

# 'One of our best': Vandiver retires from BSU ministry after 40 years

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For 40 years, Wayne Vandiver faithfully invested in the lives of college students, serving as BSU director for 11 years at Itawamba Community College (ICC) and 29 years at Northeast.

"When I started college in 1991, Bro. Wayne was my BSU director," said Ed Earnest, Baptist Student Union (BSU) associate director at Northeast Community College. "My freshman year, Bro. Wayne was 33 years old and had been serving BSU at Itawamba for a few years at that time. The lady that I would eventually marry was the president of the Itawamba BSU, so that's how my wife and I met Bro. Wayne. We've been friends with him since we were students."

After his schooling at ICC, Earnest transferred to Middle Tennessee State University, where he led many worship events. Some time later, Vandiver relocated to the position of BSU director at Northeast after Joe Cobb retired from the role. When Earnest visited Booneville as a worship leader for a retreat, Vandiver asked Earnest to fill a vacancy as his associate director of Northeast's BSU. As he finished school, Earnest and his wife prayed about the opportunity and decided to take it. "Bro. Wayne has always been our guy," Earnest shared. "He was really a mentor to us when we needed one. It was a great opportunity to work alongside him, and we have worked together now for 27 years.

"Bro. Wayne and I have something in common. We were both Christians when we went to college, but neither one of us had really grown in our faith until that point, and we found

ourselves around all these people that were further along than us. We were challenged and encouraged by that, and God really used BSU to minister to both of us. And Bro. Wayne loves Jesus, and he always wants other people to be able to experience Him.”

On June 1, Earnest, his wife, Carolyn, and BSU Northeast alumni hosted a celebratory retirement party for Vandiver. Former and current directors, the associations from the Itawamba and Northeast districts, and Collegiate Ministries Director of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), Sam Ivy, dropped in to honor Vandiver and his wife, Connie.

Reflecting on his service, Vandiver considered one of the highlights of collegiate ministry to be working with students for the mission of the Kingdom. “It was neat that a BSU at a junior college was extraordinary in raising money for summer missions. For most of the years that I can remember, we either had the top goal of all the schools in the state, or we would be up there as number two or number three. But I was always just proud of them for all the fundraisers we had, and our special ministry teams, like singing groups and drama groups.

“Churches would call us and say things like, ‘We’re having a revival, and we need four students Sunday through Wednesday night to be there from 6:30 to 8:30, to take care of the five-year-olds and under.’ And they would give us a love offering for doing that. We had a policy that any team that served and received money for it, the money wouldn’t go to our BSU budget, but into summer missions.

“A lot of our students participated in our ministry teams,” Vandiver affirmed, proud of his students for sacrificing time and energy for Kingdom efforts. “One church in Tupelo used to host a big Passion Play, going to such lengths that they had camels and sheep on their stage. It was a big-time production that ran for several nights, with a lot of church members involved, so we would look after their kids for usually about

10 to 12 nights, for four to five hours, and had to have 15 students per night to keep all those kids. That was a hard thing to commit to, but our students did it and we got it done.”

Weaver McCracken, retired Mississippi College BSU Director who also served in the state office as Collegiate Ministry State Associate Director for 18 years and State Director for 10, commended Vandiver, “Wayne was always highly committed to reaching college students in northeast Mississippi. He was consistent, always helpful, and very much involved in helping students in the areas of personal spiritual growth, evangelism, and missions.

“When I began my work as Associate Director at Northeast Louisiana University in 1981, shortly afterward, I met Wayne as he would come to the BSU to meet with students. He was a youth minister at the time for a local Baptist church in town. Later, when I became the BSU Director at Mississippi College, I was not surprised when I found out that Wayne had moved from Monroe to be the BSU Director at ICC.

“Mississippi,” said McCracken, “has long been a state strongly and uniquely committed to BSU ministry on community college campuses. Wayne was one of our best.”

“Every year, to every class that came through,” Earnest recalled, “going back all the way to my years until even this past year, Bro. Wayne would give his last little talk to the students, encouraging them that, ‘If you ever need anything or you need to talk to me, you make sure and call me, because I will always be your BSU director.’ To this day, he has students from 40 years ago that call him because of parents passing away or anything like that, because we’re all getting to that age and we’re in a different chapter. But Bro. Wayne is still there. He’s still our BSU director. He’s still our guy.”

Looking back on God's faithfulness, Vandiver affirmed, "The Lord always guided us in what we needed to do. The more opportunities you give students, if you can get a Bible study going in the dorm and even if you only have two or three students, it's worth starting because maybe that's two or three students who might not have done anything otherwise. But you did it in a place that they would do it in, at a time they could do it. The Lord was faithful to us as He showed us different opportunities for ministry.

"He also showed faithfulness in our finances, because if there's one thing to be said about Northeast BSU, it is that our surrounding churches really care about collegiate ministry and about those students. So that was the Lord being faithful, touching the hearts of His people for a ministry to these kids."

Bringing along his open mindset to the Lord's opportunities, Vandiver has few details of the road ahead just yet, but amid some travel and rest with his wife, Connie, he plans on "getting up every day and doing something different." With his undergraduate degree in teaching high school social science, he intends to serve local schools as a substitute teacher whenever necessary. "I'd be glad to give it a shot," stated Vandiver.

Retired State BSU Director Jerry Merriman, who hired Vandiver 40 years ago, wrote a letter congratulating Vandiver on his outstanding service. "To my knowledge, you, Jimmy Breland, and June Scoggins are the only three directors in the Mississippi Collegiate Ministry family and the SBC who have served on a local campus for that length of time.

"It was both a joy and privilege to work with you through the years. Your commitment, enthusiastic personality, and determination to make things happen impacted our local and state BSU work immeasurably. All of us owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude for a job exceptionally done. Your life and

influence have been a great blessing to many.”

“I would like to say thank you to Mr. Jerry Merriman for hiring me back in 1984,” Vandiver acknowledged. “And I want to thank the Convention Board for the support I have had, and thank you to the churches of the Northeast Junior College District. As far as their support goes, the Cooperative Program is definitely at work in BSU ministry. We work together as BSU, we work together with the churches, we work together with the associations. So thank you for serving right alongside me.”