

# Black leadership conference 'powerful and personal'

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP) – African American ministers from across the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) met July 18-22 at Ridgecrest Conference Center in North Carolina for the 2022 Black Church Leadership and Family Conference.

The attendance of just over 400 was less than half the annual attendance before the COVID -19 pandemic, but conference convener Mark Croston, national director of black church ministries at Lifeway Christian Resources of the SBC in Nashville, said the numbers proved favorable for the meeting.

“Our numbers were smaller than usual, but this provided for an even more powerful and personal experience. About one-third of the participants were first-timers,” he said. “Many of our churches are only seeing about half of their members in live worship and some are still not open, and that also impacts our numbers.”

In its 29th year, the Conference provided attendees with a broad display of Southern Baptist life, presenting national, state, and local leaders in daily schedules packed with preaching, worship, Bible study from the Lifeway’s YOU curriculum, fellowship, recreation, and dozens of classes in leadership and personal edification.

## **On the program**

Special activities engaged women, men, young adults, youth, and children in activities targeting their interests and spiritual needs. Woman2Woman speakers were:

– Archalena Coats of Homestead, Fla., member of the SBC Executive Committee, Florida educator, and wife of Covenant Church Pastor Patrick Coats.

– Elizabeth Woodson, Bible teacher and author from Dallas.

Addressing men in Man2Man sessions were:

– Ken Felix, senior pastor of Bethel Evangelical Church in Miami Gardens, Fla.

– JerQuentin Sutton, senior pastor of Lebanon Church in Westwood, N.J.

Among other Southern Baptist leaders present were:

– Willie McLaurin, interim president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee in Nashville.

– Leo Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention in Rochester, Minn.

– Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Seminary in New Orleans.

– Todd Unzicker, executive director and treasurer of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina in Cary, N.C.

– Valerie Carter Smith, executive director-treasurer of the Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia in Richmond, Va.

## **Frank Williams**



Frank Williams

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“The demon defied their attempts. How did the demon know, ‘I don’t need to obey?’ Jesus said, at its root, there is some unbelief somewhere [among the disciples]. How did Jesus know it was unbelief? He’s the Son of God. He knows everything, OK? How did the demon know it was unbelief?

“Could it be that they were sending out signals or vibrations of unbelief in their words that were picked up in the spirit realm? Unbelief is a subtle thing. It’s like a contaminated element that spoils the quality of our faith.”

### **Tommy Green**

Florida Baptist Convention executive director-treasurer Tommy Green’s message to attendees pondered pastors’ attempts to lead with pure hearts and skillful hands, which were qualities attributed to King David in Psalm 78:72.

“The struggles of a pastor and family are real. Spiritual warfare marks every day of your ministry. Spiritual warfare is imminent, not imaginary, and the battles are from outside the church and... inside the church.

“Evil has a place, and evil has a face, and evil has a taste. Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy, and you have a bullseye on your life.”

God knows what pastors are facing, Green said in exhorting pastors to trust in God, shake off the dust of discouragement and defeat, and rise up in the victory that comes in Jesus Christ.

“Heart and hands stretches every fiber of our being. Look unto Jesus. He is the author and finisher of our faith,” Green said in a poetic homage to Jesus’ hands. “Jesus moved with compassion of heart and hands.

“He had healing hands that touched blind eyes to see. He had healing hands that touched deaf ears to hear. He had healing hands that reached out to lame limbs to walk. He had healing hands that made the sick whole.

“He had holy hands that calmed the sea. He had holy hands that raised the dead. He had holy hands that fed the multitudes. ...He had humble hands that washed the feet of the disciples.”

## **Breonus Mitchell**

In the July 20 evening sermon, Breonus Mitchell, lead pastor of Mount Gilead Church in Nashville, presented Malachi 2:17-3:6 as a court case with the Israelites as the plaintiffs waging a complaint against God.

“The Israelites have taken God to court, and they have charged God with being unfair and unfaithful. They say that the God of Hosts has abandoned His covenant relationship with the

children of Israel, because everybody around them is living their best life while the children of Israel are living their worst life.

“In reality tonight, do we really want God to be fair? Next time you open your mouth, talking about what you don’t deserve and how somebody else got what you deserved, you wished you had something else, go back down memory lane,” Mitchell said.

“Where would you be, what would you be, what ministry would you have, what church would you pastor, what marriage would you have, what children would you have, what money would be in the bank, what health would be in your body if God was fair?”

### **Chip Luter**

Chip Luter, senior associate pastor of Franklin Avenue Church in New Orleans, focused on the historical truth of the resurrection in the final sermon of the Conference, contending that to refute the Lord’s resurrection in the face of all the historical evidence would be like refuting the tragedy of the attacks of September 11, 2001, that killed thousands, or the COVID-19 pandemic that all the world experienced.

Luter stressed that Jesus appeared to 500 men and women after the resurrection and his body has never been found, but armed guards contended that Jesus’ disciples stole His body from the tomb.

“Do you know that the original conspiracy theory started after the resurrection?” asked Luter. “Can you imagine these armed soldiers saying, ‘Oh, His disciples came and stole the body?’ Let me just give a little context. Does anybody remember the kind of disciples Jesus had? They were fishermen, tax collectors, and physicians.

“Can you imagine? Really, bro? They stole the body? Here’s the thing. If you can buy the lie, you don’t have to submit to the truth.”

Chip Luter is the son of Fred Luter, senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Church and former two-term SBC president.

### **Conference availability**

Much of the conference will be available on demand beginning July 25, with access available for purchase at [lifeway.com/blackchurchconference](http://lifeway.com/blackchurchconference). More than 24 hours of content will be available until July 2023, Croston said.

“There was a recent study that reported that the majority of people do not watch TV by time anymore, but via recordings and OnDemand,” Croston said, “so this is right in line with the new viewing patterns of people.”

Registration for the 2023 BCLFC, scheduled for July 17-21, is open at [ridgecrestconferecnecenter.com](http://ridgecrestconferecnecenter.com).