

Ridgeland church sees advantages of seminary training

RIDGELAND, Miss. (Special) – As the busyness and complexity of life present new challenges to following Jesus, the church's mission remains the same – to make disciples who make disciples.



This mission requires training, which is why Southern

Ba
pt
is
ts
,
So
ut
he
as
te
rn
Se
mi
na
ry
in
Wa
ke
Fo
re
st
,
N.
C.
,
pa
rt
ne
rs
wi
th
lo
ca
l
ch
ur
ch

es
th
ro
ug
h
it
s
Eq
ui
p
Ne
tw
or
k
to
of
fe
r
se
mi
na
ry
-
le
ve
l
co
ur
se
s
in
th
e
co
nt
ex
t

of
th
e
lo
ca
l
ch
ur
ch
.

Designed to supplement the local church's training efforts, the Equip Network empowers local churches and ministry organizations to take an active role in the theological education of their students.

For Chad Hunsberger and Jerry Welch, pastors at Colonial Heights Church (CHBC) in Ridgeland, Southeastern's Equip Network was exactly the kind of training partnership for which they were searching.

"We had a desire to train up the next generation of ministers and missionaries, so we began looking into different programs," recounted Hunsberger, lead pastor and elder. "We really liked what Southeastern offered through its Equip Network.

"One of the things we like about Equip is that it not only offers seminary-level training but also allows us to teach and supervise the courses with our church's DNA," he said.

Hu
ns
be
rg
er
ho
ld
s
a
ma
st
er
's
de
gr
ee
fr
om
Ne
w
Or
le
an
s
Se
mi
na
ry
an
d
a
do
ct
or
of
mi
ni



COLONIAL HEIGHTS

BAPTIST CHURCH

st
ry
de
gr
ee
fr
om
So
ut
he
rn
Se
mi
na
ry
in
Lo
ui
sv
il
le
,
Ky
.
Bo
th
ar
e
So
ut
he
rn
Ba
pt
is
t
sc

ho
ol
s.

Since becoming an Equip partner in 2019, CHBC has facilitated eight different Equip courses to supplement their discipleship and leadership training ministry. With more than 40 CHBC members participating in these courses, Hunsberger and Welch are excited to be teaching through another cycle of the eight Equip courses that CHBC offers.

“The Equip Network continues to provide our church a good hybrid approach to training,” noted Welch, family discipleship pastor and elder. “We are able to teach and tailor some of the content and material to our context, all while working alongside Southeastern professors with their videos, syllabi, and material.”

Welch is a graduate of Mississippi College in Clinton and holds a doctorate in Christian education. Mississippi College is affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

When CHBC became an Equip partner in 2019, global discipleship pastor and elder Kiley Ham decided it was the right time for him to pursue seminary training for ministry in the church.

“I loved that you could do a significant part of your seminary education through the Equip program in the context of your local church,” recalled Ham.

“As a pastor who did not have prior seminary education, I felt like there were a couple key elements that I needed from seminary,” Ham recounted. “I was getting asked to preach and teach more, so I knew I could benefit from hermeneutics, homiletics, Old Testament, and New Testament courses.

“I also knew I would enjoy the missional emphasis of Southeastern’s courses,” he said.

As a Southeastern student, Ham was able to take several of his courses through CHBC and eventually graduated in May 2022 with his master of arts in Christian ministry degree. As a pastor at CHBC, Ham has also seen firsthand the impact the Equip courses are having on the missionary families sent out by their church.

“One of the great benefits of our Equip partnership is that several of our missionary families have been able to take part in the Equip courses at our church as they prepare to be sent out,” noted Ham. “Our field candidates and field personnel have really seen the value of joining these courses as they prepare.”

The Equip Network’s impact at CHBC also extends beyond its missionary sending process. Many longtime members like Mike Gladney, a certified public accountant and elder, are taking advantage of the opportunity for in-context training to be better equipped as elders, life group teachers, and faithful church members.

For Gladney, the Equip courses enable him to gain seminary-level training as a life group teacher while continuing his job and staying rooted in his community.

“When CHBC started offering Equip courses, I remember thinking that taking seminary courses could be helpful to me as a teacher,” Mike recalled. “I also knew I was getting closer to my retirement, and I thought a seminary degree could be helpful to me in my retirement years.”

For CHBC, partnering with Southeastern allows them to offer extensive theological training that would be difficult to facilitate on their own.

Church members and leaders like Ham and Gladney can more easily pursue seminary-level training, which means the church’s teachers, leaders, and missionaries are better trained and better resourced for future ministry.

“I just love the fact that we’re able to bring seminary-level education into the local church like this,” commented Welch. “I love this partnership. It serves our life group teachers, our elders, our deacons, and our people who just want to learn more.

“They can get this training without having to relocate, and they are also able to get in-person instruction without having to do everything online,” he said.

Because Southeastern believes theological education is best done in partnership with the local church, the Equip Network is designed to work with and for local churches to train their people to serve the church and fulfill Jesus Christ’s Great Commission.

The Southeastern Seminary initiative at Colonial Heights Church complements the mission statement adopted by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board: “We equip local churches to make disciples in Mississippi and around the world.”

Additional information is available at www.thetimothyproject.org or by contacting Welch at jwelch@colonialheights.org.