

Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist

Volume 39, Number 1

January 2024

Table of Contents

- 1 Empower/Equip
- 1 Pastors and Wives Retreat
- 2 Wa Tra Xiong
- 3 Leo Endel: Perspectives
- 3 Bill Tinsley: Reflections
- 4 Leadership: Clint Calvert
- 5 Intercultural: Na Herr
- 5 Guest Column: Wes Grim
- 6 Good news from the associations
- 6 MWBC family featured
- 7 Calendar of events
- 8 IMB missionaries
- 9 WMU Board
- 10 Mission Gifts from the Churches
- 11 Mission Gifts from the Churches
- 12 Pastor and Wives Conference

Empower returns to Green Lake, Equip becomes separate event

Green Lake, Wis. — JJ Washington, college football standout who became a pastor and evangelist, will be keynote speaker at this year's Empower conference, Mar. 8-9, at Green Lake (Wis.) Conference Center.



JJ Washington

The last time Empower met at Green Lake was in 2019. The event was scheduled there in 2020 but canceled at the last minute due to the COVID-19 outbreak. In 2021 Empower was held at the Great Wolf Lodge in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., in 2022 at Southtown Baptist Church in Bloomington, Minn., and in 2023 at the Kahler Hotel in Rochester, Minn.

Equip Next Gen Ministry Conference will not share time and space with Empower as it has in the past, but will be Apr. 5-6 at Southtown Baptist Church in Bloomington, Minn.

The Equip conference is for all leaders and volunteers in children and youth ministries. Featured speaker for Equip will be Landry Holmes, manager of Lifeway Kids Ministry Publishing. [Click here to register.](#)

This year's Empower theme is "Creating a Culture of Evangelism." The conference is free, but registration is required. [Click here to register.](#) Reserve lodging and meals with Green Lake Conference

Center.

JJ Washington is national director of personal evangelism for the North American Mission Board, but his journey to ministry began while he was playing corner back for the North Carolina

State University Wolfpack. When he tore his ACL and asked someone to pray for him, he got more than just a prayer for physical healing. The pastor shared the gospel and

See **EVENTS** page 2



Pastor Brian Schoffstall and his wife Tarese of Transformation church in Sun Prairie, Wis., pass out cheese and apples to build relationships at the Missouri Baptist Convention. The booth caught the attention of Bradley James, director of missions of Laclede Baptist Association in Lebanon, Mo. In the background is Julie Sundeen, executive/financial assistant of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Tinsley leading Pastors and Wives Retreat

Green Lake, Wis. — Bill Tinsley, former executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, will lead this year's Pastors and Wives Retreat, Feb. 1-3, at Green Lake (Wis.) Conference

Center.

"Worthy of the Call" is the theme, based on Ephesians 4:1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been

called."

Tinsley and his wife Jackie now live in Colorado. He writes the Reflections column which appears in the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist as well as dozens of other newspapers

across the nation. The weekly faith column has more than 230,000 online views.

The retreat is free to all MWBC lead pastors plus one additional pas-

See **RETREAT** page 5

**Registration
deadline is
Tuesday!**

Register for Pastors and
Wives Retreat today!

Hmong executive was godly, devoted

Wa Tra Xiong, executive director of the Hmong Baptist National Association, died Oct. 31, 2023. He was 53.

He was a wonderful husband, father, pastor, and friend. He was extremely patient and humble

and his devotion to his family was unconditional. He built his family's foundation on faith, love, and the Word of God. He was known as a kind, generous, and intelligent man who



inspired people with his faith and hope in God and set a godly example. His love for God

was incomparable and was recognized by all who knew him.

Xiong was born Sept. 5, 1970 in Ban Haib Thoos, Xaingabori

Province, Laos, to Cher Xang Xiong and Maiv Vang. He was the third of six children.

In 1976, he fled from Laos to Thailand to live in refugee camp Ban Nangao, Nan, to escape

communist Laos.

Then in 1982, he moved to Phanat Nikhom in Chonburi. He met and married the love of his life Mee Her, whom he lovingly called "Honey." In 1984, they immigrated to the United States of America as refugees and settled in Fresno, Calif.

In 1987, he accepted Christ as his personal Savior and was called to use his gifts and talents for the service of the Lord. In his early ministry, he loved, studied, and preached the Word of the Lord. In 2000, Pastor Xiong finished his doctor of Christian ministry at Southern

Baptist School of Biblical Studies.

In 1989, Pastor David Vang appointed him to be a pastor and sent him to start a Hmong mission in Sacramento. Since then, he has served as senior pastor in Hmong churches in different cities such as Hmong Baptist Church in Fresno, Hmong Hope Community Church in St. Paul, Hmong Baptist Mission in North Carolina, Hmong (now Freedom) Community Church in Fresno, and Eureka Hmong Baptist Church in Eureka.

In 2016, he became executive director of Hmong Baptist National Association and

served in that role until the Lord called him home in peace at Mayo Clinic Hospital in Rochester, Minn.

He leaves his devoted and beloved wife, Mee, six sons, six daughters, and 24 grandchildren. Dr. Wa Tra Xiong will be fondly remembered by his family, fellow pastors, and friends as a loving father, minister, and preacher.

EVENTS

continued from page one

Washington trusted Christ as Savior.

Leaving football behind, he graduated in communications and went into the ministry, serving as a youth pastor, children's pastor, church planter, and pastor, before being called to the state convention staff in Georgia, and later to NAMB.

Also speaking will be Peter Yanes, who served 2019-2023 as executive director of Asian American relations and mobilization for the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Tim Steele, founding and discipleship pastor of Cross Waves Church in Roseville, Minn.

Empower begins at 1 p.m. Friday, Mar. 8 and ends at noon on Saturday, Mar. 9.

Childcare will be provided by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Woman's Missionary Union.



JJ WASHINGTON



PETER YANES



TIM STEELE



NextGen Ministry Conference Southtown Baptist Church

Friday April 5th 1pm—9pm
and Sat April 6th 8 am—Noon
Register at

<https://EQUIP2024.eventbrite.com>

\$39 per person by Mar 9

\$49 per person by April 5

Pastors attend for free with paid
registrations from church



Koinoinia capacity?

Last week the Wall Street Journal published an article entitled, "It Takes at Least 200 Hours to Make a Close Friendship, and More to Maintain It." That statement made me wince because I feel that pressure. I am a "people person" who loves deep friendship but has



Perspectives

Leo Endel

been called to various ministries that press me to be, as I once described it, "relationally two states wide and 1/64 of an inch deep," and even that's overstated! Churches often have a similar challenge.

We say, "Hello," well enough; "glad to have you with us this morning," and we mean it, but even our best intentions are hollow. We don't have room in our lives for much more than a new acquaintance.

I've learned that being a friendly church isn't easy; if you're really going to reach people you've got to be a church where people can find real, intimate, personal friendship,

not just a smile and a handshake. The Bible calls this koinoinia. The cliché is true, "People aren't looking for a friendly church, they're looking for friends."

Koinoinia is the Greek word that is usually translated "fellowship." Koinoinia is about living life TOGETHER. Koinoinia is sharing, interacting, and supporting each other. Koinoinia is about becoming family and investing ourselves in each other. Koinoinia is one of the five functions of the church as listed in Acts 2:42-47 (worship, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and evangelism), and is critically important to the healthy church.

But how many people can you do life with? Robin Dunbar has famously argued that while we are only capable of having five intimate friends, we are

capable of having fifteen close friends, and even fifty good friends. Dunbar argues that our circle is maxed-out at 150 casual friends. If he's right, and I think he is, this may be the reason why most churches never grow beyond 150 people.

Years ago, when I pastored a church that had grown from a weekly attendance of 35 to over 400, a godly woman came up to me and said, "Pastor, I know God wants our church to grow and reach people, but I really liked it a lot better when we were a church of sixty." She was struggling to keep up. With hundreds of people involved in our fellowship she could no longer know everybody; she could not even know everyone's name, let alone be engaged in their lives. She was frustrated. Her

koinoinia capacity was satiated.

That is why one mega church pastor famously said, "As we grow larger, we've also got to grow smaller." A growing church needs a network of growing relationship circles where people can connect and find koinoinia. New small groups provide clusters of relationships where people can connect. It has always been this way. Anyone who has worked in Sunday School understands that new groups grow much faster than existing groups. As a rule, new fellowship groups provide the time and opportunity to bring people together in meaningful relationship.

Growing koinoinia takes an investment of time; that's the overall message of the Wall

See **CAPACITY** page 11

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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New beginnings

We have officially celebrated the beginning of a new year. Thousands made the trek to New York to watch the ball drop at Times Square. Others went to Pasadena for the Rose Parade and the thrilling playoff game between Alabama and Michigan while the Longhorns



Reflections

Bill Tinsley

and the Huskies fought it out in New Orleans.

Most of us gathered with family and friends to welcome 2024 with hugs and kisses. It is time to look forward, to engage the year to come. If our minds are

open to new things, and our hearts are open to God, 2024 can be the start of something spe-

cial, a new beginning!

New beginnings are always exciting: weddings with candles and flowers, beautiful bridesmaids, handsome groomsmen, laughter, toasts and dancing; the birth of a baby wrapped in blankets, showered with gifts; graduations with speeches about dreams and possibilities followed by posed photos that will hang on living room walls; a new job; a new home. Starting anew stirs our imagination.

New beginnings are

filled with excitement, optimism, and hope . . . as well as fear, doubt and worry. Weddings are fun, but making a marriage can be hard work. Babies are cute, but raising a child can be difficult. Graduation marks a significant achievement, but finding a job and advancing in a chosen career can be daunting.

We cannot predict our future. Not all newlyweds who leave the marriage altar

See **NEW** page 4

Time to register for Empower and Equip

Empower will be held March 8-9 at Green Lake Conference Center in Green Lake, Wis.

This year's theme is Creating a Culture of Evangelism.

The North American Mission Board has developed evangelism resources that express care for church leaders and encourage churches to make evangelism an integral part of a church's culture. Empower will introduce attendees to these culture-shaping resources.

Featured speakers include JJ Washington, Peter Yanes, and Tim Steele.

Register at mwbc.org or directly with Eventbrite at Empower 2024. The conference is free to attendees; however, lodging and meals must be arranged



Leadership
Clint Calvert

and paid for with the Green Lake Conference Center. Ministry to children will be provided by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Woman's Missionary Union.

Breakout topics will include Disaster Relief Training, providing ministry to people in the community, and an overview of the *Can I Ask You a Question?* book series authored by Preston and Kelly Condra.

Empower will feature JJ Washington, NAMB's national director of personal evangelism.

JJ earned a football scholarship and played corner back for the North Carolina State Wolfpack. During the Fall of 2000, against their rivals, the University of North Carolina, he tore his ACL. JJ, seeking someone to

pray over his knee, had a life-changing experience when Rev. David Cameron shared the gospel with him. That night, JJ repented of his sin and accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord; the rest is history!

JJ decided to forgo his last year of football, graduate with his B.A. in Communications, and enter the ministry. JJ began his ministerial career as a youth pastor before eventually serving as a children's pastor. He also played a strategic role in two church plants. JJ joined the staff of First Baptist Church Woodstock before transitioning to lead their sister church, Woodstock Church-Austell, through 2019.

JJ joined the church strengthening team for the Georgia Baptist Mission Board (GBMB) in January 2020. He eventually became the evangelism catalyst for the state of

Georgia.

In the summer of 2022, JJ transitioned from the GBMB to NAMB, where he currently serves.

JJ is a licensed and ordained minister, and he holds a M.A. and M Div. from Luther Rice Seminary, and a D.Min. from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. JJ has been married to his wife, Tamara B. Washington, for 19 years and they have two children, Jairus age 15, and Jayla age 11.

Equip is a Next Gen Ministry Conference that will be held at Southtown Baptist Church, Bloomington, Minn., on Friday, April 5, from 1:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., and Saturday, April 6, from 8:00 a.m. to noon.

You can register at EQUIP2024.eventbrite.com. If you register by March 9, the cost is only \$39. If you register after March 9, the cost will be \$49. Pastors attend

for free with paid registrations from their church.

Equip will address the needs of those who minister to children, students, and young adults.

Equip will feature Landry Holmes, the manager of Lifeway Kids Ministry Publishing. A graduate of Howard Payne University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Landry served on church staff before joining Lifeway Kids. He is a church leader, writer, workshop facilitator, and publisher. Landry also teaches children at his church in Middle Tennessee. He and his wife Janetta are the parents of two adult sons and two daughters-in-law and the grandparents of four grandchildren.

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

NEW

continued from page three

showered with rice, petals and birdseed will experience a life-long relationship of love and fulfillment. Not all babies will grow to maturity. Not all graduates will find career positions for which they prepared. But we are all called to something new, something significant.

God always calls us forward into new be-

ginnings. He beckons us to leave the old and familiar to follow Him on a journey of discovery into places we have never been. He encourages us to calm our fears and exchange our doubts for faith. He challenges us to trust in Him for a better future and a better day.

When God called Abraham, He called him from his familiar home to follow Him into a strange land. God said, "Go forth

from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house to a land that I will show you; and I will make you a great nation and I will bless you, and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing" (Genesis 12:1-2). Abraham's step of faith to follow God into a new beginning changed history.

To Isaiah, God said, "Forget the former things; do not dwell

on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland" (Isa. 43:18-19).

Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone. The new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

My hope and my prayer for you is that 2024 will be the start of something new, something special. May

each of you be blessed, as Abraham was, and may God make you a blessing to others.

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

Free missions resources

As you wrap up your Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, I wanted to make you aware of some great resources from the IMB for churches. I have used these resources for training teams going to Southeast Asia.

For an introduction to missions in general, I recommend downloading the free e-book

Foundations. This book takes you through the six stages of the

missionary task: entry, evangelism, discipleship, healthy church formation, leadership

development, and exit to partnership. The principles in this book can be applied to the local mission field as well as the international

mission field. The missionary task is not complete until indigenous leaders have been raised up to perform the missionary task themselves. To download a copy of this free e-book, [click here](#).

If your church is ready to take the next step of going on mission, I recommend going through the IMB training course for short-term missions. You can set up this course online for your team to go through together. The course includes lessons, videos,

and tests to help prepare your team for the mission field. To access this free training course, [click here](#).

There are many other excellent missions resources available on the IMB website: www.imb.org. I encourage you to spend some time looking at their resources and using some of them in your church small group.

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



Intercultural
Na Herr

Road trip to Louisville

My wife Sierra and I led a group of four University of Wisconsin-Madison students from our church to Cross Con 24. Attending the Jan. 3-5 event with

us were Eden Luedke, Nathan Klauk, Kang Pan, and Caleb Alles

We rented a van that was paid for by gracious donations from the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention. Our road trip took seven hours each way.

Cross Con – led by names like John Piper, David Platt, Kevin Deyung, Rosaria Butterfield, and Trip Lee – was very impactful for all four students and for

ourselves as leaders.

The theme of the conference was “Unde-feated,” focusing on the sovereignty of God in the life of every Christian and in God’s mission

to the nations to accomplish all that He has planned. God is undefeated and will remain undefeated until all nations gather to worship Him for all of Eternity (Rev 7:9).

Each student expressed gratitude to have been given the opportunity to go on this trip and each felt that God spiritually refreshed them and filled them at the conference. “I felt like I had



Students from Red Village Church in Madison arrive in Louisville, Ky., for Cross Con 24. Left to right are Nathan Klauk, Wes Grim, Caleb Alles, Eden Luedke, and Kang Pan. Also in the group but taking the photo is Sierra Grim.

recently been losing the ‘why’ in my relationship with God,” one student said. “The overall theme of this conference has given me an eagerness and excitement again for why I am a Christian and for making Him known to those around me.”

We all came back from the conference refreshed and excited to apply what God had

shown us, as well as a greater appreciation for the local Church and its role in making disciples and reaching the Nations. Thank you MWBC for allowing Red Village Church to take this trip and for helping us make disciples of Christ!

Wes Grim is a pastoral assistant at Red Village Church in Madison, Wis.

RETREAT

continued from page one

tor from churches with multiple pastoral staff. In addition, retired pastors can attend for free. The retreat is funded through Cooperative Program giving and the Texas Baptists’ Mary Hill Davis Offering.

The retreat begins Thursday, Feb. 1 with registration and check-in at 4 p.m. The first event is dinner at 5 p.m. Thursday. The retreat ends with breakfast on Saturday, Feb. 3.

The retreat is designed for fellowship, renewal and growth. The schedule is light. Dress is casual. Child-care is not provided. Infants less than six months or still nursing are welcome. However, since this is a “get-away” weekend for all, parents need to find alternative care with friends and family for other children.

Friday afternoon is free for pastors and their wives to explore the conference center grounds (bring skis, snowshoes, hiking boots), go shopping in one of the many small towns in the area, fellowship with other couples around a game board, or take a nap.

Register by completing this [online form](#).

Registration deadline is Tuesday, Jan. 16 or until capacity is reached, at which time, a waiting list will be started.

To change or cancel your reservation, contact Na Herr at herr@mwbc.org or at (507) 282-3636.

Back to the beginning

Good news from the associations

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

City on a Hill Church in Fitchburg will be attending the Houston NAMB assessment with new church planter Jose Lino and his wife, Cindy, on February 1-2.

Jose and Marylu Marco of Emmanuel Church in Madison both have passed their citizenship examinations and will become full U.S. citizens in the coming weeks at their oath ceremonies.

Wes Grim, college student minister at Red Village Church in Madison, graduated from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas in December.

Pastor Matt Wunderlin of Rolling Hills Church in Platteville has shared they now have three worship services including a Saturday night service. In other news, Matt is being promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Air Force National Guard in January.

Thirty people were trained at a Residency Builder Event provided by the North American Mission Board Nov. 30 at Transformation Church in Sun Prairie. Participants were given a way to develop a unique and intentional plan for their churches to develop their own residency program within their respective churches.

SWBA has 12 people going to the Midwest Leadership Summit in January in Springfield, Ill.

NORTHWOODS

Hill City Baptist Church was blessed by Northland Missions late last year as they faced covering the cost of replacing a roof. The cost was around \$15,000. Northland Missions gave \$3,500 and another Northland Missions church gave an additional \$3,500.



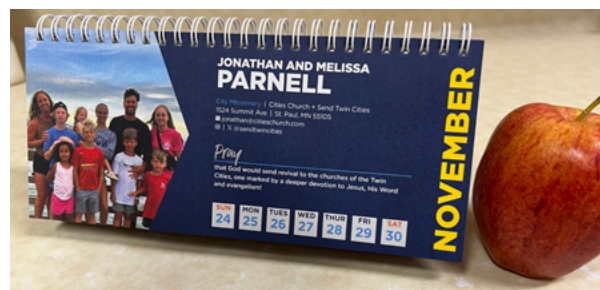
This team from Reborn in Christ Baptist Church provided and served the lunch at the SWBA annual meeting in November.

MWBC family featured in prayer calendar

Alpharetta, Ga. — Jonathan and Melissa Parnell are among the missionaries featured in the North American Mission Board 2024 desk prayer calendar. The calendars are free and can be ordered at NAMBstore.com or by calling (800) 634-2462.

Southern Baptists will be praying specifically for the Parnell family Nov. 24-30, asking God to “send revival to the churches of the Twin Cities, one marked by a deeper devotion to Jesus, His Word, and evangelism.”

Parnell is the lead pastor of Cities Church in Minneapolis-St. Paul, a church he and his team planted in 2015. He is the Send Network’s City



Jonathan and Melissa Parnell, along with their eight children, are on mission in the Twin Cities.

Missionary in the Twin Cities, where he also serves as a church-planting trainer.

“Pray for continued unity among our churches and a fresh passion to advance the gospel,” Parnell says on the back of the calendar. “Pray new planting residencies will emerge from among our churches that have a vision to

multiply in the next two years. Pray for more strategic partnerships to help resource and equip church planters in the Twin Cities.”

Parnell is the author of *Mercy for Today: A Daily Prayer from Psalm 51* (2020), *Never Settle for Normal: The Proven Path to Significance and Happiness* (2017) and coauthor of *How to Stay Christian in Seminary* (2014).

Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist



This ordination council convened Oct. 14 at Journey Church in Amery, Wis., to lay hands on the church’s pastor, Isaac Karpenske, third from left.



Jose Marco, pastor of Emmanuel Church in Madison, Wis., and Hispanic church planter mobilizer in Wisconsin, became a U.S. citizen on Wednesday, Jan. 10, as he took the Oath of Allegiance at a naturalization ceremony in Milwaukee. He and his wife Marylu are from Argentina and both are graduates of Word of Life Bible Institute in Argentina and Rio Grande Bible College in Texas. Marylu is a music teacher with a bachelor's degree in Christian Education. She has also passed her citizenship test and will take the oath at a future ceremony.



More than 25 attended this two-day Leadership Accelerator event sponsored by SWBA at Transformation Church in Sun Prairie in November. The event featured Mac Lake and Michele Barnett of the Multiply Group. The conference will be followed by four coaching sessions during the first half of 2024. The purpose is to build teamwork and help participants create vision, form a mission statement, adopt core values, and develop a battle cry for 2024 that helps their church focus on what is most important.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NBA: Northwoods Baptist Association
 SMBA: Southern Minnesota Baptist Association
 TCMB: Twin Cities Metro Baptist Association

BLBA: Bay Lakes Baptist Association
 SWBA: Southern Wisconsin Baptist Association
 LBA: Lakeland Baptist Association

MWBC events are in bold print.

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

JANUARY

23-25 Midwest Leadership Summit, Springfield, Ill.

FEBRUARY

1-3 Pastors and Wives Retreat, Green Lake (Wis.) Conference Center

MARCH

3-10 Week of Prayer for North American Missions/Annie Armstrong Easter Offering

7-9 Empower Conference, Green Lake (Wis.) Conference Center
 29 Good Friday – **MWBC Office Closed**

APRIL

5-6 Equip - NextGen Ministry Conference, Southtown Baptist Church, Bloomington, Minn.

19-20 MWBC Executive Board Meeting, Rochester, Minn.
 30 MWBC Lottie Moon Offering Cutoff

MAY

19 New Pastor Orientation, Rochester, Minn.
 27 Memorial Day Observed – **MWBC Office Closed**

JUNE

9-12 Southern Baptist Convention, Indianapolis, Ind.
 17-22 Hands of Hope, location TBD
 30 MWBC Annie Armstrong Offering Cutoff

JULY

1-14 SEA Mission Trip, Nan, Thailand
 4 Independence Day – **MWBC Office Closed**

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

1-30 Season of Prayer for State Missions
 2 Labor Day – **MWBC Office Closed**
 13-14 MWBC Executive Board, Rochester, Minn.
 20-22 Called Out Youth Conference, Baraboo, Wis.

OCTOBER

24 Church Planters Gathering, Valley Baptist Church, Appleton, Wis.
 25 Pastors Conference, Valley Baptist Church, Appleton, Wis.
 25-26 MWBC Annual Meeting, Valley Baptist Church, Appleton, Wis.
 28-29 Missouri Baptist Annual Meeting, St. Charles Convention Center, St. Charles, Mo.

NOVEMBER

10-12 Baptist General Convention of Texas Annual Meeting, Waco, Texas
 28-29 Thanksgiving Holiday – **MWBC Office Closed**

DECEMBER

1-8 Week of Prayer for International Missions/Lottie Moon Christmas Offering
 25-1/1 Christmas/New Year's Holiday – **MWBC Office Closed**
 27-1/5 Israel Trip

New Myanmar fellowship sends first missionaries ‘full circle’ to nations

By Julie McGowan
IMB

As new International Mission Board missionaries gathered for a special commissioning service near Richmond, Virginia, on Dec. 7, six representatives of the Myanmar Baptist Churches USA fellowship traveled from Maryland. They were on-site to support one couple who represents a historic milestone for the Southern Baptist Convention.

The latest group of newly trained IMB missionaries includes 108 adults and 41 children ready to take the gospel to people in 37 countries. Among this group are the first Southern Baptist missionaries sent through IMB by the new Myanmar Baptist Churches USA fellowship, which conducted its first meeting at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in New Orleans in June.

In one sense, this Burmese American missionary couple represents Southern Baptist missions “coming full circle,” said IMB

President Paul Chitwood, referencing one of the first Baptist missionaries from America, Adoniram Judson, who took the gospel to Burma (modern-day Myanmar) in 1812.

Representing the cross-cultural heart of the Myanmar fellowship, the missionary couple commissioned Dec. 7 will be taking the gospel to North Africa. They are being sent by Falam Christian Church of Indianapolis, Indiana, where Hre Mang serves as senior pastor. Mang also is the executive director of Myanmar Baptist Churches USA.

“Today takes on a new significance as it marks a milestone,” said Chitwood, sharing the words of Adoniram Judson as recorded in “To the Golden Shore,” as he reflected upon the sacrifices required of his missionary service and the results he hoped for.

Judson said: “The poor Burmans are entirely destitute of those consolations and joys which constitute our happiness; and why should we be unwilling to part with a few fleeting, inconsiderable



The first Burmese-American Southern Baptist missionaries sent through IMB speak during their commissioning service December 7, near Richmond, Va. “We have a chance to go to an unreached nation,” they said. “We will carry on that vision.” IMB Photo

comforts, for the sake of making them sharers with us in joys exalted as heaven, durable as eternity! We cannot expect to do much, in such a rough, uncultivated field; yet, if we may be instrumental in removing some of the rubbish, and preparing the way for others, it will be a sufficient reward. I have been accustomed to view this field of labor, with dread and terror; but I now feel perfectly willing to make it my home the rest of my life.”

“Judson and his family answered God’s call and did the work God called them to do,” Chitwood said. “What does that have to do with December 7, 2023? Today marks the first time in history that Burmese Southern Baptist churches here in the U.S. will send out missionaries through the IMB to foreign fields,” he said to the applause of those in attendance at the commissioning.

“Because Judson and others went to the Golden Shore to share the gospel, believers today, in a round-about way, go from the Golden Shore to take the gospel to others so they, too, can be ‘sharers with us in joys exalted as heaven, durable as eternity!’ So today we celebrate this ‘full circle’ of Baptist missions.”

Before the service, the new missionary couple welcomed supporters from the Myanmar fellowship who made the journey south to Virginia as a show of support for the new Burmese American missionaries and to learn more about how they also can send cross-cultural missionaries through the IMB. The group included pastors Cin Do Thawng, George Cin Za Mang, and Thuam Cin Khai, as well as Khai Cin Pau, Thawng Hauzelal, and Mang Lamh Huam-Khai.

“It is an honor to

be here, and very important,” said Cin Do Thawng, pastor of Si-zang Burmese Mission Church in Catonsville, Maryland. “God has been working in this way for over 200 years. And God is still doing great things through Burmese people.

“We have a heart for missions. The American missionary had a heart for Burmese people, and now Burmese people need to send others to the nations, too.”

For IMB’s first Burmese American Southern Baptist missionaries, the on-site support from the Maryland churches was a welcome surprise on their commissioning day. The couple noted that Myanmar — their family’s homeland — was once an unreached nation until Judson and others took the gospel there.

“Now we have a chance to go to an unreached nation,” they said. “We will carry on that vision.”



IMB president, Paul Chitwood, right, welcomes several members of the Myanmar Baptist Churches USA fellowship to IMB’s missionary commissioning service near Richmond, Virginia. The group included (second from right to left), pastors Cin Do Thawng, Thawng Hauzelal, Khai Cin Pau, George Cin Za Mang, and (not pictured) Thuam Cin Khai and Mang Lamh Huam-Khai. IMB Photo

Stories of faithfulness highlight WMU board meeting

By Julie Walters
WMU

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — From Alaska to Maine, nearly 200 missions leaders from across the country gathered on Missionary Ridge in Birmingham for WMU's January Board Meeting this past weekend, Jan. 6-8, 2024.

Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national WMU, said often when you hear mission speakers, they tell you inspirational story after story of amazing ways they've seen God at work in their midst; people coming to Christ; masses being baptized; dancing on mountaintops of spiritual experiences.

But she then told a story a missionary who served with IMB for 12 years who said when we hear those stories, we should rejoice; but for every mountaintop, there are usually weeks, months or many years leading up to that mountaintop when you are stuck in the valley. And those are years of prayer, and tears, and rejection, and hardship that have to be passed through in order to see the grace of God.

Wisdom-Martin compared this IMB missionary's inspiring story to Adoniram Judson, famous missionary to Burma in the 1800s who didn't have one convert until his seventh year.

"Adoniram's son Edward once said, 'If you succeed without suffer-

ing, it's because others suffered before you. If you suffer without succeeding, it's so others may succeed after you,'" Wisdom-Martin shared. "You have to get to the point where you believe Christ is enough. He is enough and He is worthy of every heartache and sacrifice."

Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, addressed the group Sunday morning and stated, "Missions in the SBC would not be what it is if it were not for WMU and if it were not for Sandy Wisdom-Martin. We are very grateful for her and we are grateful for how you support our missionaries. They are overwhelmed with gratefulness when we tell them all that you do."

Ezell preached an encouraging message about the urgency of sharing the gospel.

"Time moves at a rapid pace and we have to make the most of our time, to live in the moment. You see that sense of urgency in the apostle Paul," Ezell said, citing 1 Cor. 16:5-9.

"Paul saw opposition as a reason to stay not an excuse to leave," Ezell said. "He was determined. Let's not get discouraged. Let's not get distracted. We are about the mission. When opposition comes, embrace it but at the same time understand it and be faithful in the midst of it."

Paul Chitwood, president of the International



Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national WMU, encouraged participants with stories of God's faithfulness. "He is worthy of every heartache and sacrifice," she said.

Mission Board, said during his report, "We at the IMB thank God for WMU. You are the unwaveringly advocates in prayers for our missionaries."

During her address, national WMU President Connie Dixon compared God's love to a vast ocean, saying it is long, deep, wide, and high.

"God's love reaches every corner of our experience," she said. "While it cannot be measured by any comprehensible standards, God wants us to know this ocean of love. Like describing an ocean, its total beauty cannot be understood until you see it for yourself. It is the same with God's love. Until you actually experience it and possess the true peace with God, no one can describe its wonders to you."

"We as WMU need to show that kind of love to the world," Dixon continued. "Our unwavering focus is making disciples of Jesus who live on mission as we seek to help every

man, woman and child understand missions and their role in fulfilling the Great Commission."

Veronica Stone serving with IMB and Osvaldo and Vanessa Lerma serving with Send Relief along the Texas border shared ways God is working in their lives and through their ministries.

Participants attended breakout sessions on a variety of topics from age-level missions discipleship to mental health to communication and leadership skills. Additional opportunities included a walk-through of areas of study in WMU curriculum for 2024-2025, a WorldCrafts shop, tours of the WMU building and artifacts, and health and wellness checks by Baptist Nursing Fellowship. The WMU Foundation hosted a silent auction and book sale that generated more than \$1,300 in donations for the Missions Camping Endowment, and had a station where participants wrote notes of en-

couragement to WMU/WMU Foundation scholarship recipients.

WMU welcomed four new state WMU presidents to the executive board: Robin Barden, Alaska; Sandra Hughes, California; Denise Clymer, New Mexico; and Jackie Faughn, Texas. In addition, four presidents who will rotate off the executive board this spring as they complete their term were recognized for their faithful service: Carolyn Fountain, Louisiana; Jan Turner, Missouri; Deborah Taylor, North Carolina; and Cindy Burns, South Carolina.

During the executive session on Saturday night, the executive board heard updates from committees and approved:

- the 2024 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering goal be set at \$205 million.

- the 2025 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering goal be set at \$78 million.

The next scheduled WMU board meeting will be June 1.

Mission Gifts from the Churches

MINNESOTA WISCONSIN BAPTIST CONVENTION COOPERATIVE PROGRAM AND STATE MISSION OFFERING RECEIPTS

January - December 2023

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Cooperative Program Budget 2023 | \$652,342.00 |
| Cooperative Program Receipts 2023 | \$574,708.14 |
| Under Budget 2023 | \$77,633.86 |

| NAME | CP 2023 | SMO 2023 |
|------|---------|----------|
|------|---------|----------|

BAY LAKES BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Amherst, Amherst Bible | \$500.00 | \$0.00 |
| Appleton, Valley | \$55,073.64 | \$2,590.00 |
| Appleton, Fox Valley Hmong | \$360.00 | \$0.00 |
| Clintonville, First Baptist | \$2,206.96 | \$600.00 |
| Green Bay, Highland Crest | \$57,192.13 | \$0.00 |
| Green Bay, Graceway Fellowship | \$5,754.22 | \$0.00 |
| Manitowoc, New Beginnings | \$254.86 | \$0.00 |
| Neenah, Living Vine | \$600.00 | \$0.00 |
| Sheboygan, Mapledale Baptist | \$3,325.50 | \$0.00 |
| Tilleda, Bethany Baptist Church | \$2,520.10 | \$1,000.00 |
| Waupaca, Fellowship Baptist | \$2,214.25 | \$0.00 |
| Stevens Point, Tapestry | \$200.00 | \$0.00 |
| Appleton, Hmong Baptist | \$2,270.87 | \$0.00 |
| Appleton, Church of the Living | \$111.69 | \$0.00 |
| BLBA TOTAL | \$132,584.22 | \$4,190.00 |

LAKELAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Bassett, Westosha Baptist | \$1,780.00 | \$200.00 |
| Kenosha, Fellowship Baptist | \$12,127.66 | \$2,696.00 |
| Kenosha, Parkside Baptist | \$2,755.53 | \$380.00 |
| Milwaukee, Grace Point | \$462.26 | \$0.00 |
| Brown Deer, Brown Deer Baptist | \$1,000.00 | \$835.00 |
| Milwaukee, Ephesians Baptist | \$900.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, Hmong First Baptist | \$0.00 | \$182.00 |
| Milwaukee, Jericho Church | \$150.00 | \$150.00 |
| Milwaukee, Korean Baptist | \$900.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, Layton Avenue | \$12,805.26 | \$2,330.00 |
| Milwaukee, Mercy Memorial | \$1,650.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, Monumental | \$325.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, Mt Horeb Baptist | \$300.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, Mt Pilgrim | \$2,100.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, Northwest Baptist | \$2,924.85 | \$0.00 |
| Pewaukee, Crossroads | \$3,553.65 | \$0.00 |
| Racine, Hope Community | \$2,971.58 | \$235.00 |
| Mount Pleasant, Immanuel | \$12,493.58 | \$1,905.00 |
| Franklin, Emmaus Fellowship | \$600.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, Milwaukee Arabic | \$1,185.87 | \$0.00 |
| Brookfield, Redemption Church | \$3,600.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, UFlourish Church | \$2,035.96 | \$0.00 |
| Mount Pleasant, I.C.A.R.E. | \$1,171.26 | \$0.00 |
| Kenosha, Amistad Cristiana | \$3,600.00 | \$0.00 |
| Hartland, Disciples Church | \$2,500.00 | \$0.00 |
| Milwaukee, Iglesia Su Presencia | \$35.58 | \$0.00 |
| LBA TOTAL | \$73,928.04 | \$8,913.00 |

| NAME | CP YTD | SMO 2023 |
|------|--------|----------|
|------|--------|----------|

TWIN CITIES METRO BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Minnetonka, Slavic Baptist | \$600.00 | \$0.00 |
| Bloomington, Southtown Baptist | \$18,193.50 | \$2,500.00 |
| Minneapolis, Gracepoint | \$1,300.00 | \$0.00 |
| Brooklyn Park, Ebenezer | \$900.00 | \$0.00 |
| Brooklyn Park, North Center | \$3,019.47 | \$60.00 |
| Brooklyn Park, N Center Lao | \$0.00 | \$900.00 |
| Burnsville, Resurrection | \$0.00 | \$350.00 |
| Spring Lake Park, Hmong Hope | \$500.00 | \$800.00 |
| St. Paul, Hmong Unity Christian | \$500.00 | \$0.00 |
| Sunfish Lake, Bethel Baptist | \$7,515.39 | \$0.00 |
| St. Paul, Iglesia Hispana Betel | \$1,625.00 | \$0.00 |
| Roseville, Twin City Hmong | \$1,980.00 | \$700.00 |
| Maple Grove, Northwood | \$1,200.00 | \$0.00 |
| St. Louis Park, First Ukrainian | \$500.00 | \$0.00 |
| Monticello, First Baptist Church | \$321.92 | \$0.00 |
| Roseville, Roseville Baptist | \$8,400.00 | \$0.00 |
| Fridley, Good News Hmong | \$500.00 | \$0.00 |
| St. Paul, Followers Of Christ | \$9,028.57 | \$31.00 |
| Coon Rapids, First Hmong | \$3,000.00 | \$800.00 |
| New Prague, Calvary Church | \$23,246.21 | \$1,799.25 |
| North St. Paul - Eternal Life | \$2,856.00 | \$0.00 |
| St. Paul, Cities Church | \$10,000.00 | \$0.00 |
| Bloomington, Hope of Nations | \$1,095.96 | \$0.00 |
| Amery, Journey Church | \$10,755.44 | \$500.00 |
| Maple Grove, Unlock Church | \$1,100.00 | \$0.00 |
| Bloomington, MN Kangnam | \$1,200.00 | \$0.00 |
| Sunfish Lake, Vietnamese | \$720.00 | \$0.00 |
| Richfield, Richfield Bible | \$1,200.00 | \$0.00 |
| Minneapolis, All Peoples | \$6,480.00 | \$0.00 |
| Ramsey, Bethlehem Worship | \$550.00 | \$250.00 |
| Minneapolis, Shalom Community | \$1,000.00 | \$0.00 |
| Burnsville, Berean Baptist | \$2,000.00 | \$0.00 |
| Monticello, Grace Bible | \$1,300.00 | \$0.00 |
| New Hope, Westview | \$5,000.00 | \$0.00 |
| White Bear Lake, Emmaus | \$16,852.00 | \$0.00 |
| Minnetonka, Redeemer Bible | \$1,200.00 | \$0.00 |
| Eagan, Eurasia Baptist | \$50.00 | \$0.00 |
| St. Paul, Gracepoint Midwest | \$1,200.00 | \$0.00 |
| Eagan, Good News | \$9,600.00 | \$0.00 |
| TCMBA Total | \$156,489.46 | \$8,690.25 |

SOUTHERN MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Austin, Austin Baptist | \$5,082.35 | \$0.00 |
| Mankato, Hope Baptist | \$1,396.60 | \$0.00 |
| Red Wing, Hiawatha Valley | \$6,764.20 | \$610.00 |
| Chester, Chester Woods | \$1,810.54 | \$590.00 |
| Rochester, Redemption City | \$12,260.65 | \$0.00 |
| Rochester, Rochester | \$1,100.00 | \$0.00 |
| Rochester, Emmanuel Baptist | \$17,263.56 | \$2,135.00 |
| Eyota, Hmong Baptist | \$2,000.00 | \$1,305.00 |
| Viola, Viola Bible | \$187.69 | \$155.00 |
| Winona, Cornerstone Community | \$4,674.05 | \$0.00 |
| Rochester, Northbridge | \$6,612.00 | \$0.00 |
| Marshall, Radiant Life | \$2,879.67 | \$0.00 |
| Sartell, Faith Journey | \$5,505.72 | \$0.00 |
| St. Cloud, St. Cloud International | \$500.00 | \$0.00 |
| Sauk Rapid, Harvest en Espanol | \$225.00 | \$0.00 |
| SMNBA Total | \$68,262.03 | \$4,795.00 |

Mission Gifts from the Churches

| NAME | CP YTD | SMO 2023 | NAME | CP YTD | SMO 2023 |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| SOUTHERN WI BAPTIST ASSOCIATION | | | NORTHWOODS BAPTIST ASSOCIATION | | |
| Madison, Red Village | \$8,500.00 | \$0.00 | Bemidji, Ridgewood Baptist | \$1,228.00 | \$0.00 |
| Madison, Hope In Christ | \$816.80 | \$67.15 | Ely, Berean Baptist | \$1,600.00 | \$0.00 |
| Madison, Campus Community | \$1,800.00 | \$0.00 | Cambridge, Cross Pointe | \$3,575.00 | \$0.00 |
| Platteville, Rolling Hills | \$8,018.84 | \$0.00 | Crookston, Prairie Community | \$6,501.98 | \$67.04 |
| La Crosse, New Hope | \$600.00 | \$0.00 | Pequot Lakes, Eagles Nest | \$0.00 | \$8,000.00 |
| Madison, East Madison Baptist | \$8,254.00 | \$1,440.00 | Hill City, Hill City Baptist | \$1,400.00 | \$0.00 |
| Madison, Midvale Baptist | \$12,509.09 | \$0.00 | Grand Rapids, Calvary Pines | \$2,460.00 | \$0.00 |
| Sun Prairie, Transformation | \$3,194.10 | \$0.00 | Rice Lake, Hope Baptist | \$6,179.90 | \$1,965.00 |
| Reedsburg, Trinity Baptist | \$17,400.00 | \$0.00 | Warroad, Westside Baptist | \$2,545.50 | \$0.00 |
| Boscobel, Blue River Valley | \$1,128.32 | \$100.00 | Roseau, Immanuel Baptist | \$4,041.54 | \$0.00 |
| Sparta, Gospel Baptist | \$3,819.90 | \$0.00 | New York Mills, Grace | \$2,282.00 | \$0.00 |
| WI Rapids, Church at Wazeecha | \$3,975.01 | \$810.00 | NWBA Total | \$31,813.92 | \$10,032.04 |
| Sun Prairie, United Hmong | \$1,349.39 | \$0.00 | | | |
| Waterloo, Cornerstone | \$1,100.00 | \$0.00 | OTHER | | |
| Janesville, Resonate | \$5,351.37 | \$0.00 | Eau Claire, Jacob's Well | \$10,200.00 | \$0.00 |
| WI Rapids, First Baptist | \$510.00 | \$100.00 | Eau Claire, Trinity Baptist Church | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| Waterloo, Centro Biblico La Roca | \$120.00 | \$0.00 | Eau Claire, One in Christ Church | \$1,391.89 | \$0.00 |
| WI Dells, Rock of Hope | \$2,400.00 | \$0.00 | Grantsburg, Living Hope Church | \$0.00 | \$0.00 |
| Madison, Livingstone Baptist | \$3,800.00 | \$400.00 | Contributions by Individuals | \$0.00 | \$3,990.00 |
| Madison, Doxa | \$1,574.36 | \$0.00 | OTHER TOTAL | 11,591.89 | \$3,990.00 |
| Madison, Antioch Fellowship | \$600.00 | \$0.00 | | | |
| La Crosse, Crossway | \$2,400.00 | \$645.00 | | | |
| Janesville, Casa de Oracion | \$20.00 | \$20.00 | | | |
| Madison, Shalom Christian | \$425.00 | \$0.00 | MWBC TOTAL RECEIVED | \$574,708.14 | \$45,107.44 |
| Sun Prairie, Christ Fellowship | \$1,200.00 | \$0.00 | | | |
| Sun Prairie, Reborn in | \$2,014.55 | \$315.00 | | | |
| Monroe, Redemption | \$665.65 | \$0.00 | | | |
| Verona, Memorial Baptist | \$250.00 | \$0.00 | | | |
| Madison, Gracepoint | \$1,200.00 | \$0.00 | | | |
| Janesville, Bethel | \$3,714.20 | \$0.00 | | | |
| Madison, Emmanuel | \$728.00 | \$0.00 | | | |
| Watertown, Watertown | \$600.00 | \$0.00 | | | |
| WI Rapids, Mosaic Fellowship | \$0.00 | \$600.00 | | | |
| SWBA TOTAL | \$100,038.58 | \$4,497.15 | | | |

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

CAPACITY

continued from page three

Street Journal article. If your congregation only gathers once a week in worship with only a third of them in a Bible Study fellowship for a second hour, they will never experience meaningful koinonia. Add to that the fact that new research reveals even active attenders of your church attend less frequently than ever. Once people attended multiple services every week; today they might attend one time a week

every other week.

How can we help weave together the kind of connections that will build support and sustain our people with warmth and joy? Here are a few thoughts.

- Consider starting something new—new small groups, new Sunday School classes, new Bible Studies, new study groups, new service or ministry groups, new community groups...etc. New groups make it easier for new people to connect.

- Augment your Sunday worship experience

with additional connection opportunities like pre-service coffee at the building entrance or after church refreshments. Anything that causes people to linger will help them engage in conversation.

- Build opportunities around other existing gatherings. Some churches have added a meal to their midweek service to give people the opportunity to relax and connect.

- Appoint a Sunday morning koinonia leader to function as a minister of connections. Identify that

person in your church who loves people and is loved by people. Train this person to not only say, "hello," but to get to know newcomers well enough to introduce them to people they might be able to connect with.

- Train and encourage your people to engage and connect with guests.

- Have ongoing open invitation events where people can choose to connect. Regularly scheduled Saturday morning coffees or monthly breakfasts are easy connecting opportunities.

nities.

- Provide your pastor and wife with a reimbursable expense fund with which they can take guests out to lunch.

- Be creative. You can come up with ideas of your own that can help your church connect.

Find a way to build koinonia in your church and it will revitalize your ministry!

Leo Endel is executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Back to the beginning

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a Bible. The person is wearing a blue denim jacket over a red shirt. The Bible is open, and the text is visible on the pages. The background is dark and out of focus.

Pastors & Wives Retreat

February 1-3, 2024

Worthy of the Call

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord,
urge you to walk in a manner worthy
of the calling
with which you have been called.
Ephesians 4:1

Guest speaker
Bill Tinsley

**Green Lake Conference Center
Green Lake, WI**