

86TH

NAFWB



When Free Will Baptists returned to Birmingham after 17 years, they found a city vastly different from the one they visited previously. Sure, the residents were still friendly, the late July humidity sweltering, and the barbecue savory. But new apartments and high-rises had replaced previously vacant and run-down buildings. New interstate flyovers crisscrossed the city skyline near the convention complex, and beautiful parks and public areas marked a new day in Birmingham.

Birmingham wasn't alone in its changes. Free Will Baptists are a different denomination than the one that visited the city in 2006. A new generation holds many leadership positions, and the denomination faces new challenges within and beyond the church. Churches and congregations have endured a Great Recession, natural disasters, social and racial division, a global pandemic, pastoral shortages, and shrinking membership. Yet, Free Will Baptists face these challenges (and others) with hope, clear direction and vision, and determination to work together to overcome whatever the future holds with God's help.

GO THE
extra mile

This spirit of determination was reflected in the 2022 convention theme, which challenged attendees to “Go the Extra Mile.” Sunday morning, **Rett Floyd (SC)** taught Sunday School from Psalm 119 before **Chris Todd (SC)** urged convention-goers to go the extra mile in practicing forgiveness (Luke 15:11-32). Sunday evening, after observing the Lord's Supper together, **Tim Baumgarten (AL)** challenged listeners to go the extra mile in Christian unity (Romans 14), reminding

them we “are not called to uniformity but to unity.” Monday evening, **Jim McComas (TN)** admonished those listening not to wait for the *extra* mile to help hurting people (Luke 8:40-46) but to make it a “first-mile priority.” Tuesday, **Kent Barwick (GA)** reminded the crowd that Jesus Himself went the extra mile to reach the woman at the well (John 4), and we should do the same to introduce others to the Living Water. In the concluding Wednesday evening missions service, **Fernando Bustamante (SC)**, speaking in Spanish with interpretation by Steve Lytle, shared a final challenge to leave our comfort zones and go the extra mile to take the gospel to all the earth (Acts 10).

Music and Scripture reemphasized the convention theme. From rousing congregational singing to musical offerings from soloists, groups, praise teams, choirs, and orchestra, the music in every service was moving and memorable. Hearts were stirred and altars filled throughout the week, as Free Will Baptists embraced this challenge to go the extra mile. Thanks to the Media Commission, all services were



CONVENTION

JULY 24-27, 2022 • BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

live-streamed, and listeners watched from across the country and around the world.

Sunday afternoon, attendees observed feet washing for a second year. From well-known hymns to a short devotion presented by **Dr. Kevin Hester (TN)**, listeners were reminded we wash feet because Jesus humbly washed the disciples' feet and urged us to follow His lead. The service provided a wonderful time of fellowship and worship and set a powerful tone of humility for the meeting that followed.

BACK TO WHERE THE IMPACT STARTED

Seventeen years ago, Free Will Baptists made history when volunteers from eight states braved hot temperatures and sweltering humidity for the first IMPACT outreach event. Since then, thousands of Free Will Baptists have volunteered for the annual outreach program, participating in everything from door-to-door evangelism and street fairs to painting, remodeling, and landscaping churches.

This year, IMPACT took place at the Salvation Army just north of Birmingham. Eighty-seven volunteers went the extra mile to prepare care kits to distribute to the homeless community. Director Ken Akers expressed excitement about the event: "We had a *great* turnout! Volunteers from ten states worked with donated items from 11 states."

After completing 600 care kits, four teams in six vehicles traveled to shelters and locations throughout Birmingham, giving away 450 bags in two hours. They left approximately 150 bags at the Salvation Army. Other volunteers picked up trash and cleaned the Salvation Army grounds while the bags were distributed.

Akers encourages other Free Will Baptists to get involved: "Seventeen years later, we *continue* to be excited about the potential of the IMPACT program. I hope everyone will join us next year when we work together to make a difference for the people of Raleigh."

BUSINESS IN BIRMINGHAM

The **General Board** began its annual meeting Monday, July 25, with a brief message from Moderator Tim York (TN). The board heard reports from eight national agencies and four commissions during a one-hour, 55-minute meeting. The board approved a broad slate of recommendations from the Executive Committee, including a recommendation to approve the 2023 denominational budget of \$31.4 million and a recommendation to amend Article 2 of the Constitution to allow international churches and associations to affiliate directly with the National Association. These recommendations from the General Board were later approved by delegates during the convention business session.

Convention Business Session. Moderator Tim York opened the two-day meeting with a message on "Ministry Methods" from Acts 2 before opening the podium for departmental reports.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE. Comparing today's American church to a physically unhealthy community, Executive Secretary Eddie Moody acknowledged the challenges facing Free Will Baptists, noting, "Last year, we lost 41 churches, and we currently have 212 churches without pastors." However, Moody chose to focus on *solutions* rather than problems, asking "What can we do to change this?"

He encouraged pastors and churches to embrace the Three for Thirty denominational campaign, reaching their communities, training their congregations, and giving faithfully to the Lord's work. With the aid of a Three for Thirty Task Force established in 2021, the Executive Office continues to develop and offer Reach, Train, and Give Resources.

Know Your Community, offered in cooperation with Church Answers, helps churches know and understand their communities better, equipping them to reach neighbors more effectively. The Hope Initiative, another collaboration with Church Answers, seeks to change the culture in struggling churches. Churches interested in participating should contact questions@nafwb.org.

2022 CONVENTION AT A GLANCE

REGISTRATION

NAFWB Attendees - **3,452**

Vertical Three - **2,894**

Total Attendees - **4,038***

*Note: Many attendees register for both conventions.

SPEAKERS

Sunday School, July 24

Rett Floyd (SC)

Sunday Morning, July 24

Chris Todd (SC)

Sunday Evening, July 24

Tim Baumgarten (AL)

Monday Evening, July 25

Jim McComas (TN)

Tuesday Evening, July 26

Kent Barwick (GA)

Wednesday Evening, July 27

Fernando Bustamante (SC)

Contributors: Eric Thomsen,
Tori Matlock, Sarah Sargent

Vertical Three: Derek Altom

Photographers: Rodney Yerby,
Sydney Walker, Michael E. Rogers

Download Photos:

nafwb.yerbyphoto.com

Moody additionally introduced the new Growing Together initiative that will harness the power of Zoom technology to bring together affinity groups for training, collaboration, fellowship, and encouragement. In cooperation with North American Ministries, Growing Together offers professional counseling from Tom Jones, a church planter and counselor with Keystone Christian Counseling. Carolyn Dwyer will also begin providing support for pastors' wives in the fall.

Moody pointed to other valuable resources developed and guided by the office: multi-lingual resources, the ever-expanding Rekindle program, pastoral search materials, Gideon's Army prayer team, and more. He encouraged churches and individuals to support The Together Way offerings and The Together Way Trust, a perpetual endowment established to help underwrite denominational agencies and departments.

"You matter, and what you do matters," Moody concluded. "The problems we are facing today can only be solved by the gospel. Let us each call upon God and ask Him what role He wants us to play in being His hands and feet."

Following the report, Moody honored David Shores (IL) for many years of service on the Executive Committee for the state of Illinois.

FWB FOUNDATION. "A slow-motion miracle" was how Director David Brown described the phenomenal growth the Foundation has experienced over the past 30 years. [Read more in *Brown on Green*, page 39.]

The miracle continues as the department enjoyed its largest one-year increase in assets in 2021 (\$23 million-plus), doubling the previous record set in 2019. Money management investments grew by \$12.5 million, and gift annuities increased by more than \$370,000. Unitrusts increased by more than \$120,000, and the endowment pool increased by more than \$2.8 million. The department also enjoyed dividend gains of 25.6%, the highest percentage growth since 2004. "Frankly, I have no explanation for this phenomenal growth," Brown admitted. "But I view this as a good thing, because it means I had nothing to do with it other than planting and watering. God gave the increase."

The Foundation's growth made it possible to award a record \$750,000 in grants to 23 ministries in 2022, bringing total grants awarded to \$3.4 million since 2017. Additionally, the Foundation gifted \$1.1 million to The Together Way Endowment, Vertical Three, and WNAC, bringing the giving total to \$2 million in 2022. Looking back on these historic numbers, Brown reflected emotionally, "I never dreamed 30 years ago we would someday give away \$2 million in a single year. After all, that is twice as much as we held in assets at the time."

He noted the estate planning program, slowed by the pandemic, has bounced back, with 152 new families participating last year and participation returning to pre-pandemic levels thus far in 2022. Estate planning accounts for \$900,000 already given to Free Will Baptist ministries.

NORTH AMERICAN MINISTRIES (NAM). Director David Crowe celebrated three successive years of financial gains, finishing \$900,000 in the black in 2019, \$425,000 in 2020, and just under \$200,000 in 2021. He noted the Church Extension Loan Fund now holds \$1.14 million in assets, which helps investors, churches, and the department's general fund.

Crowe pointed to numerous exciting "firsts" for NAM: first churches in Vermont and North Dakota; first non-ordained workers on a church-planting team; first church in a retirement community (The Villages, Florida); first partnership with district associations and local congregations to plant churches; first Hispanic Power Conference in the States; first English/Hispanic





ELECTED IN 2022

Welch - 2028

Brad Ryan (IL)
Wayne Miracle (GA)
Rusty Campbell (TN)

IM, Inc. - 2028

Will Harmon (AR)
Cameron Lane (AR)
Rodney Yerby (AL)

Randall House - 2028

Jay Baines (VA)
Timothy York (NY)
Darren Gibbs (NC)

WNAC - 2028

Jonda Patton (KY)
Lee Ann Wilfong (MO)
Sharon Dickey (TX)

Theological Commission - 2027

Kevin Hester (TN)

Historical Commission - 2027

Willie Martin (GA)

Music Commission - 2027

Doug Little (TN)

Media Commission - 2027

Devon Dundee (AR)

Executive Committee - 2025

David Taylor (AR)
Danny Williams (AL)
Mike Kilcrease (CA)

Nominating Committee - 2022-23

*appointed by moderator

Ben Crabtree (OH), chairman
Tim Eaton (OK)
Isaiah Hatfield (WV)
Terry Hinds (IN)
David Taylor (AR)
Elizabeth Hodges (TN)

church plant in Athens, Alabama; first onsite assessments at the recently established assessment center; first pastor's boot camp; first African-American and Hispanic NAM board members; first heavy equipment added to the Disaster Response Team; first historical church property deeded to NAM (the Ridge Church in New Hampshire).

He defined a clear direction for NAM: planting English and Hispanic churches in North America; relocating and emphasizing the Hispanic Bible Institute; expanding and supporting Free Will Baptist chaplaincy; continuing and expanding Master's Men Disaster Response; church revitalization; growing and maintaining the Church Extension Loan Fund; and forming partnerships with local churches, associations, and departments for the sake of the gospel.

Crowe concluded: "On behalf of our family—65 church planter families, chaplains, board members, staff, part time staff, volunteers, and one very tired CEO—we say thank you so much for what you do to help us."

In conjunction with the NAM report, Board Chairman Jeff Jones honored church planters Brian and Emily Williams (Buffalo, New York), Marc and Casie Neppel and Kevin and Beth Bass (Portsmouth, Virginia) for taking their churches to self-supporting status.

BOARD OF RETIREMENT. Director John Brummitt pointed to 2021 as a difficult year for the office, as things slowly emerged from the "fog" of the pandemic. His office experienced staffing changes and challenges as employees were hired, trained, and began new roles. Despite the upheaval, Brummitt noted the organization is headed in the right direction. Contributions rose significantly in 2020, up more than \$4 million. After good market returns for the last two years, assets have increased to \$114 million, although 2022 has not experienced the same success. Contributions were \$1.4 million, with an annual net gain of \$14 million. Institutional Investing has increased \$9.6 million as more churches and ministries use the plan for strategic savings.

While the number of new participants is down because of the pandemic, the department is focused on finding new members this year. With that in mind, Brummitt introduced new options available to participants, giving them more control over their retirement accounts.

He encouraged Free Will Baptists to take advantage of Bible-based, financial, educational resources available by newsletter, social media, through the Re:invest Podcast, and at boardofretirement.com. "Our hope is for these resources to be uniquely beneficial to our denomination, not only for pastors, but for individual church members as well."

In closing, Brummitt urged Free Will Baptist employees to make plans for retirement *now*: "Free Will Baptists have an excellent vehicle to help your retirement grow, but you have to make a start and make the contributions!"

RANDALL HOUSE. Director Ron Hunter shared "notable quotables" throughout his report to guide his explanation of the exciting things happening at Randall House. He described the process of discipleship: *gather, train, and disciple*. This process happens at home, church, and work—throughout the daily routine and not only one day a week. Psalm 78:5-6 commands each new generation to teach statutes and commandments to the next.

Hunter rejoiced over the global expansion of D6, now hosted in six countries beyond the U.S. While Randall House is not a missions agency, Hunter emphasized D6 philosophy supports the work of missions at every level.

He thanked the Discipleship Task Force established in 2021 for its work to help Randall House prepare for the fall 2023 release of the next line of D6 curriculum and celebrated increases

within the Randall House Book Division, where sales rose 30% in 2021, followed by the highest quarterly sales ever in early 2022.

Hunter acknowledged a 14% drop in curriculum sales in 2021, as churches continued to recover from the pandemic, accompanied a 33% drop in Vertical Three attendance, and an operational loss of 18% for the D6 Conference. Despite these discouraging figures, Hunter expressed gratitude that Randall House finished 2021 in the black, thanks to unexpected influxes of cash from since-forgiven PPE loans, the sale of an adjacent lot, the sale of a press, and more. He thanked the Foundation for two grants that helped the department through COVID-related financial challenges and also made it possible to buy an in-house binder and complete the purchase of a new and much-needed press.

Numerous churches and individuals have begun supporting Randall House financially since the department introduced a development department in 2020. Terry Hill, long-time auditor, encouraged all Free Will Baptist churches to support Randall House through budgeted giving, individual financial support, and buying curriculum faithfully.

Following his report, Hunter introduced a potential name change from Randall House to D6 Family Ministries, noting, “We are not a publisher who does ministry but a ministry who publishes...D6 Family Ministries is the best expression of who we are.” If the name change is approved, book publishing would continue under the Randall House, Randall House Academic, and D6 Publishing imprints. The name change will be revisited in 2023.

In conjunction with the report, Randall House Board Chairman Mike Trimble (MI) honored Hunter for 20 years of ministry.

IM, INC. “Sometimes at IM, it feels as though we are stacking rocks,” observed Director Clint Morgan, as he noted the department’s pursuit of organizational balance. He pointed to two ingredients that must be present for this balance to take place: *equilibrium* and *symmetry*. He introduced five “musts” for IM to achieve this balance: 1) obey the Scriptures; 2) adhere to Free Will Baptist structure; 3) focus on mission; 4) steward resources; and 5) contextualize.

Morgan reminded listeners the World Missions Offering has shifted from April to August, although churches can schedule the offering throughout the year in the timeframe that works best for their congregation. The offering helps underwrite the IM general fund and partners. This support for partners is crucial, Morgan explained, because a significant paradigm shift has removed IM from the “hub” of Free Will Baptist missions work. Today, IM works in cooperation with partners around the world to accomplish the Great Commission. IM currently has 27 partner agencies, and others are being vetted. Considering this philosophical shift, Morgan reassured listeners, “You can be sure we *cannot* and *will not* compromise the Scriptures, nor have we lost sight of our primary mission.”

Morgan updated listeners on several staffing changes. Neil Gilliland, director of member care and mobilization, will retire at year’s end. Leslie Nichols, current CMP coordinator, will become the new director of mobilization, starting January 1, 2023. Hanna Mott (MI) will step down after a decade as ETEAM coordinator, and Lauren Herren (TN) will follow her in the position.

Significant field transitions are also taking place. Uruguayan Free Will Baptists have assumed leadership in their country, becoming strategic partners with IM. As a result, Jaimie Lancaster has become associate director of field partnerships, and Steve Torrison works with the Center for Intercultural Training. After 38 years, Donnie and Ruth McDonald are returning home



2023 BUDGETS

Executive Office - \$929,343

Foundation - \$2,490,000

NAM (includes Master's
Men) - \$5,000,000

IM, Inc. - \$8,850,000

Retirement - \$855,850

Randall House - \$4,641,500

Welch College - \$8,363,889

WNAC - \$249,669

Theological Commission - \$6,800

Historical Commission - \$5,680

Media Commission - \$9,425

Music Commission - \$9,320

Total - \$31,408,476

2022 VERTICAL THREE CONFERENCE

Registration - **2,894**

Truth & Peace - **164 participants**

Competitive Entries: **747**

Competitors: **1,412**

Buck-A-Week Offering: **\$5,029.56***

* Initial count may be adjusted





from Japan. Donnie will work with the IM development team, and Ruth will become director of WNAC. Missionaries to Spain Tim and Kristi Johnson have resumed ministry in the U.S. Tim will lead the missions department at Welch College starting fall 2022, and Kristi was introduced as development communications manager.

Following the report, IM recognized several individuals. Jerry and Barbara Gibbs were honored for 50 years of missions work, receiving a standing ovation from delegates. Morgan recognized Neil Gilliland, outgoing director of member care, mobilization, and candidate shepherd for decades of service as both missionary to Ivory Coast and on staff with the mission.

WNAC. Phyllis York, interim director of WNAC, acknowledged 2021 as a year of transition. After former director Elizabeth Hodges retired in August 2021, Phyllis began serving as interim director until Ruth McDonald returns from Japan to begin her new role.

Income for the department is down, a result of recent changes to membership structure and fees. Considering this, York encouraged individuals, groups, churches, and associations to support WNAC through The Giving Tree, a campaign of monthly organizational support.

Free Will Baptist women gave \$425,000 in 2021 to missions and ministry causes. Over the last year, more than \$21,000 in home goods and gift cards were donated to the Provision Closet. Scholarships were awarded to Daniel Delgado (Miley Scholarship); Word of Life School, Bangladesh (Pursell Scholarship); Leslie Arrendondo, Heather Thomas, and Michelle Sharp (Wisehart Scholarship).

York celebrated the first in-person event since the pandemic, when 115 attendees from ten states gathered in West Virginia for the Flourish Conference hosted by ladies from Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia. She pointed listeners to new Web and social media resources, including online *Treasure* Bible studies, e-blasts, and resources for young women at shinefbw.com.

At the conclusion of her report, York honored Pam Hackett for many years of board service, thanked women for the opportunity to serve as interim director, and gave Ruth McDonald an opportunity to greet delegates.

Ruth expressed thanks to Phyllis for her interim work, thanked the WNAC Board for the honor of serving as the new director, and expressed excitement about “changing hats” as she steps into the new position. However, she also explained the missions of IM and WNAC overlap and complement one another in fulfilling the Great Commission and making disciples. “This new role is not a departure from my calling,” Ruth concluded. “It is an extension of my calling.” McDonald thanked Free Will Baptist women for their faithfulness and staunch support of missions and expressed her desire to give back, coming alongside Free Will Baptist women everywhere to disciple the next generation of young women.

WELCH COLLEGE. After the pandemic depressed college enrollment in 2020, President Matt Pinson celebrated enrollment increases during 2021-2022, and announced the 2022 freshman class is tracking at pre-pandemic numbers. The school did not experience anticipated financial losses of \$900,000 in 2021 but ended the year with a deficit of only \$90,000 instead. Pinson encouraged listeners to identify and enlist donors to join the *Building on the Legacy—The Next Step* campaign to erase construction debt on the new campus and make further development possible.

Pinson celebrated Welch’s steady rise in college rankings, now listed among the top ten in *U.S. News & World Report’s* Best Colleges, improving in every measurable educational metric. He

thanked God that, despite the pandemic, the college was able to begin Welch Divinity School, offering a Master of Divinity degree to join the college's other master's degree programs. Twelve students enrolled in the first class.

A new B.A. to M.Div. program dovetails with a recently initiated \$10,000 scholarship to assist young men in pastoral and youth ministry programs. This is especially important, Pinson noted, "in a time when fewer high school students are answering the call to ministry."

Pinson thanked God for students who "are growing up here...becoming more spiritually mature. They are becoming leaders—ministry leaders for churches and missions around the world and lay leaders who bear witness to Christ across the professions."

Following the report, President Pinson honored outgoing board member Mike Armstrong (OH) for his service.

COMMISSIONS

Music Commission. Chairman Doug Little reported the growth of an onsite worship workshop program. A dozen churches applied in 2021, and several workshops were presented in early 2022. The program will continue, and Little noted the commission "will continue to work with churches in a coaching role." The commission continues active involvement in National Convention worship, working with the Media Commission and Executive Office staff to help convention services flow smoothly and efficiently.

Media Commission. Josh Owens celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Media Commission, which started as the Radio and Television Commission, using radio broadcasts to promote the gospel. Today, the work of the commission continues via new technology. As the grandson of an original member, Owens expressed, "What a blessing it is to be able to continue the vision of my grandfather and the other members of that original commission." He thanked the Foundation for a grant to purchase live-streaming equipment with ASL translation capabilities. The commission is available to consult with churches regarding communication, technology, and design.

Commission for Theological Integrity. Chairman Matt Pinson updated listeners on a successful and engaging Theological Symposium in 2021, with papers on a wide range of important topics. He indicated the release of another edition of *The Journal for Theological Integrity* later in 2022 and invited delegates to attend the next Symposium October



3-4, 2022, at Welch College. He pointed to the continuing mission to alert Free Will Baptists to dangerous theological trends, to prepare materials to help preserve the denomination's theological integrity, and to provide education on subjects relevant to this purpose. He invited Free Will Baptists to visit fwbtheology.com for news, updates, and dialogue.

Historical Commission. After unveiling a new logo, Secretary Eric Thomsen thanked delegates for a sharp increase in current minutes submitted by associational clerks. "It is easy to forget minutes produced today are history tomorrow," he warned. He thanked individual and organizational contributors to the Historical Collection and updated progress on scanning and posting denominational minutes to FWBHistory.com. He noted representatives from the commission were delighted to join the Ridge Church celebration in New Hampshire, marking 200 years since the historic building was constructed. Finally, Thomsen announced a forthcoming book from Randall House to guide churches and associations through planning, funding, and producing their history.

In other business, delegates considered a broad slate of resolutions. After lengthy discussion and debate, they passed three of five resolutions, tabling two others (regarding standards of ordination) to be considered by the Executive Committee and the Commission for Theological Integrity. Adopted resolutions include:

- A resolution thanking God for the recent Supreme Court decision regarding abortion, requesting the Executive Office send a letter of thanks to the U.S. Supreme Court to express appreciation for its decision, and urging Free Will Baptists to redouble efforts to see each state's abortion laws reflect the value of unborn life.
- A resolution denoting corporate repentance as Free Will Baptists, acknowledging our sin before God; begging His forgiveness both individually and as a body, fasting, praying, and pleading for Him to hear our prayer; and setting aside the first Tuesday in November as a day of fasting and prayer as evidence of our resolve and repentance.

- A resolution expressing a rising vote of thanks to the Alabama State Association for hosting the 2022 national convention.


Read the full text of these resolutions at nafwb.org/convention.

Delegates also adopted an addition to the *Treatise* (presented by the Commission for Theological Integrity for consideration in 2021) further defining Free Will Baptist doctrine regarding gender, marriage, and sexuality. They passed a motion requiring the Resolution Committee to prepare and present their report to convention delegates by the Monday evening service. And, after many years, delegates also raised

the honorarium for the convention clerk and moderator from \$500 to \$1,000 to offset rising travel expenses.

Business ended with pastors and leaders from across the nation praying together. They cried out to God in repentance, begging His grace and direction.

LOOKING AHEAD

Executive Secretary Eddie Moody invited Free Will Baptists to join the National Convention July 16-19, 2023, when the denomination gathers in Raleigh, North Carolina, for the 87th convention with the theme “As for You.” 



One of the greatest things Free Will Baptists do is gather each summer for the National Convention and Vertical Three Conference. The interaction with friends from across the denomination gives the meeting a “family reunion” feel. You cannot attend a convention without getting a brief earthly glimpse of what Heaven will be like someday.

CTS MINISTRY EXPO

One of the ways Free Will Baptists connect is through the CTS Ministry Expo. This year, **1,412 students** competed in **747 categories** of Bible and fine arts. However, the emphasis of CTS is not competition but students using their talents to glorify the Lord in music, art, writing, digital media, and Bible. The future of the Free Will Baptist family is bright. It is my prayer the students in our movement will continue to hide God’s Word in their hearts and use their talents for His Kingdom and glory.

TRUTH & PEACE STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

The 2022 Truth & Peace Student Leadership Conference was the largest conference in its history, gathering 164 students from across the denomination. They were trained on the campus of Welch College for ten days prior to the Vertical Three Conference. The journey from the college to Birmingham proved quite an adventure. One of three charter buses broke down on I-65 in North Alabama. Thanks to many kind members of the Free Will



Baptist family and the experienced conference staffers, the crew arrived safely in Birmingham, only a few hours behind schedule.

Starting on Sunday, Truth & Peace put their recent training into practice when they became the workforce needed to execute the CTS Ministry Expo and various other components of the Vertical Three Conference.

The 2022 Truth & Peace Conference marked the 25th year for Allen Pointer as conference director. The Bible is clear: honor should be given to those to whom honor is due. The Free Will Baptist denomination owes Allen a huge debt for shaping the lives of young people for over two decades.

YOUTH EVANGELISTIC TEAM

One of the highlights of the Vertical Three Conference is the Youth Evangelistic Team leading other students in worship. Thirteen students assembled at Welch College in late June for a week of training and rehearsal before heading out on a two-week tour through Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Alabama. After a short break, the team reunited in Birmingham to lead the Vertical Three Conference worship services and present their full program following the Monday evening service.

SERVE THE CITY

The 2022 Vertical Three Conference saw the return of Serve the City. Jane Parker led this ministry. Families from across the denomination gathered to distribute care bags to the homeless population of Birmingham and to provide items for a children's and women's shelter. Seeing moms and dads serve alongside their children is truly heartwarming.

WORSHIP SERVICES

Though all of the ministries are important, I see the highlight of the Vertical Three Conference as the various worship services. Preschool worship, as in the previous 20 years, was led by Katie Greenwood (TN). Johnny Miller (AR) led children's worship. Like Katie, Johnny has led children's worship for over two decades. Steve Greenwood (TN), leader of 456 worship, led preteen students in high energy songs and relevant Bible lessons helping shape their biblical worldview at this crucial age.

Along with YET leading in worship, middle school and high school students heard sermons centered on John 14:6 and Jesus being "the way, the truth, and the life." The Lord used pastors Tommy Franks (AL), Caleb Milling (OK), Chris Edwards (SC), former missionary to Spain Kristi Johnson (TN), and youth evangelist Jeffrey Dean Smith (TN) to challenge Vertical Three attendees. The conference was capped off by a night of fun and laughter with comedian Byron Trimble (MI).

JUST LIKE FAMILY

The convention is a place where college friends reconnect, Truth & Peace alumni gather over coffee and share stories of bygone conferences, and new friendships are formed to last for decades to come. Just like a family reunion? Absolutely! **ONE**

