

Discern weekend gives voice to calling out the called

By Tony Martin

Associate Editor

Discern, a weekend retreat for high school and college students who believe they are sensing a call to the Gospel ministry, was held Jan. 6-7 at Garaywa Camp and Conference Center in Clinton.

According to Ken Hall, student ministry consultant in the Discipleship/Sunday School Department at the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board in Jackson, "We had 55 students attend this year's retreat, which walked them through what it means to be called. This was accomplished through Bible study, worship, breakout groups, and hearing from various ministry practitioners."

Members of the planning team for the retreat included:

- Andy Mullins – McLaurin Heights Church, Pearl.
- Andrew Irwin – First Church, Laurel.
- Wes Wroten – First Church, Clinton.
- Jed Moak – Baptist Student Union (BSU), Co-Lin Community College.
- Zach Depriest – First Church, Jackson.
- Joanie Winborne – Clinton.
- Caroline Lindsey – Twin Lakes Church, Madison.
- Brandy Johnson – First Church, Clinton.
- Clint Jackson – Highland Church, Meridian.

- Jason Morrow – First Church, Columbus (now at First Church, Cartersville, Ga.).
- Aaron Sibley – First Church, Brandon.
- Jeremy Richey – First Church, Batesville.

“Discern is a great chance for a student to think about all issues concerning a call to ministry,” said Mullins. “Students get the chance to hear from ministers about issues ranging from education to integrity and spiritual health to daily schedule. They leave encouraged and equipped to see if God is calling them to ministry.

“Discern 2023 was the fourth installment of such a conference. It has grown every year in its programming and reach. It has been exciting to see how God is speaking to high school and college students around the state,” Mullins said.

“Discern weekend provided a great opportunity for young people to carve out time to hear clearly from the Lord and a variety of people who are currently serving in full-time ministry settings,” Johnson pointed out.

“Broadening the scope of ministry-related paths this year proved to be a valuable part of the weekend. Team members included a missionary to an unreached people group, a BSU director, a church planter, traditional ministerial roles, women in ministry, and a college professor at a Christian university, among others,” she said.

“The beauty of the event was found in the truth that The Kingdom of God cannot be put in a box,” Johnson stressed. “We serve an incredibly creative God who uses His people in a variety of ways to accomplish His purposes. When the Lord calls, you respond with a resounding ‘yes’ and let Him work out the details.”



Photo courtesy of Joanie Winborne.

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- John Allen May, pastor/church planter, Eastpoint Church, Olive Branch.
- Jesse George, former missionary/bible translator.
- Mandy Phillips, BSU director, Mississippi College, Clinton.
- Ronald Meeks, professor, Blue Mountain Christian University, Blue Mounain.

Hall said, “Besides our team members leading breakout groups and participating in panel discussions, we invited Austin Bahm, college pastor at Temple Church, Hattiesburg, to speak at our three worship sessions and Corey Carr, worship pastor at New Palestine Church, Picayune, to lead worship.”

“Discern retreat is one of the best things we offer as Mississippi Baptists,” Irwin said. “Having a weekend set aside every year to help call out the called is at the core of what we are doing. We want those who have accepted the call to ministry and those who are wrestling with that call to be able to be poured into at this retreat.

“Our hope is that through this retreat, the Holy Spirit would bring more clarity to the individuals that attend. I am honored to be able to be a part of these amazing weekends. To me, this is one of the best ways we can train up the next generation of Mississippi Baptist ministers.”

Mullins said, “One of the goals of Discern is to ensure that the students who come have an adult at home, or in their home church, that will journey with them as they pray and ascertain God’s call. There are even sessions just for adults so that they can be equipped to walk alongside a student.

“There have already been instances of the adults who have brought students answering God’s call to ministry or having their call to ministry reaffirmed,” he said.

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