



THE BAPTIST MESSAGE

February 25, 2021

Volume 136 • Issue No. 3

John 3:16

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Supreme Court refuses former president's appeal, ending lawsuit against LC

By Staff
LC News

PINEVILLE, La. (LCNews) – During the past four years, former Louisiana College President Joe Aguillard has filed numerous lawsuits against his former employer. On Jan. 11, the U.S. Supreme

Court put a stop to his federal claims attack campaign.

With its refusal to hear the case, the High Court upheld all the federal judges' decisions in Louisiana College's favor. Aguillard made claims of mistreatment and discrimination, including



Aguillard

under the Civil Rights Act and Americans with Disabilities Act. None of his claims made it to trial.

"These claims and suits were worthless when filed and have been shown to be nothing more than a vengeful attempt to hurt LC," said

LC counsel Steve Oxenhandler of the Gold Weems law firm.

Aguillard was fired for cause on March 31, 2016, after a Faculty Committee and the College's Executive Committee found him guilty of multiple acts of miscon-

See LAWSUIT, page 6

Ray Swift named director of pastoral leadership for Louisiana Baptists

By John Kyle
Louisiana Baptist communications director

ALEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) — Ray Swift accepted the invitation of Louisiana Baptist Executive Director Steve Horn to become



Swift

the director of pastoral leadership for Louisiana Baptists.

Swift, who currently serves as the administrative pastor for the First

Baptist Church in Lafayette, will assume his new role on March 1, 2021.

"Ray has a broad experience in ministry including serving as a senior pastor and a bi-vocational minister," said Horn. "I'm certain Ray will be a tremendous asset to Louisiana Baptist pastors."

Swift fills a position

See SWIFT, page 7



Submitted photo

Dustin Lee and his daughter Micah embrace after her baptism Feb. 14 at First Baptist Church in West Monroe. Micah and three other children were baptized during "Wear Red Sunday" when youngsters wore red shirts to proclaim their love for Jesus.

A love beyond compare on Valentine's Day 2021

By Brian Blackwell
Message staff writer

WEST MONROE, La. (LBM) – Feb. 14 was more than a holiday for Dustin Lee and his six-year-old daughter, Micah, and greater than the small expressions of love exchanged through cards and small gifts among their family.

Instead, it was a day that marked the love of the Father for His child.

A month after confessing her sins and asking Christ into her life, the youngster proclaimed that commitment publicly as her father baptized her to affirm her adoption as a child of God.

"Micah had questions for a while and on the first Sunday night in January she told my wife, Alisha, and me she was ready," Lee, minister to children at First West, told the *Baptist Message*, "Right there in our home, we got the privilege of sitting with her as she said she was a sinner and asked God in her heart. As dads our highest calling and privilege is to pray for our children and

walk alongside them in their faith journey. This extends to the time from before they accept him to when they grow more to become a disciple of Him."

Micah was joined by three other children for baptism during "Wear Red Sunday" at First West. During the service, children wore red shirts to proclaim their love for Jesus.

"I am so thankful for our parents leading well during this season," Pastor Michael Wood said. "They have been so intentional as the primary disciplers of their children. It has been a great thing to see the fruit of that time as evidenced by many children coming to faith in Christ and following Him in baptism."

Since March 2020, First West has resorted to creative measures to reach children and in turn has seen 14 of them baptized. Also, an additional 100 volunteers have stepped up to serve in a variety of roles in the children's ministry, which had seen a 30 percent increase in

See LOVE, page 6

Johnston launches ministries to offer prayer, hope

By Brian Blackwell
Message staff writer

COVINGTON, La. (LBM) – Jay Johnston, a long-time Louisiana Baptist minister and founder of Jay Johnston Ministry,

has launched two webinars designed to encourage others to pray more fervently and to be reminded that Christ is the hope to endure.

Launched in early February, both webinars

are free and offered on his website, jayjohnston.org. "How to Pray" airs at 8 p.m. Sundays, and "The Hope Call" occurs at noon every Tuesday.

See JOHNSTON, page 5

Leslie Allen

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Praying mawmaw shaped Jason Lovins for life

By Brian Blackwell
Message staff writer

SHREVEPORT, La. (LBM) – Contemporary Christian musical artist Jason Lovins has never met his dad, but the love shown by his mother and grandmother sustain him, he said Jan. 26.

At 15 years old, his mother was raped and did not realize she was pregnant until after a visit to her doctor. The news shocked the family, but they supported Lisa's choice to go through with the pregnancy.

"I had a praying mawmaw who said we're going to go to church and we're going to pray," Lovins shared with Louisiana Baptists during the sec-

ond day of the 2021 Evangelism Conference at Summer Grove Baptist Church in Shreveport. "And that's what they did."

"If you would have heard her tell the story, she would have made it sound so simple," he explained. "And I understand that it couldn't have been that easy. But, you see, my



Brian Blackwell photo

Jason Lovins, the contemporary Christian musical artist, told the crowd at the 2021 Evangelism Conference that his praying grandmother helped to shape his life.

Jo, with a faith that helped guide the family through-

grandmother very much understood how big God is. She believed that He is so big, in fact, that He wasn't surprised by me."

Lovins, the lead singer for the Jason Lovins Band of Ashland, Ky., credited his grandmother, Mary

out the ordeal.

"She believed with all of her heart these things that we read in Jeremiah that He formed me in my mother's womb and that He had a plan for me," he said. "So, for her and her 15-year-old daughter, they had some choices that they had to make. She told me 'I had Christian people tell me, 'Now Mrs. Lovins in the case of rape nobody will be upset with you if you allowed your 15-year-old daughter to have an abortion.'"

"I'm thankful I had a praying mawmaw who wasn't listening to the world," he said. "She was listening to the One who created the world."

Lovins said throughout his childhood his family showered him with the love of Christ.

"My family made it very clear to me at a young age that 'We don't even know who your dad is; but you have a heavenly father who loves you more than you will ever know,'" he said. "And they would just continue to remind me that over and over and over. And it's always been enough."

His grandmother has passed, but Lovins seeks to

See LOVINS, page 4

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TIM LEE

Tim Lee served his country in Vietnam where both of his legs were severed by a land mine and left him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. He pastored for five years before surrendering to the full-time ministry of evangelism. He is a protector of freedom having traveled hundreds of thousands of miles to help preserve the foundation on which our country was built.

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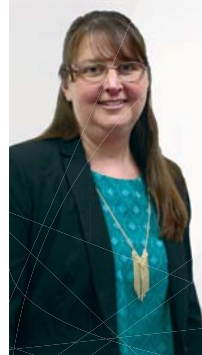
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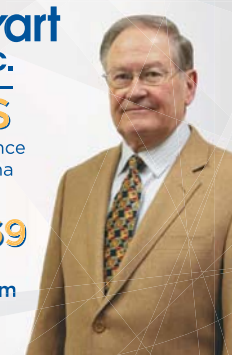
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LBC Women to 'Embrace' purpose at FBC Pineville

By **Brian Blackwell**
Message staff writer

PINEVILLE, La. (LBM) – Andrea Lennon, a Little Rock, Arkansas-based writer and speaker, will challenge ladies attending the upcoming Louisiana Baptist women's missions and ministry celebration to embrace their God-given purpose.

Scheduled for March 20 at First Baptist Church in Pineville, "Embrace" is an event for women of all cultures and generations to realize their God-given value and purpose.

"Embrace, like most everything else, has been reinvented several times since last year's canceled event," Louisiana Baptists women's missions and ministry strategist

Janie Wise told the *Baptist Message*. "But I am convinced that we must have presence and that presence must not only center on Bible study, worship, inspiration and a gathering, it must be a time for the individual woman to have opportunity for spiritual growth and personal development."

This year, because of COVID-19 protocols, Embrace will be a hybrid experience that will allow participants to attend in-person or via livestream.

Following the March 20 event, the experience will continue with pre-recorded breakout conferences available online March 22 through April 30 for all registered guests.

Breakout sessions will include such topics as spiritual growth, personal development, setting and maintaining spiritual goals, mental health and wellness, contentment and thriving in ministry during difficult times.

The event kicks off at 8:15 a.m. with registration, though a Baptist Nursing Fellowship breakfast for nurses and other health care professionals will take place at 7:15 a.m.

Embrace will include general sessions featuring prayer, music, testimonies, Bible study, uplifting messages, a panel featuring missionaries and the state Woman's Missionary Union business session.

Alayasia White, the

worship leader from Grace Community Church in Baton Rouge, will lead times of praise. Her husband, Titus, is the GCC pastor.

For those unable to attend the event in-person, the conference will be livestreamed. Visit <https://louisianabaptists.org/event/2021-embrace/> to participate online.

"Embrace" is sponsored by Louisiana Baptists' Women's Missions and Ministry and partially funded by the Cooperative Program.

The registration deadline is March 11 and includes lunch. The cost to attend in-person is \$30, live-stream for \$20 and an additional \$10 for the breakfast.

For more information, e-mail wmm@louisianabaptists.org or call 318.448.3402.



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Louisiana Baptists to return to Brazil in 2021

By Brian Blackwell
Message staff writer

SOROCABA, Brazil

(LBM) – COVID-19 travel restrictions caused the cancellation of last year's annual Louisiana Baptist-led

mission trip to Brazil, but plans are moving forward to return to the country this summer.

While many unknowns face the team, trip coordinator David Denton is confident God has prepared the field for a spiritual harvest in a country searching for hope.

"COVID has reminded us we don't know tomorrow but we are hopeful in the truest sense," Denton told the Baptist Message. "We are planning weekly and monthly and trusting in God's providence."

Denton, pastor of Highland Baptist Church in New Iberia, said the team will participate in the usual projects that include construction of chapels for local congregations, evangelism on the streets, drama performances and Vacation Bible School. But he offered that the pandemic has brought additional ministry opportunities because of high unemployment, rising food prices and restrictions on meeting inside church facilities.

These new opportunities include funding food packages for families in need (\$23 each) and donating food for local pastors and their families. Denton said more than \$6,000 has been raised for far and asked those who might not be able to go on the trip to participate by making donations.

The last time a team was able to travel to Brazil, 2019,

56 participants led 1,835 Brazilians to the Lord. These new believers were turned over to local pastors for discipleship toward spiritual health and growth.

The team will leave for Brazil July 9 and return July 20.

Most of the team's work will take place in Sorocaba, which, with a population of 645,000, ranks as the eighth largest city in the state of Sao Paulo.

The cost is \$2,400 for the mission trip and \$2,900 for team members who choose to extend the trip to include a two-day excursion to Iquacu Falls before returning home. Costs include housing, meals, airfare, daily transportation, airport transfers, insurance, tips and team t-shirts.

Participants will need to be tested for COVID-19, and be negative for the disease, within 72 hours of leaving the United States. The same process will be required to depart Brazil. The price for a COVID-19 test in Brazil is \$23 and is not included in the cost of the trip.

Denton urges all participants to take the vaccine, if available.

"I understand the concern that many have concerning travel, especially international travel," said Denton. "Prepare yourself by getting the vaccine and pray about going with us."

For more information on serving in Brazil, call 337.359.7689, or email denton@hbcni.org. Those unable to travel to Brazil can help by sending donations to Beyond the Walls, 607 Victory Drive, New Iberia, LA 70563.

ECON from page 2

honor her by sharing the courageous story of how he was given life when his mother could have made another choice.

"This mawmaw I talk about all the time, we were very close," Lovins said. "She was just remarkable in so many ways. You couldn't have a conversation with her for more than a few seconds and, somehow, she would point you to Jesus. That's just who she was."



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JOHNSTON

from page one

"We all face life-dominating issues, and through Christ we can experience hope and victory no matter the problems we face today," Johnston told the *Baptist Message*. "'My hope is to share resources and direct people to local churches and get them connected. If God will use this as a force to encourage people, then I am all about it. It's for His glory. I want to be available to Him as an instrument and be faithful.'"

Johnston said God created a burden in his heart to start the webinars after frequent visits with others in Louisiana and phone calls with others in surrounding states. Most people he engaged with indicated they were discouraged and needed direction.

"Just recognizing a sense of hopelessness among people and be-

ing a spiritual leader in the community, I knew I needed to do something," he said. "As I began praying, I felt impressed that maybe I could share hope in Christ through some form of technology where I network with prayer leaders, counseling professionals and enlist people to share testimonies of hope, share Scripture and pray with people.

Through this time of searching, I have launched a webinar on prayer and the hope call."

HOW TO PRAY

Through his years of ministry, Johnston said that he had encountered many faithful prayer warriors who stressed the importance of talking with God each day. Johnston has applied what he learned to a weekly webinar where he

discusses laying a prayer foundation, prayers found in Scripture and lessons learned from Jesus' prayers in John 17.

"There is a lot of heritage amongst Southern Baptists in prayer," Johnston said. "Some of those who left this legacy were pastors, some were missionaries, some were seminary professors, and some were just faithful, praying people. I hope to help fan that flame and encourage other people to pray for people, churches, families, cities, and neighborhoods, for the lost, for leaders, for America, and the world. We need to be a praying people, our churches need to be praying churches, and I desire to see God use this work to build a foundation and attitude for prayer with the awareness that we can pray anytime and anywhere."

Johnston said he is thankful for those he has met who value prayer, such as a coffee shop

owner who heard of his vision and offered to promote his webinar.

"As I talked with her, she said, 'I am all about that. These young folks who work here, the older folks that come in, I am listening to them all the time, and they are asking, 'Is there any hope?' and I direct them to the Lord.' She is a faithful believer in Jesus Christ. She told me she would pass out my cards in the coffee shop and get them to other places because we need this. May we have others who will share that same vision."

HOPE CALL

During his years as a pastor, Johnston has recognized that so many people carry heavy loads, he said. So he created the Hope Call webinar to inspire, inform and encourage others who face life-dominating issues. Each week he features individuals who share

testimonies of how God changed their lives and gave them hope to continue living for Christ.

He said multiple Christian counseling centers around the state and nation have agreed to promote Hope Call.

"I see both of these webinars as a resource for individuals, families, church leaders, pastors, and community leaders," he said. "As I carry out this work, my prayer is that I can introduce Jesus to those without him and equip those who already have a personal relationship with Him so they can go and share the Hope of Christ with others. Everywhere we go, people need to know someone loves them and cares about them. So may God use this work to multiply and send forth His people to love Him and to love others. Jesus is our hope, and the Hope Call lets people know of the Hope and love they can find in Jesus."



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Love from page one

attendance on Sundays right before COVID-19 restrictions were implemented.

Overall, since March, the church that averages more than 2,500 for Sunday morning worship has seen 42 baptized and many more are planning to be baptized, Lee said.

Throughout the pandemic, Life Group leaders have continued to contact

members and guests through phone calls, text messages and delivery of meals, balloons and care packages. The church also has hosted events such as a drive-in movie night at its West Monroe and Fairbanks campuses; a park outreach that included a ventriloquist and catered Chick-fil-A meals; and, delivery of Easter eggs to nearly 500 homes.

Lee said none of that would be possible without a dedicated army of volunteers and church staff.

"People are very appreciative of all we have done," he said. "Now that people are home more than ever, a simple act of kindness goes a long way. As we have gone through COVID-19 we have faced something we haven't dealt with before. It's hard and at times scary, but our trust is in the Lord, and we know that God has called us to be creative and pursue

Him with our whole hearts."

But even more, Lee is thankful for the way the entire congregation has embraced reaching their neighbors, including the next generation.

"It's incredible to see how the Lord is working," Lee said. "It's not just one person and is definitely not just me. It takes a God movement and takes the whole church praying."

Garrah Leshe, whose daughter, Viv, was baptized Jan. 10, said she is grateful for

how the church has strengthened the faith of her family. Viv turned to Christ Nov. 16 and was excited to publicly declare her faith in Christ during a day which featured activities based off the movie "Frozen."

Even though the heater was not functioning inside the baptistery, Viv was adamant on participating.

"Though the waters were freezing, nothing could erase the smile on her face or mine that morning," she said. "I could not have been more proud or more thankful to know that we will all be together in Heaven one day. I am so thankful for all of the Godly influences on her life from our family, friends and church leaders. I cannot wait to see all of the amazing things God has in store for her."

Lawsuit

from page one

duct detrimental to Louisiana College, including attempting to undermine new President Rick Brewer. At that time, he was serving as President Emeritus of LC, a position he assumed in Spring 2015, after being removed as president. During his tenure, the College's accreditation was put in jeopardy and serious financial pressures ensued from decisions and lawsuits generated from his actions.

"Despite these challenges, we celebrate all the blessings LC has experienced during this ordeal," said Chairman of the Board of Trustees Eddie Wren. "The College continues to experience enrollment growth, expansion of donor support, and the refurbishment of facilities campus-wide."

Although the federal cases are over, there are cases that remain in the State of Louisiana court system. All state court cases that have been settled have been decided in LC's favor, and Aguillard has twice been ordered to pay the College's attorney and court cost.

"This sad chapter in the history of a storied institution is finally drawing to a close," said Charles Weems, LC's counsel in the state court litigation, "and it's none too soon."

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Amy's experience also includes working with a Christian continuing care retirement community as well as serving on the Speakers Bureau for the Alzheimer's Association. She has written a number of articles on older adult ministry and she is the author of the book, *Baby Boomers and Beyond: Tapping the Ministry Talents and Passions of Adults over 50*.



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Swift from page one

vacated by the retirement of the late Bill Robertson in December of 2019.

During a specially called meeting of the Louisiana Baptist Convention Executive Board Administrative Committee, Horn shared he immediately began the search for Robertson's successor upon his retirement but when the pandemic hit, he was hesitant to proceed due to travel restrictions and potential budget implications.

Horn said although he was not "pressing the gas pedal" in searching for a new director, he also had not been sitting idly by. "As the year progressed and I saw the Lord's provision through His churches, I felt it was time to move forward

in filling this important position."

As the pastoral leadership team director, Swift will be responsible for strategic planning, leadership development, consulting churches regarding church health, and assisting ministers, their families, and churches in need.

"Even though there is a sincere sadness about transitioning from ministry in the local church after 33 years, I am very excited for this new phase of ministry," said Swift. "I look forward to reaching out to all the pastors and churches in our state to love on them, listen to them, lead them, and lift them up in the work the Lord has called them to."

Born in Oklahoma, Swift

was brought up in a pastor's home and was introduced to the Gospel at a young age. However, it wasn't until a conversation with his Sunday School teacher when

he was 16 that he trusted Christ. Swift believes God also called him to ministry at that time, but it wasn't until 10 years later that he surrendered to that call.

Swift is a graduate of Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma, and Southwestern Baptist

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Swift from page 7

Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He has served churches in Oklahoma, Kansas and Louisiana. He is certified in the FAITH witnessing program and also is a certified chaplain for the North American Mission Board.

During his ministry, Swift has been active in denominational life serving on various associational and state convention committees in Oklahoma and Louisiana, including the President's 2020 Commission in 2013. He also served

on the Nominating Committee for the Southern Baptist Convention.

Swift and his wife Diana will celebrate 29 years of marriage in April and have three children.

As he prepares to assume his new role, Swift said he knows pastors are feeling the brunt of the current pandemic and believes

God has placed a strategy on his heart for helping them.

"I want to let them know they are loved. I want to sit down and talk face-to-face and receive what is on their hearts and pray for them. I want to do all I can to encourage them and help them to advance the Gospel."

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Scripture Crypto

The Scripture Crypto is a Bible verse in which one letter has been substituted for another, thus encoding the verse. To find out what the verse is, you must determine what each letter is a substitute for. An "a," for example, may stand for a "t" in this week's issue of the Scripture Crypto. Next week, "a" could stand for a "d." Each week, each letter is different. Solve by trial and error. The answer will be given next week. Note: All numerals, such as those in the scripture reference after the verse, are spelled out.

H VEVIB NZM SZGS IVXVRE VW GSV TRUG, VEV M HL

NRM RHGVI GSV HZNV LMV GL ZMLG SVI, ZH TLLW

HGVDZ IWH LU

URIHG KVGVI ULFI:GVM

Clues:

T = G; L = O

Answer to January 28 Scripture Crypto:
First Samuel twenty-five:eleven

EDITOR'S NOTE: Do you have a Revival, Homecoming, a new pastor, a community outreach or a concert? The Baptist Message would love to share your church news with the rest of the state. It is very easy to do, just send in your information (who, what, where and when) to philip@baptistmessage.com or call 318.449.4345. To get your event in the paper, please submit your information three weeks prior to the event.

ON THE MOVE

- **Byron Comish** is the interim pastor at First Baptist Church, Springfield.
- **Nick, wife Kara, Watts** is the new minister to students at First Baptist Church, Lafayette.
- **Juri Thompson** is the new youth minister at Cheniere, West Monroe.

REVIVAL

- Sweetwater Baptist Church, Quitman: **Revival**, February 28-March 3. Evangelist: **Bill Britt**. Pastor: Wilton Wall.
- Ouachita Baptist Church, West Monroe: **Revival**, March 7-10. Evangelist: **Bill Britt**. Pastor: Mike Holloway.
- Louisiana College, Pineville: Chapel, March 9-11, Evangelist: **Chip Luter**.
- Lonestar Baptist Church, Pitkin: **Reviv-**

al, March 7-10, Marh 7, 11 a.m. & 6 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. Evangelist: **Sam Moore**. Music Evangelist: Arlen Smith. Lord's Ambassadors of DeRidder will provide speech music on March 7. Pastor: John Elliott.
- First Baptist Church, Robeline: **Revival**, March 14-24. Evangelist: **Sam Moore**. Pastor: Brian Ray.
- Open Door Baptist Church, Ragley: **Revival**, March 21-24. Evangelist: **Bob Pitman**. Pastor: Sonny Simpson.

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- **Under shepherd** seeking a church body to love and care for. Please call David Cox at 318.461.2526 or 318.461.9388.
- First Baptist Church, Vivian: **Man to Man**, March 20, 5 p.m. Speaker: **Billy Weatherall from Christ Fit Gym**. Music: **Steven and Stan of Solid Ground Ministries**. Pastor: Brett Puckitt.
- **Annual Gulf Coast Music Celebration** at Bayou Vista Baptist Church, March 21, 6 p.m. Pastor: Steven Kelly.

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Biden mandates slight women athletes, imperil unborn

By Will Hall

Message executive editor

WASHINGTON (LBM) – Newly sworn in President Joe Biden is on a record pace for signing executive orders, nearly doubling (22) the first week mandates issued by the last seven presidents before him, combined (13), according to the Federal Register.

But, more importantly, at least two of the mandates are controversial, with one nega-

tively impacting Title IX, a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination “on the basis of sex” in education programs, a law which has been essential in elevating women’s sports in schools; and another that eviscerates protections of the unborn to people of color abroad, by rescinding what is known as the Mexico City Policy, which prohibited foreign aid from being spent on performing or promoting abortions.

CULTURALNEWS

Specifically, EO 13988 mandates that biological males who identify themselves as transgender -- without having hormone treatments or other medical procedures -- be allowed to compete against biological girls, stating these transgender athletes cannot be denied “access to the restroom, the locker room, or school sports” of girls.

A corollary action, EO 14004, overturned a previous military policy that prevented the recruiting of transgender as well as banned the use of federal funds to pay for sex reassignment surgery. Now, transgender military members may wear male or female attire. Likewise, they are eligible to have controversial medical procedures despite research showing such “transitioning” efforts do not work in terms of providing the mental health improvements sought.

Meanwhile, in a memo-

randum to agency heads, the president revoked the Mexico City Policy -- first implemented by Ronald Reagan in 1984 and expanded by Donald Trump in 2017 -- to remove any pro-life conditions to foreign aid provided via non-governmental organizations. Additionally, he withdrew the United States from the Geneva Consensus Declaration, a 2020 document signed by 34 countries that promoted pro-family policies worldwide.

According to the *Baptist Press*, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention described Biden’s executive actions as “a mixed bag,” calling some of the policies “praiseworthy, as they accord with the convictions and biblical principles of Southern Baptists,” but conceding that “some of the administrative actions raise concerns.”

Specifically, the ERLC opposed Biden’s LGBT order expanding protections for “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” beyond employment which creates “a host of civil liberty problems.” Likewise, the ERLC rejected Biden’s freeze on any Trump Administration regulations that had not yet taken effect, citing concerns that the move would affect a policy that protected faith-based child-welfare provid-

ers. Additionally, the ERLC strongly objected to Biden’s rescission of the Mexico City Policy.

However, the ERLC supported Biden’s Jan. 12 memorandum to governmental departments requiring them “to preserve and fortify DACA,” a 2012 immigration policy (Obama/Biden), “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.” Applicants must meet age, continuous residency and education or military requirements, as well as not pose a risk to public safety or national security. On ERLC.com, the SBC public policy arm said that it “has long advocated for our government to provide a permanent solution for this special category of immigrants,” arguing that in 2018 SBC messengers “explicitly urged Congress to develop a ‘just and compassionate path to legal status’ for undocumented immigrants already living in our country.”

However, the ERLC failed to note that in that 2018 SBC resolution, in the language immediately preceding the call for a “just and compassionate path to legal status,” there was a demand for “an emphasis on securing our borders.” Likewise, the ERLC did not acknowledge that Southern Baptists addressed

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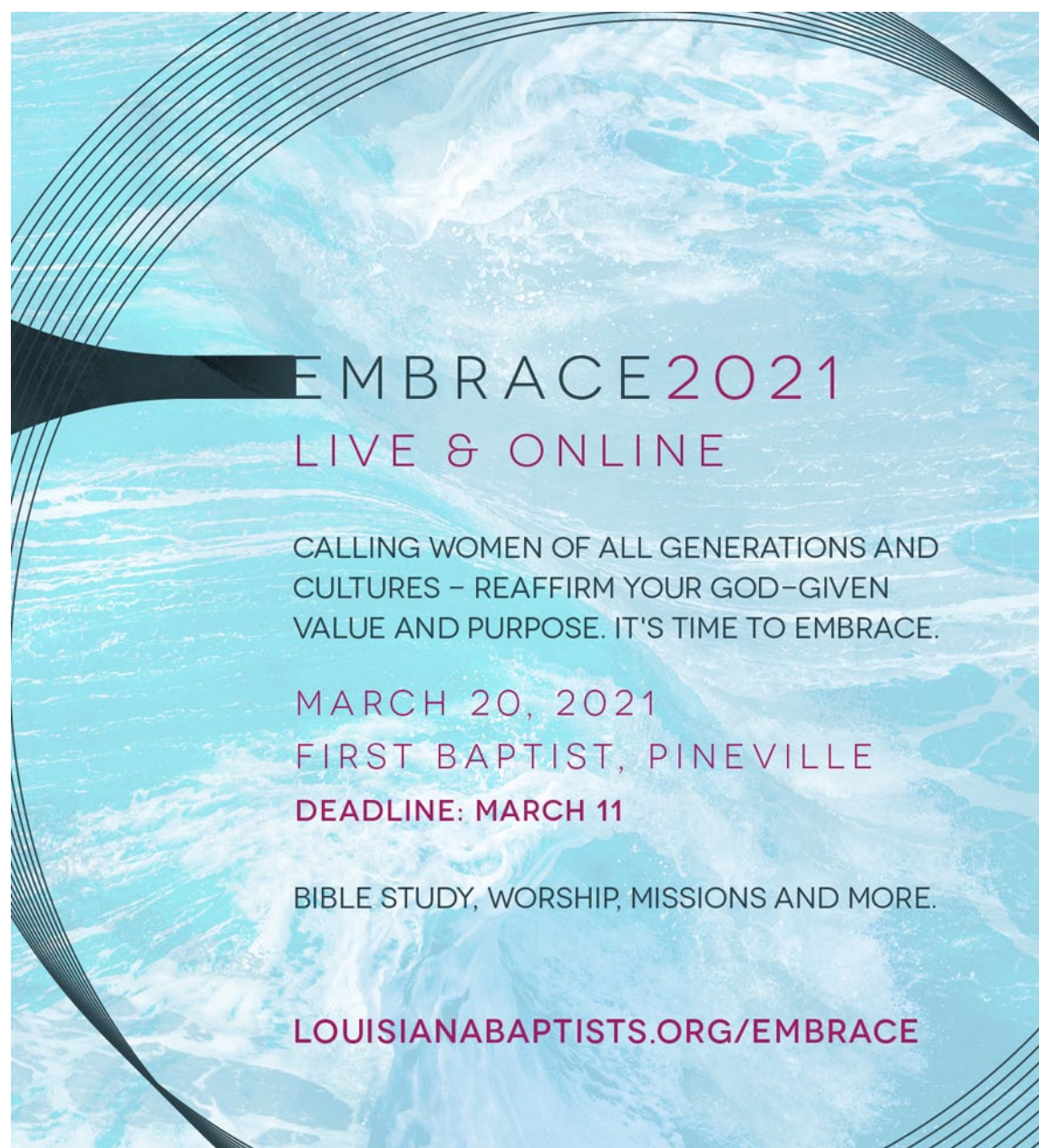


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immigration in two other resolutions, urging the federal government to “enforce all immigration laws” (2006) and asking government authorities to secure the borders before addressing the issue of legal status as well as calling for appropriate restitution from any illegal immigrant seeking legal status (2011). Moreover, the 2018 resolution repeated a statement in the 2011 resolution that “this resolution is not to be construed as support for amnesty for any undocumented immigrant” – an emphasis that was not mentioned by the ERLC.

The ERLC also lauded Biden’s lifting of a Trump Administration travel ban that initially blocked seven countries, but eventually was expanded to prohibit travelers from 13 nations.

“The ERLC welcomes this action as Southern Baptist’s commitment to welcoming the stranger has long been reflected in the SBC’s resolu-

tions about those fleeing persecution in their home countries,” the SBC entity wrote. However, the same 2016 SBC resolution referenced by the ERLC also expressly called on “governing authorities to implement the strictest security measures possible in the refugee screening and selection process, guarding against anyone intent on doing harm ...”

The Trump travel ban, described by the ERLC as a “Muslim ban,” was specifically implemented in 2017 against countries that lacked adequate control of government travel documents; failed to share critical information about its citizens such as criminal history or terrorist links; or, deemed to be safe havens for terrorists, according to government documents. In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the travel ban, saying President Trump had acted within his authority to protect national security, and dismissed

claims of religious bias in the order.

Greear’s hiring practices under review after sexual abuse victim complains

RALEIGH, N.C. (LBM) – *The Houston Chronicle* reports that The Summit Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, has launched a review of the hiring of a pastor accused of a sex abuse cover-up at his last congregation.

Southern Baptist Convention President J.D. Greear is pastor of Summit and was key in the hiring of Brian Loritts to serve as executive pastor of teaching and development.

Loritts previously served as pastor of Fellowship Memphis (2003-2015), a multi-ethnic church in Memphis, Tennessee. His brother-in-law, Rick Trotter began to serve as worship pastor there in 2005 and remained on staff until 2010.

According to the *Commercial Appeal*, a daily newspaper of Memphis, Trotter

was caught having placed “a hidden camera in a bathroom where he recorded women—and, reportedly, minors, too.”

The news outlet also stated that Fellowship Memphis “didn’t report him [Trotter] to authorities, and he avoided prosecution.” A victim at Fellowship Memphis told the *Commercial Appeal*, “I asked about pressing charges, but they discouraged us from doing that. They really didn’t give us any of the information.”

Trotter left Fellowship Memphis and in 2011 joined the staff of Downtown Church, another Memphis congregation, where he was caught in 2016 taking pictures up the skirt of a praying woman and subsequently arrested.

At the time he announced the hiring of Loritts (May 24, 2020), Greear called the new staff member “one of the most gifted pastors and preachers in the United States,” according to the *Biblical Recorder*, the news service of North Carolina Baptists. “He has been a leader in the movement of churches

seeking to reflect the Gospel through multiethnic reconciliation, a true reconciliation that demonstrates the power of the Gospel to bring people together as one.”

Greear said that Loritts had “freely disclosed” about the incident, the *Biblical Recorder* reported.

Loritts began his new job with The Summit Church on June 1, and The Summit Church issued a June 8 statement as an “explanation of the transparent and thorough process” that preceded the hiring of Loritts.

The press release said Loritts was upfront about the scandal during the candidate process and they lauded his “commitment to biblical self-evaluation and humility” for being forthcoming. They concluded from looking into the matter that Loritts “had not attempted in any way to cover up the incidents of abuse that occurred at Fellowship Memphis in 2010, protect the abuser, or discourage victims from seeking justice for their abuses.”

See CULTURAL, page 14

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Cultural from page 13

One of those not satisfied with the explanation was Rachel Denhollander, a former Michigan State University gymnast and sex abuse victim, who exposed Larry Nassar, a former MSU doctor convicted of sexually abusing MSU and USA Gymnastics athletes, including Denhollander.

Denhollander was a key

player in Greear's initiative to address sexual abuse in the SBC -- as a response to an exposé by the *Houston Chronicle*, which reported in 2019 about 220 sexual abusers and 700 victims who were part of one or more of the 47,000 or so SBC congregations during a two-decade period.

After serving as a neutral observer on a conference

call between a Fellowship Memphis victim and Summit leaders, she tweeted that "there are serious questions that remain that need to be answered."

Denhollander tweeted more extensively, June 12, saying, "I am deeply discouraged by this hire [of Bryan Loritts] as things stand right now. From Summit's statement it would appear that the process for bringing Bryan on board is more extensive than many churches would have done. However in cases where serious allegations and questions have been present and there is concern about obtaining all relevant information, a closed process simply cannot provide what is needed to ensure the truth is reached."

She also urged pastors in similar situations to "hire an independent, trusted and qualified third party to handle the vetting and investigation for you."

A statement on sum-mitchurch.org now says that "On January 20, 2021, The

Summit Church engaged Guidepost Solutions LLC to review Bryan Loritt's response to sexual abuse allegations at Fellowship Memphis in 2010," noting it felt "it would be helpful to get an independent firm to review this matter."

Robertson leads new CBN chapter in Louisiana

BOSSIER CITY, La. (LBM) — The Conservative Baptist Network announced Feb. 18 the launch of its Louisiana state chapter, with more states soon to launch as it expands as a localized, grassroots effort, according to organizational sources.

In a statement released to the Baptist Message, the CBN shared that Philip Robertson, Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee member (2018-present) and two-time past president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention (2004-2005), will serve as the lead state coordinator.

Robertson is senior pastor of Philadelphia Baptist Church, Deville, with a campus in Alexandria, and served as a member of the Louisiana Baptist Convention Executive Board (1997-2003), including two years as LBCEB president (2001-2002). He also was a trustee of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (2003-2006). Robertson currently serves in various capacities for his local association and state convention.

"I joined the Conservative Baptist Network for two reasons," Robertson said. "One, because I believe there are important issues affecting our churches and the SBC that need to be addressed, and two, because CBN is a 'pro' Southern Baptist Convention movement. I wholeheartedly support our cooperative work as Southern Baptists, and I believe it is important that we address the concerns that threaten our cooperation in Kingdom mission. Having a Louisiana chapter of CBN will provide an opportunity to educate, encourage, and engage all Louisiana Baptist pastors who are committed to the sufficiency of Scripture and evangelism."

Joining Robertson as chapter regional leaders are Steve Folmar (First Baptist Church, Houma), David Goza (Jefferson Baptist Church, Baton Rouge), Mike Holloway (Ouachita Baptist Church, West Monroe), Nathan Davis (First Baptist Church, Coushatta), Lewis Richerson (Woodlawn Baptist Church, Baton Rouge), and Corey Smith (Heritage Baptist Church, Shreveport).

Davis, Richerson and Smith currently serve as members of the national steering council as well.

Folmar cited a commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture as a driving force in his decision to join and support the biblically conservative group.

"The CBN is working hard to keep us grounded in the Word of God and not chasing every new idea that comes along," Folmar said. "The Gospel is sufficient for all of our needs! We do not need the Gospel plus something else."

Holloway, too, harkened to honoring the Word of God as a reason for joining the leadership of the Louisiana



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Cultural

from page 14

state chapter.

"I have been burdened about the direction of our SBC for a few years," Hol-loway said. "When asked to join this Louisiana steering committee I agreed with one major thought: I'm willing to do my part to help return our Convention to evangelism and continue its belief in the inerrant Word of God."

Davis echoed the sentiments of his fellow pastors.

"I have admired the Southern Baptist Convention and our leadership but feel the Conservative Baptist Network has been established for such a time as this," Davis said. "I am grateful to be involved in a network of like-minded pastors and leaders and am encouraged by the participation and engagement."

Louisiana pastor and CBN spokesman Brad Jurkovich lauded the formation of the state chapter

and noted his excitement for the growing interest in the network from within his own state.

"This particular state chapter is especially encouraging to me as it comes from the state where I serve as pastor of a local church," Jurkovich said. "The value of these state chapters cannot be overstated. Pastors and churches standing together locally and nationally in SBC life and organizing to speak and vote at the annual SBC gathering in Nashville is vital for the future of our Southern Baptist family."

Robertson noted that the Louisiana chapter already has scheduled three events, each featuring Mike Stone, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Blackshear, Georgia, and a candidate for SBC president: March 15, 6 p.m., Jefferson Baptist Church, Baton Rouge; March 16,

noon, Philadelphia Baptist Church, Deville; and, March 16, 6 p.m., Cook Baptist Church, Ruston.

"Everyone is invited for a time to hear about current issues within the Southern Baptist Convention," Robertson offered. "There also will be a time for your questions and answers and for sharing your SBC concerns."

Learn more about Louisiana chapter events at www.conservative-baptistnetwork.com, which also shares about the CBN as a broad-based grassroots movement of Southern Baptists. Individuals may become members by signing up online. The complete list of the CBN Steering Council can be found there as well. This leadership team comprises pastors and laypeople from across America and includes some well-known figures such as former Atlanta fire chief Kelvin Cochran, former Arkansas Governor Mike

Huckabee, Family Research Council President Tony Perkins, past SBC President Charles Stanley, Billy Graham Evan-

gelistic Association Vice President Tom Phillips, and immediate past SBC Executive Committee Chairman Mike Stone.

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