

'I am a product of CP,' says grateful Texas pastor

Editor's Note: April 25 is Cooperative Program Sunday across the Southern Baptist Convention.

MABANK, Texas (BP and local reports) – When Southern Baptists tithe, the emphasis usually is on what they can give to support ministries throughout the world – but sometimes it's worth considering what churches receive in return from the Cooperative Program (CP).

The Cooperative Program is the state Baptist conventions and Southern Baptist unified plan through which cooperating churches give a percentage of undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) missions and ministries.

At Grace Community Church in Mabank, Texas, Pastor Michael Cooper explains how CP dollars that went out from his church circled back to benefit the congregation. "I would say that I am a product of CP, so in a sense I owe a debt to those who have given," noted Cooper, a two-time graduate of Criswell College in Dallas and currently a student at Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth.

CP dollars support Criswell and Southwestern, among other entities. The colleges, universities, and seminaries that are affiliated with state Baptist conventions and the SBC educate leaders like Cooper, who was only 24 when Grace Church called him as pastor in 2013.

The 13-year-old church, about 54 miles southeast of Dallas, had members with an average age of 70 and attendance around 30. "The group just loved the Lord. They were older saints, but they had a desire to grow spiritually and reach the community," Cooper recalls.

The nearby Cedar Creek Lake area, 6.5 miles southwest of Mabank, has hundreds of churches of various sizes but finding a church that prioritizes the Gospel is not easy, Cooper said. "One of the things we've really tried to do here at Grace is to cultivate a focus on Gospel community both within the church and outside the four walls," he pointed out.



Grace Church has three core values to guide its focus:

- Christ-exalting simplicity.
- Biblically faithful worship.
- Family-oriented community.

Cooper said in his first few years at the church, he led the congregation to a healthier culture primarily through preaching and small group discipleship. Church attendance reached 140 before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and is currently averaging around 100. As the church gained some health, more people were saved and baptized.

Last fall, despite the pandemic, the church paid off its debt. Now it's in a position to build a new sanctuary for the years ahead.

"I'm convinced we're at the precipice of really seeing good Gospel growth and Gospel transformation within our church but also within our community," Cooper said. Mabank, population 3,379, is projected to see a population increase during the next two years of 1,500 people, he noted. "For us as a little rural town, that's big time."

Much of that growth will be near Grace Church. "There are

about 300 homes being built less than 500 yards away from our church,” Cooper said. “We already have plans in place to make sure we knock on every single one of those doors so that every person in that home receives a personal invitation to church and a personal invitation to come to Christ.”

The pastor envisions a discipleship funnel where people start by attending a worship service and then go deeper by branching off into small groups. Beyond Sunday School and Wednesday nights, people can join Ladies of Grace or Men of Grace Bible studies offered on weekdays.

The Ladies of Grace and Men of Grace ministries identify and cultivate gifts and train leaders for service. “For us, that is one of the identifying marks of discipleship, when our leaders are training up new leaders for various ministries,” Cooper said

Grace Church forwards seven percent of its undesignated receipts through CP and gives another five percent to its local Baptist association. “If a normative-size church like Grace Community Church can impact darkness all around the world through the Cooperative Program, then I’m going to support that,” Cooper stressed.

“I’m thankful that our [state] convention forwards 55% on to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). That’s one of the dominant reasons I love being a Southern Baptists of Texas Convention pastor – we believe in CP.”

When Grace Church called Cooper as pastor, he remembers the search committee telling him they didn’t want to hire a pastor just to benefit from him; they wanted to be a blessing to that pastor.

“I can say from that time to now, being 32, nearly eight years of pastoring a single church, I would not trade any of it for anything,” Cooper said, adding that he has done a lot of funerals of saints who laid the groundwork for the fruit that

is visible now.

The vision of Grace Church is not just something the congregation made up, he said. "It goes back to Jesus: to be a blessing to our community, to be a blessing to the nations, to see people come to know him, to be baptized, to be taught," he said. "It ultimately goes back to the Great Commission [Matt. 28:18-20]. We're called to something bigger than ourselves."

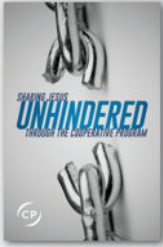
For more information on the Mississippi Cooperative Program and to download promotional resources, visit <https://www.mbc.org/what-is-cp/cp-resources/>. E-mail: lleavell@mbcb.org. Telephone: (601) 292-3347.

For more information on the SBC Cooperative Program, visit <https://www.sbc.net/missions/the-cooperative-program/>.

Editor's note: Based on an article that originally appeared in the Southern Baptist TEXAN, news journal of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.



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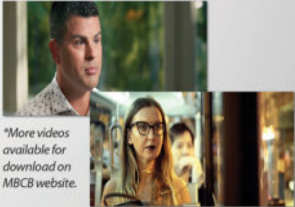


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