suicidal individuals give definite warnings of their suicidal intentions. However, their friends and family members usually are either unaware of the significance of those warnings or do not know how to respond to them.

See **SUICIDE** page 6

PREVENTING SUICIDE

The Facts About Suicide

- It is generally estimated that there are 25 suicide attempts for each death by suicide.
- Between 25 and 50 percent of people who kill themselves had previously attempted suicide.
- Those who have made suicide attempts are at higher risk for taking their own lives.
- Each suicide intimately affects at least six other people (estimated).
- Talking about suicide does not cause someone to be suicidal.
- Suicide occurs across all age, economic, social, racial, and ethnic boundaries.
- Suicidal behavior is complex and not a response to one problem that a person is experiencing.
- Some risk factors vary with age, gender, or ethnic group and may occur in combination or change over time.
- Surviving family members not only suffer the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide, they may themselves be at higher risk for suicide and emotional problems.

The Warning Signs of Suicide

People who are in danger of harming themselves may try to reach out, sometimes directly or sometimes indirectly (a "cry for help"). Rarely will potential victims immediately volunteer the information that they are thinking of harming themselves. Instead, they often describe their concerns in terms of physical symptoms.

Warning signs indicate that the individual may be considering suicide. While there is no foolproof method of determining that someone is thinking of hurting himself or herself, the following signs might indicate that someone is considering suicide.

- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities
- Engaging in violent or self-destructive behavior
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Anxiety, agitation, being unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- Expressing feelings that life is meaningless or that there is no reason to live
- Insomnia
- Feeling desperate or trapped, like there is no way out
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life
- Diagnosed with a mental illness, particularly depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia

Some behaviors may indicate that a person is at immediate risk for suicide.

- Talking or writing about suicide, death or dying
- Giving direct verbal cues, such as "I wish I were dead" and "I'm going to end it all" (suicidal threats)
- Giving less direct verbal cues, such as "What's the point of living?" or "Soon you won't have to worry about me," or "Who cares if I'm dead, anyway?"

How to Respond to Suicide Signs

Most suicidal individuals give definite warnings of their suicidal intentions. If you suspect someone is thinking about suicide, assume you are the only one who will reach out. It is important to respond quickly and lovingly, asking about suicidal thoughts and behaviors in a non-judgmental and supportive manner, convincing the person to seek help, and following up to make sure the help is received.

Here is how to talk to someone who may be struggling with their mental health.

- Have an honest conversation
- Talk to them in private
- Listen to their story
- Tell them you care about them
- Ask directly if they are thinking about suicide
- Encourage them to seek treatment or contact their doctor or therapist
- Avoid debating the value of life, minimizing their problems or giving advice

If a person says they are considering suicide:

- Take the person seriously
- Stay with them
- Help them remove lethal means
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- Text TALK to 741741 to text with a trained crisis counselor from the Crisis Text Line for free, 24/7
- Escort them to mental health services or an emergency room

Planter as peacemaker

The Christian is called to be a peace maker. At the core of our mission is fostering the



Church Planting

Joshua Whetstine

peace between God and others, but we often miss the second part of this. In our being peacemakers, we are meant to make peace between God's pinnacle creation as well, humanity. Given that we are at peace with God, we are the only ones equipped to bring

true peace to the world through Jesus.

One of the challenges of "lists" like the fruit of the Spirit and the Sermon on the Mount in Scripture is our tendency to gravitate towards some and steer clear of others as if we are only wired for this or that. While we may struggle more with some, we are redeemed to embody them all.

Every human who has made peace with God is meant and will instinctively want peace for others toward God and themselves. Most of our time and energy is spent on creating, maintaining, and shepherding toward reconciling people to God and fostering continued growth toward being like Jesus. We have to take up the mantle of people peacemaking like never before, and we may have to reimagine what that looks like.

Even if you have a thriving system to get people together in your church, chances are they still spend fewer than five hours a month with one another. Peace is made in relationship, and five hours a month is not going to create the type of peacemaking relationships the church is capable of.

This is one of the reasons that we focus on geography in church planting. Proximity creates an ease of presence.

Joshua Whetstine is church planting field director for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Good news from the associations

NORTHWOODS

Badger (Minn.) Baptist Church received a large donation of turkeys and food items to help with their take-out Thanksgiving dinner for the community.

A volunteer, unpaid pastor in the association had his truck break down and the association was able to give him \$1,000 to help with the repair cost.

Grace Connection in Wadena is planning to construct a new facility this summer.

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

On Nov. 7 pastors and leaders from across Wisconsin gathered for SWBA's annual meeting, held in the new building of Doxa Church in Madison, a 2018 church plant. The meeting included testimonies from several church planters about how God is using the

COVID crisis. Also at the meeting a new partnership was launched between Livingstone Baptist Church, a Korean church plant in Madison, and Fellowship Baptist Church in Morgan's Point Resort, Texas.

Trinity Baptist Church in Reedsburg has called Bridges Harrison as worship pastor. He is from Clinton, Miss., and graduated in May from Samford University with a bachelors in religion and minor in worship leadership.

LAKELAND

Milwaukee Arabic Church is reaching 5,000 to 15,000 people each week with their online worship and Bible study. Viewers include the Muslim population of Milwaukee, as well as many people in the Middle East. Issa Safadi is pastor of the church which meets at Layton

Avenue Baptist Church in Greenfield.

Pastor Kurt Owens is planting UFlourish Church in Milwaukee, and also leads Bridge Builders and Central City Church Planters. The missional focus of UFlourish is neighborhood revitalization, having adopted 140 blocks of the city, to inspire inner city innovation. God is answering prayer by providing financial partnerships, and connecting with the right people at the right time. The church is planning to launch public worship in September. Ephesians Missionary Baptist Church in Milwaukee is the Sending Church.

Eli Hasbani, pastor of Ethnos Church in Milwaukee, reports that when they partnered with "Let Us Worship" on Sept. 15 at the Milwaukee Lakefront they saw hundreds saved and baptized 35 people.

Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist

SUICIDE

continued from page five

To reduce the rising toll of premature deaths due to suicide, and to protect family and friends from the psy-

chological burden and pain associated with surviving the death of a loved one, we all need to become more aware of the facts about suicide, the warning signs of suicide, and how to

respond to those warning signs.

If you suspect someone may be at risk for suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

Steve Dyess is assistant to the executive director for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Back to the beginning

NATIONAL
SUICIDE
PREVENTION
LIFELINE
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

NEW YEAR

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need assistance the most. Restaurants, struggling under the restrictions of the pandemic have provided meals to front line workers.

Doctors, nurses and medical staff have served sacrificially putting themselves at risk to care for COVID-19 patients. Like so many others, our daughter-in-law is a nurse and a breast cancer survivor. She suffered severe symptoms after contracting COVID-19 from her patients. Now recovered, she has returned to continue her work. Our son-in-law has volunteered as a bone-marrow donor for someone struggling with leukemia. We are proud of our kids and the millions of others who continue to put the interests of others before their own during these trying times.

Jesus was clear that every generation would have such trials. He warned of wars and rumors of wars, plagues, famines and natural disasters. Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke

21:25-28).

God has promised, "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope" (Jer. 29:11).

Bill Tinsley is a former executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention. Appearing in various local newspapers around the country, his column "reflects" on current events and life experiences from a faith perspective.

Back to the beginning

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MWBC events are in bold print.

BLBA: Bay Lakes Baptist Association

SWBA: Southern Wisconsin Baptist Association

LBA: Lakeland Baptist Association

NBA: Northwoods Baptist Association

SMBA: Southern Minnesota Baptist Association

TCMBA: Twin Cities Metro Baptist Association

To have your events included, email them to davidwilliams@compuserve.com.

MARCH

7-14 Week of Prayer and Mission Study for North American Missions/Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

12-13 Empower Conference, Great Wolf Lodge, Wisconsin Dells, Wis.

APRIL

2 Good Friday – **MWBC Office Closed**

16-17 MWBC Executive Board Meeting, Rochester, Minn.

30 MWBC Lottie Moon Offering Cutoff

MAY

21 New Pastor Orientation, Rochester, Minn.

22 IMB SE Asia Summit

31 Memorial Day Observed – **MWBC Office Closed**

JUNE

13-16 Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

Hands of Hope - TBD

30 MWBC Annie Armstrong Offering Cutoff

JULY

5 Independence Day Holiday Observance – **MWBC Office Closed**

9-23 SEA Harvest Mission Trip

AUGUST

28 MWBC Foundation, Tomah, Wis.

SEPTEMBER

1-30 Season of Prayer for State Missions

6 Labor Day – **MWBC Office Closed**

17-18 MWBC Executive Board, Rochester, Minn.

OCTOBER

15-17 Called Out Youth Conference, Baraboo Wis.

21 Annual Church Planter Forum – TBD

22 Pastors Conference, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Brooklyn Park, Minn.

22-23 MWBC Annual Meeting, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Brooklyn Park, Minn.

NOVEMBER

25/26 Thanksgiving Holiday – **MWBC Office Closed**

28-12/4 Week of Prayer and Mission Study for International Missions/Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

DECEMBER

24-1/1 Christmas/New Year's Holiday - **MWBC Office Closed**



Choosing a Major

A Guide for IMB Students

Majors and Roadmaps

- **Choosing a Major**
- **Physicians Roadmap**
- **Nursing Roadmap**
- **Allied Health Professional**
- **Engineering Major**
- **Business Professional**
- **Education Major**

Young adults who are considering how best to follow God's path of service have a resource in the International Mission Board. A series of guides on choosing majors in a variety of fields are available. Know someone who would benefit from working alongside a career missionary? Contact Bob Smith to learn more about Summer, Semester and two year appointments at BSmithMWBC@msn.com.

SBC entities see God's faithfulness during difficult year

NASHVILLE (BP) – Virtually nothing was left untouched by the interruptions and dangers caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. SBC entities grappled with stay-at-home orders, financial uncertainty and mandated safety protocols – all while continuing to carry out their ministry assignments.

On this and the following pages are reports from the entities about how they navigated a strange year.

COVID-19 not the only reason 2020 was eventful for Executive Committee

By Scott Barkley

NASHVILLE (BP) — Even before the wide-scale interruption of a worldwide pandemic, 2020 showed itself early to be a busy and momentous year for the SBC Executive Committee.

Most notable among developments was the election of California pastor Rolland Slade as the EC's first Af-

rican American chair and EC President and CEO Ronnie Floyd's announcement of a renewed dedication to discipleship, Vision 2025.

In addition, the EC acted on a recommendation from the Credentials Committee to disfellowship a Texas church, created a task force to study the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and took action amid controversy

over the speakers lineup at the annual SBC Pastor's Conference preceding the annual meeting.

The February meeting would be the only one taking place at the SBC building in Nashville. COVID-19 necessitated remote meetings the remainder of the year.

Read the full story [here](#).

NAMB keeps mission moving forward during year of challenges

By NAMB Staff

ALPHARETTA, Ga.— With nearly every aspect of life and ministry impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) adjusted its priorities to ensure that the mission of sharing the gospel would move forward.

In the face of the challenges brought on by travel restrictions, economic shutdowns and church closures, NAMB took financial steps to support missionaries and keep them on the field while they served and shared the gospel with their neighbors through church planting and compassion ministry. Evangelism initiatives

continued through Who's Your One, and NAMB provided resources designed to help pastors in the area of leadership and evangelism.

With the obstacles brought on by the pandemic, NAMB's priority centered on supporting church planting missionaries to make sure they were able to stay on the field and help newly-planted churches weather the crisis. For both established and new churches, for pastors and church planters, NAMB produced a number of webinars and other resources to help leaders adjust to the new normal.

To assist with evangelism on and around college campuses,

NAMB announced the hiring of Paul Worcester as its national director of collegiate evangelism. Worcester will serve alongside Shane Pruitt, NAMB's executive director of next gen evangelism, and work through on-campus and church-based ministries.

While the pandemic caused a number of Who's Your One Tour events to be postponed, several were conducted safely in the late spring into the early fall. To help with churches that may have been struggling financially, NAMB also offered free evangelism kits to pastors and churches.

Read the full story [here](#).

IMB looks back at 2020

By IMB Staff

We would never have imagined going into 2020 that our top news events would be the effects of a global pandemic. But what we see looking back is that God never stopped moving among His people. IMB is grateful to have been a part of what He chose to do among the nations this year.

COVID-19 affected us globally and IMB made the difficult decision to ask volunteers not to go. Many missionaries also had to leave their countries of service and change approaches to their ministries and daily lives. At the end of March, IMB senior leadership directed all personnel to postpone hosting any ministry volunteer groups through June 30.

Despite the pandemic, we began to hear and share stories of God's continued work through IMB missionaries and local believers. Nothing could have encouraged us more.

We rejoiced during three Sending Celebrations and the 161 new missionaries commissioned this year. Representing

Southern Baptist churches throughout the United States, 21 IMB missionaries were publicly celebrated during a service at Magnolia Church in Riverside, Calif., Jan. 29. This would be the only in-person commissioning service to take place in 2020. On June 9, the IMB commissioned 61 missionaries in a virtual Sending Celebration and in another virtual event on Nov. 18 appointed 79 others.

During 2020 IMB celebrated 175 uninterrupted years of bringing the gospel to all nations. A 175-day prayer emphasis and an interactive timeline directed Southern Baptists to our history, but also current needs and future plans.

The IMB reported a 2019-20 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering total of \$159.5 million, the second highest offering in history. This total exceeded by \$4.5 million the 175-year-old organization's budgeted goal of \$155 million. IMB also received \$97.2 million from the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program for 2019-20.

Read more [here](#).

SBC entities see God's faithfulness during difficult year

LifeWay Christian Resources

By LifeWay Staff

NASHVILLE (BP) – As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world in early 2020, LifeWay quickly moved to better serve churches and church leaders trying to minister in unforeseen circumstances.

As the coronavirus continues to impact congregations into the new year, Ben Mandrell, LifeWay president and CEO, says the organization “wants to do everything we can to help churches sustain their vital ministries during this time. Because of this, we have been working on solutions for supporting local churches as they seek to grow together as disciples during this season and walk with them as they begin rebounding.”

In the spring, LifeWay provided church assistance packages, low-cost books and Bible studies, as well as numerous free resources including digital giving plans, curriculum, at-home children's ministry kits, student discipleship packages, and a tool for reopening churches.

Some of the most difficult pivots centered around events and camps, but LifeWay worked to provide safe alternatives for churches and church leaders.

“Reach” was the

theme of this year's ETCH Conference, held Oct. 13-14, which brought together online more than 900 ministry leaders of kids and students for training and virtual fellowship. ETCH – hosted by LifeWay Christian Resources – stands for equipping the church and home.

More than 700 women gathered physically and online for the 2020 LifeWay Women's Leadership Forum Nov. 12-13 at Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn. For COVID-19 safety and compliance reasons, in-person attendance was capped at around 250, which included women spanning 21 states and seven denominations.

Throughout the year, LifeWay reached more than 40,000 women with a number of digital events hosted by hundreds of churches and streamed by more than 27,000 individuals. More than 100,000 women also joined one of the LifeWay Women's online Bible studies in 2020.

More than 6,000 people tuned in for the 2020 Black Church Leadership and Family Conference, held July 20-24 as an online-only event during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Read the full story [here](#).

Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

By ERLC Staff

NASHVILLE (BP) – Throughout 2020, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission has continued to partner with churches to provide resources that equip Southern Baptists to engage some of the most difficult and pressing issues of the day with the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On ethical issues ranging from religious liberty and abortion to technology and sexuality, ERLC has sought to be a reliable and consistent voice in the public square and to partner with Southern Baptists in reaching a world in need of Christ.

As Southern Baptists continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic,

the ERLC has sought to be a leading help for churches – providing resources and recommendations on everything from church safety to children's ministry to analysis of SBA Loans. Additionally, the ERLC has been in regular contact with civic leaders and even courts – working to defend against any erosion of religious liberty, while insisting that churches should be seen as key partners in combating this virus.

The ERLC remained tireless in its efforts to stand up for the lives of the preborn as fellow image-bearers and worked to develop several new initiatives to be announced in the coming year. Throughout 2020, the ERLC

provided regular pro-life resources and advocated for pro-life policy at the state and federal level. Additionally, the ERLC worked to secure a major increase in its ultrasound-placement ministry, The Psalm 139 Project, and will be placing 10 ultrasound machines across the country over the first six months of 2021.

ERLC welcomed three new executives, including new Executive Vice President Daniel Patterson, Chief of Staff and Vice President for External Affairs Brent Leatherwood, and Vice President of Operations and Life Initiatives Elizabeth Graham.

For church resource, visit ERLC.com.

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

By NOBTS Staff

NEW ORLEANS, La. (BP) – COVID-19 presented its share of challenges for New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College in 2020. The pandemic made life harder for students and professors alike. With all the difficulties brought on by COVID guidelines and social distancing, new initiatives and partnerships brought welcomed news to the seminary community.

Leavell College launched a “house system” to promote fellowship, community, and discipleship and promote a well-rounded experience for students. Patterned

after the college systems at Oxford and Cambridge, the houses – Elliot, Bonhoeffer and Moon – are named for historical Christian leaders that exemplify the values listed in the school's mission statement. In addition to the house system launch, Leavell College also received newly renovated offices in the Hardin Student Center and unveiled a new logo early this spring.

Financial gifts to the school made a big impact during COVID-19. This year's Giving Tuesday Dec. 1 saw record giving: \$253,000 raised with a \$100,000 matching gift, benefitting the school's Providence Fund. And during the height of the

COVID-19 surge in Louisiana, special student scholarships provided for the summer term helped offset the financial burden for students impacted by COVID-19 and drew a record summer registration in total credit hours.

A new partnership designed to promote church planting and missions was approved in the spring. The partnership between NOBTS and the North American Mission Board will result in a new church planting center on the NOBTS campus to coordinate and enhance church planting assessment and training. The center will train church planters to serve throughout North America as well as in New Orleans.

SBC entities see God's faithfulness during difficult year

GuideStone Financial Resources

By Roy Hayhurst

DALLAS (BP) – While 2020 has been unprecedented on so many levels, GuideStone President O.S. Hawkins, who announced his retirement in September, said the year has held its share of blessings for the ministry and its participants.

Growth of Mission:Dignity

Mission:Dignity is on pace for a record year in 2020, likely exceeding \$10 million in gifts. In response to large numbers of churches not meeting earlier in the summer, Mission:Dignity Sunday, on the SBC calendar for the fourth Sunday in June, was moved to August this year. Southern Baptists responded with more than \$1 million given — a record.

Another record set this year came on the annual #GivingTuesday, when

almost \$900,000 was received from donors.

One hundred percent of gifts to Mission:Dignity goes directly to the aid of a retirement-age pastor or his widow. Administrative costs are funded from an endowment established many years ago. The ministry is funded by gifts from individuals, churches and Sunday school classes. It receives no Cooperative Program gifts.

Focus on inclusion and diversity

GuideStone continues its work to reflect the ethnic diversity of the Southern Baptist Convention and recognizes the inherent strength of a diverse workplace. At the end of 2020, non-Anglo employees account for about 20 percent of GuideStone employees, up from 9.8 percent at the beginning of this millennium. Kasan Boyd, a 14-year veteran

of GuideStone with experience in training and human resources, has moved into a new role to lead these intentional efforts. GuideStone currently has six African American trustees, including the first African American woman to serve as chair of an SBC entity trustee board.

Addition of new chief insurance officer

Chu Soh, a retired U.S. Air Force officer and health care industry executive, and a native of South Korea, joined GuideStone as chief insurance officer in June. Prior to joining GuideStone, Soh served as chief operating officer for a large health sharing organization, growing it from 23,000 households in 2013 to more than 150,000 households last year.

Read the full story [here](#).

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

By SBTS Staff

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP) – Over against the dark days of the COVID pandemic, the light of God's grace shone clearly at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary during the recently completed fall semester.

In 2020, the seminary's enrollment reached an all-time high, allowing the school to educate more students – both in person and online – than at any time in its history. When the pandemic hit last spring, leadership opted to cut tuition by 15 percent, which helped stabilize and strengthen enrollment at both Southern and its undergraduate school, Boyce College.

In the weeks following the COVID shutdown, SBTS reduced its budget by 30 percent, and the school's financial health has increased all year enabling the school to sustain financial strength throughout the year. In his fall convocation address, SBTS President R. Albert Mohler Jr. said the pandemic is merely one obvious example of myriad dangers that lurk in a fallen world every day, dangers that

always surround Gospel ministers as they carry out their work.

"We will never be surrounded by anything less than deadly dangers," Mohler said. "And we are preparing those who will serve Christ in the church and in the world by sending them out into a world which is even more dangerous."

Earlier this month, the seminary graduated 236 during its fall commencement. By God's grace, the seminary and college held on-campus classes – with proper masking and social-distancing policies in place – and performed more than 4,000 COVID tests with only 32 positives (an infection rate far lower than that of the community at large), the vast majority of which were asymptomatic.

Mohler told students and faculty in his convocation address that the opportunity to meet at all during a pandemic was a precious gift from God.

"Right now, I seize with you the opportunity to enjoy, appreciate, and be found faithful in this academic year we had no right to expect, but is now God's gift to us," he said.

BOOK

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cycle and try something new. Often we're afraid that it "won't work," but the reality is that what we are currently doing isn't working, so why not try something new? Maybe this new outreach will work, maybe it will lead us to something that will make us more effective in our mission field.

"Where Do We Go from Here?" is designed to unite a church in prayer for their future and

walk a small group of the church's leaders through a three-hour strategy process to develop just a couple of fresh strategies to fulfill the Acts 2 church's basic functions: worship, evangelism, fellowship, ministry, and discipleship. When ideas emerge from this meeting they can be approved by the church, implemented, tested, and adjusted.

"Where do we go from here?" is an important question as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Are you thinking about what your church needs

to do as the summer months progress and COVID releases its grips on your church and community? Now is the time to pray through and think through how to position your church to reach people post-COVID-19.

Your pastor received a copy of my simple book with the State Missions Offering resources. A limited number of these copies are available to you by emailing Na Herr, herr@mwbc.org. It's a simple three-hour planning meeting that your church can easily do

on its own. May the Lord show you where you go from here.

Leo Endel is executive

director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Back to the beginning

SBC entities see God's faithfulness during difficult year

Gateway Seminary

By Gateway Seminary Staff

ONTARIO, Calif. (BP) – Though the COVID-19 pandemic presented numerous challenges, Gateway Seminary has thrived.

“Decades of economic, social and spiritual challenges prepared the seminary to effectively overcome those presented by the pandemic,” Gateway President Jeff Iorg said.

“We have faced many obstacles over the years – the financial realities of doing ministry on the West Coast, pressure from local communities to abandon biblical positions on social issues, and the difficulties of bringing the Gospel to very secular culture. Frankly, Gateway staff and students have developed strong constitutions, and that allowed us to withstand the pandemic.”

All face-to-face classes were moved to online delivery formats starting on March 16. That temporary change became permanent for the spring 2020 semester as state and local restrictions continued to develop. Though Gateway classes continued with little interruption, events such as spring commencement were canceled. After a summer of preparation, on-campus classes resumed in fall 2020. More than 60 percent of Gateway students opted for online or remote access courses.

Stay-at-home orders

in California required much of the staff to work remotely. In light of the complications of remote work, staff were paid regardless of the hours they worked, and underworked staff were temporarily assigned to other offices. There were no layoffs.

In September, two vice presidents announced plans to retire. Michael Martin, vice president of academic services, and Tom Hixson, vice president of business services (VPBS), will retire in 2022 and 2021 respectively. Both have committed to aid in the transition by taking on new roles when their successors have been hired.

Glenn Prescott, director of theological field education and professor of ministry leadership, and Bob Philipps, director of library services, also announced retirements in 2021.

At their spring meeting in April, trustees approved a reduced budget of \$11,500,000. The approved budget represented a reduction of \$250,000 from the previous year's budget. By October, trustees approved a budget increase to \$12,000,000 in light of enrollment numbers and Cooperative Program funding that exceeded projections.

On April 2, Gateway announced a \$250,000 gift designated for student scholarships. Donors also raised more than \$85,000 in April to

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

By Michael S. Brooks

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP) – While collectively, people have grown familiar with the reality of “unprecedented times” and “new normal,” one aspect of life within the Midwestern Seminary and Spurgeon College community has remained constant: the opportunity to render time, effort and resources toward equipping the church for maximal impact in Gospel ministry.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated several significant changes on the ground. 2020 saw a transition to full-time virtual learning in the spring and, later the creation of “Residential Plus” — a new hybrid course-delivery system that permitted students to return to campus for in-person learning this fall. Elsewhere on campus and in keeping with local and state health guidance, precautions were set in place

across the seminary's Kansas City campus to allow for social distancing and decreased in-person contact.

In Spring 2021, online students will benefit from the new classroom technology as a slate of “Online Plus” courses will be offered featuring live virtual lectures with MBTS faculty.

Amid difficult circumstances more broadly, the seminary experienced a number of positive developments as well. The trend of increasing year-to-year enrollment growth continued in 2020. President Jason Allen reported to trustees a 12 percent increase in hours taken for the fall 2020 semester compared to fall 2019 and a 9 percent increase in the total number of students enrolled. Additionally, the academic committee announced a number of promotions among the seminary faculty, along with the addition of Geoffrey Chang as

assistant professor of historical theology; Andrew King as assistant professor of biblical studies; Patrick Schreiner as assistant professor of New Testament and biblical theology; and Charles Smith as assistant professor of Christian leadership.

Expressing gratefulness and trust in God for the days ahead, President Jason Allen exhorted the seminary community in one of several presidential updates earlier this year: “I encourage you to frame all of this with biblical wisdom. As men and women of God, we are to be wise, but not fearful; vigilant, but not unnerved.

“We trust in our sovereign God, His kind providence, and in the power of prayer. Moreover, this is a time for a Christian community, such as Midwestern Seminary and Spurgeon College, to radiate Gospel hope, fervent prayer, and a confidence in our Redeemer.”

assist students during the pandemic. In December, the seminary raised more than \$108,000 to fund the Hoff House, a home for future professionals-in-residence at Gateway. The Hoff House is named in honor of Lisa

Hoff, former director of the Kim School of Global Missions, who passed away Sept. 21, 2020.

“This has been a difficult year, but students and staff at Gateway have responded with strength and grace,”

Iorg said. “Though the pandemic challenges are new, our response has been the same, consistent one we have had through our history – we focus on the mission, work hard, and trust God for the rest.”

SBC entities see God's faithfulness during difficult year

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

By SWBTS Staff

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) – Even in 2020, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary remained true to its mission, adapting to changing circumstances in order to commission 638 graduates in an in-person commencement in December, strengthen its academic offerings, hire new faculty, and continue its emphasis on both academic output and evangelistic outreach.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, precautions were taken by the seminary, including closing the campus and moving all courses to solely online platforms in March through the spring and summer semesters.

“The coronavirus pandemic has not lessened the urgency of theological education; indeed, it has only heightened that urgency,” President Adam W. Greenway said.

After the Texas stay-at-home order expired in April, Greenway announced that the campus would reopen for the fall semester with extensive safety measures.

During the fall semester, 594 new students enrolled, an increase of 29 percent over the prior fall. The school experienced a 14.9 percent revenue

increase during the 2019-2020 fiscal year, including a 14.6 percent increase in tuition revenue; and a 215 percent increase in donations to the school's annual fund.

During two meetings, trustees approved 10 new degrees. Southwestern also launched eight-week courses for online students to expedite their path to graduation and partnerships with Oklahoma Baptist University and Dallas Baptist University to provide advanced standing and joint degrees, respectively. Through elections and appointments, 15 faculty were added across academic disciplines.

Southwestern Journal of Theology, under the leadership of editor Davis S. Dockery, launched its Book of the Year Awards. Dockery also was appointed interim provost. Faculty authored or contributed to 10 books, and Seminary Hill Press released three new titles.

Even during the pandemic, faculty and students' ongoing commitment to sharing the Gospel with the lost continued utilizing pre-existing relationships, technology, and even, in some cases, socially distanced door-to-door efforts.

Read the full story [here](#).

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

By SEBTS Staff

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP) – Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's (SEBTS) mission of serving the church and fulfilling the Great Commission endures in a remarkable way despite a year of significant challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic.

SEBTS experienced record numbers of enrollment for both the 2019-2020 academic year and the fall 2020 semester. Likewise, SEBTS continues to see an influx in applications to the seminary and col-

lege. Our enrollment continues to hold steady outperforming general trends within higher education. Additionally, SEBTS is continuing to see great progress in its financial campaign, For the Mission, which has reached 59.2 percent of its \$20.5M goal.

This fall, SEBTS resumed in person classes. Students were required to wear masks in class, indoors, and any time social distancing was not possible. SEBTS also provided different formats to help students attend classes, including seven-week courses and live, synchronous

courses. This fall, faculty were also required to record all in-person lectures for students who were unable to attend class due to COVID-19.

In light of the pandemic, student tuition was reduced by five percent. A 2020-2021 budget reduction allowed SEBTS to achieve its goal of not laying off full-time staff members during the pandemic. In order to maintain all employees, full-time staff received a reduction in pay, led by President Akin and the members of the cabinet.

Read the full story [here](#).

EMPOWER

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those attending the event in person, there will also be breakout sessions on Friday afternoon.

Featured speakers will be Johnny Hunt and Richard Blackaby. Both will speak at each of the main conference sessions.

Hunt is senior vice president of evangelism and leadership for the North American Mission Board. He served 33 years as senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Ga., and was president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 2008.

Blackaby is president of Blackaby Ministries International. He served as senior pastor at Friendship Baptist Church in Winnipeg, Canada, and then as the president of the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary for 13 years. He continues to serve as the seminary's chancellor.

M-W Baptists should register for the event through the MWBC website and also make their own lodging reservations with Great Wolf Lodge by calling (800) 559-9653. “Registration is highly encouraged for timely communication in the event of any unforeseen changes,” Calvert said.

There is no fee to attend Empower, but attendees are responsible for their own lodging and meals.

“Everyone will be on their own for meals in Great Wolf or nearby restaurants,” Calvert said, adding that if in-person dining is shut down, there are plenty of drive-in options near the lodge.

Due to space constraints, ministry to children will not be provided. However, this year's schedule has been relaxed so that families may come early and stay late to enjoy the water park and other amenities at Great Wolf.

Back to the beginning

With everything affected, COVID forced churches and SBC to be flexible

NASHVILLE (BP) – Everything, it seems, changed on Wednesday, March 11.

By then Southern Baptists were aware of the mysterious, flu-like illness – at that point simply referred to as “the coronavirus” – that had originated out of central China. Baptist Press’ first mention of it came Feb. 4 when Peter Yanes, executive director of Asian American Relations & Mobilization for the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, urged discernment as misinformation spread across social media that had led to racial stereotyping and xenophobia regarding Asian Americans.

It’s difficult to recall now as 2020 draws to a close, with COVID-19 having permeated virtually every aspect of life – and causing millions of deaths worldwide. But last winter, if most people were aware at all, news of a new coronavirus seemed to be a distant issue, of limited concern. Yanes first heard of the virus from his sisters, who live in Hong Kong.

“It was isolated cases,” Yanes said. “Very isolated, very local. I couldn’t even imagine that we would get to here (in Dec. 2020), and it became a global pandemic.”

The year 2020 brought many challenges. In the United States, what had already promised to be a tense election campaign was roiled by racial tension,

protests and civil unrest. But the injection of a nasty, highly contagious virus undoubtedly exacerbated and heightened tensions. The economy was staggered by shutdowns. Jobs were lost. More important, lives were, too – and countless more were altered in a year like none other in recent memory.

In the SBC, the pandemic led to at least a temporary pause of in-person worship by the vast majority of churches and to postponement or cancellation of countless other events, including the 2020 SBC Annual Meeting.

At year’s end, with deaths in the United States having climbed past 300,000, the overall impact of the global pandemic seemed immeasurable. And though the arrival of vaccines – after an unprecedentedly rapid process of trials and approval – had provided hope for a return to something approaching normalcy in 2021, its end remained uncertain.

But in the winter of 2020, the recognition that everything would change came slowly, both to the SBC and the world.

Feb. 13 – SBC Executive Committee President Ronnie Floyd, alongside Yanes, hosted a teleconferenced prayer call with some 30 other ethnically diverse SBC leaders.

Feb. 28 – The Interna-

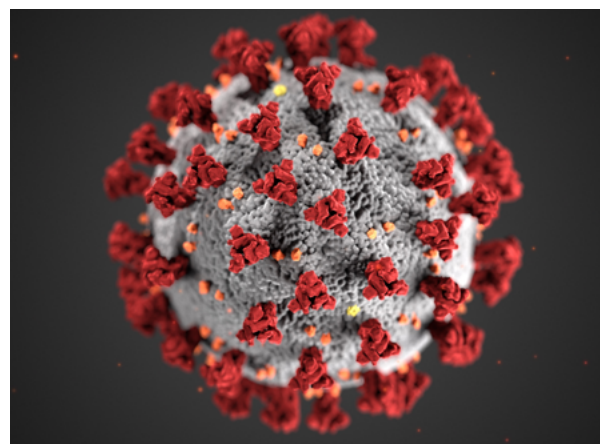
tional Mission Board organized a task force to address the impact of the coronavirus on missionaries as well as churches planning trips. The task force would later recommend postponing travel. The IMB pulled many missionaries home to the U.S.; at year’s end, many still remained stateside, though plans to return to the field were underway.

March 6 – An Alabama mission team in Israel became one of many groups of Southern Baptists held up from returning home due to COVID-19 concerns.

March 6 – The SBC Executive Committee issued a statement on the coronavirus and its potential impact on the annual meeting to be held in Orlando less than 100 days away. At that point, the EC resolved to continue with plans to meet while issuing a commitment “to creating a safe and responsible gathering [while keeping] the health and safety of messengers and attendees our top priority.”

The last normal Wednesday, finding new ways

Southern Baptist churches held mid-week services March 11 as they had other Wednesdays. However, it would be the last “normal” one for the foreseeable future. Since then, church suppers, prayer services, Bible study groups and



children and youth ministries continue to be impacted.

Earlier that day many churches would have balked at postponing services due to the spread of COVID-19. Soon however, postponement of the NBA and NHL regular seasons as well as the NCAA’s men’s and women’s basketball tournaments demanded a reassessment. Add to that school systems shutting down temporarily and many churches followed, postponing in-person gatherings on Sunday, March 15. Many more followed suit the next Sunday.

First Baptist Church of Dallas drew 2,000 to on-site worship March 15, but Pastor Robert Jeffress told BP the next day that the historic congregation would be meeting online only the following Sunday.

“The situation is changing,” Jeffress said. “We felt like since the city allowed it, and given where we were last week, that we wanted to have our people together as much as possible for the encouragement they need, but

also to send a message that we were not fearful. A.W. Tozer said, ‘A scared world needs a fearless church.’ But we also believe God wants us to exercise common sense. And with the new CDC guidelines that just came out . . . we made the decision that we will be totally online next week with our worship services.”

As the need to go online became crucial, many churches realized they were not prepared for such a move. In addition to joining physically for Bible study, prayer and preaching, churches – particularly rural ones – also relied on in-person meetings to receive donations and were not ready to move tithing and giving online. On March 20, LifeWay announced it would provide its online giving platform to churches for free, as well as price cuts on discipleship and discussion books.

As giving decreased – partly because churches weren’t meeting, but also because of the economic downturn – many churches,

FLEXIBLE

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as well as several SBC entities, participated in the Paycheck Protection Program, part of the federal CARES Act stimulus package passed in spring 2020 that provided forgivable loans to cover employee payroll, utilities and rent or mortgage payments. By late July, many churches had reported a rebound in tithes through online giving.

Meanwhile, drive-in services grew in popularity for those churches wanting to have some form of gathering together. Congregations continued to grow in familiarity with online tools and strategies. Perhaps pastors' biggest personal adjustment came through delivering a sermon to a camera, minus the faces they had grown accustomed to seeing each week.

Although many churches later resumed meeting — almost all following social distancing guidelines — virtual participation remained a fixture; many reported attendance lower than previous averages. In some locations, churches found themselves in conflict with governmental restrictions on in-person gatherings, raising constitutional issues of religious liberty that sometimes were resolved in court.

Seminaries quickly joined the online format, cancelling in-person classes to try and help stop the spread.

“Right now, love of

neighbor means that we're going to have to interrupt the way we do theological education and college education in order to be responsive to the needs that are now presented to us by the COVID-19 challenge,” R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said in March.

In response to the economic downturn, seminaries tightened and cut budgets. Other financial measures included freezing salaries and staff reductions. But the seminaries reported optimistic projections for the future. The seminaries returned to in-person instruction for the fall semester, with modifications and enhanced safety protocols.

On March 19, Floyd published an open letter to Southern Baptists, commending them on their efforts to continue in ministry during trying times.

“God is using this global pandemic to bring us together, to communicate with one another regularly, and to sharpen our focus like never before,” he said. “We are doing all we can with all God has entrusted to us to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in every town, every city, every state and every nation.”

Annual meeting canceled

Not since World War II had Southern Baptists failed to meet annually. However, the Executive Committee announced March 24

that COVID-19 led to the cancellation of the annual gathering, which had been set for June in Orlando. The decision came through a unanimous vote of the group composed of SBC officers, the SBC Executive Committee and leaders of the SBC's boards and institutions.

At the time of the announcement there were nearly 400,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide and more than 17,000 deaths (in the U.S., more than 46,000 cases and almost 600 deaths). The Orlando meeting was anticipated to be the largest such gathering in recent memory, on par with the 12,000 who attended the 2010 annual meeting, also in Orlando.

The meeting's cancellation led to North Carolina pastor and SBC president J.D. Greear serving a third term alongside other officers.

“In one sense, this was a difficult decision for us. Gathering regularly to hear about the great things God is doing in the present and to seek His face together for the future is an essential part of who we are as a Convention, and we will be saddened to forego this opportunity in June,” Greear wrote in a column posted the same day.

“But in another sense, this decision was easy. Our purpose in coming together is to support one another in Gospel mission and to better catalyze our collective mission efforts. This year, the best way to ac-

complish that purpose is by NOT meeting together.”

Entities cut budgets

COVID-19 brought an immediate economic downturn, as from February to May the number of unemployed Americans grew by more than 14 million. An unemployment rate of 3.8 percent in February had reached 14.4 percent by April and, as such, Southern Baptist entities had to make adjustments alongside everyone else.

In September, the SBC Executive Committee adopted a Cooperative Program Allocation Budget reflecting a 5 percent drop from the one projected at the group's February gathering. Normally its approval would have been considered at the SBC annual meeting, but due to the meeting's cancellation, the responsibility fell to the EC. Despite the downturn, giving to the Cooperative Program during the 2019-20 fiscal year totaled \$192.9 million, 1.83 percent lower than the projected budget of \$196.5 million.

An initial shortfall of \$4 million as the economy shut down during the spring led to spending cuts and a hiring freeze at the International Mission Board. In September, IMB trustees ultimately approved a 2020-21 budget at 4.5 percent less than 2019-20. The North American Mission Board instituted a budget freeze on discretionary spending in March. At its fall meeting, trustees approved

a budget reflecting a 20 percent cut from last year's budget.

LifeWay Christian Resources, which had been facing economic headwinds before the pandemic, saw a steep decline in revenue during the downturn. Trustees unanimously approved a 2020-21 budget of \$210 million, a reduction of 17 percent year over year. COVID's impact brought an immediate punch to LifeWay, as cancellations of summer camps and women's events led to missing the 2019-20 budget by \$61 million, said President and CEO Ben Mandrell.

As 2020 drew near its close, the pandemic continued, with COVID-19 surging even as the first vaccines were being delivered. It was uncertain when a return to normalcy would be fully realized — or whether on the other side of the pandemic, normal would be something different. And yet, a weary world of Southern Baptists rejoiced in recognition of a simple truth: The advance of the Great Commission was not thwarted.

“This global pandemic,” Yanes said, “became an opportunity to learn new possibilities for doing ministry that we'd never even thought of in the past. People became very creative. They still focused on the Gospel message. We embraced the new ways of delivering the message of the Gospel, and took advantage of it.”

Back to the beginning

Mission Gifts from the Churches

MINNESOTA WISCONSIN BAPTIST CONVENTION COOPERATIVE PROGRAM GIVING

January - December 2020

2020 CP Budget	\$590,000.00
2020 CP Receipts	\$647,143.44
OVER Budget 2020	\$57,143.44

SMO Goal 2020	\$74,000.00
SMO Giving 2020	\$74,525.75

NAME	CP	SMO
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BAY LAKES BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Amherst, Amherst Bible	\$500.00	\$0.00
Appleton, Fox Valley Hmong	\$180.00	\$0.00
Appleton, Hmong Baptist Mission	\$338.45	\$0.00
Appleton, Valley	\$53,690.96	\$18,385.00
Black Creek, Community Bible	\$7,487.00	\$0.00
Clintonville, First Baptist	\$2,190.60	\$300.00
Green Bay, Bethel	\$666.65	\$0.00
Green Bay, Graceway Fellowship	\$7,014.13	\$186.00
Green Bay, Highland Crest	\$55,580.41	\$0.00
Manitowoc, New Beginnings	\$387.73	\$0.00
Neenah, Living Vine	\$559.57	\$402.00
Sheboygan, Mapledale Baptist	\$3,641.97	\$1,205.00
Stevens Point, Tapestry	\$500.00	\$0.00
Tilleda, Bethany Baptist	\$2,077.50	\$1,090.00
Waupaca, Fellowship Baptist	\$2,463.87	\$0.00
BLBA TOTAL	\$137,278.84	\$21,568.00

SOUTHERN WI BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Boscobel, Blue River Valley	\$1,539.29	\$0.00
Ft. Atkinson, Casa de Oracion	\$45.00	\$20.00
Janesville, Resonate Church	\$3,524.64	\$0.00
La Crosse, New Hope	\$100.00	\$0.00
Madison, Antioch Fellowship	\$0.00	\$1,000.00
Madison, Campus Community	\$1,950.00	\$0.00
Madison, City on a Hill	\$3,500.00	\$0.00
Madison, Doxa Church	\$30,025.82	\$0.00
Madison, East Madison Baptist	\$7,801.00	\$1,272.00
Madison, Hope In Christ	\$2,743.14	\$0.00
Madison, Livingstone Baptist	\$2,395.30	\$200.00
Madison, Midvale Baptist	\$13,436.89	\$3,481.00
Madison, Red Village	\$12,500.00	\$0.00
Madison, Sovereign Joy Baptist	\$3,505.08	\$0.00
Platteville, Rolling Hills	\$3,337.18	\$0.00
Portage, River of Life	\$2,249.34	\$0.00
Reedsburg, Trinity Baptist	\$17,250.00	\$0.00
Sparta, Gospel Baptist	\$4,582.60	\$1,085.18
Sun Prairie, United Hmong	\$3,576.30	\$0.00
Waterloo, Centro Biblico La Roca	\$210.00	\$0.00
Waterloo, Cornerstone	\$600.00	\$0.00
WI Dells, Rock of Hope	\$2,400.00	\$0.00
WI Rapids, Church at Wazeecha	\$3,450.50	\$1,783.60
WI Rapids, First Baptist	\$650.00	\$95.00
SWBA TOTAL	\$121,372.08	\$8,936.78

LAKELAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Bassett, Westosha Baptist	\$2,027.00	\$660.00
Brown Deer, Brown Deer	\$1,500.00	\$3,500.00
Kenosha, Fellowship Baptist	\$21,724.75	\$2,500.00
Kenosha, Missio Dei Fellowship	\$10,042.00	\$0.00
Kenosha, Parkside Baptist	\$6,895.94	\$0.00
Mequon, Westlake Church	\$550.00	\$0.00
Milwaukee, Ephesians Baptist	\$3,900.00	\$0.00
Milwaukee, Grace Point	\$432.34	\$0.00
Milwaukee, Hmong First Baptist	\$150.00	\$321.00
Milwaukee, Korean Baptist	\$900.00	\$0.00
Milwaukee, Layton Avenue	\$17,553.32	\$2,787.00
Milwaukee, Mercy Memorial	\$1,200.00	\$0.00
Milwaukee, Milwaukee Arabic	\$353.66	\$0.00
Milwaukee, Monumental Baptist	\$1,490.00	\$0.00
Milwaukee, Mt Horeb Baptist	\$250.00	\$150.00
Milwaukee, Mt Pilgrim Miss.	\$900.00	\$0.00
Milwaukee, Northwest Baptist	\$13,019.51	\$0.00
Mount Pleasant, Immanuel	\$9,845.31	\$1,895.00
Pewaukee, Crossroads Church	\$3,752.68	\$0.00
Pleasant Prairie, Pleasant Prairie	\$10,660.00	\$687.00
Racine, Hope Community Church	\$4,321.30	\$0.00
Wauwatosa, Redemption Church	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
LBA TOTAL	\$113,467.81	\$12,500.00

SOUTHERN MN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Austin, Austin Baptist	\$2,093.30	\$0.00
Austin, Primera Iglesia Bautista	\$2,646.12	\$0.00
Chester, Chester Woods	\$2,119.70	\$500.00
Eyota, Hmong Baptist	\$1,319.62	\$0.00
Mankato, Hope Baptist	\$3,027.97	\$0.00
Marshall, Radiant Life	\$3,122.07	\$100.00
Red Wing, Hiawatha Valley	\$2,500.00	\$1,120.00
Rochester, Emmanuel Baptist	\$16,803.14	\$5,597.00
Rochester, Joyful Hope Baptist	\$120.00	\$0.00
Rochester, Redemption City	\$16,661.46	\$0.00
Sartell, Park Fellowship	\$4,225.64	\$0.00
Viola, Viola Bible	\$3,435.06	\$2,370.00
Willmar, Grace Baptist	\$100.00	\$5,000.00
Winona, Cornerstone	\$3,971.28	\$0.00
SMNBA TOTAL	\$62,145.36	\$14,687.00

BIBLE

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Just as the gospels are essentially reporting the same event from different perspectives, so, too, other books of the Bible generously give us different angles from which to see these moments in history. Don't let format overwhelm you!

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might

have hope" (Romans 15:4, ESV).

The Bible has purpose on every page

Sometimes it's easy to gloss right over passages only to realize you read nothing while reading all of it. A strategy I use is to read so as to teach. As I read, I am searching the content for something to write down and be able to teach. I learned through looking for teachable content that on every page there is

Mission Gifts from the Churches

TWIN CITIES METRO BAPTIST ASSN.

Amery, Journey Church	\$8,750.00	\$0.00
Bloomington, MN Kangnam	\$1,200.00	\$0.00
Bloomington, Southtown	\$25,763.29	\$300.00
Bloomington, True Light Chinese	\$200.00	\$0.00
Brooklyn Park, Ebenezer	\$2,400.00	\$0.00
Brooklyn Park, North Center	\$9,610.97	\$80.00
Burnsville, Berean Baptist	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
Burnsville, Crystal Lake Road	\$4,000.00	\$0.00
Coon Rapids, First Hmong	\$1,250.00	\$300.00
Maple Grove, Northwood	\$2,166.71	\$0.00
Maple Grove, Unlock Church	\$4,478.62	\$0.00
Minneapolis, All Peoples Church	\$6,480.00	\$0.00
Minneapolis, Gracepoint	\$1,300.00	\$0.00
Minneapolis, Hope of Nations Fellowship	\$698.76	\$0.00
Minneapolis, Hope of Nations Gospel	\$207.54	\$0.00
Minneapolis, Jubilee	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
Minneapolis, New Hope Baptist	\$200.00	\$0.00
Minneapolis, Risen Church	\$4,500.00	\$0.00
Minneapolis, Shalom Community	\$1,392.73	\$0.00
Minnetonka, Slavic Baptist	\$600.00	\$0.00
Minnetonka, Zion House of Prayer	\$250.00	\$0.00
Monticello, First Baptist Church	\$500.06	\$0.00
Monticello, Grace Bible Church	\$1,800.00	\$0.00
New Hope, Westview Church	\$1,800.00	\$0.00
New Prague, Calvary Church	\$25,465.14	\$0.00
Oakdale, Eternal Life Hmong	\$2,184.00	\$0.00
Ramsey, Bethlehem Worship	\$475.00	\$175.00
Richfield, Richfield Bible Church	\$600.00	\$0.00
Roseville, Gospel Hmong	\$956.80	\$0.00
Roseville, Redeemer Church	\$8,000.00	\$0.00
Roseville, Roseville Baptist	\$10,000.00	\$0.00
St. Louis Park, First Ukrainian	\$500.00	\$0.00
St. Paul, Cities Church	\$5,000.00	\$0.00
St. Paul, Followers Of Christ	\$5,290.52	\$0.00
St. Paul, Iglesia Hispana Betel	\$1,175.00	\$0.00
St. Paul, Living Water Baptist	\$54.00	\$0.00
St. Paul, Salt City Church	\$23,750.00	\$2,250.00
St. Paul, Twin City Hmong	\$2,275.00	\$700.00
St. Paul, Vertical Church	\$5,000.00	\$0.00
Sunfish Lake, Bethel Baptist	\$6,600.00	\$0.00
Sunfish Lake, Vietnamese	\$660.00	\$0.00
TCMBA TOTAL	\$181,534.14	\$3,805.00

BIBLE

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something from which we can both learn and teach. The Lord completely saturated the Bible in purpose.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return

to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11, ESV).

The Bible is worth reading

Repeatedly throughout my college career, I would fail to read the material needed for learning the subject matter. I would rely on skimming and context to get me through, consistently finishing with mediocre scores and a poor

NORTHWOODS BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Bemidji, Ridgewood Baptist	\$1,044.20	\$1,050.00
Cambridge, Cross Pointe	\$3,000.00	\$0.00
Crookston, Prairie Community	\$5,047.86	\$95.42
Ely, Berean Baptist	\$630.00	\$0.00
Grand Rapids, Calvary Pines	\$2,830.36	\$50.00
Hill City, Hill City Baptist	\$750.00	\$0.00
Pequot Lakes, Eagles Nest	\$6,158.41	\$0.00
Rice Lake, Hope Baptist	\$4,365.00	\$6,550.00
Roseau, Immanuel Baptist	\$3,873.42	\$0.00
Thief River Falls, Cornerstone	\$1,981.34	\$0.00
Wadena, Grace Connection	\$620.00	\$0.00
Warroad, Westside Baptist	\$3,200.00	\$0.00
NWBA TOTAL	\$33,500.59	\$7,745.42

OTHER

Eau Claire, Jacob's Well	\$10,200.00	\$0.00
Eau Claire, One in Christ Church	\$2,428.45	\$50.00
Miscellaneous Donations	\$0.00	\$5,233.55
OTHER TOTAL	\$12,628.45	\$5,283.55

MWBC TOTAL RECEIVED **\$647,143.44** **\$74,525.75**

NOTE: No giving received by MWBC-affiliated churches not listed above during stated giving periods

GPA. If you are anything like me, your method of ingesting the Bible has taken a similar approach, and as you hop around chapter and verse following topics, suggestions or study materials other than the Bible, you skip over important material necessary for your spiritual development. Studies about the Bible are good, but they do not replace studying the Bible. Rest assured, you cannot skim the Bible and ace the test.

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40, ESV).

Several weeks ago, as I began to see the end in sight, I emailed George Guthrie, author of the supplementary content and format of the CSB

Day-by-Day Chronological Bible, to express my gratitude for his faithfulness in giving Christians this strategy in reading the Bible. He responded with such a poignant and timely statement: “I believe with all my heart that one of the most basic aspects of discipleship is our time being shaped by God’s good word.”

Today, my prayer for you is that you would have a deep desire to study God’s whole Word and submit to it as it impacts your life, and that you would find yourself in the middle of a new discipline that will mark the rest of your life.

Michael Davis is multimedia coordinator for Falls Creek Baptist Conference Center in Oklahoma. This article appeared in The Baptist Messenger.

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