

# Baptist Nursing Fellowship celebrates 40 years of nurses on mission

*By Laura Leathers*

*Correspondent*

Nurses and other medical staff from across the United States attended the Baptist Nursing Fellowship Summit 2023, recently held at First Church, Jackson.

But this year's conference was unique because the 60 registered guests celebrated 40 years of encouraging, engaging and equipping nurses to share God's love and healing with others.

Ten speakers at the Nov. 3–5 event focused on an acrostic of the word "firm." Being faithful, intentional, relentless and missional was the summit's theme. The last two words were the focus of this year's conference. The Scripture selected for the conference was from Psalm 118:17–20:

*I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD.*

*The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death.*

*Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, and I will praise the LORD.*

*This is the gate of the LORD, through which the righteous shall enter.*

## **Highlights from the summit**

Health care professionals came together for a time of worship led by Michael Gibson. Scott Fortenberry, pastor of Soul City

Church in Jackson, led the Bible study. Also featured on the program were testimonies from BNF missionaries. Three educational workshops were available for the attendees. There were opportunities for fellowship, encouragement and networking throughout the celebration weekend.

Marilyn Graves, executive director-treasurer of BNF, oversaw the summit. She and her husband, Eddie, have treasured memories and connections to First Church, Jackson. They were both students at Mississippi College and then served as Southern Baptist representatives in Chile. Throughout the years, when they were home on furlough, they would participate in the missions weekends held at the church. They also have family ties in the area. Graves has been a member of BNF since its inception.

The summit began on Friday afternoon with a pre-conference titled "Faith Community Nursing in My Church?" Leading the conference were two Mississippi residents, Deborah Bolian Massey and Ella Jackson.

Deborah Bolian Massey has served as president-elect and then as president of BNF and has served on its board. She became involved in BNF in 1992 at the Mississippi College School of Nursing. Today, she is an assistant professor at the school. She rotated off as president this year.

Ella Jackson, a registered nurse, spent the first 25 years of her career caring for acutely ill adults and children. She made a lateral move to a new endeavor at the Mississippi Baptist Medical Center in 1988 and retired after 43 years of service. She completed training for congregational health nursing in 2001, joining Mississippi College and the Mississippi Baptist Medical Center to start a statewide congregational health care nurse training program.

### **Special guest**

A special guest for this year's summit was Jemima Hansen, a

nurse from the Paraguay Baptist Medical Center in Asuncion, Paraguay. She shared about the state of nursing in Paraguay. Hansen is the director of nursing education at Centro Medico Bautista.

On Nov. 5, there was an opportunity for the attendees to serve at the Community Health and Wellness Fair at Soul City Church. Coordinating the medical clinic was BNF member and Alabama resident Charlotte Wyckoff. She serves on the BNF executive committee as the chair of missions and prayer and has experience in local, stateside and global health care.

More than 20 local agencies were represented, providing information and resources to promote healthy living. The community participants also enjoyed live music, food and, in Graves' words, "the love of Jesus was shared with all who attended."

On Nov. 4, an anniversary celebration was held after the business session and installation of the new officers. The new president, Charolette Rock, is from Louisville, Kentucky. She has established a new theme based on an acrostic of the word "rest" for the next two years. It will focus on restoration, evangelism, strength and trustworthiness.

### **Vision and goals**

Moving forward into a new year, Graves was asked what her vision and goals are. She said she would like to see 100% of BNF members engaged in missional lifestyles and membership increase by 20%. She hopes for the development of donor patrons and new revenue streams to support BNF efforts to reach others for Jesus Christ through their health care skills.

### **Ways to get involved**

Join Baptist Nursing Fellowship by visiting [here](#). The membership fees provide scholarships for missions, national

conferences and other endeavors.

Listen to Emily Johnson share a short personal testimony of how she got involved with BNF. Also, visit the BNF Facebook page to see the newest members and their participation at this year's summit.

Start a group within your local church enlisting current and retired medical personnel.

Contact junior colleges, universities and other educational facilities with a student nursing program and share about BNF.

Participate in the Page Turners Book Club online. You can learn more about the current book by visiting the BNF website. Graves recommends reading "Hands Reaching Out of Darkness" by Myrtice Owens, a former missionary to West Africa who served as BNF president.

Scholarships such as the Ellen D. Tabor Endowment, Mississippi's Mary Lou Davis Scholarship and the Norma Underwood Scholarship are available through BNF. Contact your Woman's Missionary Union office if you would like to donate to or request funds for these scholarships.

#### **Four directors**

Only four women have served as the executive director-treasurer for the BNF since its creation in 1983. Dr. Ellen Tabor is credited with being the founder, and by her side was June Whitlow, who served for 36 years. Together, they the organization created and enlisted individuals to be involved.

Kristy Carr, Lori Spikes and Marilyn Graves followed in their shoes, with Debby Akerman serving as interim executive director in 2021.

#### **Calling all medical personnel**

The next BNF missions trip will be March 1–10, 2024, at Mully Children's Family Campus in Ndalani, Kenya.

This trip will include medical evaluations, labs, physical therapy, pharmacy, dental treatment and eye care.

"Going back to our Scripture verses for the summit, BNF is not dead," Graves said. "BNF is alive, and we're going to tell everyone what God is doing!"

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