

Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist

Volume 38, Number 2

March 2023

We will see you at
EMPOWER!
Page 2 for details.

Table of Contents

- 1 Pastors and Wives Retreat
- 1 Valentine Outreach
- 2 Empower/Equip
- 3 Leo Endel: Perspectives
- 3 Bill Tinsley: Reflections
- 4 Leadership: Clint Calvert
- 4 Intercultural: Na Herr
- 4 Student Ministries: Bob Smith
- 5 Israel Trip
- 5 Abortion Issue
- 6 Good news from the associations
- 7 Flagship Florida church
- 7 Calendar of events
- 8 MWBC church featured
- 9 SBDR Roundtable
- 10 Mission Gifts from the Churches

Pastors and Wives find rest at retreat

Green Lake, Wis. – A total of 107 attended this year’s Pastors and Wives Retreat at Green Lake (Wis.) Conference Center.

Offering a relaxed schedule of worship, fellowship, encouragement, meals, and free time, the Feb. 2-4 retreat provided not only teaching about the theme of REST, but also some practical experience in how to spend a couple of days at rest.

The REST theme was taken from Jesus’ words in Matthew

11:28, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Sponsored by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention and funded through the Cooperative Program and a special gift from Texas Baptists’ Mary Hill Davis offering, the retreat is free to all lead pastors of MWBC churches, plus one additional pastor from churches with multiple pastoral staff.

See **RETREAT** page 2



Leo Endel, executive director of Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, prays over Philip and Jummai Nache at the Pastors and Wives Retreat, which happens to fall on Philip’s birthday. Nache is pastor of Hope of Nations Fellowship Church in Minneapolis, Minn.



An amazing outreach event – Pastor Chucklu Vang of Eternal Life Hmong Baptist Church in North St. Paul, Minn., preaches to attendees at the church’s Feb. 4 annual Valentine outreach banquet. The name of the event in Hmong is Hlub Kom Kawg, which means “Everlasting Love.”

About 530 people attended this year’s event provided without cost and open to all in the community. The church itself has 56 families . . . 211 members . . . average worship attendance of about 100. The event is so large that they must rent another church’s facilities.

“The purpose is to strengthen relationships between husbands and wives and we purposely

invite people from the community who are not involved in church,” said Ber Yang, chairman of deacons and one of the organizers of the banquet. Between 80 and 90 percent of the people currently in the church were reached through this ministry, he said.

The Hmong language event begins in the afternoon and goes through the evening. In addition to the keynote message from the pastor, the event includes ice breaker activities, photo booth, silent auction, live auction, door prizes, music, and dinner. During the banquet all are invited and encouraged to attend the church’s Sunday School and worship service, Yang said.

Empower and Equip just days away

Rochester, Minn. — Time is running out to register for Empower and Equip, twin conferences which will be held this year in Rochester, Minn.

The Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention annual events will begin at 1 p.m., Friday, Mar. 10, and end at 12

noon on Saturday, Mar. 11.

Empower will meet in the Kahler Grand Hotel and the Equip NextGen Ministry Conference will be at Emmanuel Baptist Church.

Also at Emmanuel will be disaster relief training in DR 101 and

Recertification; Chaplaincy; Assessment; Blue Cap; Chainsaw/Recovery; Flood Recovery; Shower/Laundry; and Prayer Team.

To register for Empower or disaster relief training, go to MWBC.org/Empower. To register for Equip, go to MWBC.org/Equip.



Multi-Course Trainings at Empower

Emmanuel Baptist, Rochester, MN

March 10-11

Trainings offered:

- DR 101 and Recertification
- Chaplaincy
- Assessment
- Blue Cap
- Chainsaw/Recovery
- Flood Recovery
- Shower/Laundry
- Prayer Team



RETREAT

continued from page one

Leo Endel, MWBC executive director, speaker for the event, focused on the Sabbath, which he said is “God’s gift of a weekly day to stop, worship and rest.”

He said that the Sabbath is:

- a day to rest/refresh
- a day to worship
- a day to trust God
- a day to remember redemption
- a day to long for heaven

“Weekly remembrance of our redemption reminds us of the

power of God at work in our lives,” Endel said, calling attention to Deuteronomy 5:12-15 which ties Sabbath observance to redemption: “Be careful to remember the Sabbath day . . . Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. That is why the Lord your God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

People need the rhythm of Sabbath in their lives, Endel said, and they may need

to be creative to find a way to work it into their week. He offered suggestions for observing a Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, or from Sunday morning to Monday morning, or all day long on any day of the week that works for one’s schedule. Sabbath activities might include worship, prayer, napping, meals, time with family, enjoying a hobby, walking, fishing, reading, or any number of things that help one pull away from the regular routine for rest and revitalization.

Endel also encour-

EMPOWER
March 10 - 11, 2023
Kahler Grand Hotel
Rochester, MN
that they may have life


Mark Clifton
Sr. Director, Replanting and Rural Strategy, NAMB


Jack Lucas
Leadership Development Director, IBSA


Gary Jennings
Final Command Ministries

Register for this free event
<https://EMPOWER2023.eventbrite.com>
 Children and Youth Program provided by MN/WI WMU



NextGen Ministry Conference

Ephesians 4:12

March 10-11, 2023



Delanee Williams
Content Editor for The Gospel Project



Jana Magruder
Strategic Initiatives Director of Lifeway Kids



Jack Lucas
Leadership Development Director Next Generation Ministries Illinois Baptist State Association

This conference is for all leaders in Children and Youth Ministries. It will be a time of encouragement, equipping, community and fun. Make plans to bring your everyone who works with the youth and children’s ministries.

This conference will be held in conjunction with the MWBC Empower Conference and is FREE.
If you have any questions, please ask on Facebook @ MWBC KidMin Community or call Penny @ 218-340-0862

Register for this conference @ <https://EQI1PNextMinConf2023.eventbrite.com>

MWBC

aged pastors at the event to plan for a pastoral sabbatical, “a strategically planned time of rest from ministry demands” for the

purpose of revitalization of the pastor and recalibration of the congregation.

Back to the beginning

Generations need each other

Twenty years ago my oldest daughter and I attended an amazing evening worship service of approximately 2,000 students from Northwestern and Bethel colleges.

Soft tears flowed from my eyes and my voice cracked as we

worshiped together—singing, praying, and reading Scripture. It was powerful!

Earlier that morning we had been at one of our Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention churches in the Twin Cities where I preached and we worshiped in a much quieter traditional way. This church was more diverse especially regarding the age range from toddlers

to senior citizens. We had sensed the Lord's presence there too.

In 1955, Donald McGavran, probably the most well-known missiologist of the 20th century observed what came to be known as the homogeneous unit principle (HUP). The HUP postulates that most people become Christians easiest when they hear the gospel without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.

Over the next 60 years Christians have argued for and against this observation. McGavran was not speaking against diversity in the church;

he was simply recognizing that diversity initially complicates evangelism. In the last couple of decades, I have noticed that differing age segmentations also complicate evangelism.

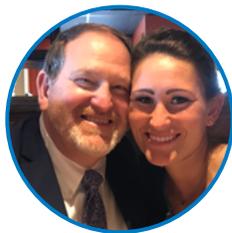
Most of our newer churches are primarily made up of people ranging from 25-35 years old. They are homogeneous in a different way than McGavran initially identified. They are products of today's culture separated by music, technology, ministry and other worship styles and preferences. Within their own homoge-

neity they have their own strengths but they also have their own weaknesses.

What I see is McGavran's principles at work regarding the evangelism of people by people who are of the same generation. At the evangelism level, this principle is powerful; however, for ongoing discipleship, there are glaring weaknesses to single generation discipleship.

My daughter and I have talked for years about these observations. I remember her beginning to see

See **GENERATION** page 11



Perspectives

Leo Endel and Rachel Endel Sellmeyer

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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Awakening at Asbury

On Feb. 8, students at Asbury College in Wilmore, Ky., filed into Hughes Auditorium for their regularly scheduled chapel service. What happened next was anything but regular.

What has continued to happen is far beyond anything anyone could have scheduled.

A spontaneous prayer meeting broke out that has continued for weeks. Characterized by humility, confession and prayer, more than 50,000 showed up from over 200 other campuses and many countries.

The college of 2,000 was overwhelmed. It ignited similar movements on campuses at Samford University in Alabama, Lee and Belmont Universities in Tennessee, Anderson University in Indiana, Baylor University in Waco and Texas A&M. In all at least 20 campuses have reported revivals, and that number is growing.

According to Beck Taylor, President of Samford, "This is spontaneous, organic, student-led worship." He continued, "What's happening isn't con-

trived, programmed, or scripted. Nor is it performative or disingenuous. Students and others see it as an opportunity for the Samford campus to find unity in Christ, to encourage one another to faithfulness, and to extend the love and grace of Jesus to everyone."

The participants are young, many are students, others in their 20s and 30s. It is not the first time this has happened. In 1970 a similar spiritual movement started spontaneously at Asbury and spread across the country. The broader context of that movement came to be known as The Jesus Revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s. Thousands of

lives were changed as many who had sought fulfilment in drugs and the hippie culture found faith in Christ.

There have been other spiritual movements in our nation's history, most notably the Great Awakening of the 1700s that swept England and the American Colonies. That movement included John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield and was witnessed by Benjamin Franklin who published Whitefield's sermons.

We don't know what long-term results will come from the current experience at Asbury. It is too early to tell. What is undeniable is the evidence of

See **ASBURY** page 6



Reflections

Bill Tinsley

Pray Like Paul

One of the most popular television commercials of all time encouraged viewers to “Be Like Mike” and drink Gatorade. A highlight reel of National Basketball Association’s MVP Michael Jordan dominating the basketball court was interspersed with scenes of Michael playing basketball with children and drinking Gatorade. The video was accompanied by an earworm suggesting how great it would be to be like



Leadership
Clint Calvert

Mike:
“Sometimes I dream, That he is me. You’ve got to see that’s how I dream to be. I dream I move, I dream I groove. Like Mike, If I could be

like Mike.”

To play basketball like Mike, apparently, one would need to enjoy an orange sports drink.

On a spiritual realm, believers seek role models to emulate in the Christian faith. Charles Spurgeon, a famous 19th Century

Baptist pastor, and D. A. Carson, a contemporary evangelical biblical scholar, have both suggested the Apostle Paul as a role model worthy of imitation for developing a theology and practice of prayer. If “Be Like Mike” could be re-written with the Apostle Paul as a role model, it might sound like this:

“I always pray, specifically, with thanksgiving and intentionality, I pray to God, I pray for you, Like Paul, because I pray like Paul.”

Prayers punctuate the letters of Paul in

See **PRAY** page 6

The importance of short-term volunteers

The goal of every missions agency is to recruit long-term career missionaries. However, not every believer is called to long-term missions. In order to take the gospel to as many places as possible, it is necessary to have both long-term career missionaries and short-term volunteers on the field.

Certainly, long-term missions are more sustainable financially when you consider the cost of plane tickets

and training. But there is definitely a place for short-term volunteers.

Here are some quotes from our own missionaries on the field.

“Is it worth the

cost and effort to send short-term volunteer teams around the world to partner with missionaries and local believers? We who serve longterm emphatically say, ‘Yes.’ Volunteers open doors so we can share the gospel with more people. And they encourage

us and local believers. As Southern Baptists already know, we can do more together than any one of us can do on our own.” – an IMB representative in Latvia

“A group of churches came from the U.S. to start spiritual conversations with people. We now have several contacts to follow up on. Please pray that our team will be able to connect with people and that many will come to faith in Jesus.” – an IMB representative in France

“Volunteers from the U.S. helped our team launch discipleship groups for Sudanese refugee believers. We

See **VOLUNTEERS** page 8

The Power of Partnerships

There may be nothing that defines who we are as Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptists more than the way we connect with the larger Baptist family in order to extend the Kingdom of God locally and globally.

To better tell the story I will have to take you back in time to the summer of 2020.

I received a phone call from Dave Engelhardt, Director of Christian Challenge at New Mexico State University.

Christian Challenge

is the equivalent of Baptist Campus Ministry in New Mexico. Dave connected with me to let me know that a young couple would be coming to Madison for graduate work. Wes and Sierra Grim were active in the ministry in New Mexico. Both of them had served in a variety of mission/ministries including ministry through the International Mission Board.

Almost immediately upon arrival in Madison, they joined Red Village Church. Through partnership with the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, Wes began an internship helping the church to reach students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The Barnabas Connection provided a number of grants to help resource the growing ministry.

Jan. 1, 2023 Wes transitioned from serving as a self-funded campus ministry intern to a fully funded church staff position with expanded responsibilities with students from middle school through university. He is on track to complete his masters of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in December. This was made possible in large part due to grants from the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention Scholarship Fund.

Scholarships are to assist the lead pastor of a congregation in friendly cooperation with MWBC. Secondary staff and laypersons who are actively involved are encouraged to apply, especially those who are being called into vocational ministry. The scholarship is to be applied to the master of divinity (M. Div.) program. Other master’s level programs may be considered with the approval of the MWBC executive director. It is not approved for a second master’s program or advanced programs (doctorates). The stu-

See **POWER** page 6



Student Ministries
Bob Smith

Group returns from 9th MWBC trip to Israel

Rochester, Minn. — A tour group of 42 returned home Dec. 8 after a ten-day trip to Israel — the ninth such trip led by Leo Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Endel sees the trips as an important part of his ministry in and to the churches of the convention.

“Apart from experiencing the Holy Land and bringing the Bible to life for more than 125 pastors and wives plus more than 100 other individuals from

our churches, these tours have united the MWBC pastoral leadership into long-term supportive relationships that have enriched our lives and our work for the Kingdom,” Endel said.

The next trip is designed for laypeople from the churches, he said. The date is Dec. 27, 2023 through Jan. 5, 2024. Interested persons can find information and register for the trip by visiting:

[RegisterNow.ittworld.com](https://www.ittworld.com) and enter Tour Code: Endel23



This Israel tour group of 42 people was the ninth led by MWBC Executive Director Leo Endel. The gold building in the background is the Dome of the Rock, an Islamic shrine built in the 11th century on the site of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem which was destroyed in 70 A.D.



Paul Fries officiates the Lord's Supper at the Garden Tomb. Donald Bennett preached the message.



Katherine Bennett rides a camel after visiting the Dead Sea.



Tonger Vang walks out of the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem.

Minnesota, Wisconsin governments take opposite stances on abortion issue

By Diana Chandler

ST. PAUL, Minn. (BP) — Minnesota is the first state to codify abortion as a “fundamental right” after the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, in stark contrast to neighboring Wisconsin, where abortion has been banned in state law that became effective with *Roe*'s reversal.

Leo Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, serves churches in both states.

“We are disappoint-

ed but not surprised. Today, we grieve that our culture has declined to the point that it has lost its ability to sort through its values,” Endel told Baptist Press. “We can no longer distinguish between the competing ideals of human freedom and human responsibility. When our freedom supersedes the value of someone else's life we are in great peril. When the values of human dignity and life are overshadowed by freedom and choice,

the barbarians are at the door.

“Today we grieve,” he said, “but vow to continue the fight for the unborn who, just like us, are eternally valued by God and are created in His image.”

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz signed the Protect Reproductive Options (PRO) Act Jan. 31 after the Minnesota Legislature passed the law Jan. 27. It took effect immediately. Minnesota joins Colorado, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont and D.C.

where abortion rights are codified throughout pregnancy by acts of the respective legislatures, according to the Guttmacher Institute's tracking.

Abortion was already legal in Minnesota through the 1995 state Supreme Court *Doe v. Gomez* decision, but the PRO Act affirms abortion rights that can only be reversed by another act of the legislature.

In addition to abortion, the PRO Act codifies contraception,

fertility treatments, sterilization, reproductive counseling and other reproductive health care.

Minnesota saw 11,060 abortions performed in the state in 2020, the Guttmacher Institute reported, or 10.2 abortions per 1,000 15- to -44-year-old women. By contrast, Wisconsin saw 6,960 abortions in the same time period, or 6.4 abortions per 1,000 women in that

Good news from the associations

NORTHWOODS

Thomas Johnston of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary is filling in at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Thief River Falls and taking an active role in helping this young church become an established congregation.

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

All pastors and leaders are invited to participate in free Coach Map Training on Mar. 30-31 at Transformation Church in Sun Prairie. The free training and all meals are provided by the North American Mission Board and SWBA. Coaching is “learning how to ask powerful ministry questions to help people accomplish their goals as they are guided by the Holy Spirit.” Requirements to participate include registering for the event, making certain commitments, and participating in two one-hour preparation ZOOM meetings. For more information contact Mark Millman, SWBA director of missions/church planting catalyst.

ASBURY

continued from page three

deep and widespread spiritual hunger among the young across our nation. We can pray that God will do something in our day and in this generation that will redeem our nation

TWIN CITIES

TCMBA took this team to Fort Myers, Fla., in February to help a Southern Baptist church rebuild their facility and a member’s home, both of which were damaged by Hurricane Ian in September 2022. The



POWER

continued from page four

dent must be admitted to a Southern Baptist Convention affiliated seminary. Other institutions are subject to approval of the MWBC Executive Director.

Maximum grant amounts are \$500 per class, \$1,000 per term, and \$7,500 per student. Support for the MWBC Cooperative Program working

and produce the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Bill Tinsley is a former executive director of the Minne-

sota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention. Appearing in various local newspapers around the country, his column “reflects” on current events and life experiences from a faith perspective.

team was led by Pastor Chris Reinertson and his wife Jude and included members of their church, Southtown Baptist Church in Bloomington, as well as members of Ebenezer Community Church in Bloomington and Journey Church in Amery.

alongside partnerships across our convention make stories like this a reality. For more information about internships or the Seminary Scholarships program contact me at BSmithMWBC@msn.com.

Bob Smith is student ministries catalyst for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Back to the beginning

sota-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

PRAY

continued from page four

the New Testament. One can see a pattern in the prayers of Paul written in the letters to the Thessalonians. The prayers are found in 1 Thessalonians 1:3-4; 3:11-13; 5:23-24 and 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; 2:16-17, 3:5, and 3:16-18.

After teaching doctrine or exhorting the Thessalonians, Paul would offer a prayer that connected the character and power of God to the virtues believers needed to obey his instructions. Paul wanted the Thessalonian church to be presented blameless in the Day of the Lord and to be a powerful testimony to the gospel in the places they currently lived.

The prayers of Paul for the Thessalonians returned to repeated themes. Paul prayed with an expectation that the Thessalonians would obey his in-

struction. Paul prayed in awe of God’s character. Paul prayed with an assurance that God would answer. Paul prayed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If one were to put Paul’s themes into a pattern that emulates his prayers for the Thessalonians, it might sound like this.

Father,
I pray, willing to obey You,
I pray in awe of who You are,
I pray believing You will answer,
I pray in the name of Your Son
the Lord Jesus Christ,
Amen.

Scripture shows us that we can be great at prayer when we ‘Pray like Paul.’

Clint Calvert is church leadership catalyst for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Back to the beginning



www.mwbc.org

Flagship Florida church calling members to draw line in the sand

By Brandon Porter

Jacksonville, Fla. (BP) – A well-known Florida church is navigating the cultural tides as it requires members to sign a statement defining biblical sexuality.

“We believe in a

sexually confused culture, it is important for our church to be united and to be clear about a matter like this which is a closely held religious conviction held by every member in our congregation,” Heath Lambert, pastor of

First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, wrote in emailed correspondence.

The statement reads: “As a member of First Baptist Church, I believe that God creates people in his image as

See **FLORIDA** page 12



Heath Lambert, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., addresses his congregation as well as members of the community at an open mic forum at the church Sunday, Jan. 29.

ABORTION

continued from page five

age group, Gutmacher said.

Most abortions are illegal in 14 states, namely Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia (six weeks), Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia and Wisconsin. State constitutional amendments in Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee and West Virginia explicitly deny abortion rights and the use of public funding for such procedures.

Bans in Utah and Wyoming are blocked, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported.

In addition to states codifying abortion, the procedure remains widely available in Alaska, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan and Montana, according to tracking sites. Among those states, California, Michigan and Vermont have secured abortion rights in their state constitutions, Gutmacher reported.

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
 TCMB: Twin Cities Metro Baptist Association

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

MARCH

5-11 Week of Prayer and Mission Study for North American Missions/Annie Armstrong Easter Offering
10-11 Empower Conference, Kohler Grand Hotel and Emmanuel Baptist Church, Rochester, Minn.
30-31 Coaching Map Conference, Transformation Church, Sun Prairie, Wis.

APRIL

7 Good Friday – **MWBC Office Closed**
 12-14 SEND Network Midwest Meeting, Columbus, Ohio
21-22 MWBC Executive Board Meeting, Rochester, Minn.
28-29 New Pastor Orientation, Rochester, Minn.
30 MWBC Lottie Moon Offering Cutoff

MAY

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

JUNE

11-12 WMU Missions Celebration and Annual Meeting, New Orleans, La.
 13-14 Southern Baptist Convention, New Orleans, La.
15-30 SEA mission trip (Thailand)
30 MWBC Annie Armstrong Offering Cutoff

JULY

4 Independence Day Holiday Observance – **MWBC Office Closed**
8-14 Hands of Hope, Milwaukee
 16-18 Baptist General Convention of Texas Annual Meeting, McAllen, Texas

AUGUST

27 Global Hunger Sunday

SEPTEMBER

1-30 Season of Prayer for State Missions
 4 Labor Day – **MWBC Office Closed**
15-16 MWBC Executive Board, Rochester, Minn.
22-24 Called Out, Baraboo, Wis.

OCTOBER

19 SEND Network Planters Gathering, Twin Cities, location TBA
20 Pastors Conference, Twin Cities, location TBA
20-21 Twin Cities, location TBA
 23-24 Missouri Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, Springfield, Mo.

NOVEMBER

23-24 Thanksgiving Holiday – **MWBC Office Closed**

DECEMBER

3-9 Week of Prayer and Mission Study for International Missions/Lottie Moon Christmas Offering
 25-1/1 Christmas/New Year's Holiday – **MWBC Office Closed**

MWBC church, pastor featured in local newspaper

Milwaukee Pastor Kurt Owens is a big believer in multicultural relationships

© Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel – USA TODAY NETWORK

Benjamin Wells

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
USA TODAY NETWORK – WISCONSIN

When Kurt Owens started working in the village of Sussex, he expected to experience racism making deliveries for a pharmaceutical company.

Instead, he felt the community embrace him.

That surprise sparked in him a passion to make a real attempt to bridge urban Milwaukee with its neighboring communities by bringing people of different ethnic backgrounds together for volunteer work.

Personally, it's also inspired him to undertake what he calls a "multi-ethnic" lifestyle.

It took years to turn that passion into action, but in 2016, he created Bridge Builders, which has worked in the Thurston Woods and Old North Milwaukee areas, landscaping, fixing resident's homes and helping with code enforcement. The areas are south of suburban Brown Deer, roughly bounded by N. Teutonia Ave. and N. Sherman Blvd., and W. Florist Ave., and W. Congress St.

According to its website, Bridge Builder's work has stretched across 170 blocks in the city of Milwaukee. With the help of more than 1,300 volunteers, it has completed at least 75 projects, large and small, since the organization's inception. The idea is to work one block at a time.

"We don't try to tackle everything" said Zac Reuter, operations pastor at Bridge Builders. "We focus on particular things that are beneficial to our city and our neighborhood... Just interacting with people and seeing how they live their life has really helped grasp the dynamic of living here."

For Owens, it's an unexpected mission.

Born a pastor's child, he didn't feel as though the church welcomed him in during his youth.

"It almost felt like you had to earn your way into heaven and I didn't fit the bill," Owens said. "So the streets embraced me."

In his later teenage years and into adulthood, Owens became a drug dealer in Milwaukee, making him a target for



Kurt Owens delivered a sermon on living the faith at Epikos Church's north side location in 2016. MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL FILES

both police and other criminals. One day, he was held up.

"I just had a moment," he said. "I was told to get down on my knees and I just knew life was over for me at that point in time."

With a gun in his face, Owens asked God's forgiveness and promised, if he got away alive, to turn his life around.

He escaped unharmed.

"Once I was able to get out of that situation, I knew that I was done with being a drug dealer," Owens said.

He got a job as a delivery driver for a pharmaceutical company, making runs to Sussex and other parts of western Waukesha County. The irony is not lost on him.

"I was still delivering drugs, but this time they're going to hospitals and doctor's offices," Owens said with a laugh. "But that was my first time outside of a central city context... there's not a lot of Black people that live out there."

While running his deliveries, Owens said, he was wary of how a Black man driving around a predominantly white area would be received. It wasn't necessary.

"People were embracing me in a community of people that I didn't think

would even care," Owens said.

A white boss mentored Owens, and he was promoted and moved to Jackson, Miss., where the pharmaceutical company was based.

"The hustlers mentality that I had in the streets, I was able to take it and siphon it into something that was legitimate," Owens said.

While in Jackson, Owens met an older white missionary who reintroduced Christ to his life. And that ultimately led Owens back to Milwaukee.

In 2005, Owens helped launch Epikos, a non-denominational, multi-ethnic church that started on E. Bellevue Place, between North Farwell and North Prospect avenues. At the time, he planned to move his family to Grafton.

A church member challenged that decision.

"Someone from the neighborhood came and just really railed into me," Owens said. He told the church member that he grew up on Milwaukee's north side, went to movies in the area, was steeped in the area. "I said, 'I live right around the corner.' And the moment I said that, the world stopped."

In the ZIP code where Bridge Builders is based, 53209, almost 70% of the resi-

dents are Black, and the average household income is just above \$42,000 a year. In 53024, the ZIP code where Grafton is located, the household income average is over \$90,000 a year and less than one percent of residents are Black.

He had become so disconnected from his community that he almost forgot he actually still lived there.

The move to Grafton was off. And from that, Bridge Builders was born.

Reuter, the operations pastor, said the key to understanding problems in an area is to be fully engaged with people living there.

"I think it's easy to have misconceptions about areas that you don't really interact with," he said. "Realizing the complexities of the problems that people have, it's not just one thing. It's a ton of different things and they all layer on top of each other."

Currently, the non-profit is hoping to raise 1.9 million dollars to purchase and renovate 20 homes in their target area in a fundraiser called, "Reclaim the Block." The idea is to develop affordable housing and increase local home ownership — two huge issues in Milwaukee because of the high number of renters paying money to out-of-state landlords.

"I grew up in an era where our neighbors, they knew who we were, they knew our parents and all of those things" Owens said. "A society where love for a neighbor is actually reflected in what you see. To me, that's a revitalized community."

Bridge Builders is a ministry partner of Uflourish Church, which Owens pastors. The church brands itself as a gospel-centered, multi-ethnic church called to help people flourish.

Owens' family has flourished as well; he and his wife Dee-Dee have five adult children and 10 grandchildren.

On the Uflourish website, Owens shares some of this story, and the motivation that continues to drive him. Two pivotal encounters in his life — the mentoring boss and the older missionary — were with people who were not Black.

As a result, he says on the Uflourish web page, "I value multi-ethnic ministry because I am the product of what can happen through multi-ethnic relationships."

VOLUNTEERS

continued from page four

worshiped, studied the Word, and ate together. More than 100 people attended! Would you pray for Sudanese lead-

ers to arise from these discipleship groups?" — an IMB representative in Uganda

In June our state convention will send a team of 12 individuals on a short-term mission trip

to Thailand. Last year, we connected with a local school that invited us to come back. This year we are planning to teach English at that school and follow up with a Bible camp for

young people in partnership with the local Baptist network. Please pray for our team and the people we meet that they will be receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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

Back to the beginning

Unity, partnership evident at disaster relief national roundtable

Jacksonville, Fla. (BP) – Southern Baptist Disaster Relief (SBDJR) volunteer Jason Yarbrough kicked off his first year as state disaster relief director for the Baptist Convention of Oklahoma by attending the annual SBDJR roundtable Jan. 24-26 at North Jacksonville Baptist Church in Jacksonville.

Yarbrough was one of 38 state SBDJR directors, out of 42 state Baptist conventions, who gathered to review the past year's work and to discuss plans for the future. The directors joined with about 200 leaders and volunteers who took part in committee meetings and a variety of training and information sessions.

The former pastor of 11 years and member of Glenpool First Baptist of Glenpool, Okla., Yarbrough just began serving as his state's SBDJR director Jan. 1. He attended the new state directors' orientation breakout group at his very first roundtable.

Yarbrough is looking forward to serving and to future opportunities with SBDJR.

"I will key in on building relationships with our pastors, directors of missions and associations and share with our local churches to come and be a part of us," he said.

Many shared in the spirit of Yarbrough's enthusiasm, such as fellow state director Scottie Stice, SBDJR

director for the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention (SBTC) and outgoing chair of the SBDJR's steering committee.

Stice is excited about the strengthening of relationships between the state leaders and national leaders such as Send Relief, the joint compassion ministry arm of the North American Mission Board and the International Mission Board. Send Relief comes alongside SBDJR efforts and provides recovery resources and food to support its ministries to disaster survivors.

"We've got the best relationships now since I've been in DR," said Stice, who began serving in disaster relief in 1984 with Texas Baptist Men.

"Our main goal is for continued growth of the partnerships we already have," said Stice who has served for the past three years on SBDJR's steering committee. He has served as state director of disaster relief for SBTC since 2014.

Those partnerships were exemplified, Stice said, in the SBDJR's response after Hurricane Ian hit Florida.

"All resources from our state are available for Florida, and I'm looking for Florida to have a win," he said.

Send Relief's crisis response director, Coy Webb, agreed and said the roundtable meeting was very positive.



Jason Yarbrough, new state disaster relief director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, talks with fellow Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Volunteers of Oklahoma volunteers Nancy Charlton, left, of First Baptist Church, Union City and Teri Fuller of First Baptist Church, Medicine Park during a break at the annual SBDJR roundtable Jan. 24-26 in Jacksonville, Fla. Yarbrough was one of 38 state SBDJR directors who attended the roundtable. NAMB photo by Laura Sikes

He looks forward to growing current partnerships and to building on SBDJR's rich legacy.

"The future is bright. We are in a great time. Our unity is as strong as it's ever been," Webb said.

"We're growing in our understanding in how we work best together, and God is doing some really good things."

Webb joined the feeding committee meeting which was attended by about 50 roundtable participants who came from all six SBDJR regions with representatives from several states.

Karen Smith, SBDJR feeding committee national chair, led the group.

"This is the biggest committee meeting we've had since I've come to a roundtable," said Smith, who has attended about 16 roundtables. Smith, a member of Pleasant View Baptist in Waynesburg, Ky., is also feeding co-

ordinator of Kentucky Baptist SBDJR and has been a volunteer for 28 years.

The feeding committee is working on a more precise plan to use all the equipment such as forklifts, freezer trailers, kitchens and dry storage that God has provided to state conventions, she said.

"I came away from our committee meeting, workshops and our roundtable itself with a sense of unity to do God's work together," Smith said. "We are ready to go when He calls."

Clara Hohmann, national feeding coordinator for region 1 (West), was pleased about the group's plans.

"We are going to be stepping out in faith and will do more in SBDJR, especially with feeding, and have more personal contact [during responses]," said Hohmann, of Redemption Church in Ogden, Utah.

The Rapid/Quick strike response to disaster session also had a high attendance with all six SBDJR regions represented by several states from North Carolina, Alaska and Vermont to Hawaii.

Dwain Carter, director of Mobilization and Disaster Relief of Georgia SBDJR, led the group of about 50 who listened to presentations from regional leaders.

The group discussed all types of responses – mass floodings, tornadoes, hurricanes and earthquakes.

"Mass flooding will be an event that every state sooner or later will experience," Carter said.

But state director Dennis Belz of Colorado Baptist Disaster Relief reminded volunteers to be ready to respond to all types of situations, even unexpected and out-of-the-box ones.

For example, he said

Mission Gifts from the Churches

MINNESOTA-WISCONSIN BAPTIST CONVENTION COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

January-February 2023

Cooperative Program Budget 2023 Year to Date	\$111,584.83
Cooperative Program Receipts 2023 Year to Date	\$71,019.18
Under Budget 2023 Year to Date	\$40,565.65

NAME	CP YTD
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BAY LAKES BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Appleton, Hmong Baptist Mission	\$1,700.00
Appleton, Valley	\$4,835.88
Clintonville, First Baptist Church	\$166.20
Green Bay, Graceway Fellowship	\$596.15
Green Bay, Highland	\$10,168.36
Manitowoc, New Beginnings	\$83.52
Neeenah, Living Vine Church	\$50.00
Sheboygan, Mapledale Baptist	\$589.35
Stevens Point, Tapestry	\$200.00
Tilleda, Bethany Baptist Church	\$369.60
Waupaca, Fellowship Baptist	\$217.98
BLBA TOTAL	\$18,977.04

LAKELAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Bassett, Westosha Baptist	\$199.00
Franklin, Emmaus Fellowship	\$600.00
Hartland, Disciples Church	\$100.00
Kenosha, Amistad Cristiana	\$300.00
Milwaukee, Grace Point Community	\$101.99
Milwaukee, Layton Avenue Baptist	\$2,112.95
Milwaukee, Mercy Memorial	\$150.00
Milwaukee, Milwaukee Arabic	\$167.18
Milwaukee, Mt Pilgrim Miss.	\$300.00
Milwaukee, UFlourish Church	\$303.36
Mount Pleasant, I.C.A.R.E. Ministry	\$204.61
Mount Pleasant, Immanuel	\$591.10
Pewaukee, Crossroads Church	\$415.37
Racine, Hope Community Church	\$322.76
LBA TOTAL	\$5,868.32

TWIN CITIES METRO BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Bloomington, MN Kangnam Korean	\$200.00
Bloomington, Southtown Baptist	\$2,706.00
Coon Rapids, First Hmong Baptist	\$500.00
Maple Grove, Northwood Community	\$100.00
Maple Grove, Unlock Church	\$100.00
Minneapolis, All Peoples Church	\$1,080.00
Minneapolis, Gracepoint	\$100.00
Minneapolis, Shalom Community	\$1,000.00
Minnetonka, Redeemer Bible	\$200.00
New Prague, Calvary Church	\$4,587.87
North St. Paul - Eternal Life Hmong	\$1,008.00
Roseville, Roseville Baptist Church	\$1,400.00
Roseville, Twin City Hmong	\$180.00
St. Paul, Iglesia Hispana Betel	\$125.00
Sunfish Lake, Bethel Baptist	\$1,200.00
Sunfish Lake, Vietnamese Baptist	\$120.00
TCMBA TOTAL	\$14,606.87

NAME	CP YTD
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NORTHWOODS

Bemidji, Ridgewood Baptist	\$182.00
Cambridge, Cross Pointe Church	\$275.00
Ely, Berean Baptist	\$200.00
Grand Rapids, Calvary Pines	\$410.00
Hill City, Hill City Baptist Church	\$200.00
New York Mills, Grace Connection	\$50.00
Rice Lake, Hope Baptist Church	\$655.00
Roseau, Immanuel Baptist	\$1,290.60
Warroad, Westside Baptist	\$49.70
NWBA TOTAL	\$3,312.30

SOUTHERN MINNESOTA

Austin, Austin Baptist Church	\$764.10
Marshall, Radiant Life Church	\$256.97
Rochester, Emmanuel Baptist	\$1,503.00
Rochester, Northbridge Church	\$1,949.00
Rochester, Redemption City	\$6,034.00
Rochester, Rochester Community	\$100.00
Sartell, Park Fellowship	\$1,472.72
St. Cloud, St. Cloud International	\$100.00
SMNBA TOTAL	\$12,179.79

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

Janesville, Bethel Church	\$371.42
Madison, Campus Community	\$150.00
Madison, East Madison Baptist	\$866.00
Madison, Emmanuel Church	\$15.00
Madison, Livingstone Baptist	\$385.00
Madison, Midvale Baptist Church	\$3,875.46
Madison, Red Village	\$2,125.00
Reedsburg, Trinity Baptist Church	\$2,900.00
Sparta, Gospel Baptist Church	\$401.95
Sun Prairie, Christ Fellowship	\$200.00
Sun Prairie, Reborn in Christ	\$551.93
Sun Prairie, Transformation	\$676.47
Sun Prairie, United Hmong	\$192.51
Waterloo, Centro Biblico La Roca	\$30.00
Waterloo, Cornerstone Church	\$1,100.00
Waterloo, Shalom Christian Assembly	\$125.00
WI Dells, Rock of Hope	\$400.00
WI Rapids, Church at Wazeecha	\$378.62
SWBA TOTAL	\$14,744.36

OTHER

Eau Claire, Jacob's Well	\$850.00
Eau Claire, One in Christ Church	\$480.50
OTHER TOTAL	\$1,330.50

TOTAL MWBC RECEIPTS

\$71,019.18

Minnesota-Wisconsin
Baptist

UNITY

continued from page nine

his SBDR group in Denver is now considered “experts” at graffiti removal after helping with cleanup after civil unrest in the city in 2020.

“(The cleanup) gave us an opportunity to get in the community and share the Gospel,” said Belz of Reclamation Church in East Boulder.

Carter also encouraged participants not to shy away from the unusual response.

“Everything we do is about bringing the Gospel,” he said.

To cap off the event, volunteers were hon-

ored at an awards banquet. Several awards were given for distinguished service, including the Robert E. Dixon Lifetime Service award and the Joel W. Phillips Outstanding Achievement award.

Tommy Green, executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention expressed his appreciation to the group for SBDR’s response to Hurricane Ian when it devastated southwest Florida in September.

SBDR volunteers gave 248,000 hours and served 735,000 meals, Green said.

“You came, and you came big, and you

helped us,” Green said. “You brought the love and compassion of Christ, and we thank you.”

Green shared a message from Philippians 3: 12 -14, in which Paul charges the faith-

ful to keep pressing toward the goal.

“I say ‘thank you,’ tonight, because I know you keep pressing,” he said.

New England SBDR volunteer Edward Lucas, Southern Ver-

mont Regional coordinator, left the dinner with a big smile.

“I loved being here for the training and the fellowship. It’s like family,” he said.

Back to the beginning



GENERATION

continued from page three

this in her late 20s. She began to realize that everyone at her church had about the same level of life experience as she had. There weren’t ladies ten years ahead of her who could help her face her next challenge or question. She didn’t have an older woman in the congregation who could share her life and experience with her. Increasingly she saw this as a problem.

A few years later she was given an opportunity to mentor high school girls in a multi-generational church. There she began to see again the beauty of a broader age distribution. She was pouring her life and experience into girls ten years young-

er than her, and she had the benefit of learning from women, 20 to 50 years older than her.

What Rachel rediscovered was the beauty of a multi-generational church built upon family relationships. In a simpler time, grandpas and grandmas went to church with their sons and daughters and their grandchildren. Generation after generation they were all interwoven together in family and church. Grandma cared about the lives and futures of her children and grandchildren. She was regularly and personally connected cross-generationally to support and resource the next generations. With guidance and vision she would do all that she could do to see that her posterity

walked with Jesus.

I fear that today’s younger generation is maturing without the guidance and experience of an older generation, and an older generation is bored and depressed by a lack of energy, passion, and purpose that would come from the upcoming generations. Both generations are impoverished.

Both generations are stymied. Both generations need each other and usually can’t see what has been lost.

If you are in a multi-generational church, you may need to revitalize your church by intentionally drawing your diversity into groups across generational lines. I think that means those of us who are older must in genuine humility take the initiative to

connect with and be flexible enough to adjust our preferences and ministries to engage the passion and energy of the younger generation. Consider multi-generational small groups rather than age segmented groups. Look for ways to train mentors and teachers to bridge the generations.

If you are in a single-generational church, consider recruiting older believers from a partner church (with permission of course) who will add another dimension to your church family. Train them to serve the generation that God is raising up in your congregation. Empower and use these older leaders to come alongside your people. Dare I suggest something even more radical?

Give that generous partner congregation some of your young families to reinvigorate that congregation.

Family is meant to be multi-generational, and so is church. “Remember the days of old; consider the years of past generations. Ask your father, and he will tell you, your elders and they will teach you” (Psalm 32:7). “We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy acts of the LORD, his might, and the wondrous works he has performed” (Psalm 78:4).

Leo Endel is executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention. His daughter, Rachel Endel, collaborated on this column.

Back to the beginning

FLORIDA

continued from page seven

either male or female, and that this creation is a fixed matter of human biology, not individual choice. I believe marriage is instituted by God, not government, is between one man and one woman, and is the only context for sexual desire and expression.”

A motion approved by the church in a meeting Oct. 9, 2022, gives members until March 19 to sign the statement.

If a member doesn't sign it, "...you will be considered to have resigned your membership from First Baptist. But you can always join again by going through our membership process – attending the membership class, meeting with a pastor, and being voted on by the congregation,” according to an FAQ posted on the church's website.

“This was actually a decision that comes from the church and was unanimously voted on by the church so it couldn't have happened without enthusiastic church support,” Lambert told Baptist Press.

He says taking a stand has made a difference in the church, but not the one many people may expect.

“We have also noted record new membership requests since this requirement was announced, which is very encouraging to

us,” he said.

The church posted a video Sept. 21, 2022, where Lambert presented what he called prophetic, legal and pastoral reasons for the statement.

“The sexual revolution is not neutral. They've proven that they're willing to fight against anyone who refuses to endorse their confusion,” Lambert said in the video.

The Jacksonville City Council passed an ordinance on Feb. 14, 2017, that ordered sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) be included in all equal opportunity, fair housing and public accommodation laws. Religious organizations were given an exemption in the bill.

“Protecting our church legally means that we must do everything possible to communicate that our biblical beliefs about gender are a core conviction, absolutely central to who we are as a church of Jesus Christ,” Lambert said in the video.

Lambert began serving at the church in 2016 and became senior pastor in September 2017.

In October 2020, the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and Alliance Defending Freedom published a handbook to help churches as they face SOGI laws on local, state and federal levels.

It chronicles a 2014 ordinance in Houston, Texas, that did

not give churches an exemption, opening the door for people to use public restrooms based on their gender identity.

After much public outcry, the Houston ordinance was reversed.

In a pastoral blog post of the FBC Jacksonville's website, Lambert wrote, “Throughout the history of redemption, God's people have always faced issues that have tested their faithfulness. In our culture, one of those issues is our massive sexual confusion. We cannot be silent where our culture is most confused.”

He believes taking a clear stance on sexuality is one of the most loving things a local church can do.

“Christians are the only ones who know what sin is and are the only ones who know the solution to that sin is found in Christ alone,” he wrote. “That means a culture that is drowning in sexual sin will only hear about it and can only know that they must repent if they hear about it from us.”

The pastor said the response from those outside the church has been mixed.

“There are many, of course, in our secular society that are deeply opposed to anything like this. On the other hand, we have received overwhelming support from many circles, including other pastors, Christians and people of conviction

in the city,” he said in an email to Baptist Press.

The church hosted an open-mic public forum on Sunday evening, Jan. 29. The event lasted for nearly an hour and 20 minutes.

Lambert opened the forum by saying that neither the statement's contents nor the requirement for members' agreement with it are unusual for Christian churches.

“Every faithful church and even lots of faithless churches ask their members to believe things,” he told the audience. “It's a 2,000-year-old reality in the Church to have confessions, to have statements of faith that express what we believe.

“It is not strange or new to have a statement of faith that a church would vote on to ask its members to agree with.”

He added that many, if not most, organizations have standards for members.

“Facebook has community standards,” he said. “Twitter has community standards. If you go to the Kiwanis Club or a gym or a school, there are community standards. Of course, our church can, should and does have a community standard, and those community standards come from the Bible. That is good, right, appropriate, typical and far from novel.”

Before opening the floor to questions,

Lambert answered the question he said he's been asked the most regarding the statement: Why now?

“You think now is not the time to talk about sexuality?” he asked. “Everybody's talking about sexuality. ... Disney has a stated view on sexuality. Starbucks has a stated view on sexuality. Why should not the Church of Jesus Christ have a stated view on sexuality?”

“The most effective statements of faith in the history of Christianity have been the statements of faith that apply directly to something current, something controversial at the time. ...

“When there is a whole lot of confusion about sexuality, it's good and right that we express God's mind on what that is.”

In an interaction between an unidentified questioner and the pastor, Lambert said the goal of the statement is not to single out any one group, but to lead the church to a healthy understanding of biblical sexuality.

“Our mission at First Baptist Church is to reach all of Jacksonville with all of Jesus for all of life,” he told BP. “Everything we do is accomplished with that mission in mind and so our intention is that God will use the proclamation of his truth and his son to build his church in his city.”

Back to the beginning