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>> BRYAN PAINTER



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Oklahoma Baptists' Board 'blessed' by meeting at Falls Creek Sept. 12



>> PHOTOS: 1) BRIAN HOBBS; 2-3) CHRIS DOYLE

1) Leslie Osborn, chief financial officer for Oklahoma Baptists, reports on Cooperative Program giving in Oklahoma; 2) Luke Holmes, chairman of the constitution & bylaws review and revision task force, gives a report of the task force's work; 3) Robert Kellogg, CEO of WatersEdge, shares about Water-Edge's goal of annually distributing \$25 million to Kingdom-impacting ministries by the year 2025.

>> by Brian Hobbs
EDITOR

DAVIS—On Sept. 12, Oklahoma Baptists' board of directors met at Falls Creek Conference Center for a regularly-scheduled business meeting. Members of the board spent time in fellowship, prayer and conducting key business.

Oklahoma Baptists Executive Director-Treasurer Todd Fisher addressed members of the board during the morning and afternoon sessions. In addition to speaking to various issues and business recommendations before the board, Fisher detailed his ministry stops at churches around the state, saying how the Oklahoma Baptists staff seeks to bless and encourage pastors and churches.

"Our vision of Advancing the Gospel Together continues to guide all we do," he said. Fisher spoke about points of emphasis for the state convention.

"Our Purpose is to embody ministries with a Gospel-centered and church-focused approach; To serve and support churches with resources for strength, health, and effective Gospel ministries in their communities; and to encourage and equip pastors, church staff, and other ministry leaders to fulfill God's calling on their lives."

Fisher explained that the state convention is "by churches, through churches, for churches." He stated the following commitments from Oklahoma Baptists:

- "Strengthening mission engagement among churches
- Helping churches plant new churches
- Encouraging pastor & family wellness
- Revitalizing existing churches
- Prioritizing Next Generation ministries
- Assisting churches in building a culture of evangelism"

Following the meeting, Fisher said on social media, "We just finished (a great time) at Falls Creek for our Oklahoma Baptists board of directors meeting. I appreciate so much the men and women who serve on the board and our amazing team who works so hard attending to all the details to make the meeting a reality." He added the hash tags, "#weareoklahomabaptists" and "#bychurches-throughchurchesforchurches."

Members of the board commented how they feel blessed to be part of Oklahoma Baptists ministry efforts.

Kevin Baker, pastor of Altus, Martha Road, said, "I love serving with Oklahoma Baptists advancing the Gospel."

Cooperative Program giving fuels Gospel advance

Leslie Osborn, chief financial officer for Oklahoma Baptists, gave a presentation concerning Cooperative Program giving in Oklahoma.

"As of the 36th week of 2023, Cooperative Program receipts were approximately \$159,000 behind budget and approximately \$180,000 behind

this time last year. As of the end of July total budgeted income exceeded total budgeted expenses by approximately \$2,300,000. This large margin is common at the end of camp season but will decrease as the year progresses," Osborn said.

"The 2024 financial plan is only \$1,459 more than the current year budget and it includes an increase of over \$200,000 for direct ministry expenses. An additional \$79,000 was added to BCM ministry and an additional \$131,000 was added to Church Relations & Resources and Falls Creek. This is only possible by making cuts in the support services area.

Osborn noted a significant statistic about the Falls Creek budget as compared to salvations seen during the summer of 2023. "The amount of Cooperative Program dollars used by Falls Creek per salvation was \$280. Even our smallest church in Oklahoma can proudly say because they gave through the Cooperative Program lives were changed for eternity at Falls Creek."

Affiliates, Committees detail ministry impact

All four Oklahoma Baptists' affiliate leaders—Robert Kellogg, CEO of WatersEdge (also known as the Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma); Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) President Heath Thomas; Baptist Village Communities (BVC) President Bill Pierce;

>> CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Oklahoma Baptists' Board 'blessed' ... (cont.)

and Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children President James Swain—each delivered ministry reports to the board of directors.

Kellogg gave an encouraging report concerning the WatersEdge goal “to distribute \$25 million to Kingdom-impacting ministries annually by the year 2025.” Thomas spoke about OBU making significant strides in its renewal from the April tornado around campus. Pierce shared how BVC is unique in its field of aging services by finding ways to activate residents in ministry volunteering at each BVC location. Swain shared that OBHC is celebrating an important ministry milestone in its 120th anniversary.

Board approves recommendations

Also, reports from each board committee were heard, including recommendations from the executive committee.

The board unanimously approved “the purchase of the Ada cabin at Falls Creek Conference Center from the Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma (dba WatersEdge), as directed by the September 15, 2020, Memorandum of Un-



>> PHOTO: CHRIS DOYLE
Chris Wall, pastor of Owasso, First and president of Oklahoma Baptists, moderates the board meeting.

derstanding between Oklahoma Baptists and WatersEdge, be approved in the amount of \$2,675,000 to be drawn from the unrestricted reserves of Oklahoma Baptists.”

A report to the board of directors was given by Luke Holmes, pastor of Tishomingo, First. Holmes served as chairman of a special-appointed task force to review and recommend updates to the state convention bylaws, constitution and governing documents. The task force, which was appointed by Oklahoma Baptists President Chris Wall, including pastors and lay leaders across the state.

“It has been a privilege to lead the special task force of Oklahoma Baptists tasked with reviewing and updating our state convention’s bylaws and constitution. This is an important task, and this group of pastors and lay leaders represents Oklahoma Baptists well, and has done a thorough, thoughtful and excellent job. We invite Oklahoma Baptists to read the proposed updates and prayerfully consider them as we vote on the matter during our Annual Meeting in November,” Holmes said.

The Board of Directors approved that “the draft Constitution & Bylaws be adopted as amended and commended for adoption by messengers to the 2023 Oklahoma Baptists Annual Meeting after proper notice in the Baptist Messenger.” Holmes noted that the revisions will be available online at oklahomabaptists.org and announced in the Baptist Messenger in advance of the Annual Meeting on Nov. 13-14 at Del City, First Southern.

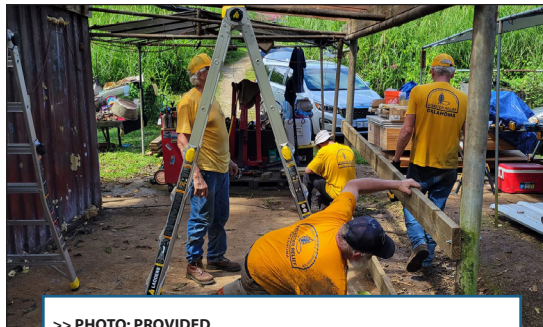
The next regularly scheduled board meeting is set for Feb. 27, 2024, at the Baptist Building in Oklahoma City. [m](#)

DR team in Guam returning home, work in Florida ramps up

>> by Bob Nigh
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As a team of five Oklahoma Baptist Disaster Relief (DR) volunteers prepared to complete a two-week deployment to the Pacific island of Guam, Oklahoma Baptists are forming to deploy to Florida to help clean up debris left behind by Hurricane Idalia.

The team in Guam helped do clean-up, repair and rebuild following Typhoon Mawar which devastated the island in late May. Guam weathered the worst of the storm’s direct impact when the storm’s eye passed just north of the island, battering the island with powerful winds and torrential rains.



>> PHOTO: PROVIDED
Oklahoma Baptist DR team work on a rebuilding project in Guam.

The Oklahomans, who are expected to return home on Sat., Sept. 30, joined with other DR volunteers from Arizona, Illinois, Tennessee, and North Carolina in an effort coordinated by the Hawaii Pacific DR Ministry, and working in conjunction with FEMA.

Ryan Deatherage, assistant state DR director, said Oklahoma is prepared to send “multiple chainsaw and debris removal teams” to Florida, where clean-up continues following Hurricane Idalia in three areas—Perry, Live Oak, and Iverness.

Jason Yarbrough, state DR director, reported the Oklahoma DR teams will set up to work from Perry, Fla., First.

“We will have teams deploying throughout the month of October as there are 800 plus homes in need of assistance,” Yarbrough said.

To donate to Oklahoma DR visit the website, okdisasterhelp.org. [m](#)

God's power and presence felt in OBU Prison Divinity Program Convocation

>> by Bryan Painter
OBU MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

LEXINGTON—Two lines of a song captured what was occurring in the 2023 Convocation for the Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) Prison Divinity Program at the Lexington Assessment and Reception Center.

"There's resurrection power that can save," and "There's power in Your name, power in Your name."

And the power of God was present in an awe-inspiring way as some inmates lifted their hands and others closed their eyes in praise while singing, "Stand in Your Love."

"The convocation was, indeed, a demonstration and affirmation of God's work among us," said Bruce A. Perkins, assistant professor of Christian education and director of the Prison Divinity Program. "Words are not adequate to express the depth of emotions I felt—humility that God has given me the opportunity to walk this journey alongside these men, pride in the spiritual vigor and academic success of these students, gratitude for the souls that have been saved on the yard, wonder at the magnificence of God, and excitement about what lies ahead. I truly believe that if God should bring another awakening and revival to our nation, it will begin inside the prison walls. Unbeknownst to us, we may be witnessing something historical in the making."



>> PHOTOS: CLINTON SINCLAIR
1) OBU President Heath A. Thomas visits with students of the OBU Prison Divinity Program before Convocation at the Lexington Assessment and Reception Center; 2) Students worship during Convocation.

OBU, Oklahoma Baptists and the Oklahoma Department of Corrections are partners in this historic endeavor of the Prison Divinity Program in Oklahoma. OBU offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in Christian Studies to inmates in an Oklahoma prison. Upon completion of their degrees, these men will be eligible to be commissioned as field ministers and deployed to other prisons across the state.

There are currently 67 students enrolled in the program. The first cohort of students has started their junior year. The second cohort has completed the orientation term and has started courses for credit.


OBU President Heath A. Thomas delivered the convocation message examining future shapers from the perspective of deep faith, full hearts, strong hands and wise minds.

"Students, you are using strong hands here, as you learn and serve," Thomas said. "You will be learning and growing, stretching yourself beyond what you think you are capable. It is the right thing, the hard thing, to step

up with strong hands and make a positive difference for change. That is what future shapers do—the hard thing, the right thing, with strong hands."

Larinee Dennis, OBU's dean of business, health, science and education, provided the Scripture reading from Psalm 93, and Matthew Emerson, OBU dean of theology, arts and humanities, led The Litany.

Speakers also included Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt, Oklahoma Department of Corrections Director Steven Harpe and Commissioner Burl Cain, founder of the Angola Prison Seminary and the Prison Seminary Foundation.

"I love what C.S. Lewis said," Governor Stitt shared, "'You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.' You all have made a choice to pursue a higher calling for your life. And we in this room applaud you. We're so excited for your future. You chose to surround yourself with these leaders in this program and to better yourself." 

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People in the news



BLANCHARD, AGAPE CELEBRATES MEMBER'S 105TH BIRTHDAY. Lois Smith, left, celebrated her 105th birthday in August, and Blanchard, Agape honored her Aug. 20 with a birthday celebration. Smith is a charter member of the church, and Pastor Luke Sills said he is encouraged by Smith's faithful commitment.

"Lois represents what so many people hope to be in this life and that is faithful and finishing strong. She has been foundational to the health of our Agape baptist church and an encouragement to each and everyone of our members and guests. Her legacy is one that will truly impact the world for the next 105 years. [m](#)

Coming events

OCT. 8. Perry, First is celebrating its 130th anniversary. Music and speakers will be featured in the 9:30 a.m. service. Lunch will follow and feature testimonies and a word from Pastor Kim Hays. [m](#)

OCT. 22. Red Oak, First will host its second annual "Oak-tober Pumpkin-palooza," beginning at 4:30 p.m. until dark. Music, food, an art contest for kids, pumpkin painting and face painting will be featured at this free event. [m](#)

NOV. 9. Oklahoma City, Northwest will host VBS Jumpstart. Lifeway's VBS theme for 2024 will be "Breaker Rock Beach: God's rock-solid truth in a world of shifting sands." This event will include curriculum overview with Lifeway's Melita Thomas, decorations, make & take crafts and lunch. Visit oklahomabaptists.org/vbsjump to register. [m](#)

VOLUNTEER MISSIONS OPPORTUNITIES

OKLAHOMA

On-going opportunities for volunteers:

Baptist Village Communities:

- Ada—Tracy Scheer—580/332-6004
- Broken Arrow—Monty Baggett—918/355-0099
- Cleveland—Danna Ellis—918/358-2575
- Cordell—Alicia Holt—580/832-5831
- Elk City—Cathy Henderson—580/225-5555
- Grove (Honey Creek)—Gary Mishler—918/786-2223
- Madill (Lake Texoma)—Alandra Needham—580/564-3776
- Miami—Shane McGhee—918/542-7124
- OKC—Chris Finley—405/470-8915
- Okmulgee—Matthew Wood—918/756-5377
- Owasso—Steven Walkingstick—918/272-2281 ext 102
- Entrusted Hearts (Home Health Care)—Shannon Ryan—405/942-3000 ext 4685

DISASTER RELIEF

Training:

- Sept. 28**—Chaplaincy Refresher Course \$10—Norman, Bethel**
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org
- Sept. 30**—Chaplaincy Refresher Course \$10—Blanchard, Middleburg**
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org
- Oct. 7**—Chaplaincy Refresher Course \$10—Baptist Building**
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org
- Oct. 11-13**—Chaplain Manual and Operational Stress First Aid \$60—Baptist Building—Instructor: Naomi Paget.
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org
- Oct. 14**—Disaster Relief Orientation & Credentialing – 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., DR Team Center, 7180 NW Expressway, Okarche, OK
Register at: Orientation & Credentialing | Oklahoma Baptist Disaster Relief (okdisasterhelp.org)
- Oct. 20**—Chaplaincy Refresher Course \$10 – Wilson, Zaneis**
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org
- Oct. 21**—Chaplaincy Refresher Course \$10—Baptist Building**
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org
- Oct. 26**—Chaplaincy Refresher Course \$10—Broken Arrow, First**
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org
- Nov. 4**—Chaplaincy Refresher Course \$10—Tulsa, South Tulsa**
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org
- Nov. 16-17**—Assisting Individuals in Crisis – 9 a.m.-4 p.m. – \$50
Baptist Building, 3800 N. May Ave., Oklahoma City, OK 73112
To register, please email pjones@oklahomabaptists.org

** For endorsed chaplains only

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