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ONE magazine

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2026

Telling Your Story
for God's Glory

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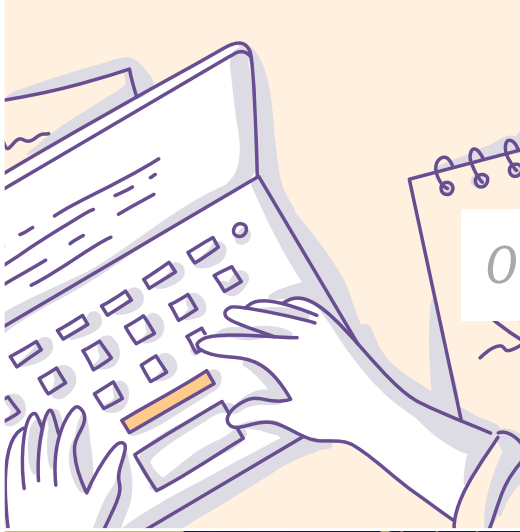
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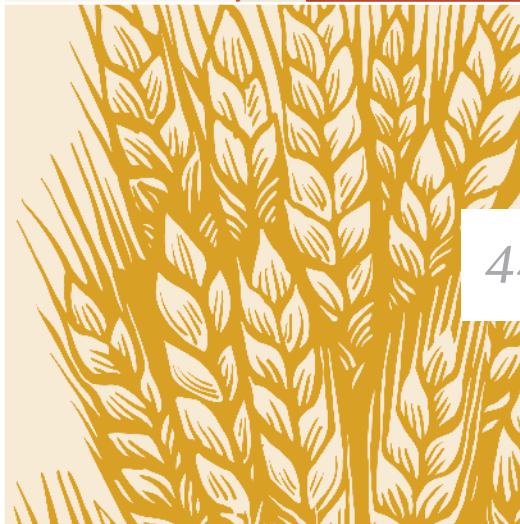
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Only Human

BY ERIC K. THOMSEN

We make mistakes at *ONE Magazine*. Perhaps you've noticed. Misspelled name here, typo there, a wrong date, or a statistic with an extra zero. Despite our hard work and best efforts, mistakes still happen. We are only human.

And we plan to stay that way.

Following several lengthy (and intense) discussions, the *ONE Magazine* editorial team recently crafted a policy regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which was later approved during the annual meeting of the magazine's Oversight Board. Since this policy is long and detailed, let me offer a summary:

- Both human creativity and technological advancement offer a marvelous reflection of God's image at work in creation. However, because humanity is also broken and sinful, we must be discerning about how (and which) technology we use.
- *ONE Magazine* writers, editors, and designers WILL NOT use generative AI to produce "original" content, nor will we ask AI to mimic or copy the style of another writer, publication, artist, or designer.
- *ONE Magazine* writers, editors, and designers WILL continue to use traditional (or corrective) AI — think spelling check and grammar tools or red-eye correction in photos. These tools refine rather than create content.
- On occasion, articles may be written on AI addressing theological implications, cultural impact, moral questions surrounding Artificial Intelligence, and more. In these instances, authors may need to interact with AI for illustrative purposes. When this is the case, our team always will be transparent about where and how AI was used through a caption, a credit, or an editorial note.

In summary, it is the goal of *ONE Magazine* to avoid the unlawful use of pre-existing content and ensure our publication aligns with the highest degree of biblical, journalistic, and professional ethics. At the same time, we want to use technology in a biblically ethical way to promote the gospel and refine how we communicate.

ONE Magazine may never deliver a mistake-free issue, but you always can be sure it's us: human and broken but also redeemed by the One whose Word is, and always will be, perfect.

It still amazes me God has chosen to work through His imperfect people, even if we are only human.

Read the full *ONE Magazine* AI Policy: onemag.org/about.htm/. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Eric K. Thomsen is managing editor of *ONE Magazine*. Email: eric@nafwb.org.



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WHAT'S COMING IN SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2026

September 6 • The Foundation of Scripture • 2 Timothy 3:16–17

September 13 • How Did We Get the Bible? • Psalm 119:89

September 20 • Who Is God? • Exodus 34:6–7

September 27 • Who Is Jesus? • John 1:1–14

October 4 • Who Is the Holy Spirit? • John 14:16–17, 26

October 11 • What Is Discipleship? • Luke 9:23

October 18 • What Good Is Christianity? • John 10:10

October 25 • How to Study & Live Out the Bible • James 1:22–25



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Telling Your Story for God's Glory

BY KRISTI JOHNSON

Do you ever feel your story is just too messy, too painful, or even too ordinary to matter? That nobody is interested in your life? The number of influencers who share the most boring details of their lives with thousands of devoted online followers should remind us everyone's story matters!

What is the difference between us as Christians and online influencers? Our stories include God — the places and circumstances where God met us and changed our lives forever. Psalm 66:16 says, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, And I will declare what he hath done for my soul." God *commands* us to share our stories of what He has done in our lives.

Consider one familiar Bible story about how one woman's story changed an entire town. We find the Samaritan woman in John 4, and her story begins with a need. She went to a well for water and, instead, she found Jesus. The things He told her intrigued her, because He already knew intimate details of her life. How could He know these hidden things about her? And what was this *living water* He offered?

Interrupted by the arrival of Jesus' disciples, she left her water jar and returned to her village to tell everyone about this Man, wondering if He could be the Christ. Her transparent testimony influenced her neighbors, and the Bible records many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony: "He told me all things that ever I did."

Perhaps she didn't think her story would matter to anyone. As a sinful Samaritan woman living in a male-dominated society, she was an outsider in religion, race, and gender. She had endured five failed marriages and currently lived in shameful isolation, an isolation that led her to venture out to the well at midday, when others would not be present to scorn her. She likely felt overlooked, judged, and broken.

But the Samaritan woman had an encounter with Jesus. In the place of shame and judgment, He offered water — living water! Leaving her water jug behind (and symbolically leaving her old life), she immediately ran to tell others about her new Savior. Why would anyone listen to her? Why would they pay attention? Because she had done everything right or had all the answers? Of course not. It was because she shared her experience with Jesus through her story. What can we learn from the Samaritan woman?

Stories create connection. I often speak at women's conferences, and I enjoy getting to connect with women across our denomination. Their stories give me opportunities to pray for them, keep in touch, and ultimately find ways we can serve together. For the last two years, I've shared frequently about my mom's passing and her inspiration to me in discipleship. Many women have been drawn to tell me stories of their own mothers and



mentors, creating a bond that leads to discipleship moments.

When we share our stories and struggles, we feel lighter, knowing someone else is walking with us and helping shoulder our burdens. When we tell our testimonies, we highlight for ourselves and others how God worked through each situation. Giving Him the glory is the best way to connect our life stories with His glorious story.

Stories break isolation. The Samaritan woman isolated herself because she didn't feel comfortable with her neighbors, those who knew her failures and weaknesses. But when she spoke up and allowed her own struggles to point others to the Savior, she opened doors for the gospel.

Stories show God's grace. Our stories may be the "proof" of Jesus someone else needs to see. Sharing authentic, vulnerable stories — even when difficult — reminds others that healing, change, and ultimately, God's grace, are more than a possibility. They are reality! When we share God's story even when we don't always have it all together, when our lives are messy, and when we have doubts and fears, others are reminded of the far-reaching grace God offers.

What are some practical ways to develop these God-focused stories?

Remember each story has three parts:

- 1) Before:** What was your life like before God met you in a hard season?
- 2) During:** How did God show up? Through prayer, Scripture, people, or a turning point in your life?
- 3) After:** How are you different now? What has changed? How did God heal, teach, or sustain you?



Our stories may be the "proof" of Jesus someone else needs to see.

Keep in mind, however, honesty and transparency do not give us license to share graphic details. Avoid TMI — you know, "too much information." Keep the focus on God's grace and work in the situation rather than the pain or failures experienced. Point to Him, not to you. And remember, God is still writing your story, even when you can't see the ink.

Where can your story be used? In hospital rooms and classrooms. In backyards and business suites. Coffee shops. Cars. Wherever you can have conversations. God can use both grandiose locations and dark hallways.

So, tell your story. Tell it with passion. Tell it with emotion. But, most importantly, tell it in ways that reveal God's glory.

"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, And I will declare what he hath done for my soul" (Psalm 66:16). **ONE**

About the Writer: A former missionary to Spain, Kristi Johnson and her husband Tim spent nearly three decades on the field before returning to the States. Tim teaches missions at Welch College, and Kristi is director of Women Nationally Active for Christ.

From Animism to Leadership

A TESTIMONY OF TRANSFORMATION



AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP BONSU BY CLINT MORGAN, GENERAL DIRECTOR OF IM, INC.

“

My name is Philip Bonsu Kwame Osei. I was born in Ghana, West Africa, the second child and only boy in a family of five children. Two other babies died shortly after birth. My parents were animists, meaning

they believed spirits could inhabit inanimate objects and give them power to protect as well as do harm. They believed the intervention of the traditional priest and his idols was the reason my three sisters were born and survived.

From that point forward, my sisters were considered to belong to the priest. The priest ordered my parents to put some eggs into a pot every year, as an offering for my siblings and me. Also, at the end of every year, we came together to thank the idol with the first fruits of our farm products.

When we moved to the city, our commitment to the idols began to dwindle, but our grandmother continued to put eggs in the pot every year on our behalf.

How I Came to Know Christ

While in Kumasi, the capital city of Ghana, I was invited to a youth camp. On the second day at camp, September 16, 1991, I gave my life to Jesus Christ. I made this decision after hearing a message about the Great White Throne Judgment and about God's love for me, manifested through Jesus Christ.

I prayed for my sisters and encouraged them to give their lives to Jesus Christ. Praise be to the Lord, from that time until now, nothing — absolutely nothing — has ever happened to any of us.

Journey and Experience in France

In 1999, I was admitted to study law at Buckingham University in the United Kingdom. Before leaving Ghana, some schoolmates, convinced of God's calling on my life, advised me to receive training and enter the ministry. I told them I was aware of God's calling, but the time was not right. I wanted to further my education first.

While I was attending the Free Will Baptist church in Nantes (La Boissière), France, I met a missionary who was visiting from the Ivory Coast. He approached me and tried to learn more about me. I told him about myself and what I was doing in France. During our conversation, I also shared with him about God's call on my life.

He told me about the Bible institute where he taught in Ivory Coast. He suggested I could be trained there if I was willing. Initially, I did not like the idea of going back to Africa for training, but God knew what He was going to do.

Life in Ivory Coast

I left France for Ivory Coast after struggling with the Lord for a year. My family opposed my becoming a minister, but God convinced me through the story of Moses, who refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter when he grew up (Hebrews 11:24–27).

After 18 months at the Bible Institute in Bouna, in the northeastern part of Ivory Coast, a civil war broke out. I relocated

to the capital Abidjan to attend seminary during the political upheaval. After a four-year course, I obtained a master's degree in theology.

Ministry in Ghana

Following graduation, I felt God directing me back to my home country of Ghana to help in a church-planting effort with an American couple from another mission agency. I worked with them until 2012. When I left, we had planted four churches in four villages in the Wa region. These churches are still functioning today.

Returning to Train Others

Since February 5, 2011, I have been married to a wonderful and helpful woman called Claudine. The Lord has given us a boy and a girl, Blessing and Lissa. I arrived in Bouna in July 2012 to serve at the Bible Institute. Since then, I have helped in training three graduating classes of students, and I count this as a blessing. Praise the Lord for having led us this far! We count on Him to continue to lead us.



Why Stories Like Philip's Matter

Philip Bonsu's journey closely mirrors the story of Philip the Evangelist in Acts 8. Philip, too, was directed by the Holy Spirit to bring the gospel to people, crossing cultural and religious barriers to reach the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip Bonsu has been used by God to bring transformation across cultures in West Africa. Both Philips willingly left behind comfort and tradition in obedience to God's call, taking the gospel to new places and people.

Philip Bonsu's journey is living proof the gospel not only changes individuals but also ignites movements to transform communities and nations. The path from animistic traditions in Ghana to training future pastors in Côte d'Ivoire is not merely a personal victory but a demonstration of how God shapes leaders to multiply His impact within their own cultures.

Philip's transformation was never a journey taken alone. At each pivotal moment, God provided the faithfulness, generosity, and vision of believers, individuals, churches, and ministries that recognized a family's potential and chose to invest in it. Every opportunity Philip received was made possible by a network of partners, mentors, and a community of mission supporters whose prayers and sacrificial giving turned the impossible into reality.

Multiplying the Gospel Through National Leaders

The strategy of empowering national leaders is rooted in the New Testament pattern. The Apostle Paul, for example,

appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23) and instructed Timothy to entrust the gospel to faithful people who would also teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). When the gospel takes root in the hearts of local believers, they are best equipped to reach their communities, understand cultural barriers, and multiply disciples.

Philip's life is a blueprint for this kind of multiplication. Each person Philip mentors is not just an individual reached, but the beginning of a chain reaction. As he pours biblical knowledge, leadership skills, and passion for Christ into every student, he equips them to become leaders themselves.

These trained leaders go on to evangelize, disciple, and plant churches, creating a ripple effect that extends the reach of the gospel far beyond what any one person could accomplish alone. Every student Philip equips is a seed for a future church, new believers, and ongoing transformation.

This biblical approach to missions is both effective and faithful to God's design for the church. Training and supporting leaders like Philip multiplies your generosity as each new leader trains dozens more. **The WMO does not end with a single leader; it launches a legacy of gospel growth touching families, communities, and entire regions, ensuring the message of Christ continues to spread for generations to come.**

An Opportunity to Participate

Across the globe, countless men and women are called by God and eager to serve. Like Philip, they need training, support, and partnership to open the door to life-changing ministry.

Through the WMO, you can become an essential part of a movement changing lives and shaping communities for generations to come.

Your generosity does more than provide funding; it opens doors to hope, transformation, and lasting impact in places the gospel is desperately needed. Your partnership truly matters. Because of your partnership:

- The gospel reaches those who have never heard, bringing light and hope to remote villages and cities alike.
- National leaders are identified, trained, equipped, and deployed to minister in their own languages and cultures, creating significant and sustainable change.
- Some national leaders hear the call to go beyond their culture and pioneer new works and are equipped to do so.
- New churches are planted, and existing fellowships are strengthened, becoming centers of faith, support, and community development.

- The work of missions expands, multiplying the impact of every gift and every prayer beyond what any one person could accomplish alone.

When you give, you aren't just contributing; you are empowering individuals and entire communities to experience the life-changing message of Jesus. Your support directly invests in leaders who continue to share the gospel, plant churches, and train others, creating a ripple effect that reaches future generations.

Philip's story is one of many. Through faithful partnership, more stories like his will emerge. Partner with us today. Together, we can make an eternal difference.

From Clint Morgan: Philip and his family are some of the humblest, kindest, God-honoring people you could ever meet. He has done an amazing job teaching at the Bible institute. However, he and Claudine have sensed God's direction to go to Italy and work with one of IM's partner agencies. Pray they will receive visas and funding as they continue the mission. [ONE](#)



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Let's look at how IM Partnerships grew and expanded from 2017 to 2025...

Pastoral Workforce



from **223** → **926**
pastors

from **13,931** → **66,212**



Weekly Attendance

Note:
Attendance per church has remained relatively stable (42–52); growth is driven by more churches, not larger ones.

Annual Baptisms



from **387** → **3,203**



Number of Churches

from **330** → **1,209**

from **631** → **3,500**

New Believers (per year)



Country Reach Expansion

from **5** partnership countries → **16**

God is changing lives around the world — and you can be a part of it. **Give to the World Missions Offering** and help us reach our **\$1 million goal** for 2026. Together, we can **take the gospel to 1 million people** — people who hear, respond, experience transformed lives, and follow Christ!

www.iminc.org/wmo



Sent, Supported, Sustained

HOW THE **WORLD MISSIONS OFFERING**
IS LAUNCHING A NEW MISSIONARY TO **BULGARIA**

BY DON MATCHETT

Some call it a leap of faith. For Tiffany Carpenter, it feels more like a steady pace, one step at a time, learning to trust God to provide exactly what is needed, exactly when it is needed.



Her journey is taking her to Bulgaria, where she will serve among children, many of whom have never heard the gospel. But before she boards a plane, before she steps into orphanages and children's homes, her story is unfolding in churches, on long drives, in quiet prayers, and in unexpected moments of generosity. It is a story genuinely shaped by the World Missions Offering (WMO).

AN EARLY CALL

Tiffany's call to ministry didn't begin with a dramatic moment. Instead, it grew quietly over time. "As a kid, I was always doing donation drives," she recalls. "It was just always in my heart to give to other people."

What started as small acts of kindness gradually grew into something more meaningful. As a teenager, Tiffany began to realize her desire to serve wasn't just a personality trait but



a calling. “Around age 16 or 17, the Lord really put cross-cultural ministry on my heart,” she says. “Cross-cultural ministry isn’t for some elite group. God chooses who to call.”

That realization changed *everything*. Missions was no longer a distant idea reserved for someone else; it became a personal invitation.

THE FIELD UP CLOSE

Tiffany didn’t step into missions blindly. Through short-term opportunities, she began to see and experience life on the mission field firsthand. She participated in outreach efforts through The Hanna Project (THP) and Operation Christmas Child. She later served through the College Missions Program (CMP). Both experiences brought her to Bulgaria, where she partnered with established missionaries and ministries.

It was there, in the rhythms of real ministry, her calling became clear. “I got to see the ministry in Bulgaria — where it came from and where it can go,” she says. “And I knew I wanted to be part of that...The Lord really put me in Bulgaria.”

NATION IN NEED

Bulgaria has been shaped by a history filled with war, political upheaval, and decades under communist rule. Today, fewer than 2% of the population identifies as evangelical Christian. While many Bulgarians are connected to Eastern Orthodox tradition, Tiffany explains their faith often lacks the relational aspect central to the gospel. “They believe in a higher power,” she observes, “but not in a relationship with that higher power.”

The years of communism and hardship have left a mark. “A lot of people have a sense of abandonment,” she adds. “Like, ‘God let all these things happen to us; where was He?’ There’s openness but also a kind of resentment.”

Tiffany is being sent into this spiritual landscape.

AMONG THE FORGOTTEN

Much of Tiffany’s work in Bulgaria will center around children, especially those living in group homes and orphanages. Around 14 children’s homes populate the region where she served on mission trips. Many of these children cannot attend church, so missionaries take church to them.

“We have what’s basically a Sunday School,” Tiffany explains. “We just love on them, share the gospel, and remind them they’re not forgotten. Many of them feel that way...forgotten.”

One little boy left a lasting impression on her. A recent arrival at a children’s home, he was confused, displaced, and still adjusting to his new reality. But something changed as Tiffany and her team began visiting regularly. “Almost every time we visited, he would run up and say, ‘My friend, you came back! You came back for me!’”

Those words carry weight.

Consistency became a form of ministry. Presence became a message. Through simple Bible lessons like the story of Peter walking on water, the team shared a deeper truth: even in life’s storms, peace is found in Christ. “He was going through a storm,” Tiffany says. “Even if he couldn’t fully understand it yet, we got to show him God brings peace.”

HIDDEN CHALLENGE...GETTING THERE

While the mission field may be thousands of miles away, one of the most difficult parts of becoming a missionary happens long before departure: fundraising.

For Tiffany, the process has both stretched and refined her. “It’s slow,” she admits. “Especially when you come from a small town where people aren’t as familiar with missions on a larger scale.”

In some cases, the challenge isn’t just financial; it’s relational. “I’ve had people question if I’m real,” she says candidly. “Like, ‘Are you a scam?’” Others simply struggled to believe someone from their community could step into global missions. “I heard, ‘That’s not something people from here do.’”

And yet, something unexpected began to happen. “As people started seeing I am doing it, it began to change their perspective,” Tiffany says. “It helped them realize they, too, can serve.”

Her fundraising journey has become a form of ministry itself.

WMO MAKES A DIFFERENCE

This is where the World Missions Offering steps into the story.



*The World Missions Offering
is not just a fund;
it's a launching point.*

Recognizing the unique challenges missionaries face at the beginning of fundraising, the WMO provides startup funding to help them gain momentum. For Tiffany, this support has been nothing short of essential. “It’s been such a blessing,” she says. “It’s given me peace just knowing it’s there.”

Practically, the funding helps cover the costs of travel as she visits churches, shares her story, and builds partnerships. Even local trips can mean hours on the road, and those expenses add up quickly. “It’s helping me get off the ground,” she explains. “Right now, it’s holding me up as I’m starting out.”

Without the WMO, the picture would look very different. “I’d be a lot lower financially,” she says. “Nowhere near where I am right now.”

The WMO doesn’t just fill a gap; it creates possibilities.

FAITH IN THE WAITING

Fundraising has taught Tiffany dependence on God is not optional; it is essential. “I don’t come from a background of wealth,” she says. “So, this has forced me to rely on the Lord.”

She has goals to meet, deadlines to consider, and uncertainties to navigate. But through it all, her faith is growing. “I’ve found peace in knowing if it’s for God, it will happen,” she says. “He will make a way.”

That doesn’t mean the process is easy. In fact, one of the biggest lessons God is teaching her right now is patience. “I’m very much a ‘let’s go, let’s get it done’ person,” she admits. “And the Lord is teaching me to slow down, to wait on Him.”

Obedience for Tiffany doesn’t look like rushing forward. It looks like surrender. “Letting Him take full control,” she says.

“Letting Him lead and use me when and how He wants.”

A GIFT THAT SAYS EVERYTHING

Along the way, small, sacred moments remind Tiffany why this journey matters. One of those happened in a church after she shared about her mission. As she returned to her seat, a young girl ran up holding a small bundle of cash and coins. “It’s not much,” she told Tiffany, “but it’s all I have.”

Later, Tiffany counted it: \$3.16. The number immediately struck her. “It made me think of John 3:16,” she says. “How God gave everything — His only Son.” In that moment, the offering felt far greater than its monetary value.

“She gave all she had,” Tiffany says. “And she did it because she cared about other kids hearing about Jesus.” It is a picture of generosity in its purest form, and a reminder impact is not measured in dollars, but in obedience.

AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE STORY

As Tiffany prepares to go, her message to supporters is simple: “Your support makes a difference. Every penny does something.”

The World Missions Offering is not just a fund; it’s a launching point. It helps missionaries like Tiffany move from calling to action, from preparation to presence. And the impact doesn’t stop there. It reaches into children’s homes in Bulgaria. Into the lives of boys who learn they are not forgotten. Into communities beginning to see faith not as ritual, but as relationship.

Tiffany hopes people will remember, “God is faithful. If we are faithful to Him, He will be faithful to us.”

SENT TOGETHER

Today, Tiffany Carpenter stands at the beginning of her missionary journey, but she does not stand alone. Behind her is a network of churches and believers who have chosen to give. Some give out of abundance. Some give sacrificially. Some, like a little girl with \$3.16, give everything they have.

Through the World Missions Offering, those gifts come together to do something extraordinary. They send. They support. They sustain. They remind a new generation of missionaries and the people they serve no one is forgotten. Not here. Not there. Not anywhere. **ONE**

About the Writer: Don Matchett is director of development at IM, Inc. Learn more: iminc.org/WMO/.

SHARE THE GOSPEL.

Give a Million. Reach a Million.

IM General Director Clint Morgan often quotes an old African proverb: “The load is lighter when two people carry it.” This simple truth paints a vivid picture, not just of shared physical labor, but of the shared calling we bear as followers of Christ to reach the unreached and fulfill the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

It truly takes all of us to carry the load. Some are called to go. All are called to pray. And together, we are called to give sacrificially so the gospel can go where it’s needed most. The command to take the Good News to the ends of the earth is a command to every believer.

We invite you to join us this year as we pursue the mission to “Share the Gospel. Give a million. Reach a million.” To reach the million-dollar goal for the World Missions Offering, we need you.

Your generosity to the WMO kick-starts the work of new IM missionaries, strengthens the IM General Fund, and empowers global partnerships advancing the gospel through local national believers. Our missionaries, national leaders, partners, and staff are committed to presenting the gospel in a way that invites a response from those who hear it.

Partner with us to share the gospel by giving to the World Missions Offering. ONE



Resources to Promote Generosity to the WMO:

Two WMO poster variations: The two poster variations provide a design to inspire people to be involved in the WMO.

WMO desk or magnet prayer calendar: These encouraging resources provide a way to keep missions in front of you year-round.

Missions Moments: A free, downloadable monthly resource for kids, youth, and adults, Missions Moments can be used as a family, individually, or in your church. Each month’s Scripture, activities, prayer focus, and devotional encourages readers spiritually and helps define your vital role in laboring with us in the Great Commission.

Download or request WMO resources at www.iminc.org/wmo/.

WMO Videos with IM Missionaries:

Our YouTube channel features IM missionaries in new videos sharing about the impact of your generosity and challenging listeners to find their role in the Great Commission through the World Missions Offering.

Bonus! Spanish materials: Several Spanish language resources are available.

WMO Newsletter: Join the WMO newsletter. Receive exclusive content and updates about the WMO directly to your inbox all year long.





Geraldine Waid Home With the Lord

Antioch, TN — Former missionary to Japan, Geraldine Waid, passed away Friday, June 12, 2026, at Colquitt Regional Senior Care and Rehabilitation in Georgia. The 95-year-old was born December 11, 1930, in Lucama, North Carolina, to James Richard and Bessie Mae (Batten) Gay.



Geraldine Waid

Geraldine married Herbert Waid July 23, 1954, in Nashville, Tennessee, after they met at Free Will Baptist Bible College (now Welch College). In 1958, the couple was appointed to missionary service in Tokyo, Japan, where they served for 17 years.

During their years of ministry in Japan, they became the first Free Will Baptist missionaries in Tokyo, established a church in Irumagawa, and provided teaching and ministerial support in four mission works.

Debbie Griffin, current IM missionary to Japan, reflected,

"Mrs. Geraldine was a godly woman who followed the Lord's call with her whole heart. As pioneer missionaries, she and Brother Herbert planted enduring seeds of faith in Japan. Though her time on the field ended, her missionary heart never retired. She poured love for Japan into fervent prayer, unwavering support, and mentoring the next generation. She became a precious mentor to me, selflessly sharing her deep wisdom and experience. I will be forever grateful for Mrs. Geraldine and the lasting impact she made, not only in Japan, but also deep within my own heart."

After returning from Japan, Geraldine served alongside her husband in Georgia for many years, offering encouragement and steadfast support throughout their years of service.

Herbert passed from this life 14 months before his wife. Geraldine is survived by four children (Nancy Thiessen, Peter Waid, Penelope Wilkinson, and Amy Dykxhoorn), 15 grandchildren, and 25 great-grandchildren.

Funeral services were held June 21, 2026, at Cobb Funeral Chapel. Her son, Reverend Peter Waid, officiated. **ONE**

From Sorrow to Rejoicing

Kenya — On Palm Sunday, Kenneth Eagleton preached at Bible Way Free Will Baptist Church in a village in Eastern Kenya, near Kitale. Over the next two days, he and Danny Gasperson conducted a seminar for the people before returning to the States.

The following Thursday, Pastor David Wafula of the Bible Way FWB Church informed Kenneth about the death of a teenager who had been ill. A few days later, Kenneth received another message from the pastor. During the teen's funeral, Pastor David preached an evangelistic message, and 27 people responded to the invitation.

Kenneth exclaimed, "What an example of God taking tragedy and turning it into rejoicing as 27 souls found salvation in Jesus!" **ONE**



Pakistan —

Twenty-six people were baptized May 6 at God's Love FWB Church in Lahore, Pakistan.





Cuba — Three mission works connected to the Cedars of Lebanon Free Will Baptist Church gathered for a Ladies Month celebration at the "Salvados por Cristo" (Saved by Christ) Free Will Baptist Mission in Pinar del Río, Cuba. Jo-

cabed (the daughter of Boris Sarlabous, director of the Los Cedros del Libano seminary) delivered the message to the group of nearly 70 women.

Brazil — The Jaboticabal Free Will Baptist Church launched a new church plant in the neighboring town of Monte Alto on May 25. On June 7, a scant two weeks later, 85 people (15 children and 70 adults) gathered for worship. Fifty-five of them were Monte Alto residents.



France — On June 7, Merina, a young Ukrainian, who attends the Russian service at the St. Nazaire Free Will Baptist Church, shared her testimony of

salvation. After the church service, the congregation gathered at the ocean for her baptism.

Panama — On May 24, at Bethania Free Will Baptist Church in Panama, four people were baptized, publicly declaring their faith and stepping into a new chapter of life.



Togo — Sunday, May 24, Pastor Akoda baptized 12 people at the Free Will Baptist Church in Togo, West Africa.



Côte d'Ivoire — Free Will Baptist youth in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, organized a large evangelistic march through Yopougon to celebrate World Evangelism Month in May.



Along the route, they distributed gospel tracts and proclaimed the Good News of Jesus Christ to passersby with joy and conviction. By all accounts, the event unfolded under excellent conditions and reflected months of intentional preparation.



Cuba — A new Free Will Baptist mission work was established during the spring in Recompensa, Cuba, ten miles from Bahía Honda. The congregation, named "Getsemaní," is a

place of prayer, surrender, and faith. With few material resources, the small, faithful community is already making its mark. Pastor Durley López Gómez and the Bahía Honda Free Will Baptist Church sponsored the new work, believing God's mission is never limited by what we lack.

Bangladesh — In April, Free Will Baptist believers in Bangladesh finalized a studio



to transmit Christian programming. They are creating a web-based Christian radio station to transmit the gospel in the Bangla language.

Going to Work With God

BY BARRY RAPER

2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-13

If you have children or grandchildren, you know what it is like to involve them in your work. Whether cooking or yardwork, it is important to show children how to do things. As they get older, it gives them confidence to do things on their own. When kids are young, their helping sometimes really doesn't help much. But that isn't the point. You want them to develop a sense "we" did this together.

This recalls one of the staggering truths in Scripture. God involves us in His work in the world. Certainly, He could do His work without us, yet in His providence, He chose to involve us in His redemptive plan. He allows ordinary people to work with Him through our unique talents and abilities — and even weaknesses — to bring other people to Him. He allows us to "go to work with Him."

As 2 Corinthians 6 begins, Paul continued his thoughts from the end of chapter 5 where he identified us as ambassadors for Christ. Here, he defines how it looks when someone works with God.

Treasure the grace of God (verses 1-2). Paul exhorted the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. What does this mean? This word *vain* could also be translated *empty* or *for nothing*.

Some commentators suggest Paul was writing to people within the church who had heard the gospel without receiving it. While this may be true, I believe Paul primarily was addressing Christians who had already received the grace of God in Christ but abused that grace as a license to sin more, or who viewed the grace of God as insufficient.

In response, Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8, from one of the servant songs written predictively about Jesus Christ some 700 years before His birth. Like all servant songs, it pointed to the age when *anyone* who called upon the Lord would be saved, an age of the free grace of God offered in Jesus. Like us, the Corinthians were living in this age — the time between the first and second coming of Jesus. Paul emphasized to them that *now* is the day of salvation.

Why now? Because both Scripture and life experience tell

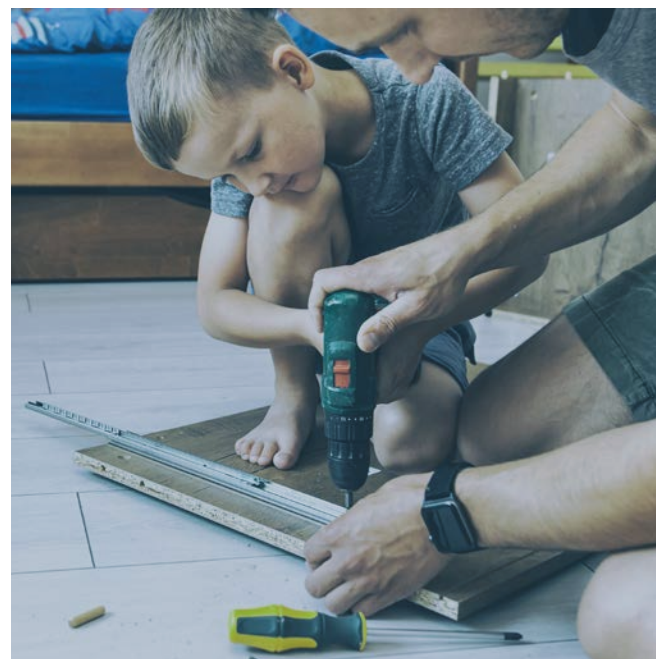
us life is short and uncertain. Even though these verses were written to Christians, the message obviously applies to unbelievers as well. If you are reading this and have never accepted Christ as your Savior, please understand the urgency. You need to come to Him while you can! You are only promised this present moment.

Imagine a death row inmate, guilty, condemned, and awaiting death. Suddenly the cell door swings open, and the warden comes in and tells the prisoner his charges have been dropped. He is free because someone else accepted his punishment. This is grace. But if the prisoner simply returns to a life of crime and violence, he received grace in vain. May this never be said of us!

Avoid becoming an obstacle to the gospel (verse 3).

Paul was deeply concerned with how his attitude and actions impacted others. He committed himself to living in such a way he did not cause others to stumble in their relationship with Jesus. He wrote about this in various places (Romans 14:13; Galatians 5:7).

Perhaps the most familiar is found in 1 Corinthians 8, where he answered a question about meat sacrificed to idols. Paul explained that while he was free to eat meat previously sacrificed to idols, he would give up meat for the rest of his life, if it meant he kept others from stumbling in their faith.





When we reach a certain stage in life, unfortunately we find it necessary to get up during the night. Obviously, you recognize the need to have a clear path since it will be dark when you get up. So, you clear the way beforehand. Here, Paul was “clearing the path” for others, removing any behavior that might distract them from the life-changing message of the gospel, both prior to and after conversion.

This starts at home. As a Christian husband and father, I must determine not to cause my wife and children to stumble. I must avoid saying or doing things that would hinder them from following Christ. Rather, I want to live in a way that helps them.

This principle ripples out into all relationships...all the way to social media. Before you post, comment, or debate, ask yourself, “Will this be a stumbling block for someone?”

Live like an open book (verses 4-10). These verses are difficult to summarize succinctly. As you work your way through 2 Corinthians, it becomes clear Paul’s opponents — false teachers who sought to undermine the apostle’s character and ministry — were bent on showcasing their own ministries. In contrast, Paul was reluctant to shine the spotlight on himself.

However, these verses make it clear servants of God live commendable lives as open books, the gospel emanating from every page, every action. Such a life is not easy. Consider the lifestyle Paul described here:

- Endurance through extreme hardship (verses 4-5).
- The visible evidence of the Spirit and the Word working in us as we endure spiritual warfare (verses 6-7).
- Persistence in the face of slander, accusations, pain, and poverty without becoming bitter or losing heart (verses 8-10).

Paul made it clear to the Corinthians that their lives might not bring fame or fortune in this life, but they would still be known (verse 9). Unknown, and yet well known.

Morrison Fuller spent most of his life as a missionary to Ecuador. A member of my home church, he was well advanced in age by the time I came around. Morrison served in Ecuador at the same time as Jim Elliot and Nate Saint, whose names became known internationally after they were killed by members of a native tribe. Morrison Fuller was one of the men who retrieved their bodies from the river after they were killed.

I had the privilege of preaching Morrison’s funeral. Maybe 40-50 people attended. As I sat on the platform looking at the small crowd, I thought how quietly this faithful, godly man left the world. Yet to God, he was well known.

Speak freely from the heart (verses 11-13). Paul desired full fellowship with the church at Corinth. He told them he had spoken freely, held nothing back, and shared what was on his heart. He also opened his heart to them.

However, at least some portion of the congregation didn’t reciprocate. Paul appealed to them in this section by first calling the church by name: “Corinthians.” Then in verse 13, he appealed to them as to children, speaking to them with fatherly affection. But you can only get close to someone if they allow you to do so. Perhaps one of the reasons Christians don’t experience deep and lasting fellowship is because we refuse to open our hearts to one another.

God allows ordinary people to work with Him through our unique talents and abilities — and even weaknesses — to bring other people to Him.

A SIMPLE CONCLUSION

The Christian family represents many occupations: doctors, lawyers, bankers, educators, farmers, and on and on. Whatever your vocation, remember you are not only working in a particular field, but you are also working together with God. The hymn writer put it well: “In the harvest field now ripened, there’s a work for all to do. Hark! The voice of God is calling, to the harvest, calling you.” **ONE**

About the Columnist: Dr. Barry Raper is pastor of Bethel FWB Church near Ashland City, Tennessee, and teaches ministry at Welch Divinity School.

One Year In

A “BRENTVIEW” WITH BRENT PATRICK, NEW DIRECTOR OF THE FREE WILL BAPTIST FOUNDATION



What will people be most surprised to learn about you?

I am an only child. When most people learn that about me, they automatically look at me differently and place me in a category with all other only children, like we are on the Island of Misfit Toys. Thankfully, I married into a family of four children, with several nieces and nephews. They all keep me grounded about weird things like “sharing” and “thinking of others’ needs before mine.” Of course, I’m speaking a little tongue-in-cheek, but over the last 30 years, my wife has done her best to successfully humble my only-child tendencies.

Another thing: in addition to 23 years of pastoring and 30 years of total ministry experience, I also have degrees in business. Before answering the call to preach, I graduated from the University of Kentucky with a degree in Business Management along with an MBA from Morehead State University. Without a doubt, God has used those degrees in combination with my pastoral training to help me conduct ministry that has led to my role at the Foundation.

Tell me briefly about your wife Paula and your kids.

If my son (the younger of our two children) were answering, he would say, “Let me tell you about my favorite child and then my younger kid.” Obviously, our younger son, Blake, is the jokester. He’s 22 years old and married to Cailey Sexton, the youngest daughter of David and Charity Sexton. Blake graduated from Liberty University with a degree in church ministry and serves as the connections pastor at CrossPointe FWB Church in Suffolk, Virginia. He, like his mother and sister, is full of life, hardworking, and enjoys working with his hands.

Olivia is 26, a sixth-grade math teacher at Landstown Middle School in Virginia Beach. She also graduated from Liberty University with an undergraduate degree in Elementary Education and a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction. She serves in the worship and children’s ministries at Gateway Church, and she is intelligent, conscientious, and loves to laugh.

My wife Paula is the rock of our family. She exudes love, joy, and laughter.

She’s truly beautiful inside and out and is an encourager to everyone around her. We have been married 30 years, and she is my most trusted counselor. Throughout our ministry journeys, Paula has been faithful to the words she spoke at our wedding: “Wherever you go, I will go ... your God shall be my God.” She holds a degree in middle school education from Morehead State University and is a fifth grade English teacher at Mt. Juliet Christian Academy.

Besides your parents, who most influenced your life?

Wow! It is hard to narrow that down. So many have influenced me through the years. But I would have to say that three men have greatly impacted my life. One is a lifelong family friend named Paul Daniel who is like a second father to me, and someone I’ve always looked up to. He’s taught me many practical things through the years and has been supportive to our family.

The others are my father-in-law Paul Wayne Browning and my cousin Dann Patrick. Both men have been my pastors and encouraged me spiritually; led me to a deeper understanding of ministry, preaching, and pastoring; and challenged me to trust the Lord with my life and be fully devoted to His calling and will.

You have been a pastor, businessman, educational administrator, and now find yourself a national denominational leader. How do you juggle all the responsibilities?

Not well at times! But I am very thankful for how the Lord has gifted me and allowed me to travel so many pathways. Each experience has built on one another to enable me to handle the next challenge. As the Psalmist said, “The Lord is the strength of my life.” He graciously provides the knowledge, wisdom, strength, and ability to accomplish His purposes. Likewise, my wife is the ultimate helpmate, supporter, encourager, counselor,

and clutch assistant. She has been beside me each step of the way and continues to be a major player in every area of my life.

What is a hobby of yours that few people know about?

I love NASCAR racing. For 25+ years, I've been to multiple tracks and watched numerous races. The driving ability of the racers at such high speeds and proximity is exciting to me. I know most of the drivers, their stories, and their racing history. I must be careful; sometimes my "NASCAR-nature" wants to come out on the highway!

Besides church and family, what do you miss most about Virginia?

The beach! We are beach people as a family. The sand and the waves are both tranquil and relaxing. Likewise, the sunrises and sunsets on the East Coast are breathtaking.

What has been the biggest challenge during this transition to Tennessee?

Learning a new discipline continues to be the biggest challenge. After pastoring for 23 years and being settled in a ministry, uprooting at age 54 to follow the Lord's leading to begin a new work almost feels like starting ministry all over again.

Plus, not being "the pastor" anymore is a bit disorienting. For so long, many simply called me "Pastor." Not hearing that title is taking some getting used to. It feels strange to attend a church service without overseeing what is taking place. I still want to stay and talk to everyone I see and be the last one to leave.

How would you describe your leadership style?

I do my best to be a servant leader and be collaborative and strategic in my leadership, as well. I naturally see the big picture, which helps me keep mission and goals in mind while ensuring daily operations meet those objectives. I believe the best decisions come from listening to the people closest to the work. I intentionally seek input from others because I value diverse perspectives and recognize every team member brings unique experiences and strengths. Creating a culture where people feel heard and respected leads to better outcomes and stronger engagement.

At the same time, I recognize leadership requires accountability. While I strive to build consensus whenever possible, I'm also comfortable making difficult decisions when necessary. I believe servant leadership is not about avoiding hard conversations or decisions but making them with integrity and a genuine commitment to what is best for the team, the organization, and the people we serve.

You are coming up on your first full year as the director of the Foundation. Can you briefly answer some rapid-fire questions?

- **What has been accomplished?** New culture, clear mission focus, new database, development of Legacy Partners
- **What has proven to be the biggest challenge?** Learning the operations and functionality of the Foundation
- **How would you describe the condition of the Foundation in a word (or sentence).** The Foundation has yet to reach its fullest potential, which gives hope for exciting days ahead!

Briefly, what do you see as the future for the Free Will Baptist Foundation in both the short and long term?

As a denomination, we must start building financial strength that supports ministry both today and for generations to come. That mission operates through endowments. We must capitalize on this window of time to plant financial seeds, water them through consistent giving, and allow the Lord to give the increase for Kingdom growth. The establishment, building, and use of endowments is a primary focus for the Foundation. Therefore, the Foundation must position itself, strengthen operations, and be the purposeful agent that helps fund today and tomorrow's ministry efforts.

Dream with me for a moment: what if the Free Will Baptist Endowment reached \$100 million? With that amount and a 5% payout, \$5 million would come annually — year after year after year until the Lord returns — to all Free Will Baptist national agencies and commissions. Over \$400,000 of additional annual income. I think we can easily see how allowing our money to work for us adds massive benefit to ministry operations!

Why is the Foundation important for Free Will Baptists?

We partner with Free Will Baptist individuals, churches, and ministries to provide biblically-grounded financial stewardship. We manage their investments, endowments, and legacy gifts, allowing them to align their personal financial goals with eternal impact. Our goal is to help God's people invest wisely, give faithfully, and leave a lasting legacy.

What is one thing would you like to say to the denomination about the Foundation?

Thank you for remaining supportive with your prayers, patience, and commitment during this leadership transition. The Foundation remains financially strong, missionally focused, and passionately committed to the financial future of Free Will Baptists.

I believe the biggest days for the Foundation and its impact are just ahead! **ONE**



Changed by Experience

BY CODY AND LAUREN HERREN

Perhaps you have heard about the World Missions Offering (WMO) and thought, “What am I even giving toward?” or, “I’d rather give directly to the missionaries!” Or maybe, “I already give to missionaries, so I don’t need to give more money to something else.”

We have been in your shoes! To be honest, we once had the same thoughts. Until recently, that is. Like so many others, our experiences have shaped us and given us insight. Through our experiences, we began to see the WMO is vital to ministry.

We love what we currently do. Cody received his doctorate in physical therapy, and Lauren became a registered nurse early in our marriage. Married for eight wonderful years, we have two children and another baby due soon. We have lived an exciting life as a married couple. That’s why you should marry your best friend (a topic for another day).

We have held multiple positions within the medical community, but none were as fulfilling as serving as ETEAM coordinators. From 2022 through 2025, we were privileged to lead this IM student missions program, and the Lord was gracious enough to allow us to play a small part in what He is doing around the world and in the lives of high school students.

During this time, we began to see how vital the WMO is to ministries such as ETEAM, College Missions Program (CMP), and The Hanna Project (THP). But this was just the beginning.

Beyond our experience as ETEAM coordinators, we also were blessed to participate on a THP team in Ivory Coast in 2016. Not only have we seen firsthand what it takes to make these ministries happen, but we also have benefited personally from the WMO even before we knew why it was necessary. We cherish these experiences. God used them to burden our hearts, chisel away at our lives, and bring us to a point where we were willing to give up our careers and lives here in the States and move overseas to make disciples. The Lord has been faithful in opening doors to go to France and share the gospel. We look





forward to building relationships and seeing lives changed by the Good News.

Being involved in almost all branches of IM, we have a unique perspective on why the World Missions Offering (WMO) is so important and how it impacts these branches. We've been part of the student missions programs equipping young stu-

dents in missions, received support from the

IM Stateside Ministry Team, benefited from training and care as missionaries, and much more.

Let's take a deeper look into each of these branches. Once you coordinate programs like **ETEAM/CMP**, you realize quickly they do not just happen. They require much work!

Giving to the **WMO directly funds ETEAM through the General Fund**. The General Fund provides student missions funds toward their internal staff, such as the ETEAM coordinator and CMP director. The General Fund also provides funding needed to implement critical services for student missions, such as background checks on those who interact with students during these programs. This keeps the program and, most importantly, your students safe.

Another way the WMO supports ETEAM/CMP is by allowing the staff to vet, monitor, and analyze new locations for

students, young adults, and leaders. We ensure these sites are safe and align with the mission, vision, and purpose of our youth programs and IM.

Like any other job, many important behind-the-scenes tasks are never seen in public. Hundreds of pages must be printed, sorted, and filed. The IM stateside ministry team ensures trips are funded, payments are assigned to the correct student, and communications with host fields are accurate. Internet network, phone, and other bills must be paid on time to keep operations running. It is impossible to write an adequate job description for the team members who make each of these programs possible and growing.

Like our youth programs, THP benefits from the WMO through the General Fund. Though the students and adults who participate with THP underwrite their own trips, the WMO funds similar background tasks essential for THP.

As a family now moving toward serving as international missionaries in France, we see the direct impact the WMO has on missionaries. When starting out as a missionary, it is daunting to be unable to work a full-time job to make a living and give up that sense of "control" over our lives. Relying fully on the Lord to identify partners and find funding is intimidating! We are learning to live with hands lifted in full surrender. **However, the WMO plays a big part in the God-given peace that passes all understanding.**

Why do we say that? The WMO creates a jump-start in funding for new missionaries, placing a generous sum directly into our account when we were commissioned by the IM Board.



Without those funds, we would start at zero. **Because of your generous partnership in the WMO, the Lord is using you to move this mountain.**

Hopefully, these simple facts help you understand the importance of the WMO, not just for us, but also for other missionaries, students, and volunteers. However, it would be a waste of time if you read this, understand the urgency, and then do nothing. Please accept the urgent challenge to do something.

Free Will Baptists number approximately 200,000 members in North America. The 2026 WMO goal is \$1 million. I'm sure you

can do the math, but that is only \$5 per person. We spend \$5 on so many unimportant things each month without batting an eye. If only half of Free Will Baptists would commit to partner financially with the WMO by giving \$5 a month for a year, the WMO would total \$6 million.

Imagine the impact! This challenge is an honor as we partner with God in what He is doing around the world. We all can do that!

We humbly ask:

- **Will you be obedient to your Lord with your giving?**
- **Will you steward what He has given you to make massive impacts on the Kingdom?**
- **Will we unite through the WMO to see God blow away our feeble attempts at making goals?** ONE

About the Writers: Cody and Lauren Herren and their children were recently commissioned as two-year intern missionaries in France. Learn more: www.iminc.org/.



LEGACY PARTNERS

You can be a Legacy Partner charter member!

The **Free Will Baptist Foundation** invites all past and present endowment donors to be honored as charter members of the new community of **Legacy Partners**. Learn more about Legacy Partners at fwbgifts.com/legacy-partners.

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www.fwbgifts.com/legacy-partners

Selina

BY PAUL V. HARRISON

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26).

Daughter of one earl and wife of another, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791), exuded love for people. Rich, poor, it mattered not. Each person was a soul for whom Christ died, and she determined to be an instrument of their conversion in the Lord’s mighty hand.

Walking about her spacious grounds one day, she spoke with James, a worker repairing her garden wall. She pressed on him the claims of Christ. No response. Some years later, Selina spoke to another of her hired hands: “Thomas, I fear you never pray, nor look to Christ for salvation.”

“Your ladyship is mistaken,” he replied. “I heard what passed between you and James...and the word you designed for him took effect on me.”

“How did you hear it?” she inquired.

“I heard it on the other side of the garden, through a hole in the wall: and shall never forget the impression I received.”

Selina wasn’t just bold in witness with those below her socially. Learning of excessive social frivolity at the Archbishop of Canterbury’s residence in London, she went to King George III and asked him to intervene. Despite her boldness, the King was enchanted by her charm and commented after their lengthy conversation: “I wish there was a Lady Huntingdon in every diocese in my kingdom. There is something so noble, so commanding, and...engaging about her, that I am quite captivated with her Ladyship....She is an honour to her sex and the nation.”

For the Countess to receive such praise was not unusual. Preacher-poet Augustus Toplady, author of “Rock of Ages,” called her “the most precious saint of God I ever knew.”

Converted in 1739 through the Methodist movement, Selina listened to George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, whose powerful preaching swept England. Aflame for God, she began to finance these ministers and many others who engaged in open air preaching to vast audiences of the poor and middle class.

Realizing her peers — lords and ladies and courtesans — also needed the gospel, she expanded her Chelsea farm to accommodate occasions for preaching. Many English aristocrats responded to her hospitality, heard the message, and bowed before Christ.

Widowed after 18 years of marriage, Selina used her wealth to fund Christian causes, building chapels far and wide and establishing over a hundred preaching points. She strained her expansive income to the breaking point, even selling personal jewels to finance the Lord’s work. Her charitable contributions exceeded \$40 million! She founded Trevecca College in Wales to train ministers, investing as much in the students’ preaching trips as in their academic training.

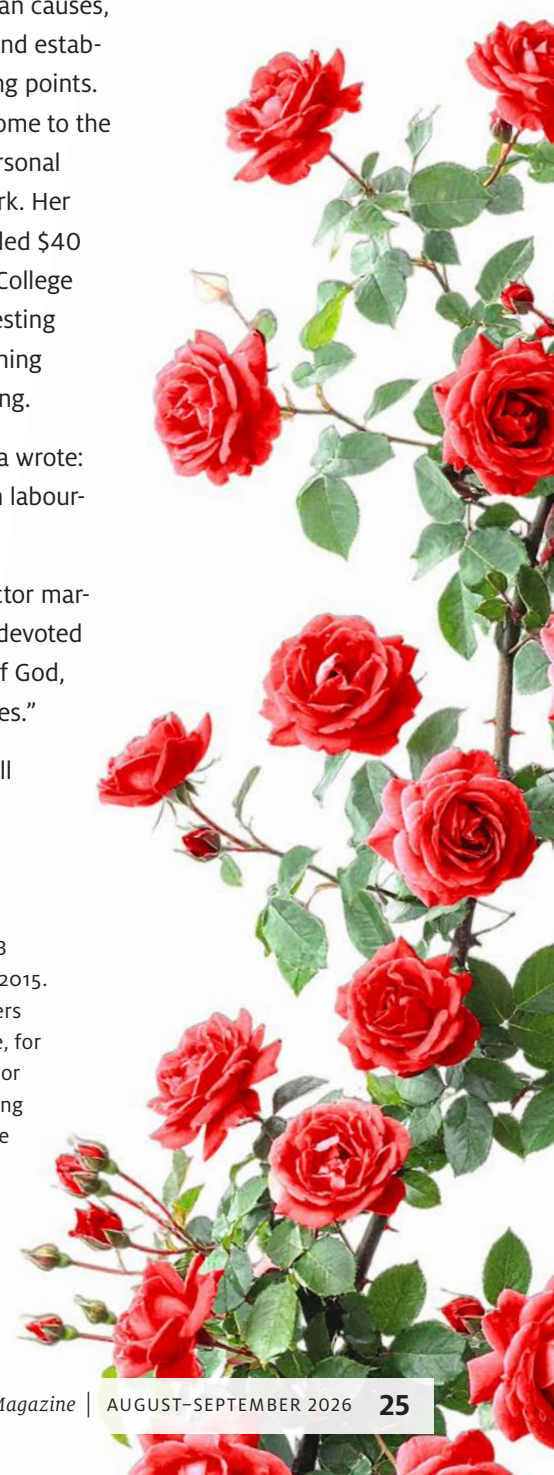
In 1790, her health spent, Selina wrote: “Let me die with my last breath labouring for him.”

At her death, the attending doctor marveled: “Her whole life seemed devoted to one great object: the glory of God, and the salvation of his creatures.”

She herself said: “My shame will be I have lived so little for him.” **ONE**

About the Columnist: Paul V.

Harrison has pastored Madison FWB Church in Madison, Alabama, since 2015. Previously, he pastored Cross Timbers FWB Church in Nashville, Tennessee, for 22 years. He was an adjunct professor at Welch College for 17 years, teaching church history and Greek. Paul is the creator of Classic Sermon Index, a subscription-based online index of over 66,000 sermons, with clients including Harvard, Baylor, and Vanderbilt, among others: www.classicsermonindex.com/.



Reaching TEENAGERS Who Don't Care

APOLOGETICS FOR THE INDIFFERENT

BY CHRIS TALBOT

In previous generations in the United States, the apologetic question may have been framed as one of authority: “Who says?” Apologetics in youth ministry, in response, gave attention to the reliability and authority of the Bible. Those in youth ministry focused on topics like inerrancy and textual reliability.

In the current generation, the question may be one of relevance: “Who cares?” We find ourselves not so much faced with questions as faced with indifference. Youth pastors doing apologetics are often more focused on stirring up belief in youth rather than on resolving difficulties. Thus, to minister more effectively to unbelieving youth in the United States, focus must be given toward a compelling and transformative apologetic.¹

THE PROBLEM

A natural question arises: why are youth in America largely indifferent to the gospel? Questions like this are obviously complex. Any number of variables could explain why an individual seems inoculated to the Good News of Jesus Christ. Consequently, any kind of diagnosis will necessarily

generalize and not describe every individual of the demographic. The effort here is to offer a broad diagnosis and prescription, knowing we often need to provide specific apologetic approaches to individuals.

Compared to other countries, many American youth enjoy high rates of prosperity and affluence. For example, they have often experienced higher material wealth and lower unemployment than others. According to one study, 56% of Americans were high income by a global standard, another 32% were upper-middle, while “only 7% of people in the U.S.



¹ This article summarizes a longer forthcoming chapter published by Langham Press.

were middle income, 3% were low income, and 2% were poor.”² Moreover, the United States is home to the largest number of millionaires, which has increased in previous years.³ Material prosperity and affluence are valued goods in the United States.

However, with material prosperity often comes extravagant, affluent lifestyles. Where being wealthy means one has material abundance and financial resources, affluence refers to a high standard of living regardless of actual wealth. Thus, a vast majority of individuals in the U.S. live affluently whether their budgets allow for it or not.⁴

Interestingly, the emphasis on individual prosperity is what American apologist Francis Schaeffer called “personal peace and affluence.”⁵ Back in 1976, Schaeffer warned,

*Personal peace means just to be let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city — to live one’s life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed. . . . Affluence means an overwhelming and ever-increasing prosperity — a life made up of things, things, and more things — a success by an ever-higher level of material abundance.*⁶

As Schaeffer made clear decades ago, economic and material prosperity can be a double-edged sword. Schaeffer would argue personal peace and affluence inevitably lead to significant indifference to the world around you, including the radical claims of Christianity. In a desire for more material abundance and an untroubled life, youth become desensitized to the profound and provocative truth of Christianity.

2 Rakesh Kochhar, “How Americans Compare with the Global Middle Class”: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/07/09/how-americans-compare-with-the-global-middle-class/>.

3 “UBS Wealth Management USA,” *Wealth Management USA*: <https://www.ubs.com/us/en/wealth-management/insights/global-wealth-report.html>.

4 The average U.S. citizen, regardless of age group, possesses personal debt. The average debt across age groups is as follows: (1) Gen Z (ages 18 to 23): \$9,593, (2) Millennials (ages 24 to 39): \$78,396, (3) Gen X (ages 40 to 55): \$135,841, (4) Baby boomers (ages 56 to 74): \$96,984, and (5) Silent generation (ages 75 and above): \$40,925. Megan DeMatteo, “The Average American Has \$90,460 in Debt,” CNBC: <https://www.cnbc.com/select/average-american-debt-by-age/>.

5 Francis A. Schaeffer. *How Should We Then Live? in The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1986), 5:211.

6 Schaeffer. *How Should We Then Live?* 5:211.

THE APOLOGETIC

If a major problem among emerging youth in the United States is indifference amid affluence rather than any number of issues (e.g., lack of knowledge or philosophic concerns), then the apologetic response must answer accordingly. Articulating a robust vision of the Christian life is vital to the response. That is, a sufficient answer requires not only a defense of “mere Christianity” but also a “thick” vision of Christianity worth dedicating one’s life.

What youth in the United States need is a defense of a full-orbed, robust Christianity, rather than a fragmented and anemic Christianity. As Richard Ross posits, “Perhaps teenagers and adults have settled for sleepy, sentimental, scaled-down versions of the One who reigns supreme.”⁷

Kenda Creasy Dean likewise observes, “If teenagers lack an articulate faith, maybe it is because the faith we show them is too spineless to merit much in the way of conversation.”⁸ She continues, “The God of the Bible traffics in life and death, not niceness, and calls for sacrificial love, not benign whatever-ism. If the God of Jesus Christ is a missionary God who crosses every boundary — life and death and space and time — to win us, then following Jesus is bound to be anything but convenient.”⁹

These insights amount to saying those involved in apologetics must provide youth with something worth believing in — something that will rouse youth not only from their indifference but also from their unbelief.

This kind of apologetic emphasizes Christianity’s truth, beauty, and goodness. We teach students the truth of the Christian worldview, demonstrating its internal consistency and its external coherence. But we also show students that when the true worldview is lived out, it is good for both them and others, and it is also beautiful.

Appealing to beauty and goodness will help rouse youth from their indifferent slumber. By not only giving them true answers regarding the Christian faith but also teaching and demonstrating the goodness and beauty of Christianity, the apologist hopes to awaken the whole person to the Christian worldview.

7 Richard Ross. *Student Ministry and the Supremacy of Christ* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2009), 7.

8 Kenda Creasy Dean. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

9 Dean. *Almost Christian*, 37.

Continued on page 33



Welch Graduates 54 in Commencement Exercises

Gallatin, TN — Welch College conferred degrees on 54 students during its Commencement ceremony May 8, according to Provost Matthew McAfee. Commencement exercises were held in the Student Activities Center, along with the Baccalaureate service Thursday evening, May 7, and the Commencement ceremony Friday morning, May 8. The college awarded associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees, Master of Arts in Teaching degrees, Master of Arts degrees, and the Master of Divinity degree.

Dr. Edward E. Moody, executive director of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, delivered the Commencement address. Rev. Chris Truett, pastor of Bethel Free Will Baptist Church in Kinston, North Carolina, delivered the Baccalaureate sermon.

President Matt Pinson recognized Coordinator for Admissions Records Pam Buck, Registrar Anna McAfee, and Librarian Christa Thornsby for ten years of service. Additionally, he recognized faculty and staff members who retired during the 2025-2026 school year: Tina Tolbert, freshman coordinator and assistant professor of speech (27 years); Mike Anderson, facilities technician (33 years); and Martha Fletcher, executive assistant to the president (17 years).

Pinson also recognized Dr. Jon Forlines, who recently retired from the position of vice president for Student Services. State Representative and Dean of Adult Studies William Slater awarded Dr. Forlines a commendation for 24 years of service, passed by both houses of the Tennessee Legislature.

Teacher of the Year was awarded to Dr. José Rodríguez, program coordinator for Pastoral Ministry and dean of the Spanish Ministry Institute. Dr. Christopher Talbot, assistant professor of Ministry and Apologetics and program coordinator for Youth and Family Ministry, was honored as Academic Advisor of the Year.

The college congratulates the 2026 graduating class and commends them to the service of Christ and the transformational work of His Kingdom.

ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE DEGREES

Terry Lloyd Brewer
Happy, Kentucky
Ministry

Jacob Michael Edgmon
Dickson, Tennessee
Ministry

Katie Nicole Newton
Mount Juliet, Tennessee
Business

Julianna Kaye Richards
Antioch, Tennessee
Biology

Emma Caroline Whited
Papua, Indonesia
Early Childhood Education

ASSOCIATE OF ARTS DEGREE

Josie Noelle McLamb
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Teaching

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREES

Hannah Grace Barnes
Portland, Tennessee
Psychology

Hannah Joy Carmack-Gaddy
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Theological Studies

Clayton Lee Carter
Madison, Indiana
Business Administration

Walker Hamilton Cummins
Gallatin, Tennessee
Business Administration

Omar Josías García Carrero**
San Pedro de Macorís,
Dominican Republic
Business Administration

Zaimes Bradley Hall
Graceville, Florida
Exercise Science

Locke Grayson Hord
Fairview, Tennessee
Exercise Science

Matthew Garrett Johns*
Ashland City, Tennessee
General Christian Ministry

Ethan Lance LaWarre*
Altha, Florida
Business Administration

Camden Eli Lewis**
Clarksville, Tennessee
Biology

Rachel Cheyenne Lewis***
Gastonia, North Carolina
Psychology

Stephen James Lewis***
Chicago, Illinois
Biology

Zoey Renee Lincoln***
Wabash, Indiana
Child Development and
Learning

Morgan Brooke Livingston***
Locust Grove, Oklahoma
English Education

Jacob Nathan Miller
Ozark, Alabama
Business Administration

Charlie James Oglesby
Nashville, Tennessee
General Christian Ministry

Jacob Dilan Petitt
White House, Tennessee
Business Administration

Michaela Grace Pinkerman*
Goodlettsville, Tennessee
Business Administration

Samuel Jae Riggs
Pleasant View, Tennessee
Business Administration

Emily Belle Roach***
Greeneville, Tennessee
Mathematics Education

Malone Jeanette Roberts
Gallatin, Tennessee
Psychology

Jacob Andrew Robertson*
Amory, Mississippi
Music Performance

Marcus Eli Scarlett
Lebanon, Tennessee
Exercise Science

Jahleh Eva Scott**
Apollo Beach, Florida
Child Development and
Learning

Nathan Michael Shute
Oak Ridge, Tennessee
Youth and Family Ministry

Brook Jewel Snow**
Pleasant View, Tennessee
Biology

Mason Dale Thornhill
Brownsville, Tennessee
Exercise Science

Easton Samuel Truett*
Kinston, North Carolina
Youth and Family Ministry

Dalton Lane Ulrick
Clarksville, Tennessee
Business Administration

Caroline Hope Watts*
Pleasant View, Tennessee
Business Administration

Karilyn Kathleen Wieting***
Huron, South Dakota
Exercise Science

BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREES

Benjamin Wendell Becker
Gallatin, Tennessee
History



Korey Ryan Canady
Smithfield, North Carolina
English

Emmett Hudson Markins*
Gallatin, Tennessee
Humanities and Arts

Caleb Brooks Sampsell**
Northport, Alabama
Pastoral Ministry

James Wilson Walton***
Colquitt, Georgia
History

Christopher Jameson Elijah
Williams***
Hamilton, Alabama
Pastoral Ministry

MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING DEGREES

Makayla Ann Binkley
Ashland City, Tennessee
Special Education
Authentic Learning
Experience Compendium:
*The Effects of Behavior
Management Strategies
on Students with Autism
Spectrum Disorder*

Opal Rena Brackin-Loza
Brackentown, Tennessee
Special Education
Authentic Learning

Experience Compendium:
*Achieving Organizational
Success for ADHD and Autism
Spectrum Disorder Students*

Susan Rose Brotherton
Ashland City, Tennessee
Teaching
Thesis: *The Effectiveness of
Teaching Methods in World
Language and the Satisfac-
tion Found Therein: Grammar
Translation versus Total
Physical Response Storytelling*

MASTER OF ARTS DEGREES

Edward Keith Byrd Jr.
Charlotte, North Carolina
Organizational Leadership

Kristi Marie Johnson
Gallatin, Tennessee
Organizational Leadership
Research Project: *Servant
Leadership Explored Through
an Incarnational Lens*

Sarah Katherine Lovett
Gallatin, Tennessee
Theology and Ministry
Thesis: *Covenantal Continui-
ty: Thomas Grantham and the
Unity Between the General
and Particular Baptists*

Anna Elizabeth Pinson
Gallatin, Tennessee
Humanities
Thesis: *Dramaturgy:
A Christian Approach*

Osamu Sakamoto
Tokyo, Japan
Theology and Ministry

James Wilson Walton
Colquitt, Georgia
Humanities
Thesis: *Generals in the
Heartland: Confederate
Leadership in the West*

Derek Corbin Whited
Hendersonville, Tennessee
Humanities
Thesis: *The Gyres and a
Tower: Evaluating Conserva-
tism in the Poetry and Prose
of W. B. Yeats*

MASTER OF DIVINITY DEGREE

Michael David Hollis
Pleasant View, Tennessee

*** Summa Cum Laude – 3.75

** Magna Cum Laude – 3.50

* Cum Laude – 3.25

Honors awarded only to recip-
ients of Bachelor's degrees. ONE

LESSONS *in*

BY MATTHEW S. BRACEY

Several years ago, I was asked to co-present a workshop on mentorship at the Free Will Baptist Leadership Conference with *ONE Magazine* editor Eric Thomsen (who was my youth pastor growing up). The idea was to demonstrate the mentor-mentee cycle. Someone invested in him, he invested in me, and now I invest in others who will hopefully invest in yet others. We were asked to present the session again at the D6 Conference. This article adapts my portion of the presentation, where I make four recommendations regarding mentorship.

1. BE AVAILABLE.

When I think about mentorship, I think first about availability. Eric was available — his time, thoughts, and emotions. He was *there*, and he was *real*. I now know how busy he was (and is). But I never — not once — sensed he didn't have time for me. I asked many, many questions: questions about Jesus and girls and genealogies (yes, *genealogies*), temptation and miracles and the end times and movies and music and all kinds of things. Eric did his best to answer all the questions.

Mentorship requires profound patience. But availability is patient; it is longsuffering. When we look to Jesus' example, we see He was available to people, especially His disciples. He invested in them. He engaged their questions (including silly questions). So, would you be available, even to the youth who asks a thousand questions?

2. TAKE PEOPLE SERIOUSLY.

One of the authors to whom Eric introduced me was C. S. Lewis. Through the decades, I have benefited tremendously from his writing. Lewis once criticized the way some authors patronize children:

The child as reader is neither to be patronized nor idolized: we talk to him as man to man....Once in a hotel dining-room I said, rather too loudly, 'I loathe prunes.'

'So do I,' came an unexpected six-year-old voice from another table. Sympathy was instantaneous. Neither of us thought it funny. We both knew that prunes are far too nasty to be funny. That is the proper meeting between man and child as independent personalities.¹

Now, I happen to like prunes. But Lewis is instructive; it can be tempting not to take young people too seriously. Eric succumbed to no such temptation. He neither ignored me nor disregarded me. He took me (with all my absurdity and silliness) seriously.

This characteristic can require great empathy on the mentor's part because a genuine meeting of the minds can be difficult. Perhaps it is difficult because you know this thing "Johnny" is so concerned about is not really a big deal. Or perhaps it is difficult because you know a certain line of questioning could lead Johnny to a dangerous place.

Whatever the case, good mentors empathize with others because it is what Jesus did. He met people where they were. His responses ranged from sharp to compassionate, but they were always precisely what people needed. If we rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), then we also struggle with the struggling and question with the questioning. Empathy does not require affirming people in their wrong-headed ideas; it means taking them seriously. It is better that you, as a God-fearing Christian, seeking to conserve the truth of God's Word, take Johnny seriously because, if you do not, someone else — who does not fear God — will.

3. BE HONEST.

When taking youth seriously, we should also be honest with them. As followers of the One Who said, "I am the Truth" (John 14:6), we must tell the truth. Eric told the truth; he was honest. He showed wisdom and demonstrated propriety in *how* he told the truth, but he was honest. Honesty can be hard because it may mean you are rejected because of it. But true mentorship is willing to risk rejection for the sake of the mentee, for the sake of his or her maturity in the Truth.

I once shared a meal with someone I mentor, who *feels* deeply for people. He asked, "How can you be honest with people but not hurt their feelings?"

That is a great question but a tough one. I thought immediately of Jesus, who was somehow full of both grace and truth (John 1:14). We must be profoundly truthful, and we must be

profoundly gracious and kind, because we are disciples of Jesus.

Forewarning: the execution of this principle can be challenging. For one thing, we are not Jesus; we will stumble where He succeeds. But when we stumble, our mistake becomes an opportunity to demonstrate humility toward whomever we have wronged. A second challenge stems from the reality that no two situations are the same. Hence, the precise application of truth and grace will depend on the particulars. In these circumstances, we must seek God's face and ask for wisdom (Psalm 27:8; Proverbs 1:1-7).

Wisdom is crucial. It goes without saying that 14-year-old boys have serious questions about the grand mysteries of life: like sex. I did, and Eric showed tact and propriety in his answers. But he was honest, and he was real.

But honesty is not simply about what we say; it is also in how we present ourselves.

4. BE YOU.

Finally, Eric was (and is) Eric. He did not try to be anyone else; he did not try to keep up with the changing fads. I did not need a "cool" mentor; I needed an adult mentor. I knew cool kids, and their examples hindered, not helped, my spiritual growth. Mentees need a model of maturity. Even if a mentee does not follow that example in the moment, he may in the future, and at least he or she gains a standard for later in life.

Being you is not just about being some generic adult; it is about being who God made you to be for the sake of others being who God made them to be. When I think of young people with whom I spend quality time and friendship, it occurs to me I did not seek them out *per se*. Our friendships developed organically around common interests. You being you and not someone else allows you to build relationships with people who share your interests. If you were someone else, you could not mentor those same people in the same way.

Eric was interested in hiking and traveling, art, music, and theology. His mentorships have formed with other people interested in those topics. I like running and politics and the arts and theology and writing and reading and the country. Hence, my mentor relationships have tended to form with people interested in those topics. The point is, be you, the person God made you to be.

In this way, mentorship does not become "something extra" on your plate; it is part of what you are doing anyway. Eric was going hiking anyway. So, what did he do? He invited me to go with him, and I did — and found myself in the middle of deep

¹ C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children." *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1982), 42.

woods on a rainy weekend with a fierce tornado within a mile of our campsite (not kidding).

In my case, I run or talk about movies or eat or whatever. With one of my friends, I invite him to run with me. We discuss the issues of life: running, engagement, family, death, home buying, church leadership, graduate school, politics, etc. With another friend, we discuss the latest movies, their themes, scores, and so on. Mentorship takes place everywhere — on the greenway, at the dinner table, along the trail, in the car — and it concerns everything because it is fundamentally about life. But you must be you.

Sometimes, you may reveal qualities about yourself of which you were unaware. Sometimes, the Lord will send a person into your life, and you will think, “Him? What on earth do we have in common?”

Perhaps you have more in common than you realize; whatever the case, he or she sees something in you, so mentor whomever God gives you.

Mentorship is a cycle: a mentor mentors a mentee who becomes a mentor who mentors a mentee and so on. But I leave you with a warning: Jesus Himself did not bat a thousand

(think Judas), and neither will we. Some will make you proud; others will break your heart. C.S. Lewis, who I mentioned earlier, had helpful insight into that point:

*To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.*²

Love people. Invest in them. But know it is not for the weak of spirit; it requires real fortitude. Know it is hard work but also good work. I am a beneficiary of godly mentors. You are beneficiaries of godly mentors. Now, let us pay it forward. [ONE](#)

About the Writer: Matthew Bracey, Ph.D., serves at Welch College as vice provost for academic administration and as a faculty member, teaching courses in history, law, and theology. He is a co-founder and senior editor of The Helwys Society Forum. This article is adapted from an essay appearing on Helwys Society Forum: HelwysSocietyForum.com/.

2 C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960; repr., Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1988), 121.



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Continued from page 27

This apologetic seeks to battle indifference (and any kind of unbelief) by providing a splendid picture of Christianity — one that implores its listener to respond. In other words, by showing youth Christianity is not only true but also incredibly good and splendidly beautiful, the apologist paints a picture of the Christian worldview so incredible young people can no longer be indifferent to its claims.

Admittedly, this approach is not easy. Though this point may seem counterintuitive, the best way forward for ministry and apologetics with the emerging generation is actually backward into history, showing students the Christian worldview to which the Church has held for millennia. David Kinnaman, summarizing his own findings concerning the next generation, states, “After countless interviews and conversations, I am convinced that historic and traditional practices, and orthodox and wisdom-laden ways of believing, are what the next generation really needs.”¹⁰

¹⁰ David Kinnaman. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 202.

The best apologetic that the church in the United States can provide is one worth believing — one worthy of all acceptance (1 Timothy 1:15). Youth need an apologetic that argues for a *whole Christianity for the whole person for the whole of life*.

Youth in the United States enjoy much prosperity. Unfortunately, what has passed for apologetics for them often has been fragmented and truncated. Apologetics for youth must be true, logical, and compelling. For those indifferent to the claims of the Bible, they need to be shown the truth, goodness, and beauty of the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8), the redemption and eternal life offered in Jesus.

For those clouded in their own sin, indifferent to the Kingdom of God, my prayer is an apologetic such as this one will help them realize God will supply all their needs “according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). **ONE**

About the Writer: Dr. Christopher Talbot is an assistant professor of ministry and apologetics at Welch College, where he also teaches courses in biblical and theological studies. This article is adapted from a post published on Helwys Society Forum, January 2026: HelwysSocietyForum.com/.

Frontier

the FLAMES of MINISTRY

BY KYLAH WALKER

More than a decade ago, I etched my name into a soft slab of freshly poured concrete at my grandparents' home in Pea Ridge, Alabama. I saw that wet slab as an opportunity to make my mark on the piece of land that has passed down through my family for generations. Every time I visit, I walk over that same slab, permanently marked with my name.

What strikes me most is not that my name is still there, but rather how slim the window of opportunity was. If I had shown up only a few hours later, the surface would have hardened, and I would have missed the opportunity.

Humans are a lot like that concrete walk at my grandparents' house. Early on, we are moldable and impressionable, ready to be shaped. As time passes, we begin to harden. Our patterns solidify, our comfort zones deepen, and the window for molding becomes harder to access, just like that concrete. This is why our early years are so important and why North American Ministries created our newest program, Frontier Student Missions.

FRONTIER STUDENT MISSIONS EXISTS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN CHURCH PLANTING AND MINISTRY LEADERSHIP, FANNING INTO FLAME THEIR GIFTS AND CALLINGS AND EMPOWERING THEM TO BLAZE NEW TRAILS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA. Our goal is to help students see the need across North America, step outside their comfort zones, courageously respond to God's call, and experience ministry firsthand. After participating in Frontier, students will return home changed, with a clear, intentional pathway to keep walking in their callings.

EXPERIENCE OVER EXPLANATION

When it comes to calling, experience often outweighs explanation. This statement reminds me of my sister, who pursued nursing through high school and into college. She enjoyed studying anatomy and physiology, was intrigued by a nurse's job description, and desired to make a difference by helping people. As a first step on her career path, she became a certified nursing assistant (CNA). After only a few days of working as a CNA, what once felt like a calling no longer seemed a good fit.

Many might describe this experience as disruptive; in reality, her experience clarified her calling. This is why Frontier values experience over explanation. We don't merely *tell* students how the Lord is working in church plants across North America; we give them an opportunity to *experience* the transformative power of the gospel firsthand.

As students experience ministry in various contexts, they will also discover the gospel need across North America.

COURAGE OVER COMFORT

It has been said necessity is the mother of invention. In much the same way, *awareness of necessity* is the mother of calling. How can we meet needs we do not know exist?

Just as a doctor must diagnose a patient before prescribing a remedy, Frontier aims to help students diagnose the spiritual needs around them, acknowledging the brokenness of the world as well as the hope of the gospel they carry.

The need is great.

Yes, we need church planters, but we also need pastors, leaders, and faithful believers willing to serve wherever God leads them. North America is filled with unreached communities and unfilled pulpits. Ministry opportunities are outpacing the number of people fulfilling them.

Often, the places of greatest need are not the places of greatest comfort. If you do not believe me, name some states where you would not like to live, and then visit the Free Will Baptist church directory to see how many churches we have there.

Leaving your comfort zone does not always mean leaving your family to plant a church in a remote area or harsh climate. For some, it might mean stepping into an unfamiliar ministry role at your home church or simply choosing obedience when it interrupts your daily routine. I'm constantly reminded of the saying, "comfort zones are great, yet nothing ever grows there." This is why Frontier values courage over comfort.

While we want to expose students to the needs across North America and encourage them to step out of their comfort zones, we do not want to simply tell them where their lives should go. We want to help them listen to God's direction and equip them to take the next step wherever He leads. We want to walk with them as they live out faithful obedience.

Frontier is not a temporary spiritual peak students descend and leave when they return home. It is the trailhead of a life-long path. The Christian life is not a sprint but a marathon. We want to run alongside students long after their Frontier trip ends.

VISION TO REALITY

In the summer of 2027, the Frontier Student Missions vision will become reality. The first trips will take place June 12-26, beginning with four days of training and team building before students are sent into hands-on ministry and service opportunities.

Teams will travel to church planting locations such as Hawaii, Montana, and California. Each of these locations offers unique cultures, challenges, and opportunities for students to experience spiritual and physical needs firsthand. Frontier is designed specifically for students in grades 9-12, and the cost ranges between \$2,500 and \$3,000, depending on the destination.

Frontier Student Missions is more than a trip. It is an invitation for students to courageously step out of their comfort

zones, see the need, and discover firsthand how God may be shaping their calling, beginning a life-long journey of obedience to His leading.

If you are a student ready to take the next step or someone who believes in the next generation enough to send them out, now is the time!

Don't wait until the concrete settles.

Make your mark today and apply at frontierstudents.com/.

About the Writer: Kylah Walker is the newly-appointed student impact coordinator for North American Ministries. In this role, she manages the logistics of Frontier Student Missions and works to connect students with resources to grow their faith, live out their callings, and join the mission of North American Ministries to spread the gospel and reach the lost.

Who?

9th–12th grade students

Where?

Frontier's first teams will serve in Montana, California, and Hawaii

When?

June 12–26, 2027

Cost?

\$2,500–\$3,000
based on location

Application deadline?

October 15, 2026

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**ADVENTURE.
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Morell Family Approved to Plant New Work

Lebanon, TN — North American Ministries is pleased to announce the approval of church planters Hansel and Ellie Morell. Through a partnership between NAM and The Donelson Fellowship, the Morells will plant Cedar City Church in Lebanon, Tennessee.

Hansel and Ellie are both from the Nashville area and spent the past several years ministering at The Donelson Fellowship, where Hansel served as student pastor and Ellie as the lead pastor's assistant. The Morells have two young daughters, Ivy Grace and Madeline.

Located just east of Nashville, Lebanon is the twelfth fastest-growing city in America. While the southern United States — Tennessee in particular — is often considered a “churched” region, a recent influx of unreached people groups and families have moved into this region. The result is a significant need for healthy, multiplying churches to bring the gospel to these communities.

The Morells have lived in Lebanon since 2024 and sense a clear calling to plant this kind of church in their community. Their longing to see people find freedom, purpose, and fulfillment through Christ has shaped their vision for Cedar City Church: a place where the lost are found, and lives are transformed by Jesus — ordinary people changed by an extraordinary Savior, reaching the one far from God, and multiplying disciples until their city and generations to come are transformed by His love.

To learn more about Cedar City Church or to financially partner with the Morells, visit fwbnam.com/morell/. **ONE**



Hansel and Ellie Morell

The Altar SD Launches Sunday Services

San Diego, CA — One of NAM's newest church plants, The Altar SD, launched Sunday services March 29, 2026. The service marked a time of celebration and thankfulness, remembering all God has done and looking forward to all He will continue to do in their San Diego, California, community.

Please pray The Altar will be a place where “the lost will be found, and the saints will be strengthened, to the glory of God.” Also, ask God to strengthen and empower NAM church planters Chris and Ashly Littlecreek, Leah Williams, and Levi Johnson as they lead the work.

Learn more about The Altar SD and its leadership team at thealtarsd.org/. **ONE**





NAM Announces Staff Transitions

Antioch, TN — Free Will Baptist North American Ministries is excited to announce two important staff transitions effective June 1, 2026.

Kylah Walker transitioned into a newly-created role as student impact coordinator after faithfully serving as accounts administrator since joining the staff in 2023. During her time in the accounting office, Kylah has served church planters and supporters with diligence, efficiency, and kindness.

In her new role, Kylah will oversee the logistics of NAM's newest program, Frontier Student Missions, helping connect young leaders with opportunities that encourage spiritual growth, equip them to pursue God's calling, and inspire them to join North American Ministries in its mission to spread the gospel and reach the lost.

Drawing from her experience at NAM and her personal background in church planting ministry, Kylah is uniquely equipped to invest in the next generation of ministry leaders.

As Kylah transitions into this new position, NAM is also pleased to welcome Paula Kivette as NAM accounting administrator. Paula and her husband Chad are veteran church planters who have served with NAM since 2005, planting and revitalizing churches in Colorado, Tennessee, and Mississippi.

Most recently, the Kivettes ministered at New Life FWB Church in Amory, Mississippi, a revitalization work that recently reached self-supporting status and transitioned to local pastoral leadership as the Kivettes relocated to Nashville.

In addition to extensive ministry experience, Paula brings more than 25 years of educational and administrative experience from both public and private schools. Her background in ministry and education gives her valuable insight into the needs of church planters, chaplains, supporters, and ministry partners across the various ministries of NAM.

These transitions reflect NAM's continued commitment to strengthening ministries, supporting church planters and chaplains, and investing in the next generation for the advancement of the gospel across North America. **ONE**



Kylah Walker



Paula Kivette

CELF Announces Investment Interest Rate Changes

Antioch, TN —

Due to current market conditions, interest rates for the CELF* investment program

were reduced by one-half percent (0.5%) beginning July 1, 2026.

Effective July 1, CELF investment rates are as follows:

3.0% for \$500 - \$24,999

3.5% for \$25,000 - \$49,999

4.0% for \$50,000 - \$99,999

4.5% for \$100,000 - \$499,999

4.75% for \$500,000 - \$999,999

5.0% for \$1 million and up

Thank you for your continued partnership and trust in our department as we work together to build God's Kingdom!

*CELF may not be available in all states. **ONE**



The State of the Church

PART 1: FACING THE DECLINE

BY BRAD RANSOM

No pastor or his church members like to hear certain words used to describe their church. Terms like *plateaued* or *declining* are among them. These terms carry a heavy weight of discouragement. However, acknowledging reality isn't about losing hope; it's about opening the door for God to do something new.

While it's true the Free Will Baptist movement faces significant challenges, this moment is also filled with opportunity. Some churches are thriving, and their stories remind us God is still working in powerful ways. However, many churches are struggling so much that, without swift intervention, their only option will be shutting their doors.

If we face the facts with honesty and humility, we can also step forward with renewed faith and clear direction and make a difference in these cases.

When comparing the 2023 Digest of Reports to 2022, our denomination reported a net loss of 33 churches and averaged only 1.7 baptisms per reporting church. Behind those numbers are real congregations. Some churches witnessed salvations and baptisms, and others didn't. That's a statistical average, so let's talk real numbers.

Many churches didn't baptize anyone. They didn't fill their baptistry all year. It's also likely that in some churches, not a single person walked the aisle to confess Jesus as Savior. Not one person led another person to Christ, including the pastor, in an entire year.

Fifty-two weeks. 365 days. Not one salvation. No baptisms.

That is difficult to consider and even more difficult to say (or put in print). Acknowledging these numbers isn't about assigning blame. It's about clarity, and clarity is a gift. It helps us understand where we are so we can begin moving toward where God wants us to be.

These challenges are not unique to us. Across the country, the broader evangelical church is experiencing similar struggles. Lifeway Research reported 4,500 churches closed their doors in 2023, outpacing new church plants. Many congregations have not fully recovered from the pandemic,

especially those already declining before 2020.¹ This means we are not alone in the struggle, and we can learn from churches and denominations finding ways to reverse these trends.

For Free Will Baptists, our size adds urgency. With just under 1,950 churches nationwide, losing 30 churches a year for a decade would significantly reduce our footprint for the gospel. Fewer churches means fewer leaders, fewer missions resources, and fewer young people being equipped for ministry. Yes, we are planting new churches, and praise God for every new work, but currently, closures outpace openings.

The good news? Trajectories change. History is filled with examples of denominations, ministries, and local churches that turned decline into renewal.

The reasons behind these trends are varied. Our culture continues to drift toward secularism. Many families no longer consider Sunday sacred. Yet some challenges are internal as well — outdated methods, inward focus, leadership gaps, or a slow drift from the mission of making disciples. These are real issues, but they are also fixable issues. None are beyond the power of prayer, intentional leadership, or a fresh movement of God's Spirit.

So where does this leave us? Not in despair but in a moment of holy opportunity.

Recognizing our struggles is not a death sentence. It is a wake-up call. The local church is *still* God's chosen vessel for reaching the world. Jesus is still building His Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). If we want to see revitalization across Free Will Baptist churches, the first step is simply acknowledging where we are. The next step is believing God can take what looks fragile and breathe new life into it.

1 Lifeway Research (2024). "U.S. Church Closures Outpace Openings." <https://research.lifeway.com>





*We are not in despair
but in a moment of
holy opportunity.*

Decline is real. Urgency is necessary. But hope is greater.

This article isn't meant to provide answers. Those will come later. It is meant to lift our eyes. God is not finished with Free Will Baptists. A healthier future is possible, and together, by God's grace, we can move toward it.

Be sure to read coming ReFresh columns for practical, realistic steps toward lasting revitalization. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Dr. Brad Ransom is chief training officer for North American Ministries. Contact Brad: brad@nafwb.org.

TURNING THE CORNER

BY EDDIE MOODY

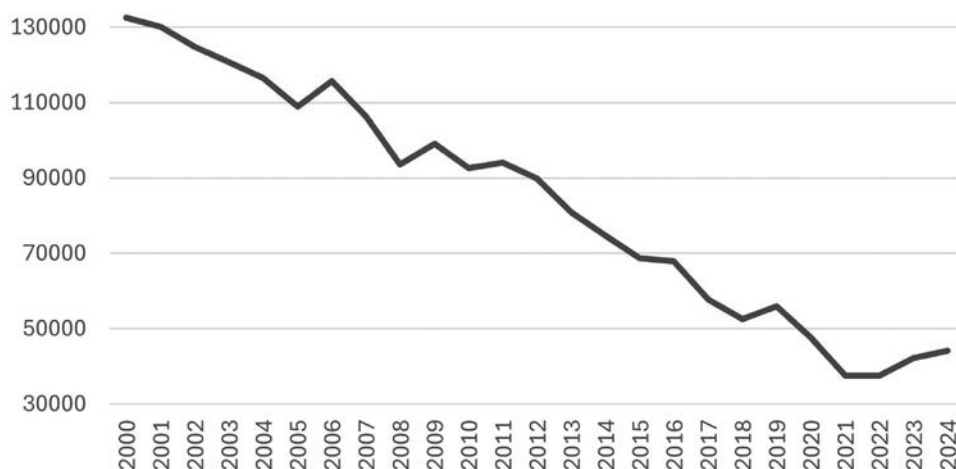
In history, we often see turning points. These moments are not always obvious when they happen, but looking back, one can often see a corner turned. The latest datasets seem to indicate Free Will Baptists may have turned a corner. I hope and pray so.

Healthy churches are the natural result of healthy leadership and engaged membership. After years of decline for the denomination, numbers point to signs of stabilization, even growth, in key areas.

Although we, like all other denominational groups in the U.S., continue to struggle from a shortage of pastors, the number of Free Will Baptist deacons rose in 2023 and remained steady in 2024.

In addition, reported Sunday School enrollment (see chart below) reveals growth in 2023 and continuing in 2024. A strong discipleship program is critical, and it can be a pipeline to develop church leaders. Strong leaders lead to strong churches that buy curriculum; produce students, pastors, and missionaries; and help fund Kingdom work.

Sunday School Enrollment



Reported church membership (see chart at middle right) rose slightly from 2023 to 2024, from a low of 103,653 in 2023 to 109,276 in 2024. Is this a one-year blip, or will it become a trend?

Perhaps a more pronounced measure of growth comes in baptisms. (See chart at bottom right.) The number of baptisms has increased steadily since 2020. In 2024, NAFWB churches reported the highest number of baptisms (5,162) in 12 years. This is a clear reversal, for which we praise the Lord.

To build on this momentum, we must remain intentional about equipping believers, prioritizing evangelism, and strengthening discipleship pathways. Below are specific action steps toward church health.

- **GROWING TOGETHER.** This year, the Executive Office has provided webinars to help churches make a good First Impression (nafwb.org/firstimpressions), and to equip congregations to identify and help those at risk for suicide (nafwb.org/care). Webinars on the value of deacons are scheduled for September 15, October 20, and November 17 at 6:00 p.m. CT.
- **KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY.** Three hundred fifty-one churches have used Know Your Community. Follow up feedback sessions equip pastors and church leaders to reach their neighborhoods with the gospel (nafwb.org/know).
- **BLESS.** Free Will Baptists have prayed nearly a quarter-million prayers for their neighbors, and adopted 31,000 homes (nafwb.org/BLESS).
- **THE HOPE INITIATIVE.** Seventy-three churches have participated in The Hope Initiative. This intervention helps churches focus outward to reach those around them with the gospel (nafwb.org/hope).
- **FIRST AID READY.** Eight churches have participated in the First Aid Ready process, which equips congregants to minister to hurting people in their community (nafwb.org/firstaid).

PRAY FOR HARVESTERS

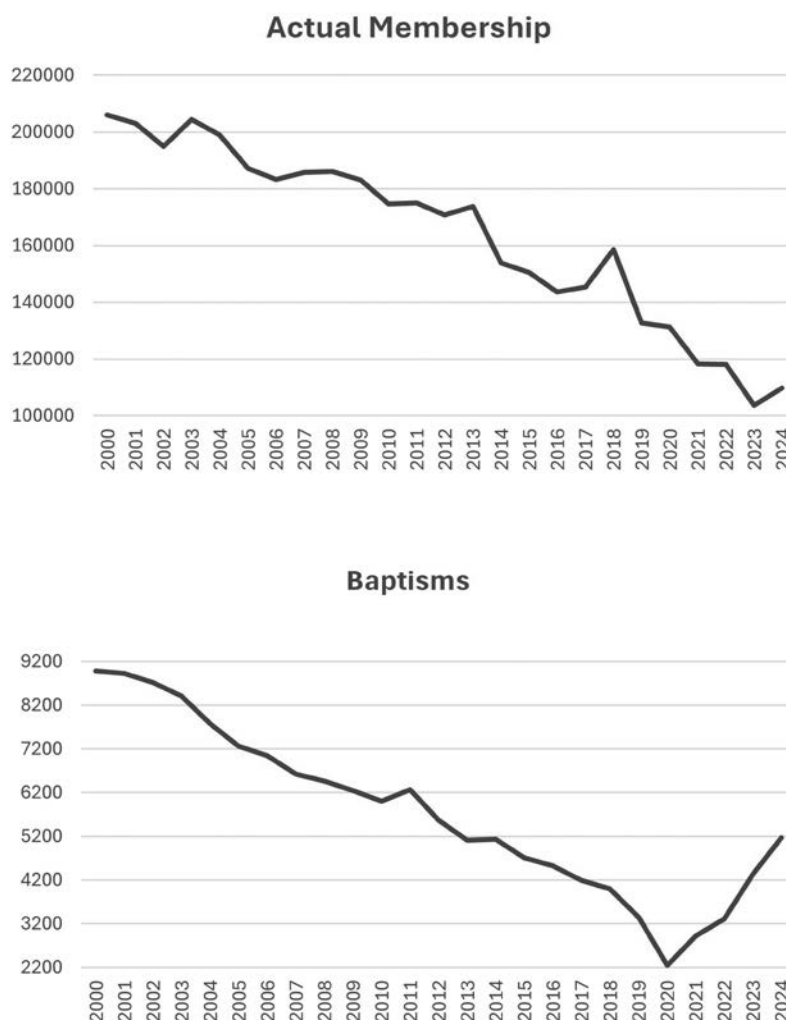
As we consider turning the corner, we must be ready! Pray for God to call men to preach from your congregations. Approach them about the call. AS a reminder of God's command in Matthew 9:38, we are encouraging

everyone to pray daily at 9:38 a.m. or p.m. that God will call laborers into His harvest. Read Dr. Paul Harrison's discussion on this subject many years ago (onemag.org/pastoral_turnover.htm). Listen to these Better Together Podcasts (nafwb.org/podcast) about the problem:

- **Dr. Paul Harrison:** *Raising Up Pastors Within Your Congregation*
- **Dr. Barry Raper:** *Answering the Call to Ministry*
- **Dr. Tim York:** *The Value of a Pastor and How You Can Support Him*

If we see a rise in the number of men who answer the call to preach, and lay people willing to lead, our future is indeed bright. **ONE**

About the Writer: Eddie Moody is the executive director of the National Association of Free Will Baptists: nafwb.org/.



From the **Valley of DEATH**

to

Eternal Life

BY TERRY MOTTE



Not long after I began my first pastorate, I received a shocking phone call. A nine-year-old girl in my congregation had been accidentally shot in the head by another child and was at the hospital. Of course, I hurried to the hospital and was immediately escorted to the emergency room, only to learn she had died.

The attending physician took time to carefully show me where the bullet had entered her head just above an eyebrow. He gently pulled back her hair to show me the exit wound in the crown of her head. Then, he asked me to accompany him into a private room to inform the parents.

How do you help parents in this situation? What about the extended family, the other child involved in the shooting, or for that matter, the entire congregation? The task before me seemed overwhelming. I had received no training to deal with such a situation.

Knowledge and skill are crucial, and you need both. But even more importantly, you need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is the work of a pastor. “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Isaiah 50:4).

A Difficult Doorway

From the perspective of someone experiencing a significant loss, the emotional turmoil can be confusing, even overwhelming. In such situations, the bereaved is highly motivated to seek help. It is likely your church members will turn to you for support in time of need, but you may also be surprised how often you hear from those outside the church who need direction and encouragement.

Though difficult, these moments present an opportunity for ministry. Don't shy away from the challenge; proceed with confidence and in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Embrace the encouragement Jesus offered His disciples, “And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say” (Luke 12:11). While the immediate context of these words referred to persecution, you can be confident the same Holy Spirit who helped the Apostles will provide the words during moments when you comfort others.

A Path Through the Valley

When it comes to this difficult area of ministry, consider four simple steps:

- **Equip yourself before the situation arises.** Whether you are a pastor or church member, resources are available to prepare you to help the grieving. *First Aid for Your Emotional Hurts* by Dr. Eddie Moody helps you understand the basics of the grieving process yourself, and the accompanying booklet *Grief* can be given to those experiencing grief.
- **Pray families through the immediate loss.** Those enduring traumatic situations need a reminder they are not alone in their suffering. Pray for them by name and ask God to help them. Your voice itself is comforting, and your words will remind them God is still there, He cares, and He knows them by name. It is unlikely they will remember much of what you say, but they will remember you prayed.
- **Assess the situation.** All grief is not the same. Losses range from natural death to preventable deaths such as accidental, suicidal, and homicidal. After the initial loss has passed, assess the grieving of the bereaved, consider the type of loss experienced, and then develop a plan for care. Provide resources to help them grieve in a healthy way.
- **Offer long-term support.** Grief takes time. Walk the bereaved through the process of grief. Check on them regularly. Watch for signs of complicated grief, that is, grief that makes everyday life and responsibilities difficult. Provide a listening ear for the lonely.

In this broken world, all relationships end in death, divorce, or separation. Thankfully, as believers, we offer a message of hope, salvation, and reunion for those who place (or have placed) their faith in Christ. As we walk through the Valley of Death with the grieving, we point the way to eternal life! **ONE**

About the Writer: Terry Motte pastors First FWB Church in Salem, Oregon, where he also serves as a hospice counselor. He is a certified thanatologist and board-certified pastoral counselor.



FIXERS AND FINAGGLERS

BY BRENDA EVANS

We human folk have an appetite for “fixing” things, even other human beings. And we know where that appetite comes from — our fallen, sinful nature. But maybe sometimes it is not from our fallenness. Maybe sometimes it’s from our redeemed nature. Entirely for good. Entirely from God. Case in point: Boaz who fixed, finagled, and manipulated more than a little bit, and I praise him for it. I believe the Lord did, too.

My husband Bill is one kind of fixer. Call him Mr. Fix-it, at least around the house and yard. He’s quick to do small repairs and troubleshoot household and lawn problems. I’m glad he can fix things and glad our three sons followed in his footsteps, not mine. I’m a half-wit-know-nothing about repair stuff. My four fellows are do-it-yourself guys.

My Missouri friend Brie was also a DIY fixer. She installed her kitchen garbage disposal and washing machine, repaired leaky toilets and broken furniture, slapped goop on sheetrock to repair, sand, and paint. She did all sorts of fix-it stuff around the house. Her husband could talk the talk, but he couldn’t or wouldn’t fix things. Of course, he didn’t need to. He had Brie.

But I’m another kind of fixer, which I think many of us females are. Maybe I’m wrong about this, but I think we women try to fix broken people, mangled relationships, and tangled situations. Maybe that’s partly because of our compassion and partly because of our need to control. In any case, we are helpers and fixers, and we need to help and fix. Sometimes, I must confess that devolves into finagling, even manipulating — or at least trying to.

Jeanette, a writer acquaintance, recently confessed: “I’m a champion finagler, schemer, and manipulator.”

Me, too, sometimes. And like Jeanette, I’m ashamed of it. Because as she said, “It’s usually not Christlike.”

I also agree with something else Jeanette confessed: “My finagling is rooted in fear and worry.”

And there it is. Fear and worry may be the root of it, at least for Jeanette and me. And for many of us — male or female. You see, finagling is not just a female art; it's a human art!

Nowhere is this more evident than in Scripture. Think about it. There's Jacob, top-dog schemer and manipulator. Or Sarah, whose plot to cure childlessness birthed a whole tribe of enemy Ishmaelites. And what about David? His lustful contrivances with Bathsheba resulted in both adultery and murder. Or Judas' horrible ploy, Tamar who tricked her father-in-law into fornication to secure her family line, and Haman whose anti-semitism conspired to destroy the Jewish race in Persia's 120 provinces. There are Lot's daughters, Joseph's brothers, Elijah's greedy servant Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira. And never forget Herodias. When her "opportunity came" to raise the head of John the Baptist on a platter, she finagled a way to do it (Mark 6:21).

So many machinations, so much finagling spawned by not only fear and worry, but also by lust, greed, envy, and hatred. The Bible does not spare the details, and when you think about it, we should be glad. These are lessons for us as Paul said. Biblical men and women are our "examples," and their stories are written for our instruction (1 Corinthians 10:11). And as he said to Timothy, this Word is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). We must be warned. We must learn and be trained, and we must avoid.

On the other hand, we can embrace another kind of fixing and finagling. I'm going back to Boaz. I treasure Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz and their remarkable story with its tragedy and heart-break and happy ending. Boaz is a gentleman, a smart and savvy fixer and a godly one. I'm so glad the Lord gave us the grand story of these two good women and one good man who fixed, finagled, and manipulated for good, for righteousness, for love, for holiness, and for the lineage of our Savior.

I put Boaz at the top of that list. Without his courage and savvy and undisguised love, no kinsman-redeemer would have rescued the destitute Naomi, no lineage of Jesus that included a Moabite, God-loving woman named Ruth. Boaz arranged it, but not just to reward and satisfy himself. He blessed all of us children of the Lord through his and Ruth's lineage. The Savior, the Promised One, our Redeemer, our salvation.

In case you are unconvinced fixing and finagling may be God-directed, here's my argument. Two "rare" cases stand out to me: the Old Testament Ruth-Naomi-Boaz example, and the New Testament Paul-Onesimus-Philemon one. For now, I'll leave the New Testament alone. I will write about that one another time,

a truly engaging story in twenty-five verses. Paul was the masterful fixer, although the book of Philemon ends without knowing for certain if Paul got what he wanted. *Nice plot twist, Paul.* Sort of a biblical cliffhanger I'll return to another time.

Let me say that fixing things, including people, is sometimes thoroughly biblical. Jesus did it regularly. He worked out untenable situations including food and storms. He chased away unscrupulous moneychangers. He comforted the grieving. He wept over the unconcerned. He warned hypocrites, defied enemies, forgave sins, cast out demons, cured illnesses, raised the dead.

But His consummate work came at the Place of the Skull where He cried out, "It is finished." There, we were ransomed, redeemed, rescued "with the precious blood of Christ...a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). In triumph, He defied death and walked out of the tomb alive to secure mankind's salvation. Jesus and the Father arranged it all. They orchestrated our salvation, engineered it, fixed it, finagled it. Call it what you will, they found a way!

What about Boaz? He also found a way, a way to protect Ruth, provide for her and Naomi, and establish a lineage. It took some "arranging," some fixing, but he did it. "Leave some for her," he said at the first, and the reapers did. He covered her with his influence and power and protected her from scandal, fixing what could have been a gossip issue. He maneuvered his "other relative" into declining to serve as redeemer. Of course, if you read the story closely, Naomi and Ruth did some finagling as well, but I'll not go there this time.

I've wondered if Boaz knew Moses' words in Deuteronomy 1:30-33, where he recounted what the Lord God had done for His people. Maybe he did and was spurred to act in unusual shrewdness and cleverness.

Maybe Moses galvanized Boaz to make Ruth his wife. I believe he counted on being carried by the Lord and being shown the way to go. I see both his deep trust in the Lord our God and his human ingenuity. As Jesus urged later, be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. Boaz was. His plan was not deceitful or ungodly. He simply gave his relative a way to dodge the kinsman responsibility, and the relative ducked and ran.

That's it. I'm not pushing you to fix, finagle, and maneuver, nor am I justifying it. I am simply saying Boaz did it, God intended it, and I'm glad...for all of us. **ONE**

About the Writer: Brenda Evans lives and writes in Ashland, Kentucky. You may reach her at beejayevans@windstream.net.



Come Explore the Closet That Serves the World

Antioch, TN — The WNAC Provision Closet has been filling the homes and hearts of international missionaries and North American church planters since 1962. Women across the denomination have filled and refilled shelves. From towels and teacups to mixers and microwaves, items have been used for ministry in countries around the globe and in church plants across the country.

The Provision Closet also has supplied dorm rooms for missionary kids in college and met the needs of students in Bible institutes on foreign fields. Nowadays, gift cards help missionaries purchase items needed to set up house-keeping in the States and provide meals while they visit churches and raise support.

Linda Snow, missionary to Japan, appreciates how the Provision Closet helped her college-age children: “It was as if the denomination sent them a hug when I couldn’t be there myself.”

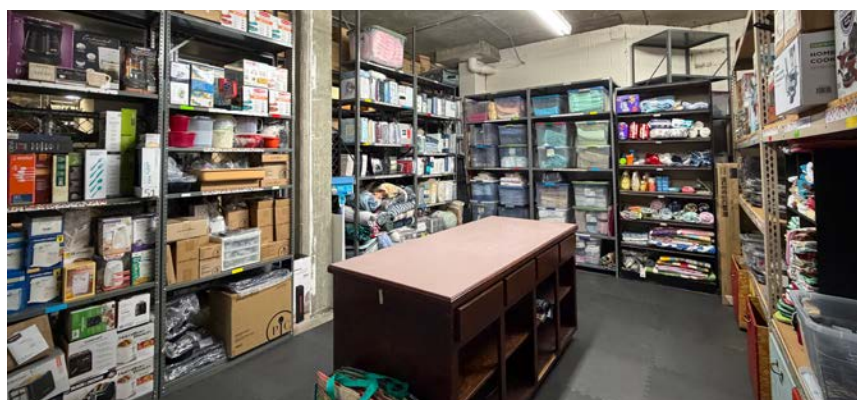


In recent months, updates and renovations to the Provision Closet have been underway. Volunteers from Cofer's Chapel in Nashville, Tennessee (pictured above), have been working regularly to organize, sort, and refresh items to serve missionaries and their families better.



Missionaries and church planters drop by often to get supplies they need, but WNAC wants to invite *everyone* to visit the Provision Closet. Contact kristi@nafwb.org to schedule a time to explore the Provision Closet and step into the history of WNAC in a whole new way.

Also, when you give to The Giving Tree, you not only support the ministry of the Provision Closet, but you also support the entire ministry of WNAC. Give today to help care for missionaries and make a difference through women's ministries everywhere. **ONE**





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Is your church interested in becoming a host location for the next *Shine!* Simulcast? Apply online by October 30, 2026, to participate in the 2027 *Shine!* event to be held February 27, 2027.

Teen girls ages 12-18 from churches everywhere will gather virtually to “Be Still and Behold” how God is working in their lives. Visit wnac.org/shineconference/ for more information. 



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Your **gifts to WNAC** help support the ministry of the Provision Closet.



Learn more: wnac.org/



TEACH A MAN TO FISH

BY JOHN BRUMMITT

Benevolence is the disposition to do good, characterized by kindness, goodwill, and a desire to promote the happiness of others.

As a little kid, I remember hearing men at church talk about benevolence. Of course, at the time, I didn't understand the big word. I just knew they were considering giving money to someone in a tough spot. The conversation turned to the adage, "Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime."

Because I was only a kid, I have no idea what happened after that conversation. I assume funds were provided to meet an immediate need. As an adult now serving in a congregation, discussions about benevolence and the role of the church often return to the same adage, how to "teach a man to fish." This brings up another question: "Should churches merely give money away? Or strategically invest it to make long-term restoration possible?"

Strategic investment lines up with that old adage. As with everything in this world, views differ on how the church should provide benevolence: meet immediate needs or solve a larger problem for an individual or group. Topics such as impact investing, faith-driven venture capital, community development finance, and restorative justice economics are hot-button items when discussing the role of the church.

Real-world examples include affordable housing, refugee businesses, prisoner reentry programs, and anti-trafficking, to name a few. The idea of what provides the best return on church dollars spent reigns in conversations. Should the church fill up a gas tank for someone needing financial assistance, or should the church have a work assistance program to help that person find a job?

The answer is more complicated. If the church doesn't meet the immediate need, there may be no way to reach a long-term solution. However, the idea of investing funds toward lasting, impactful solutions to help

build a community is what upcoming generations expect from churches. How can churches do both? How do they meet the immediate, “I need assistance today,” and still provide long-term community resource-building benevolence?

STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

To start, try setting up line items in your church budget, including a line item for “giving fish” and another for “teaching to fish.” Having your church budget reflect your strategic intentions does two things for the church: 1) it defines this is an important issue for the congregation and one entered mindfully; 2) it ensures you are not just “giving” without “teaching” or vice versa. Note: you will always have more needs than budget, even if 100% of the church budget were designated toward benevolence.

Next, make sure the giving and teaching work together. Guard against becoming a “soft touch” church, enabling detrimental behaviors in the individuals you help. Consider the teaching

necessary to improve your community. The teaching aspect of your church's ministry may vary widely from the one in the next community. If your area has high unemployment, how can the church offer long-term, effective assistance? If you have high drug use in your community, would an intervention or recovery program be helpful? What is the congregation passionate about? The church's strategic benevolence in the place where the Lord has placed it is an important outreach that shows God's love and offers both short-term and long-term hope.

Jesus spent time with fishermen and taught them the way a church is supposed to fish. Whether giving a fish or teaching someone to fish, remember that fishing for souls is our calling, and making a difference in lives is what we must do. **ONE**

About the Writer: John Brummitt became CEO of Richland Ave Financial in January 2016. He graduated in 2011 with an MBA from Tennessee Tech University. A 2004 graduate of Welch College, John has served with Richland Ave Financial since spring 2006.

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Preparing **Faithfully** for **RETIREMENT**

BY CHRIS COMPTON

One of the most important financial decisions we make is preparing for retirement. Most all of us want to retire someday. Many even have a picture in their heads of what retirement will look like — all the things they wish to do.

For Christians, saving for retirement is not only a financial decision. It is also much more — an act of wisdom, stewardship, and preparation. Since everything we have is the Lord's, we have a responsibility to manage our finances faithfully, and that includes preparing responsibly for the future.

Some Christians feel tension around retirement planning because they wonder if planning demonstrates a lack of faith. However, Scripture resolves that tension. The Bible praises wise preparation. Proverbs 21:5 indicates careful thought and planning leads to abundance.

Retirement savings should never become our idol or the source of our security. Saving for retirement is not about putting more trust in money than God. It is simply being wise and faithful with the money God has entrusted to us. We demonstrate our faith when we manage God's provisions wisely for our futures. Beyond the motivations, consider two practical reasons retirement planning is important.

- **We should seek to avoid putting undue stress on our families.** While it is tempting to think we will work forever, a season is likely coming when we can no longer



work a full-time job or earn the income to which we have become accustomed. Saving for retirement allows us to replace income and provide peace of mind for the last quarter of our lives.

- **Retirement preparation today provides greater freedom tomorrow.** This freedom is not only financial. Preparation allows us freedom to continue serving as the hands and feet of Jesus. Many people think retirement is simply about stopping work, but for Christians, retirement can open new doors, along with new opportunities for ministry and service. With more time on their hands, retirees can volunteer in churches, disciple younger believers, go on mission trips, or support ministries financially in ways they could not earlier in life. When we save for retirement, we are not only saving for our financial future, but we are also saving for our future ministry.

Planning for retirement may seem daunting. It does not have to be. Practical retirement planning often begins with simple,

consistent habits. Contributing regularly to a retirement account allows savings to grow steadily over time, with the added benefit of compound interest. Starting early is especially important because time is one of the greatest tools for retirement savings. Even small monthly contributions grow significantly over time. The key is consistency through all stages and changes in life.

Ultimately, retirement planning is a stewardship issue. The question is what we will do with the resources, opportunities, and abilities God has provided to us. Preparing faithfully for retirement honors the Lord with our money now while preparing us to serve Him in every season of life — a powerful testimony of God's faithfulness and our trust in His provision. **ONE**

About the Writer: Chris Compton is the CFO for Richland Ave Financial. He graduated in 2007 with an M.A. in Bible Exposition from Columbia International University. A 1998 graduate of East Tennessee State University, he has over two decades of administrative and financial experience, along with seven years in pastoral ministry.

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Phrases Leaders Struggle to Say, Part 4

BY RON HUNTER JR., PH.D.

The first three installments of *Phrases Leaders Struggle to Say* explored courage and conviction, capacity and pace, and course correction. Each theme pointed to a leader's willingness to act with clarity. This column moves deeper, into the personal responsibility that shapes trust: humility.

Few phrases carry more weight than, **"I'm sorry."** An apology requires a leader to step out from behind positions and into accountability. When leaders admit error, they create margin for others to do the same. That margin does not excuse repeated carelessness, yet it does acknowledge mistakes are part of growth. Even costly errors can become tuition to educate future decisions. Teams know they can be honest about failure, stop posturing, and start learning. Apology restores trust and begins rebuilding bridges silence quietly damaged.

The words, **"I was wrong,"** may be the smartest admission a leader can make. Leaders often carry pressure to appear confident, yet growth requires reflection. John Maxwell stated, "Experience is not the best teacher; evaluated experience is." Many leaders avoid revisiting mistakes, yet an honest after-action review often reveals blind spots and missed signals. Leaders who walk back decisions with humility gain clarity others never reach. Admitting an error sharpens judgment and strengthens credibility.

Saying, **"I mishandled that conversation,"** demands quick awareness and humility. Both introverted and extroverted leaders can say things in ways never intended. Biting humor, careless wording, or subtle insinuation can land harder than expected. In some cases, leaders need someone they trust to point out the problem. Most missteps relate to speaking before fully listening or misplaced humor from a position of power. Addressing the moment quickly prevents misunderstanding from hardening into resentment. Timely correction protects relationships and keeps communication healthy.

Admitting, **"My pride got in the way,"** reaches even deeper. Leadership can quietly shift expectations toward entitlement. Strong leaders remember their roles begin with service. Christ consistently pointed His disciples to serving rather than status or position. Those servant-leader disciples



went on to pastor, teach, and reach others because they knew the true Leader and the service their roles required. When leaders begin to assume others exist to serve them, an accountability check is necessary (which we will address in the next column). Leaders who confront their own pride lead with greater awareness and steadier influence.

These phrases share a common humble responsibility, which strengthens leadership from the inside out. Leaders who apologize rebuild trust. Leaders who admit error grow in wisdom. Leaders who correct conversations protect relationships. Leaders who confront pride lead with clarity and purpose.

Humility does not weaken leadership; it anchors it. **ONE**

About the Columnist: Ron Hunter Jr. has a Ph.D. in leadership and is CEO of D6 Family Ministry. You may contact him at ron.hunter@d6family.com.

ONE Magazine Honored by the Evangelical Press Association

Antioch, TN — During the annual meeting of the Evangelical Press Association held in Franklin, Tennessee, May 11-13, *ONE Magazine* was honored with ten Higher Goals awards in areas ranging from writing to design:

- **Critical Review** – "Teaching Children to Be Christians" by Matt Pinson (fourth place)
- **Department** – "Leadership Whiteboard" by Ron Hunter Jr. (fifth place)
- **Devotional** – "Forgiveness Great and Small" by Marianne Stewart (first place)
- **Evangelism Article** – "Evangelism in Prayer and Practice" by Joshua Colson (fifth place)
- **Personality Article** – "Upstream With Mr. Trout" by Eric Thomsen (first place)
- **Table of Contents** (second place)
- **Two-page spread design** (fifth place)
- **Titles** (fifth place)
- **Publication Redesign** (first place)
- **Publication Design** (second place)

The Evangelical Press Association is a professional organization of more than 400 Christian print and digital publications and has become one of the world's leading professional associations for the Christian publishing industry.



Managing Editor Eric Thomsen noted, "It is encouraging for the *ONE Magazine* team to be recognized by the greater Christian community for publishing excellence. It was a special honor for Marianne Stewart, the magazine's lead designer, to receive top honors for both writing and design categories in the same year, a rare feat."

Stewart additionally won design awards for typography and infographic design for other publications.

D6 Family Ministry also won eight Higher Goals awards, along with six Awards of Excellence for their devotional magazines. Between the two, Free Will Baptist publishing efforts were among the most honored by the association.

Executive Director Eddie Moody said, "We are incredibly proud of Eric Thomsen, Marianne Stewart, and the entire team behind *ONE Magazine* and D6 Family Ministry. These awards prove what we can achieve when we pool our talents for God's Kingdom. We truly are better together." **ONE**

2027 Nominees Requested

Antioch, TN — The 2026-2027 Nominating Committee, which will serve through the national convention in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is prepared to receive nominees for the 2027 election, according to Barry Long, committee chairman.

The committee will consider nominations and compile a report offering a single nomination for each position to be filled. The report will be presented to delegates at the 2027 convention.

The following board and commission positions will be filled in 2027: Free Will Baptist Foundation (3), North American Ministries (3), Richland Ave Financial (3), Media

Commission (1), Commission for Theological Integrity (1), Historical Commission (1), Music Commission (1), General Board (11), Executive Committee (3), General Officers: assistant moderator and clerk.

The following boards do not elect members in 2027: Welch College; WNAC; D6 Family Ministry; and IM, Inc. Nominations, accompanied by a brief resume, must be submitted exclusively to the chairman on or before October 1.

Download the nomination form at www.nafwb.org.

Contact Nominating Committee Chairman Barry Long at pastorbarrylong@gmail.com. **ONE**

FOCUS

90TH NATIONAL CONVENTION

NAFWB

JULY 19-22, 2026 • COLUMBUS, OH

MAKING CONVENTION MEMORIES IN THE "BIGGEST SMALL TOWN IN AMERICA"

After more than forty years, the National Association of Free Will Baptists returned to Columbus, Ohio, July 19-22 for the 90th National Convention. As 3,944 registrants filled streets, hotels, restaurants, and meeting halls, they brought excitement, optimism, and energy. They left encouraged, refreshed, and with a renewed FOCUS on the future of the denomination.

Executive Director Eddie Moody reflected on the meeting's FOCUS theme. "With so much happening around us, it is easy to become distracted from our mission. These days together pointed us back to things that really matter."

Free Will Baptists arrived in Columbus ready for great worship services, and they were not disappointed. The Music Commission delivered a strong program with a convention choir, orchestral ensemble, vocal ensemble, thunderous congregational singing, and a wide variety of special music that prepared listeners to receive the Word of God.

In each service, powerful preaching brought attention to a particular area upon which we should **FOCUS**. Sunday morning, after representatives from Truth & Peace Student Leadership Conference taught Sunday School, Jon Forrest (TN) challenged listeners to FOCUS on loving God. Sunday evening, Isaiah Hatfield (WV) invited listeners to **FOCUS** on loving their neighbors. Monday, Brian Williams (NY) drew the **FOCUS** to the Church. Tuesday, Jeff Crabtree (OH) put the **FOCUS** on the family before



Kenneth Eagleton, Jr. (TN) wrapped up the conference on Wednesday by reminding Free Will Baptists to **FOCUS** on the mission before us. The convention concluded with the annual missionary service, where new church planters and missionaries were commissioned to various fields of service.

Though convention services were not live streamed this year due to budgetary cutbacks, services were recorded and posted on Facebook by the Media Commission and will also be available at nafwb.org/convention/.

IMPACT Turns Twenty

Saturday morning, July 18, 113 volunteers gathered at multiple locations across Columbus, Ohio, to participate in the annual IMPACT evangelism and service event. At Hillview FWB Church in Reynoldsburg, volunteers completed multiple painting projects inside and out, offered a free carwash, cleaned carpets, and pressure washed needed areas. Hillview Church member Geri Baker was amazed by what they accomplished in a short time. "It's wonderful!" she exclaimed. "It just fills my heart and soul to see what they are doing. I'm just so grateful."

Other Hillview volunteers made a short drive to Reynoldsburg FWB Church where they painted the basement children's area. Across town, participants joined members of the congregations of Heritage FWB Church and Canaan Land FWB Church to serve widows in a variety of ways.

Their hard work marked twenty years of IMPACT, which started in 2006 in Birmingham, Alabama. Director Ken Akers is quick to thank volunteers and local churches that make IMPACT possible. "Over these 20 years, we have had nearly 4,000 people give up their convention Saturday to make a difference. Yet, in all the years I've been IMPACT director, I've never heard a single person regret being involved!"

Make plans now to join IMPACT on Saturday, July 24, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For more information throughout the year, visit fwbmastersmen.org/impact/.

Serious Business

The **General Board** meeting began promptly at 8:00 a.m., Monday, July 20, with a message from outgoing Executive Board member Stan Bunch (MO). The board heard reports from eight national agencies and four commissions during the two-hour, 52-minute meeting. The board approved recommendations from the Executive Committee including a recommendation to approve the 2027 denominational budget of \$35.1 million and recommendations to make changes to the *Treatise* and *Free Will Baptist Board Member Manual* to align the books while also updating outdated language.

All recommendations were later approved during convention business sessions, along with a resolution renewing and expanding the denomination's stand against pornography and a resolution thanking hosts for their hospitality and generosity.

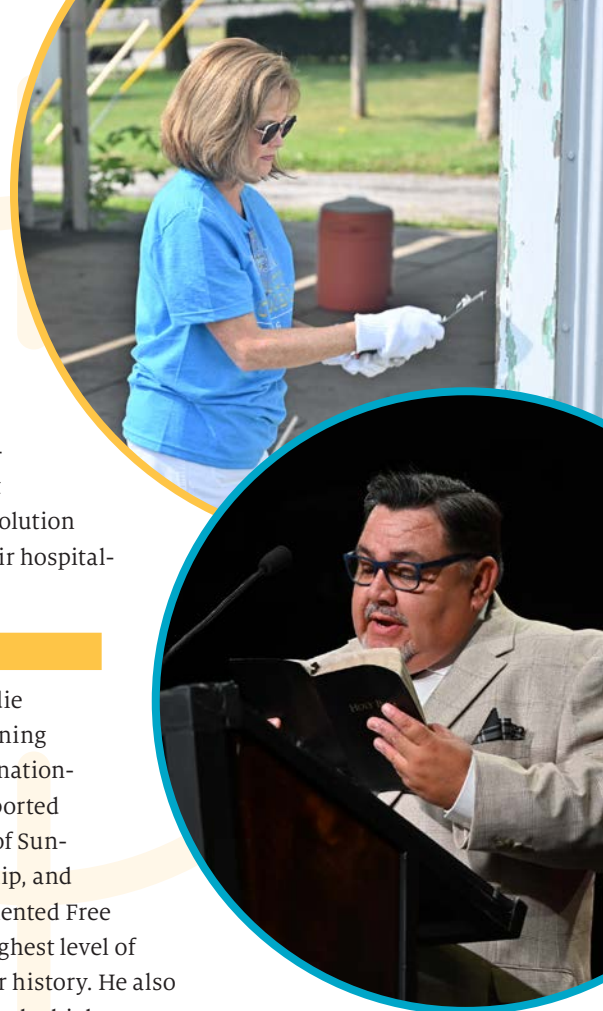
EXECUTIVE OFFICE

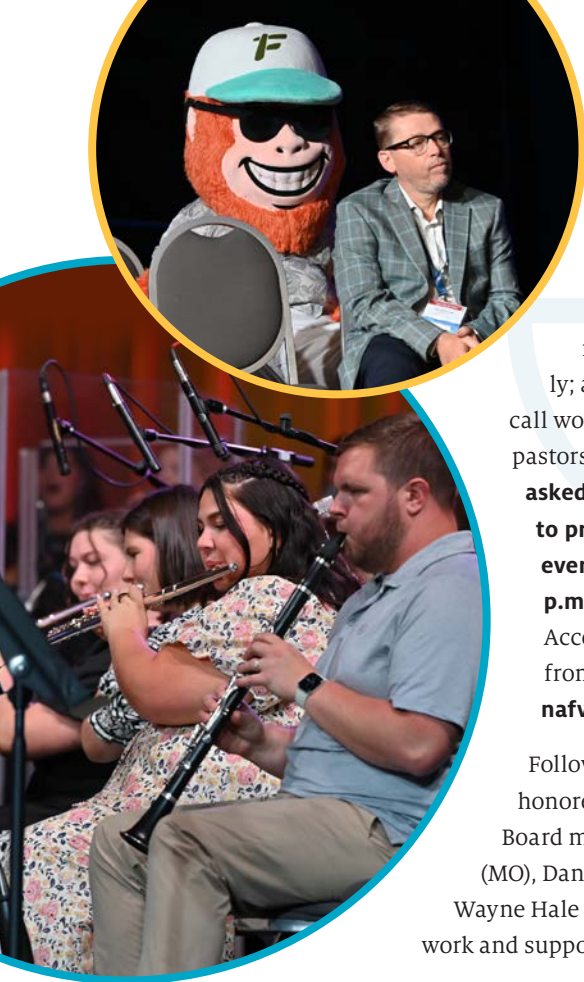
Executive Director Eddie Moody celebrated "turning the corner" in denominational growth based on reported statistics in the areas of Sunday School, membership, and baptisms. He complimented Free Will Baptists on the highest level of giving per capita in our history. He also expressed gratitude for the high percentage of youth in our churches and encouraged the denomination to engage in discipling, training, and encouraging the rising generation, concluding, "By God's grace, future generations will inherit a stronger denomination than the one we enjoy today."

He thanked Ohio, national departments, churches, and individuals for supporting the convention in 2026. Based on these increased levels of support, the Executive Office can resume planning conventions beyond 2028. "I'm asking you to keep supporting the convention," Moody encouraged listeners. "We need all Free Will Baptists to do their part so we can continue meeting." He also encouraged attendees to stay in convention hotels, to give generously to offerings, and to encourage others to attend.

Moody warned the continued decline in the number of Free Will Baptist pastors, which began in 1995, has reached crisis levels, with more than 200 churches without pastors. In response, the Executive Office has developed Rekindle Coaching and Refresh Counseling, along with a broad slate of pastoral resources and The Shepherding Initiative, which offers help to churches between pastors. Moody thanked donors who make these programs possible, noting, "I can assure you, the pastoral problem would be a whole lot worse without them."

Moody asked the denomination to help the Executive Office by giving to Refresh Counseling; encouraging Rekindle Coaching for





new and potential pastors at a local and regional level; reporting statistics regularly and accurately; and praying for God to call workers — specifically pastors — into the harvest. **He asked all Free Will Baptists to pray for more pastors every day at 9:38 a.m. or p.m. (and preferably both).** Access available resources from the Executive Office at nafwb.org/resources/.

Following the report, Moody honored outgoing Executive Board members Stan Bunch (MO), Daniel Edwards (IN), and Wayne Hale (DE) for their faithful work and support.

RICHLAND AVE FINANCIAL

Director John Brummitt described 2025 as a positive year for the department, with 130 new enrollees (making 1,300 in the last decade), contributions increased by more than \$400,000 over the previous year, with nearly \$5 million in new contributions to the retirement plan. When combined with Institutional Investing, total contributions for the year reached \$8.5 million. Brummitt expressed gratitude for good annual returns, a smooth transition through the department's name change, and steady overall growth from \$52 million in 2016 to \$147 million in 2025.

In conclusion, Brummitt urged listeners to start saving *now* for retirement. "Starting as soon as possible makes it much easier to accumulate the assets needed for retirement," he asserted. "Allowing for time and compounding interest works in your favor. Churches and institutions also should be planning for their future by setting aside funds that can grow and compound."

Following the report, Board Chairman Lance Boyer (MO) recognized CEO John Brummitt for twenty years of service and CFO Chris Compton for ten years of service.

FWB FOUNDATION

New Director Brent Patrick introduced himself and expressed his excitement about what God is doing through the Foundation. He thanked his board, staff, and the denomination for support and encouragement through a year marked by transition, challenges,

and opportunities. He reemphasized the unchanged mission of the Foundation: to serve denominational investors, strengthen the Free Will Baptist financial base, and supply the Free Will Baptist mission.

Patrick pointed to healthy growth over the last three years, with total assets reaching nearly \$96 million in 2025. He explained a continued pause in the Grants Program as the Foundation evaluates its current situation.

He promoted the establishment and increase of endowments, noting, "We want to reach a point where we focus on *mission*, not only on maintenance. The greatest trees in the Kingdom are planted by people who know they will never sit in their shade.... We need to plant *now* for generations to come."

Patrick announced multiple initiatives: a new database, new monthly receipts, the establishment of Legacy Partners, a monthly digital newsletter, and a new financial partnership with Eagle Legacy Group, offering several types of annuities to participants.

In closing, Patrick reminded listeners the words "Invest Today, Impact Tomorrow" are more than a promotional slogan. "They are the driving force behind what the Foundation is about and what we desire to do."

NORTH AMERICAN MINISTRIES

Director David Crowe expressed enthusiasm about Frontier Student Missions, a new program at North American Ministries (NAM) that will give students firsthand ministry experience in church planting. "I'm as excited as I've ever been," Crowe remarked, "and I'm excited about what the Lord is going to do through this program." To learn more, visit fwbnam.com/frontier/.

Crowe expressed gratitude that the ministry branches of NAM finished \$400,000 in the black and thanked 54 church planters serving in 36 church plants, with three new church plants in Hawaii, California, and Montana. In 2025, 220 individuals came to faith in Christ, with 180 baptisms.

Crowe explained a \$5 million deficit in 2025 for the Church Extension Loan Fund (CELF) was related primarily to real estate losses surrounding a single church loan/building purchase and detailed the steps the department has taken to mitigate the loss.

NAM continues as the endorsing agency for Free Will Baptist chaplains, with 16 current chaplains and partners. He also noted the hard work of Master's Men Disaster Response Teams and training events offered in partnership with the denomination.

Crowe pointed to a gradual reduction in staff at NAM, with several staff retirements expected over the next few years. The department will streamline, reducing full-time directors and replacing

2026 CONVENTION AT A GLANCE

REGISTRATION

National Convention – 3,650

Vertical Three – 2,758

Total (Unique) Attendees – 3,944*

**Note: Many attendees register for both conventions.*

SPEAKERS

Sunday School, July 19
Truth & Peace

Sunday Morning, July 19
Jon Forrest (TN)

Sunday Evening, July 19
Isaiah Hatfield (WV)

Monday Evening, July 20
Brian Williams (NY)

Tuesday Evening, July 21
Jeff Crabtree (OH)

Wednesday Evening, July 22
Kenneth Eagleton, Jr. (TN)

2026 VERTICAL THREE CONFERENCE

Registration – 2,758

Truth & Peace – 150 student participants; 16 staff

Competitors: 1,641

Buck-A-Week Offering: \$4,058*

** Initial count may be adjusted.*

Buck-A-Week Recipients:

NAM: Layton and Stephanie Smith (FL)

IM: Cody and Lauren Herren (France)

ELECTED IN 2026

FWB Foundation

2031 – David Beltz (MO)

Executive Committee

Ken Simpson (MO)

Larry Reynolds (MS)

Jimmy Lawson (MI)

D6 Family Ministry

Gary Clark (FL)

Dick Terry (OK)

Rick Taylor (AL)

IM, Inc.

Chris Todd (OK)

Rick Cason (GA)

Steve Reeves (MO)

Welch College

Jeff Manning (NC)

Ben Eskola (TN)

Chris Truett (NC)

WNAC

Alyssa Harvey (TN)

Brenda Bunch (MO)

Dusty Harrison (OK)

2028 – Karinda Polk (AR)

2030 – Sarah Lawson (MI)

COMMISSIONS

Historical – Jesse Owens (TN)

Media – Adrian Holland (TN)

Music – Sam Harris (NC)

Theological Integrity –

Jeremy Craft (FL)

Nominating Committee - 2026-27

Barry Long (KY), chairman

Jeff Jones (NC)

Danny Williams (AL)

Edwin Hayes (OH)

Todd Williams (IN)

Joshua Colson (IL)

Allan Austin (FL)

Resolution Committee

Stan Bunch (MO), chairman

James Coffelt (OK)

John Collier (TX)

Will Harmon (AR)

Mark Walker (GA)

2027 BUDGETS

D6 Family Ministry - \$5,165,600

Executive Office - \$1,269,885

FWB Foundation - \$1,677,350

IM, Inc. - \$11,700,000

NAM (includes Master's Men) - \$5,190,000

Richland Ave - \$1,019,000

Welch College - \$8,800,484

WNAC - \$285,806

Historical Commission - \$6,000

Media Commission - \$5,275

Music Commission - \$10,350

Theological Commission - \$7,000

Total – \$35,136,750

**Figures rounded*

The following boards did not elect members in 2026: North American Ministries, Richland Ave Financial.

Reporters: Eric Thomsen, Claire Ryan

Photographers: Rodney Yerby, Mark McCarty, Matthew Puckett, Ava Ormand, Chloe Stevanus, Eric Thomsen

Download Photos:

nafwb.yerbyphoto.com



these positions with part-time and volunteer staffers.

IM, INC.

General Director Clint Morgan reminded listeners God sometimes takes us places we never imagined, both individually and as a ministry or organization. “The world of missions does not follow normal coordinates....God sometimes leads us off the map, and the real question is, ‘Will we follow Him there?’” He thanked Free Will Baptists for supporting IM, even when that takes the mission “Twenty Miles East of the Equator.”

Morgan honored the passing of four “mapmaker” pioneer missionaries and IM staffers who set the course for today’s work: Eddie Payne (Ivory Coast), Geraldine Waid (Japan), Fred Warner (AR), and Henry Van Kluyve (TN).

Morgan updated the results of the 2020-2025 goals: 67,061 global average attendance (goal 50,000); 107 missionaries (goal 125); \$865,000 World Missions Offering in 2025 (goal \$1 million). He noted only 252 churches contributed to the WMO. In 2026, IM has set the goal of engaging 500 churches to contribute to the WMO.

IM celebrated the following benchmarks in 2025: 167 ministry centers ministering to 110,784 people; 278 missions works and preaching points; 28,094 presentations of the gospel and 3,612 conversions; 3,312 baptisms with 2,651 in new convert courses; 83 church plants, 909 churches, and 67,061 in weekly attendance; 15 Bible institutes with 519 people involved in leadership training; six current fields, 12 current and legacy fields, and a presence in 39 countries through current and legacy missionary fields and strategic partnerships. “These are not simply IM statistics,” Morgan reminded listeners. “These numbers represent the faithfulness of Free Will Baptist people.”

Morgan announced a change in IM leadership, as Kenneth Eagleton will transition from his role as director of global partnerships to global training. Francisco (Frank) Vazquez (CA) will step into the vacated role. Morgan also announced the commissioning of Emma Hayes as a missionary intern.

Morgan revisited three IM Horizon goals for 2035: 1) commission 100 new missionaries; 2) reach and sustain annual \$1 million WMO and build a \$3 million GROW Endowment; and 3) see the number of Free Will Baptists double outside of North America. This final goal includes sharing the gospel with one million people and planting a thousand new churches.

“Quite simply, we would not be where we are today without you....” Morgan concluded. “So when God redraws the map, let’s

keep going...even if it takes us 20 miles east of the equator.”

Following the report, Board Chairman Rodney Yerby honored Clint Morgan for 50 years of service to IM and outgoing board member Jeff Nichols (TN) for his work.

WELCH COLLEGE

President Matt Pinson pointed to a major increase in enrollment in the past year, the highest in 42 years and the highest ministry enrollment in 44 years. It appears this trend will continue into the 2026-2027 year, with enrollment up 10% already. “This unprecedented increase is *truly* an answer to prayer,” Pinson noted.

He expressed gratitude for “qualitative” increases as well, with a continual rise in academic and administrative excellence, as represented by various academic and regional rankings. “There is no measure for academic quality in which we have not gone up....” Pinson noted. “Our stellar faculty and staff are producing results that other small Christian colleges simply do not produce.”

He updated changes to administration following the retirement of long-time dean of students Jon Forlines. Daniel Webster has been named vice president for administration and student engagement, and Whitney Lute will follow Forlines as the dean of students.

Pinson pointed to a gradual financial recovery for the college, undergirded by rising enrollment. The college finished well into the black for the fiscal year, making it possible to pay down more than \$1 million in debt during the 2025-2026 financial year. “Thank you for your continued, prayerful support....” Pinson concluded. “All you do to pray and fast, to encourage and support your college makes it possible for the Welch College team to face our challenges with hope for the future.”

Following the report, Pinson honored outgoing trustees Jeff Crabtree (OH) and Shiloh Hackett (TN) for their faithful service.

WNAC

New WNAC Director Kristi Johnson expressed gratitude for her new role where she can help Free Will Baptist women find and fulfill their roles in the Great Commission. She acknowledged significant financial struggles for the department and identified





steps taken to address those struggles: engaging new supporters, speaking truthfully and transparently, and articulating purpose and vision clearly to engage and attract WNAC participants.

To meet funding shortfalls, Johnson has cut the budget, reduced staff, and minimized expenses. “We are at bare bones!” She acknowledged ruefully. But she also pointed to stabilizing finances, positive net incomes, and great strides toward three-year goals. “This is a God story!” she concluded regarding the turnaround. “Six months ago, I walked into a situation that produced *many* questions. Today, I am happy to say we are doing great. God has worked through faithful people to allow us to continue our mission.”

She celebrated the impact of the 2026 *Shine!* Conference, with 800 girls participating across the nation. This impact on students continues through scholarships for both U.S. and international students at Free Will Baptist colleges.

Johnson also reported the renovation and expansion of the Steward Missionary Provision Closet, which continues to provide for the needs of missionaries and church planters going to and returning from their fields of services.

She encouraged donors to support WNAC through The Giving Tree, a monthly program of support, concluding, “This is the moment to make a difference!” Learn more: wnac.org/giving_tree/.

Following her report, Kristi Johnson honored outgoing board members Katie Postlewaite (NC), Jessica Edwards (TN), and Tracy Payne (OK). She also honored long-time WNAC staffer Phyllis York, who served with WNAC for more than two decades.

D6 FAMILY MINISTRY

Director Ron Hunter addressed the question, “Why are our churches and denomination in decline?” simply: “Because we have made converts rather than disciples.” He encouraged Free Will Baptists to help redefine D6 Family Ministry (D6) as much more than a publisher. Instead, D6 is a discipleship partner providing resources, training, equipping, and yes, printed resources. He acknowledged churches are not looking to buy products but to solve problems. “Please start promoting us as the denomination’s ‘discipleship’ organization rather than the denomination’s printer,” he urged.

Hunter celebrated finishing 2025 \$108,000 in the black, a \$750,000 turnaround in a single year, with positive financial trends into 2026. “Donors make a huge difference,” he concluded, acknowledging the need for continuing support.

He introduced the new D6 curriculum centered around Discipleship Journals. The journals are designed for use during the week and also for a church or small-group setting.

Hunter updated listeners on relocation efforts, observing the premium location of the current facility near the airport makes it possible to sell for approximately \$6 million. Staff will move to a smaller office space while leasing warehouse space for printing and distribution. This will create a \$3 million surplus to be invested long-term as a financial base.

He closed his report by challenging churches to take the Faith Forging Five Discipleship Assessment. Learn more: d6family.com/backwarddiscipleship/.

Following his report, Hunter honored outgoing board member Paul Bryant (MS) for his faithful work on the board.

Commissions

MUSIC. Kevin Justice pointed to a “quiet” year for the Music Commission as they continued to explore new ways to resource music leaders and congregations across the denomination. The commission began a monthly worship gathering (via Zoom) that has been positively received and well-attended. The commission continues to offer onsite workshops for interested churches as well as five convention workshops. Learn more: fwbworship.com/.

MEDIA. Adrian Holland explained the commission’s decision not to stream convention services in 2026 due to travel, equipment, and Internet expenses. He explained costs averaged \$33,000 per year over the last decade and were simply unsustainable. Streaming expenses do not include the work the commission does for the denomination throughout the year, such as Leadership Conference, the *Shine!* Conference, and more. Learn more: fwbmedia.com/.

THEOLOGY. Chairman Kevin Hester emphasized the ongoing work of the commission, including the annual Symposium, **FWBTheology.com**, the *Journal for Theological Integrity*, and the newsletter *De Doctrina*. Hester announced the 2026 Symposium will meet October 5-6, on the campus of Welch College, Nashville, Tennessee. He encouraged those interested in submitting papers to contact Cory Thompson at fwbtheology@gmail.com.

HISTORY. Eric Thomsen celebrated the completion of a decade-long effort to scan all national, state, and local minutes held in the Free Will Baptist Historical Collection. He thanked many individuals who have been involved in the effort, “especially Dr. Robert Picirilli who envisioned the project, set up the process, consistently encouraged us, and helped guide it to completion.” These minutes will be available on **FWBHistory.com** by the end of 2026. **ONE**

VIII CONFERENCE

A D6 FAMILY MINISTRY EVENT

JULY 19-22, 2026 • COLUMBUS, OH

BY CLAIRE RYAN

Another exciting Vertical Three Conference has passed. Each year, the gathering of fellow followers of Christ is deeply moving, refreshing, and challenging. But the truths learned here and the talents students cultivate should continue to grow and impact the people and places at home.

Consider some of the long-term ripple effects of ordinary acts of faithfulness from scriptural heroes of the faith. Did Ruth understand that her faithful decision to remain with Naomi and accept her God would place her in the lineage of King David and, ultimately, the Messiah? Was David aware of how far his faith would impact history when he faced a giant nearly twice his size? Did the three Hebrew children know the impact their devout stand for the Lord would have on the Bible-believing generations to follow? Did Esther realize she was saving more than her Jewish people when she stood before the king and boldly requested rescue?

Did the disciples realize when they left their nets, tax tables, and familiar lives to follow Christ, they were helping launch a movement to carry the gospel to every nation? Did Paul know his unshakable resolve in the face of storms, riots, and persecutions would stretch across time, still reaching believers today? Was Mary Magdalene aware when she faithfully proclaimed, “I have seen the Lord,” she would become the first herald of the risen Christ, her testimony echoing through the centuries? Did Lydia imagine when she opened her heart to the gospel and her home to God’s people, her hospitality would help establish one of the New Testament’s first churches? Did Andrew know every person he quietly brought to Jesus, including his own brother Peter, would multiply into a ministry reaching the world? Did John imagine by faithfully recording the life, love, and words of Jesus, he would help countless generations believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

All these individuals had something in common. At some point in their lives, they made the decision that “here and now” they would follow the Lord. These ordinary men and women rarely knew the full extent of the influence their faithfulness would have. Similarly, for us, every stand for truth, every gospel conversation, every act of obedience, every disciple in whom we invest has the potential to outlive us. We may never see the full harvest this side of eternity, but God has always multiplied the faithfulness of His people to reach lives they could never imagine.

We return from the Vertical Three Conference with the challenge: allow your decision to obey the Lord **right here, right now** impact your context. Take it to friends, co-workers, coaches, bosses, family; let them reap the benefits of your time at V3. As followers of Jesus, it is our responsibility to go and make disciples, teaching and training them in the ways of the Lord (Matthew 28:19–20).

VERTICAL THREE SERVICES

This year’s V3 Theme, “Right Here. Right Now,” focused on Matthew 5:1-16 and 43-48. The Kingdom of God is not just something for the future; it is also for the here and now. We are called to live in a way that proclaims we serve the Lord and Him alone.



RIGHT HERE RIGHT NOW

MATTHEW 5:1-16, 43-48



In Matthew 5, Jesus outlines how believers should live as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven **right here, right now.**

Sunday morning featured a joint service with adults and V3-Teen. Truth & Peace students led Sunday School: Landon Reiter, Charlie Haskins, Eli Parish, Desmond Pontious, and Tommy Trimble. Truth & Peace students Bella Dingess, Ruth Foster, Ana Luthy, and Myra Little led V3-456 Sunday School. Jon Forrest preached from Matthew 22 and challenged each of us to choose to love God with all our heart.

Sunday evening, Johnathan Washak spoke on The Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12, reminding the V3-Teen audience of the characteristics of Kingdom citizens. Monday night, Kevin Jones preached from Matthew 5:13-16 about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. V3-Teen services wrapped up Tuesday evening as Ray Paxton shared a challenge from Matthew 5:43-48 to be known for a love that reflects Jesus' love for us.

After Tuesday's service, students enjoyed an encore performance by the one and only Mark Brown, an illusionist from Nashville, Tennessee. V3-Teen was once again blessed with incredible emcees Jon Forrest and Neil Gilliland.

Johnny Miller and his amazing team led V3-123, while V3-456 students enjoyed services and activities headed by Steve Greenwood and Jonathon Reed. Once again, Katie Greenwood and her team led V3-Preschool. Each night, students were challenged to live for Jesus, knowing we can live in His promises here and now.

CTS MINISTRY EXPO

Every year, hundreds of young people in our denomination spend countless hours preparing for the CTS Ministry Expo competition. The end goal is that those countless hours spent worshipping the Lord, speaking His truths, and studying His Word will help ground students with a foundation of faith that will stand against the trials of this life. The true purpose is not a medal or trophy but the promise of Christ and His Kingdom. This year, 1,641 competitors from kindergarten through high school competed in various music, drama, Bible, and arts categories.

TRUTH & PEACE STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

This year 150 students and 16 staff members participated in the Truth & Peace Student Leadership Conference. They examined the theme *Explore*, with a focus on training students for life in service to Christ and His Kingdom. Students learned how to grow in their faith using personal Bible study practices and received training in methods for teaching God's Word to others.

Students arrived at Welch College in Gallatin, Tennessee, July 8 and immediately began leadership training through leadership development courses, team building opportunities, and service projects.

YOUTH EVANGELISTIC TEAM (YET)

The Youth Evangelistic Team was comprised of nine students and their leaders, Bryan and Kinsley Houser. The team arrived at Welch College in Gallatin, Tennessee, July 6 to begin preparations for YET 2026. The team led worship throughout the Truth & Peace Conference, as well as during V3-Teen in Columbus, leading an exciting night of worship Monday evening.

BUCK-A-WEEK

The annual Buck-a-Week offering was collected Tuesday evening during the V3-Teen Service. The generous onsite offering totaled \$4,058 and will benefit IM missionaries Cody and Lauren Herren and NAM church planters Layton and Stephanie Smith. **ONE**



Free Will Baptists and the Broken Pastor Pipeline

BY EDDIE MOODY

On Mother's Day, Axios — an American media company known for non-partisan reporting and signature ultra-short writing style — published an article titled, "America's Pastor Pipeline is Collapsing." The article began, "Fewer Americans want to become pastors, accelerating a leadership vacuum inside of one of the country's oldest civic institutions. Why it matters: As the pastor role becomes lower-paid, higher-risk and less trusted, the U.S. isn't just losing clergy — it's losing a key layer of local leadership, especially in rural and Black communities."

In other words, this broken pastor pipeline has big implications for America. The writer notes the impact upon rural areas, the areas where 50% of Free Will Baptist churches are located. What can we do?

We began addressing this problem five years ago in a series of articles (See nafwb.org/938). I encourage you to read or review those articles to acquaint yourself with the complexities of this issue.

Refresh Counseling. Axios noted the number of pastors who had considered quitting the ministry. The National Association began offering the Refresh Counseling Program in 2022, and to date, we have conducted more than 3,500 counseling sessions. This fulfills our belief the laborer is worthy of his hire. Several participants indicate the program helped them through burnout and enabled them to continue, even excel, in ministry.

Rekindle Coaching. Pastors, especially those in rural areas, often feel isolated. The coaching program allows pastors to work with a mentor on strategy and planning. This fulfills our belief we are not meant to minister alone. It is truly an example of how iron sharpens iron.

The Shepherding Initiative. Many churches stagnate or close when they go without a pastor. The top reason we lose churches is they cannot find a pastor. Through The Shepherding Initiative, Dr. Tim York works with laypeople to help them stay focused on the church's ministry. He trains laypeople to conduct devotions or make hospital visits.

When we first shared this problem in the March 2021 article, "Everyone's Problem," we provided guidelines for how to pray and search for pastors and deacons and how they could serve their local churches in the meantime. In short, it appears God is pushing all of us back to Ephesians 4. The ministry of the church was never meant to fall upon one person or a small handful of people. Instead, we all called to work together to edify the body.

If all of us are busy, serving in the manner God designed us (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12) while discipling and training others to follow our footsteps, Free Will Baptists will not only survive the "broken pastor pipeline," but we will thrive.

Let's stop treating church growth and ministry as "the pastor's job" and start viewing it as our shared calling. We are, and always will be, Better Together. 



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The **Free Will Baptist Foundation** recently began publishing *The Foundation Connection*, a quarterly email newsletter with updates, impact stories, and stewardship insights. Subscribe now to receive the next edition (September 2026):



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Pray for **MORE** Pastors...

What happens when we lose pastors? Without pastors, churches close or become inactive. Fewer churches means fewer places for people to worship and grow. As churches close and struggle, people quietly drift away to another church or out of church entirely. Spiritual growth declines, and membership gradually falls.

The bottom line is we need more pastors. Therefore, we must invest in pastors and pray God gives us more of them. This year, we challenge *everyone* to pray every day at 9:38 a.m., 9:38 p.m., or both! This comes from **Matthew 9:38**: "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

We are asking Free Will Baptists everywhere to pray daily God would raise up workers for His harvest. While we desperately need missionaries, teachers, and deacons, nothing is more essential to the future of our movement than seeing God call more pastors.

9:38

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*For God so loved
the world, that he
gave his only begotten
Son, that whosoever
believeth in him
should not perish,
but have everlasting
life. John 3:16*

GO MAKE DISCIPLES
MATTHEW 28:18-20

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