

THE BAPTIST MESSENGER

DIGITAL EDITION | NOV. 19, 2025



**2025 Pastors' Conference
Encourages Pastors to 'Dig
Deep, Reach Wide'**
by Messenger Staff

See Page 5

**Lottie Moon Exhibit at
Moore, First Celebrates Life
of Missionary**
by Jacob King

See Page 7

Church News

See Page 8

2025 ANNUAL MEETING:OKLAHOMA BAPTISTS CELEBRATE 100TH ANNIVERSARIES OF CP, BAPTIST FAITH & MESSAGE DURING

by Messenger Staff

Nearly 1,000 Oklahoma Baptists gathered at Oklahoma City, Southern Hills Nov. 10-11 for the 119th Annual Meeting. The two-day Annual Meeting was attended by 875 registered messengers from churches across Oklahoma, as well as other attendees and guests.

The theme was "Prevail," based on Matt. 16:13-19. Michael Butler, pastor of Chickasha, First, served as Oklahoma Baptists president and led throughout the Annual Meeting.

Monday Evening Celebrates 100 Years of the Cooperative Program

During the opening session of Annual Meeting on Monday evening, Oklahoma Baptists Executive Director-Treasurer Todd Fisher shared his annual address.

Fisher, who was involved in a near-fatal automobile accident in July of 2024 thanked Oklahoma Baptists for their prayers and support. He then led in a time to commemorate the 100th anniversaries of the Cooperative Program (CP) and the Baptist Faith and Message.

"As we gather this evening in our annual meeting as Oklahoma Baptists, we do so in remembrance and celebration of a long and rich history of obedience to God's Word and faithfulness to the mission he has given the church," Fisher said. "Our cause for gratefully looking back at our heritage are the 100th anniversaries of both the Cooperative Program and the Baptist Faith and Message. In light of these milestones, we would do well to do as these examples from history have done and learn from our history to help us in our today and our future.

"I am reminded of the address an aging Joshua gave the leaders of Israel in Joshua 23 as he looked back on the history of his people. He used that history to help encourage the leaders of Israel to remain focused on the Word and mission God had given them. We would do well to do the same."

Fisher emphasized the legacy and history that Oklahoma Baptists enjoy.

"As we look at who we are as Oklahoma Baptists, we would do well to look back at our history and the incredible work that God did to unite our state around shared beliefs and mission," he said.

According to Fisher, the history of Oklahoma Baptists is rooted in the unification of two separate conventions—the Baptist General Convention of Indian Territory and the Oklahoma Baptist State Convention—prior to Oklahoma achieving statehood in 1907. This merger, formalized in 1906, created a unified body committed to missionary work, Christian education, and denominational enterprises, a purpose that Fisher states continues today.



>>Photos by Staff

1) Oklahoma Baptists Executive Director-Treasurer Todd Fisher holds historic gavel used to bring first Oklahoma Baptists' Annual Meeting into session.

2) Oklahoma Baptists President and pastor of Chickasha, First, Michael Butler

OKLAHOMA BAPTISTS' 2025 ANNUAL MEETING (CONT.)

"The two Baptist conventions, seeing the imminent reality of statehood and the merging of the two territories, began to formally discuss merging the conventions. After a series of meetings for both sides, the two conventions agreed to become one. On November 9, 1906, the Baptist General Convention of Indian Territory met inside the First Baptist Church of Shawnee (that building is Stubblefield Chapel on the campus of OBU) and formally approved the merger. The Oklahoma Baptist State Convention met inside the First Methodist Church of Shawnee and voted to merge as well.

"At 10 a.m., both groups walked out of the two churches and met together—400 messengers in total. They walked down Main St. of Shawnee in pairs, one from Indian Territory and one from Oklahoma territory to the Shawnee Opera House. They were no longer competitors, but brothers sharing a common faith and commitment to the Word of God and the Great Commission. As they walked, they sang the old hymn, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds." Inside the opera house, they had their first annual meeting as a unified convention."

Fisher explained how the two conventions had their own respective gavel. The two gavels were merged into one gavel used at the annual meeting the following year. After the opening prayer, the first song they sang was "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." God, through His purpose and power, had united the two conventions."

Fisher held up the original gavel in his hand during Annual Meeting, which was a reminder of the unity experienced in the past and today.

"Their stated original purpose of forming the convention was 'to promote missionary operations, Sunday School work, the dissemination of religious literature, the cause of Christian education and our denominational enterprises in general, and to develop our people in missionary enterprises at home and abroad.'"

He added, "That purpose and commitment has not changed today—the Word of God and the Great Commission. Neither has the unity they experienced in that moment faded from the ranks of Oklahoma Baptists."

Tuesday Features Key Business, Officer Elections, Ministry Reports

The Tuesday morning session began with pre-session music by the Southern Hills Worship Team, directed by Randy Lind. Oklahoma Baptists' First Vice President Owen Nease, who is pastor of Oklahoma City, Emmaus, led the session.

Baptist Village Communities (BVC) President Bill Pierce then delivered the BVC report, where he emphasized the strategic ministry impact of BVC in Oklahoma. Last year during the "Every Door in '24" campaign, 19 senior adults made professions of faith and 78 recommitted their lives to Christ.



>>Photos by Staff

3) Oklahoma Baptist University President Heath Thomas

4) Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children President James Swain.

OKLAHOMA BAPTISTS' 2025 ANNUAL MEETING (CONT.)

Pierce also gave an update on the various repairs, renovations and replacements for BVC properties. To conclude the BVC report, Pierce announced the launch of new programs to help families care for their senior adults.

Oklahoma Baptist University (OBU) President Heath Thomas highlighted the work OBU is doing to reach the next generation of future shapers through their world class education programs built on the foundational Rock of Christ. For the fourth year in a row OBU has had an increase in enrollment from the previous year with 17 percent more students enrolled than in 2024. Thomas also announced the creation of new doctorate and master's programs. Finally, he talked about the progress of the remodeling projects across the OBU campus, including the recent reopening of Shawnee Hall, the soon-to-be opening of Thurmond Hall in 2026 and the status of Raley Chapel's remodeling.

During the business session of Annual Meeting, messengers approved the 2026 Financial Plan, which said that "The 2026 Cooperative Program allocation be distributed 40 percent Southern Baptist Convention / 45 percent Oklahoma Baptists / 15 percent (Oklahoma Baptists) Affiliates. The plan, which featured the same CP allocation as prior year, has a giving objective of \$24.5 million.

During the election of officers, messengers elected Owen Nease as president. Pastor Kevin Moss of Spencer, Antioch Fellowship was elected as first-vice president; and D.J. Carney, pastor of Bristow, First, was elected as second-vice president. Each of the officers ran unopposed and were elected by acclamation.

Oklahoma Baptist Executive Director-Treasurer Todd Fisher then gave the Board of Directors Report, beginning with recognition of Veterans Day and thanking veterans for their service.

After another time of worship through prayer and praise, Michael Butler delivered the President's Address which was based on 1 Cor. 4. Butler emphasized how unique and amazing the unity amongst Oklahoma Baptists is, but how we must still work to keep that unity for the sake of the Gospel.

"We are all servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God that is the Gospel," Butler said.

The evening session opened with worship, prayer, Scripture reading and a call to order. Then, Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children (OBHC) President James Swain reported on the 2025 OBHC strategic plan, titled "Pillars of Hope." The pillars focus on filling the OBHC campuses, furthering the work of Hope Pregnancy Centers and finding OBHC's place in foster care.

In 2025, OBHC has served people on all of its campuses and served 2,449 clients at Hope Pregnancy Centers. Additionally, they worked with 20 churches to establish resource management families and referred 84 families to adoptive families. Among all their programs, OBHC has seen 82 professions of faith this year.

In his ministry report, WatersEdge Chief Executive Officer Robert Kellogg highlighted the "25 by 25" campaign, which began in 2013. The campaign originally sought to distribute \$25 million by the end of 2025, has met and exceeded the original goal. The total amount distributed since 2013 has even surpassed \$350 million, which is nearly the same amount WatersEdge had in assets under management when the campaign began. Kellogg acknowledged this achievement, and he reminded messengers that the mission is not over and there are still those who need help.

Fisher helped celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the *Baptist Faith & Message* through a video presentation by Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler. Fisher also recognized staff and volunteers who helped make Annual Meeting possible.

After the Southern Hills Worship Team led messengers in a final time of praise, David Wallace, lead pastor at Roosevelt, Frist, delivered the Annual Sermon. Wallace is a military veteran and Green Beret who was honorably discharged after sustaining a major injury. His message focused on standing strong in the faith when the world stands against us.

"Be courageous and prevail through Christ," Wallace said.

Fisher concluded Annual Meeting with a recognition of outgoing officers and presentation of newly-elected ones. Moss gave the closing prayer to round out Annual Meeting. The 120th Annual Meeting of Oklahoma Baptists is set for Nov. 9-10, 2026 at Tulsa, South Tulsa. For more information, visit www.oklahomabaptists.org



2025 OKLAHOMA BAPTISTS PASTORS' CONFERENCE ENCOURAGES PASTORS TO 'DIG DEEP, REACH WIDE'

by Messenger Staff

On Monday, Nov. 10, hundreds of Oklahoma Baptist pastors gathered at Oklahoma City, Southern Hills for the annual Pastors' Conference. The theme for the event was "Dig Deep, Reach Wide," based on Matt. 28:18-20.

The day began with a welcome, theme introduction and opening prayer time by Jeremy Freeman, pastor of Newcastle, First, who served as Pastors' Conference president.

Following this was a brief time of worship before Freeman took the podium again for the first sermon of the conference.

He first focused on the theme of the conference, encouraging pastors to do all they can to reach the lost people in the community. Freeman mentioned the account in Mark and Luke of the four men who brought their paralyzed friend to Christ to be healed as an example of how pastors should give it their all to reach the lost.

"The chief burden of all of our hearts is the Glory of God," Freeman said. "God is most glorified when we are on mission."

Freeman then challenged pastors to lead by example for their congregation and then to rely fully on God for their mission work.

In the second sermon, Michael Taylor, pastor of Ponca City, First, spoke about keeping Jesus at the forefront of everything we do in church and life. He said that keeping Christ as the only way to Salvation will lead to Jesus always in their lives and anything other than that is lesser. That also means putting oneself last, living selflessly.

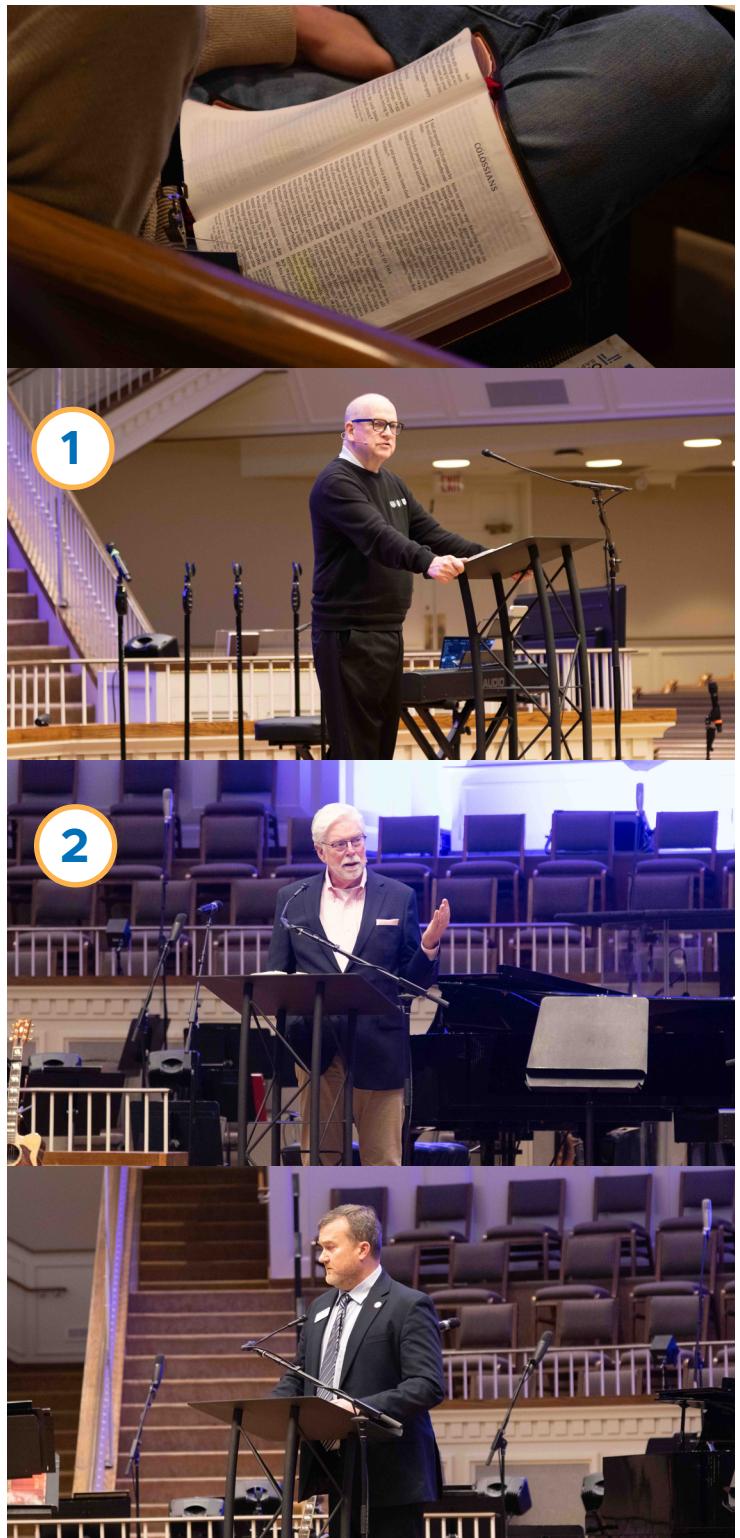
"A life spent with Jesus leads to only one kind of impression—he is a Jesus man," said Taylor.

After another worship set, Southeastern Seminary President Danny Akin delivered a sermon. His message highlighted the urgency of the Great Commission and how to be a Great Commission people.

"Everyone of us should have the heart and mind of a Great Commission Christian," Akin said.

He challenged pastors to lead their congregation to be a "Great Commission people." Reminding them that all things belong to Christ.

During the Pastors Conference Lunch event, attendees heard from Hershael W. York, who is Southern Seminary's Dean of The School of Theology and senior pastor of Frankfort, Kt., Buck Run. York shared a message from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians.



>>Photos by Staff

1) Southern Seminary Preresident Danny Akin
2) Southern Seminary Dean of Theology, Hershael W. York

OKLAHOMA BAPTISTS' 2025 PASTORS' CONFERENCE (CONT.)

During the afternoon session, the second annual J.B. Rounds Bi-Vocational Pastor of the Year award was presented. This award honors a bi-vocational pastor who has demonstrated exceptional faithfulness in their ministry. Named in honor of Rounds, one of the founders of Falls Creek and leader of Oklahoma Baptists, this award is meant to highlight the importance of recognizing those who labor in smaller or underserved churches while also maintaining other careers. The 2025 award recipient was multi-vocational pastor Manny Parker of Mannford, New Hope.

The first sermon of the afternoon session was by Jeff DeGiacomo, senior pastor of Shawnee, Immanuel. His message came from 2 Tim. 4. DeGiacomo challenged pastors to reach out into their community, even when they don't feel like doing so.

"Reaching people with the Gospel doesn't just happen behind the pulpit," he said.

DeGiacomo reminded pastors that reaching out is what God called Christians to do, and it needs to be done whenever possible.

Participants in the Oklahoma Baptists Pastors' Conference elected Michael Taylor, pastor at Ponca City, First, as First Vice-President and Kenny Mossman, pastor at Carnegie, First, as Second Vice-President.

Following the time of business, York delivered the fifth sermon of the day. He spoke from Numbers 20 and focused on how pastors must finish the race just as strong as they started.

"The more God uses you, the less you have room for disobedience," York said. "When you speak for God, there's no such thing as a small sin."

After a time of worship, Tyler McDowell, pastor of Blair, First, delivered the sixth sermon of the conference. He framed the sermon on the historic account of Joshua and the wall at Jericho, saying that there will always be a "Jericho" in life to overcome. McDowell reminded pastors that God will be with them when they ask for help and to listen when He calls.

"If we want God to move in the lives around us, we need to listen to His instructions," McDowell said.

He concluded by encouraging pastors to not be intimidated by the "Jerichos" in their lives because they have prayer and the Gospel to sustain them.

The final sermon of the Pastors' Conference was given by evangelist Ken Freeman. Tying into the theme of Dig Deep, Reach Wide, Freeman shared his life story and how he

would be a completely different person if a family hadn't reached out to him with the Gospel.

After a series of difficult life circumstances from being raised in a broken home, Freeman met a Christian who showed Jesus' love, which radically changed his life.

"Because of a family that let me live on their couch and a football player who thought I needed Jesus, I'm a saved man," Freeman said.

He concluded by challenging pastors to go out and find the other Ken Freemans of their communities, those who are in hard situations, and lead them to Christ.

The annual Pastors' Conference is held in conjunction with Oklahoma Baptists Annual Meeting. For more information, visit oklahomabaptists.org/pastors.



>>Photos by Staff

3) From Left: Michael Taylor, 1st Vice President and pastor at Ponca City, First; Jeff DeGiacomo, President and pastor at Immanuel, Shawnee; Kenny Mossman, 2nd Vice President and pastor at Carnegie, First.

4) Evangelist Ken Freeman delivering the Pastors' Conference Sermon.

5) Commemorative coins given to pastors after the conference.



LOTTIE MOON EXHIBIT AT MOORE, FIRST CELEBRATES LIFE OF MISSIONARY

by Jacob King

MOORE—The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering is an important part of the Christmas season for Oklahoma Baptists and Southern Baptists all over the world. It not only allows the Church to honor Moon's legacy of mission work and give to International Missions, but also gives them opportunity to inspire the next generation of missionaries.

At Moore, First, Paulia Box Merrell wanted to motivate kids in a more visual fashion. Due to the efforts of her and the missions team, 13 different displays can be found around the Moore, First facility. Each exhibit features items and clothing from countries all over the world, including a special recreation of what Moon's house looked like when she was in China. They also have a sign explaining what is on display and specific ways people can be praying for the country.

"There are so many people who aren't going to be able to go on mission trips, but if they see these and they read and they learn about what the need is for the country, that is really our purpose for this," said Merrell. "It's to give them some encouragement and some insight to what's out there."

Before moving to Moore, First, Merrell and her husband, James, attended a church in Kansas City, Kan. The idea for a display began with a Prayer Parade at that church. The congregation would place out flags representing the different countries that needed prayer during the Christmas season. When Merrell moved to Oklahoma and started attending Moore, First in 2017, she wanted to continue the tradition. Merrell got inspiration for the displays seen today at Moore, First from a Lottie Moon house display she saw in Fort Worth, Texas.

"I want to have a Lottie Moon House in our displays," she said.

Each year, the number of displays has grown, representing the many countries missionaries serve in. Typically, they begin as drawings and sketches that Merrell creates. From there, her husband and the missions team work to bring Merrell's vision to life. They work to get authentic items from the countries tied to the displays, but also use a bit of creativity to fulfill Merrell's vision when in need.

One of the newer displays is of the Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall, in Israel. It depicts a man, woman and child wearing clothing from the region standing in front of a partial recreation of the wall. Like in real life, pieces of paper are stuck in the crevices of the wall which represent the papers that visitors write down prayers on and stick in the wall.

Merrell comes from a family of missionaries, herself serving in Asia for eight years. She has a passion not only for the displays, but also for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering as it played a key role in her family's work.

"If our family hadn't received the offering, we wouldn't have been able to survive," she said. "I have an aunt and uncle who were missionaries for 30 years, and if they hadn't received the offering, they wouldn't have been able to do much. It's really important to us."

The world needs new missionaries every day. An exhibit like the one at Moore, First is one of the many ways churches can inspire the next generation.

"Our world is in such a need right now," Merrell said. "We are told to go and give. Our goal is to inspire the next generation of missionaries.

For more information about the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering or to give, visit imb.org/generosity/lottie-moon-christmas-offering.



From Left: Paulia Merrell; James Merrell; Charlie Blount, Lead Pastor at Moore, First; Tyler Kelley, Executive Pastor

CHURCH NEWS

INDUCTION OF HALL OF FAME MEMBERS HIGHLIGHTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION LUNCHEON

The induction of three more outstanding deceased Oklahoma Baptist servants into the Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame highlighted the annual Oklahoma Baptist Historical Commission (OBHC) luncheon on Tues., Nov. 11 at Oklahoma City, Southern Hills. This year's honorees included preacher and evangelist John R. Bisagno; writer and speaker Willa Ruth Garlow and collegiate ministry leader Deborah Jo Inda Lipscomb. Certificates of induction were presented to members of the honorees' families who were at the luncheon—which was attended by about 40 people—and featured the presentation of the 2025 Distinguished Service Award to Walter Mullican, former longtime pastor of Oklahoma City, Portland Ave., and recognition of Bethel Acres, Blackburn Chapel, which was awarded the Gaskin Church History Award for 2024.

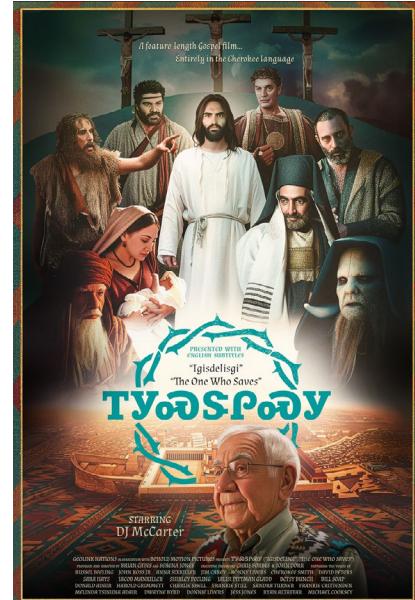


CHEROKEE-LANGUAGE FILM WRAPS DUBBING PRODUCTION UNDER CHURCH LEADERSHIP

TAHLEQUAH—GeoLink Nations, in association with Behold Motion Pictures, announces the completion of dubbing for "The One Who Saves" a groundbreaking feature-length film sharing the story of Jesus Christ in Tsalagi, the Cherokee language. The project is a ministry initiative designed for local church use in discipleship and outreach, while also complementing broader community efforts to revitalize language. The film was completed under the leadership of Oklahoma Native American Baptist churches, with participation from Cherokee congregations and community members as cast. New narration scenes in the film were shot on the grounds of the Cherokee Baptist Associational Camp, featuring Oklahoma Baptist pastor D.J. McCarter of Tahlequah, Elm Tree. Pastor Russell Feeling of Salina, New Jordan served as a language coach during production. For more information, Contact Chris Forbes at chris@forbesstrategies.com.

PERRY COX RETIRING AFTER 72 YEARS OF MINISTRY

Perry Cox, pastor of Tulsa, Skelly Drive, is retiring following 72 years of ministry, beginning in 1953 in Texas, his home state. He has served Baptists in Oklahoma since 1977, where he was called to Tulsa, Calvary, serving four years before joining the staff on the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma as a staff member of The Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma (now WatersEdge), directing the Tulsa office of that ministry along with his wife, Carol, who died last year. Now in his fourth retirement at age 91 he will serve Skelly Drive, Tulsa until the end of the year and return to Houston to be near family, early in 2026. Cox has been privileged to preach in numerous states during those years, and has preached in various places worldwide, including Canada, Haiti, Spain, Nigeria, and India. Applications are being received by the Tulsa congregation, and recommendations may be sent to the Pulpit Search Committee at 8504 E. Skelly Drive, Tulsa, OK 74129, or online at www.sdbctulsa.com, att: Patti Brock, secretary. Phone number is 918.627.4264.



FOSTERING HOPE FUNDRAISER

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7TH NOON TO 4PM

mitchell's
jewelry

100% OF SALES

WILL GO TO

FOSTERING HOPE

BENEFITTING FOSTER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN CLEVELAND, MCCLAIN AND GARVIN COUNTY.

SHOP IN-STORE OR ONLINE.