

Southside Baptist Network Associational Mission Strategist 2019 Annual Meeting Report

Welcome to our seventh annual meeting! Our churches established this Network on March 1, 2013. Since then, the Lord has blessed us with 73 churches, 3 satellite campuses, 8 missions, one church under watch care, and one church plant preparing to launch, for a total of 86 congregations in Clayton, Fayette, Henry, Rockdale, Spalding, Coweta, and DeKalb counties. SBN exists to assist churches in advancing the Gospel.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your Associational Mission Strategist (AMS), which is the new title recommended by the Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders. Our dedicated staff consists of Rev. Tommy Hargrove, Church Planting Catalyst; Allison Gentry, Director of Communications; Debbie Hendrix, Administrative/Financial Assistant; and Debra Gentry, Ministry Assistant/Biblical Counselor.

It has been a good year, but also a very difficult year for me. As most of you know, our oldest daughter, April Gentry Witkowski, was diagnosed with Stage 4 breast cancer that had spread to bones throughout her body in late May. She is undergoing hormone therapy daily, and should find out if that is shrinking the tumors when she goes back to The Mayo Clinic Oct. 23-24. Our family cannot thank you enough for your prayers, gifts, kindnesses, and many forms of encouragement! Please continue to keep April and our family in your prayers. It is a difficult journey, but your prayers and support helps tremendously.

Here are some of the ways God is using your prayers, participation, and gifts to the Southside Baptist Network:

The Evangelism Trailer is much appreciated and well used by our churches. The Evangelism Trailer Team does a great job inspecting and maintaining it.

Christmas Backpacks for Appalachia – In 2018 our goal was 300, but our churches donated 324! Bring backpacks this year to the SBN Ministry Center, Oct.17, 21-24.

Churches Going Back to School: This was a great conference equipping our members in how to connect with and impact our schools, Jan. 19, Jodeco, Stockbridge.

Southside Baptist Network Pastors/Wives Retreat was held Jan. 24-26. We attended the FBC Jacksonville Pastors/Wives Conference together.

The Southside Summit on Feb. 25 was perhaps the best yet, over 450 attended. The theme was *Making Disciples Who Make Disciples* led by Dr. Robby Gallaty, his Replicate Team, and Dr. Johnny Hunt, Pastor, FBC Woodstock at Eagle's Landing FBC, McDonough.

Georgia Baptist Children's Homes Truck Loading: Thank you to those churches that participated March 4-7. These much-needed items help to stretch the budget for operating expenses and keep the pantries full throughout the year. Your generosity is a blessing to all the campuses in Georgia. Next year's dates: Mar. 2-5.

Approximately 100 **Community Changers** went to the Northwest Coast Association near Panama City, FL, to do clean up and recovery after Hurricane Michael during Spring Break, March 31-April 4. Great trip! Much appreciated.

Church Planting/Missions: Dyke Crane has a Core Team and is having Bible studies preparing to launch Perfecting Faith Church, Stockbridge. It will be a predominantly African-American Church Plant. Bread of Life Baptist Church, Locust Grove (Keith Colter, Pastor), is a new church under Watchcare. Grace Baptist Church, Locust Grove (Kenny Heath, Pastor), has become a full member after a year of Watchcare.

Church Planting/Missions: IMB Mexico: We have entered into a Missions Partnership with Doug and Dana Roberts, IMB Missionaries from our association. They are missionaries to Unreached People Groups, Mexico and the Americas. Stan Jordan, William Bishop, and myself are going on a Vision Trip Nov. 5-8 to explore ways to reach the Nahuatl unreached people group near Puebla, Mexico. Mission trips will start in 2020.

International Pastors Leadership Team: We have 24 ethnic congregations that speak 11 languages in addition to English: 6 Hispanic, 3 Vietnamese, 4 Korean, 3 Haitian, 1 Filipino, 2 Laotian, 1 Cambodian, 1 Chinese, 1 Zomi (from Myanmar), 1 Ghana, and 1 Ethiopian. This Team helps us better connect with these Pastors.

Church Revitalization: In addition to assisting Tanners, Ellenwood, Dr. Rob Peters is hosting a ReFocus Cohort of six churches meeting at the SBN Ministry Center one Sunday afternoon a month for six months, August – January. It is going very well.

Kid's Camps 2019 – Two Sessions had 185 participants. Both went very well.

Church Sexual Abuse Prevention Seminar by Brotherhood Mutual Attorney Steve Case on Aug. 27, at Tara, Jonesboro, was well done. Over 30 were in attendance.

Church Leadership Development: We did not have Equip this year due to one of the two Go Georgia trainings being held at FBC Jonesboro. We offered scholarships to those who attended from SBN churches. Equip will return on a Saturday morning next August.

Ministers Conferences for pastors and staff are still appreciated for equipping, networking, and fellowship. In addition, Music Ministers, Education/Discipleship Ministers, and Student Pastors continue to meet monthly for fellowship, networking, and equipping.

Pastor Cohorts: I am thrilled that 26 pastors have signed up to participate in six Pastor Cohorts meeting at either breakfast, lunch, or dinner once a month, September 2019 – May 2020. We are studying SBC President J. D. Greear's wonderful book, *Above All: The Gospel Is the Source of the Church's Renewal*.

The Georgia Baptist Mission Board (GBMB) estimates that at least 70% of our population of **680,000+** is lost – far from God – that is over **475,000 people!** 80%+ of our population is unchurched – not in any church typically – over **540,000 people!**

Here are some statistics about our associational mission field I have gleaned from GBMB research over the last five years:

We live in a large, growing, and diverse mission field, unlike most counties in Georgia that are declining in population. All of our counties are increasing in population. Our churches are increasing in undesignated gifts, but are stagnant in resident members. Our churches are declining in worship attendance and Sunday School Average Attendance. Our churches are declining greatly in baptisms and other additions. One caveat about these numbers: Only about 2/3 of our churches complete the Annual Church Report (ACR) each year. The ACR is where these numbers come from. Your help is needed to have more complete and more accurate data. Please help us make sure someone from your church completes the ACR that Debbie Hendrix sent to your church! Please return it (or fill it out online) as soon as possible. Today (Oct. 10) is the deadline, but if you cannot turn it in today, please do so by early next week.

Based on Prayer and Research During My Sabbatical, I Believe Our Focus Should Be On Becoming a Gospel-Driven Network of Churches.

- Being Gospel-Driven Means Intentional Evangelism and Being on Mission
- Being Gospel-Driven Means Intentionally Making Disciples Who Make Disciples
- Being Gospel-Driven Means Building Deeper Relationships and Trust Through Pastor Cohorts
- Being Gospel-Driven Means the Pastor and the Church Cares about Width and Depth

The Five Metrics That Matter Most

1. A Growing Esteem for Jesus Christ
2. A Discernible Spirit of Repentance
3. A Dogged Devotion to the Word of God
4. An Interest in Theology and Doctrine
5. An Evident Love for God and Neighbor

I also believe the Southside Baptist Network needs a Vision Team to objectively assess our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. I will recommend that in the coming months.

Thank you for your church's prayers, gifts, and participation in The Network! We could not do what we do without your trust and cooperation! Please help us be even more effective by encouraging your church to...

1. **Pray** and include me or the Southside Baptist Network on your church Prayer List.
2. Encourage members to **subscribe** to our free monthly e-newsletter.
3. **Adopt a neighborhood, a school, and a fire/police station near your church.**
4. Continue to **support or increase** support for associational missions with your financial contributions (3% of undesignated church receipts is the goal).
5. **Participate** in one or more SBN mission trips and ministry opportunities throughout the year.

To the praise of His glory,

Dr. Ray Gentry