

ANNUAL REPORT

2020



Florida Baptist
Convention

Right Beside You.

Florida Baptists are still committed to releasing more resources to ministry outside the state of Florida.



**That the GOSPEL
will be shared**



**That LIVES will be
transformed**



**That GOD'S KINGDOM
will be expanded**



Together

we have a greater reach than we
ever could alone

51%

to the Southern Baptist Convention
Cooperative Program

49%

to the Florida Baptist Convention
Cooperative Program

**Giving away more
than we keep**

Praise the Lord!

2020....what else can be said to describe this year in ministry. It was a year that consumed, challenged and crushed us at times. Still, just as we see over and over in scripture, when man was ready to give up, we find words like "but God." As the year 2020 squeezed us and stretched us as individuals, as churches and as communities, God continued to reveal His mighty hand in ways that man could have never ordained. Despite an unprecedented year, we celebrate the mighty moving of God through the unique ways that churches ministered in their communities, adapting to the ever-changing environment and developing extraordinary ways of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. These pages reflect the challenges but most importantly they celebrate the blessings that God gave Florida Baptist churches in ministry this past year, propelling the Gospel to people that might not have heard the Good News otherwise.

It was my pleasure to walk alongside each and every pastor and church in our convention through these challenges. Countless moments revealed just how important it is to be united in ministry and just how much we can do together for the glory of God.


Executive Director
Treasurer





Food ministry grows through pandemic, page 10

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Total CP gifts from Florida Baptist churches
through the Cooperative Program

\$28,022,527

2020 Cooperative Program Giving



\$13,793,607

Total Portion
of CP receipts
utilized in Florida



\$1,320,000

to the Baptist
College of Florida



\$912,000

to Florida Baptist
Children's Home



\$160,000

to Lake Yale
Conference
Center



Missions

Giving

imb INTERNATIONAL
MISSION BOARD

\$12,417,569

given by Florida Baptist Churches to
International Missions through CP and
Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

I>> North American
Mission Board

\$4,874,781

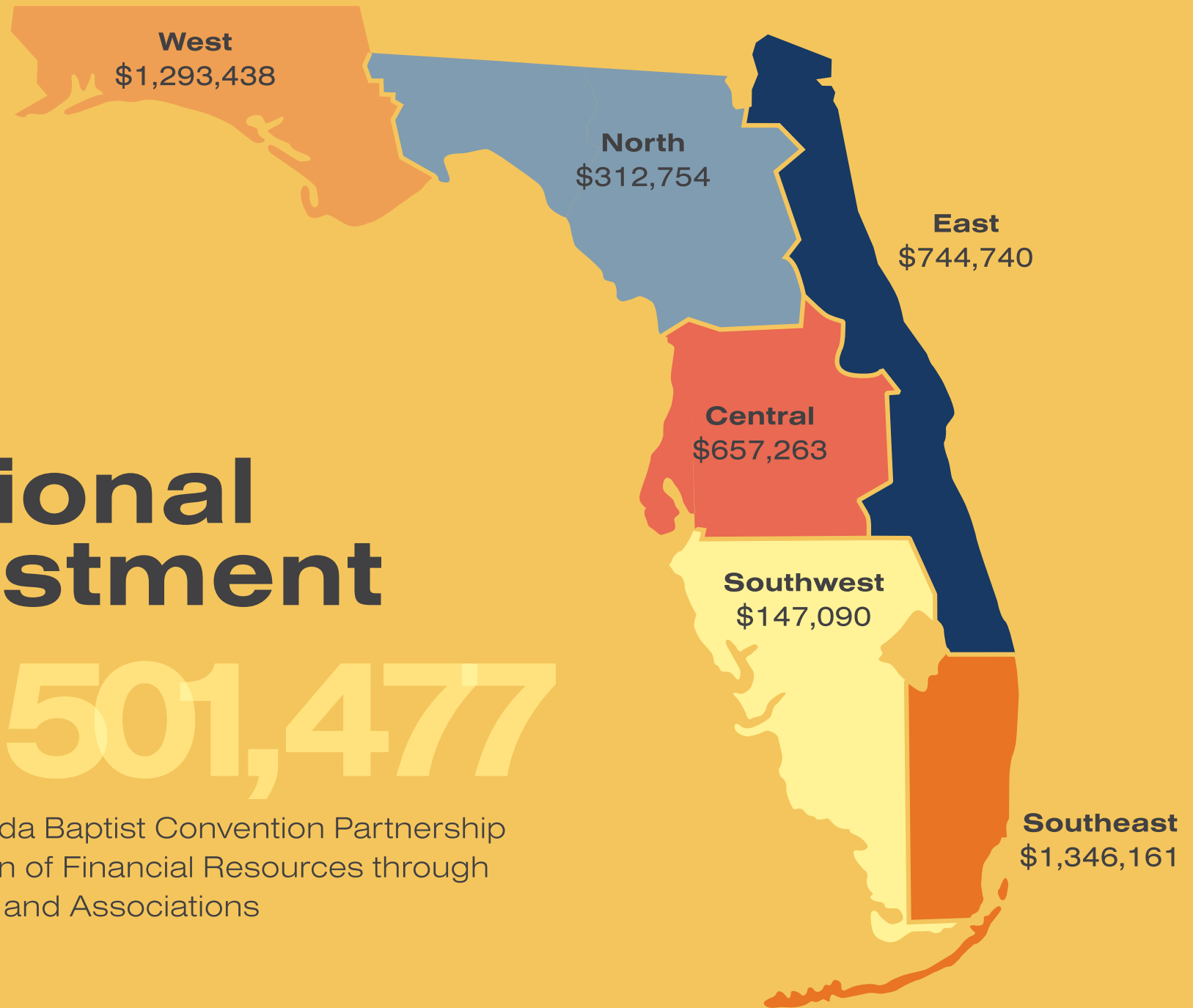
given by Florida Baptist Churches to
North American Missions through CP
and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering



Regional Investment

\$4,501,477

2020 Florida Baptist Convention Partnership
Distribution of Financial Resources through
Churches and Associations





Florida churches adopt creative ways to minister during COVID-19

As a shadow of fear and uncertainty spread over the nation in response to the COVID-19 crisis, Florida Baptist churches found inventive ways to be the Light of Christ to a world looking for hope and comfort.

Called to social distance to slow down the spread of the virus, churches became creative with worship and prayer services and stepped up to help those affected by the crisis.

Many churches, including Fifth Street Baptist Church in Key West, streamed their worship services, Bible studies and prayer times online through Facebook Live.

Fifth Street offered an interactive online streaming Bible study and prayer on Wednesdays and Sunday's online streaming services provided Bible studies for children, youth and adults. Viewers submitted prayer requests or other needs online. The church offered counseling, to demonstrate it "is here for the community," during this time of crisis, said Pastor Josh Dryer.

Driftwood Church at the Beach in Jensen Beach streamed their service online as Pastor Eddy Fredryk preached the Sunday sermon standing in water at the beach.

"We are grateful that we are able to have church in this way," he told his congregation. "I do miss all of you, but I do think in this situation it is important for us to do what our local and even federal government want us to do."

With its new drive-in church service, Fellowship Church in Madison invited all to "Drive up, stay in car, and tune in for music and teaching" as a safe way to gather for worship amid stay-at-home orders.

Each Sunday, members drove their cars to the church, as usual, but remained there for social distancing reasons. The makeshift stage was a flatbed truck with two big speakers and the worship team consisted of a guitarist and a vocalist who led the group in praise and worship songs in time for Pastor Jackie Watts to bring the day's sermon.

Celebrating the Resurrection

Instead of being hindered by COVID-19 constraints, Florida Baptist congregations tapped into their creativity to discover new and resourceful ways to connect with their members and their communities in celebration of Christianity's Holy Week.

Legacy Church, located 20 miles north of Naples in Estero, broadcasted its service from a rented trailer bed to cars parked on the church's property in a classic drive-in format.

Primarily a church of children and young families, North River Church, located in Parrish, relied on Facebook to host a seven-day Easter photo scavenger hunt. Church families were encouraged to read daily Scriptures and post pictures in the comment section of their family

completing the challenge. Families were provided bags with eggs and a family devotional guide.

Refusing to let a long-lived Easter tradition go-by-the-wayside, West Bradenton Baptist Church encouraged members to take family pictures in front of a familiar site located on the church's property, a flower cross. The church asked members to display Easter signs in their yards to create a community-wide scavenger hunt.

First Baptist Church in Palmetto offered a virtual egg hunt for children during their online Easter service—challenging children to find 27 eggs strategically hidden throughout their online broadcast—including one in Pastor Phillip Hamm's shirt pocket.

Calvary Church, with campuses in Clearwater, Seminole, and Tarpon Springs, hosted daily devotions throughout Holy Week and streamed a Good Friday Lord's Supper service. The church used this time to serve and love their community, delivering bags with food, diapers and baby wipes to 200 homes.

Many churches, including Bell Shoals Baptist Church in Brandon and North Naples Baptist Church, hosted online Good Friday and Easter Sunday services that reached both their congregations and people scattered around the world.



Pastors' virtual gatherings: 'We're all in this together'

"Believing that if we will, as scripture says, 'humble ourselves, pray and seek His face, He will heal our land,'" Allen Hawkins, pastor of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Mayo, joined fellow Florida Baptist pastors "to call out upon the Lord" during the second virtual statewide prayer meeting April 2.

Hawkins and at least 110 pastors participated in the video conferencing call while another 45 watched through a live stream on Facebook. The call to prayer has become a weekly event since the coronavirus pandemic forced Floridians to shelter in place, disrupting worship services and pressing pastors to create new paradigms to do church.

Four Florida Baptist pastors led the Thursday evening meeting: H.B. Charles, Shiloh Metropolitan Baptist Church, Jacksonville; Brian Stowe, First Baptist Church, Plant City; Ted Traylor, Olive Baptist Church, Pensacola; and David Uth, First Baptist Church, Orlando. Meetings were held concurrently for Hispanic and Haitian pastors.

Tommy Green, Florida Baptist executive director, said the online prayer meetings "have become like a mini-pastors' conference. God is using this opportunity to minister to our pastors during this unique season of ministry."

Among the reasons Michael Mott, pastor of Seminole First Baptist Church in Tampa, participated in the statewide calls is the "great appreciation I have for each pastor who shared from God's Word," he said. "I, personally, was encouraged and uplifted by the time with other pastors. Knowing we're all going through this and that we can lean on one another is a great reassurance."

Erik Cummings, pastor of New Life of Carol City in Miami, said the calls to prayer "are valuable because it affords all of our pastors the opportunity to connect across the state for encouragement and enrichment through God's word and prayer. I feel

that is vital at any time, especially during difficult times like today."

Along with the weekly statewide prayer meetings, convention staff have led smaller regional and affinity-based calls since the coronavirus sidelined events, travel and gatherings. In these meetings, pastors share their struggles, assist fellow pastors—especially as it relates to new technology—and celebrate each other's victories.

In the past 30 days, the convention staff led 449 online meetings for 5,819 participants who devoted more than 200,000 minutes to the Kingdom work in Florida.

Eddie Bevill, pastor of Parkridge Church in Coral Springs, helped to facilitate a South Florida meeting. "We're all in this together is what resonates with me. It is a great reminder of the grace and sovereignty of our loving Lord. I am also amazed by some of the praise reports of the creativity and servanthood among our churches."



COVID restrictions drive worldwide ESL ministry



Teaching others English as a second language is personal to Natalie Prim of Ocala. Her father was an immigrant who came to America in the late 1940's and married her American mother. The daughter watched as he worked during the day to support his family and then spent hours at night learning to read and write English. His struggles were real, but so were the rewards as he finished high school, college and started a business.

"It was the American dream, and it came true," said Prim, who now serves as the English as Second Language director at College Road Baptist Church in Ocala. "For me this is an opportunity to give back to God's kingdom and to improve lives here."

With the Coronavirus outbreak, the church's weekly ESL classes were suspended in March 2020. Learning of Zoom, the College Road teachers began logging in with their students who wanted to improve their English conversation skills.

"When 2020 began, 38 Florida churches offered English as a Second Language," said Marc Johnston, Florida Baptists' community ministries catalyst. "When the pandemic hit, many churches closed their doors and went online. Several ESL ministries stopped meeting. All of the ministries began to look at alternative ways to teach and looked at various virtual platforms."

During the summer, the state convention offered training sessions by Zoom on how to conduct ESL on a virtual platform. And as ESL ministries went online, a trend became apparent. Students from across the globe began registering for the classes.

"They realized very quickly that God had given them a world-wide ministry," Johnston said.



According to Prim, 20% of the ESL registrations were coming from outside Ocala—international registrations from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Spain and Brazil.

Students came from other states and outside of the Ocala region.

Susan Russo, director, ESL & Citizenship Ministry for Jacksonville's Southside Baptist Church, experienced the same phenomena. When the pandemic struck, she sought to create an interactive classroom through her students' smartphone, realizing not everyone had access to a computer. Utilizing VEDAMO, an interactive web conferencing tool for educators, she created a multilevel approach incorporating YouTube videos, listening classes, the "Jesus" film and other teaching aids.

They began reaching people outside Jacksonville as students told friends and family in their home countries.



Starting with 55 learners, at one point 85 persons across the globe were on the site, including learners from Brazil, Thailand and Myanmar.

Nationally they began reaching students from Texas and other places in Florida. They found the world was waiting at the end of their phone.

During each session, Russo asks for prayer requests and strikes up spiritual conversations.

"I was first concerned it wouldn't be as personal as teaching in person," Russo noted. "But connecting over the phone is even more personal and intimate as we pray together."

"The world continues to come to Florida," said Johnston. "ESL continues to be a great way to build relationships with Internationals, help our new friends with communication skills and share the gospel. Now, thanks to the pandemic, our churches can go to the world on a weekly basis through virtual platforms teaching ESL."



Churches, food ministry bring hope during pandemic

With the outbreak of COVID-19, hunger became a real and very tangible problem for many more millions of people in the U.S. As unemployment surged from temporary shutdowns, so did an overwhelming increased need for food.

In the Sunshine State, Florida Baptist churches responded in multiple ways as the hands and feet of Jesus to the least of these in their communities.

Since its beginning, Nueva Esperanza–New Hope Ministries–brought people to Christ through its food distribution ministry. Pastor Jose Garcia helped the church grow through its weekly food giveaways to Miami’s low income Allapattah neighborhood. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the need among residents, and the church began supplying additional food almost daily. The bivocational pastor provided his warehouse as a distribution point for food to other Florida Baptist churches. The outreach has led to hundreds of professions of faith, and Garcia baptized 30 new believers in the days after the virus struck.

The food boxes that arrived across the state were available for needy families through a partnership between the Florida Baptist Convention, the State of Florida, and private food corporations, all of which sent multiple tractor-trailers loaded with thousands of meal kits for Florida Baptist churches to deliver in their communities.

“Churches with ongoing food ministries have been very thankful for the boxes,” said Marc Johnston, Florida Baptists’ community ministries catalyst. “Many of their pantries have been depleted and with the number of hungry persons increasing, their sources for food have been decreasing. Some churches are using the contents to provide backpack lunches for out-of-school children.”



Lakeland’s Mt. Tabor Baptist church donated the boxes to homeless families throughout Polk County.



In St. Johns and Putnam counties, Iglesia Anastasia joined 25 other churches to distribute food boxes and groceries to their communities. “Thank you all for your time, generosity and sharing Christ’s love,” read a message on the church’s social media.



Pastor Derrick Gerber of Westside Baptist Church in Wewahitchka delivered backpacks filled with food to children at a local elementary school over fall break. “One child mentioned that they had just used up their food stamps and didn’t know where they would get any food to eat.” The heartbreaking responses reaffirmed the decision by the church to deliver 120 bags to the school to make sure the students did not go hungry over Thanksgiving break.

“The reason for this is that we want the children to be able to focus on learning while at school instead of wondering where their next meal will come from,” said Gerber. “Our church has made a commitment to reaching our community and food distribution is one vehicle that we use.”



Panama City’s First Baptist Church of Bayou George began ministering to the hungry with 100 pizzas and a desire to make Christ’s name known. As the threat of COVID-19 loomed, the church decided to hand out pizzas to the community. As neighbors drove up to the church for the free pizzas, they received information about the church and prayers.

Partnering with the Florida Baptist Convention, the church distributed the food to their community and then found other sources of food and donations to ensure the ministry continued. “We have shared the gospel with thousands, and dozens have made life-changing decisions because of this ministry,” said Pastor Jay Powell.



First Baptist Church in Callahan partnered with a local organization to provide easy-to-prepare, shelf-stable meals to local schools after learning free lunches for children at Title 1 schools would not be provided during spring break. Led by Pastor Lynn Hyatt, the church distributed meals to about 325 families during spring break week. If the family could not pick up the food at the church, the church delivered it to their house. The meals were well received with the flow of “lots of tears,” said Hyatt.



Pandemic Food Distribution

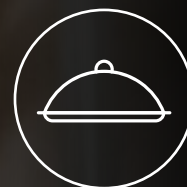
\$31,631,027

of food distributed



8,216,015

meals distributed



708

churches participated



6,424

professions of faith





96-year-old on baptism:

‘I couldn’t wait to get in that water’

At 96 and a half, Betty Schoch is believed to be the oldest person to ever be baptized at Hopeful Baptist Church in Lake City.

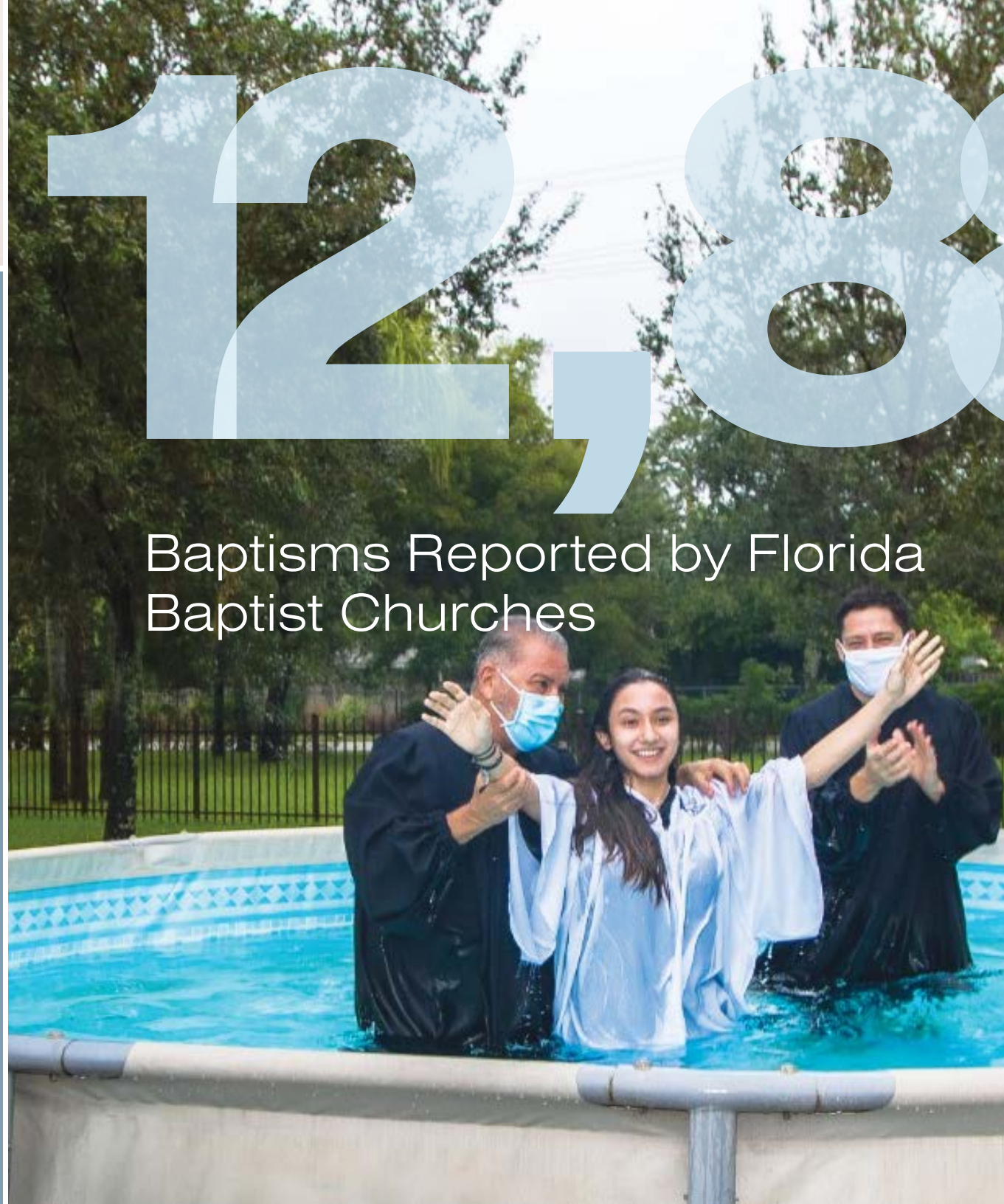
Schoch was baptized after recently becoming a member of the church.

“I could not wait to get in that water,” she said. “I was so excited and at peace to know I had finally taken care of this very important act of obedience. It made my heart full of joy because I could hear His voice saying, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant.’ It filled me with His indescribable peace.”

Raised in a Christian home and baptized as an infant, she was eager to take part in believer’s baptism, demonstrating her own public profession in Jesus Christ. Schoch says she accepted Christ as her savior at a tent revival in 1969 when she first moved to Lake City. She then joined a Methodist church and became active in many ministries.

Schoch began attending Hopeful Baptist about two years ago. Once she got plugged into a great Sunday School class, she soon felt compelled to become a member of the church.

“When she came up out of the water, she raised her fist,” said Associate Pastor Mark Cunningham. “She was so excited. She gave me a big hug. It was such a special time. I cried I think more than she did.”



12,888

Baptisms Reported by Florida Baptist Churches



Miami church plant celebrates new life with drive-by baptisms

Equipped with portable baptistry, pastor and musical instruments, Love Unlimited Church of Miami drove to the homes of four new believers to celebrate their new life with Christ through baptism—for all the neighbors to see.

“This is as close as it gets to baptizing like John the Baptist did,” said Pastor Mark Rodriguez. “I don’t know if there is a better way to declare your faith publicly than this.”

Much like birthdays and graduations have been celebrated since the quarantine began, the church’s worship team and Rodriguez drove up to homes in a parade-style caravan honking car horns and cheering from car windows. The worship team played a short worship set at each location and Rodriguez shared a quick Bible message.

Neighbors left their homes to witness the celebration.

Christine Plaza was baptized Sunday, Sept. 13, for all her community to bear witness. She thanked the pastor and his wife, Leilani Rodriguez, “and our

Love Unlimited family for coming to our home and welcoming us to your church. You have changed our lives in Jesus’ name.”

“Talk about a witness,” said Al Fernandez, southeast regional catalyst of the Florida Baptist Convention. “Now the neighbors know that these people are Christians also.”

The church had considered several possibilities for the baptism event, including “putting a pool in the back of my truck and going house-to-house,” said Rodriguez. Thankfully, in the middle of the night, he remembered the Florida Baptist Convention had a mobile baptistry located at the Southeast Regional Training Center in Hialeah.

“This happened not because we were trying to be creative but because we were trying to meet a need,” said Rodriguez. “Many times, we limit what God can do because we are used to our comfort, but at our church we don’t let our circumstances dictate what God wants us to do.”



Next

Virtual VBS unites kids around state and globe

Children and families in Florida and across the globe participated in Vacation Bible School this summer without ever having to leave their homes.

Virtual VBS became a safe approach during social distancing days of the Covid 19 pandemic—providing a 21st century spin on an age-old summertime church tradition that dated back to the late 1890s.

Tallahassee's virtual VBS, held during the week of June 15, featured a worship rally on Facebook Live each day, on-demand videos and PDF files that instruct and equip children and families in rotational tracks including crafts, music and recreation.

What began as a group of five Tallahassee churches uniting to plan a joint virtual effort, grew into partnership of 35 churches in five states. Registration reached 678 children, representing some 98 churches—from a variety of faiths—in 15 states and three countries including Canada, Brazil and Taiwan.

"What started out as a vision to kind of help one another and work together in this crazy time, God took that and grew it into this monstrosity that it is now. It's exciting to see what God is doing with this," said Jenny Whitaker, children and family ministry director at Bradfordville First Baptist Church in Tallahassee.

Westside Baptist Church in Gainesville also pulled off a successful week of engaging local families in God's word with the unique twist. 'VBS



Gen

Unleashed' was held virtually but included: drive-by events at the church, nightly VBS news video on Facebook, and contests and prizes creating great interaction.

For its VBS curriculum, Westside had already chosen Lifeway Christian Resources' "Construction and Cranes" prior to the pandemic, according to John Park, family pastor. They recorded their own videos featuring all the typical VBS elements—the daily lesson, Bible story, music, crafts, and recreation—for viewing on the church's website.

But Westside became creative in offering several physical touchpoints for their virtual event that added some of the traditional VBS excitement.

Some 600 VBS packets were distributed at a special drive-up event. "We usually run about 500 plus for VBS," Park said. "We just felt like this year we were probably going to go a little bit further just because people were going to be looking for stuff to do with their kids during COVID-19."

Whitaker said it's not necessarily a bad thing for VBS to look different this year.

"God can bring beauty from ashes. He has taken something that could have felt very negative and sad and just blown it open. He's turned it so positive and cast this new vision. We have this opportunity and potential to reach way more kids than we might have been able to reach if we had been doing this the traditional way."



Annual Meeting

In a year that was like no other, the 2020 Florida Baptist State Convention annual meeting scheduled Nov. 9-10 for Lakeland was canceled due to the challenges of safely gathering people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The FBSC meeting held annually in November draws Florida Baptists from across the state together for worship, fellowship and to transact convention business.

Calling the cancellation "the most prudent plan," Tommy Green, Florida Baptist Convention executive director-treasurer, said the dilemma state convention leaders faced this year is identical to the ones that Florida Baptist churches faced every week as they decided whether they should meet as a congregation.

Elected FBSC officers, under the leadership of President Erik Cummings, decided to cancel the meeting by unanimous vote during an Aug. 27 teleconference call. Cummings, pastor of New Life Baptist Church of Carol City in Miami, made the proposal to cancel the meeting; and was approved by

FBSC officers: Mike Wiggins, pastor of Pine Terrace Baptist Church in Milton; Vanessa Rodriguez-Cardona of Winter Garden; and Randy Huckabee, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dade City.

Also, giving their approval were Phillip Herrington, pastor of First Baptist Church in Live Oak, chair of the FBSC Committee on Nominations, and Dan Glenn, pastor of Stetson Baptist Church in DeLand, chair of the FBSC Committee on Order of Business.

With the cancellation of the meeting, the State Board of Missions, which serves as the convention ad interim, transacted necessary business to position the convention for the upcoming year, including the official cancellation of the meeting, making future meeting adjustments and adoption of a 2021 Florida Baptist Cooperative Program budget.

The Board approved a proposal to extend the service of all elected leaders serving on FBSC boards and governing bodies for another year until messengers return during the 2021 annual meeting.

Maguire State

Mission Offering

SEND Network Florida

The SEND Network Florida partnership allows for the entire state of Florida to be included as a part of the SEND City emphasis. Any church in Florida has access to the resources of the Florida Baptist Convention and the North American Mission Board (50/50 support partnership) for church planting.

The entire Maguire State Mission Offering supports SEND Network Florida. As you give generously to the Maguire State Mission Offering, you and your church are supporting church planting all across Florida.

Receipts from Florida Baptists

\$557,972



of your donations support church planting all across Florida

481



Churches Participating





Hunger

Relief Offering

Almost 800 million people around the world live with constant hunger.



1 in 6 in North America are undernourished.

Southern Baptist organizations are working together through hunger relief to meet needs and see lives transformed.

\$127,848

was given to Global Hunger Relief by you in 2020.



of your donations go toward hunger needs in Florida, nationally and beyond.

Board honors Green's

five years of leadership



Tommy Green's five-year anniversary as the tenth executive director-treasurer of the Florida Baptist Convention was celebrated by members of the State Board of Missions during its Sept. 18, 2020 meeting in Jacksonville.

In making the presentation, SBM President Brian Stowe, pastor of First Baptist Church in Plant City, noted that Green began serving in the role June 8, 2015, after his May 29, 2015 election.

"Dr. Green has led the convention for the past five years to develop and embrace the ministry objective of being 'right beside you,' the local pastor and church," Stowe said. "This focus has allowed the convention to support, strengthen and encourage the local church through partnerships for Kingdom ministry."

Stowe recalled that upon Green's recommendation as state executive, he urged the Board to send a more generous amount of Cooperative Program gifts from Florida Baptist churches to the mission field beyond the state. He challenged Florida Baptists to send a 51/49 percent split of CP receipts where 51% of every dollar received would fund missions

beyond Florida. Prior to his election as EDT, the Florida convention was retaining 55% of all CP giving in the state.

With Green at the helm, the 51/49 split began with the first adopted CP budget in January 2016. Estimating the difference from January 2016 through August 2020, this single change has resulted in \$8 million more being sent to the SBC. Including the 51% contribution from the sale of the former Baptist Building, the total additional investment forwarded to the SBC from Florida Baptists is \$11,190,480.

"Dr. Green believes in investing back in the local church," added Stowe. "Whether through church planting or revitalization grants, hunger relief or disaster relief, since 2015, the Florida Baptist Convention has sent over \$12 million back to Florida Baptist churches and associations for local ministry initiatives and an additional \$8 million in church loans have been awarded."

Stowe also commended Green's leadership in the convention's response in the aftermath of multiple disasters including Hurricane Michael in 2018 and Hurricane Irma in 2017.

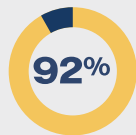
“ Dr. Green believes in investing back in the local church. ”

—Brian Stowe
President, State Board of Missions

Under Dr. Green's leadership

for the past five years tenure,
Florida Baptist churches:

**Planted
283 churches**



remaining
active

**Invested
\$4.4 million**



in the church planting partnership

**Right
Beside You**



\$11,988,044 ministry investment
in churches

Reported 
115,773 baptisms

included 12,888 in 2020 when many
churches did not meet



**Gave
\$145,329,000**

through the Cooperative Program, including
\$77.8 million advanced to the SBC-CP

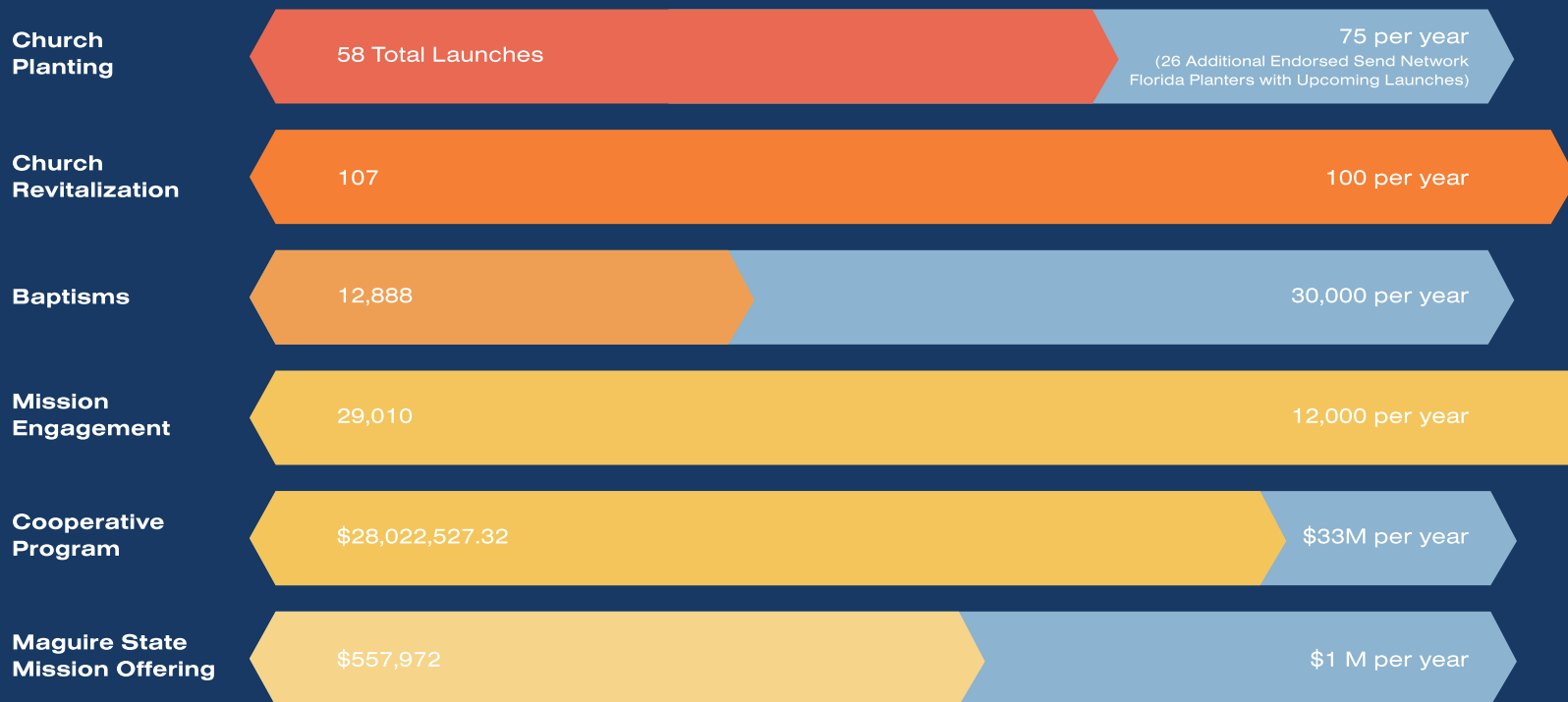
**Gave
\$3,125,319**



to the Maguire State Mission Offering,
mostly earmarked for church planting

Challenge 2025 progress

2020



flbaptist.org/challenge-2025

