

The Oklahoma Baptist Chronicle



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30th Anniversary of Murrah Building Bombing Stirs Emotions, Memories

by Bob Nigh, Oklahoma Baptists' Historical Secretary

At 9:02 a.m., Wed., April 19, 1995, a huge explosion rocked downtown Oklahoma City, and an ominous pillar of black smoke soared into the bright azure sky above the center of the state's capital city. Shocked and stunned residents watched in disbelief, wondering what had happened.

Because of almost immediate television coverage, it took only a few minutes for most residents to learn that the explosion was the result of a powerful bomb placed inside a 24-foot Ryder rental truck parked in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building at 200 N.W. 5th St.

The nine-story building contained about 315,000 square feet of occupiable space; 107,000 square feet of office space, 196,000 square feet for storage and 11,750 square feet that included rest rooms and a cafeteria. The building cost an estimated \$13.2 million to construct during an 18-month project completed in March 1977 and the structure was dedicated in October 1977.

The building was named for Alfred Paul Murrah (Oct. 27, 1904–Oct. 30, 1975), who was a United States circuit judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit and previously was a United States district judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Oklahoma, the United States District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma and the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma.

Located in the building were regional offices for the Social Secu-



The building, named for federal judge Alfred P. Murrah, an Oklahoma native, was opened on March 2, 1977.

Murrah Building Bombing

city Administration, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Secret Service, the Department of Veterans Affairs vocational rehabilitation counseling center, the Drug Enforcement Administration (D.E.A.), and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF). It also contained recruiting offices for the U.S. military.



First responders huddle in front of the demolished Murrah Federal Building shown in the background.

At the time of the blast, the Murrah Building housed some 550 federal and contract workers, as well as an estimated 250 visitors. The explosion represented the most destructive—and costly in the terms of lives taken—act of domestic terrorism carried out in U.S. history. The blast was felt as far as 30 miles away and damaged 347 buildings in the immediate area. Thirty buildings were heavily damaged. In the aftermath, almost 20 buildings were torn down. Twenty blocks of downtown Oklahoma City were cordoned off due to the extent of the bomb damage. Tragically, 168 lives were lost, including

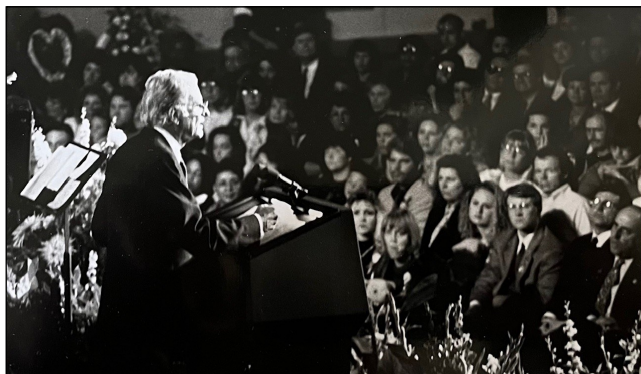
three unborn babies, and hundreds more people were injured.

Oklahoma Baptists were among the first to respond to the tragedy and by May 5, initial donations totaling \$263,530.08 had been received by the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma (BGCO). Disbursements were coordinated by local churches, with requests overseen by a relief fund committee headed by BGCO Executive Director-Treasurer William G. Tanner and Convention President Charles Graves, pastor of Oklahoma City, Quail Springs. Others on the committee included Anthony L. Jordan, pastor of Oklahoma City, Northwest; Rod Masteller, pastor of Oklahoma City, Putnam City and Capital Association Executive Director Ernie Perkins.

It was determined later that Timothy McVeigh, a disgruntled former U.S. serviceman, carried out the bombing which also injured more than 680 people in addition to those killed. The bombing was the deadliest act of terrorism in the United States prior to the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and

the Pentagon.

McVeigh was arrested shortly after the bombing and indicted on 160 state offenses and 11 federal offenses, including the use of a weapon of mass destruction. He was found guilty on all counts in 1997 and sentenced to death. He was executed by lethal injection on June 11, 2001. Co-conspirators Terry Nichols and Michael Fortier were also convicted. Nichols was sentenced to eight life terms for the deaths of eight federal agents, and to 161 life terms without pa-



Evangelist Billy Graham speaks at the memorial service on April 23, 1995, four days after the bombing. Graham spoke where families, community members, and dignitaries came to pay their respects to those who lost their lives. President Bill Clinton also delivered comments.

role by the state of Oklahoma for the deaths of the others. Fortier was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment and was later released.

Tragically, among the lives lost that spring morning were 19 children under the age of 6 being cared for in

the America's Kids Day Care Center on the second floor. The total number of lives lost would increase by one with the ensuing death of a first responder—nurse Rebecca Anderson—who died as the result of a piece of concrete striking her in the back of the head while she was engaged in rescuing survivors.

More than two decades earlier, Oklahoma Baptist Disaster Relief (DR) volunteers had been organized and specifically trained to respond to disasters. The state had been divided into four quadrants—divided by I-40 and I-35—each with a team of volunteers under the supervision of an area leader. This enabled more volunteers to become involved in ministry without calling the same team to respond time after time. All volunteers and leaders of the four areas were called upon to help in the response to the Oklahoma City bombing.

According to the 1995 Oklahoma Baptists *Annual Report*, 55 OSBDR volunteers prepared approximately 6,000 meals for rescue workers, and 21 volunteers provided emergency day care at Shepherd Mall Shopping Center at N.W. 23rd St. and Villa Ave. for 11

Murrah Building Bombing

days. A total of 93 children were given supervised care at the request of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

As the dust from the destroyed Murrah building was settling, Southern Baptist chaplains, including BGCO chaplaincy and community services specialist Joe Williams; Oklahoma City Police Department chaplain Jack Poe, Oklahoma City Fire Department (OCFD) chaplain Ted Wilson and Cleveland County Sheriff's Office chaplain Paul Bettis—ministered to teams searching the Murrah Building for survivors. Chaplains ventured into the shattered remains of the Murrah Building with search teams of police and fire crews and provided debriefing and counseling services for the first responders who worked under grueling, dangerous and horrifying circumstances.

The chaplains' work continued during the duration of search and rescue operations, and for months after the building was demolished as they counseled with men and women whose lives were devastated by the disaster. By 11:50 a.m. on Sept. 11, three victims recovered.

Bettis, who also was working in prison chaplaincy at the time, later served as Oklahoma Baptists chaplaincy specialist from 2002-2013. As the bombing response continued, he was involved—along with officers with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency—in serving death notifications to family members.

Wilson, who was the OCFD volunteer chaplain at the time, was kept busy 16-18 hours a day, leading continuous Critical Incident Stress Management sessions. He said a total of 985 OCFD firefighters participated in the rescue and recovery effort after the bombing. In addition, there were about 250 police officers. All told, there were more than 25,000 people who worked the site, he said.

Not only did Williams, who died in 2016 from bladder cancer, minister as a chaplain, but he also later represented Oklahoma Baptists as a member of the committee that distributed donated funds to



BGCO disaster relief volunteers Jack Hill, left, and Dean Kiser, members of Arcadia, First Southern, prepare food to be served to first responders and medical personnel after the Murrah Building bombing. The feeding unit was set up on the parking lot of Oklahoma City, First a few blocks north of the Murrah Building site.

survivors and victims' families. Also serving on that distribution committee was Wilson, who, at the time of the bombing, was fresh out of rookie school. Wilson retired as OCFD chaplain after serving in that capacity for 30 years.

Updated records showed that as of Aug. 9, 1995, donations to help victims and their families and relief workers totaled \$678,862.63 with \$264,758.31 having been disbursed. Initially, \$125,000 was placed in an account with the Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma by a new seven-member Oklahoma City Disaster Relief Committee appointed by Tanner to oversee the management of funds received by BGCO for that purpose. The committee, enlisted in January 1996, included Williams as chairman, Adams, Tom Cole, Norma Corley, Kenneth de Cordova, Bob Haskins and Bob Rutherford. The group met Feb. 5, May 21, June 24, and Aug. 28. A even later update of the fund revealed that contributions totaling \$691,350.92 had been received, and disbursements of \$314,582.31 had been made to assist victims of the disaster.

"The largest amount given to the Oklahoma Baptist Relief Fund included \$26,000 from Tulsa Metro Association; the smallest \$1.06 from an individual in Norman. Nine state conventions sent money, which included \$10,500 from Georgia and \$10,000 from Texas. An independent Baptist church in Anchorage, Alaska sent a check for \$3,831.56. Also included was \$100 from a group of children in Georgia. Children at Calvary Church in Sidney, Neb. braved a cold, damp Saturday to run a corner stand selling drinks and homemade cookies. The donations, \$270.84, were sent to the relief fund.

In the days and months following the bombing, the response and outpouring of love and self-sacrifice made by Oklahomans came to be known as the "Oklahoma Standard."

Jordan, now retired as executive director-treasurer of Oklahoma Baptists, wrote 20 years after the tragedy in his *Perspective* column in the *Baptist Messenger* that, "In the hours and days that followed the bombing, one thing became clear. Oklahoma faced tragedy in a different way than had been evidenced in other parts of the country and world. Volunteers, companies and first responders rushed to the site, offering themselves, equipment, food and anything needed to help with the search and rescue effort... No need went unmet."

The OSBDR feeding unit was set up on the parking lot of Oklahoma City, First, located a few blocks north of the Murrah Building site. The operation was discontinued after four days, however, because Oklahoma City officials requested all feeding for police, fire and chaplaincy teams be done at the Myriad Convention Center by members of the Oklahoma Restaurant Association.

As people across Oklahoma, the nation and the world recognize the 30th anniversary, the refrain "We Will Always Remember" stands true. Remember the 168. Remember that even in the face of tragedy and unspeakable loss, God will bring about good.

SBC Cooperative Program, *Baptist Faith and Message* 100 Years Old

From Baptist Press

In 1925, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) convened in Memphis, Tenn. At that momentous meeting, messengers made two decisions with far-reaching consequences. First, they adopted the *Baptist Faith and Message*. Second, they launched the Cooperative Program as a unified funding strategy for Southern Baptist ministries.

In remarks to the SBC Executive Committee earlier this year, SBC President Clint Pressley rightly referred to the *Baptist Faith and Message* and the Cooperative Program as the “two rails” of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Southern Baptists’ confession was born of controversy. For the first 80 years of SBC

history, there was no Convention-wide confessional statement. The reason is not because Southern Baptists were not confessional. Most local churches had confessions. Most Baptist associations had confessions. Many state conventions had confessions. The three SBC seminaries at the time had confessions. Southern Baptists were clearly a confessional people, and had been since their founding in 1845.

There was little felt need for a denominational confession prior to the mid-1920s because SBC churches enjoyed widespread doctrinal consensus. The rise of modernist theology changed that. When some liberal pastors and professors began accommodating Darwinism, Southern Baptists responded by adopting a revised and expanded version of the New Hampshire Confession as the *Baptist Faith and Message* 1925.

Over the years, controversy has continued to result in revisions and amendments to the *Baptist Faith and Message*. In 1963, the confession was revised primarily in response to some seminary faculty teaching Neo-Orthodox views of Scripture. In 1998, the confession was amended to include a statement on the family that addressed progressive views that were becoming popular in American culture. In 2000, the confession was revised once more to clarify our



conservative theology on the other side of the Inerrancy Controversy. In 2023, a minor revision clarified that there is only one pastoral office in the New Testament, and that only men are biblically qualified to serve in that role.

Because of the historic relationship between controversy, confessionalism, and cooperation, it can be tempting to think of the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* primarily in those terms. However, thousands of local churches have adopted the confession since the turn of the century. In some cases, that decision might have been mostly symbolic or perfunctory. But in an increasingly post-denominational age, the confession can play an important role in helping churches understand what it means to be a Southern Baptist.

New members join SBC churches from all sorts of backgrounds. Some are new believers who might not know much at all about the Christian faith. Others are longtime Christians who have been nurtured in other denominational traditions or nondenominational churches. Still others might have been Southern Baptists for all their Christian life, but they have little idea of what that means. The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* is the best resource for helping all these types of new members—and every type of long-term member—to understand the faith and practice of Southern Baptists.

The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* reminds us that Southern Baptists are orthodox believers who affirm the primary doctrines of the Christian faith

The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* reminds us that Southern Baptists are evangelicals who hold to a conservative biblical understanding of Scripture and salvation

The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* reminds us that Southern Baptists are followers of Christ who affirm a regenerate church membership, believer's baptism by immersion alone, congregational polity, local church autonomy and religious liberty for all people

The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* reminds us that Southern Baptists are Great Commission Christians who are committed to evangelism, discipleship and church planting among all peoples.

The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* reminds us that Southern Baptists are culturally engaged believers who care about the implications of the Christian faith for authentic human flourishing.

It's important that pastors and church leaders have some strategy for helping their members understand what Southern Baptists believe. There is no better tool for this purpose than the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.

The Cooperative Program, a new plan

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is a fellowship of nearly 47,000 Baptist churches scattered across the United States and its territories. These congregations, comprised of numerous racial, eth-

nic, language, and socioeconomic people groups, are called “cooperating churches.” They have organized themselves to accomplish a specific set of missions and ministry initiatives, all for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people everywhere.

There are 46,906 cooperating churches in the SBC, with a total membership of 12,982,090 across 1,076 cooperating associations in 41 state conventions across the country.

The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists’ unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches



**COOPERATIVE
PROGRAM**

give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries.

Since its inception in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has always had one mission—the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). To fulfill its assigned part of this divine mandate, each SBC entity made special offering appeals to the churches. This method was referred to as the “societal” approach to missions and resulted in severe financial deficits, competition among entities, overlapping pledge campaigns, and frequent emergency appeals which greatly hampered the expanding ministry opportunities God was giving Southern Baptist. Some entities took out loans to cover operating costs until pledges or special offerings were received.

In 1919, the leaders of the SBC proposed the 75 Million Campaign, a five-year pledge campaign that, for the first time, included everything—the missions and ministries of all the state conventions as well as that of the Southern Baptist Convention. Though falling short of its goals, a God-given partnership of missions support was conceived—The Cooperative Program. Since its launch in 1925, the effectiveness of the Cooperative Program has been dependent upon individuals, churches, state conventions, and SBC entities cooperating, working toward a common goal of sharing the Gospel with every person on the planet.

So, how does it work, Southern Baptists?

It begins with you! You give yourself first to God (II Cor. 8:5). Next, out of gratitude and obedience to God for what He has done for you, you commit to give back to Him, through your church, a portion of what He provides. This is commonly called a tithe and represents ten percent of your income (Lev. 27:30, Mal. 3:10).

Your Church... decides the next step. Every year your church prayerfully decides how much of its undesignated gifts will be committed to reaching people in your state and around the world through The Cooperative Program. This amount is then forwarded to your State Baptist Convention.

Messengers at the State Convention Annual Meetings from your church and other churches across the state decide what percentage of Cooperative Program gifts contributed by local congregations stay in your state to support local missions and ministries. The percentage to be forwarded to the SBC for North American and international missions and ministries is also determined at this time.

Messengers at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting from across the country decide how the gifts received from the states will be distributed among SBC entities. These gifts are used by SBC entities to send and support missionaries, train pastors, and other ministry leaders; provide relief for retired ministers and widows; and address social, moral, and ethical concerns relating to our faith and families.

Why embrace the Cooperative Program?

It presents a unified and comprehensive budget, throwing a funding blanket over statewide, national and international missions and ministries.

It provides a long-term sustainability for our entities. When a church makes their missions giving as a percentage of their church budgets, it provides consistency and stability.

It adheres to our long term Baptist principle that “we can do more together than alone.”

The Cooperative Program mitigates competition between entities, thereby allowing for a balanced Acts 1:8 strategy.

It levels the playing field, and makes a place at the table for small and ethnic churches. Every church can stand hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, on level ground, as partners in the Gospel (large churches, small churches, new churches, growing churches, graying churches, and ethnic churches).

According to the SBC website, giving to the Cooperative Program in 2022-23 totaled \$449,039,992.

After Y2K, SBC agencies reported 'business as usual'

Twenty-five years ago, it seemed like the entire world was in a tizzy over the move from the year 1999 to 2000 and that "Y2K" would create computer errors related to the formatting and storage of calendar data for dates in and after 2000. Many computing programs represented four-digit years with only the final two digits, making the year 2000 indistinguishable from 1900. Fear spread across the world that computer systems' inability to distinguish dates correctly had the potential to bring down worldwide infrastructures for computer-reliant industries.

In the years leading up to the turn of the millennium, the public gradually became aware of the Y2K scare, and individual companies predicted the global damage caused by the bug would cost between \$400 million and \$600 billion. A lack of clarity regarding the potential dangers of the bug led many individuals to stock up on food, water, and firearms, purchase backup generators, and withdraw large sums of money in anticipation of the feared computer-induced apocalypse.

Contrary to published expectations, only a few major problems emerged in 2000. This was attributed primarily to pre-emptive actions taken by many computer programmers and information technology experts.

In Oklahoma, production of the *Baptist Messenger* moved smoothly into the 21st Century with no Y2K computer problems that were predicted as the world transitioned to the decade of the 2000s.

The *Baptist Messenger* celebrated its 90th anniversary that year, became a four-color publication, outsourced printing for the first time and endured changes from shorter to longer stories, and less photography. Circulation for the first issue of 2000 was 94,416.

Officials with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) didn't ignore the possible adverse effects of Y2K, and Baptist Press writer Todd Starnes wrote on Jan. 5, 2000 that effects were minimal as the calendar turned a page.

"It's business as usual for Southern Baptist Convention agencies in the wake of Y2K, thanks to months of preparation," Starnes wrote on Jan. 5, 2000. "Except for a minor glitch in the e-mail system at the North American Mission Board (NAMB), no agencies reported Y2K computer problems."

Starnes added that a NAMB spokesman said the glitch in their system caused some employees to receive duplicate e-mail messages and may not have been Y2K related.

Baptist Press reported that LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention made final preparations for total Y2K

compliance with its information systems-related equipment and software. In a mid-August meeting, key personnel in LifeWay's finance and business services division reviewed a wide range of areas in which Y2K readiness is critical.

Topics of practical importance to churches and individuals were included in the report, which dealt with many internal operations of the agency as well as its ability to provide ministry resources. Compliance, for purposes of the LifeWay meeting, was defined as the ability to accept, display and report dates using correct century and year; cross into the year 2000 without automation failure; prevent premature expiration of security, licenses or files due to year 2000 crossover; treat the Year 2000 as a Leap Year; and interface with other year 2000-compliant software and data.

"We anticipate a smooth transition into the year 2000," said Gerald Shields, director of LifeWay's information systems department. "Persons who use our automated telephone ordering service and who order through our Internet site (www.lifeway.com) should experience only a brief interruption in service between late Dec. 31 and early Jan. 1 while we intentionally power down all of our systems."

Shields said information systems personnel powered off devices before midnight on Dec. 31. On Sat., Jan. 1, personnel powered on devices and verified that all services were working.

Overseas International Mission Board (IMB) personnel were urged to "Prepare for Y2K, trust God."

IMB writer Mark Kelly reminded IMB personnel to "Make common-sense preparations for possible disruptions of their lives caused by the Y2K computer software bug.

"And no matter how seriously Y2K disrupts people's lives, God's mission to redeem a lost world will prevail," an IMB special task force added.

The board's Y2K Task Force, led by Jerry Burkett, the agency's vice president for global information systems, developed contingency plans to help missionaries deal with Y2K interruptions. Their work continued beyond the spring of 2000.

A 24-hour call-in center went online Dec. 31 at the IMB, said Les White, requirements development director for the board's office of global information systems.

The board's Y2K preparedness effort began two years earlier with an intensive effort to create an electronic network integrating both overseas missionaries and home office employees, White said. During that time, the board updated hardware and software to ensure everyone would be ready for the advent of the new year.

"Our story is more one of prevention than problems," White said. "We replaced a lot of computers here in Richmond and worked with our overseas people to make sure missionaries knew what they needed to do to be ready. We installed new computer systems in five of our 14 regional offices overseas and completely rewrote an

accounting software package several of those offices were using.”

“We had a team come in on Jan. 1 to bring the system up and test critical applications. The fact that we’ve had no major problems reported is a testimony to the tremendous amount of work done to prevent them.”

Still, IMB troubleshooters remained on alert for several days to help missionaries and staff cope with any difficulties.

“We are happy that the passing of the old year and the coming of the new one has been largely benign and uneventful,” Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC Executive Committee, said at the time. “Y2K uncertainty and fear should give way to a new commitment to make the most of each day of the new century in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Chapman said the months spent preparing the Executive Committee’s phone, computer and financial systems for the new year paid off.

At the Annuity Board, a “technology SWAT team” worked through the weekend to tackle any possible issues and pulled together to assure a smooth entry into the new millennium.

“We will continue to monitor our systems, but so far all has been normal,” said Rick Hart, executive officer for Systems and Technology Services.

Logically, many Annuity Board participants fretted over the possibility of Y2K affecting their balances and there was a steady stream of Annuity Board participants calling to check on their retirement balances, ask questions about their insurance claims or verify the amount of their annuitant check for the coming year.

“It was business as usual during the last five days of 1999” said Christy Teeter, Customer Relations department head. “We had a normal volume of calls with little interest or concern about Y2K.”

Roddy Cummins, executive officer for investments, said a few participants chose to move money out of the stock market before the end of the year.

“However, most of our participants wisely stayed true to their long-term asset allocation and were rewarded with positive year-end results in the equity markets,” he said.

At LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville-based employees in facility operations and information systems worked New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day to ensure that the agency would be open on Mon., Jan. 3. Utilities and electronic information systems were turned off Dec. 31 to prevent any possible problems due to power surges. Since no Y2K-related utilities problems occurred in Metropolitan Nashville, LifeWay systems were turned back on Jan. 1. Many information systems personnel returned to LifeWay or dialed in from home to turn on and check systems. Some problems related to equipment having been turned off, rather than to Y2K issues, were identified and corrected.

Retirees' group elects officers

Max Pyron headed the slate of Central Oklahoma Baptist Retirees Association (COBRA) officers elected for 2025 during the group's spring luncheon May 6 at Baptist Village of Oklahoma City.

Other officers elected included Sam Vinall, vice president; Jan Haskins, secretary; Dana Williamson, treasurer; Pat Choate, greeter; and Glenda Nigh, fellowship coordinator.



Robert Griffin

Special music was presented by eight current or former members of the Singing Churchman of Oklahoma. The group was accompanied by Aletha Gibson.

Robert Griffin, former long-time pastor in Oklahoma City, gave his testimony during the luncheon, attended by nearly 50 people.

The group enjoyed Mexican food, including homemade sopapillas, prepared and served by the Village's kitchen staff.



Eight current or former members of the Singing Churchmen of Oklahoma provided special music during the May 6 meeting of the Central Oklahoma Baptist Retirees Association held at Baptist Village of Oklahoma City. From left are Terry Dennis, Jon Duncan, Don Scott, Max Pyron, Keith Butler, Bill Green, Randy Hart and Rusty Stowe. They were accompanied by Aletha Gibson.



Supporters of the Baptist Mission Center and Grace Rescue Mission in Oklahoma City were invited to “lay their hands on” a wall following an anniversary celebration.

OKC Mission centers celebrate 75th and 100th Anniversaries

On May 4, officials with Metro Baptist Network, Oklahoma City (MBNOKC), celebrated the 75th Anniversary of Grace Rescue Mission and the 100th Anniversary of the Baptist Mission Center. The centers, located at 2125 and 2205 Exchange Ave., are supported by approximately 160 Southern Baptist churches in the metro area.

“Celebrating 100 years for Baptist Mission Center and 75 years for Grace Rescue Mission is a wonderful testimony to God’s faithfulness through His local churches,” said Mark Walters, MBNOKC associational mission strategist and executive director.

Walters pointed out that Grace Rescue Mission began with \$50 borrowed by a local church pastor in 1950.

“It was birthed out of the heart of a local pastor, but it has taken a cooperative effort by churches to meet the difficult needs of people in the heart of OKC for all these years.”

Scott Allen, director of community ministries for the missions’ centers for the past 21 years, was the emcee for the anniversary celebration, which was attended by about 75 people.

“Through the years, both missions have had faithful men and women in leadership who always kept their focus on meeting the basic needs of others, caring for them, and sharing Jesus as often as the opportunity presented itself. Though both missions and the services they provide may look different today from when they first opened, that focus has never changed.”

During the brief celebration, Allen recognized those current and past volunteers present who have worked at the missions centers. As the event ended, he encouraged those in attendance to participate in a “Hands Up” project by dipping the palms of their hands in paint and leave their handprint on a wall of the center.

Men's Retreat Celebrates 25 Years

The Oklahoma Baptist Men's Retreat held annually near Davis at Falls Creek Baptist Conference Center offers men and their sons the opportunity to delve deeper into the Word of God, while also providing avenues of recreation and specific activities for attendees to enjoy with their fellow "campers."

The Men's Retreat was initiated in 1999 by Sam Porter, at the time BGCO Men's Missions and Ministries Specialist. The event reaches men from all backgrounds and interests. These differences are what sets the Oklahoma men's retreat apart from other men's retreats around the country. It is one of a few retreats where you will see a biker, cowboy, hipster, gamer, and businessman standing together in worship as the greater tribe of Christian men.

The focus is on transforming the lives of men through a relationship with Jesus Christ. The unifying force that brings these men together is threefold: first, a love for Christ and desire to be men of God who influence their world; second, to find the right next step or direction for their relationship with God; and third, to find and build godly friendships with other men.

Following are highlights of some of the retreats..

1999

Men's Missions & Ministries, led by Sam Porter, hosted the first Oklahoma Men's Retreat at Falls Creek. It was a phenomenal success despite the cold weather, with 2,000 men in attendance.

2007

Featured speakers at the Ninth Annual Men's Retreat included Lt. Col. Steven Russell, commander of the hunt for and capture of Saddam Hussein; former NFL quarterback Neal Jeffrey, associate pastor of Dallas, Preston-

wood, who made it clear that his stuttering handicap was not a thorn, but a gift from God; Emmy award winning producer Greg Vaughn, who wrote letters to each of his children expressing his love and appreciation for each of them in the book, *Letters from Dad*; and Tony Emamghoraishi, former Muslim and a Iranian Baptist church pastor, reminded attendees that, "Despite our fears and prejudice, we must reach out to the Muslim community."

2008

The April 25-26 retreat focused on II Cor. 3:18, and using the



theme, "Rewired," the retreat was an outdoorsman's delight. From the roar of 500 hp motorcycle engines to the style and grace of a single steed, and outdoor legacies demonstrated through fly fishing and bird dog training, retreat speakers spiritually challenged and encouraged men to have an encounter with God through adventure, worship and interactive teaching. The featured speaker was former University of Oklahoma All-America running back and Super Bowl winner with the San Francisco 49ers, Spencer Tillman.

2010

The retreat included expanded venue options directed at changing the core affections of men's hearts, including a larger Cowboy Camp and Rodeo; a six-week post-retreat discipleship study for small groups; and various activities prior to and after adventure activities. More than 2,370 men and their teenage sons attended the retreat.



Disaster Relief volunteers serving food were seen at virtually every Men's Retreat through the years.

2011

REWIRED had multiple venues to connect with the various sub-cultures of men, drew almost 3,600 men in attendance and became the largest event of its kind in the Southern Baptist Convention.

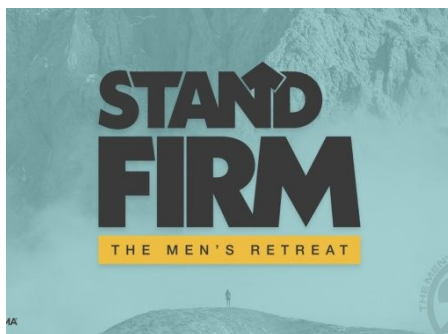
2012

With an emphasis was on helping men's ministry leaders understand the importance of rallying around pastoral vision to impact a church and community, and in developing a leadership engine for pastors in the local church, retreat venue leaders put together a four- to six-week discipleship study that accompanied their topics to be available to men on the Rewired website or iPhone App. The two worship and keynote sessions were lived-streamed, reaching 1,100 people in 28 states and six countries. One positive indicator this year was a large increase in the attendance of young men between the ages of 13–18.

2013

Organizers created a new Rewired website designed to be a portal for men throughout the year in providing discipleship material and current manhood/family related topics. 3,200-plus attendees re-

ceived resources to assist in overcoming sexual addiction and to help men grow spiritually in strong biblical manhood. The Rewired



website recorded more than 2,333 page visits from individuals from 13 countries. The emphasis was on addressing idolatry in the lives of men. Every man received two books on pornography and sexual purity. Every church represented received a DVD, "Somebody's Daughter," which addresses pornography addiction in the lives of men. Both worship

and keynote sessions were live streamed with a viewing audience totaling 12,295 on 169 unique computers.

2015

"War Room," the new motion picture from the creators of "Facing the Giants," "Fireproof," and "Courageous," was screened four months before the announced Aug. 28 national release of the movie, which illustrates the power of prayer. The film was brothers Alex and Stephen Kendrick's first production independent of Sherwood Pictures, the filmmaking ministry of Albany, Ga., Sherwood. The PG-rated, family-friendly film featured best-selling author and Bible teacher Priscilla Shirer in a leading role, and a cameo appearance from best-selling author and Bible teacher Beth Moore. Alex Kendrick also was a featured speaker.



2016

Stories of men rescued from the pit of despair after the death of his wife, plucked from the expanse of the ocean after accidentally being thrown overboard into a raging sea, having joy in the face of immense suffering of a young son dying of cancer, and being a curse breaker of generational sin inspired the 3,210 men who attended the Rewired Men's Retreat April 29-30.

2017

"Being a Man of Influence" was the theme of the retreat, which fea-

Men's Retreat

tured activities such as archery, BMX/Stunt Bikes, climbing wall, cowboy activities, darts, motorcycle village, ropes course, skeet shooting, Tour De Creek (bicycle tour), trout fishing, video games, zip line (a new feature) and wild hog dressing. Fred Luter, Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Convention, was the keynote speaker with special guest "Propaganda," a nationally known lyrical artist and Christian rapper, who shared poetic talks.

2019

The father-son coaching duo Bobby Bowden and Tommy Bowden were the featured speakers in the closing session Saturday morning. Tommy, former Clemson University football coach, introduced his father, sharing how they faced each other nine times, during Bobby's 34-year tenure as the head coach at Florida State University. Tommie Harris, former University of Oklahoma football standout and NFL Pro Bowl defensive lineman, was the featured speaker for the Friday evening, April 26, main session. Harris shared his confidence he has in God that "He will never leave me nor forsake me," and his assurance was increased after his wife, Ashley, died during surgery. Harris retired after playing eight years in the NFL because of Ashley's death. "Ever since that day, I've been relying on the power of Jesus," he said and shared how God could change other lives, too.

2020

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Retreat was canceled.

2023

Rather than two main sessions, the Men's Retreat offered a wide array of activities and points of interest for all men, including fishing to motorcycles, target sports to grilling. Organizers said there was more of an emphasis of "having more of a retreat and less of a conference," to allow more time for each church's men's group to connect and enjoy their time together. Also, well-known bass fisherman Jimmy Houston shared fishing stories and his faith; Lew Sterrett, a professional horse trainer and pastor, spoke at the Cowboy Corral.

2025

Porter returned as a keynote speaker, along with Tarvoris Uzoigwe, Oklahoma Baptists' Evangelism and Apologetics Ministry Partner, and former men's ministry specialist Keith Burkhardt, creator of "Rewired.



2024 awards presented at annual meeting



The family of women's ministry leader Velma Hendricks accepts an Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame certificate in her honor.



The family of chaplain Joe B. Williams accepts an Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame certificate in his honor.

2024 Awards



The family of pastor and evangelist Sam Cathey accepts an Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame certificate in his honor.



Above, Carolyn Kay Ellenbrook's daughter, Margaret Dixon, accepts an Oklahoma Baptist Hall of Fame certificate in her mother's honor. Bill C. Haggard, top left, received 2024 Distinguished Service Award. Left, former pastor Luke Holmes presents Rita Lokey a certificate for the Gaskin Church History Award for Tishomingo, First.

NECROLOGY

Jan. 1–Dec. 31, 2024

Adams, Larry died Feb. 5. He was a longtime state pastor and denominational leader. He served at Eufaula, First; Shawnee, Immanuel and Piedmont, First. He also worked for Baptist Village Communities as campus director at Baptist Village of Oklahoma City and as BVC's vice president of development.

Almy, Donna died Jan. 4. She was the wife of Bruce Almy, pastor of Dewey, Bluestem.

Arterberry, Jerry died Aug. 7. He was the husband of Deborah Arterberry, Johnston-Marshall Association ministry assistant.

Billy, LeRoy died Feb. 21. He was the pastor of Poteau, Trinity for 49 years and also served as pastor at Hontubby.

Bolton, Mary died May 3. She worked for two decades as the "Falls Creek Grocery Store Lady." She and her husband, Jack, lived and worked at Falls Creek.

Boren, Perrie died Feb. 16. He was the father of Pauline Boren, Baptist Collegiate Ministry director in Oklahoma City.

Boyd, Dorothy died Feb. 6. She was the mother of Mark Boyd, Director of Missions in Frisco Association.

Brown, Kent died Aug. 31. He was the brother of Art Brown, pastor of Connerville, First and former director of the Oklahoma Baptist Home for Girls in Madill.

Carter, Martha died June 23. She was the mother of Tim Carter, bi-vocational pastor at Wapanucka and mother-in-law/mother of Greg and Shawn Idell, pastor of Madill, Oakview.

Cheek, Gary died April 23. He was the father-in-law of Brett Selby, Oklahoma Baptists' Central Regional Ministry Partner.

Cook, William died Jan. 4. He served for 20 years as pastor of Bartlesville, First.

Corley, Fern died Feb. 28. She was an administrative assistant to BGCO executives for many years and served as the pianist at Oklahoma City, Northwest for almost 50 years.

Cotten, Ruth died June 21. She was the wife of Tom Cotton, former Enon Association Director of Missions. She and Tom worked as gatekeepers at Falls Creek for 23 years and helped direct children's camp for 19 years. She went on 30 mission trips with the IMB.

Cox, Carol died June 29. She was a former executive secretary for the state convention's women's ministry and the wife

of Perry Cox, pastor of Tulsa, Skelly Drive.

Cox, Vera Faye died May 14. She was the wife of Tom Cox, pastor at Lawton, Leitia; Shawnee, Fairview; Ramona, First; Valliant, First and Ninnekah, First and director of missions in Washington-Osage Association.

Crow, Pam died Sept. 6. She was the wife of John Crow, pastor of Broken Bow, Chapel of the Pines.

Dance, Bobbie died Feb. 20. She was the mother of Mark Dance, former Oklahoma Baptists' East Central Ministry Partner.

Dixon, Vurl "O.B." died May 1. He was a longtime disaster relief volunteer who participated in roughly 40 disaster recovery and relief missions in locations from tornado-torn Oklahoma, to the flooded hills of Kentucky, and from earthquake-ridden California, to starving villages in third-world countries.

Fannin, Ron died Jan. 20. In addition to his ministry in music, education, youth and administration at churches, he served the Baptist Foundation of Oklahoma (currently WatersEdge) as Vice President for Church Building Loans and Student Services and Senior Vice President from 1988-2000. In the latter role, he oversaw a \$30 million church building loan portfolio, traveling more than 40,000 miles a year assisting Oklahoma churches in evaluating building projects and creating a safe debt service to allow them to maintain their current ministry and keep their missions giving strong. He later served Oklahoma Baptists as Senior Associate Executive Director from September 2000-July 2014.

Ferguson, Sue Ellen Albright died Sept. 21. Known as "The Glad Hatter," she was youth director and minister to women at Bethany, Council Road.

Floberg, Randy died April 19. He was the step-father of Johnny Wagner, pastor of Okmulgee, Calvary.

Foutch, Frank died Sept. 9. He was a former director of Oklahoma Baptists' Religious Education Dept.

Hogue, Leroy Benjamin died May 8. He served the SBC Foreign Mission Board in Taiwan, China, Singapore and Indonesia and was pastor at Grant, Paruna, Onapa, Lone Wolf and Warren.

Hollaway, Carolyn died May 17. She was the wife of Jerry Hollaway, pastor of Stuart, First.

Kellogg, Lynn died Feb. 23. She was the mother of Robert Kellogg, Chief Executive Officer of WatersEdge.

King, Rufus “Wagooli” died June 19. He served as pastor at Lost City, Keener; Jay, Pine Ridge and Eucha, Round Springs.

King, Ruth died July 11. She was a charter member of the Singing ChurchWomen of Oklahoma and wife of John King, retired pastor at Madill, Trinity Southern and Cumberland.

Karch, Teresa died Nov. 20. She was the wife of Charles Karch, pastor of Arkoma, First.

Landrum, Everett Leon died March 13. He served as pastor of several Oklahoma churches in Craig Mayes Association, including Big Cabin. He and his wife Bonnie served several years as houseparents for Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children.

Ligon, Jean died Feb. 9. She was the mother of Joe Ligon, Oklahoma Baptists’ senior associate executive director.

Maxey, Paul died May 9. He served as pastor among Oklahoma’s Muscogee Creek churches and as a member of the Indian Falls Creek Board of Directors.

McKean, Gina died March 31. She served at Oklahoma City, Portland Ave. for more than 40 years, including director of children’s ministry for the last 30 years. She also was a founding member of Mission Ignition and had been the event’s coordinator since 2009.

Meshaya, Shane died May 24. He was pastor at Armstrong, First.

Miller, Carol died April 12. She was the mother/mother-in-law of Vicki and Jason Yarbrough, Oklahoma Baptists’ disaster relief and chaplaincy ministry director.

Miller, Linda died Nov. 15. She was the Oklahoma Baptists’ mailroom supervisor and mother of Kdie Nix, Oklahoma Baptists’ ministry assistant.

Mills, Eula Mae died Sept. 7. She retired after serving for 30 years with the Woman’s Missionary Union of Oklahoma Baptists.

Morlan, Ben died Oct. 25. He was the son of Lori and Tim Morlan, pastor of Oklahoma City, Classen Blvd.

Orta, Victor died July 11. He served as catalytic missionary in Oklahoma, planted 20 Hispanic churches and founded 25 Hispanic ministry centers.

Patterson, Helen Marie died Jan. 22 at the age of 107. She was the wife of retired pastor Lester Patterson, serving in Native American ministry. She was a leader in the Pottawatomie-

Lincoln Association Woman's Missionary Union for 23 years.

Perry, Eugene A., died March 28. He was pastor at Ashland; Konawa, First; Norman, Brookhaven; Lone Grove, First; Tonkawa, First and Westport. He also was an adjunct faculty member at Oklahoma Baptist University.

Pittman, Bob died May 17. He retired as pastor at Hanson, and was still serving as their associate pastor.

Pittman, Vickie died Aug. 5. She was the wife of Terry Pittman, pastor of Paden, First.

Pratt, Christina died June 26. She was the wife of Jr. Pratt, pastor of Cushing, First Indian.

Pybas, Doris died April 11. She was the widow of Garth Pybas, pastor of Oklahoma City, Britton Rd.

Racy, Vernell died May 5. He served as pastor of Gans, Grace New Beginnings.

Rawlings, Stella Lane died Sept. 8. She was the retired circulation manager with the *Baptist Messenger*.

Reece, Charles Herman died April 25. He was a longtime lay leader at Oklahoma City, Northwest and the driving force behind the annual Oklahoma City Metro Prayer Breakfast.

Sebastian, Glenda died July 20. She was the wife of Don Sebastian, longtime pastor of several Oklahoma churches.

Sigman, Michelle died March 31. She was the sister-in-law of Sandy Delsigne, Oklahoma Baptists' Finance Team.

Sutton, Kirk died May 2. He was a retired pastor from Central Association.

Turner, Pat died July 20. He was a disaster relief chaplain for almost 20 years.

Wallace, Daniel died March 28. He was the son of Nikki and Darren Wallace, Director of Missions in Muskogee Association.

Welch, Sheila died Feb. 18. She was the mother of Travis Welch, Director of Missions in Kay Association.

