

# **'Together for the Nations' connects MS churches with missionaries**

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This year marks 180 years of the International Mission Board (IMB), founded for the distinct purpose of reaching the lost of every tribe and every nation through the partnership of Southern Baptist churches and the missionaries from which they are sent.

This spring, the IMB is sponsoring "Together for the Nations," a missions-centered, one-day conference, in various locations throughout the country. On Feb. 1, this event was hosted at First Church, Madison, for local pastors, church leaders, and church members to make connections and build relationships with IMB missionaries and representatives. AMS strategists, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) employees, First Madison staff and members, as well as IMB alumni, also attended the event.

The three purposes of "Together for the Nations" are to encourage local churches with the stories of God's work across the world, to network with missionaries and create those partnerships necessary to do missions locally and globally, and for church leaders to return to their congregations with opportunities to get involved with missions. As president of the IMB, Paul Chitwood, expressed: the world's greatest problem is lostness. God's solution is the Gospel.

"As we think about addressing the world's greatest problem with the Gospel, we are committed to and convictional about missionary presence as the delivery mechanism for the Gospel to the nations: incarnate missionary work, witness,

discipleship, and more,” remarked Chris Derry, IMB director of church and network mobilization. “The way that we cooperate together to see the solution delivered is through missionary presence.

“Many of you are already deeply involved with your prayer generosity. Many of you are going on trips, as well. Some of you are sending out or training the next generation of missionaries. We need you. The Gospel work is built on partnership. Let’s do this together.”

Every day, 166,338 people die without Christ. Missionary presence among the lost is the biblical model to provide Gospel access, Gospel belief, and Gospel multiplication. Currently, 3,577 IMB missionaries serve around the world, as well as thousands of national partners who are profoundly involved with spreading the Gospel into new places. In 2024, 1,609,869 people heard the Gospel, and 144,964 believed.

“There are a lot of reasons to love being a Southern Baptist, but one of the crown jewels is the International Mission Board and the partnership we get to have in reaching the nations,” stated Breck Ladd, pastor of First Church, Madison. “What we couldn’t do alone, we get to do together.”

### **The Impact of MS Baptists**

“We are grateful for the generosity of MS Baptists as you give to the Cooperative Program,” said Derry, “which sustains the engine that drives the mission forward. Thank you for giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering each year, as every single dollar goes toward our overseas budget. Those of you who have gone overseas to serve with our missionaries, thank you. Through that, through your gifts, through your prayers, you are already a part of the work.”

Throughout the day, attendees discussed several critical questions at their tables, including:

- “What does lostness look like where I live?” This was important in understanding how to best address that lostness with the Gospel.
- “What are ways my church is addressing lostness locally and globally? What are we doing well? What do we need to start doing?” This helped attendees to see how they might play a role in promoting missions within their church.
- “How will my church partner with the IMB?” The MBCB Missions Mobilization department can financially assist any church, no matter its size, in making partnerships with missionaries overseas through short vision journeys. Relationships that once seemed impossible to maintain can now be built and sustained through brief trips and easy internet accessibility.

During the conference, a panel of pastors and mission leaders shared ways they keep missions and missionaries on the forefront of their congregation’s minds, as well as the obstacles that come with championing missions.

“One thing that we’re doing is thanks to Chad McCord (MBCB Director of Missions Mobilization) and his help in making partnerships with missionaries. When our missionaries are stateside, we try to bring them in when they’re able to, to be with our people to build those personal relationships with those missionaries, because that’s so important for both sides,” commented Anthony Britt, missions and outreach pastor of First Church, Madison.

“We’re also blessed to have been given a house to use as a guest missionary home. We want to keep those missionaries in front of our congregation and even our children so they can learn about missions and what a missionary is like. Another thing we have is four WMU groups in our church, and those ladies are constantly praying for our missionaries. Our WMU groups do a wonderful job of keeping our focus on the

missionaries.”

## **The Great Commission**

“I believe keeping a focus on missions starts with the pastor,” observed Lowell Walker, pastor of Mt. Sinai Church, Tupelo, and MBCB African American ministry consultant. “For me, it is continuing to carefully monitor what I’m preaching. The main thing has been to set a vision that deals with the Great Commission. Every Sunday, the congregation is hearing about the Great Commission and how they can take part in that. We have stayed in communication with partners in Uganda through George Smith (former IMB missionary and now IMB representative), as well. So on a regular basis, I receive phone calls or call them to see how they are doing and then I relay that back to our church.”

“If you want to get your people fired up about the Great Commission, just put them in a small room with our missionaries, where it becomes very personal, and it changes things. Suddenly they’re not just names overseas; you’re loving and caring for friends,” said Mike Lazenby, IMB church mobilization strategist for Mississippi and leader of the panel.

## **Obstacles**

“In our context, we have a ton of college students who serve well, which is a blessing,” stated Nathan Taylor, college and missions minister of First Church, Starkville. “But a lot of times our church would see that and think, ‘What those college students are doing, that’s an extension of us, so we’re doing our thing,’ though they may not actually be personally involved. They’re giving generously, probably, but they’re not active in serving.

“They just figure that missions is for somebody else. So that is an obstacle of helping people to see that God’s heart for the nations is for everybody to be involved in, and there is

no plan B other than the local church to take part in that.”

“As a large church, we really lean on the Next Gen ministries to go and participate in the Great Commission,” agreed Kenzie Flippo, missions pastor of Central Church in Jonesboro, AR. “Sometimes even people in their 30s all the way up to retirees are not necessarily participating. So we really want to do our job in saying, ‘The Great Commission is for this congregation.’”

“We also want to address misconceptions about missions. A lot of people believe the missionaries go and do while we stay back to support and sign the checks. So it’s about really getting them involved and engaged, and out of an inward mindset, talking to pastors on staff and life-group leaders to be sure we are making disciples and not just recycling the same discipleship groups, but reaching people outside our walls.”

### **True partnerships**

“Sometimes we get into a ‘mission-trip mentality’ that looks at the trips we’re making this year, and the locations we’re going to, but we can’t even name the people that we’re going to work with,” said Chad McCord, MBCB Director of Missions Mobilization. “The goal is to have a true partnership, forming a lasting relationship with the missionaries you’re working with. You meet the missionaries and get to know their ministry on the trip, you know them personally, you host them when they’re on stateside, you have them speak at your church, and when they’re home overseas, you have them report in a video or livestream to be in front of your people, and you do a prayer time each week.”

“For example, Morrison Heights Church, Clinton, does a short mission highlight every Sunday on a missions partner they have so that their church knows who they’re partnering with and they get to learn more about them. Your congregation needs to

know them and your kids need to know them, as well. Including that into your church service and Sunday school classes is so important. That's what we want to see our churches do; not just have mission trips but have true mission partners."

As discussions came to a close, Shawn Parker, MBCB executive-director treasurer, led the gathering in prayer and gave a challenge moving forward. "MS Baptists, you gave 31 and a half million dollars to the Cooperative Program last year, and a significant number of that goes to the IMB. MS Baptist churches, you also gave eight and a half billion dollars to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Thank you. You do a great job praying. You do a great job giving.

"I do want to share this burden. One concern I have is that I would love to see more Mississippians going. I attend a lot of the missionary-sending celebrations and honestly, I usually walk away feeling like we are underrepresented in those missionary-sending celebrations. Given the spiritual focus of our state in general and the strength of mission leaders, I really would love to see us do a better job of raising up our children and our teenagers in missions, and even saying, 'Lord, send me,' and then going as the Lord so leads, because this is the heart of the work. If we're not going, who is going?"

For information on upcoming "Together for the Nations" events, visit <https://www.imb.org/together/>.

For information on churches or individuals getting involved with IMB programs and partnerships, visit <https://www.imb.org/get-involved/>.

For information on Vision Journey trips with MBCB Missions Mobilization, contact Chad McCord at [cmccord@mbcb.org](mailto:cmccord@mbcb.org) or visit <https://mbcb.org/ministry/missions/mobilization/>.

Your church's gifts to the Cooperative Program support the International Mission Board.

100% of your gifts to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering  
sustain missionary presence overseas.