

Plaque honors long, fruitful relationship between Mississippi College and Mississippi Baptists

By Bruce Coleman

Correspondent

For 172 years, the partnership between Mississippi College (MC) and Mississippi Baptists has influenced countless young people to dedicate themselves, their education, and their livelihoods to the cause of Christ. That longstanding and productive relationship was formally acknowledged July 11 during a dedication ceremony for a new historical marker on MC's main campus in Clinton.

"Only God knows what this cooperative effort has wrought, and what it will continue to mean to Mississippi, our nation, and the world," said Anthony Kay, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, to those gathered around the gold-lettered Covenant of Cooperation sign near the front steps of the Leland Speed Library, which houses the Baptist Historical Commission.

Kay said the marker will inform generations of students about the integral relationship between the university and Mississippi Baptists.

Founded in 1826, Mississippi College is a private, coeducational, Christian university of liberal arts and sciences. The state's oldest institution of higher learning, MC was originally unaffiliated with any religious denomination until the 1840s, when it was briefly associated with Methodist and Presbyterian leadership.

Financial difficulties returned MC to the ownership of local citizens in 1850 when, under the leadership of pioneering Mississippi Baptist minister Benjamin Whitfield, the Mississippi Baptist Convention assumed ownership.

Whitfield was also instrumental in the 1836 founding of the Convention of the Baptist Denomination of the State of Mississippi, a predecessor to the Mississippi Baptist Convention, and served as president from 1839-1843.

Together, the relationship between MC and Mississippi Baptists has survived the Civil War, the Great Depression, and two world wars. One of the state's leading private universities, MC is America's second-oldest Baptist-affiliated university and the first college to grant degrees to women.

Kay thanked members of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB), the Mississippi Baptist Historical Commission, and Mississippi College supporters who composed the Historical Marker Committee. Among those mentioned were:

- Heather Moore, head of special collections, Leland Speed Library.
- Jim Futral, retired immediate past executive director-treasurer of MBCB.
- Ronnie Falvey, resource development director for Mission First.
- Daniel White, assistant professor in the MC Department of English and Philosophy.

"To Dr. Shawn Parker [MBCB executive director-treasurer] and to Dr. Blake Thompson [MC president], may God guide you as you lead our cooperative ministries in their future endeavors," Kay said. "God bless Mississippi Baptists; God bless Mississippi College."

Thompson likened the historical marker dedication to a time of

religious renewal. "When I was growing up, we had revival every year," Thompson said. "It was a time to renew and revive commitment. I think that's what we're doing today. This sign is another renewal of that commitment between the churches and our school. I'm proud of it, and I'm thankful for it."

As an example of that commitment, MC launched a church partnership program in 2021 to give back to the Baptist churches in the state that have supported the university throughout the years. The agreement allows students who are members of Baptist churches to be considered for scholarships of at least \$10,000 annually.

"This partnership is available to any Baptist church in the state of Mississippi," said Evan Lenow, director of church and minister relations at MC. "They have all contributed to the mission of MC through their gifts to the Cooperative Program."

After acknowledging the vital role of Jim Futral in obtaining and placing the historical marker, Parker said the sign fittingly represents the decades of faithful partnership between MC and Mississippi Baptists.

"Week after week, as I have an opportunity to visit in churches, I [encounter] children of pastors who are graduates of Mississippi College," Parker said. "I have a son who is a graduate of Mississippi College, so I have a great appreciation for what this institution means, not just to this state, but to the nation and the world."

"Through this partnership, individuals have been trained for ministry and trained to have a Biblical worldview. I'm excited about this commemoration and very thankful for what Mississippi College means, for Dr. Thompson and Dr. Falvey, and for their relationship."

Kay closed the proceedings by offering a dedicatory prayer, asking God's blessings on "this reminder of the long and fruitful relationship between Mississippi College and

Mississippi Baptists.”

“May those who come after us know of our faithfulness and commitment to one another, and may Your amazing grace, abundant love, and empowering Holy Spirit accomplish great things in, through, and for us through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The text from the newly placed historical marker reads, “On November 30, 1850, Mississippi College established a lasting partnership with the Mississippi Baptists, who had resolved since 1817 to prepare congregants for gospel ministry. Founded in 1826, MC had first sought alliances with the legislature in 1837, Methodists in 1840, and Presbyterians in 1842. MC and the Baptists forged a covenant of cooperation that melded the Baptists’ commitment to the cause of Christ and MC’s dedication to academic excellence. Their union advanced the University across two centuries and set a course for MC’s future.”

MC and Mississippi Baptist’s other institutions of higher learning, Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain and William Carey University in Hattiesburg, are supported by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program.

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