

Mississippi Baptist churches see major growth in baptisms, other ministry areas

By Tanner Cade

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The latest data from the Annual Church Profile (ACP) reveals a significant increase in baptisms, worship attendance, and small group attendance at Mississippi Baptist churches in 2023.

Lifeway Christian Resources released their compilation of numbers across Southern Baptist Convention congregations, and Mississippi Baptists followed similar trends with a peak interest in specific numerical areas.

Compared to 2022 results, 2023 is headlined by nearly a 9% increase in baptisms. The 8,458 baptisms also equal a 79% gain since 2020.

Jon Martin, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board's (MBCB) chief strategy officer, suggests a couple of reasons for the increase in baptisms.

"There seems to be a renewed emphasis on personal evangelism in our convention. This has reminded us of the task and we are simply being found obedient. Second, I also think we are encountering a younger generation that is looking for purpose and value, and they are finding that in the Gospel."

"I sometimes ask church leaders what they think the most pressing challenge is for churches, and the response I hear more than any is the need for personal evangelism," added Dr. Shawn Parker, MBCB executive director-treasurer. "No doubt, this is an area where the Lord is working in broad fashion,

and I suspect this has a lot to do with the increase in baptisms.”

Tracking numerical data through the ACP can expose where the Lord is working. Posting a significant increase in baptisms over the last few years is a huge point of celebration for church leaders.

Pastor Ben Simpson at First Church Collinsville experienced an increase in baptisms within the last two years. “We are simply being faithful to emphasize the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all of our adult, student, and children’s gatherings,” said Simpson. “We are seeing the Lord save people.”

“The Gospel is a focus at every single event we have at New Hope,” said Doug Goodman, pastor of New Hope Church, Meridian. “We minister in our community and schools at every opportunity and that helps draw people to our fellowship,” added Goodman. “We seek to love our community and consistently proclaim the hope found only in Christ. The Lord continues to draw people and bless us with new people every week that then hear the Gospel.”

Along with baptisms, Mississippi Baptists noted an increase in average in-person worship attendance and small group attendance. Comparing 2022 to 2023, worship increased 6.7% and small group attendance increased 3.2%.

At New Hope, Goodman describes how they added nearly 100 people in average small group attendance in one year’s time. “We have been doing disciple groups and small group Bible studies for several years in addition to our Sunday morning life groups. People like the close relationships and the depth of study in a smaller group where everyone is a participant. They also like the relaxed atmosphere of meeting sometime during the week other than Sunday morning.”

Simpson notes their 11% increase in worship attendance follows an ongoing four-year positive trend. “And now in 2024 through

April, our in-person worship attendance has grown by another 10%.”



First Church, Collinsville

First Church, Collinsville, is currently documenting numbers that show over a 50% increase since 2021 in worship attendance.

“These encouraging statistics show the resiliency of Mississippi Baptists and remind us that we have not lost our mission,” stated Martin. “Mississippi Baptist churches are reaching their neighbors with the Gospel and discipling those believers in their congregations.”

Numerical data since 2020 has continued to challenge many aspects of ministry. Dr. Parker describes the connection to the historical nature of the last four years.

“I suspect the increase in worship attendance is part of the ongoing post-COVID recovery,” said Parker. “We’re just now getting back to the number of worship attenders prior to the outbreak of COVID, and I’m thankful for the hard work our churches have given to recover from the losses the pandemic created.”

As Mississippi Baptists continue the mission to reach their

communities, Simpson describes some of the ministry approach at First Church Collinsville.

“We pour a lot of energy, volunteers, and dollars into our children’s ministry and our student ministry,” said Simpson. “People want to be where their children and grandchildren will be encouraged, evangelized, and disciplined. So, I think a lot of our growth can be attributed to this emphasis.”

While the ACP provides a vital numerical benchmark for Mississippi Baptist churches, the MBCB strategy office is aware of the approach to such numbers. Martin explains the need to encourage more church participation in this data entry.

“With 73% of churches filling out the ACP, we are getting a pretty good picture of the work of our churches, but that picture would be exponentially better if we could see an increase in the number of churches that participate,” explained Martin. “This data is useful for churches as they can look back over the past to see trends in growth or decline, and particularly what areas of ministry they are seeing growth. This allows them to help set goals, cast vision, and accomplish the mission to which we are called.”

For Mississippi Baptist churches, the ACP will look a little different next time. The MBCB strategy office will communicate the new changes starting in mid-July.

“I’m proud of our churches for the resilience they’ve shown over the last several years,” said Parker. “At the same time, we still have an immense amount of work to do in reaching Mississippians who are lost.”

“The broader research shows that the majority of people in the state aren’t involved in church, and probably don’t have a personal relationship with Christ,” concluded Parker. “So, while we rejoice at the improvements we see, we need to keep our hand to the plow as we cultivate the fields and reap the

harvest.”

For any questions regarding the Annual Church Profile, please contact Vesta Clary at vclary@mbcb.org or 601-292-3310.