

Discern equips students for lifetime ministry decisions

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

More than 20 young people seeking to confirm the Lord is moving them toward ministry careers attended the Discern conference Feb. 25-26 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton.



Hall

“Discern is for high school and college age/young adults who have sensed a call to Christian vocational ministry,” said Ken Hall, student consultant in the Discipleship/Family Ministry Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB).

“We bring in ministry practitioners from all areas of ministry to lead,” Hall noted. “We had church planters, age-group ministers, educators, and pastors, and associate pastors.”

The schedule included worship sessions, small groups, breakout sessions, times for girls only and guys only, meetings with leaders dealing with specific ministry assignments (pastors, church planters, missions, age group ministries, and other staff), and worship.



Hoover

“Discern came about because of the desires of a couple of youth ministers who wanted to do something like this, so we got some interested youth ministers together and did our first Discern some years ago,” Hall said. “Our last one was in 2020 before COVID hit, and we plan on doing it every year. Our planning team put it all together.”

Jack Hoover is a student at West Jones High School in Laurel and a member of First Church, Laurel. “I’m feeling a call to ministry, so I came to help confirm that call,” he said. “I’ve always loved talking to people, and of course I’ve always loved the Lord. I was raised in church. As I’ve grown, I’ve learned that I want to spread the Word for a living. I’d love to be a youth pastor, or maybe a main pastor.

“I can’t see myself being happy doing anything else,” Jack said. “I was sort of waiting for an ‘ah-hah’ moment, but not everyone has that. I’ll just continue on this path and if God doesn’t want me to do that, He’ll just reveal it to me otherwise. I’m going for it. All throughout my life people have told me they could see me doing that.”

Alexis Tyron is a member of West Heights Church, Pontotoc, and a student at Baptist-affiliated Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain. She recounted how she began sensing a call at the

beginning of high school. “Just doing VBS got me started. I really want to hear from God. I’ll be doing my first mission trip this summer.”



Tyron (left) and Webster

Alexis said she sought help understanding what a call to ministry means. “I talked to our youth minister because I was interested in missions. I’m pursuing a degree in psychology because I want to be a counselor. He said, ‘If missions is where you’re supposed to be, you don’t want to miss that,’ so I’m here to get a better understanding of what that would look like, just to hear from God and see where that’s going to go whether it’s full time or part time.”

Talia Webster, also a member of West Heights Church, is a student at Ole Miss. “I was a junior in high school when I first got the sense that I was being called to do something besides just being a volunteer at church. Our youth pastor at the time was really adamant about being and making disciples.

“That really turned the way I saw student ministry,” Talia said. “The Baptist Student Union at Ole Miss has been very impactful. I love being able to share my love of the Gospel with people around me. If we’d had this conference a year ago, I wouldn’t have been able to say this: I surrendered to full-

time ministry in February. I'm super excited about that."

Both Alexis and Talia believe women in ministry isn't all that common in the Baptist world, and they wanted to see what opportunities were available. They also acknowledge their call wasn't necessarily a Damascus Road experience, but something that simply gradually grew on them. "It was like one opportunity lead to another," Alexis said.

"One thing I'd like to encourage pastors to do is to make the call to ministry part of their weekly invitation during worship," Hall stressed. "That used to be part of every invitation, and we've gotten away from that. When someone went forward and accepted their call, it was a time of celebration for the whole church. They were recognized as being called out. For me, it was really a watershed moment."

Conference leaders and the planning team members included:

- Jim Yates, Calvary Church, Tupelo.
- Chris Layton, First Church, Brookhaven.
- JB Long, Harrisburg Church, Tupelo.
- Zach DePriest, First Church, Jackson.
- Joanie Winborne, Shades Mountain Church, Birmingham, Ala.
- Angie Boydstun, MBCB.
- Dwayne Parker, MBCB.
- Jason Morrow, First Church, Columbus.
- Andy Mullins, McLaurin Heights Church, Pearl.
- John Allen May, Eastpoint Church, Olive Branch.
- Conner Alford, McLaurin Heights, Pearl.
- Brandy Johnson, First Church, Clinton.

- Kelsey Dowdy, Brandon Church, Brandon.
- Cole Pratt, Duck Hill Church, Duck Hill.
- Cody Robertson, Fairview Church, Columbus.
- Clint Jackson, Highland Church, Meridian.
- Jeremy Richey, First Church, Batesville.

Discern is supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program and a registration fee. The next Discern is scheduled for January 6-7 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center. For more information, Hall can be contacted at khall@mbcb.org.