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# HORN: Cooperate for Gospel

**By Brian Blackwell**
Message staff writer

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM) – During the 2026 Louisiana Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, Nov. 10, hosted by Trinity Baptist Church, Lake Charles, Louisiana Baptist Executive Director Steve Horn urged messengers to cooperate as they seek to reach the 4.6 million people who live in Louisiana.



**Brian Blackwell** photo

**Louisiana Baptist Executive Director Steve Horn urged messengers to cooperate as they seek to reach the 4.6 million people who live in the state.**

### HERE FOR YOU

Horn highlighted two ways the state missions services staff has strived to be there for Louisiana Baptists.

*IRS letters*

The Louisiana Baptist Convention has mailed letters to churches to explain a change by the Internal Revenue Service in how it qualifies group exemptions for houses of worship.

*Revenue Procedure* 2026-8, issued by the IRS in January, ended the freeze on group exemption letter applications that had been in place since 2020. The new IRS rule also modified what churches must do to be part of an umbrella Group Exemption like the one granted to the Louisiana Baptist Convention.

Now Louisiana Baptist congregations must complete a form by Nov. 30 that declares their desire to participate in the LBC Group Exemption, instead of relying on the IRS to presume their participation by way of affiliation with the LBC.

Insurance cooperative

Two information sessions for a proposed faith-based cooperative were held Oct. 22 at the Baptist Building and another Nov. 9 at Trinity Baptist before the LBC Annual Meeting.

The faith-based cooperative, known as the Fellowship of Louisiana Churches

See **HORN**, page **2**

# Louisiana Baptists enjoy fellowship, worship, conduct business

**By Brian Blackwell**
Message staff writer

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM) – Louisiana Baptists enjoyed fellowship and worship during the 2026 LBC Annual meeting, Nov. 10, hosted by Trinity Baptist Church, Lake Charles.

### BUDGET APPROVED

Messengers approved the 2027 financial plan, based on Cooperative

See **CONNECT**, page **6**

# APOLOGETICS 101 (Part 11): New Testament odds and ends

**By Will Hall**
Message executive editor

ALEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) – Archaeological discoveries are helpful not just for countering attacks against the truthfulness of the Word, but also for giving "texture" to our understanding about the people, places and phenomena recorded in the Bible.



**Will Hall**

### A REVELATION ABOUT EPHESUS

Consider, for instance, Ephesus.

This city was the commercial, political and pagan religious center of Rome's Provincia Asia, yet the church there thrived as a faith community, especially as a hub for expanding Christianity into that region (now modern-day Turkey).

See **APOLOGETICS**, page **5**

# Pastors Conference: Fulfill ministry

**By Brian Blackwell**
Message staff writer

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM) – During the 2026 Louisiana Baptist Pastors Conference, Nov. 9, hosted by Trinity Baptist Church, Lake Charles, speakers offered words to encourage them to fulfill their ministries.



**Brian Blackwell** photo

**Tommy Kiker, pastor with East Leesville Baptist Church, cited 2 Timothy 4:5-8 to remind pastors to exercise self-control.**

### KEN WHITTEN

Ken Whitten, national director of pastoral leadership with the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, spoke during the opening session from 2 Timothy 4. He encouraged pastors to do the work of an evangelist, reminding them to persevere in soul winning even when quitting replac-

See **FULFILL**, page **3**

# 2027 changes for Baptist Message subscribers

**By Staff**
Baptist Message

ALEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) – A new partnership will allow the Baptist Message to continue to provide printed copies of the newspaper to subscribers in 2027.

Subscribers will see changes in the look, and there are price and billing changes, too.

The Baptist Paper, an Alabama Baptist newspaper, and the Baptist Message will jointly publish a monthly Louisiana Baptist special edition that goes to Baptist Message readers.

The newspaper will combine six pages of Louisiana Baptist content (typically four full-length feature articles plus six news reports written by the Baptist Message team)

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and Nonprofit Religious Organizations, was authorized by Act 259 in 2023 and a one-time "launch" appropriation was approved in 2025 as part of Act 461. However, lawmakers needed to address four additional policy points.

"We are closer now than we have ever been before," Horn said. "We've been delayed by various things, including some additional legislative issues that needed to be addressed in order for us to be to move forward. The good news is that we were able to get these changes written into the law, so that though delayed, we are back to work getting the program in a presentable fashion.

"And so, it's really time to hear from you," he continued. "We're really interested in this endeavor. Much has changed since we first started talking about this four years ago, including some new players in the Louisiana market that might better be suited for you, and that is fine."

### 2026 HIGHLIGHTS

*Serve Tour*

Horn said that the recent SEND Relief Serve Tour was a success and could even lead to an annual event in the state.

The collaborative effort, in partnership with the North American Mission Board, Northeast Louisiana Baptist Association and Louisiana Baptist Convention, involved 1,070 volunteers, collectively, from 76 churches who participated in 48 service projects throughout northeast Louisiana as the foundation for evangelism. Projects included 10 block parties, eight grill walks (teams knocking on doors and offering hamburgers, chips and drinks to start Gospel conversations), church building upgrades, school improvement projects and paying for locals' laundry at four laundromats.

The weekend of evangelistic outreach, Aug. 21-22, produced a spiritual harvest of at least 81 known professions of faith during the Serve Tour in Morehouse, Ouachita and Richland parishes.

Horn shared that Louisiana was issued a challenge by Serve Tour to hold similar events in the state, and he offered that the next one could take place as soon as the spring of 2028.

"We told you last year when we met that this weekend would be a highlight of the year and for those who participated and those who received help, it was," he said. "This, in my opinion, is an example of cooperation at its best."

*Listening sessions*

Horn said that 33 listening tour sessions related to the Cooperative Program were attended by 551 people representing 367 churches. He said that the key "take-aways" from the tours were:

-- presence is the key to relationships;

-- communication holes exist;

-- the LBC needs to better organize around the mission of the church;

-- expectations about the LBC vary based on the church's ethnic identity, size and location (urban or rural); and

-- everyone wants Louisiana Baptists to rally around the Gospel and the lostness of Louisiana.

### NEW INITIATIVES

Horn said that three initiatives will be implemented next year: CP small groups curriculum, evangelism and baptisms as well as a renewed strategy on prayer.

*CP curriculum*

Horn said Cooperative Program small groups curriculum will launch in 2027. Written by LBC President Kirk Jones and state missions services staff, the four-week curriculum will focus on biblical foundation, historical success, current potential and future potential of cooperation.

"Every generation of Southern Baptists must be educated about the Cooperative Program," he said. "But more than educated, every generation must catch the vision of our cooperation. But more than education and vision, every generation must see the value in our cooperation."

*Increase in baptisms*

Horn shared a goal to increase baptisms by 7 percent each year over the next seven years. If achieved, that would move the state's total from 8,988 baptisms in 2025 to approximately 15,500 by 2033.

He said that executive directors in other state conventions have a similar goal to help their states increase baptisms through 2033. If all the state conventions achieve that same goal by 2033, then baptisms for the Southern Baptist Convention would be the highest in any year ever, eclipsing the 445,725 new believers who were baptized in 1972.

"Now, some people are going to say 'that can't happen, that can't be done, that's an impossibility,'" he said. "Well, the Bible says that 'with God, all things are possible.'"

*Prayer*

Horn said the greatest resource for evangelism is prayer, and to that end he is asking Louisiana Baptists to come together to seek God for the lost of Louisiana, and for revival among those who already are believers. Associations will be encouraged to have an evening of prayer, pastors will be called upon to dedicate a Sunday morning to prayer, and every Louisiana Baptist will be challenged to pray at 10:02 a.m. or 10:02 p.m. based on Luke 10:2 "He told them 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'" (NIV).

Horn said his heart's desire is to see the people of Louisiana turn to Jesus.

"There are 4.6 million people living among us in Louisiana, and every single one of them needs the Gospel," he said. "It's going to take all of us."

### HONORING SAYLOR

Horn also honored Jeannie Saylor, who will retire on Dec. 31 after serving with the state missions services staff for 36 years (including the last 18 years as executive administrative assistant to the executive director).

"I feel like you, the messengers, would want to have a moment to express your gratitude to Jeannie," he said. "And so, Jeannie, you are loved by Louisiana Baptists."




**Brian Blackwell** photo

**The African American Fellowship of the Louisiana Baptist Convention presented Louisiana Baptist Missions and Ministries Team Director James Jenkins with its Louisiana Distinguished Service Award during the 2026 Louisiana Baptist Convention Annual Meeting. Presenting the award was Fellowship President Steve Beckham.**

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# FULFILL from page one

es waiting, when doxology replaces theology and when imagination replaces revelation.

"All of us have out of seasons in ministry," he said. "You might be one of those right here and I'm not fussing at you. I'm not pointing at you. I'm not yelling at you.

"I'm trying to encourage you and comfort you that it's way too soon to quit," he said. "Please don't quit. Be not weary in well-doing."

He said not to misinterpret the season. Rather, Whitten said to preach the Word.

"People are not wanting a good experience," he said. "They're wanting a God encounter."

He told pastors to keep doing the work of an evangelist regardless of the circumstances.

"Lift up your head," he said. "Be encouraged. You haven't preached your last sermon yet."

### MATTHEW MCKELLAR

Matthew McKellar, professor of preaching with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, told pastors to preach the Word.

Preaching from 1 John 2:28-3:3, McKeller said pastors must stay connected to Jesus and stay affected by Him.

"The vast majority of your ministry and my ministry is spent in the mundane, routine, daily responsibilities where nobody sees and nobody's watching and pretty much nobody cares," he said. "But let me tell you who cares – the Lord Jesus Christ. And you see, one of the greatest gifts He can give to you is the reminder that you are doing what you do as unto the Lord."

He said God knows the worst about each person and has chosen to love them anyway. And pastors must continue to communicate to their congregation.

"As long as you have an entitlement mentality toward God, as long as the people to whom you preach have an entitlement mentality about God, they will never be enthralled with God," he said. "The two things are mutually exclusive, and I think it's an epidemic in evangelical Christianity, certainly in the West today. We're got people in the pews that are entitled. They are not enthralled with Jesus.

"We've got people standing in pulpits who are preaching, and they are in an entitlement relationship with Jesus," he continued. "But they're not enthralled with Him. They're not astonished. They're not amazed. They're not speechless before the very throne of God. And listen, as long as you think you do something to earn you way to God, you will never be enthralled."

McKeller also challenged pastors to keep preaching on the identity they have in Christ and the destiny they have by trusting in Him.

"What is your identity," he asked. "What is my identity? Well, I'm a broken down, lost, hopeless, helpless, hideously malformed sinner. But in Jesus Christ, I'm somebody completely new."

### TOMMY KIKER

Tommy Kiker, pastor with East Leesville Baptist Church, cited 2 Timothy 4:5-8 to remind pastors to exercise self-control.

He challenged them to remember, live and remain committed to their calling.

"We've got to stay focused," he said. "We've got to lay aside our sin. We've got to lay aside even the things of lesser value."

Kiker noted that pastors must spend time with and sacrifice everything for Jesus.

"The church does not need us," he said. "They need Jesus in us, through us, around us, above us, behind us, in front of us."

He added that pastors must start, run and finish well.

"We've got to walk in sober mindedness, close with Jesus, remembering Paul's exhortation to Timothy as if it's Christ's exhortation to us through His apostle," he said.

He reminded pastors that at some point, life will become difficult.

"This side of this journey for all of us ends in death," he said. "You are going to get kicked in the teeth at some point in life and ministry. Stay sober minded, knowing that His grace is sufficient."

### GARRISON GRIFFITH

Garrison Griffith, pastor with First Baptist Church, Wisner, and Pastors Conference vice president, cited Acts 7:54-8:3 to remind pastors to endure hardship.

Like Stephen who was stoned to death, pastors too must have a rock-proof faith. He said such a faith realizes the presence of the triune God, embodies the ministry of Jesus and endures even in the faith of persecution.

"Rock-proof faith endures the hardship that it can't fix by looking up to Je-

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# PASTORS from page three

sus and handing everything to Him, whatever it cost," he said.

He said pastors face hardship on two sides: those they endure in their own lives and those they endure alongside others.

"Pastors are a people well acquainted with grief, hardship and sorrow," he said. "Stephen is the extreme case of hardship, but I believe what held him up when he faced these stones of persecution is the same things that can hold us up no matter what hardship we face.

"The apostle Paul told young pastors to share in suffering as good soldiers of Christ Jesus," he continued. "Brother pastor, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to share in suffering, to come and die, if necessary, to endure whatever hardship your ministry requires."

He pointed out that as Stephen was being stoned, he asked for the Lord to receive his spirit and for the forgiveness of those who killed him.

"The hardship of death is something that we can face with boldness," he said. "Stephen embodied the ministry of Jesus in how he prayed.

"Stephen embodied the ministry of Jesus in how he forgave. Stephen embodied the ministry of Jesus in how he died. And get this, Stephen embodied the ministry of Jesus in how He will be raised. Rock-proof faith requires us to remember who it is we follow into hardship and to follow His example in all we do, especially when we enter hardship."

### HERSHAEL YORK

Hershael York, professor of preaching with Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, closed the Pastors Conference with a reminder to pastors to fulfill their ministries.

Sharing the parable of the Good Samaritan and story of the home of Mary and Martha, as told in Luke 10:25-42, York said the former shows the true place of service, and the latter shows the true place of worship.

He said that aiding others is good but adoring Christ is best.

"In these stories Luke is showing us the two commandments taken individually and out of balance, because the only thing greater than service to others is adoring and listening to Christ," he said. "Ministry often brings anxiety and trouble, but worship quiets and stills a heart disturbed and burdened by ministry."

He asked the pastors if they delight being with Jesus.

"Has the Holy spirit ever awakened you early in the morning?" he asked. "(Saying) 'Get up. Come be with me. Open the Word. Let me speak to your heart. Tell me what's on yours. Quit being distracted with many things. Choose me, your portion. Long for me more than ministry.' This is the thrill of knowing Jesus."

### LANGIAPPE

Pastors Conference President Joey Smith, pastor with Grayson Baptist Church, prayed for the pastors at the meeting.

"How much more gentle we can be with people when we remember how gentle you are with foolish men like us who often walk around looking good on the outside and empty on the inside," he prayed. "Lord Jesus, you are so good to me. I know there's a room full of men and women here who would testify of the same thing. I pray for grace for each pastor in the room today, that they would fulfill the ministry that you have given to them, that you have charged to them, but to do so by seeking you."

In other business, officers were elected for the 2027 Pastors Conference: Garrison Griffith (pastor, Wisner Baptist Church), president; Juri Thompson (pastor, First Baptist Church, Archibald), vice president; and Nick Watts (pastor, First Baptist Church, Eunice), secretary.



**Submitted** photo

**Pastors Conference officers for 2027 are Nick Watts (interim pastor, First Baptist Church, Eunice) secretary; Garrison Griffith (pastor, First Baptist Church, Wisner) president; and Juri Thompson (pastor, FBC Archibald) secretary.**





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First Baptist Church, Mansfield, Louisiana is prayerfully seeking a Christ-centered Part Time Worship Minister to lead a blended worship service, incorporating both traditional hymns and contemporary worship, while also leading and developing our choir. We're looking for someone with a heart for ministry, a love for local church, and a passion for leading people into meaningful worship.

If you feel called to serve in this role, we'd love to connect with you!

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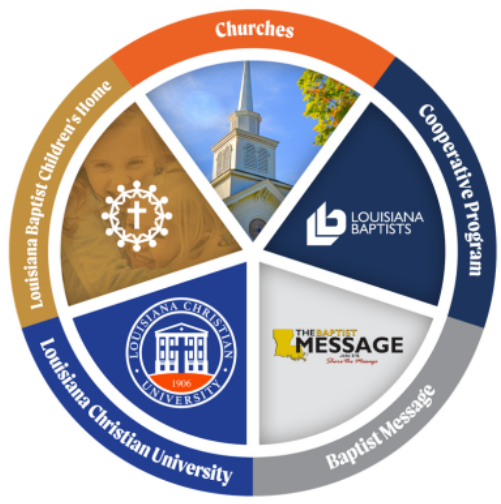
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# APOLOGETICS from page one

In fact, the congregation of Ephesus was blessed to enjoy the leadership, at different times, of Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Timothy and John the Beloved:

-- Acts 18, 19 and 20 detail how Paul helped to lay the foundation for the church in that city.

-- He counseled Timothy about how to lead the church in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1).

-- Then while imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus to encourage them, among other things, "to be strengthened" by the Holy Spirit and to remind them that they were "rooted and grounded in love" and that they have experienced the width, length, depth and height of "the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:16-19).

However, in the revelation given to John, the church in Ephesus was the subject of a letter from God that rebuked the Christians there for having "left your first love" (Revelation 2:4). Moreover, He warned them to remember their first love, repent for abandoning their first love and return to that first love in the work they had been doing from the beginning, "or else, I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place" (Revelation 2:4-5).

Despite all the advantages it had enjoyed, the church at Ephesus lost its lampstand, and archaeology has shown how God used changes in His creation, a foreign invasion and a natural disaster to remove it:

-- Over the centuries, silt deposits eventually moved the coastline far away from the city, and without the trade provided by a port, commerce declined and so did the population.

-- There were invasions by the Goths, who largely destroyed the city including the Temple of Artemis that was a vital marketplace for the huge silver trade in Ephesus.

-- Finally, an earthquake in A.D. 614 destroyed what little of the city remained. The once-vibrant body of believers vanished with the city's demise, and thus, no more lampstand.

Sadly, the only visitors to Ephesus today are tourists and archaeologists.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Regular discoveries being made offer pieces of information, fitting like broken glass in a mosaic that is not finished, with each tessera (or tile) adding clarity to what is seen.

The 2004 discovery of the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem, which is still being restored, adds details about the history of the ancient city, and could tell us why Jesus chose it as the place for His sermon about the promised Holy Spirit as "living water" (John 7:37-39) and why He used it as a means for the healing of a man who was blind from birth (John 9:1-41).

Similarly, the 1968 and 2017 discoveries of nails in human heel bones dating to Roman rule (first century, Jerusalem, and fourth century, Great Britain), confirm the Bible's description of Jesus' crucifixion by the Romans. Although not considered "proof" by archaeological standards, both give ghastly reminders to believers about the painful torture Jesus endured, as described in the Gospels, to forgive our sins.

But faith is not the culmination of reassurances from extra-biblical sources such as excavated relics (whether it is gopher wood from Noah's Ark, or the cup used by Jesus for the Last Supper) or translated ancient writings (by any historian or official).

Indeed, Jesus scolded a doubting Thomas, who refused to believe without seeing for himself the physical appearance of the risen Lord, telling him, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). He was reminding Timothy, and us, that our confidence rests in our relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit, Whom God has given us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), Who dwells with us and in us (John 14:16-17), and Who guarantees our spiritual inheritance of salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14).

# The Giving Reaction

**As autumn leaves drop across the South, churches face a familiar seasonal rhythm.** Our thinking and messages naturally pivot from harvest, to recounting of our blessings, and ultimately to Christmas and end-of-year giving. True Biblical stewardship, however, is never a seasonal transaction; it is a spiritual chain reaction triggered by a thankful heart.

Dr. J.D. Grey, the former Southern Baptist Convention President and longtime pastor of First Baptist Church of New Orleans, famously noted the deep connection between a thankful heart and a joyful life: "The person who has forgotten how to say 'thank you' has also forgotten how to be truly happy. Contentment doesn't start when your hands are full; it starts when your heart is full of gratitude to the Provider."

When we give thanks, the Holy Spirit shifts our focus to the Giver, helping us to remember His past faithfulness, and our fear of the future fades. Gratitude breaks the grip of fear—the nagging anxiety that if we give today, we won't have enough for tomorrow. Instead of worrying, "Do I have enough?" our hearts worship, "Look how much the Lord has provided!"

Paul lays out this divine economy clearly in 2 Corinthians 9:11-12. The act of financial giving produces a harvest of thanksgiving back to God. As we give, cheerfulness expands, gratitude deepens, and we realize that our earthly resources are nothing compared to the overwhelming generosity of the Almighty. Our ultimate response isn't just a budget met; it is genuine worship to the One who gave everything.

## FOSTERING A CULTURE OF GRATITUDE

Help move your church from a mindset of scarcity to a culture of overflowing thankfulness this season.

- Gratitude Pause: Shift the offering from a transactional routine to a reflective moment of worship. Before the offering, prompt a silent response to this sentence: "One thing that God did this week that I am grateful for is..."
- Testimony Minutes: Dedicate three minutes of Sunday service to a live or video micro-testimony. Have a member share a recent answered prayer or blessing. Or before entering a prayer time, intentionally call for praises first.
- The Gratitude Wall: Set up a dedicated bulletin board in your lobby or Sunday School hallways. Provide sticky notes where members can publicly tape specific praises and blessings.
- Praise Reports: Written Thanks Offerings: When collecting the tithes and offerings, encourage your people to drop in an index card or note detailing a specific answer to prayer.



To learn more about Biblical stewardship and financial discipleship, visit LouisianaBaptists.org/stewardship or contact Rhea Fix at rhea@compassfinancialministry.org. Rhea Fix is the Executive Director for Compass Financial Ministry serving Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and West Tennessee.

COMPASS well-versed in finances

# CONNECT from page one

Program contributions of $17,397,201, an increase of 2.79 percent. Cooperative Pro¬gram projections are based on actual receipts from Au¬gust 2025 through July 2026. The allocation formula for distributing CP gifts between Southern Baptist entities and Louisiana Baptist causes remains unchanged, 62.87 percent to support ministries in the state and 37.13 percent forwarded to fund national entities.

### MOTION DEFEATED

Presented by Garrison Griffith, pastor and messenger with First Baptist Church, Wisner, messengers defeated a motion that moved in part that "the Louisiana Baptist Convention instruct the Executive Board through its Business and Finance Committee to study the best use of convention resources in the work of the Baptist Message and the partnership between the Convention and the Baptist Message in light of the Baptist Message's ongoing transition" relating to its print and digital publications.

Wisner spoke for the motion, and two messengers spoke against it. The measure failed, 80-84.

### RESOLUTIONS

Messengers affirmed three resolutions: expression of appreciation for all who made the 2026 Annual Meeting possible; promotion of healthy families by improving fatherhood; and commitment to the 2033 Great Commission baptism goal.

### LAGNIAPPPE

The final messenger count for the 2026 Annual Meeting was 473, a decrease from the 582 who registered for the 2025 Annual Meeting, held at the Randolph Riverfront Center, Alexandria.

The 2027 LBC Annual Meeting is scheduled for Nov. 16 and will be hosted by Temple Baptist Church, Ruston: The convention sermon will be preached by James Doughty, pastor with First Baptist Church, Monroe. The alternate preacher will be David Rose, pastor with Trinity Baptist Church, Lake Charles. The worship leader will be Jonathan Ickles, worship pastor with Fellowship Church, Prairieville.

### OFFICERS ELECTED

Kirk Jones, pastor with Fellowship Church, Prairieville, was re-elected president. Ben Hackler, pastor with First Baptist Church, Sterlington, was re-elected first vice-president, and Neil Treme, pastor with Glenmora Baptist Church was re-elected second-vice president.

All three men were given individual votes of acclamation by the Convention – a single ballot cast by the LBC executive director in view of no opposition to any of the candidates.



**Brian Blackwell** photo

**Louisiana Baptist Convention officers for 2027 are Neil Treme (pastor, Glenmora Baptist Church, Glenmora) second vice-president; Kirk Jones (pastor, Fellowship Church, Gonzales) president; and Ben Hackler (pastor, First Baptist Church, Sterlington) first vice-president.**



# EDITORIAL: Power does not corrupt men, men corrupt power

**By Will Hall**
Message executive editor

ALEXANDRIA, La. (LBM) – A quote by John Dalberg-Acton about power and absolute power often is used to convey a "moral of the story" that power tends to corrupt men.

But the biblical truth is that men tend to corrupt power, not the other way around.

Scheming, plotting, secretive discussions, harmful actions hidden behind seemingly honest ends are not caused by power. Rather, the values, morals and traits that are the true nature of a man come out when given the opportunity.

Jesus made such an emphasis when He preached His Sermon on the Mount and declared that murder and adultery begin in the heart. His message conveys the lesson that the only difference between lust and adultery, or between hatred and murder, is an opportunity to act. In other words, whatever desires reside in your heart will become actions if given a chance.

Haman's example in the book of Esther helps make this point.

He was not corrupted by power when he was made second in command of the kingdom. Instead, he brought pride and a historical hatred of Jews to that position, and there were consequences for the actions of his heart.

But there is a positive flipside to Christ's lesson about the heart, and Paul reveals it in his words of encouragement to those enduring tensions and offenses.

He told the church in Rome, which was facing internal struggles, to "... glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:3-5, NKJV).

It is a prescription for peace in any situation.

In the end, the heart matters because "everything you do flows from it." (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

Guard your heart.

Prepare your heart.

And whether in power or under adversity, honor Him with your heart.

B
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# Speakers press messengers to connect

**By Brian Blackwell**
Message staff writer

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM) – Kirk Jones charged pastors to cooperate and connect in his presidential address during the 2026 Louisiana Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, Nov. 10, hosted by Trinity Baptist Church, Lake Charles.

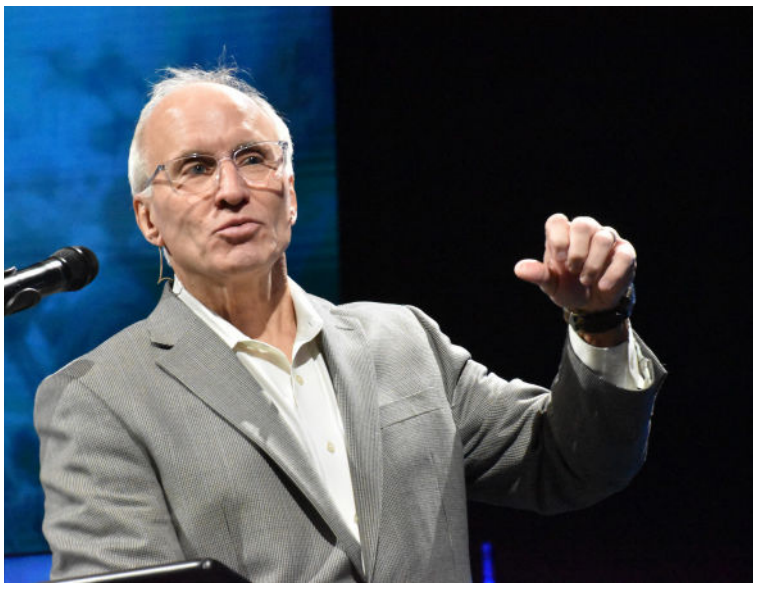
"The Lord has called us to a work, and it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ," he said. "We are here that disciples would be made, so that those who are not disciples and followers of Christ would become that which they are not. That is your labor and it is the best labor you ever will find. You are not laboring in vain."

Drawing from 1 Corinthians 16:1-18, Jones said for cooperation to happen there is an intentional and sacrificial collection, an accountable cooperation, humble leadership, strategic partnership, personal connection, faith-filled availability, opportunity-driven priorities, leadership elevation, respectful and cooperative disagreement, and honoring leadership.

"We need to be found faithful in cooperating together, being a part of this collective, this Cooperative Program," he said. "And we're together in what God has called us to do. Because God has called us to reach to the ends of the earth with the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

He said churches are

See **SPEAKERS**, page **12**



**Brian Blackwell** photo

In his convention message, Chris Craig, pastor, First Baptist Church, Ruston, told messengers that life can unravel fast, but that victory can occur when handled through faith and obedience.



**Brian Blackwell** photo

Kirk Jones charged pastors to cooperate and connect in his presidential address during the 2026 Louisiana Baptist Convention Annual Meeting.

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# Headline News: Johnson wins, Firment in runoff, Edmonds falls short

**By Staff**
Baptist Message

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson (R), a member with Cypress Baptist Church, Benton, won re-election, with 58% (or 134,739) votes cast in the 4th Congressional District, Nov. 3, while State Senator Rick Edmonds (R), pastor, First Baptist Church, McComb Miss. and retired pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Shreveport, fell short, finishing third in CD-6, garnering 49, 242 votes (19 percent) to the 50,882 (19 percent) earned by Chauna Banks (D), a staff member with East Baton Rouge Parish Public Schools, and the 50214 (19 percent tallied by State Representative Blake Miguez (R).

Banks and Miguez will face each other in a Dec. 12 runoff.

In Louisiana a candidate must win more than 50 percent of the vote to win the election. Otherwise, a runoff election will be held between the two top vote-getting candidates.

Meanwhile, State Representative Gabe Firment (R), a deacon and Sunday school teacher with First Baptist Church, Pollock, is headed to a runoff race in CD-5 against fellow State Representative Pat Moore (D) after both earned about 40,000 votes in the General Election (Firment, 17%; Moore, 19%; in a field of nine candidates).

Firment released a brief statement to the *Baptist Message*, thanking voters for their support and asking pastors "to urge their members to vote in the Dec. 12 runoff election."

### Give to plant a church, win souls

To honor its partnership in the Gospel with Louisiana Baptists, and

See **CHURCHPLANT140**, page **16**






# SPEAKERS from page 10

not in competition but rather have the same mission to share the Gospel.

"We are a collective, God's people, with a shared commission," he said. "We should be excited to see our brothers and sisters being faithful and fruitful in the ministry that God has given them. We should encourage one another along the way."

He challenged messengers to consider being fully committed and cooperative for the next five years to the Cooperative Program, and to plant a church, noting that less than three percent of Louisiana Baptist congregations are planting new churches.

"We want you to voice with respect and cooperation concerns you might have, places that you think we could do something different and better in the Kingdom of God," he said. "Be a person who, in love, speaks truth and takes a place in this cooperative work."

### BIBLE STUDY

Jeff Iorg, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, encouraged messengers to endure.

Basing his Bible study on Romans 15:4-5, 1 Peter 1:25, Romans 12:12, 2 Corinthians 6:4, Titus 2:2, Revelation 3:10, Romans 5:3-4 and Colossians 1:11, Iorg said that endurance is rooted in God's Word, a Christian/Church virtue, source of hope and comfort, essential to spiritual growth and a point of prayer.

Iorg challenged the messengers to read the Bible daily and ground themselves in the Word.

"This is the foundation of endurance; the Word of God endures forever," he said. "The Word of God provides us the endurance and encouragement we need to keep going. If you are not regularly accessing the Word of God for yourself, I'll say it as boldly as this: You will not endure. You won't make it because you're depending on something else to sustain you rather than God's Word."

He said mature Christians should set the example of endurance for others.

"Older men, we have a direct responsibility in the body of Christ to model endurance, to show younger men and to show older women and younger women this is what it looks like to stand," Iorg told messengers, adding that they can be sources of hope.

"When we are afflicted and we endure, it improves our character," he said. "People will look at us and say 'if he can do it, if she can do it, if he can make it, if she can make it, so can I.' So the next time a person says that to you, just wear it well because it's actually a biblical concept."

He encouraged messengers to pray for brothers and sisters to endure.

"I want to add this to your prayer repertoire as you counsel and consult with people," he said. "It's fine to pray for deliverance but have some discernment. Sometimes the person sitting across the table from you needs to be instructed in endurance and needs prayer that they will endure."

### CONVENTION SERMON

In his convention message, Chris Craig, pastor, First Baptist Church, Ruston, told messengers that life can unravel fast, but that victory can occur when handled through faith and obedience.

Preaching from 1 Samuel 30, Craig shared that bad days occur because of he does "dumb stuff," others do "dumb stuff" and the devil is real.

To handle these moments, Craig stressed the need to allow time for grief, look upward and seek divine guidance.

"When the world is falling apart, you and I need to look to Jesus instead of at everything going on around us," he said.

He reminded messengers of the need to take our problems to the Lord in prayer.

"God is waiting to take care of us," he said. "And there's such a correlation in our strength, in our power, in our victory, when we spend time daily with Jesus.

"That's where our strength is found," he continued. "That's where we get up ready to do it over and over and over again."

# CHANGES from page one

with international and national news headlines as well as special features such as Christian Crossword, Word Search, and Explore the Bible and Bible Studies for Life lessons (provided by The Baptist Paper team).

The first edition starts in January and with it will come some changes in price and billing.

Invoices will be sent in December to close out 2026. Then in January, subscribers, both churches and individuals, will be invoiced for the first quarter (three months). Thereafter, subscribers will continue to be billed ahead of each quarter (April, July, October).

The price for subscriptions will change, too, with a flat $10 fee for everyone. That is a 75-cent increase per year for group rates, and a $4 drop per year for individuals.

These changes will save on costs of mailing invoices and lessen confusion about rates.

Importantly, all Baptist Message advertisers will have access to place ads in the 12 monthly special editions. So, Louisiana Baptists will continue to be blessed by the information shared about the services, products and event opportunities that will be offered.

"I am excited about this partnership and the extra features the combined effort will offer to our readers," said Will Hall, the Baptist Message executive editor. "Our friends in Alabama are like-minded Baptists and are equally enthusiastic about how this special edition will bless them, too."

Hall said the Baptist Message would continue to publish digitally on www.BaptistMessage.com, and on Facebook and X (formally known as Twitter), and that changes to the newspaper would soon be reflected in its online offerings.

If readers or church leaders have questions, please reach out to Will Hall by phone, (318) 449-4348, or via email, Will@BaptistMessage.com.






# LBC entities report achievements, plans

**By Brian Blackwell**
Message staff writer

LAKE CHARLES, La. (LBM) – Messengers to the 2026 Louisiana Baptist Convention Annual Meeting, Nov. 10, held at Trinity Baptist Church, Lake Charles, heard encouraging updates from their four entities.

### LBCHFM

Louisiana Baptist Children's Home and Family Ministries President and CEO David Jeffreys told messengers they are part of helping the entity fulfill its mission.

He expressed gratitude for messengers' praying for the LBCHFM, which had experienced a shortage of cottage parents. However, the entity has brought on three new cottage parents this year.

"So, pray for them, and pray for God to send more workers to the harvest as well," he said. "We still need more cottage parents. So, you can pray for that, and you can recruit for that as well, and we would appreciate that."

He said the entity continues to fulfill their mission in a variety of other ways: residential care program (that offers short-term care for foster children transitioning into long-term programs), Women's Learning Center (that helps women obtain high school equivalency diplomas); Minister Care program (supports ministers and families during a time of transition); Orphans Embrace (reaching Haiti through a children's home in that country); Granberry Counseling Centers; Connect1Child (foster care and adoption ministry); and HomePlace (ministry for homeless women and their children).

"Thank you, Louisiana Baptists, for what you do, how you partner with us," he said. "We would love to partner with more of you and would love for more of you to come and take a look at our campus, to work on our campus, to serve with us and just to be a part of what God is doing. So thank you, Louisiana Baptists."

### LBF

Louisiana Baptist Foundation Executive Director Jared Price explained that the entity provides financial resources that strengthen Louisiana Baptist churches and other ministries as they advance the Kingdom.

Price reported that since July 2020, more than $134 million has been realized through charitable gifts and investment growth as part of the LBF's Vision200 (advancing the Kingdom with $200 million through the LBF in 20 or fewer years).

He said the strategic plan is built upon four primary objectives:

-- Educating and facilitating gifts;

-- Providing impactful ministry services;

-- Implementing a comprehensive marketing strategy; and

-- Maintaining efficient operations.

Price highlighted that the Foundation has helped numerous donors facilitate thousands of gifts that have had a cumulative impact of over $13 million so far this year, and continues to provide educational seminars on charitable giving, primarily through its Legacy Seminar.

Price also highlighted that the Foundation's short-term fund has a current annualized yield is 4.25%, its group investment fund has a 3-year average performance of 12.15%, and it manages more than $346 million in assets for churches and ministries.

Additionally, he honored the retirement of controller Kevin Brown and that of administrative coordinator Kim Deville earlier this year, adding that assistant controller Tami Willis will retire Dec. 31 after 32 years of service.

"We would love the opportunity to connect with you and see how we can partner in ministry," Price said. "May we continue to endeavor together to advance the Kingdom, one dollar at a time, one ministry at a time and one life at a time."

### LCU

Louisiana Christian University President Mark Johnson shared that the school's path forward continues to center on three phases — Restore, Rebuild, Re¬imagine — each averaging three years in length. He said God continues to be faithful in many ways including operating expenses that have been reduced by about $1.37 million this year and generating national attention after LCU's football team on Aug. 27 defeated Northwestern State University, a Division I opponent.

"When they won this game, our marketing just exploded," Johnson said. "It was probably about a $1 million or $2 million blitz throughout the nation of everyone talking about us.

"Those are the small breadcrumbs that God gives us as we're striving to do His work, and that's why I'm not getting tired," he said.

Johnson shared about ways he and the university have continued to connect with alumni and Central Louisiana:

-- outreach to more than 20,000 Wildcat alumni by sharing opportunities that exist to bring them back into the life of the university;

-- the Presidential Gala, Oct. 1, to celebrate the university's 120th anniversary, bringing together business, education and religious leaders; and

-- 39 speaking engagements, including revival services, associational meetings and other church gatherings.

He added that students, faculty and staff served 14 churches and other organizations, collectively, in central Louisiana during the second SendLA Day, Oct. 6. This concept was inspired by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary President Jamie Dew's "Serve Day" where students serve and evangelize their local community. For the LCU event, which began with a "commissioning" during chapel service, students, faculty and staff spread throughout the parish to minister in practical and relational ways, showing the Gospel in action.

Johnson encouraged messengers to invite their church members to participate in Mission LCU, which will take place in summer 2027 and will connect students, alumni, and local churches through hands-on volunteer service projects and campus improvement. Visit lcuniversity.edu/mission-lcu for more information.

### BAPTIST MESSAGE

*Baptist Message* Executive Editor Will Hall asked for prayers for the family of Lynn Clayton, former editor of the *Baptist Message* who died Nov. 5, and for Philip Timothy, managing editor of the *Baptist Message* who is experiencing health issues, and his wife, Joanne, who is caring for him.

He said the *Baptist Message* will partner with The Baptist Paper in Alabama to jointly provide a monthly print edition for Louisiana Baptist subscribers in 2027. Additionally, the *Baptist Message* will continue to work to expand its online offerings.

"We represent an affinity group, both in print and online," Hall said. "Our readers want to be Louisiana Baptists.

"Our readers are tithers to your church," he continued. "Our readers are contributors to the Cooperative Program. And I'm proud to say that we are going to continue to serve them with a monthly special edition in print. This partnership allows us to continue to serve faithful Louisiana Baptists."

He also told messengers about a church planting initiative for 2027 to honor the news service's 140th anniversary. The entity will work with Louisiana Baptists to raise $30,000 to establish a new Louisiana Baptist congregation.

"We feel that it's the appropriate way to celebrate being a 140-year partner in the Gospel with Louisiana Baptists," he said. "The Louisiana *Baptist Message* is a constant voice; it's a consistent voice. We inform and equip you through your stories. We are a voice that consistently seeks to unify you as a faith community, unify you to be Christ-like, unify you 'to seek and save that which is lost' in our state and beyond.

"The *Baptist Message* is not a single sermon," he said. "It's not a single annual report. It's not a single statement. It's a constant voice. It's a consistent voice. It's your voice. We are the voice of and for all Louisiana Baptists, and I urge you, don't lose your voice."



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Contact information: 337-580-9651 and donna.lavergne6535@gmail.com

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *The Baptist Message provides churches an opportunity to share with other Louisiana Baptists an upcoming revival, homecoming, new pastor, new staff member, a community outreach, or a concert in Louisiana Notables. To place your event in the paper, send your information (who, what, where, when, time) to brian@baptistmessage.com or call 318.305.3396. Please submit your information four weeks prior to the event to insure placement in the Message.*

### ON THE MOVE

■ Jeremy Abernathy (wife, ) is the new pastor with New Hope Baptist Church, Lake Providence.

### HOMECOMING/ANNIVERSARY

■Calvary Baptist Church, Shreveport: 100th homecoming, Nov. 22, 10:25 a.m. Pastor: John Lary.
■Cotile Baptist Church, Boyce: Revival, Dec. 13, 10:30 a.m., and Dec. 14-16, 6 p.m. Evangelist: Mike Courtney. Pastor: Robert McLane.

### LAGNIAPPE

■First Baptist Church, Youngsville: Holiday crafts and food festival, Nov. 21, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Come and enjoy a day of shopping, great holiday gifts, good food and door prizes. Pastor: Chris Fuselier.
■Victory Baptist Church, Hammond: 9th annual Camo Day, Nov. 22, 10:45 a.m. Join us for bounce houses for the kids, dinner on the grounds, giveaways and prizes for best dressed in camouflage. Pastor: Jonathan Watts.
■Calvary Baptist Church, Springhill: Measure of Grace in concert, Nov. 22, 10:45 a.m. Join us for fellowship, food and music. Pastor: John Franklin.
■Calvary Baptist Church, Alexandria: Turkey Trot, Nov. 26, 8 a.m. Join the Calvary Family and others as we begin a day of thanksgiving with a family-friendly event featuring a 1-mile run/walk and 5k run/walk. To register visit https://runsignup.com/Race/LA/Alexandria/CalvaryTurkeyTrot. Pastor: Todd Strain.
■Cross Point Baptist Church, Bossier City: Community fall festival and chili cook-off, Nov. 29, 3 p.m. Join us for an afternoon of fall fun including chili tasting, fall photo spot, popcorn, games, kids' activities, hot chocolate and classic car displays. Pastor: Shane Nugent.
■Antioch Baptist Church, Slagle: Wild game feast and wild game cookoff, Nov. 29, 5 p.m. Enjoy some great community, food and singing. Trophies will be awarded for first, second and third place winners in the cookoff. Pastor: Terry Ward.
■First Baptist Church, Pine Prairie: Southern Plainsmen in concert, Nov. 29, 5 p.m. All are invited for a time of fellowship, gumbo and music.
■First Baptist Church, Covington: Christmas tree lighting, Nov. 29, 6 p.m. Join us for this exciting event on our south lawn. Pastor: Waylon Bailey.
■First Baptist Church, Folsom: "A Silent Monday Night" ladies event, Nov. 30, 6:30-8:30 pm. Come enjoy a peaceful evening away from the holiday noise as we intentionally prepare our hearts for Christmas and focus on Jesus. Registration is required at https://www.fbcfolsom.com/events/a-silent-monday-night. Pastor: Will Robbins.
■First Baptist Church, Eunice: "Believe" concert featuring the Eunice Community Concert Band, Community Choir and Children's Choir, Dec. 3-4, 7 p.m. Pastor: Nick Watts.
■Macedonia Baptist Church, Holden: "Christmas in the Pines," Dec. 3, 6 p.m. Join us for a night filled with Christmas joy including carols, fellowship and potluck supper. Pastor: Shain Picou.
■Zoar Baptist Church, Baton Rouge: "The Bethlehem Experience," Dec. 5-13, 5:30 p.m. Step into Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born. The Bethlehem Experience is a free, immersive, guided journey through the first Christmas. Walk the streets of Bethlehem in small groups, meet the people who lived there, explore the bustling marketplace and become part of the story as you make your way to the manger. Pastor: Clint Newsom.
■Istrouma Baptist Church, Baton Rouge: "Jingle Jam," Dec. 5, 9 a.m. Jingle Jam is a Christmas party big enough for the whole family! Join us for pictures with Santa, pancakes and lots of fun. And Jingle Jam is free, so bring a friend. Pastor: Merrick Nunn.
■First Baptist Church, New Orleans: "Breakfast in Bethlehem," Dec. 5, 9 a.m. Pastor: Chad Gilbert.
■First Baptist Church, Tullos: "Breakfast in Bethlehem," Dec. 5, 9-11 a.m. We will have a live walk-through nativity scene followed by a pancake breakfast. Pastor: Scott Smith.
■First Baptist Church, Luling: Christmas craft fair, Dec. 5, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Pastor: Cody Cunningham.
■First Baptist Church, Pineville: Gloria: "Journey to the Heart of Christmas," Dec. 5-6, 6 p.m. Join us as our choirs aAnd orchestra present a moving evening of music, drama, and worship. Pastor: Stewart Holloway.
■New Zion Baptist Church, Covington: Christmas Drive-Thru, Dec. 5-6, 6:30-8 p.m. See the story of Christ's birth, death and resurrection with authentic costumes, live animals, people and vivid scenery, all from the comfort of your own vehicle. Pastor: Clark Stewart.
■First Baptist Church, Covington: "Miracle in a Manger," Dec. 6, 9:30 and 11 a.m. Take a walk through Bethlehem with your Connect Group class as we see a live nativity of Jesus, Mary and Joseph and animals. Pastor: Waylon Bailey.
■First Baptist Church, West Monroe: "Just Jesus" annual ladies Christmas dinner, Dec. 6, 4 p.m. Join us for a night of shopping with local vendors and this year's speaker, Kathy Nelson. The cost is $20. Pastor: Michael Wood.
■Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Choudrant: The Hootens in concert, Dec. 6, 6 p.m. Pastor: Kenneth Swanner.
■Philadelphia Baptist Church, Deville: Natalie Grant "Christmas" concert, Dec. 10, 6:30 p.m. Tickets can be purchased on simpletix.com. Pastor: Philip Robertson.
■Calvary Baptist Church, Merryville: Live walk-through nativity, Dec. 11-12, 6-8 p.m. Pastor: Jim Miers.
■Eastwood Baptist Church, Haughton: "Tell Me the Story" Christmas production, Dec. 12-13, 6:30 p.m. Two free performances presented by the worship arts team of
■Eastwood Baptist Church, "Tell me the story" invites you on a journey through the greatest story ever told - the story of the One who changed history and eternity forever. Pastor: Jason McGuffie.
■McClendon Baptist Church, West Monroe: "Let's Build a Manger" family event, Dec. 13, 4:30 p.m. Come spend time together as a family and build a manger. Pastor: Keith Stewart.
■Maplewood First Baptist Church, Sulphur: "Tell Me the Story of Jesus" drama, Dec. 13, 6 p.m. Pastor: Jeremy Blocker.
■First Baptist Church, Mandeville: "A Mandeville Christmas," Dec. 13, 6 p.m. Join us as we bring to life the beautiful story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. From the humble stable in Bethlehem to the glorious hope of the Resurrection, this powerful portrayal will remind us all of the true reason for the season. Pastor: Ronny Cooksey.
■Westside Baptist Church, Natchitoches: "A King Is Coming" Christmas program, Dec. 13, 3:30 and 6 p.m. Pastor: Zach Anderson.
■First Baptist Church, Lafayette: "Choirs & Carols: Hallelujah Noel," Dec. 13, 9:30 and 11 a.m. Through beloved Christmas carols, powerful songs of praise, and Scripture, our choirs will share the story of the Savior's arrival—the fulfillment of God's promise and the gift of hope for the world. Pastor: James Pritchard.
■Acadian Baptist Center, Eunice: "Christmas Celebration," Dec. 15, 6 p.m. Tickets available at the office. Camp director: James Newsom.
■Calvary Baptist Church, Alexandria: "A Night of Hope," Dec. 17-19, 7 p.m. Dec. 20, 3 pm. The wonder of Christmas will come to life before your very eyes through an original experience featuring dramatic storytelling, breathtaking visuals, and custom music, each written and produced specifically for Calvary. A live orchestra, stunning scenery, and a cast and crew of more than 400 people will help portray the journey to Bethlehem and the manger, highlighted by our beloved Living Nativity - including elements like majestic kings, camels and flying angels. Tickets are available at calvarynet.net. Pastor: Todd Strain.
■First Baptist Church, Vidalia: "Christmas Through The Storm," an original Christmas story, Dec. 19-20, 6 p.m. Pastor: Brad Watson.
■Grawood Baptist Church, Keithville: Christmas carnival, Dec. 19, 5-9 p.m. Our goal is to create a fun, family-friendly Christmas evening filled with games, shopping, caroling, treats and a special ride through the true Christmas story. Pastor: Christ Willcutt.
■Start Baptist Church: "On This Very Night" Christmas musical, Dec. 20, 10:30 a.m. Pastor: Jeffrey Thomas.
■Amiable Baptist Church, Glenmora: Christmas program, Dec. 20, 5 p.m. Soups and salads to follow. Pastor: Benji Rhame.
■First Baptist Church, Arcadia: "A Glorius Night …. When Christ Was Born" Christmas musical, Dec. 20, 6 p.m. Pastor: Justin Caples.
■East Leesville Baptist Church, Leesville: Christmas Eve service, Dec. 24, 5 p.m. Pastor: Tommy Kiker.
■First Baptist Church, Pineville: Christmas Eve candlelight service, Dec. 24, 5 p.m. Pastor: Stewart Holloway.
■First Baptist Church, Zachary: Christmas Eve candlelight services, Dec. 24, 4:30 and 6 p.m. Pastor: Eddie Wren.

# LBC recognizes pastors for dedication in ministry

Two Louisiana pastors were recognized as the Louisiana Baptist Convention as Outstanding Bivocational Pastors of the Year during the 2026 Annual Meeting while two retired Louisiana Baptist pastors were recognized for their dedication and hard work in ministry.



**Brian Blackwell** photo

**Eddie Rhymes, associational mission strategist with Deer Creek Baptist Association, and his wife, Donna, accepted a Louisiana Baptist Convention Outstanding Bivocational Pastor of the Year award on behalf of Prentis Gandy, who was unable to attend the presentation. Gandy is pastor with Friendship Baptist Church, Baskin.**



**Brian Blackwell** photo

**David Free (left) accepted his award as a Louisiana Baptist Convention Outstanding Bivocational Pastor of the Year. He is pastor with Magnolia Baptist Church, Ragley. Also photographed was Tom Bruce, associational mission strategist with Beauregard Baptist Association.**



**Brian Blackwell** photo

**Freddie Rodrigue (second from left) accepted his award as a Louisiana Baptist Convention Retiree of the Year. He recently retired as pastor with Faith Baptist Church, Livonia. Also photographed was his wife, Deborah, Tommy Middleton, associational mission strategist with Baptist Assocaition of Greater Baton Rouge, and his wife, Karen.**

# CHURCHPLANT140 from page 11

to celebrate its 140th anniversary in 2027, the *Baptist Message* is asking churches and individuals to contribute to a fund that will help start a Louisiana Baptist church plant.

The *Baptist Message* strongly emphasizes soul winning in each issue it publishes, and it has set up an account with the Louisiana Baptist Foundation for the ChurchPlant140 initiative. The goal is to raise enough funds to support the new congregation for one year, and the effort aligns with the recently announced LBC initiative to increase baptisms by 7% each year through 2033.

Visit lbfinfo.org/churchplant140 and donate in any multiple of 140 ($1.40, $14.00, $140.00, etc.), or as you feel led, to help raise $30,000 by December 31, 2027.

CHURCHPLANT140

### Churches urged to file Annual Church Profile data

The number of churches who have submitted 2026 Annual Church Profile data is lagging the number of churches who filed the information in 2025. This survey collects essential information across the state and is used to gauge the health and growth of congregations as well as to help plan Louisiana Baptists' cooperative missions and ministries.

So far, only 935 or 62.5% of churches have contributed to the database in 2026, compared to an average of about 82% for each of the prior three years.

The ACP survey is a vital tool for assessing the effectiveness of methods and strategies for church planting and outreach, and it helps to identify areas where there is a need for a greater Louisiana Baptist presence. But it also is critical for representation with the Southern Baptist Convention and Louisiana Baptist Convention. Each organization uses the information to allot appointments to their respective executive boards.

The SBC also uses the data to elect trustees to the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board. Meanwhile, messenger representation to the state and national annual meetings is determined by a church's profile in the ACP database.

Blank ACP forms can be printed from LouisianaBaptists.org under 'ACP Forms and Resources.' Or churches can complete the survey online, LaOne.org.

### Churches need to complete LBC form for IRS group exemption

The Louisiana Baptist Convention is sending out letters to explain a change by the Internal Revenue Service in how it qualifies group exemptions for churches.

Louisiana Baptist congregations must complete a form that declares their desire to participate in the LBC Group Exemption, instead of relying on the IRS to presume their participation by way of affiliation with the LBC.

Dale Lingenfelter, chief financial officer and associate executive director for Louisiana Baptists, said that completing and signing the form "will not affect the autonomy of the local church." He also said that a church can choose not to participate and instead seek its own letter of exemption from the IRS.

Lingenfelter said churches must complete and sign the form (whether the answer is "yes" or "no") and return it to the LBC Executive Board no later than November 30:

- GroupExemption@LBC.org, or
- P.O. Box 311, Alexandria, LA 71309

Don't delay: Tax benefits have deadlines for year-end giving

If charitable gifts are not completed by year-end deadlines, tax benefits may not be claimable for the 2026 tax year.

*DEADLINES*

Checks: A check mailed through the U.S. Postal Service postmarked on or before Dec. 31 generally qualifies for that tax year. Checks sent through commercial carriers such as FedEx or UPS generally must be physically delivered to the charitable organization by Dec. 31.

Credit cards: A contribution charged to a credit card by Dec. 31 generally qualifies for that tax year, even if the credit card bill is paid later.

Stocks and other securities: Gifts of publicly traded stocks and other securities must be completed by Dec. 31. For electronic transfers, this generally means the securities must be transferred out of the donor's brokerage account and delivered to the charitable organization's account by Dec. 31.

Processing times can vary. Begin the giving process well before Dec. 31.

*NON-ITEMIZERS*

One important tax law change offers benefits to individuals and couples who claim the standard deduction.

Beginning in 2026, eligible taxpayers who do not itemize may claim an additional charitable deduction of up to $1,000 for individuals or $2,000 for married couples filing jointly. This deduction applies to qualifying cash contributions to eligible charitable organizations. Noncash gifts, such as stocks and real estate, and contributions to donor-advised funds do not qualify.

*GIFTS FROM IRAs*

Individuals 70½ or older, may make a qualified charitable distribution (QCD) of up to $111,000 from an individual retirement account (IRA) directly to qualified charitable organizations. These distributions are excluded from your taxable income and count toward your annual required minimum distribution (RMD).

Visit www.lbfinfo.org/givenow or call (318) 445-4495 to learn how the Louisiana Baptist Foundation can help you support your church and other ministries.

### Agricultural Missions Fellowship seeks members and donations

The Louisiana Baptist Agricultural Missions Fellowship plants Gospel seeds across the world and has helped needy people for 25 years by providing financial support to IMB missionaries for agricultural projects in locations around the world.

Members of the Fellowship have donated funds through the Louisiana Baptist Foundation for such projects as the purchase small animals (laying hens, meat chickens, sheep and goats) and improving garden methods (drip irrigation systems) that in turn help families better provide food for their table and raise more produce to sell in the market (only in countries with .

Learn how to join or donate via La. Baptist Ag Missions Fellowship, 1312 Ridgeland Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70810.

Morelock tapped to lead Tennessee Baptist DR team

Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief Associate & Volunteer Mobilizer Mark Morelock has been named the new disaster relief specialist with the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

He will succeed Wes Jones, who retires in January after ministering in that position for 11 years.

Morelock joined the TBMB staff Nov. 2.

Morelock told the Baptist Message "Louisiana Baptists are like a family," and that serving Louisiana Baptists has been "one of the greatest blessings of my life."

Morelock has helped coordinate LBDR responses to hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, fires and winter storms, and has assisted in the training of leaders of all ages to become members of DR teams. and helped implement updated incident management and reporting processes.

He also established the first Rebuild Program in Louisiana to assist natural disaster survivors to rebuild their homes and buildings, a step further than what has been typical (mud-out efforts, debris removal, etc.) in previous disaster relief responses.

But he said the highlight of his DR ministry has been to "share the Gospel and lead people to the Lord."

### Clark finishes 46 years of media ministry with FBC Lafayette

On Oct. 31, Dennis Clark wrapped up 46 years as minister of media with First Baptist Church, Lafayette, closing a chapter of service that began Aug. 19, 1980.

Clark helped the church navigate through technological changes via television (over air broadcast, cable and satellite) and then by internet, while equipping generations of volunteers to serve, and assisting three pastors (Perry Sanders, Steve Horn and James Pritchard).

Horn, now Louisiana Baptists' executive director, said he could not think of a single time when Clark said, "We cannot do that.'"

"He always found a way and did so with joy," Horn shared. "When you think about all the technological changes that occurred in media ministry over 46 years, you have to admire Dennis and even be in awe of him for adapting to every change.

### Louisiana Reach Haiti to receive mission teams again

For the first time since 2020, Louisiana Reach Haiti ministry leaders are preparing to welcome mission teams to its island facility.

Unrest in the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, had prevented teams from coming, but the situation has improved and the first team since 2020 will serve in April 2027.

An October 2027 mission trip also is being considered.

Since a Louisiana Baptist team helped complete a Children's Village in Croix-des-Bouquets in 2015, Louisiana Reach Haiti has hosted Vacation Bible Schools, installed water filtration systems, put on medical clinics, completed construction projects and trained pastors.

LRH President Darrin Badon told the *Baptist Message* that there are 15 children, aged nine to 17, and four 18-year-olds in the ministry's Life Academy (a life skills program) who need sponsors to provide $30 each month. These funds go specifically to school needs such as tuition, uniforms, books and supplies.

He also shared the ministry's need for financial support of multiple projects:

-- construction of walls around the property

-- additional Children's Village buildings.

-- water wells for residents, staff and the community

-- land to build a new facility.

Learn more or donate via LouisianaReachHaiti.org; 18112 Kenner Drive, Prairieville, LA 70769; or, 225.241.2297.