



THE BAPTIST MESSENGER

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2025 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting Highlights



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Presents the Gospel to
Inmates 'Behind the Wire'**
by Jacob King

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2025 SBC ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS: 58 IMB MISSIONARIES COMMISSIONED, COOPERATIVE PROGRAM AND BAPTIST FAITH & MESSAGE 100TH ANNIVERSARIES CELEBRATED

by Messenger Staff

DALLAS, Tex.—10,599 Southern Baptist messengers from across the nation and world gathered June 8-11 in Dallas for the annual Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Oklahoma was in the top five per state for amount of messengers sent with a total of 650 Oklahoma Baptist messengers this year. During this event, the International Mission Board (IMB) sent numerous missionaries, including one Oklahoma Baptist, to proclaim the Gospel in nations across the world.

PASTORS' CONFERENCE

As a prelude to the convention, the 2025 Pastors' Conference was held June 8-9. Eight pastors spoke during the event and a panel discussion. They included Caleb Turner, senior pastor of Mesquite, Texas, Friendship Church; John Mark Harrison, pastor of Knoxville, Tenn., Concord First; David Kim, senior pastor at Torrance, Calif., Good Community; Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Seminary and Leavell College; Josh Powell, lead pastor at Taylors, S.C., First; Juan Sanchez, senior pastor at Austin, Texas, High Pointe; Aaron Harvie, senior pastor of Louisville, Ky., Highview; and Robert Smith, distinguished professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University.

Each pastors' sermon focused on the conference's theme of "Worth Following," based on 2 Timothy. This theme revolved around how Paul described God's plan for a pastor's life. Even though the sermons were directed at pastors, the way God has planned for them to live their lives also applies to the members of the churches the pastors serve.

On June 8, during the Pastor's Conference, the anniversaries of the IMB Journeyman Program, North American Mission Board's (NAMB) Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and the Women's Missionary Union (WMU) Foundation were celebrated. This event was held by WMU representatives and featured the theme "Let the Nations Be Glad," based on Psalm 67:4: "May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You rule the people with equity and guide the nations of the Earth."

Each segment of the celebration highlighted the works of missionaries past and present. During the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering celebration, Augusta "Gus" Smith, executive director of Native American ministry and director of Native Praise, shared about Annie's impact for Native American women in Oklahoma.

"In my childhood, many families received clothing, shoes and coats from mission boxes distributed among our Indian Baptist congregations," said Smith. "These acts of kindness stemmed from Annie's efforts to help Native people many years earlier."



WMU celebrating the anniversaries of IMB Journeyman Program, NAMB's Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and the Women's Missionary Union Foundation

SBC ANNUAL MEETING - DAY 1

Tuesday, June 10, marked the first day of the 2025 SBC meeting. It began with worship, an opening prayer and then a call to order. After various reports and introductions of 13 new motions, the IMB held its sending celebration. During this event, 58 missionaries from across the nation were recognized and sent to the mission field, one of these included an Oklahoman, "Emilie."

Many of the missionaries, including Emilie, stood behind a banner to conceal their identities as the countries they are being sent to are considered secure countries, meaning it is unsafe to openly proclaim the Gospel there.

"This is a primary reason why Southern Baptist and Oklahoma Baptist churches cooperate together," said Oklahoma Baptists' Executive Director-Treasurer Todd Fisher on a Facebook post. "To send fully-funded missionaries to take the Gospel of Jesus to some of the most spiritually dark places in the world. We do more together than apart!"

Following the sending ceremony, SBC President Clint Pressley delivered the President's Address. He urged messengers to "hold fast" in their convictions and in their cooperation. With this year being the 100th anniversary of both the Cooperative Program (CP) and the Baptist Faith and Message, Pressley cited these as the guiding rails Southern Baptists run on to carry out their mission.

In the afternoon, Pressley was elected for a second term as president of the SBC, Daniel Ritchie was elected as first vice president, Craig Carlise, current Alabama State Convention president, was elected as second vice president, Nathan Finn was reelected as recording secretary and Don Currence was reelected as registration secretary.

A total of 15 motions were made during the afternoon session. Eleven of the motions made during the morning session were referred to appropriate entities for further consideration, two motions were scheduled to be voted on the following day, Wed., June 11. These were a motion to abolish the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) and a motion to adopt the Sanchez Motion which is similar to the Law Amendment.



Many of the IMB Missionaries will serve in secure countries and their identities cannot be shared.

OKLAHOMA BAPTISTS GATHER FOR FELLOWSHIP EVENT

That evening, Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) and Oklahoma Baptists hosted an event for all Oklahoma Baptists attending the SBC Annual Meeting at the AT&T stadium in Dallas. This event provided fellowship for OBU alumni and friends and allowed prospective students to speak with OBU faculty from the various departments.



OBU President Heath Thomas provided updates to the campus's remodeling and reconstruction from the damage done by the April 19, 2023, tornado. Thomas said that the newly remodeled Shawnee Hall will conduct its opening ceremony in August during OBU's "The Weekend" homecoming week. The historic Raley Chapel is still undergoing construction and should be completed in 2027. Thomas also reported that the number of new freshmen was up 40 percent from last year.

Fisher also spoke during the event. He thanked all those who had been praying for him during his recovery from the automobile accident he was involved in last year, saying that he was especially thankful for being able to walk this soon. As a token of gratitude for all he has done, OBU presented Fisher a customized jersey. Additionally, a collection of pastoral books and gift baskets were given away to two pastors and their wives to show gratitude for the hard work they have done.

SBC ANNUAL MEETING - DAY 2

Wednesday's session, June 11, began with a time of worship and an opening prayer before proceeding into the next reports, including from the ERLC. There was another time of worship before Tony Wolfe, executive director-treasurer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, delivered the convention sermon.

The sermon, based on Ecc. 11:1-6, urged messengers not to retreat from their calling, which is The Great Commission. Wolfe noted that the CP is a powerful tool in advancing the Great Commission and that messengers should consider what the next generation will see 100 years from now. Following the sermon, Joint Seminary Reports and the second part of the SBC Executive Committee Report were presented.

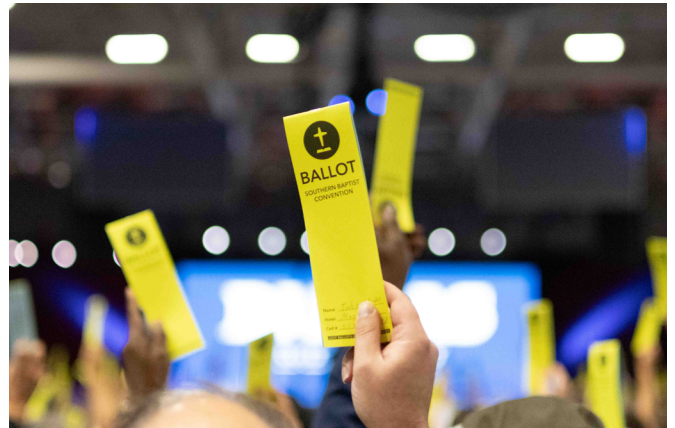
Following this was a time dedicated to handling previously scheduled business. During this time, messengers cast ballot votes on whether the ERLC should be abolished. Numerous messengers gave reasons for and against the ERLC's abolishment, including a former president of the ERLC. After tallying the votes, the motion to abolish the ERLC failed with a total of 6,581 ballots cast. Of those votes, 2,819 (42.84 percent) voted to abolish and 3,744 (56.89 percent) voted to retain; 18 votes (0.27 percent) were disallowed.

The second item scheduled for voting was on whether the SBC should adopt the Sanchez Motion. This was also cast to a ballot vote but failed to obtain the two thirds majority required to pass; 3,421 (60.74 percent) voted for the amendment and 2,191 (38.90 percent) voted against it.

After the time for previously scheduled business concluded, NAMB, WMU, the IMB and the Committee on Order of Business provided reports.

Outgoing SBC officers were recognized for their work, including Oklahoma Pastor Brad Graves, of Ada, First, who served a one-year term as SBC first vice president.

The Wednesday afternoon and final session of the 2025 SBC concluded with the election of next year's convention preacher, alternate preacher, worship leaders and the presentation of officers. Next year's annual meeting will be held in Orlando, Fla., June 9-10, 2026.





CELEBRATE RECOVERY PRESENTS THE GOSPEL TO INMATES 'BEHIND THE WIRE'

by Jacob King

GRANITE—Located off State Highway 9, Oklahoma State Reformatory houses more than 1,000 inmates, “the worst of the worst” as said by KSWO 7News. As implied by the name, those incarcerated within Oklahoma State Reformatory are there to be reformed, changed and to become better people than when they first walked in. Mark Benedict, worship leader at Altus, Martha Road is helping inmates find a unique kind of life change that can only be found through the Gospel.

“Jesus is changing lives through this ministry,” Benedict said. “I had a student say, ‘I have never felt more free than I do right now’.”

Every week, Benedict travels to the reformatory and leads various classes that help inmates conquer addictions. They read through books and lessons that point to Christ’s redeeming power to free themselves from the metaphorical prison that is their addictions. This program is in partnership with Celebrate Recovery (CR), a national organization that seeks to help those struggling with addictions.

The national program began in 1991 and thousands of churches across the world have started their own CR ministry since then. Altus, Martha Road began its Celebrate Recovery ministry in 2016. CR has various ministries tackling the same theme of defeating addiction, but the programs that focus on prison ministry are called CR Inside programs.

In late of 2017, Benedict was invited to visit Oklahoma State Reformatory. There, he met Scott Devore, who was sharing the Gospel with inmates in the prison. After that trip, Benedict felt called to begin a prison ministry at the reformatory. Plans for the ministry were halted due to COVID, but in 2021, Benedict began his church’s first CR Inside ministry, ‘Celebrate Recovery: The 12 Steps’, in the reformatory’s medium security wing. Since then, the program has been growing fast.

“In that first year we had six graduates from the program,” Benedict said. “Last year, we had 19 graduates, and we currently have 42 that are going through the program.”

Sharing the Gospel in a prison isn’t easy work. It takes time to gain the trust of the inmates. That doesn’t prohibit the love of Christ being spread in prisons, though. Sometimes, like with Oklahoma State Reformatory, Christ is already at work behind the wires.

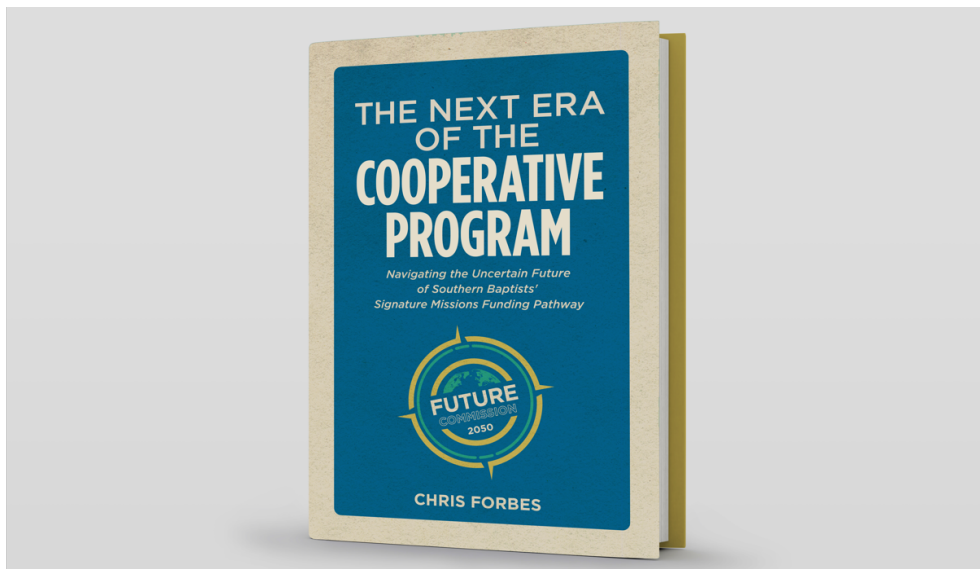
“I went into the prison thinking I was carrying Jesus into the prison, but Jesus was already there,” Benedict said. “It’s amazing. I am thrilled to be able to share these tools with other men so they can find freedom. I can’t wait to see what Christ is going to do next.”

For more information about Celebrate Recovery ministries, visit celebraterecovery.com.



Altus, Martha Road’s Celebrate Recovery program has been sharing the Gospel to inmates in Oklahoma State Reformatory since 2021. Pictured here are Mark Benedict, Altus, Martha Road CR director, and Robbie Benedict, Mark’s wife and program coordinator. Robbie works at the prison and serves as a liaison for churches that help support Prison Fellowship Ministry and a local group called Band of Brothers.

CHURCH NEWS



NEW BOOK MARKS CP CENTENNIAL, EXPLORES 'NEXT ERA' OF COOPERATION

As the Southern Baptist Convention celebrates 100 years of the Cooperative Program — the SBC's giving channel for missions and ministry — a new book explores the future of this cooperative effort.

Chris Forbes, a longtime Southern Baptist marketing strategist and consultant, wrote "The Next Era of the Cooperative Program," based on his doctoral research for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Forbes, head of Forbes Nonprofit Strategies, said in a news release that the launch of the book is "strategically timed for the CP Centennial year and offers a foresight-informed roadmap for the future of cooperative missions funding."

To learn more, go to forbesstrategies.com.

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Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children

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NEEDED**

 Baptist Children's Home

 Baptist Home for Girls

 Boys Ranch Town



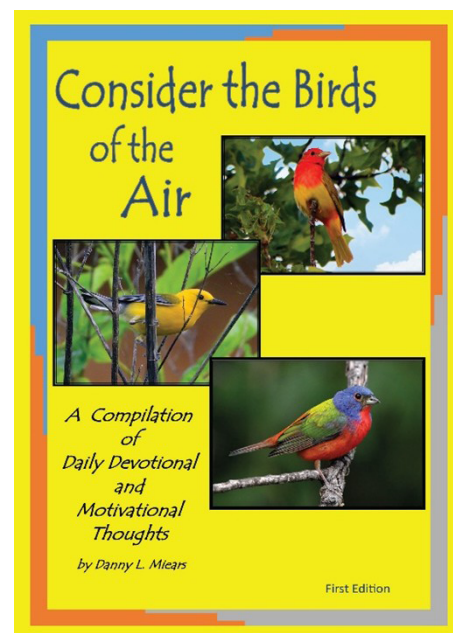
Learn more and apply today at
obhc.org/houseparents

GOD CREATED BEAUTIFUL, MAJESTIC BIRDS, AND YET VALUES HIS CHILDREN EVEN MORE

Author Danny L. Mears shares biblical truths along with his appreciation for God's creation in *Consider The Birds Of The Air* (\$31.49, Paperback, 9798868518324) (\$9.99, E-book, 9798868518331)

Mears is an avid birdwatcher and photographer and has combined that passion with his love for God and His people to produce this daily devotional. In it, readers will find thoughts, reflections, stories, Scriptures, and stunning bird photography encouraging them slow down, be in the moment, and trust that God cares for them even more than for the smallest of creatures.

Danny L Mears is a retired minister of church education and music with a master's in religious education from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He has served churches in Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas. Dan is currently a member of Oklahoma City, Southern Hills and a long tenured member of the Singing Churchmen of Oklahoma.



TRIBUTES

Benjamin Lacy, 91, died May 6. A 1958 graduate of Oklahoma Baptist University, he was ordained to the gospel ministry at Shawnee, First. He was an educator, teaching in Kayenta, Ariz. and Drumright and finishing his teaching career of almost 40 years as Principal of Drumright Elementary school. He also served as bivocational pastor at Cushing, Oak Street and served as interim pastor at many churches in Oklahoma.

Robert "Bob" L. Ross Sr., one of the pillars of Oklahoma Baptist history who helped lead efforts to advance the Gospel and grow Southern Baptist churches across the state for decades, passed away May 31 at the age of 88. Ross served the Lord in various capacities and ministries throughout his lifetime, including 25 years at The Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma (now known as WatersEdge), where he served as the Foundation's president from 1986 until his retirement in 2002. He also served on various boards with several organizations such as the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO), Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU), Southern Baptist Convention Foundation, and Association of Baptist Foundation Executives.



125 YEARS
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NATIONAL COWBOY & WESTERN
HERITAGE MUSEUM

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NURSE AND SONOGRAPHER OPENINGS

STAFF AND VOLUNTEER POSITIONS



obhc.org/employment

 Hope Pregnancy Center
OBHC



RECOMMENDATIONS SOUGHT FOR

Boards and Committees

The Nominating Committee of the convention of Oklahoma Baptists invites Oklahoma Baptists from across the state to recommend persons to serve on the various boards and committees. The committee's nominations will be presented to messengers at the Annual Meeting of Oklahoma Baptists to be held Nov. 10-11.

RECOMMENDATIONS CAN
BE SENT USING THE QR
CODE OR LINK BELOW



[oklahomabaptists.org/
recommendations](https://oklahomabaptists.org/recommendations)