# ANNUAL MEETING SPECIAL EDITION

Ernest N. Morial Convention Center | New Orleans, LA | June 10-14, 2023

Georgia Barnette

HEBAPISI

John 3:16

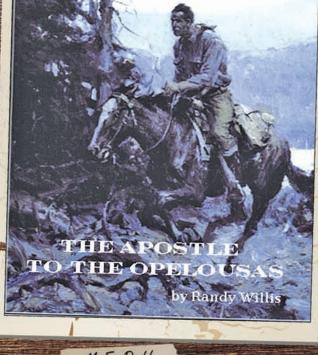
Soul Winning

6





1 Augusta State Toseph Willis





## **2 SPECIALEDITION:** WINNING SOULS

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# **LOUISIANA BAPTISTS** 175 Years of Soul Winning

**By Will Hall** Message executive editor

LEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) -- Louisiana was first settled by native Americans in 3400 B.C. In fact, the Indian mound near Monroe, Louisiana, is one of the earliest dated complex constructions in the Americas.

It is only right that the earliest culture of what is now the state of Louisiana would be represented by complexity, because "complex" best describes the state's historical development as well as its present nature.

Various Indian cultures dominated the territory until European influence began to spread during the 1500s, with the region becoming even more "continental" when La Louisiane became a colony of France in 1682, before falling under the control of Spain in 1762. It was ceded back to France, briefly, in 1800, before the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 made it the property of the United States of America.

The battle for the spiritual heart of Louisiana was almost as complex.

The Code Noir, or Black Code, policed the treatment of slaves from 1685 up to 1789, but it also regulated religion in French controlled islands and territories of the Americas. Signed by King Louis the XIV, the first eight articles expelled Jews and established "the Roman, Catholic, and Apostolic Faith" as the only recognized religion – and even outlawed the marriage of subjects by any other religious authority.

Moreover, western Louisiana was called "No Man's Land" because it was home to outlaws, bandits, pirates as well as some very brave pioneers.

It was into this complex setting that Joseph Willis, a former Cherokee slave from South Carolina and a licensed Baptist minister, launched his lifetime effort to bring the soul-saving Gospel to the people of Louisiana. His first sermon in the Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi River, sometime around 1800, led to the 1848 formation of the Baptist State Convention of North Louisiana, the predecessor of the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

Importantly, key leaders followed in the footsteps of his inspired example to pass down a legacy of soul winning:

-- Georgia Barnette left the comfort of everything she knew in Virginia and Georgia to come to "lovely Louisiana," where she traveled by train, buggy, horseback and pirogue to build a missions network to take the Gospel to the lost. The Louisiana Missions Offering was named in her honor in 1936.

-- M.E. Dodd gave up the status as pastor of a legacy church in Kentucky in answer to God's call that "the doors are wide open in Louisiana ... I have work for you to do." He became the father of the Cooperative Program, the Pastors Conference and helped establish one of six Southern Baptist seminaries while serving in the mission field of Louisiana; and he was a prolific soul winner.

-- Billy Graham was not a citizen of the Bayou State, but he made a lasting impact, holding multiple crusades before hundreds of thousands combined. He also contributed significantly to the seminary program created in Angola Prison that helped turn the bloodiest penitentiary in America into a place where 4,000 of 6,000 inmates claim Christ as Lord – and now sends missionaries to other prisons around the country to bring peace through the Peacemaker to them, too.

Moreover, Louisiana pastors, evangelists, church planters and men and women in the pews continue in the example of these legends of soul winning to take the Gospel to the diverse people groups of Louisiana in the complex contexts that compose this broadly multicultural state.

## LOUISIANA BAPTISTS' ORY

**Small Beginnings** John Coulter headed south from Kentucky to the warm tropics of Louisiana, decades before the Louisiana Purchase. His family settled in Fort Miro (Morehouse Parish). He was the very first Louisiana Baptist! From small beginnings, great things are born.

## • 1812

## **Bayou Chicot**

Joseph Willis, the first Baptist preacher west of the Mississippi River, founded Bayou Chicot (Calvary) Baptist Church in Ville Platte. The church is still active



Half Moon Baptist Church

A month earlier, Half **Moon Baptist Church** on the Bogue Chitto **River in Washington** Parish was organized. At that time, the land east of the Mississippi River was part of the Florida Parishes.

#### •1848

**Baptist State Convention** The Baptist State Convention of North Louisiana was organized by 13 Baptists meeting at Mount Lebanon. James Scarborough was elected president. At that time, there were 88 churches with 65 ministers and approximately 3,650 Baptists in the convention. One of the founders

was George W. Baines. He later became the president of Baylor University and his great-grandson, Lyndon Baines Johnson, became the 36th president of the United States.

## Joseph Willis: Father of Louisiana Baptists, carried the Gospel to the lost

## **By Staff**

Louisiana Baptist Message

LEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) - Joseph Willis crossed the Mississippi River on a mule to enter the Louisiana Territory, not for personal freedom or economic gain, but to take the Gospel to a vast untamed land with many hidden and not-so-hidden dangers.

Born a Cherokee slave to his own father, he was no stranger to danger -- he had served in the Revo-

lutionary War under the most colorful of all the American generals, Francis Marion, "The Swamp Fox."

But when he came into the Louisiana territory, he fell under the dreaded Code Noir, the "Black Code," and preaching the Gospel violated this decree's prohibitions against all religions except Catholicism. All the while he had to endure a cloud of racial and religious prejudice - even to the point that his own denomination, at first, refused to ordain him.

He lost three wives and several children in the wilderness, but he never wavered in

his faith in Christ, nor in his calling to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the people of the Louisiana Territory.

#### **LEADING THE WAY**

Several firsts for Louisiana Baptists are associated with this licensed Baptist minister from South Carolina.

Willis was the first evangelical to preach a Gospel sermon west of the Mississippi River, but the exact date is not known.

What is known is Willis sold all his property in South Carolina in 1799 and is not found there in the 1800 census. Also, in 1813, historian David Benedict, a contemporary of Willis, wrote in his book "A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World, that "Joseph Willis... has done much for the cause, and spent a large fortune while engaged in the ministry, often at the hazard of his life, while the State belonged to the Spanish government" - placing Willis in Louisiana before Oct. 1, 1800. Finally, in 1854, the Louisiana Baptist Associational Committee wrote in Willis's obituary, "The Gospel was

proclaimed by him in these regions before the American flag was hoisted here," meaning before April 30, 1803.

Although the original church minutes are missing, records of the Pearl River Baptist Association, which encompassed Mississippi and Louisiana at one time, indicate that on October 12, 1812, Half Moon Bluff Church became the first Baptist church and the first evangelical congregation in Louisiana, which was granted statehood only months earlier. Willis helped start the church near the Bogue Chitto River in what is now Washing-

NEUTRA

The dreaded Code Noir, or the "Black Code" was in place when Joseph Willis arrived in Louisiana. His preaching was a key figure in starting the Gospel violated this decree's prohibitions against all religions except Catholicism.

ton Parish about eight miles from the Mississippi border. It was the first Baptist church organized in what is now Louisiana, but it was east of the Mississippi River. Unfortunately, this congregation no longer exists today.

Importantly, Willis is described by some historians as 'the father of the Baptist religion in Louisiana" for having planted the first Baptist church west of the Mississippi River.

On November 13, 1812, he Calvary Baptist Church at Bayou Chicot, Louisiana. It was the congregation that officially

ordained him to the Gospel ministry. Louisiana had been a state barely seven months and was in turmoil when Calvary Baptist was founded. Great Britain did not consider the Louisiana Purchase legally valid, and Congress had declared war on Great Britain about five months earlier to start the War of 1812. Fortunately, the congregation survived the ordeals of this great conflict and is still active today, nearly 211 years later.

W.E. Paxton wrote in his book, "A History of the Baptists of Louisiana: From the Earliest Times to the Present (1888)," that the zeal of Willis "could not be bounded by the narrow limits of his own home, but he traveled far and wide" and such was his influence.

Paxton noted that during one stretch of traveling and preaching, Willis stayed at an inn where several other men were staying, too, and one was sick. Willis read the Bible to him, prayed with him, and witnessed to him about Christ. The next morning all the men were gone very early, except for the man who was sick. He was thankful for the

## **Story**

#### • **1849** First Executive Board

An Executive Board was named and met for the first time.

#### • 1853 Name Change

The Baptist State Convention of North Louisiana changed its name to Baptist State Convention of Louisiana.

### • **1871** Getting Organized

By this time, three boards had been organized to manage the programs of the convention, the Board of Domestic Missions, the Board of Education and the Sunday School Board.

#### • **1881** To the Ends of the Earth

The Board of Foreign Missions was organized.

#### • 1885 Restructuring

Louisiana Baptists restructured from four boards to one Executive Board with offices in Shreveport.

## WILLIS from page 3

compassion Willis had shown him and alerted him to an overnight conversation during which the other men talked about ambushing Willis. Then he told Willis about another trail he could take to his next stop, and so Willis's life was spared.

Paxton said those who loved Willis called him the "Apostle to the Opelousas" and "Father Willis" and added that according to family tradition, strong determination and profound faith were his shields:

-- He would often walk great distances to visit and preach to small groups.

-- He rode logs to cross streams or travel down-stream.

-- He would sometimes return home from a mission tour as late as 1 a.m. and awake his wife to prepare clothes so that he might leave again a few hours later.



Willis kept a diary and in 1841 William Prince Ford arranged these notes which Paxton copied in 1858. There are conflicting claims in other sources, but using this version of events combined with minutes from various Baptist associational minutes, the following additional milestones can be celebrated with some confidence:

-- Some fifteen miles or so southwest of Half Moon Bluff Church, Willis helped form Mount Nebo Baptist Church, January 31, 1813, and it is still an active congregation.

-- Sunday, March 24, 1816, a group met at Bayou Bouef, in a schoolhouse used as a church, and agreed to form a new church named Beulah. The charter members were Willis, Ezekiel and Mary O'Quin, John and Mary Grimball, Nathaniel and Anne Holly, Robert and Providence Tanner and their son Robert Lynn Tanner. Willis preached before the business meeting and the next day he established Beulah Baptist Church in Cheneyville, Louisiana, where he served as pastor until 1823.

-- The next year, Willis led a group to start a congregation at Hickory Flats, called Debourn and later Aimwell.

-- Not quite a year and a half later, on October 31, 1818, Willis (and others who had followed him from the Carolinas) created the Louisiana Baptist Association at Beulah Baptist in Cheneyville. He had founded all five charter member churches and is believed to have been elected as moderator.

Ford also made remarks in the Willis document, and Paxton recorded one of Ford's observations made in 1834, and it is very revealing concerning Willis's heart: "Nearly all the churches now left in the association were gathered either directly or indirectly by the labors of Mr. Willis.

"It was truly affecting to hear him speak of them as his children and with all the affection of a father allude to some schisms and divisions that had arisen in the past and to warn them against the occurrence of anything of the kind in the future," Ford added. "But when he spoke of the fact that two or three of them [churches] had already become extinct, his voice failed and he was compelled to give utterance to his feelings by his tears; and surely the heart must have been hard that could not be melted by the manifestation of so much affection, for he wept not alone."

#### LASTING IMPACT

In 1955 hundreds gathered to unveil a monument at Willis's grave. In honor of the event, the Louisiana Baptist Association published this statement about his work in the state: "Before the church began to send missionaries

into destitute regions, he at his own expense, and frequently at the risk of his life, came to these parts, preaching the Gospel of the Redeemer. For fifty years he was instant in season and out of season, preaching, exhorting, and instructing regarding not his property. his health or even his life, if he might be the means of turning sinners to Christ.'

Glen Lee Greene offered a similar view in "House Upon A Rock.

"In all the history of Louisiana Baptists it would be difficult, if not impossible," Greene said, "to find a man who suffered more reverses, who enjoyed fewer rewards, or who singlehandedly achieved more enduring results for the denomination than did Joseph Willis."

Meanwhile, in his book, "A History of Baptists of Louisiana," John T. Christian provided a broader context for what God accomplished through Willis.

"It must steadily be borne in mind that in no other state of the Union have Baptists been compelled to face such overwhelming odds; and such long and sustained opposition," he noted. "The wonder is not that at first the Baptists made slow progress, but that they made any at all."

Adapted from various sources, including "A Louisiana Baptist Legacy," by Randy Willis for the Baptist Message.

In all the history of Louisiana Baptists it would be difficult, if not impossible to find a man who suffered more reverses, who enjoyed fewer rewards, or who single-handedly achieved more enduring results for the denomination than did Joseph Willis.

> Glen Lee Green House Upon a Rock

# 'Miss Georgia's' love for Louisiana reflected her 'value for one soul'

**By Will Hall** Message executive editor

LEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) – Letters show that Georgia Barnette's first impressions of the Pelican state were love at first sight. Arriving by train from Atlanta, Barnette remarked how moved she was by the landscape she saw.

"Surely God loved Louisiana because He made it so beautiful," she wrote to a friend.

Years later, after having retired from serving 25 years as the director of the Woman's Missionary Union in the state, and awaiting her last breath, she lay in her bed praying for her "beloved Louisiana people."

In between these two bookends in her life, Georgia Barnette was motivated by her "value of one soul" (as noted by Virginia L. Brueck) and tirelessly worked to build up the body of Christ and minister to those in need, while inspiring Louisiana Baptists to take the Gospel across the state.

Historical archives contain scores of reports of "Miss Georgia's" tireless efforts to organize women for missions to the lost in Louisiana. For instance, documenting her work for July 1916, she reported:

"I sent out 215 yearbooks, two copies of 'Royal Service,' three catalogues, 10 handbooks. I wrote 218 circular letters, 130 personal letters, 32 postals, furnished article for 'Foreign Mission Journal,' made out quarterly report for Baltimore, made up three programs for weak Societies, also sent special appeals in the interest of the Foreign Mission Board debt. I was sick in bed one week during the month."

#### MORE THAN AN OFFERING

Her legacy of love for Christ and the people of Louisiana continues through the state missions offering that was named for her in 1936.



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## WEEK OF PRAYER: September 11-18, 2022 STATE GOAL: \$1.7 MILLION

In 2022, 773 churches combined to give \$1,581,099 to support the many missions and ministry projects through the Georgia Barnette Louisiana Missions Offering. The following recognition is intended to honor the sacrificial giving of all Louisiana Baptists through the example of these representative congregations.

#### TOP FIVE GBO GIVING CHURCHES

|                        | DOLLARS                 |                  |
|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| gregation              | Attendance              | Gift Amount      |
| n, Haughton            | 150                     | \$65,000         |
| ole, Ruston            | 700                     | \$40,754         |
| ary, Alexandria        | 1,462                   | \$40,385         |
| r Crest, West Monroe   | 454                     | \$38,014         |
| Ebenezer, Castor       | 353                     | \$28,222         |
|                        | PERCENTAGES             |                  |
|                        | (undesignated receipts) |                  |
| gregation              | Attendance              | Percentage       |
| m, Plain Dealing       | 40                      | 91.1 %           |
| ole, Winnsboro         | 55                      | 51.0 %           |
| ace Ridge, Jonesville  | 16                      | 43.8 %<br>23.0 % |
| n, Haughton            | 150                     |                  |
| im Rest, Eunice        | 45                      | 15.4 %           |
|                        | AVERAGES                |                  |
| gregation              | Attendance              | Per Person       |
| n, Haughton            | 150                     | \$433            |
| ome Home, Dodson       | 25                      | \$387            |
| Ebenezer, Castor       | 80                      | \$353            |
| Avenue, Denham Springs | 46                      | \$261            |
| Grove, Castor          | 20                      | \$209            |

See BARNETTE, page 6

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## **6** SPECIALEDITION: GEORGIA BARNETTE

## Barnette from page 5

The Georgia Barnette Louisiana Missions Offering supplements what Louisiana Baptists give through the Cooperative Program, the primary funding channel for state and

Do not become discouraged. We are attempting great things for Him and expecting great things from Him.

**Georgia Barnette** 

writing to a friend

national Baptist causes. CP gifts provide the "fuel" for all the cooperative missions and ministries of Louisiana Baptists, meanwhile, the GBO provides support for specific operations.

Some of the largest ministries that benefit from the GBO are disaster relief and church planting, both critical efforts in the state:

-- During 2020-2021, Louisiana Baptists engaged in prolonged recovery operations after

four hurricanes struck the state.

-- Meanwhile, in November 2022 Loui-

siana Baptists celebrated the 300th church planted since 2010 as part of the President's 2020 Commission Final Report goals (delayed by two years due to COVID-19 restrictions).

On top of that, Louisiana Baptists launched Vision 2030 during the 2022 LBC Annual Meeting, and a primary goal of that initiative is to grow from 1,611 congregations to 2,000 constituted churches, with church planting a major factor in the initiative.

GBO gifts will figure prominently in reaching this goal and in baptizing 25,000 new believers, also a part of the vision.

Indeed, gifts to the GBO support a wide range of cooperative missions and ministries of Louisiana Baptists: offering help to women and children who have

been rescued from sex trafficking; providing groceries to families in dire need; giving hope to men and women formerly trapped by addictions; and discipling students on college campuses across the state.

The Louisiana Missions Offering ensures

the legacy of Georgia Barnette's passion for the people of our state will continue to result in the evangelization of the lost.

#### LASTING LEGACY

In 2021, 1,569 Louisiana Baptist congregations combined to baptize 5,631 new believers, despite coming out of two years of COVID-19 restrictions and while still recovering from the cumulative effects of four hurricanes, multiple tornados and two major ice storms (with 135 church facilities and 69 pastors' homes damaged or destroyed by Ida alone in August 2021).

In that light, Barnette's encouragement to a friend remains salient to Louisiana

Baptists today. "Do not become discouraged," she wrote. "We are attempting great things for Him and expecting great things from Him."

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Georgia Barnette

## **SPECIALEDITION: M.E. DODD**

# **Story**

#### •1886

#### Current Name Chosen

The official name was changed to Louisiana Baptist Convention.

#### •1899

#### Children's Home

Louisiana Baptists began the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministries in Monroe. The first children were three girls.

### •1906

#### Louisiana College

Louisiana Baptists began Louisiana College with 19 students and three teachers.

#### •1917 ABC

#### Acadian Baptist Academy (1917-1974) was formed. They held classes until it became Acadian Baptist Center (1975-present).

#### NOBTS

Established in 1917, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary was actually the fulfillment of a centuryold dream of Baptists to reach the city of New Orleans (then one of the largest cities in America) and to establish a missionary training school at the gateway to Latin America. NOBTS was voted into being by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1917 as messengers met in New Orleans for their annual meeting.

New Orleans Seminary was the first theological institution to be created by the direct action of the Southern Baptist Convention. Originally named Baptist Bible Institute, the name was changed to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1946.

# M.E. Dodd: Father of Cooperative Program was a committed soul winner, SBC leader

#### By Will Hall

Message executive editor

HREVEPORT, La. (LBM) – When most mention the name Monroe Elmon (M.E.) Dodd, it likely is in context of his leading the development of the Cooperative Program, the primary funding channel for the cooperative missions and ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Some might recall also that he:

-- served two terms as SBC president;

-- founded the SBC Pastors' Conference;

-- led the historic First Baptist Church in Shreveport, Louisiana, to become the first church in the world to own and operate a radio station;

-- chaired the important Convention Lessons Committee (which was formed seven years earlier to ensure Baptist doctrinal purity of graded Sunday school lessons produced for use of all denominations by the International Sunday School Association); and

-- drove the establishment of the Baptist Bible Institute, later named the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

But lost in the discussions about his impact on Southern Baptist life is the fact that Dodd was a committed soul winner.

To be sure, Dodd's contribution to the development of the Cooperative Program is no small thing. Since 1925, the first year of the stabilized system of funding for the joint missions and ministries of Southern Baptists, contributions have grown from \$4.1 million for state and national causes to more than \$450 million at the end of 2022. Meanwhile, cumulative CP contributions during the 97-year life of this unique resourcing system have exceeded \$20.5 billion.

But it would not be presumptive to suggest that even Dodd would agree that the success of the Cooperative Program only has value for the ways it has helped make known "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," the focus of Dodd's first sermon in 1900.

#### **GOSPEL DRIVEN**

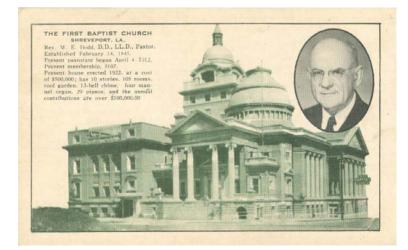
Dodd became a Christian at the age of 14, according to Louisiana Pastor Austin B. Tucker, who wrote an extensive history about Dodd, "The Life and Legacy of M.E. Dodd (1878-1952): Louisiana Baptist Leader."

At the age of 20, Tucker noted, Dodd volunteered to fight in the Spanish-American War, finding the army camp "a splendid place to study the Bible" and "to sow seeds of the Gospel."

Coming to Louisiana in 1912, Dodd preached a revival during his first month with the First Baptist Church of Shreveport, adding 98 members to the congregation which previously numbered 600.

Tucker also noted that Dodd made 1,500 visits during his first year (walking 1,000 miles for some and using street cars for others). As a result, the church bought a car for him, and his visits doubled the next year.

During WWI, Dodd volunteered to be a U.S. Army chaplain, but was detoured to serve as a camp religious



M.E. Dodd led First Baptist Church, Shreveport to become a leader in the state in baptisms and membership growth.

worker with the YMCA at Camp Beauregard in Pineville, Louisiana. After six months he was sent overseas. On the trip over he officiated several burials at sea, according to Mike Miller in "A History of Louisiana" (by Henry E. Chambers). In Paris, he was assigned to YMCA work at the front, ministering to soldiers in the field as well as in hospitals. After peace was declared, he went on a speaking tour to all the overseas camps.

Tucker reported that Dodd witnessed "more than 5,000 professions of faith and recorded 500 volunteers for Christian service in that year" during his year of service at home and abroad.

The state records for baptisms are incomplete for 1912-1926, but from 1927 until his retirement in 1950, his congregation led the Louisiana Baptist Convention in baptisms six times (including one tie) and was second or third another five times. Meanwhile, Dodd conducted hundreds of revivals that resulted in baptisms by other congregations in the state, across the nation and around the world.

In 1924, alone, Dodd preached 127 sermons in 32 cities of 11 states before a combined audience of 150,000, Miller documented.

Dodd also was credited by Tucker for launching among Southern Baptists the five-month south-wide simultaneous revival crusade of 1923.

#### **PASSION FOR THE LOST**

Tucker summed up Dodd's ministry by noting the 18,000 sermons he had preached (an average of one per day for 50 years), the 2,118 marriages he had officiated and the 500,000 miles he had traveled. But what really stands out among the records of Dodd's ministry is that "he had baptized 7,000 converts."

In 1919 Dodd delivered the Convention sermon in Atlanta, a mere six months after the end of World War I, which had wrought unprecedented carnage on the battlefields which often encompassed small towns and great cities. Moreover, there were numbers of issues that gripped the world in the aftermath, especially the Southern Baptist community of faith.

Funds were needed to retire debt and to stabilize re-

7

## **8** SPECIALEDITION: M.E. DODD

## **DODD** from page **7**

sources to meet the growing needs of Southern Baptists' cooperative state and national ministries. Moreover, 1919 was the year Dodd was charged with finding a way to extend the

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The New Testament democratic ideas prevail, in part at least, and personal and political freedom is the heritage of the world. But unless democracy has as her handmaiden a spiritual religion which demands first of all personal regeneration of each individual, it is a question whether the political victory will be a blessing or a curse. ...

#### M.E. Dodd addressing messengers at the 1919 annual meeting

moment in our history for which our forefathers toiled and sacrificed and prayed; for which they suffered and bled and died. The Baptist hour of all the centuries has sounded. To waver now would be traitorous; to give up here would be a crime against all the martyred blood of the heroes of the past. ...

"We have seen in the tragic and trying times through which we have just passed the utter failure of imperialism; we have seen the total collapse of militarism; and we have seen furthermore the absolute failure of mere intellectualism, divested of the Christian redemptive principles, in its efforts to bear humanity onward to its highest hopes. ...

"The New Testament democratic ideas prevail, in part at least, and personal and political freedom is the heritage of the world. But unless democracy has as her handmaiden a spiritual religion which demands first of all personal regeneration of each individual, it is a question whether the political victory will be a blessing or a curse. ...

"There will never be a perfectly successful democracy until each democrat is an aristocrat, born from above with royal blood from heaven's highest in his heart. At exactly this point is the imperativeness of the Baptist message for this day, "Ye must be born again."

M.E. Dodd was a statesman, a visionary and an accomplished preacher who was gifted in his presentation of the Word. Moreover, he worked tirelessly for the Baptist cause. But most of all he was a faithful disciple who reflected the character of the Master who came "to seek and save that which is lost."



A young Billy Graham, left, is welcomed by Pastor M.E. Dodd for a revival hosted by First Baptist Church, Shreveport, that was about to take place in 1951. Graham returned to Shreveport several more times at the bidding of Dodd. Both men were known as committed soul winners.

# COMPEL

Evangelist Bill Britt has been preaching the Gospel across America and around the world for decades. His greatest passion is to see a soul find hope and salvation in Jesus Christ and to be born again into the family of God.

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# **Story**

#### • 1920s Baptist Hospital

In the 20's, Louisiana Baptists began meeting the health needs of our state by founding a number of hospitals: Baptist Hospital in Alexandria, Baton Rouge General Hospital (1945), Baptist Hospital in New Orleans (1937), Beauregard Hospital in DeRidder (1946) and Bayou Sorrel Hospital in Plaquemine.

#### • 1930

OFF TO COLLEGE Seven Baptist Student Unions were formed on campuses all over the state.

### • 1944

**Foundation** The Louisiana Baptist Foundation was formed.

### • 1945

Parlez-vous Français? Louisiana Baptists launched French Radio broadcasts funded by Renee Broussard.

### • 1952

Headin' South The Louisiana Baptist Convention offices were moved to Alexandria.

### • 1972

#### LBC SBC Connection

J.D. Grey, legendary pastor of First Baptist, New Orleans, was elected as President of the Southern Baptist Convention

#### • 1977 Bringing Relief

The Disaster Relief Service was formed by John Winters, the director of brotherhood. It grew from a single van to a ministry with hundreds of volunteers serving every year with multiple services and strategies.

# Billy Graham's lasting Louisiana legacy

#### **By Will Hall** Message executive editor

LEXANDRIA (LBM)—Billy Graham touched the world with the Gospel message for nearly 67 years after he was ordained in 1939.

But he left a special imprint on Louisiana from almost the very start of his Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1950 through the first decade of the 21st century: leading crusades in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and, at Louisiana College in Pineville; comforting victims after Hurricane Katrina; and, paying for the construction of two chapels at Angola prison.

Meanwhile, Louisiana Baptists are engaging with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in a project to extend his impact in the state for years to come.

#### **EARLY DAYS IN LOUISIANA**

In 1951, Graham conducted two evangelistic events in the state: April 8-29 in Shreveport, taking one day, April 25, to speak in Pineville at what was then Louisiana College (now, Louisiana Christian University).

In anticipation of the Shreveport campaign, M.E. Dodd, pastor emeritus of the First Baptist Church in Shreveport and a past president of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote in the Baptist Message that 20,000 Louisianans had been gathering in special meetings to bathe the outreach in prayer.

He described Graham as "a God intoxicated man" who was calling on Louisiana Baptists to continue "to pray, and pray more, and pray more earnestly."

*The Shreveport Times* reported the 22-day soul-winning push netted an estimated 200,000 in attendance and the *Baptist Message* documented there were 3,000 spiritual decisions.

While at Louisiana College he spoke to a "spellbound" crowd of 9,000 - 10,000 "that overflowed Louisiana College stadium with its 8,000 capacity and spilled over into the playing field and even beyond." The *Baptist Message* described Graham as "a Jonah sounding God's warning that Nineveh would be destroyed," but also reported that "Graham made an effort to avoid sensationalism in the service" and yet "an estimated 300 persons assembled at one end of the field after the sermon, definitely committing themselves to Jesus."



Billy Graham once was considered a top candidate to be president of Louisiana College in Pineville but chose instead to continue his work as an evangelist.

At the time, Graham was considered a top candidate to be president of Louisiana College, according to historical records.

In 1954, Graham again led two evangelistic events in Louisiana. He hosted "four weeks of near-daily sessions" in New Orleans, according to the Times-Picayune, only interrupting that great harvest to travel to Baton Rouge for a one-night revival according to the *Baptist Message*.

Starting Oct. 3 in Pelican Stadium with a crowd of 10,000, he finished his evangelistic effort in the "Big Easy" on Halloween in front of 61,500 in Tulane Stadium, the Times-Picayune reported. "I have fallen in love with this city and its people," Graham said, adding that he hoped to return some day. "A total of 4,411 people committed their lives to Christ during the crusade," the report stated.

Amid the New Orleans outreach, Graham took time on Oct. 25 to go to Baton Rouge to preach to 25,000 gathered in the horseshoe shaped stadium "within the shadow of the towering State Capitol Building."

"His message contained nothing especially new," the *Baptist Message* article recorded. "The entire service was so void of the spectacular ... that a painful thought came to mind – 'What if only a handful come [forward] tonight?"

But the aisles overflowed and, in the end, "500 people stood before the platform to hear the Preacher exhort them to pray, read their Bibles and witness daily."

#### LATER YEARS IN THE STATE

Graham returned to Baton Rouge in 1970, but this time for five services conducted at the then-67,000-seat stadium at Louisiana State University.

The *Baptist Message* reported that more than 196,000 persons attended despite inclement weather, with many LSU students among the crowds of young people who were there. In all, 9,076 total decisions were made "as a result of Graham's preaching." But guests also heard from LSU football standout Andy Hamilton, who was the leading scorer at the time, as well as from the 1970 Miss America Phyllis George.

Hamilton said he had found something in the Bible that he "couldn't find if I ran up and down this field for the next thousand years – the power of Jesus Christ!"

For her part, George told the crowd she loved the Lord and proclaimed, "Jesus can help us to [make] right decisions in everything. I plead with you to turn to God."

In June 1982 Graham also made it back to New Orleans to hold a rally in the Superdome in connection with the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

He was joined by then-Vice President George H. W. Bush as well as Johnny and June Cash with their son, John Carter Cash, and 42,000 other guests.

## **SPECIALEDITION: BILLY GRAHAM**

## Graham from page 10

Described in a *Baptist Message* report as "a mixture of an 'ole fashioned political rally, a country fair and a revival meeting," an estimated 2,000 persons came forward during the meeting that night "to accept Christ or make some other religious decision."

#### **MOST RECENT VISIT**

After his June 17, 2005, sermon before a crowd of 90,000 in New York City, Graham retired from conducting stadium crusades. But that did not hinder him from coming to New Orleans in March 2006 to console Katrina-battered communities and take part in a two-day Celebration of Hope, originally scheduled to feature just his son, Franklin.

While in the city the older Graham surveyed the damage in the Ninth Ward, commenting that with Katrina's aftereffects and the ongoing war in Iraq, "…

if ever the country needs to turn to God, it is now."

He also visited the First Baptist Church in New Orleans where he spoke to 1,000 church leaders, pastors and their wives. Standing behind the pulpit he had used during the 1954 New Orleans Crusade, he encouraged them to trust God who restored Job's losses, giving Job "many more times … he had ever had in the beginning."

Yet, two of Graham's spiritual contributions to Louisiana took place without him coming to the state:

-- In 2008, prisoners in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola took part in the dedication of the Camp F chapel inside the barbed wire fences surrounding the prison.

-- A year later, employees at the former deadliest prison in America, celebrated the completion of the B Line chapel for the "free" community that lives at Angola.

Burl Cain, warden of the Angola prison, 1995 - 2016, told the *Baptist Message* that Graham, his son, the BGEA, Samaritan's Purse and the rest of the Graham family, combined, likely contributed on the order of \$800,000 to construct both structures.

#### **GRAHAM'S INFLUENCE TO CONTINUE**

Despite Graham's declining health in the decade prior to his death in 2018, the BGEA extended his evangelistic ministry by developing a thriving online outreach presence at PeacewithGod.net.

Through this web-based platform, people from all walks of life see and hear a clear Gospel message through videos and Scripture. Trained volunteers are ready to answer spiritual questions, point them to Christ and help them grow in their faith.

Since launching April 2011 and continuing through May 2023, PeacewithGod. net has recorded more than 19 million "indicated decisions" for Christ, according to live stats presented on pray.searchforjesus.net – which encourages visitors to pray for those currently online (identified only by location tags) who are seeking answers.

Importantly, Louisiana Baptists contribute to Graham's ongoing soul-winning legacy through Here for You, a multi-media outreach that seeks to give every person in the state an opportunity to say "yes" to Jesus. This partnership with

See GRAHAM, page 29



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# Caskey Center: 60,000 Gospel conversations

#### **By Brian Blackwell** Message staff writer

NEW ORLEANS (LBM) – For nearly a decade, the Caskey Center of Church Excellence with the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has

We are deploying an army of soul winners into Louisiana parishes, and counties in the states near the seminary, as well as throughout the U.S. and world

Blake Newsom Caskey Center Director more than 60,000 documented Gospel conversations.

prepared

pastors to

share the

resulting in

Gospel,

"We are deploy-

ing an army of soul winners into Louisiana parishes, and counties in the states near the seminary, as well as throughout the U.S. and world," Caskey Center Director Blake Newsom told the *Baptist Message*. "It's imperative that we train ministers to share the Gospel. By the time our students leave our campus, they will have learned how to share the Gospel and will have done so multiple times. They will have overcome fears -- that many have – such that sharing their faith has now become a lifestyle."

Launched in 2014 via a \$1.5 million gift from an anonymous donor, the Caskey Center provides scholarships for ministers who serve with churches having 250 or fewer members in Louisiana, and 150 or fewer members for congregations in Mississippi, Alabama, Indiana, Montana and Wyoming.

This scholarship program targets the vast majority of Louisiana Baptist churches. According to the Annual Church Profile database, 1,187 of the 1,258 Louisiana churches who reported information in 2022 drew 249 or fewer people to worship on Sunday mornings.

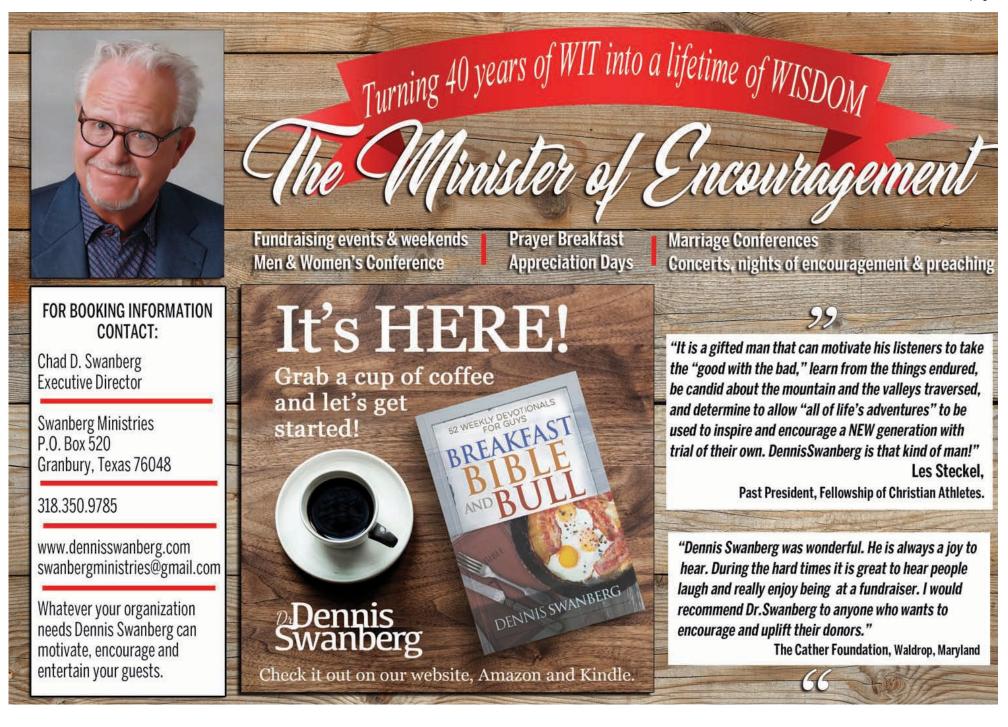
"We know education costs are



New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary students shared the Gospel with a community member during its Serve Day, April 13. At least three professions of faith resulted as 185 students, staff, faculty members and trustees shared the Gospel and served in the community. The group represented the largest number of participants to date for the once-a-semester event.

a burden," Newsom said. "Often, it's hard for ministers at the start of their ministry journey to take classes because of debt. It's equally difficult for some seasoned ministers to take on the expense of a seminary

See CASKEY, page 35



## **SPECIALEDITION: ANGOLA, NOBTS**



New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola have enjoyed a strong bond from a four-year NOBTS degree program – established in 1995 at the request of then-warden, Burl Cain, a Louisiana Baptist layman – which is credited with the dramatic reduction in murders as well as all violence, a nearly 85 percent drop, at Angola. Thirty congregations have been birthed across the prison, largely from the ongoing spiritual influence of NOBTS.

# **ANGOLA STATE PRISON:** Where souls are set free

By Will Hall Message executive editor

> NGOLA, La. (LBM) -When Burl Cain became warden of the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola in February 1995, it was known as "the bloodi-

est prison in America. Indeed, it was so violent within the walls of the oldest and largest maximum-security prison in the United States that it was commonly said, "a life sentence to Angola is a death sentence.'

Angola, like other prisons, lost its Pell grants for education in 1994. When Cain came aboard, he said he was concerned the prisoners would have no educational options. So, he reached out to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Cain told the *Baptist Message* that he was doubtful about the response, and subsequently was overwhelmed when the seminary replied ecstatically and soon put together the first class for inmates to earn an associate degree.

NOBTS President Jamie Dew said hope and favor come to mind when he thinks of what God is doing in the city of New Orleans and on its campus.

"It is amazing to see what God has done



During the final moments of a revival Sept. 19, 2019, at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, inmates came forward during a time of decision. Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, prayed with one of the prisoners.

through our prison program at Angola," Dew said. "In this program, men are taught to be instruments of God's grace and they are used widely to win many for Christ.

We are grateful to God for all that He is doing at NOBTS and Leavell College," he contin-ued. "The NOBTS family is focused on the task that God has given to us, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ."

Now, there is a four-year bachelor's degree program, provided in large part by Louisiana Baptists at no cost to the government, that has resulted in the award of 478 degrees since 1995.

More importantly, the program has led to the formation of 30 congregations on the prison grounds and half of the 6,300 Angola inmates are thought to have professed Christ as Lord. Meanwhile, officials have noted an 85 percent decrease of violence at Angola since 1995

Cain, who retired from Angola in 2016, and now serves as commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Corrections, credited the seminary "with the vision."

"It wasn't me," Cain told the Baptist Message. "I was just complaining. They saw the light and the opportunity, provided it and the rest is history.

#### WORLDWIDE IMPACT

NOBTS has exported the educational program to five other facilities:

 Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, St. Gabriel, Louisiana

- Hardee Correctional Institution, Bowling Green, Florida

- Whitworth Women's Facility, Hartwell, Georgia

Phillips State Prison, Buford, Georgia

– Mississippi State Penitentiary, Parchman, Mississippi

Together, NOBTS has conferred another

# A culture of evangelism: Anyone can be saved

LEXANDRIA, La. - "It can happen to anyone." Have you heard this expression before? You may have said it to someone or maybe, someone

said it to you

made an un-

characteristic

mistake, mis-

understood

direction, or

overlooked

something

literally right

matter what,

that was

in front of

you. No

no mat-

someone's

when you



Steve Horn Louisiana Baptists Executive Director

ter where, no matter when, "it can happen to anyone." As we continue to focus on daily developing a culture of evangelism in Louisiana, allow me to share a personal story.

My grandfather became a Christian at the age of sixty-five. His lifestyle change after his conversion represents one of the most immediate transformations that I have ever seen. He quit smoking, drinking, and cursing on the day he got saved. That same day he started attending church every Sunday, reading the Bible every day, witnessing, and even tithing. As unusual as this is, that kind of transformation is exactly what the Scripture says ought to happen when a person is saved. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Cor. 5:17) God truly changed my grandfather's life in this way.

As I think about his conversion, I stand in awe of our great God and the power of the Gospel to change

lives. Though my grandfather never attended church prior to his conver-sion, he watched Jimmy Swaggart on television. Eventually he developed a friendship with a pastor near his home. That preacher died shortly after my grandfather's conversion. In addition to those two influences, I had a childhood Sunday School teacher who awarded stickers for praying for someone who was not saved. I chose my grandfather. After I got too old for stickers, I kept praying because that had become my habit. One glorious Sunday, my grandmother called with the news that my grandfather had believed in Jesus for salvation!

It's amazing how God works to bring someone to Himself—a preacher some would call fallen, a smalltown preacher nearing retirement who refused to grow weary, and a preacher who was looking for stickers as a child.

As I continue to pray about Loui-

siana having a culture of evangelism, I think about people like my grandfather. Among the almost 4.6 million people living in Louisiana today, there are many people just like my Papaw.

Understand that in order to develop a culture of evangelism, we must have the core conviction that . . . Anyone can be saved.

We meet Simon in Acts 8:9. He practiced sorcery and claimed to be someone great. The text seems to pick up on the improbability of his salvation from a human perspective, "Even Simon himself believed." (Acts 8:13)

Actually, the greatest example of this truth that anyone can be saved is the Apostle Paul who we first meet in Acts 8:1 as being in agreement with putting Christians to death.

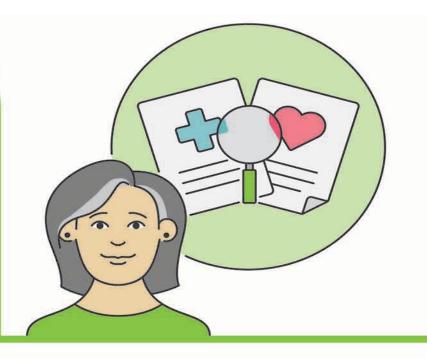
I love Louisiana! I was born in North Louisiana and grew up visiting relatives in Olla, Jonesboro, and Monroe. I was raised in South

See EVANGELISM, page 28



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## **16** SPECIALEDITION: REVIVAL

## **Revival behind bars: 31 inmates baptized**

#### **By Brian Blackwell** Message staff writer

LIVINGSTON, La. (LBM) – A spiritual awakening is taking place inside Livingston Parish Detention Center, with 31 incarcerated men celebrating freedom in Christ through baptism, all since December.

Each of the inmates. who are serving sentences ranging from 6 months to 10 years, were met with cheers as they individually emerged from the water in a galvanized horse trough during four separate worship services.

LPDC Chaplain Mark Carroll, also pastor of South Walker Baptist Church, Walker, has been intentional to share the Gospel with the men.

The first time I meet any of these guys, they

come in and generally are at a low point," Carroll told the Baptist Message. "I tell them, 'Your best decision making and best efforts to make friends got you where you are now,' to help them realize their responsibility for what has happened to them," he explained.

'But I also tell them, 'You can give your life to a Savior and surround yourself with people who will encourage and strengthen you.'

'Most don't profess Christ then," he added. "But a seed is planted.'

Livingston Parish Sheriff Jason Ard also talked with excitement about the revival he has witnessed in the jail.

'Anytime an individual makes a decision to change his or her life and genuinely attempts to do the right things in life, based on their faith, is a success," Ard said.

"We are proud to offer these programs to further the rehabilitation of offenders.

#### **RELATIONSHIPS BUILT**

Since he became chaplain in August 2019, Carroll has made frequent visits with inmates to build a positive rapport with the men, he said. Subsequently, walls came down, giving him inroads to share the Gospel.

After the baptisms, Carroll said he followed up with the inmates to help them grow in their walks with Christ. He also works with those who lead Bible study and prayer times.

"Many times, after they get out, men will go back to the wrong kind of friends, and they may end up right back in jail," he said. "But

See BARS, page 34



Livingston Parish Detention Center Chaplain Mark Carroll, also pastor of South Walker Baptist Church, Walker, has been intentional to share the Gospel with the men inside the prison. More than 30 of the men have turned to Christ and stirred the baptistery waters.

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#### An Important Year

Louisiana Baptists celebrated the election of Fred Luter, Pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, as the President of the Southern Baptist Convention. Prior to the Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Baptist Convention in 2012, David Hankins and Waylon Bailey, pastor of First Baptist Covington and then-president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, sat down to discuss God's plans for the coming years. This providential encounter was the catalyst of an amazing idea: what if we looked to the year 2020 and worked to make a radical difference in how we do church, evangelize and disciple? This idea overwhelmingly resonated with many pastors across Louisiana who were heartbroken for their state. The idea began to grow legs. Following the 2012 Annual Meeting, they continued to pray, develop and dream about how God could shape and renew the vision of Louisiana Baptists to reach our state and our world. This conversation broadened to include leaders from all over the state. The synergy created through prayer and planning gave birth to the 2020 vision a strategy to radically change Louisiana by the year 2020 and beyond.

## Louisiana Baptists minister, win souls overseas

By Brian Blackwell Message staff writer

EW ORLEANS (LBM) – Louisiana Baptists' efforts to seek and save the lost extend beyond the borders of the state and even the nation to include extensive ministry in Haiti, Brazil and Belarus, where thousands have professed Christ and matured as disciples because of this overseas emphasis in sharing the Gospel.

#### HAITI

Escalating violence has forced Louisiana Reach Haiti to halt most trips into the country, however, the ministry continues to share the hope of Jesus there.

Ministry President Darrin Badon said he wishes LRH could have continued "business as usual," but he is grateful the Lord has allowed the ministry to move forward despite the many challenges. The ministry is a partnership between the Louisiana Baptist Convention, Haiti Baptist Convention, individual Louisiana Baptist churches and the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home & Family Ministries.

"It's been a faith builder," Badon said. "We may not be able to send teams and do the many short-term ministries we did there in the past. But our permanent ministries continue to thrive. The kids in our Children's Village still need the Gospel, and our staff depend on us to provide for them each month.

"We are still in the trenches," he continued. "We are still restoring families and still are making a difference in the lives of them and the staff; and we need help to be able to continue to do that."

#### BACKGROUND

In January 2010, Haiti was devastated by an earthquake that killed more than 250,000 people and left hundreds of thousands homeless. Louisiana Baptists were among the first to provide disaster relief, and for nearly a decade have maintained a ministry presence through multiple mission trips each year.

After the earthquake response, some members of the Louisiana Baptist team felt led to create a permanent presence in Haiti and partnered with Pastor Odvald Louis and his members at New Evangelical Baptist Church in Croix-des-Bouquets. The Haitian congregation and Louisiana mission teams combined to complete a Children's Village in Croix-des-Bouquets. They also teamed up to dig a well and build a church building, school and medical clinic in neighboring Canaan.

Unfortunately, the facilities in both cities were overtaken and vandalized by gangs in early 2022, Badon said.

#### **REFOCUSED MINISTRY**

LRH has now reorganized its efforts on multiple fronts:

— In February 2022, escalating gang violence forced the Children's Village to relocate to the Florida House, a Florida Baptist Convention-owned home for missionaries in Port-au-Prince. The facility houses 21 children and six staff members.

— Meanwhile God opened doors in New Orleans, allowing LRH leaders to help relocate Odvald Louis and his family from Haiti, which he fled after surviv-



A Haitian boy was prayed for during a Louisiana Baptist mission trip to the country in 2016. Even though escalating violence has forced Louisiana Reach Haiti to halt most trips into the country, the ministry continues to share the hope of Jesus there.

ing an attempted poisoning by gang members.

— Additionally, LRH began supporting Connect International Church, a congregation in New Orleans that in April 2022 formed and hosted an international church (led by a Haitian American graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) that reaches out to Haitians and other nationalities. In July 2022, LRH partnered with Fellowship Church, Prairieville, and worked with this newly formed congregation to conduct Vacation Bible School for 30 Haitian children. This year, they are hoping to hold another VBS and assist in other evangelistic efforts.

"It's been neat to meet, see and serve alongside Haitian Americans and those who moved here," Badon said. "This is God's way of telling us that while things aren't what we hoped they would be in Haiti, He still is working through Haitians right here in Louisiana."

#### BRAZIL

For more than 40 years, Brazil has been fruitful in terms of a spiritual harvest for Louisiana Baptists. Teams (partnering with the Louisiana-based Beyond the Walls ministry) have shared the Gospel through street evangelism, Vacation Bible Schools, drama performances, sports clinics, cooking demonstrations, construction of churches and a school, and medical, dental and eye clinics with exceptional results.

Indeed, in the years immediately prior to the pandemic, multi-thousands each year repented for salvation: 3,500 (2015), 3,202 (2016), 2,568 (2017), 3,212 (2018) and 1,835 (2019).

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## **20 SPECIALEDITION: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS**

## Partnerships from page 17

Wayne Jenkins, who previously led 34 mission trips to Brazil, took his final mission trip to that country in July 2018 despite a lengthy battle with cancer and only months before his Nov. 13 death.

His son-in-law, David Denton, has continued to carry on Jenkins' legacy and love for the Brazilian people.

During the most recent trip to Brazil, July 2022, a team of 21 members recorded more than 300 salvation decisions for follow up by local churches.

"Last summer was the first time we as a church and Beyond the Walls had returned to Brazil since the pandemic," said Denton, pastor of Highland Baptist Church, New Iberia. "Participation is increasing and this summer Beyond the Walls will take 32 people from five different states. This is a good time to be reminded that we are all called to participate in the Great Commission in some capacity."

This summer 13 members of Highland will be traveling with the ministry to Uberlandia, in the state of Minas Gerais, July 7-20.

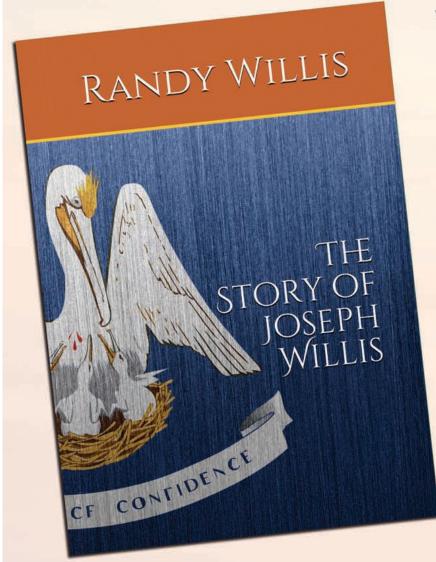
"One of the greatest stories from our time last summer was a testimony from one of our interpreters, a dynamic young believer," Denton said. "She posted a video in which she



Louisiana Baptist mission team members gathered in a circle to pray for God's guidance during a 2018 trip to Brazil. While there, the team saw 3,212 people accept Christ.

recounted her family's Christian legacy going back generations. The key factor in her family coming to Christ was a Baptist missionary from the United States. It was a reminder to me that we are one part of a larger Kingdom work in a country that is hungry for the Gospel."

See PARTNERSHIP, page 25



RANDY WILLIS PO Box 111 / Wimberley, Texas 78676 randywillisnovelist@gmail.com http://amazon.com/author/randywillis Cell: 512.565.0161 Website: http://threewindsblowing.com

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- -- His family took him to court to deprive him of his inheritance.
- -- He fought as a Patriot in the Revolutionary War under General Francis Marion, The Swamp Fox.
- -- He entered hostile Spanish-controlled Louisiana Territory when the dreaded Code Noir aka Black Code was law.
- -- His life was threatened because of the message he brought to Spanish-controlled Louisiana!
- -- After overcoming insurmountable obstacles, he blazed a trail for others for another half-century that changed American history.
- -- His accomplishments are still felt today.

-Randy Willis

Randy Willis is the fourth great-grandson of Joseph Willis and his foremost historian.

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> Will Graham Billy Graham Evangelism Association

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> Jonathan Falwell Senior Pastor, Thomas Road Baptist Church Chancellor, Liberty University

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Josh McDowell Author and Speaker

There are 72 million Gen Z youth. According to the North American Mission Board, 57 million are lost and going to a Christless eternity.

Every day in America:

- 7,773 teens begin using drugs,
- 6,300 teens begin to drink alcohol,
- 2,660 teens drop out of school,
- 260 teens attempt to take their own lives,
- 19.7% (nearly 1 in 5) consider themselves a part of the LGBTQ+ community.

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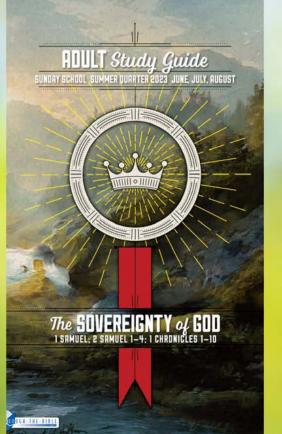
## **22 SPECIALEDITION: ANGOLA, NOBTS**





An inmate at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola lifted his hands toward heaven during a time of worship at a revival on the prison grounds Sept. 19, 2019.





Check out the Through-the-Bible Adult Study Guide for your discipleship needs.





## Angola from page 13

510 degrees through these additional programs – and dramatically changed the character of each facility. Combined, the seminary has graduated 542 prisoners in Angola and these prisons.

The NOBTS program has been so wildly successful that prison officials in Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, West Virginia and Wisconsin have reached out to learn how to start similar programs. Indeed, San Quentin State Prison in San Quentin, California, now has a similar program hosted by Gateway Seminary (a Southern Baptist school). Likewise, in Rosharon, Texas, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (also Southern Baptist) has a bachelor's degree program at Darrington Unit, a maximum-security state prison. Furthermore, the impact

has been international, with government representatives for Brazil, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Kenya seeking information from Angola and NOBTS.

Cain said the worldwide success of this spiritual reform in prisons is all due to Louisiana Baptists' investment in the lives of the men at Angola.

"I'm honored God dropped all this in my lap," Cain said. "And I'm proud to be associated with Louisiana Baptists. They just don't know all they are part of simply because they chose to support a prison ministry that God used to turn around one of the most violent corrections institutions in America.

"If Louisiana Baptists hadn't stepped forward," he added, "only God knows the number of people who would have been victims of violent crime."

**Compiled from multiple** *Baptist Message* **reports and revised.** 





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# **Revival flows across Bayou State**

#### **By Brian Blackwell** Message staff writer

LEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) -Louisiana has seen its share of hurricanes, ice storms and tornadoes the last few years, but also has witnessed the Holy Spirit move in the hearts of His church through multiple revivals across the state.

#### **FIRST BAPTIST GILBERT**

An annual revival held by the First Baptist Church, Gilbert, began March 12 with 19 baptisms, reflecting transformed hearts before the first word was preached.

Moreover, by the end of the fourth day, March 15, 20 persons had professed Christ as Savior and seven had surrendered their lives to ministry.

It was an

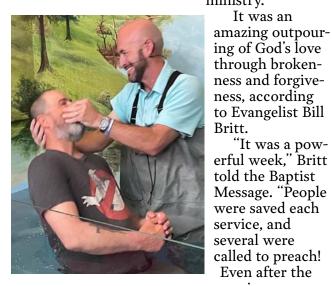
'It was a pow-

Even after the services were

seemingly over,

worshipping and going to the

people were still



Pastor Bubba Ezell baptized Scott Ford during a worship service at First Baptist Church, Gilbert, March 12, 2023.

altar.

"I never get tired of seeing people getting saved, week after week," he exclaimed. "In the last two weeks I have seen 84 people come to Jesus! There is a fresh wind from Heaven blowing across His Church."

Pastor Bubba Ezell said that lives began to be changed after the congregation committed to showing greater respect for the value of one soul.

He said he returned from the 2023 Louisiana Baptist Evangelism Conference in January and told his congregation, "I would sell this building for one soul. I would give it all up for a soul.'

He credited the challenge of "How far are we willing to go?" with creating a spark in the church.

Ezell emphasized this point by sharing a particular example involving the congregation's Amazing Grace addiction recovery ministry, which has about 30 members.

"I started asking them to witness to one person a week, and to write it down," he



The worship center at First Baptist Church, Gilbert, was filled with members and guests during a four-day revival in March 2023. The annual four-day event at First Baptist Church in Gilbert began with 19 baptisms.

explained. "Three of our guys led people to Christ." Other things began happening and before long, he said, "We started getting our hearts right with God about the value of a soul.



The churches of the Big Creek Baptist Association gathered in the B-22 Auditorium, Dry Prong, for a joint revival, March 26-29, in preparation for a possible spiritual awakening in Grant Parish.

#### **BIG CREEK BAPTIST ASSOCIATION**

The 30 churches of Big Creek Baptist Association have seen God move through multiple combined revivals.

The churches of the Big Creek Baptist Association gathered in the B-22 Auditorium, Dry Prong, for a joint revival, March 26-29, in preparation for a possible spiritual awakening in Grant Parish. Association Moderator Travis Sanders, also pastor of Hebron Baptist Church, Dry Prong, said this was the largest attendance at any association revival service in more than 20 years.

Two months later, the churches gathered again for a revival, May 7-10, hosted by the New Friendship Baptist Church, Pollock. The church had lost its worship center, education space and fellowship hall in a fire, Feb. 16, and was meeting in a tent.

While the church was devastated over the loss of the building, they have seen the goodness of God through donations, phone calls and in-person visits. Additionally, four individuals made decisions to follow Christ since the fire, according to New Friendship Baptist Pastor Lloyd Whitman.

Sanders said at least 10 of the churches in the association have seen increased baptisms in the last few months.

'We all went through COVID and God used that to prune the vines in our churches," he said. "God is doing a new thing and we are seeing our churches unified -- and people in bondage are now giving their lives to Christ."

#### **BONITA ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH**

Bonita Road Baptist Church has witnessed

a revival break out among its students and all signs point to it continuing long-term. Since revival meetings at its campuses in Log Cabin and Mer Rouge took place in late 2022, 25 middle and high schoolers have accepted Christ. Twenty-three of them have displayed their faith through public bap-

tism.



A young girl raises her hands during a time of worship at a revival service hosted by Bonita Road Baptist Church in late 2022. Since then, the church has been in an ongoing time of spiritual renewal.

Pastor Casey Johnson said students not only

## **SPECIALEDITION: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS**



## Partnership from page 20

### BELARUS

Although Louisiana Baptists are 6,000 miles away from Belarus, they are helping to change the spiritual future for thousands of Belarusians, one Bible at a time.

Andrew Ryzhkov, founder of the Byelorussian Mission in-country ministry, said Louisiana Baptists, since 2014, have faithfully donated money to the ministry, provided thousands of "Good and Evil Illustrated Bibles" for distribution at events and sent teams to Belarus.

Historically, four out of ten people who have received the special Bibles have turned to Christ, and such evangelistic success only costs just \$10 per Bible. So far, 260,000 copies have been distributed.

"With Louisiana's help, we can be stronger and get the Bibles in the hands of many more people," he said. "We need Bibles. And we need people to come and join us in spreading the Gospel."

The ministry hosts conferences for pastors and youth; tutors, provides hot meals and teaches Bible lessons at day care centers; plants churches; and sponsors orphans.

Additionally, Byelorussian Mission hosts



There is an openness and a receptiveness in Belarus among the people to accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior and to follow Him in baptism. Louisiana Baptists have been actively engaged in evangelizing Belarus since 2014.

mission teams, such as a 12-member Louisiana team who ministered to Ukrainian refugees and Belarusian pastors, May 25-June 2, 2022. The trip included volunteers from Florida and Georgia. Team members led Bible studies and worship services for Ukrainian refugees at a hotel leased by several churches in Warsaw, Poland, and they witnessed at least 75 profess Jesus as Lord. The



Louisiana Baptists have faithfully donated money providing thousands of "Good and Evil Illustrated Bibles" for distribution in Belarus. So far, 260,000 copies have been distributed. Historically, four out of ten people who have received the Bibles have turned to Christ

team also led a training conference for 250 pastors in Korbin, Belarus.

"Pray for revival, especially among young people," he said. "And pray for those who receive the Gospel to grow stronger. And pray for leadership, for us, so we can go where God wants us to go. Join us and see first-hand how the Lord is moving in Belarus."

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## **26** SPECIALEDITION: REVIVAL

## **Revival** from page 24

have met for continued discipleship on Wednesdays and Sundays but have gathered for Bible study at lunchtime in their school. Additionally, the students have shared their faith testimonies on their respective campuses and invited their friends to worship.

'We have seen our teen-

Leslie Allen

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agers be obedient to take their faith outside the walls of the church," Johnson said. "In the past they have been on fire after a youth camp and then that passion waned. But over the last six months we have seen the students' passion for sharing Christ continue. Even our adults are noticing what God is doing in the students, and they are becoming more involved."

Of the 500 who attend Sunday worship at both campuses, 75 are students. Johnson is thankful for the youngsters' faithful attendance and is excited about how God will continue to use them at Bonita Road Baptist and beyond.

'God is raising a group of teenagers who realize they are not the church of the future, but that they are the church now," he said. "They are taking that charge seriously and are making a difference. They know they don't have to wait until they are adults to serve God but they realize they can do it now."

#### **COLLEGIATE CAMPUSES**

College students from Louisiana and across the nation gathered on their respective campuses, Feb. 23, to cry out to God for revival during the 200th annual Collegiate Day of Prayer.



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Students filled the altar during a revival service at Bonita Road Baptist Church. Since revival meetings at its campuses in Log Cabin and Mer Rouge on May 3, 2023, 25 middle and high schoolers have accepted Christ. Twenty-three of them have displayed their faith through public baptism.

Held the last Thursday each February, the event was a "united, multi-generational day of prayer for revival and awakening on college campuses in America.

According to the Collegiate Day of Prayer website, individuals, churches and other organizations signed up to pray for 4,323 campuses. Additionally, a 'Day of Prayer' simulcast took place at Asbury University where more than 50,000 people have been a part of revival from the past three weeks (Feb 8 to Feb 20). On Feb. 21, those services were moved off campus as the school continued to host evening

services for college and high school aged students (25 and under) through Feb. 23.

At LSU, more than 400 students gathered for a prayer and worship service at the Chapel on the Campus. The service was scheduled to end at 11 p.m. but 50 students remained past midnight to continue pouring out their hearts to the Lord.

The event was sponsored by the LSU BCM, Chi Alpha (Assemblies of God student organization), Campus Crusade for Christ (also known as Cru) and the Refuge (the college student ministry of

See REVIVAL, page 28

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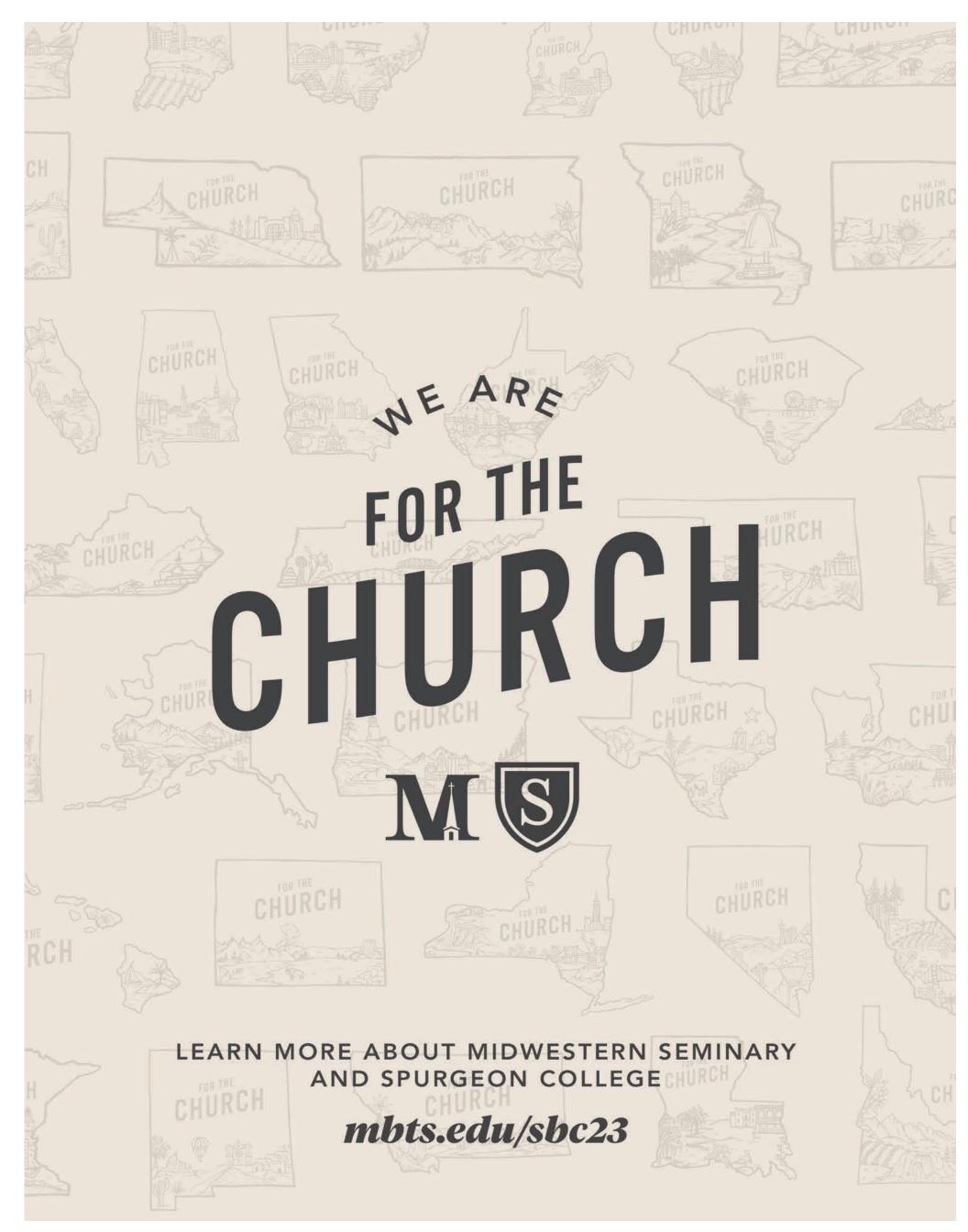
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## **28 SPECIALEDITION: REVIVAL**

## **Revival** from page 26

the non-denominational Chapel on the Campus). LSU BCM Director Steve Masters made an emotional plea halfway through the service for the students to invite their friends to attend the last part of the gathering.

"There are people lost," a teary-eyed Masters said. "There are those who need to be here."

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL of DIVINITY

At the same time the service at the Chapel was taking place, 15 adults gathered for prayer at the LSU BCM Building.

"The Lord moves in the midst of people when we gather to pray," Louisiana Baptist BCM Team Director Mark Robinson told the adults. "We pray He will move mightily in this campus and country."

For its part, Louisiana Christian University (hosted a time of prayer and worship in Guinn Auditorium.

"We have prayed for

a spiritual awakening at our campus in recent years," LCU President Rick Brewer told the Baptist Message. "Witnessing our students take the lead through worship, Scripture-led prayers and prayers of repentance and confession, aligning with other college students nationwide, lets me know this awakening is on the way."

Other campuses also reported revival: At Mc-Neese State University, students gathered for a three-hour prayer and praise time on the Quad. Meanwhile, Louisiana Tech hosted a time of prayer at its BCM Center. Nicholls State University BCM students gathered Thursday night at their building to pray, at stations, for one another, their campus and world. BCM Director Conan Sherlin called it "a sweet time of prayer.

Additional BCMs in the state also hosted prayer events, including LSU-Alexandria, Tulane and Loyola.

Evangelism from page 14

Louisiana. I went to Seminary in New Orleans. My first two pastorates were in Southeast Louisiana. My last two pastorates were in Acadiana. My Louisiana roots are deep, and my love is strong. I resonate with the Apostle Paul when writing to the Romans about his people, "My heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation. (Romans 10:1) Let's build on the work already established and work tirelessly to call our state to call on the name of Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

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## **SPECIALEDITION: BILLY GRAHAM**

## Graham from page 11

the BGEA enables Louisiana Baptists "to increase our online outreach in Louisiana," said John Kyle, director of communications for Louisiana Baptists. He noted that roughly one-third of responders in the state request follow-up materials, making Louisiana one of the more responsive populations to the BGEA outreach. Louisiana Baptists also volunteer as Chat Coaches, Discipleship Coaches and Email Coaches.

So far, Louisiana is the only state Baptist convention to join with the Graham organization in this online soul-winning effort, and the harvest has been remarkable with Louisiana Baptists sharing in 22,049 Gospel presentation views and 3,954 indicated decisions, 2019-2022, because of this partnership:

| 2019   | 2020   | 2021  | 2022   |
|--------|--------|---|--|
| 44,218 | 71,334 | 53,896  | 51,394   |
| 4,346  | 6,619  | 4,648   | 6,436  |
| 784    | 1,273  | 1,013   | 884  |
|        | 44,218 | 44,218         71,334           4,346         6,619 | 44,218         71,334         53,896           4,346         6,619         4,648 |

"This continues to be an exciting opportunity to be a part of Billy Graham's legacy and get in on what God is doing across the state," Kyle told the Baptist Message. He also urged Louisiana Baptists to continue to volunteer for the partnership: "Make yourself available, make your church available, to follow up on these commitments.

Persons interested in serving as a Chat Coach, Discipleship Coach or Email Coach are encouraged to visit www.searchforJesus.net (sister site of PeacewithGod.net) and click on the "Get Involved" link at the top of the screen.



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## **SPECIALEDITION: BAPTISM**

# Foreign exchange student discovers Christ in Louisiana

## By Brian Blackwell

Message staff writer

VILLE PLATTE, La. (LBM) – Eva Villamor came to America to experience life as a foreign exchange student but never dreamed she also would find a relationship with Christ.

"When I came here, I didn't even understand what a sermon was," Villamor told the Baptist Message. "I had a lot of questions about certain things that were in the Bible and my host family was so patient to help me. I found purpose for my life but it's sad that I had to travel all the way across the world to find Christ. But that was God's plan all along so I could find His Son."

Villamor, from Burgos, Spain, arrived Aug. 10, 2022, at the home of Ashley and Grayson Bieber, members of First Baptist Church,

UMHB

Ville Platte. For several months, she acclimated to the American culture and attended FBCVP with the family.

Through worship services, Sunday school classes and Wednesday night youth activities, Villamor was exposed to the Gospel. She also heard about Christ outside the church, including a pivotal moment at a Rend Collective concert in September at Louisiana Christian University, Pineville. During the concert, the Holy Spirit convicted Villamor for her need for Jesus and she came forward during an altar call to profess her faith in Christ.

Six months later, on April 2, an elated Villamor stirred the baptistry waters.

"She was excited like a cheerleader at a football game and kept putting her hands in the air and yelling how she was happy about this day," Pastor Kevin West said.

nusaders



Pastor Kevin West baptized Eva Villamor, April 2, at First Baptist Church, Ville Platte. Villamor, from Burgos, Spain, arrived Aug. 10, 2022, at the home of Ashley and Grayson Bieber, members of FBCVP. Through worship services, Sunday school classes and Wednesday night youth activities, Villamor was exposed to the Gospel.

"Eva had this excitement that something major had happened in her life and it was a breath of fresh air to see someone come from another country to accept Christ. We should all be excited for those like Eva who have their lives changed because of Jesus."

Ashley Bieber said their family was amazed at how God used their act of obedience to host a foreign exchange student as an inroad to

See EXCHANGE, page 35

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## **32 SPECIALEDITION: INCREASING THE KINGDOM**

# From skeptic to believer via Louisiana Tech BCM

#### By Brian Blackwell Message staff writer

RUSTON, La. (LBM) – Jonas Watkins was an atheist with a curiosity about Christ when he met Louisiana Tech University Baptist Collegiate Ministry member Caleb Henkel in September 2022.

Watkins, who previously was exposed to the Gospel through a friendship with a co-worker in high school, began meeting with Henkel each week and asked him about his faith. The conversations eventually led Watkins to abandon his skepticism about Christianity and repent for salvation, Oct. 6.

Hankel, who has discipled him each week since, was on hand to witness Watkins's March baptism by the Temple Baptist Church, Ruston.

"I always believed there is some sort of plan for us even when I was an atheist," Watkins told the *Baptist Message*. "God has a plan for everyone, and we do what He wants. I am thankful for those who didn't push the Gospel on me and continued to encourage me during my journey to Christ."

Henkel said he was honored to walk with Watkins on his faith journey.

"It's been really encouraging for me, just as much as it has been for him," Henkel said. "Getting the chance to lead someone from not believing in Jesus to salvation has been really cool. He taught me patience in the waiting. I could tell

See SKEPTIC, page 35  $\,$ 



Louisiana Tech University students Jonas Watkins and Caleb Henkel developed a friendship in September 2022 that resulted a month later in Watkins turning from atheism to Christianity. Henkel, who has discipled him each week since, was on hand to witness Watkins's March baptism by the Temple Baptist Church, Ruston

## **Client Review**

From our first meeting, I remember thinking we're in good hands. It's clear that Kent is trying to help us win.

Pastor Sean Walker The Bayou Church Lafayette, LA Renovation and Addition in Progress



## Former Angola inmate Hyde begins Mississippi prison ministry

**By Brian Blackwell** Message staff writer

PARCHMAN, Miss. (LBM) – Robert Hyde, the immediate past pastor of Grace Baptist Church in the Louisiana State Penitentiary, who was granted parole in March 2022, has begun discipling inmates at the Mississippi State Penitentiary.

In his role as a program supervisor, Hyde oversees more than 300 men who are taking classes in vocational school, adult basic education, Mississippi Delta Community College courses, careers services, book clubs via Zoom from Mississippi Library Commission and Jackson State University, and the extension center of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary classes. He also is an adjunct professor with the NOBTS extension center.

Hyde, who began working at the prison in July 2022, said his new role is a way for him to give back to those who helped turn his life around while as an inmate.

"It feels right to be here doing this," Hyde, who shared his testimony at the 2023 Louisiana Baptist state Evangelism Conference, told the Baptist Message. "This is exactly where I am supposed to be, which is helping guys. I finally get to be for these guys what other men were for me at Angola. It's the ultimate way to give back."

#### **ROAD TO REDEMPTION**

Hyde grew up in Baton Rouge with an abusive stepfather, and the domestic violence eventually led to his mother's death from a gunshot wound. He then went to live with his grandfather, whose aloof attitude left Hyde with no parental leadership. This led to a life of drugs, alcohol, the occult and eventually manslaughter in 2001 of another man at a party in Rayville at age 28.

While in Richland Parish Detention Center in Rayville, the Holy Spirit brought him under conviction and in his cell, Hyde turned to Christ.

Two years later, Hyde was given a 35-year

See HYDE, page 34

<image>

Former Angola inmate Robert Hyde shared, during the 2023 Louisiana Baptist Evangelism Conference, how God used Louisiana Baptists to turn his life to Christ.



How can we partner and help you in your next ministry event? Obedience 2 Death is a ministry dedicated to teaching obedience and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ using our Champion Labrador Retrievers as a visual illustration. O2D blends humor with simple and timeless Biblical truths that shows the power of obedience in the life of a believer. Our aim is that you will learn the power of obedience and gain a desire for a life of submission to Jesus Christ.

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**Pastor Johnny Morgan** 

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## **34 SPECIALEDITION: PRISON MINISTRY**

## Hyde from page 33

sentence for manslaughter and was transferred to the Louisiana Department of Corrections. At Winn and Dixon correctional centers, Hyde began to lead Bible studies and eventually learned of an opportunity to transfer to Angola, enrolling in 2012 with the New Orleans Baptist Theo[1]logical Seminary Extension.

Hyde earned associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees with the extension program, and was ordained by Grace Baptist Church in 2017. In 2015, he was called to be the associate pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Angola; and, during that time, October 2015, Washington Baptist Association unanimously voted to accept the congregation into its fellowship. He served in that role until 2019, when he succeeded Paul Will as senior pastor.

Hyde spent the final two years of his time in Angola helping to establish a Christian-based sub[1]stance abuse recovery program. Using the Celebrate Recovery model, Hyde witnessed 150 inmates turn from drug addictions to changed lives with Jesus.

First Baptist Church, Saint Francisville and the Washington Baptist Association provided the materials, but the inmates have paid for uniforms of mentors, the speaker system and most other costs.

Now, Hyde supervises programming and education at the Mississippi prison. Burl Cain, the former warden at Angola who started the seminary program in 1995 and now is the commissioner of the Department of Corrections in Mississippi, encouraged Hyde to apply for the position.

Hyde said the seminary was instrumental in preparing him for his new role.

"It's a real honor because the seminary meant so much to me," Hyde said. "Every penny of our seminary education was taken care of by Louisiana Baptists.

The professors and pastors who poured into me and the others were the spiritual dads we at Angola never had. I never could have done it without Louisiana Baptists."

#### **PATH TO FORGIVENESS**

Securing his release from Angola and landing a job at Parchman have been tremendous gifts from God, Hyde said. When he entered prison in 2001, Hyde already knew two of his daughters, Pa[1]mela and Kyra, who were 7 and 9 years old at the time. Through the years he maintained ongoing conversa-

## Bars from page 16

while here, new Christians build a group of solid believers as friends who, on the outside, provide support and encourage them to stand for Christ.'

Carroll cited Doucy Lomas as an example of a transformed life. Since his baptism in January, Lomas has shared his faith and wittions with them.

He later learned he had a third daughter, Janae, whose adopted parents finally agreed, 14 years after he entered Angola, that she would meet Hyde in 2016.

Once he was released, Hyde was reunited with his two oldest daughters in Baton Rouge. In December, he met his youngest daughter for the first time in Monroe. Hyde is praying that one day he will be able to reconcile with his fourth daughter.

Despite the crime he committed, Hyde said his daughters have shown un-conditional love. "I have learned there is noth-

ing more important, besides Jesus, than your blood and Christian family," he continued. "I took that for granted before I knew Jesus. Now I can appreciate it and I will never take it for granted again." Hyde asked for continued prayers as he ministers to Mississippi inmates.

'Thank you, Louisiana Baptists, for helping me learn how to be the man of God that Jesus Christ asked me to be," he said. Without your contributions, without your minis[1]try, without your churches, without the brothers and sisters in Christ, I wouldn't have stood a chance of becoming the man I am today.'

nessed other inmates come to Christ after hearing his testimony.

"Salvation is peace," Lomas said. "My old life is dead, and my new life is His life. And my joy and happiness are in serving Him and in offering Him to my family and the people I know.'

Carroll is thankful for

those men like Lomas who have become bold in their faith.

"He is seeing the world through the eyes of Jesus and not his own," he said. 'I told him that he would do mighty things with his life once he gave it to Jesus. I believe it now more than ever.'

## Evangelist Tim Lee Celebrating 50 Years Preaching, 45 Years as a Full-Time Evangelist



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## **SPECIALEDITION: INCREASING THE KINGDOM**

## Skeptic from page 32

his heart was changing and I didn't want to force it on him. I knew he wanted it as much as I wanted it for him. I prayed God would open his heart more and He did."

Watkins is among many students who have been changed through the Louisiana Tech BCM, according to Kevin Inman, who directs the program.

More than 100 students have been trained in personal evangelism since September, he said. Additionally, more than 300 students heard the Gospel on campus during a glowin-the-dark Easter egg hunt; another 400 attended a presentation by apologist Frank Turek; and 25 students made a profession of faith during a multi-denominational, campus-wide revival service attended by more than 2,000 in early May in Joe Aillet Stadium.

He said BCM student leaders and local churches have helped foster an environment that fuels spiritual growth.

'We have a lot of cooperative partnerships with students that really have been a key factor," Inman said. "It's very encouraging More than 300 students heard the Gospel on campus during a glow-inthe-dark Easter egg hunt; another 400 attended a presentation by apologist Frank Turek; and 25 students made a profession of faith during a multi-denominational, campus-wide revival service attended by more than 2,000 in early May in Joe Aillet Stadium.

#### **Kevin Inman** LA Tech BCM Director

that so many step up and value our students.' Inman's daughter, Anna Kate, is another student

#### not share that?

"If everyone lived by Romans 12:21, the world would be filled with less hate," she continued. "Just as when Jesus laid down His life even for those who hated, despised, and rejected Him. We should love others like Christ loves us.'

who God has used to strengthen someone's faith.

In March, she felt led to approach and invite Georgia Manzer (a student she did not know) to the BCM's weekly lunch. Anna Kate then discipled Manzer and helped her become a more fully devoted follower of Christ.

'She was so open to growing in Christ and changed from going through the motions to

being a committed follower of Jesus," Anna Kate said. "It's been really cool to see her so eager to learn more about growing in her faith and that may never had happened if I had not been obedient to taking that step to reach out and ask her about Christ. This is a reminder that no one is too far gone from Christ and that we just need to open our eyes to obey what Christ has commanded.'



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## Exchange from page **31**

Villamor accepting Christ.

We knew this was a great opportunity to introduce our kids to another culture," she said. "We had been praying hard that God would bring us the right student. I was shocked how open she was to the Gospel even during our conversations on the phone before she came over here and was so excited that she made the choice to accept Christ several months after



degree. We come alongside them and help them fulfill what God is calling them to do by removing that obstacle of debt.'

Each qualifying minister receives a full-tuition scholarship that can be applied to the costs of undergraduate and graduate classes. More than 275 Caskey students are expected to enroll for the fall semester, Newsom said.

'Our donors are generous and love our pastors,' Newsom said. "God has blessed our donors with the financial resources, and they are coming with an open hand to do what they can to make an eternal Kingdom impact.

Because evangelism is a key component of the program, all students are required to engage in at least

she got here." Since she was baptized, Villamor has looked for multiple opportunities to share Christ such as during a Fellowship of Christian Students meeting at Pine Prairie High School. Villamor, who will return to Spain in June before returning in August for her freshman year at LCU, said she wants others to experience the same joy she has in Jesus.

"I want people to know that they too can have the same joy I have in Christ,'

each week.

'Our students take an evangelism practicum course each week and report on the Gospel conversations they have had," Newsom said. "That adds a level of accountability."

The Caskey Center also offers resources for many others who may not enroll with NOBTS. This includes conferences on campus and other locations, as well as podcasts and online articles by Newsom and other seminary faculty.

We exist to encourage and equip those who serve in the local church," Newsom said. "Our motto is 'to win the many,' based on 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. Everything we do is to leverage, equip and encourage the local churches to win many

For more information on the Caskey Center, visit caskeycenter.org.

Villamor said. "God willingly allowed His Son to die for me on that cross, so how could I

one Gospel conversation

to the Gospel.'



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