

IMPACT gets high marks from planners, participants

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

A total of more than 700 participants representing 155 churches attended the six IMPACT Training sessions in August and September, sponsored by the Discipleship/Sunday School Ministries (DSSM) of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB).

“We wanted to look at new ways, or maybe better ways, to do training,” said Dwayne Parker, DSSM director. “One of the distinctives of this training is that we really tried to listen to our associational missions strategists and our pastors to learn what they were looking for in training,” Parker said.

“Secondly, we were very intentional in our focus. As [MBCB executive director-treasurer] Dr. [Shawn] Parker said, ‘We need to be laser-focused in our training,’ so we focused on disciple-making and evangelism.

“Thirdly, we used local pastors, youth ministers, children’s ministers, education, and discipleship leaders. We used people who are on the ground and in the trenches every day. That was a real key to what we did,” Dwayne Parker said. Training sites included:

- Country Woods Church, Byram, Aug. 4.
- East Philadelphia Church, Philadelphia, Aug. 10.
- First Church, Petal, Aug. 16.
- First Church, Cleveland, Aug. 18.

- Calvary Church, Tupelo, Aug. 25.
- First Church, Gulfport, Sept. 8.

There were 41 local church equippers, 40 church volunteers, and 18 MBCB staff involved in the training in addition to the other participants.

“The desire was to try to make something available to all of our associations,” said Michael Lee, MBCB chief strategy officer. “We tried to meet a need or needs for churches with similar geographic locations in terms of Baptist associations in the state.

“Also, some associations might not have used the typical Church Leadership Training (CLT) model because of limited space, resources, opportunities, etc., because the old CLT model required them to invest their portion of resources. With IMPACT Training, we were able to cover expenses except for travel.

“The CLT model, while it still exists, is based on an association bringing in folks to cover topics at the associational level of interest. It’s a legitimate model, but we found that fewer and fewer associations were doing that because the same topics were being covered each time,” Lee said.

Participants were generous in their praise of the IMPACT agenda. Comments registered on feedback cards included:

- “Praise God for this training session and the willingness of all who led a session to help disciples make disciples.”
- “I really liked being around like-minded people and learning from them.”
- “The teaching was encouraging, and meeting with other pastors was valuable.”

– “From the moment I walked in the door, I knew this event would be different. There was a buzz in the room, and no detail (down to the name tags) was overlooked.”

– “Well facilitated/hosted and meaningful breakouts.”

“The IMPACT Conference in Byram was a great conference,” wrote David Williams, AMS for Lincoln Association in Brookhaven. “The whole night was very practical and helpful. The roundtable was over the top!

“I heard comment after comment about the value of the night. I heard from the different age groups, and the comments were positive across all groups. Pastors thought it was one of the best ever attended. Great job to all who made it happen!”

Lee added, “When Dwayne Parker and the team did their regional dialogue sessions [meetings with local pastors and missions strategists], what came to light in those regions was that local practitioners in that general area had similarities. It wasn’t like we were bringing in people from other churches that had absolutely no similarity with the church they’re dealing with,” Lee said.

Beth Bowman, a member of West Carthage Church and a women’s speaker/children’s leadership coach, said, “The Impact Conference was a win for our church. The dynamic training provided much needed encouragement for our volunteers and vision for the future.

“Our church was so grateful to Mississippi Baptists for their leadership and insight into the needs of churches across our state. Repeat, please!”

Five IMPACT conferences are scheduled for the month of August 2023. “There are some things we will definitely keep – breakouts for pastors, adult leaders, children’s and preschool leaders – we’ll for sure do those,” Dwayne Parker said. “We’ll continue that laser focus.”

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