

# Pine Belt AMS encourages healthy churches through discipleship, leadership development

*By Chloe Newton  
Staff Writer*

*Randy Sims, Pine Belt Associational Mission Strategist, joined "Around the Table" podcast hosts Tanner Cade, MBCB Director of Communication Services, and Jon Martin, MBCB Chief Strategy Officer. Sims discussed his relatively new role as Associational Mission Strategist and his practical approach to encouraging and equipping churches within the Pine Belt.*

Randy Sims served in ministry for over 35 years before taking the role of Associational Mission Strategist (AMS) for the Pine Belt Association. Since November of 2023, Sims tasked himself with visiting every church in his association to better acquaint himself with the pastors and leaders.

The Pine Belt Association consists of 34 churches in Forest County and 4 churches in Lamar County. As he has visited these churches, Sims has learned the elements churches require to be healthy.

"I would say the two big things are the personal disciple making element of it and the other is the leadership development. Every church is looking for leaders and a lot of that is volunteer leaders. But you know what [we're seeing] more and more of, we're seeing churches raise up staff members from within their own membership. And that does my heart good watching that," Sims said.

The AMS desires to be the first call when his pastors need

anything. However, being a “first responder” for 38 pastors necessitates a balance of healthy habits.

“If I’m not very healthy, if I’m not spiritually connected with the Lord, if I’m not personally connected with some men who are pursuing the Lord, if I’m not feeling myself, I don’t have much to pass along,” Sims recognized.

“There’s also that sense of ‘Lord, where do I need to direct my attention this week?’... I have three questions that I’ve [written] on a little sticky note. Number one is have I been a friend to pastors this week? Number two is have I been a resource to pastors or churches this week? And number three is, have I connected any of us to do more missions in ministry than we were doing before?”

Additionally, Sims’ week consists of a mixture of serving at Temple Church, Hattiesburg, setting aside time for prayer, spending time with friends, discipling young men and prioritizing time with his family. The husband and father of three believes that there is not much more important than a healthy, biblical marriage. Alongside his own ministry work, Sims has led couples through premarital counseling, using a program called Prepare/Enrich.

“It has been a great tool to help supplement most of us as pastors. I found we do pretty good on the biblical side of premarital counseling, but teaching them skills and habits and techniques for being able to resolve conflict, communicate better, and handle your finances – it’s been a good opportunity for me to use that. So I’ve trained probably 60 or 70 people locally on how to do that.”

In his short time as an AMS, Sims has learned a lot about balancing ministry and personal life. His leadership position has also given him a unique perspective on how important church cooperation and joining an association is.

“The first bad word in the Bible is alone. Out of all those

goods, the first not good is 'it's not good for the man to be alone.' That was obviously in the context of marriage, but I think it applies to the context of life. Wherever you are in life, if you're alone, you're usually struggling and you're vulnerable. If you're connected in community, then you're going to be more likely to thrive," Sims said.

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