

# Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist

Volume 39, Number 2

March 2024

## Table of Contents

- 1 Pastors and Wives Retreat
- 1 Empower/Equip
- 2 Thirty Years
- 3 Leo Endel: Perspectives
- 3 Bill Tinsley: Reflections
- 4 Leadership: Clint Calvert
- 4 Intercultural: Na Herr
- 5 Guest Column: Randy Smith
- 6 TCMBA mission trip
- 6 Good News from the Associations
- 7 People and Places
- 7 Calendar of Events
- 8 Pastors and Wives Retreat
- 9 Tra Xiong
- 9 Argueta family
- 10 Mission gifts from the churches
- 11 SEA mission trip essay winner
- 12 Stories of Interest

## Tinsley challenges pastors, wives to walk worthy of their call

By David Williams  
Editor

Green Lake, Wis. — “Your marriage is the secret to your success,” Bill Tinsley told pastors and wives as they gathered for their annual retreat Feb. 1-3 at Green Lake (Wis.) Conference Center.

“Love your wife, love your husband,” he said. “The secret to your success — not just in ministry, but in life — is your marriage.”

The former executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention, Tinsley and his wife Jackie now live in Colorado. He continues to be active in ministry through preaching, coaching church planters and writing the Reflections column which appears in the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist as well as dozens of other newspapers across the



After a meal, attendees of the Pastors and Wives Retreat gather in front of the fireplace for a group photo.

nation.

The couple “came home” to Green Lake to lead the annual couples retreat that is gifted to MWBC pastors and wives through funding from the Cooperative Program and the Mary Hill Davis State Missions Offering of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. About 110

attended the event.

Addressing the theme, “Worthy of the Call,” Tinsley stressed that character and behavior are important in the ministry. “Everyone who knows you, they’re watching,” he said, “and what you do, how you conduct yourself, reflects on Jesus.”

Tinsley alluded to

some high profile cases in which pastors and other church and denominational leaders lost their ministry because of their conduct, many times involving unfaithfulness in their marriage.

“We are in an age of moral crisis and the church is in moral cri-

See **RETREAT** page 2

## Time to get ‘empowered’ and ‘equipped’

Green Lake, Wis. — March and April are bringing more than “wind and showers” as two major training opportunities are being offered by the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention.

Empower will be Mar. 8-9 at Green Lake (Wis.) Conference Center and the Equip Next Gen

Ministry Conference will be Apr. 5-6 at Southtown Baptist Church in Bloomington, Minn.

Empower is a conference for everyone and this year’s theme is “Creating a Culture of Evangelism.” Empower begins at 1 p.m. Friday, Mar. 8, and ends at noon

See **TRAINING** page 2

**EMPOWER**  
MARCH 8-9, 2024  
GREEN LAKE CONFERENCE CENTER  
CREATING A CULTURE OF EVANGELISM

JJ WASHINGTON

PETER YARNES

TIM STEELE

**EQUIP**

**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

## TRAINING

*continued from page one*

on Saturday, Mar. 9. Childcare will be provided by the M-W Woman's Missionary Union.

Empower's keynote speaker will be JJ Washington, national director of personal evangelism for the North American Mission Board. 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.

The conference is free, but registration is required. [Click here to register.](#)

Reserve lodging and meals with Green Lake Conference Center.

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

**Back to the beginning**

## RETREAT

*continued from page one*

sis," he said.

"I'm convinced there are far more pastors who are faithful and walk worthy who do not make the news or the SBC list of 700," he said, referring to a report released by the Southern Baptist Convention in 2022 listing 700 SBC church

leaders and volunteers who had been accused of sexual abuse. "But our hearts are heavy because when the world looks at us, they see the 700."

Pastors must guard their hearts, acknowledge their weaknesses, and nurture a healthy relationship with their wife, he said.

"It's not just about the marriage bed," he said.

"It's about the relationship."

Tinsley said that a pastor's call is a call that is shared with his wife.

"You ladies here, God called you, not just your husband," he said. "You didn't just tag along.

You are here because God called you. It is a shared call."

Tinsley told about his call to ministry and how

his wife Jackie shared in that call to pastor, to plant churches, to serve in an association, and to come to MWBC.

"God also gave her a call as a teacher, and I have shared in that call," he said.

Tinsley said that as a young man he had planned to study law and go into politics to help change the world.

Then God called him to ministry when he was 18 years old. His father worried that he wouldn't be able to make a living. His older brother told their father not to worry because it was just a phase.

"Well, I'm still in that phase, 59 years later," he said.

**Back to the beginning**



*Noticing several long-timers and old-timers at the retreat, Editor David Williams asked all those who were serving in the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention in 1994 to come together for this photo during the Pastors and Wives Retreat. From left to right are:*

*David and Donna Kay Williams. David was MWBC evangelism and stewardship director and state paper editor in 1994. Today he is a director of missions in Texas, but also in his 28th year as editor of the M-W Baptist from Texas. Donna Kay is a chaplain coach with Marketplace Ministries.*

*Guy and Kathy Fredrick. They were Fuge Camp Coordinators and Guy led men's ministry in 1994. Today he is pastor of Mapledale Baptist Church in Sheboygan, Wis., and associational missions strategist for Bay Lakes Baptist Association.*

*"Nhia Yee and Kelly Her. Nhia was pastor of Hmong Baptist Church in Rochester in 1994. In 2018 the congregation relocated to Eyota and he continues as pastor of Hmong Baptist Church in Eyota, Minn.*

*Norman and Patty Wallace. In 1994 Norman was MWBC church growth/health director. He retired Jan. 31, 2006. Today he and Patty live Paducah, Ky. Norman is care leader in a Sunday School class and sings in the worship choir and senior adult choir. Patty is in a crocheting "Hearts for Babies" group, teaches Mission Friends and sings in the senior choir. She volunteers at Starfish Ministries that provides furniture and clothing for people in need.*

*Phil and Randy Smith. In 1994, Phil was a lay leader at Glen Lake Baptist Church in Minnetonka, Minn., and Randy was MWBC preschool and children's consultant at the time, a position she held for 15 years. Phil later became pastor of Crystal Lake Baptist Church in Burnsville, Minn., where he served for 20 years. They retired to Frost, a small farming community in southern Minnesota. Phil leads a men's Bible study in the community and provides pulpit supply to various churches as needed. Randy heads up Kids Kamp/VBS in a local church. They maintain a watch-care membership with Emmanuel Baptist Church in Rochester, Minn.*

*Chuck and Susan Friemel. In 1994 Chuck was pastor of Hiawatha Valley Baptist Church in Red Wing, Minn., a church he and Susan had planted in 1990. They continue to serve there today, after 34 years.*

*David and Julie Sundeen. David was pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Marshall, Minn. in 1994. Today he is vice president of organizational culture and care with Baptist Homes & Healthcare Ministries in Missouri. Julie serves as MWBC's executive/financial assistant.*

*Mike and Sara Siehr. In 1994 Mike was a lay youth leader in Twin Cities Baptist Church in Manitowoc, Wis. Mike is now pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in Tilleda, Wis.*

*Bill and Jackie Tinsley. Bill was MWBC executive director in 1994. He and Jackie are retired and living in Colorado where he continues to supply preach, coach church planters and write his weekly newspaper column, "Reflections."*



# The preeminence of the gospel

In February Sarah and I traveled to Sioux City, Iowa, to celebrate the retirement of Bob Dillman, my former associate pastor at Southern Hills.

I walked into the sanctuary and immediately began seeing ghosts of people on ladders and on their knees running screws, hanging steel, finishing

sheetrock, and laying floors. Mark Elliott drew attention to the pulpit

I designed and had built in memory of my dad—with oak from Sarah's family farm in Missouri. I was drawn to memories of how

we worked together as volunteers to build an incredible building.

After the worship celebration, we went to the multipurpose building for lunch and my eyes were drawn to a sign hanging on the wall celebrating 20 years of "service to your community" through Upward Basketball. Someone

I didn't know stopped me, and started to tell me how that ministry led them to our church and to a vibrant walk with Jesus.

More ghosts came to mind. Sarah and I started this gospel-centered ministry across denominational lines so that boys and girls, moms and dads would hear the gospel at every practice and at every game. God stirred our hearts, and we reached out to the Assembly of God church across the street who were close to finishing their gym. That first year we partnered with them and used our two gyms to sponsor about 16 teams.

The next year we expanded to more churches who were willing to partner around the

written gospel presentations that were printed by Southern Baptists. At the end of three years, we had an astounding 25 churches partnering together to preach the gospel. We had gospel-centered Pentecostals, Assemblies of God, various Baptists, Wesleyans, Lutherans, Bob Jones, Independents, and E-Free churches sowing the seeds of the gospel and leading kids and parents to Jesus.

At one of the last pastor meetings I attended in Sioux City, the new Missouri Synod pastor introduced himself to me and asked me about our evangelism efforts. He said, "My people tell me that your church was once a small church on the outskirts of town.

How have you reached people with the gospel?" As I shared with him, I told him about Upward Basketball. What he said next shocked me. "We're about to finish our gym. Could we be part of your league?" I must have looked shocked, because he followed up with, "You're surprised by such a request? I know our reputation as separatists. That's the problem we have as Missouri Synod churches. We preach the gospel inside a building but never share Jesus where the lost are."

Not really knowing what else to say, I replied, "If you can agree to use the practice devotionals as written

See **GOSPEL** page 5

## 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.

**Leo Endel**  
Executive Director  
endel@mwbc.org  
519 16th St. SE  
Rochester, MN  
55904

**David Williams**  
Editor  
davidwilliams@compuserve.com  
P.O. Box 628  
Liberty, TX 77575

## Perspectives

Leo Endel

## Why so lonely?

More people live in the world today than at any other time in history, more than 8 billion with another 200,000 added daily. More people live in the United States today than at any

other time in history, over 335 million with 80 percent living in cities. We are more connected than ever before, by cell phone, text, email and social media. And, despite all this, we are lonely.

A recent headline

in USA Today, proclaimed, "Americans are lonely and it's killing them." The article went on to say, "America has a new epidemic. It cannot be treated using traditional therapies

even though it has debilitating, even deadly consequences. The problem seeping in at the corners of our communities is loneliness."

Perhaps our drive to gather in huge numbers is a symptom of our loneliness. Stadiums

and sports venues are overflowing. The Taylor Swift Eras tour has packed out stadiums worldwide, averaging 72,000 per concert in the U.S. Swift jetted home from Tokyo to join more than 61,000 at the Super Bowl in Las Vegas, while more than 200,000 packed the Waste Management golf tournament in Phoenix.

At one time or another we all feel lonely. Even though we are surrounded by other people. Sometimes it stems from a feeling that no one seems to understand, that no one knows who we really are "inside." Some-

times it stems from having no one in whom we can confide.

Sometimes we feel like we just don't fit in. This can be especially acute for teenagers trying to find their way, searching for their own identity. The urge to dress alike, look alike, talk alike and act alike can be overwhelming and leave us with a feeling that, despite all our efforts to be accepted, we don't belong.

At other times, loneliness is the result of isolation. This can be especially true for the home-bound, the disabled and the elderly,

See **LONELY** page 8



## Reflections

Bill Tinsley

## Recruiting and retaining volunteers

A pastor friend of mine recently described his church members in our post-covid context. He said, “I am looking at the same people, but the people are not the same.”

I did not detect any judgmentalism in his comment; he meant it as a statement of fact. Whether it was the pandemic, job losses, cultural upheaval, or death of loved ones, there are many reasons why people are becoming more isolated and less engaged socially, including church attendance and volunteerism.



**Leadership**  
*Clint Calvert*

I can relate to this trend as my father-in-law recently died after a long convalescence including living in and receiving care in my home for a little over two years. While caring for him and

my mother-in-law was not an excuse to stop attending church, it certainly presented challenges that caused my wife and me to stay home and be less socially engaged. As a lifelong Christian, Baptist, and church leader, I have attended church more often than most, but I could feel the center of gravity in my

life shift toward home for this season. This experience also caused me to reflect on the many people I have known who were active in church who had to step away for awhile due to life circumstances. I like to believe I am more empathetic because of this experience.

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan thought deeply about social policy and wrote these words, “We constantly underestimate difficulties, overpromise results, and avoid any evidence of incompatibility and conflict, thus repeatedly creating the conditions of failure out of a desperate desire for success.” This quote has echoed in my mind over the years as it speaks to how we

often plant the seeds for failure with the best of intentions.

When we recruit volunteers for roles in church leadership, we should remember Moynihan’s quote. How many times in church life has someone said to you, “This role is not difficult. This will not take a lot of time. This role will be easy for you”? After six months, you find out that the role is difficult, that the role takes much more time than the recruiter said, and the vacancy for the role was created amid some conflict. The turnover caused by these underestimations might be alleviated if those who recruit volunteers in church life would be more descriptive and

straightforward about the challenges of volunteer roles in church leadership.

While it may sound counter-intuitive to be more realistic with expectations and more transparent about difficulties, these may be the keys to helping volunteers re-engage with church leadership and stay in those roles longer and with greater effectiveness. While isolation grips many people in society, the church could provide the antidote by demonstrating the engagement that the gospel calls and enables believers to enjoy.

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

## Preparing for missions

Jesus commands us to make disciples of all nations, but we often find ourselves overwhelmed and too busy to follow this command.

It helps to start preparing for missional work, even before the opportunity to go and do it.

In my doctoral seminar, I learned that the key to preparation and time management is to prioritize, focusing on the hardest and most

important task first. The truth is that we will never have enough

time to do everything we want to do in life. Everyday, we have to pick and choose what is important.

What is important in your life right now?

The SEA (Southeast Asia) mission team has been making preparations for our upcoming trip in July. We are taking an online missions course from the Inter-

national Mission Board, getting our passports and travel papers, and talking to our partners on the field. The bulk of our preparations will have been completed before we even set foot in Thailand.

The most important part of our trip preparation is prayer. Please pray for our team. We have 17 people from four churches in our state convention going on the mission trip. Out of this group, nine are students, ranging in age from 14 to 21. Six of our students wrote an essay for the trip scholarship. The top two essays will be featured in our convention



**Intercultural**  
*Na Herr*



newspaper. I invite you to read these essays to see how God is moving in the lives of our young people.

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



# A new hero

In January I had the opportunity to go to a Vacation Bible School training event in Nashville, presented by Life-way. It's not my first, but this one was special.



## Guest Column

Randy Smith

thing magical.

This VBS training event was no different, except for one thing. The decorating genie (aka hero) was my own friend, Penny Reedy.

Penny is from Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention and lives in Ely, Minn. She and I have worked together many times in our joint histories of children's ministry. She has a heart for children's ministry and the knowledge and experience to go with it. She leads an MWBC team that travels around to help VBS leaders begin preparation for their own VBS.

And in this VBS training breakout, her talents shone. With Life-

way's Pacific Northwest beach theme in mind, she showed us how to make lighthouses, piers, beachside campfires, cliffs, and more. I was already in awe of her, but I am proud to add her to my hero list of Lifeway leaders who go off the charts in what they do. We as a convention can also be proud of who she is and how God is using her.

If you want some help from Penny and her team, consider giving her a call. Or, sign up for the April Equip conference. It's a good resource with a great leader, great speaker, and VBS displays as well as general information on making your children's ministry the best.

Welcome, Penny, to my private "Hall of Fame."

*Randy Smith is a former MWBC preschool and children's consultant.*



Penny Reedy at the VBS training event.



Joseph Young and his wife Foua address the congregation of First Hmong Baptist Church in Coon Rapids, Minn., as the church installed him as senior pastor on Feb. 4.

## GOSPEL

*continued from page three*

and share the gospel presentations at half-time we'd work with you." These were tentative words, but he responded immediately, "I think we can do that." He took the materials to his board, and they approved it. When I came back to do the annual end-of-the-season celebration five years later they were still an active part of the outreach league.

I learned a great deal from this experience. Denominationally we all have our distinctions, but

not all of our theological fine points are of the same importance. The gospel is of preeminent importance. If we can agree on the gospel, I can work with you.

Lyle Schaller, the foremost church expert of the 20th century, once told me that the problem Southern Baptists were facing (even 20 years ago) was whether we would choose to be a classic denomination that operates with ascending and descending authority or whether we'd continue to be a loose confederation of gospel churches cooperating for the Great

Commission.

As a leader here in Minnesota-Wisconsin I have sought to keep us from being a "denomination" that exercises authority over partner churches. I have fought to hold our gospel-preaching churches of "like faith and practice" together to impact Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the world with the message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. I fear that lesser things will keep us from effectively doing the most important thing—sharing the gospel with the world.

Recently, I was struck by the Apostle Paul's preeminent commitment to the gospel even when communicated through corrupted preachers (Phil. 1:15-18, CSB):

"To be sure, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. These preach out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Only that in every

way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice."

Twenty-three years ago, God taught me there were more Christ followers in His Kingdom than in ours. It takes humility and Holy Spirit-inspired sensitivity to maximize the proclamation of the gospel. I am praying for both.

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

**Back to the beginning**

# TCMBA goes on mission to North Carolina

Seventeen people from 4 TCMBA churches and one other church participated in the 2024 North Carolina mission trip Feb. 14-21.

The TCMBA team flew to Raleigh and drove 100 miles south to Rose Hill, N.C. The team joined with the North Carolina Baptists on Mission to stay at their mission camp, an abandoned middle school they purchased and renovated to be a disaster recovery rebuild center, a thrift store and a food distribution center. The team was fed and housed there and did work projects alongside other volunteers and staff.

On Saturday, the TCMBA team hosted a sports camp for kids 5 to 13 offering basketball, soccer and cheerleading clinics. Local volunteers from area churches came to help with a free community meal, in which 200 people were fed a free lunch. During the sports camp, Pastor Chris Reinertson presented two gospel presentations in the morning session and afternoon session.

The team was able to help sort clothing donations, build part of a parsonage, build two wheelchair ramps for local homeowners in need and work on a new home for a family whose home was destroyed by a hurricane. The team spent three of the days insulat-

ing, sheetrocking the interior, painting the exterior and adding windows.

The team was led by Pastor Chris and Jude Reinertson. Participants were: Pastor Daniel Goba, Ebenezer Community Church in Bloomington, Minn.; Greg Gerads, Journey Church, Amery, Wis.; Pastor Jeremiah Knoop, Daniel Knoop, and Adeola Adeleke, North Center Baptist Church, in Brooklyn Park, Minn.; Pastor Chris Reinertson, Jude Reinertson, Nico Bonanni, Heather McGrath, Ashlyn Jensen, and Jeff Nelson, Southtown Baptist Church, Bloomington, Minn.; Jean Braatz, Lucas Braatz, Joshua Braatz, Johnny Braatz, Hope Gold, and Abigail Gold, Friendship Church, Prior Lake, Minn.



*The TCMBA mission team gathers for worship at Postin Baptist Church in Wallace, N.C.*



*The TCMBA mission team paints the exterior of a house being built for a family that lost their home in a hurricane.*

## GOOD NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATIONS

### SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

El Bethel Baptist Church in Milwaukee is a new church meeting at Layton Avenue Baptist Church. It is made up of refugees from Burma who speak the Chin language. They have been meeting for several months and plan to become part of SWBA, MWBC and SBC.

SWBA took 12 people to the Midwest Leadership Summit Jan. 23-25 in Springfield, Ill. Ten of those are now in a cohort meeting together for the spring semester, led by Tim Lafleur who has been discipling and mentoring pastors and leaders for many years, including several prominent leaders such as David Platt, former president of the International Mission Board.

### NORTHWOODS

Immanuel Baptist Church in Roseau is helping Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in International Falls finish a remodeling project started several years ago.



# People and Places



**Brandon Myer** is the new pastor at Waterbrook Community Bible Church in Tomah, Wis., following long-time Pastor John Schmidt who has retired and helped Myer transition into the role. Myer and his wife Mason have two young daughters.



**Lino and Cindy Rodriguez** are beginning a new Spanish work in Fitchburg, Wis., *City on a Hill* in Spanish. Mexico natives, the couple met while studying at the Bible Institute in La Roca, served together in the mountains of Guerrero, then attended Rio Grande Bible Seminary before moving to the U.S. He was pastoring a church in Virginia when God called him to start the church in Wisconsin. They have two children.



**Joshua Whetstine** has been named SEND Minnesota and Wisconsin Church Planting Leader. He "will continue to work in the business world with a focus on work place evangelism while coming back in to support the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention with our church planting needs," said Na Herr, MWBC intercultural catalyst/team facilitator. He can be reached at [jwhetstine@namb.net](mailto:jwhetstine@namb.net) or (612) 900-6700.



**Lisa Zahner** is the new Lifeway Church Solutions Partner for Minnesota and Wisconsin. She can help pastors and church leaders find resources they need from the more than 11,000 products available through Lifeway. Lisa lives in Minnesota and can be reached at [Lisa.Zahner@lifeway.com](mailto:Lisa.Zahner@lifeway.com) or (612) 799-4572.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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](mailto:davidwilliams@compuserve.com).

### 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, Thailand**

4 Independence Day Holiday Observance – **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, Barboo, 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**



# Pastors and Wives Retreat



Bill and Jackie Tinsley share a tender moment while leading a session during the Pastors and Wives Retreat.



Walter and Lina Gutierrez lead worship during a session of the Pastors and Wives Retreat. He is the pastor/church planter of Iglesia Su Presencia, a Hispanic church meeting at Layton Avenue Baptist Church in Milwaukee.



Mouafu Mouanoutoua, pastor of United Cornerstone Baptist Church in Oakdale, Minn., gets ready to run sound for a session during the Pastors and Wives Retreat. He brought his own equipment to Green Lake, including microphones, sound board and speakers. He also organized a group of Hmong pastors and wives from different churches to sing a special song at the retreat.



Pastors and wives of various Hmong congregations gather to form a choir and present a special song during the Pastors and Wives Retreat.



Not ready yet to say their goodbyes though the retreat had ended, several participants linger in the dining hall as workers finish cleaning up after the final breakfast meal.

## LONELY

*continued from page three*

widows and widowers. Days may pass without having a visitor or someone with whom to talk.

So, how do we respond in this age of loneliness? There are several simple starting places.

First, know that God knows you. He knows you better than you know yourself. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you," (Jer. 1:5). "Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I get up; you understand my thoughts from far away. You

scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways," (Psa. 139:1-3).

Second, seek out a faith community. Go to church. Participate in a small group where you can be known and loved. "Not abandoning our own meeting together but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

Third, be there for someone else. Seek out the isolated, the ostracized and the rejected. Be a friend to someone else. Visit the homebound. Pick up the phone. Call someone.

God never intended that we should be alone

or feel lonely. From the outset of creation God saw that "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God makes a home for the lonely" (Psa. 68:5-6).

*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**



# Hmong Baptist leader dies shortly after being diagnosed with cancer

By Karen L. Willoughby

ST. PAUL, Minn. (BP) — A month after he led the 2023 annual meeting of the Hmong Baptist National Association, Executive Director Wa Tra Xiong, 53, died suddenly from a virulent cancer and complications from the procedure to remove it.

Xiong's sudden illness and death was a surprise even to his family, said Kuoa Vang, Xiong's son-in-law. But before Xiong died, "He said his work was done and that for his pastor friends who are staying behind to work hard and continue serving the Lord."

From a young age, Xiong lived as though he didn't have much time, and at the same time was loving, patient and humble, according to several people.

"He was a model of Christlikeness and humility," Na Herr told Baptist Press. Herr is intercultural strategist for the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention. "He treated everyone kindly, and always put others before himself. He served the Lord faithfully and always had a smile on his face."

Xiong was six when he fled war-torn Laos with his farming family for a refugee camp in Thailand. Six years later he moved to a second refugee camp for testing and processing for entry into the United States. There he met and married his wife, Mee. The first of their 12 children

— six boys, six girls — was born in that camp.

Sponsored by his older brother, the young Xiong family moved in 1984 to Fresno, Calif., where his brother took him to First Hmong Baptist Church of Fresno. Three years later, after hearing a sermon about heaven, 17-year-old Xiong made a profession of faith in Jesus.

At 19, Xiong was sent by the church to start a Hmong church in Sacramento, Calif.

"With each of nine church plants he planted in the U.S., he lived in the area for a year, during which he started churches and developed leaders who would carry forth the ministry, including 10 men who have become pastors," according to a 2016 Baptist Press article announcing Xiong's election as the new executive director of the Hmong Baptist National Association.

"He was very instrumental in helping to disciple and grow those churches," Pao Ly told Baptist Press. Ly, pastor of First Hmong Baptist Church of Morganton, N.C., has known Xiong since the man who would become HBNA executive director first moved to Fresno. "He loved to make relationships with others and wherever his presence was, he never ceased to bring laughter, the fellowship of doing ministry together, and most of all, planting churches and raising new pastoral leadership."

Education was im-

portant to Xiong: his own and that of other Hmong people so they could lead Hmong churches. He earned undergraduate, master's and doctoral degrees online.

"He didn't go physically because he wanted to serve while he studied," Vang said after talking with Mrs.

Xiong.

"Dr. Xiong brought in the Advance Program from Gateway Seminary, so that the association would have a resource to grow its next generation of leaders," HBNA President Pao Thao told Baptist Press.

Leo Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Bap-

tist Convention, said theological concerns were very important to Xiong.

"One of Dr. Xiong's greatest accomplishments was his willingness and ability to help the Hmong people work through biblical and theological issues

See **XIONG** page 12

## WMU 'spotlights' Minnesota missions couple

St. Cloud, Minn. — The Womans' Missionary Union featured Eber and Melisa Argueta in their January 2024 Missions Discipleship Spotlight Update.

The young Honduran couple serve as North American Mission Board missionaries in St. Cloud, Minn. where he is pastor and she is children's ministry director for the Spanish-speaking services of Harvest Fellowship Church (Harvest en Español).

The [WMU website](#) reported:

"The couple partners with leaders and ministry staff in the church's English congregation to offer joint activities where the two groups share in fellowship and learning opportunities. On Nov. 18, 2023, women from both congregations enjoyed the church's annual Harvest of Christmas Joy, a time to gather and remember that they are defined by God's grace, not by their faults or weaknesses.

"The growing congregation, composed of people from eight na-



*Eber and Melisa Argueta hold their three-year-old son Josué Elias. Their baby Zoe, in the carrier, was dedicated to the Lord in a November 2023 service.*

tions, celebrated its multicultural composition by hosting International Day with the theme, 'We Are One in Christ.' It was a special day with people from many nations, cultures, and languages who are part of one body and worship the one true God, coming together to experience food, clothing, and decorations from many cultures.

"This past summer, the church hosted outreach events where members prayed and

fellowshipped in a local park. They witnessed the obedience of new brothers in Christ who participated in believer's baptism as part of the July event. And, in the winter, church members collected 14 gift-filled shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child."

The article was written by Lanell Smith, a freelance writer living in Lapine, Ala., who serves as vice president for the Alabama WMU board of trustees.

# Mission Gifts from the Churches

## MINNESOTA WISCONSIN BAPTIST CONVENTION COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

January 2024

Cooperative Program Budget 2024 Year to Date	\$56,770.42
Cooperative Program Receipts 2024 Year to Date	\$58,070.90
Over Budget 2024 Year to Date	\$1,300.48

NAME	CP YTD
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### BAY LAKES BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Appleton, Church of the Living Water	\$33.34
Appleton, Valley	\$9,554.55
Clintonville, First Baptist Church	\$243.60
Green Bay, Graceway Fellowship	\$1,011.45
Green Bay, Highland Crest Baptist	\$5,497.01
Sheboygan, Mapledale Baptist	\$254.10
Tilleda, Bethany Baptist Church	\$257.10
<b>BLBA TOTAL</b>	<b>\$16,851.15</b>

### LAKELAND BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Bassett, Westosha Baptist Church	\$188.00
Brown Deer, Brown Deer Baptist	\$500.00
Franklin, Emmaus Fellowship	\$600.00
Kenosha, Fellowship Baptist	\$1,267.11
Milwaukee, Iglesia Su Presencia	\$40.50
Milwaukee, Layton Avenue	\$1,432.33
Milwaukee, Monumental Baptist	\$250.00
Milwaukee, UFlourish Church	\$200.00
Mount Pleasant, I.C.A.R.E. Ministry	\$95.40
Mount Pleasant, Immanuel	\$2,173.48
Pewaukee, Crossroads Church	\$454.98
Pleasant Prairie, Pleasant Prairie	\$4,797.10
<b>LBA TOTAL</b>	<b>\$11,998.90</b>

### NORTHWOODS BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Bemidji, Ridgewood Baptist Church	\$88.00
Grand Rapids, Calvary Pines	\$205.00
New York Mills, Grace Connection	\$383.80
Rice Lake, Hope Baptist Church	\$736.00
Roseau, Immanuel Baptist Church	\$1,861.86
<b>NWBA TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,274.66</b>

### TWIN CITIES METRO BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Brooklyn Park, Ebenezer Community	\$300.00
Bloomington, Hope of Nations	\$269.82
Bloomington, MN Kangnam Korean	\$100.00
Brooklyn Park, North Center Baptist	\$1,405.75
Maple Grove, Unlock Church	\$100.00
Minneapolis, All Peoples Church	\$540.00
Minneapolis, Jubilee	\$2,000.00
Minnetonka, Redeemer Bible	\$100.00
New Prague, Calvary Church	\$2,288.13
Roseville, Twin City Hmong	\$180.00
St. Paul, Followers Of Christ Hmong	\$1,197.60
St. Paul, Iglesia Hispana Betel	\$150.00
Sunfish Lake, Bethel Baptist	\$600.00
Sunfish Lake, Vietnamese Baptist	\$60.00
<b>TCMBA TOTAL</b>	<b>\$9,291.30</b>

## NAME

## CP YTD

### SOUTHERN WI BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Boscobel, Blue River Valley	\$248.64
Madison, Campus Community	\$150.00
Madison, Doxa Church	\$5,497.88
Madison, East Madison Baptist	\$936.00
Madison, Livingstone Baptist	\$510.00
Platteville, Rolling Hills	\$2,056.60
Sparta, Gospel Baptist Church	\$514.91
Sun Prairie, Christ Fellowship	\$100.00
Sun Prairie, Reborn in Christ	\$314.99
Sun Prairie, Transformation	\$262.94
Sun Prairie, United Hmong	\$93.69
Watertown, Watertown Community	\$150.00
WI Dells, Rock of Hope	\$200.00
WI Rapids, First Baptist Church	\$100.00
<b>SWBA TOTAL</b>	<b>\$11,135.65</b>

### SOUTHERN MINNESOTA BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

Austin, Austin Baptist Church	\$498.10
Chester, Chester Woods Community	\$218.88
Marshall, Radiant Life Church	\$604.17
Red Wing, Hiawatha Valley	\$749.60
Rochester, Emmanuel Baptist	\$2,078.13
Rochester, Rochester Community	\$100.00
Viola, Viola Bible Church	\$307.86
Winona, Cornerstone Community	\$962.50
<b>SMNBA TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,519.24</b>

### MWBC TOTAL RECEIVED

\$58,070.90

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

*CP - Cooperative Program*



*Pastor Joshua Lee (sixth from left) of Mapledale Baptist Church, Sheboygan, Wis., and Pastor Chucklu Vang (ninth from left) of Eternal Life Hmong Baptist Church, North St. Paul, Minn., were invited to speak at a Hmong Christian conference in Vietnam. They are posing in this photo with several members of the Vietnam ministry of religion department.*



# Daisy Vaching wins essay contest

Rochester, Minn. — Daisy Vaching, a student majoring in animation at Minnesota State University Moorhead, wrote the winning essay in the SEA Mission Trip contest and has won the first place scholarship award of

\$750.

She is the daughter of Kriss and Youa Vaching and a member of Followers of Christ Hmong Baptist Church in St. Paul, Minn. She plans to graduate in 2025.

The contest assign-

ment was to write an essay on Mark 5:1-20. The instructions stated: "In your response, you may want to consider the historical background of the text and its relevance to today. Your essay should answer the

following questions. What does this text teach us about Jesus? What does this text teach us about missions and evangelism? How can I apply this text to my life?"

Here is her award winning essay.



*Daisy Vaching*

From this passage, we see that Jesus is sovereign over everything.

Before Mark 5, Jesus and His disciples are crossing the sea of Galilee. Suddenly, during their voyage, a huge storm arises. The winds push the boat aside, and the waves crash into and onto the boat. The disciples are terrified because of this huge storm, and they turn to Jesus, who is soundly asleep in the stern. They awaken Him in a frenzy. Jesus wakes up, and, with His voice, He calms the sea. At His command, the wind and the waves cease. Who, in the whole world, can calm the wind and waves with the single sound of His voice? Only Jesus!

Not only that, but the demons that possessed the man themselves know the sovereignty of Jesus. They cannot even bear to stand in the presence of our Savior; they fall at His feet the moment they meet Him. And it is only at Jesus' word that they are permitted to enter the pigs. They know that the ultimate authority comes from God alone, and everything they do must be done under His reign.

In this story, we also see that even though Jesus is sovereign, He does not abuse His sovereignty because of His love for us. When the region of Gerasenes hears about Jesus' great miracle, they beg Jesus to leave their region in fear. Instead of overriding their decision, Jesus steps back into the boat. He agrees to leave. He had just entered their region, but because they were afraid, He left. The One who controls the wind and waves, the Lord who commands demons, surely, He has the power to rule over these people's decisions! However, He loves them and gives them the choice to welcome Him or reject Him.

The story does not end there though! In this passage, we realize that Jesus' love still reaches people even if they reject Him. The man who was demon-possessed, now in his right mind, chases after Jesus as He is leaving, begging Jesus to bring him along. Jesus, however, tells the man to go back home to his people and proclaim the story of what Jesus has done. The man obeys the Lord's command, and he proclaims the story not only in his town of Gerasenes but to the whole of Decapolis (ten cities!). Even though Jesus physically left the region of Gerasenes, He did not leave the people without His love. His love reached these people even if He was not physically present.

This text shows us that we can find comfort in God

when we evangelize because He is always at work around us. When we go out and share about Jesus, sometimes we may want people to accept Jesus and be saved the moment His name comes out of our mouths. Things are not always as simple as that though. Jesus had just stepped into the region of Gerasenes, but He's immediately asked to leave after He demonstrated His almighty power. He didn't even get to share the good news with the people in the town! At that moment, the only person Jesus changed, if anyone, was the demon-possessed man. To us, that would have been seen as a loss: having traveled across the sea (which was a rough voyage, mind you) simply to speak with one man. However, God is always working behind the scenes. Jesus planted a seed of faith in the once-demon-possessed man, and that seed was fruitful—the man went out and proclaimed Jesus' goodness to ten cities! That's an amazing thing! In this, we can find comfort: even when we don't see God working, He is the One who grows the seed and causes it to multiply. We can trust Him even when we do not see His hand at work.

This text also shows us how powerful it is to share our testimony when we share about Jesus. Even though it may seem simple to us, it can be powerful to someone else. The man who was demon-possessed simply shared the story of how Jesus changed his life, and many were astounded by the man's words. It is encouraging to know that our testimony has power because God has power.

In my life, I often find myself second-guessing evangelism. Not in the sense that I think it's not good—I think it's beautiful—but that I'm often afraid that my efforts are in vain, especially when I come across people who are questioning or resistant of Jesus when I talk about Him. I find myself discouraged, and I mourn my effort for days on end. However, this passage gives me a lot of encouragement. Even though I may not see the fruits of my labor, I know God is doing something behind the scenes, so I need not worry or grieve over what I believe to be lost. The Lord uses all things for His purpose, and even when I cannot see what God is doing, I can rest in assurance that He is doing something for His glory.

I am simply a worker in His Kingdom; it is He alone who has the power to save.

# Stories of Interest

## Dislike of organized religion, maltreatment cited by many 'Nones,'

By Diana Chandler

WASHINGTON (BP) — More than half of religiously unaffiliated Americans, identified as 'Nones,' say they don't like organized religion or have been mistreated by religious people, Pew Research said Jan. 24.

Specifically, 55 percent of Nones cited one of the two factors in explaining their reason for being nonreligious. Nearly half of respondents, 47 percent, said their dislike of religious organizations is an extremely or very important reason they're nonreligious, while 30 percent said the same about bad experiences with religious people.

Maltreatment by religious people was cited more often among women Nones, at 32 percent, than among men, at 27 percent.

Skepticism of religious teachings and a disbelief in God were the most common reasons cited by Nones in explaining themselves, with 60 percent questioning a lot of religious teachings and 32 percent not believing in God or a higher power. Altogether, 67 percent cited one or both factors.

Others, 44 percent, say they're nonreligious because they either don't have time for religion (41 percent) and/or don't need it (12 percent).

Nones comprise more than a quarter of American adults, 28 percent, with 20 percent of them describing themselves as agnostic, 17 percent saying they are atheists, and 63 percent saying they are "nothing in particular" religiously.

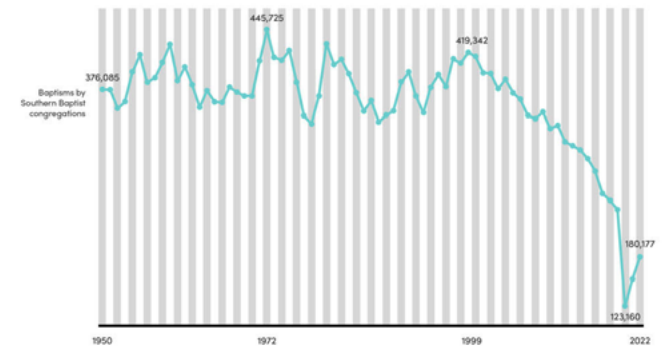
While Nones' 28 percent share of the population marks a continual decrease since 2021, and is equal to findings in 2020 and 2019, Pew's researchers said that doesn't necessarily mean Nones are decreasing among the population.

[Read more here](#)

## Baptisms rebound, but negative trend continues in Southern Baptist churches

SBC baptisms rebound some after COVID-19 collapse

Prepared by Lifeway Research in conjunction with Baptist state conventions



Lifeway research

By Aaron Earls

Lifeway Christian Resources

BRENTWOOD, Tenn. — With far fewer churches gathering in person, Southern Baptist congregations didn't do much baptizing during the pandemic. Those numbers have increased in recent years, but the overall decline within the Convention continues.

In 2022, Southern Baptist congregations that reported figures for the Annual Church Profile (ACP) recorded 180,177 baptisms, a 16% increase over 2021. Combined with the 26% increase in 2021, Southern Baptists have seen a 46% increase over the past two years emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite those recent jumps, the numbers are still part of a negative trend since the early 2000s.

[Read more here](#)

## XIONG

*continued from page nine*

through open discussions based upon serious biblical exegesis," Endel told Baptist Press. "He knew serious theological questions needed serious biblical answers. He led us all to think through how the Bible transcends culture."

Xiong continued to remember the Hmong people remaining in

Laos, Vietnam and Thailand, visiting those nations several times after he became HBNA's executive director. There he would preach, lead conferences, train and encourage pastors.

"Dr. Xiong expanded the vision of M-W Baptists by demonstrating a sacrificial heart for the people of Southeast Asia, by showing us the cultural diversity of the world, and teaching us

to see beyond our limited North American perspective," Endel said. "He did all this with a gracious spirit and a humble heart.

"He has made us all better," Endel continued.

Koua Vang spoke with Baptist Press for the family.

"He put God before his family and himself. Even when he was sick, if he was able to, he went. He continued to

serve until his body no longer allowed him," Vang said. "His legacy is that he was always helping everyone. He was humble and always willing to serve and help. He was truly a servant of God."

Xiong died Oct. 31. A traditional Hmong three-day funeral took place Dec. 9-11 in St. Paul.

The HBNA "executive team is carrying the load of the missing di-

rector and as the year is getting underway with the new administration, there will be talk as to what our next step is in fulfilling the director's role and responsibility," Thao said.

"Finding the next director will take time and prayers, so in the meantime, please continue to keep us in your prayers."

**Back to the beginning**