

September 29, 2015 • ISSUE 56

TEXAN MAGAZINE

HURRICANE RITA

A DECADE LATER

In shadow of Hurricane Katrina, second storm
blasts Texas coast, spawns providential ministry



Wedding Rings: Metal or Silicone?

If you've ever attended a traditional wedding, you have likely seen the minister hold up the rings and explain the symbolism behind them. For example, the shape of the rings—a circle—represents the never-ending commitment between the two people.

Sometimes, the minister will also reference the symbolism inherent in the rings' material composition. The use of a precious metal—typically gold—signifies the purity, value and permanence of marriage. The metal has been tested by fire and purged of impurities, and marriages likewise must be kept pure as they endure many hardships. Similarly, gold does not tarnish or fade, and neither should the couple's love toward one another. Additionally, the costliness of the ring denotes that marriage should be treated as a precious treasure and not carelessly discarded. And, finally, the strength and enduring quality of metal should symbolize the resolve and permanence that must characterize the marriage.

But does the substance of your wedding ring symbolize the substance of your marriage?

That's the question I asked myself when I saw an online ad for [silicone wedding rings](#), which are marketed to those who can't or don't want to wear traditional metal wedding rings to work or to work out because of the safety hazard. They're perfect for the mechanic who's afraid to get his ring caught on a piece of machinery and for the CrossFitter who wants to display her marital

commitment even while hoisting a kettlebell above her head.

I assume that many of those who buy a silicone ring will only wear them temporarily and then go back to their original bands, but there are actually testimonials on the site of men proposing marriage with these rubber rings, which suggests it might be the only ring they wear. But, don't worry, the rings only cost around \$20; you can get them in all different colors to accessorize with your outfit; and instead an endearing personalized inscription on the inside, you get the company's logo.

Let me be clear, I'm not bashing the use of silicone rings. I understand the practical reasons for wearing such a ring, and I celebrate those who want to wear a visual symbol of their marriage at all times. After all, there's no biblical mandate to wear a wedding ring, and the practice itself is relatively new on the timeline of human history.

I do, however, wonder if these elastic substitutes unintentionally reflect the way our culture views marriage today—cheap, flexible, temporary and disposable. While I'm sure the average couple planning their wedding these days fully expects their marriage to last, many have less hope than they let on.

I believe part of the problem for this is the romantic notions people believe about love and marriage—the kind of fairytale, star-crossed love stories found on the big screen. If you ask an engaged couple if they want their marriage to last, they will

certainly say yes. If you ask them why they think it will last, you'll probably either get blank stares or the idealistic "because we are in love."

Those who live by this latter notion should remember that no matter how many times Captain and Tennille sang "Love Will Keep Us Together," it [proved insufficient in the end](#).

I prefer to follow different advice given to me in college: "You don't fall in love; you fall in ditches. You choose to love. Love is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person."

If we want marriages that will last, we must take the vows "for better or worse ... 'til death do we part" seriously. This sometimes means standing by your commitment even when you don't feel like it. Those who enter marriage with the mindset that divorce is not an option have a much better chance of seeing it through to the end.

Enduring love requires commitment, sacrifice and the grace of God. God demonstrated the ultimate expression of this love through sending his Son ([Romans 5:8](#)), and Paul points to this as the model for marital love ([Eph. 5:22-33](#)). It's only by God's grace and through his help that we can give and receive this enduring love.

Marriages that depend on warm feelings to carry them through have the shelf life of a silicone ring. Marriages that depend on God and practice Christlike commitment and love experience the golden joy of endurance.



HURRICANE RITA

A DECADE LATER

COVER
STORY
PAGE
08

Terry Wright and a disaster relief team were in La Place, La., helping a sister church recover from Hurricane Katrina when they got the news—another storm was gaining strength in the Gulf of Mexico, and headed for their homes in Southeast Texas. They hurried home, packed up their families and joined approximately 2 million people fleeing the Category 5 Hurricane Rita barreling toward the Texas-Louisiana coast. As God would have it, their church would become a conduit of assistance impacting a nine-county area.

TEXAN MAGAZINE

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06 AT THE MOVIES

Movie critic Michael Foust reviews the second installment in the *Maze Runner* movie series, which he says suffers from poor plot and character development. He also gives brief reviews on *Everest*, *Black Mass* and *Woodlawn*.



14 Unity-themed annual meeting returns to Houston Nov. 9-10

Messengers to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention will gather in Houston this year for the convention's 18th annual meeting. The meeting, to be held Nov. 9-10 at Champion Forest Baptist Church, will follow the theme "Walking in Unity," based on Ephesians 4:1-3. Biblical exposition, times of worship and ministry testimonies will accompany business items and various committee reports during the two-day gathering slated to begin Monday evening with a message from convention president Jimmy Pritchard.

15 La Reunión Anual Se Aproxima

SBTC Hispanic Ministries director Mike Gonzales issues an invitation to the Spanish session in conjunction with the SBTC annual meeting in November.

16 Great Commission Advance 'imperative,' Page says

The needs are "glaringly obvious in our 21st-century world," SBC Executive Committee President Frank S. Page said in setting forth a Great Commission Advance 10-year initiative among Southern Baptists. The Great Commission Advance, Page said, will focus on the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' channel for national, international and state-by-state missions and ministries.

+ NATION

HOUSE OKS PPFA DEFUNDING, ABORTION SURVIVORS BILLS

The U.S. House of Representatives voted Sept. 18 to defund Planned Parenthood in the wake of the release of undercover videos providing evidence the organization trades in baby body parts.

On the same date, the House also approved legislation to protect babies who survive abortions.

House members passed the bills in the face of President Obama's promise to veto both measures.

Representatives voted 241-187 for the Defund Planned Parenthood Act, H.R. 3134. The bill would place a one-year moratorium on federal money for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA) and its affiliates while Congress investigates the organization.

The vote came after the release since mid-July of 10 secretly recorded videos that show Planned Parenthood officials discussing the sale of organs from aborted children and acknowledging their willingness to manipulate the abortion procedure to preserve body parts for sale and use. The videos also provided evidence of cutting into live babies to remove organs.

The House passed the Born-alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act, H.R. 3504, by 248-177. The proposal—which builds on the 2002 Born-alive Infants Protection Act—would require appropriate care and hospital admission for a child who lives through an abortion or attempted abortion.

Both measures will have to be passed by the Senate and signed by the president before they can become law.

[Read the story here.](#)

MARIJUANA CLAIMS FROM GOP DEBATE EVALUATED

The second 2016 Republican presidential debate included more than eight minutes of discussion on marijuana policy, with candidates differing over recreational marijuana proposals but appearing to agree in their support of medical marijuana.

"[M]any people on social media wanted us to ask about marijuana legalization," CNN moderator Jake Tapper told the candidates during the Sept. 16 event at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Semi Valley, Calif.

Following the debate, an ethicist, a legal scholar, and a pharmacy professor, each from a Baptist institution, helped clarify aspects of the marijuana policies that were discussed.

[Read the story here.](#)



CCCU ACCEPTS RESIGNATIONS OF GOSHEN, EMU

The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities announced Sept. 21 of two schools that have sparked dissension—and prompted other schools to withdraw from the council—after expanding their hiring and benefits policies to embrace same-sex marriage.

The CCCU Board of Directors announced the resignations of Goshen College in Goshen, Ind., and Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., after a CCCU board meeting. The board also appointed a task force to review CCCU categories of association to accommodate the changing face of religious liberty, CCCU President Shirley Hoogstra said in a press teleconference following the board's announcement.

"What we know is we need new categories of collaboration," Hoogstra said. "We're looking to 2015 and beyond, looking around issues of religious liberty, and we think having strong collaborations is the way forward. ... What we found is the affiliate category is widely confusing for our association."

[Read story here.](#)

POPE'S SPEECH TROUBLING, SOUTHERN BAPTISTS SAY

Pope Francis' historic address to Congress proved troubling in both its lack of clarity on moral issues and in its church-state impropriety, Southern Baptist leaders and pastors said.

The pope spoke to a joint session of Congress on Sept. 24, becoming the first head of the Roman Catholic Church to address the U.S. legislative body. His speech came on the final day of a three-day visit to Washington, D.C., that featured a White House welcoming ceremony, a parade and a mass for the canonization of a Catholic saint.

In his congressional speech, Pope Francis commented on a variety of issues but without being particularly specific on abortion and marriage.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), expressed gratitude the pope spoke to Congress "about the dignity of all human life, whether the unborn, the elderly or the immigrant, as well as the importance of the family in a free and flourishing society."

He went on to say, however, "I do think that the pope's address was an opportunity to address urgent moral issues like abortion culture and religious liberty with more clarity and directness than what was delivered."

[Read story here.](#)



STUDENT-LED PRAYER DAY CONTINUES STRONG RUN

The student-led See You at the Pole prayer initiative drew more than 1 million students globally in prayer at schools on the event's 25th anniversary Sept. 23.

While exact numbers have not been tabulated of those who gathered to pray, See You at the Pole (SYATP) has continued to grow since its 1990 birth with a handful of students in Texas. Students gathered in prayer at 7 a.m. local time around flag poles and other locations at public and private schools in the U.S. and foreign countries, event promoters said.

[Read story here.](#)

SBC COMMITTEE CANDIDATES SOUGHT BY RONNIE FLOYD

Candidates to serve on committees pivotal to the Southern Baptist Convention are being sought by SBC President Ronnie Floyd.

In addition to sending letters to SBC entity and state convention leaders, Floyd is broadening his call for candidates for several committees whose work is key to the SBC's annual meeting each year.

In his letter, Floyd explained: "As SBC president, it is my privilege and responsibility to appoint two representatives from each qualified state or territory and the District of Columbia to serve on the SBC's Committee on Committees. This Committee is responsible for nominating the Committee on Nominations, which in turn nominates trustees to the boards of the various SBC entities. I am also responsible for naming the Tellers and Credentials Committees. These two committees serve at the SBC annual meeting, counting votes and qualifying messengers, respectively.

"Appointing these committees is a daunting challenge as you can imagine," Floyd, senior pastor of Cross Church in northwest Arkansas, wrote, "and we need your help in identifying solid candidates to serve."

[Read the story here.](#)

WMU: PRAYER, HOUSING NEEDED FOR MISSIONARIES

As International Mission Board personnel who are eligible for the organization's voluntary retirement incentive prayerfully consider God's leading, Woman's Missionary Union leaders are calling for more intense prayer and support for Southern Baptist missionaries.

"Ongoing, focused prayer for our missionaries has always been a foundational component of missions discipleship through WMU," said Wanda S. Lee, executive director of national WMU. "It is both a privilege and responsibility to lift up our missionaries in prayer and so vital right now as they are making potentially life-changing decisions."

National WMU will host a special time of prayer for international missionaries during an observance of the Week of Prayer for International Missions at WMU's headquarters in Birmingham, Ala., Dec. 3.

In addition to prayer, WMU is seeking to help missionaries who decide to return to the U.S. with housing and transportation.

Missionary housing has long been a ministry provided by WMU through a password-protected database of available housing for missionaries. WMU provides counsel to those who want to learn more about starting a missionary house ministry and facilitates communication between missionaries and those who have houses available for use.

Currently, approximately 530 homes are available for long-term housing and 117 for short-term housing of missionaries made available by churches, associations and individuals in 27 states. WMU is seeking to update the database prior to posting it for missionaries to use in their search for housing if they leave the field.

[Read the story here.](#)

IMB TRANSITION TEAM ANNOUNCED FOR MISSIONARY RETIREES

International Mission Board President David Platt has announced a transition team that will focus on the practical needs of missionaries who accept the voluntary retirement incentive recently offered to personnel who are at least 50 years of age with five years of service.

The retirement incentive is the first phase to reduce IMB staff and field personnel by 600 to 800 people in response to revenue shortfalls. See related story. The goal of the plan, IMB leaders shared, is to offer as generous a voluntary retirement incentive as possible while honoring years of service and providing a smooth transition for the personnel.

"I know that this transition is not going to be easy, particularly for those who might be moving back to the U.S.," Platt told staff and missionaries during a Sept. 17 chapel service.

"We want to help as much as possible with practical needs and leverage the entire SBC family to that end," he said.

Clyde Meador, IMB's executive advisor to the president, is leading the transition team.

Meador said Southern Baptists already are responding with offers of assistance. IMB has received offers of housing, employment opportunities, vehicles, counseling and other practical expressions of support from individuals, churches, associations, state conventions, WMU, seminaries and other partners.

To best serve personnel during this time, Meador said he hopes the team will be able to connect individuals to the resources they most need. After missionaries indicate they are accepting the retirement incentive, the transition team will send them a detailed questionnaire regarding their expected needs, including housing, child education and other employment opportunities.

The transition team will work to pair specific needs with the offers of assistance from Southern Baptists that the team is receiving.

[Read the story here.](#)

FLA. BAPTIST CONV. TO REDUCE STAFF BY 47%

A reorganization of the Florida Baptist Convention staff that reduces the number of employees statewide by 47 percent—from the 115 currently employed to 61 employees—was approved by the State Board of Missions Sept. 18 at Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center.

The reorganization and downsizing was the fulfillment of a promise made by Executive Director-Treasurer Tommy Green on May 29 after being elected to the post. He stressed the need to have a responsive, lean missions organization that is decentralized, regionalized and personalized.

The downsizing will make it possible to send 51 percent of the proposed 2016 Cooperative Program Budget to the Southern Baptist Convention—a nearly 10 percent increase—and ultimately "put more missionary families on the field," he said.

[Read the story here.](#)



SUDAN CHURCH WINS COURT BATTLE FOR PROPERTY

A Christian church in Sudan has won a four-year court battle to prevent the Sudanese government from forcibly taking the church's property and giving it to Muslim investors, Morning Star News has reported.

The Administrative Court of Appeal ruled the Ministry of Guidance and Religious Endowments interfered with church matters when it appointed committees charged with turning over to Muslim investors the property of Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church in North Khartoum, Morning Star News reported Sept. 16.

The Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC) has been subject to arrests and demolition of its property during the lengthy attempted takeover. Two South Sudanese pastors had been

jailed since December 2014 and January respectively, charged with capital crimes because they supported the congregation's fight to retain its property.

Yat Michael, 49, and Peter Yein Reith, 36, both of whom have been released, could have been sentenced to death or whipping had they been convicted of the charges concocted against them by Sudan's National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). They were convicted of lesser charges on Aug. 5 and released on time served. They and their families have since relocated to a third country to protect them from Islamist retaliation.

Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church and SPEC leaders told Morning Star News they consider the Aug. 31 court ruling a step in the right direction toward ending all attempts to hand over their property to Muslim investors.

Read the story [here](#).

SCHOLARS REFLECT ON HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

Scholars from around the world gathered at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to discuss the history of Christian



persecution at the 9th annual conference for the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies.

"As the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century, we do not operate from a position of strength, but that's a good thing," said Andrew Fuller Center research associate Jeff Robinson in a concert of prayer for the persecuted church that concluded the Sept. 15-16 conference in Louisville, Ky.

"We want to remember that we're the persecuted church of Christ, and when we're persecuted, we grow," he said. "When we're at ease in Zion, we tend to decline."

Read the story [here](#).

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‘SCORCH TRIALS’ HAS AN UNINTENDED LESSON ABOUT PLANNED PARENTHOOD

ENTERTAINMENT RATING: ★★☆☆☆

FAMILY FRIENDLY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

I am sure movie makers didn't have "fetal" organ harvesting in mind when filming the science fiction thriller *Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials*. Nor were they thinking about embryonic stem cell research or any other medical studies that have pitted medical researchers against ethicists.

But as I sat and watched this intense PG-13 flick, I couldn't help but think about two of the greatest controversies of our day—the Planned Parenthood undercover videos (which involve experiments on and "harvesting" from unborn babies) and stem cell research (involving embryos).

The movie is the sequel to the first *Maze Runner* and is set in an apocalyptic Earth apparently after a series of solar storms forced everyone underground. A disease called the "flare virus" is spreading, turning people into zombie-like creatures—the Cranks. But there remains one group of people (the Gladers) who are naturally resistant to the virus, and everyone else on the planet wants to learn their secret.

So an organization appropriately known by the acronym WCKD (pronounced "wicked") sets out to study the Gladers and discover a worldwide cure. Sounds like a great idea, doesn't it? Sure, until we find out that the only way a vaccine can be made is by harvesting the blood and everything else within a

Glader—a process that kills them.

"I swore an oath to find a cure, no matter the cost," WCKD leader Ava Paige (Patricia Clarkson) says toward the end of the film.

She and her supporters make an argument that sounds oh-so-familiar if you've paid any attention to the pro-fetal harvesting arguments lately within mainstream media: This vaccine will save the lives of millions!

There are other parallels to our modern culture of death. WCKD's experiments on Gladers—not surprisingly—take place in secret, behind closed doors.

SPOILER ALERT: In the movie's final scene, a heroic Glader by the name of Thomas joins other Gladers and takes part in a battle against WCKD. WCKD wins even though Thomas survives. (A part three in the trilogy is forthcoming.)

It's a fascinating framework for a plot, but this isn't a movie I can recommend. First, it's rather dull and lacks character development. Yes, the basic plot is interesting, but it takes a way-too-long two hours to tell it. Second, the movie is visually ugly. Perhaps fans of zombie films will enjoy it, but I am not one who likes scary chase scenes. On more



than one occasion, I found myself simply looking away, not wanting to fill my mind with evil-looking junk. (I sleep better that way.) Finally, this one does contain a significant amount of language: about 50 words, including Jesus' name taken in vane at least twice.

But even without all the junk, this one is borderline boring. Kill the zombies, and give me more plot.

Post-movie discussion topics: *ethical limits of medical research; zombies—why are we so fascinated by them?*



▶ **EVEREST** (PG-13)

Based on a true story, this visually impressive disaster/thriller film recounts the events of May 1996, when eight people died trying to climb the tallest mountain in the world. *Everest* tells their stories but it also follows the lives of the few survivors, leaving us guessing throughout the 150 minutes which hikers make it out

alive. We also get to know the families of the hikers (one has a wife who is pregnant), further adding to the movie's emotional moments. British mountain climber George Mallory once was asked why he wanted to climb Everest, and he famously quipped, "Because it's there." Mallory died on the mountain, and countless others have, too. But he was only partially right.

I suspect people climb Everest simply because it's one of God's most impressive creations and because he's given us an innate drive to explore everything he has made. *Everest* contains no sexuality or coarse language. **Post-movie discussion topics:** mankind's desire to explore; our "need" for an adrenaline rush.

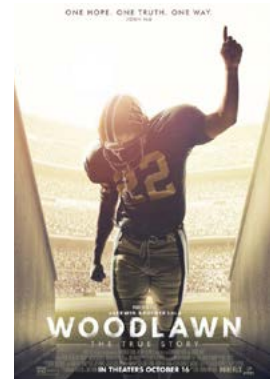


▶ **BLACK MASS** (R)

If *Black Mass* weren't based on a true story, we would discount it as simple-but-impossible Hollywood fantasy. But it's not. This violence-filled and language-ridden R-rated flick tells the real story of mobster leader James "Whitey" Bulger (Johnny Depp),

whose brother William "Billy" Bulger was the president of the Massachusetts Senate and whose long-time childhood friend was FBI agent John Connolly. Thus, during the 1970s and 80s one of the nation's most violent people had direct ties to not only big-time New England politics but also to the nation's primary federal law

enforcement agency. Worthy of a movie? Absolutely. It's just too bad that f-bombs are sprinkled into (seemingly) every single sentence and violence is used as football-like entertainment. I'd skip this one. **Post-movie topics:** violence as entertainment; our infatuation with mobs in movies.



▶ **WOODLAWN** (PG) *OPENS OCT. 16*

The latest faith-based movie from the talented Erwin brothers (*October Baby*, *Mom's Night Out*) spotlights a 1973 high school football team in Birmingham Ala., during integration. The city is on edge and the high school—Woodlawn—is on the verge of closing due to racism-induced

fight and riots. That's when a chaplain (Sean Astin) steps into the picture and asks the coach for a few minutes to talk to the newly integrated team. Amazingly, almost all of the players accept Christ, sparking a revival that spreads throughout the school and the city. Even more incredible: The story is true. The running back in the film (and real life) went on to play at

Alabama. And yes, legendary Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant (Jon Voight) makes an appearance. The best sports movies aren't about sports, and this one is in that line. **Post-movie discussion topics:** racism, revival.

*With information from Common Sense Media

WEEKEND BOX OFFICE

Sept. 18-20

Source: BoxOfficeMojo.com

Movie	Weekend Gross	Weeks in Theater
1. Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials (PG-13)	\$30,300,000	1
2. Black Mass (R)	\$23,360,000	2
3. The Visit (PG-13)	\$11,350,000	2
4. The Perfect Guy (PG-13)	\$9,640,000	2
5. Everest (PG-13)	\$7,560,000	1
6. War Room (PG)	\$6,250,000	4
7. A Walk In The Woods (R)	\$2,732,730	3
8. Mission: Impossible—Rogue Nation (PG-13)	\$2,250,000	8
9. Straight Outta Compton (PG-13)	\$1,970,000	6
10. Grandma (R)	\$1,595,820	5



HURRICANE RITA

A DECADE LATER

**IN SHADOW OF HURRICANE KATRINA, SECOND STORM BLASTS
TEXAS COAST, SPAWNS PROVIDENTIAL MINISTRY**

BY BONNIE PRITCHETT

Terry Wright and a disaster relief team were in La Place, La., helping a sister church recover from Hurricane Katrina when they got the news—another storm was gaining strength in the Gulf of Mexico, and headed for their homes in Southeast Texas.

“THE GROUPS WERE PRETTY MUCH EXHAUSTED BECAUSE THEY WERE COMING IN FROM KATRINA.”

Less than four weeks earlier Hurricane Katrina had pushed ashore in Louisiana, claiming the lives of 1,000 people there and another 200 in Mississippi. Having seen the destruction firsthand and heard the stories of hardship, Wright and the crew from the Golden Triangle Baptist Association did not have to be told twice leave. They hurried home, packed up their families and joined approximately 2 million people fleeing the Category 5 Hurricane Rita barreling toward the Texas-Louisiana coast.

Rita made landfall as a Category 3 hurricane Sept. 24, 2005, and made a beeline up East Texas, spawning some 90 tornados in the southern U.S. But almost as distressing as the storm was the calm afterward. It was too calm. The Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams that typically roll into town in the wake of a storm did not respond to the needs in East Texas with the usual speed and efficiency. Hurricane Katrina seemed to have claimed another victim.

“The groups were pretty much exhausted because they were coming in from Katrina,” said Wright, pastor of First Baptist Church in Vidor.



Hurricane Rita made landfall as a Category 3 hurricane Sept. 24, 2005, and made a beeline up East Texas, spawning some 90 tornados in the southern U.S. SBC Disaster Relief teams were already stretched thin by Hurricane Katrina, but teams rolled in and began the process of rebuilding communities in Southeast Texas.





The pastor, along with crews from the Golden Triangle Baptist Association, had made two trips to storm-ravaged La Place before being forced to evacuate their own homes. Wright said those trips were as much about helping his neighbor as they were God's means of preparing his church for Rita's aftermath. One bit of advice from the Louisiana pastors stuck with him: "You cannot wait on the government to help you. You have to help yourself."

As God would have it, FBC Vidor would become a conduit of assistance impacting a nine-county area.

The church was without electricity like most of the region but was relatively sound. They began taking in Vidor's homeless, relief volunteers and Federal Emergency Management Administration officials. But, in the days immediately following



the storm, with SBC feeding crews still on the ground in Louisiana and Mississippi, a hot meal was hard to find.

So Bettye Leslie stepped up. Her 12-hour-a-week job as coordinator for the FBC Vidor Wednesday

evening meals became an 80-hour-a-week endeavor lasting through the New Year. Initially food for the meals came from church members' freezers.

"We ate pretty good at first," Wright said, recalling how they

**“I FEEL SO LOVED.
IF THERE WAS EVER
ANYTHING I NEEDED,
MY CHURCH WOULD
BE THERE TO HELP ME.”**

enjoyed the bounty of the region supplied by its hunters and shrimpers with defrosting freezers.

As they quickly consumed that supply, help came from their sister congregations to the west. Houston’s First Baptist Church provided a generator to power parts of the church; Second Baptist Church in Houston contributed funds to buy groceries; and from October through Christmas Sagemont Church sent daily deliveries of “anything we needed.”

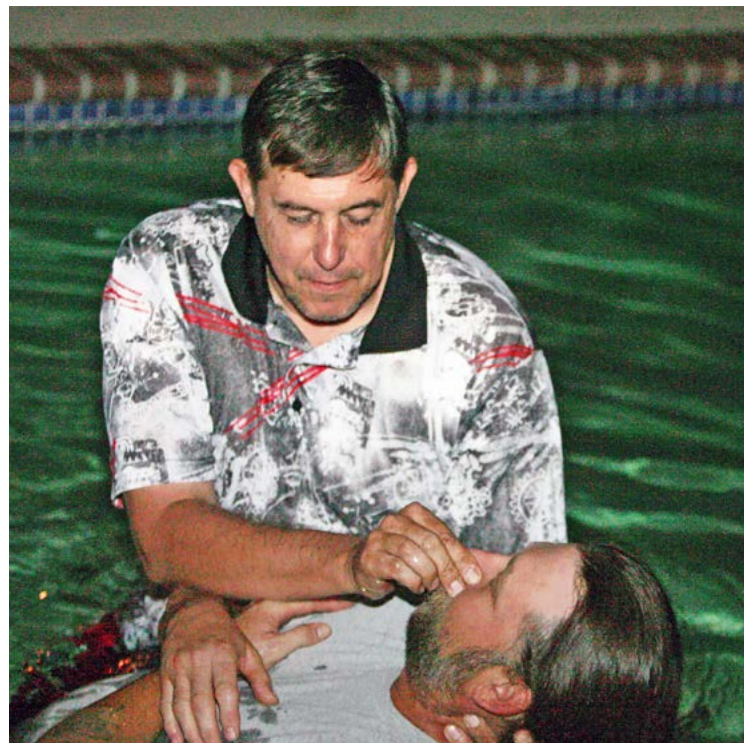
And, taking heed of his Louisiana brethren’s advice, Wright secured a warehouse where incoming supplies could be received, sorted and delivered across the region. FBC Vidor, located on Interstate 10, was easily accessible by those working and volunteering in the region. Even the Golden Triangle Baptist Association temporarily relocated to the church as their Beaumont offices were in ruins.

As the church became a focal point for those providing assistance it also drew those seeking help. And one group of people caught Wright’s attention—elderly widows who had dropped their homeowners insurance in order to meet more pressing financial demands had no means for making repairs. The women were homeless and would remain that way without help.

Because of God’s providence, a local band of believers were ready to step in. Prior to the storms the Golden Triangle Baptist Association had been in the planning stages of a new construction ministry that would build and repair churches. Those plans were



(Above) John Britt of Kirbyville embraces his daughter, Harley, during a community worship service, Sept. 30, 2005. After Britt made his conversion public, Pastor Charles Z. Burchett of FBC Kirbyville baptized him. Britt became active in helping serve victims of Hurricane Rita.





**“OUR PEOPLE
SERVED
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ON HOMES OF
PEOPLE THEY
NEVER KNEW.
THEY FED
PEOPLE.”**

put on hold after Katrina and completely altered after Rita. Nehemiah’s Vision became the ministry that coordinated and deployed teams to the poor, widowed and handicapped whose homes were damaged beyond their means to repair.

The home of Dorothy Howell, a widowed pastor’s wife and FBC Vidor Sunday school teacher, was the first to be repaired.

“I feel so loved,” said the 91-year-old Howell. “If there was ever anything I needed, my church would be there to help me.”

Howell, who lived alone in 2005, had evacuated with her daughter, Petti Barton, to Arkansas. By the time Howell returned, volunteers were

already at work on her home. She lived with a neighbor for six months while her house was under repair.

“They were just precious,” she said of one group volunteers from Pennsylvania.

Wright said the work of Nehemiah’s Vision saw not only homes, but lives restored. Some homeowners made professions of faith and others who had fallen away from God and the church returned because of the witness of the 35,000 Christian volunteers who served between 2005-2011.

During this six-year span, the non-profit organization repaired or completely rebuilt 1,200 homes in the wakes of Hurricane Rita and also 2008’s Hurricane

Ike, which caused similar devastation across Southeast Texas. Today, the ministry is officially inactive but can be



SBTC DR teams hold a Bible study while serving communities affected by Hurricane Rita.



Then-SBC President Bobby Welch preaches from the bed of a pick-up truck during an outdoor worship service in Kirbyville a week after Hurricane Rita.

up and running in a matter of hours should the need arise. But, Wright said, "I hope it never has to operate again."

Although gratified the Golden Triangle Baptist Association and Nehemiah's Vision worked so diligently to provide relief in the name of Jesus, the most significant and lingering impact

of Hurricane Rita for Wright was on the members of his own church.

"Our people served and they sacrificed. They worked on homes of people they never knew. They fed people," he said.

It had been a generation since the last storm, Hurricane Audrey in 1957, wreaked havoc

on the region. Few remained who remembered the aftermath and the necessity for ministry outside the church walls. Perhaps it took another disaster to shake loose from its moorings a church that was comfortable by the shore but desperately needed out on the stormy seas.



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Unity-themed annual meeting returns to Houston Nov. 9-10

Messengers to the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention will gather in Houston this year for the convention's 18th annual meeting. The meeting, to be held Nov. 9-10 at Champion Forest Baptist Church, will follow the theme "Walking in Unity," based on Ephesians 4:1-3. Biblical exposition, times of worship and ministry testimonies will accompany business items and various committee reports during the two-day gathering slated to begin Monday evening with a message from convention president Jimmy Pritchard.

"I am excited about our convention meetings this November," Pritchard told the TEXAN.

"I always look forward to renewing friendships, hearing how God is blessing across our state, and being encouraged by a new recognition that I am not alone in the spiritual warfare raging around us. I pray that our theme of unity will ignite a fresh passion throughout our state for renewal, revival, awakening and evangelism."

Champion Forest Baptist Church's worship team will lead in music along with a children's choir from Houston-area churches during the Monday evening session.

Tuesday morning, the annual meeting will resume with music, a panel discussion and a message from Mark Estep, senior pastor of Spring Baptist Church.



The Tuesday afternoon session will feature music from David Gentiles and the Sagemont Church worship team as well as the general business session.

The Tuesday evening session will feature a historic occasion, as the SBTC will host the Baptist Missionary Association of Texas as its special guests for a combined worship service. The West Conroe Baptist Church worship team and the Jacksonville College Choir will lead music, and a BMAT pastor will deliver a message during the session.

The annual Bible conference will precede the annual meeting Nov. 8-9, with an emphasis in "making disciple makers," based on 2 Timothy 2:2. A Spanish session will also be held Nov. 8 featuring special guest Jose Ordoñez and including a time of celebration for the things God has done through Texas ministries during the past year.

Lodging information is available at sbtexas.com/am15, including nearby hotels. When making hotel reservations, specify "SBTC" to get the discounted group rate. Messengers who might be unable to attend the annual meeting due to financial limitations may contact Heath Peloquin at the SBTC for "host home" information.

The SBTC will also provide childcare for those who pre-register their children. Parents and guardians will be able to pre-register online this fall prior to the annual meeting. Childcare is available for newborns through 9-year-old children, during meeting sessions Nov. 9-11.

Twitter users can follow the hashtag #SBTCAM15 for updates before and during this year's annual meeting. For additional updates and information, visit sbtexas.com/am15.



La Reunión Anual Se Aproxima



Iglesias Hispans de la Convención Bautista del Sur, hagan planes para asistir a la Sesión en Español de la Convención de los Bautista del Sur de Texas. Se celebrará en el FL Worship Center el domingo, 8 de noviembre de 2015 a las 6 pm en la iglesia bautista Champion Forest, 15555 Stuebner Airline Rd, Houston, TX 77069. El orador será el humorista José Ordóñez de Colombia. Este

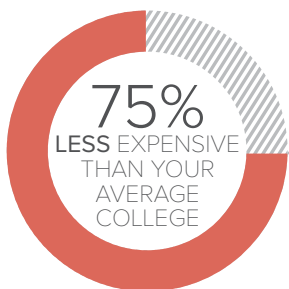
año el tema será, “Caminando en Unidad” basado en Efeios 4:1-3. Tendremos momentos de alabanzas y adoración por los grupos de alabanza de Champion Forest y Sagemont en Español y después de la sesión tendremos un tiempo de compañerismo.

Esta reunión anual es un tiempo para que las congregaciones de habla hispana puedan celebrar y ser inspirados por la Palabra de Dios

y ser animados para alcanzar a un pueblo perdido.

También hagan planes para asistir a la Reunión Anual de la Convención de los Bautista del Sur de Texas (SBTC) que serán los días 9 y 10 de noviembre, el lunes después de la Sesión en Español.

–Mike Gonzales, Director de los Ministerios Hispans SBTC



SOUTHWESTERN

CHALLENGE YOUR BRAIN,
NOT YOUR BUDGET





SBC Executive Committee President Frank Page describes the 10-year Great Commission Advance initiative during his address to trustees, Sept. 21. PHOTO BY MORRIS ABERNATHY

Great Commission Advance 'imperative,' Page says

By Art Toalston

NASHVILLE

The needs are "glaringly obvious in our 21st-century world," Frank S. Page said in setting forth a Great Commission Advance 10-year initiative among Southern Baptists.

"The need for a larger mission force, not a smaller one, is greater than ever," Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee, said during the opening session of the EC's Sept. 21-22 meeting in Nashville.

The Great Commission Advance, Page noted, will focus on the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' channel for national, international and state-by-state missions and ministries.

"The need for evangelistic church plants ... is greater than ever, as our own continent is more lost than ever before," said Page, speaking at the five-year point of his service as EC president.

"The need for excellent theological education is more necessary now than ever before. The need for an ethical voice in our society and our culture is certainly more crucial than ever before," Page said. "The need for

missions education, the need for godly resources and assistance to our churches and our pastors is absolutely imperative. ...

"We need to have a Great Commission Advance, and the best way to fund it is through the Cooperative Program," Page said.

The 10-year emphasis, now in development with

SBC entity and state convention partners, will culminate with the 100th anniversary of the Cooperative Program's founding in 1925.

The Great Commission Advance, Page said, will provide pastors and churches with ongoing encouragement "to look at the wisdom of supporting missions and ministries through the Cooperative Program. We're always seeking ways to improve it, to review it. However, its underlying principles, we believe, are sound.

"Through the Cooperative Program, we definitely are not alone," Page stated. "That is the theme of this

emphasis: We are not alone. I truly believe that often-quoted phrase: We can do more together than we can do separately."

Several thousand churches have embraced the 1% CP Challenge to increase their giving to Southern Baptist

"The need for a larger mission force, not a smaller one, is greater than ever."

causes by 1 percentage point of their yearly budgets, Page reported.

“But I think it’s also time to call our churches to a 1% increase in baptisms and a 1% increase in stewardship,” he said. “We’re seeing less money given to the Cooperative Program because we have less people in our churches. And those that are in the churches are giving less than ever before.

“We must approach these issues with great, great purposefulness.”

Page said seven key objectives will undergird the Great Commission Advance:

Prayer: “We must undergird a renewed commitment to Cooperative Program missions with coordinated prayer that invites God’s blessing and unites our churches and our entities in a Great Commission Advance,” he said.

SBC President Ronnie Floyd of Arkansas has “beaten this drum over and over, and exemplified it for us and encouraged us in perhaps more ways than we’ve ever seen before,” Page said. “The need is greater than ever, and a Great Commission Advance will only occur when people are praying to our great Lord.”

Vision: “We must communicate a renewed, clear and compelling vision of what the Cooperative Program is and what it is not for both present and future generations,” Page said.

“We cannot scream a tired announcement louder and louder over and over,” he said, recounting that he challenges young pastors “to study the Cooperative Program and if, at the end of the day, you don’t like

it, do something else. I believe if you study it thoroughly and accurately, you’ll find it is still, even with all its weaknesses, the most efficient and effective way to do missions and ministries around the world.”

Responsibility: “We must teach every willing Southern Baptist in every Southern Baptist church to embrace a personal responsibility for the Great Commission, to a balanced Acts 1:8 strategy that values cooperation with multiple SBC mission partners,” Page said, referencing Jesus’ call in Acts 1:8 for his followers to witness to their faith in their local communities and regions as well the continent and world in which they live.

Positioning: “We must effectively position the Cooperative Program as the foundational means for SBC churches to implement that intentional Acts 1:8 strategy,” Page said.

“There are many other great missions opportunities out there,” he said. Yet, the decline in support of the Cooperative Program over the years “is often due to a church’s involvement in its own mission work. We’re not against that. Every church I’ve ever pastored did its own mission work,” he said. “We believe the issue is balance, and we believe God can provide for both.”

Partnership: “We must renew full trust and collaborative Cooperative Program partnership among national SBC entities and state

conventions,” Page said. “We have begun an aggressive foundational strategy with a national consultant and our state partners ... for improvement, enlistment and retention of churches” in support of the Cooperative Program, he said. “Our North American Mission Board, our International Mission Board have joined with us in this process. ... We are not alone and we need to work together.”

Customization: “We must translate and customize cooperative missions in the convention to key audiences, sustaining positive relationships and dialogue with each of those audiences,” Page said.

Stewardship: “We must challenge every Southern Baptist to a biblical standard of stewardship and a renewed culture of generosity,” Page said.

SBC leaders are “calling on every Southern Baptist, every Southern Baptist church, every Southern Baptist entity and partner to be a part of a Great Commission Advance, so that we can do more evangelism, more in church planting, more in church strengthening, more in missions,” he said. “We want to see every man, woman, boy and girl hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Once Southern Baptists launched the Cooperative Program 90 years ago, “God has used it to do things that no other denomination has ever seen,” Page said. “As we approach that 100-year mark, may it be stronger than it has ever been before, may there truly be a Great Commission Advance.”



Imagine the Message

Nero blamed Christians for the burning of Rome. He retaliated by burning Christians. He justified his persecution and hatred for the early Christian church by campaigning a message that they brought fire and destruction to the great city. Such a medium to carry the message yielded centuries worth of cruelty and malice to the followers of Jesus.

In today's world, messages are carried by many mediums, many yielding results of chaos, violence, and hatred. We have been bombarded with a litany of hashtags, blogs and even picket signs. Yet, the one message that could yield peace, unity and hope is largely not heard or even seen. Have you ever considered what it would take for the church to be the polarizing voice that is needed within the spiritual wilderness we are now in? I believe that our upcoming annual meeting is poised to be such a meeting that can ready the churches in Texas to be both vocal and visual in their presentation of the gospel. Here are a few reasons why my church and I are attending this year's annual meeting and why you and your church need to make the Nov. 9-10 meeting in Houston a priority.

Walk in Unity. This year's theme is one that every Texas Baptist must endorse, not because it is a great theme but because it is a biblical mandate. We are called to walk together in unity. This unity reveals to the rest of the world the worth of our calling and the power and efficacy of the gospel (Eph 4:1-6).

If the church could come together unified, no longer divided or segregated as our nation has become, we could provide the public witness and the bold proclamation that every life matters because every person is made in the image of God and Christ died for all. A nation divided does not mean that the church too must be divided. Imagine the message this annual meeting could present—not "White" churches, "African American" churches, "Asian" churches or "Hispanic" churches, but redeemed races knitted together by the Spirit of God through the peace of God, who are now his church.

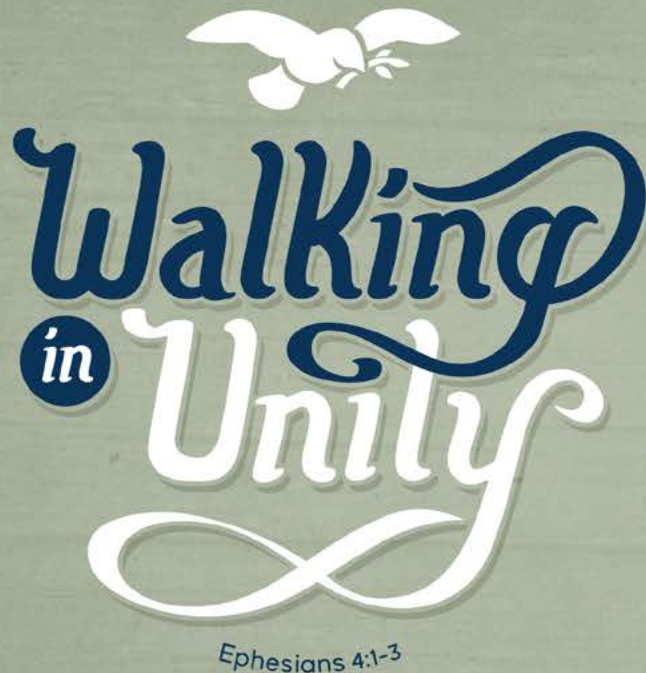
The Power of Prayer. Texas has been prayed over. This upcoming annual meeting has been saturated in prayer. SBTC Executive Director Jim Richards, prayer strategist Ted Elmore and SBTC President Jimmy Pritchard have traveled all around the state, conducting prayer meetings for the sake of revival in our churches, an awakening in our state, and the power of God to be present at our annual meeting. They have paved the way and set the example for us in prayer, and now it is our opportunity to come alongside them and pray for the same. We have tried to make our voices heard on so many platforms, but the One who has the power to bring righteousness and justice, his ear we must reach. Imagine the message this annual meeting could present—all races present, crying out to the Father for healing, for salvation, for hope, for peace, for Jesus.

Encouragement to Stay Faithful. It was not long ago that some pastors

in Houston received subpoenas for their sermons, notes and any other document that might have spoken against the HERO gender ordinance. The rally around these pastors by churches across the country was phenomenal. Our gathering in Houston is poised to be such a rally. The time is coming where being a Christian in America is going to come at a price. We need each other to stand fast, to provide accountability and to encourage one another to press forward. Imagine the message this annual meeting could present—all races interlocking arm-in-arm for the purpose of holding each other up, encouraging one another to stay faithful to the gospel message and to stand firmly rooted in Christ.

It is time that we stop waiting for the politicians, news anchors or weathermen to give us some news that is good. You and I have heard the "Good News," experienced this news and have been changed by it for the good. Now is the time for us to come together to boldly display the supernatural work of the gospel message and the unmatched love of Jesus Christ. Imagine the message that we could proclaim—diverse local churches coming together as the unified body of Christ, proclaiming "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:5-6). Imagine the message if you were there.

—Joshua Crutchfield is pastor of First Baptist Church of Trenton.



Annual Meeting & Bible Conference

November 8-10, 2015 Champion Forest Baptist Church

15555 Stuebner Airline Rd • Houston, TX 77069

Meals

Ministry Cafe

Monday, November 9

Reach Houston Dinner

Monday, November 9

President's Luncheon

Tuesday, November 10

Hotels

Comfort Inn

3555 FM 1960 W
Houston, Tx 77068
281.444.5800
Rate: \$115
Cut-Off: October 16

Residence Inn

7311 W Greens Road
Houston, Tx 77064
832.237.2002
Rate: \$120
Cut-Off: October 30

Holiday Inn Express

4434 FM 1960
Houston, Tx 77068
281.866.0500
Rate: \$120
Cut-Off: October 25

Candlewood Suites

8719 FM 1960 W
Houston, Tx 77070
832.237.7300
Rate: \$130
Cut-Off: October 9

Please specify SBTC for group rates when making any hotel reservations.

sbtexas.com/am15

Questions? Contact Ashlee Garcia
agarcia@sbtexas.com or call 817.552.2500