

# 2020 Mississippi Baptist Pastor's Conference to implement virtual hub track

*By Tony Martin*  
*Associate Editor*

Undeterred by the limitations of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, planners for the 2020 Mississippi Baptist Pastor's Conference will hold the first-ever virtual version of the annual event on Oct. 26. "We're doing a virtual conference with a series of hubs around the state for pastors to attend the conference in small groups," according to Jon Martin, conference president and pastor of First Church, Union.

The novel approach grew out of a need that he and fellow pastors identified in the midst of the pandemic, he said. "The conference is for pastors, and I've always looked at it as a time of encouragement. There are other people who might be a part, but the intention is for guys to be together with other pastors and to hear good preaching.

"I wanted the theme to be, 'Be Faithful,' from 2 Timothy. I talked to the men I had invited to preach and told them I just wanted them to encourage our guys to be faithful. Since COVID hit, a lot of men are tired and need to be encouraged to push forward."

What is novel about the meeting concept are the regional hubs, Martin pointed out. "I sat down one day with the vice-president of the 2020 Pastor's Conference, Adam Wyatt [pastor of First Church, Leakesville], and he and I sat down with Greg Belser [senior pastor of Morrison Heights Church, Clinton], because we knew that if we were going to pull something off virtually, we'd need some help.

“So we sat down at lunch one day to brainstorm and asked ‘What are we trying to accomplish?’ We wanted to encourage people with the preaching, but we also knew that pastors wanted to be together. How do you accomplish that? We thought, ‘We can’t all be in one place at one time, so let’s reach out to some guys and see if they’ll let pastors come to their churches.’”

The three men jotted down the names of some pastors they knew from north Mississippi to south Mississippi that they thought would be willing to open their doors to small groups interested in the pastor’s conference. “Every one of them said, ‘Yes. Absolutely,’” Martin said.

The eight regional hub churches for the event are:

- Longview Point Church, Hernando.
- Harrisburg Church, Tupelo.
- First Church, Indianola.
- Neshoba Association, Philadelphia.
- Morrison Heights, Clinton.
- First Church, Natchez.
- Hardy Street Church, Hattiesburg.
- First Church, Gulfport.

Speakers include Kevin Smith, executive director-treasurer of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware in Columbia, Md., and former president of the Kentucky Baptist Convention; Belser; and Clinton native David Eldridge, senior pastor of Dawson Memorial Church, Birmingham, Ala., and former pastor or church staffer at six Mississippi Baptist churches.

Martin believes the face-to-face fellowship at the hub churches will be unmatched, even if it has to be done through masks on those faces. “You can watch this pastor’s

conference on Facebook Live, but you'd be missing half the blessings. You'd miss out on the fellowship.

"We wanted to have intentional times where we gather together to pray for and encourage one another. At the end of the last session we're going to say, 'We're not providing lunch for you, but go out and eat together. Spend some time together.' The hubs are just a way for us to give folks a chance to be together."

The conference will run from 9 a.m. to noon on Oct. 26. No registration is necessary to view the conference on Facebook Live or to attend at the hubs. For more information on the 2020 Mississippi Baptist Pastor's Conference, visit [facebook.com/MsBaptistPC](https://facebook.com/MsBaptistPC).