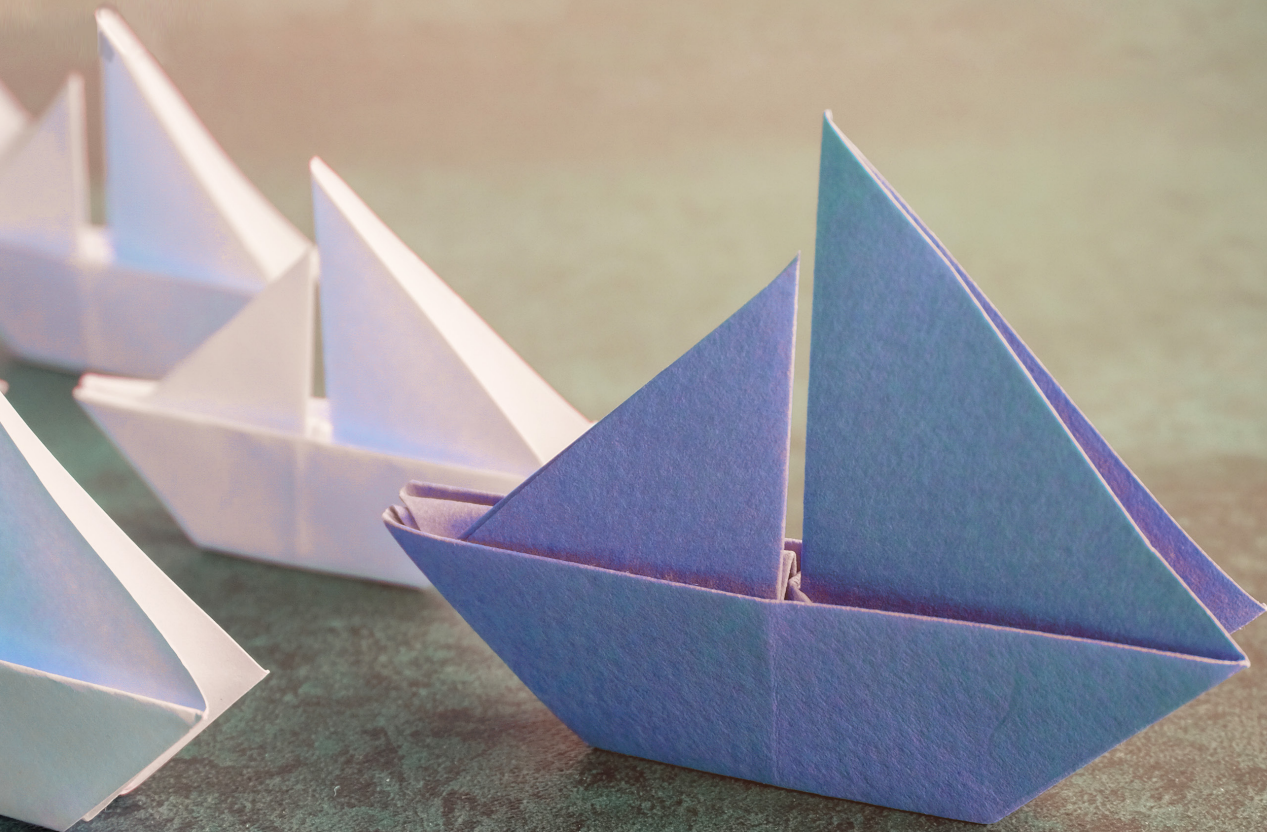


# MOMENTUM

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MBC  
AND THE LEGACY OF JOHN YEATS (2011-2023)

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# INTRODUCTION

John Yeats' 12 years leading the Missouri Baptist Convention (MBC) have been transformative, providing momentum for the future of Missouri Baptists. The convention had just completed a traumatic decade of legal battles and troubled leadership when he arrived in 2011. The challenges became a real threat to the funding of convention ministries and to the unity of the churches that made up the state fellowship. He came to the convention at a crucial time.

Yeats knew Southern Baptists well. He had served conventions in the Midwest, the Southwest, and the South after 20 years as a pastor. He was an elected Southern Baptist Convention officer and was thus an ex officio member of the SBC Executive Committee; he had seen firsthand how the national convention cooperated with autonomous state conventions in addressing the Great Commission. He had a base of knowledge and experience to lead a state convention weighed down with significant needs.

The three short chapters that follow tell stories of how Yeats and other convention leaders successfully brought the fellowship of Missouri Baptists into a better place of effectiveness and unity. These three aspects of the convention's ministry since 2011 show progress made in healing some of the bruises the fellowship had experienced in the recent past, as well as momentum for future kingdom growth among Missouri Baptists.

## PART I: RESTORING MBC ENTITIES TO THE CONVENTION

Yeats became executive director well into the crisis that erupted in 2000 as five entities built by Missouri Baptists broke away from the convention over concerns about its more conservative direction. The convention was winning the legal battle by 2011, though litigation did not come to an



John and Sharon Yeats receive a Certificate of Appreciation from Interim SBC Executive Committee President Willie McLaurin in 2022. Yeats had just completed a 25-year tenure as SBC recording secretary.

end until 2019. The challenges present by the time Yeats arrived on the scene included persevering through the complex legal process, and then winning the peace. Yeats prepared the convention to restore the prodigal entities, and he began to lead Missouri Baptists into restored unity.

## **PART II: REORIENTING THE STATE MISSIONARY STAFF**

Yeats' tenure as executive director of the MBC began during a time state conventions were examining the nature of their work. The challenges birthed by having three consecutive short-tenured Missouri executive directors depart under a cloud of controversy since 2001 had an impact on the convention's employed leaders. Yeats led the convention through a "reorientation" of its ministry to regain its founders' focus on making disciples, multiplying churches, and developing leaders. This reprioritization gave the convention missionary staff the tools to put the recent past behind it and to poise itself for greater effectiveness.

## **PART III: CULTIVATING SYNERGY AMONG MBC ENTITIES**

Not all Missouri Baptist institutions broke away after the turn of the century. The institutions that did break away and then were restored to the convention family had new leadership and a fresh relationship with Missouri Baptists. Yeats brokered a comprehensive "synergy" effort, which provided new opportunities for all convention entities to unite in common purpose, share encouragement within the enabling work they did together, and benefit from ways their relationship with the MBC might strengthen their own facilitating ministries.

It was the first strategic effort to coordinate and leverage the strengths of each entity, and it expanded to encompass the work of associations and churches as a renewed unity crowned the victories of the late 2010s.

In spite of the convention's well-known challenges since 2000, the MBC has become an encouragement and example to Southern Baptists across the country. God used John Yeats, as well as other able leaders, to give Missouri Baptists a new energy for reaching Missouri, and the world, for Christ.



MBC staff members welcome John and Sharon Yeats by praying over them in 2011.



# Part I

## Restoring MBC Entities to the Convention

**T**he decades since the beginning of the new millennium have been challenging for the fellowship of Southern Baptist churches in Missouri.

Part of that challenge was the reaction and response to the Southern Baptist Conservative Resurgence (1979-1995), a grassroots movement that resulted in each of the 12 current SBC entities calling inerrantists (those who believe the Bible is true in everything it affirms) to serve as their presidents, vice presidents, and faculty members. Several Baptist state conventions also had related disagreements over the doctrinal fidelity of institutions they supported. By the turn of the century, two states (Virginia and Texas) had formed second, conservative, state conventions in response to state leaders who rejected inerrancy.

To reject a commitment to biblical fidelity in the post-resurgence SBC was to reject cooperation with the national denomination and its entities. The resurgence was focused on the various entities of the convention (seminaries, mission boards, etc.) and resulted in a more transparent accountability to the churches of the convention – teaching and publishing in accordance with the overwhelmingly conservative theological views of Southern Baptist churches.

The Missouri Baptist Convention's first controversy of the new millennium was part of that reaction against the Conservative Resurgence. Jim Hill, elected executive director in 1997, began almost immediately to restructure convention relationships in such a way that some assets – starting with the *Word and Way* newspaper and Windermere Baptist Conference Center – would no longer be under the supervision and ownership of the state convention. Convention messengers, mostly without noticing or understanding the details, approved new articles for charters of these two convention entities that facilitated their

departure. But the first MBC entity to unilaterally amend its articles so as to remove the rights of the convention was The Baptist Home. The Home took its action in a secret meeting in September 2000, without convention approval.

## WHY THE CHANGE?

Baptist Home President Larry Johnson justified the secret charter change over concerns about “ascending and descending liability” for the MBC and its entities. He said the Home’s relationship with the convention and its entities created an increased liability risk by and between all the entities. The charter change to a self-appointing board, then, was to protect the MBC and its entities from cross-liability for the legal claims against the Home, and vice versa. Independent boards also protected the Home’s “relationship with Missouri Baptist churches and Missouri Baptist individuals,” Johnson told *Word and Way* in the midst of a heated campaign for convention president leading up to the annual meeting.

Moderates, in their rhetoric at rallies across the state, downplayed the political aspect of their tactics. The context in which these meetings took place was, however, thoroughly entangled with denominational trends and decisions.

*The Baptist Faith & Message 2000* was adopted by the SBC in June 2000. This update of the BF&M was controversial in the minds of many who were disappointed by the outcome of the Conservative Resurgence, but several state conventions acted to adopt the new confession of faith during their 2000 annual meetings. According to Baptist Press, that was also happening in Missouri Baptist associations. It’s hard to deny that this controversy was, from the beginning, one between theological moderates and theological conservatives, just as was the Conservative Resurgence in the national denomination.



Another similarity between the theological controversy faced by the SBC from 1979-1995 and the one faced by the MBC, beginning in 2000, was that in both cases the entities that had been started and funded by the churches attempted to insulate themselves from the oversight of those churches.

In October 2000, Missouri Baptist Convention messengers arrived in Lake of the Ozarks determined to recover The Baptist Home. They had little reason to suspect that four additional entities were making plans to end their traditional, and legal, relationships with Missouri Baptists. Although other states had heated discussions over leadership of their entities – Georgia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Texas, to name a few – the MBC faced the most serious challenge in institutional relationships of any Baptist state convention.

## **NEGOTIATION, ARBITRATION, AND LITIGATION**

By fall 2001, four more convention entities followed the lead of The Baptist Home: *Word and Way*, Windermere Baptist Conference Center, the Missouri Baptist Foundation, and Missouri Baptist University. Each of the five had broken their longstanding relationships with the state convention by charter amendments the convention did not approve. Convention leadership estimated the value of assets held in trust by those five entities at \$250 million.

Ahead of the 2001 annual meeting of the MBC, which was likely to result in a conservative majority on the executive board, Jim Hill negotiated a friendly severance package and resigned. He shortly thereafter became executive director of the fledgling Baptist General Convention of Missouri (now known as Churchnet), intended to be a new Missouri convention. The five entities that had broken away from the MBC aligned

themselves with the new convention. Hill said, as cited in a December 2001 Baptist Press article, that he could “no longer work with conservatives who hold a majority on the MBC executive board.”

As expected, messengers to the 2001 MBC Annual Meeting disapproved the charter changes of the five entities, calling the changes “a breach of trust.” Messengers went on to ask the entity boards to change the charters back to restore the historic relationship with the churches of the MBC. If the entities would not return willingly, messengers empowered the Missouri Baptist Convention Executive Board to take “all necessary action” to restore the five entities. Messengers also voted to escrow \$2.1 million allocated in the 2002 budget to the breakaway entities. This action led to threats of legal action on behalf of the institutions, but the convention’s decision stood.

In June 2002, the MBC Executive Board formed a Legal Opinion Task Force to act on the board’s behalf in carrying out the messengers’ instructions. The task force obtained several legal opinions from leading law firms, unanimously condemning the breakaways as unlawful. The legal task force was renamed the Agency Restoration Group in 2006. Although the group’s purpose remained the same, the name change better reflected the convention’s goal once it was clear that taking “necessary action” would not be a simple or short process.

The convention offered to engage in Christian mediation or arbitration, but the entities declined. The litigation first focused on Windermere, the camp on the Lake of the Ozarks that had been so instrumental in the spiritual life of generations of Baptists.

In 2009, the courts ruled that Windermere and *Word and Way* had legally obtained messenger approval of new articles that allowed them to break

away. The messengers had not been given advance notice of the changes, but the courts upheld the approvals.

This ended the convention's 105-year relationship with *Word and Way*. And Windermere's "successful" breakaway proved to be disastrous, as it was cut off from Missouri Baptist support. After defaulting on a \$20 million loan, Windermere lost nearly 1,000 of its original 1,350 acres to a lender, which conveyed the property to a developer that later lost the acreage in foreclosure.

Because messengers to the 2000 state convention had approved articles for Windermere and *Word and Way*, not knowing that Jim Hill's drafts did not include the former MBC-consent clauses for charter changes, a judge ruled in 2009 that the conference center and newspaper had lawfully amended their charters without MBC consent.

The convention at that point had begun a new newspaper, *The Pathway*, under the leadership of Don Hinkle, who also served as the MBC's director of public policy. During Hinkle's 20-year tenure as editor, *The Pathway* became the fourth largest paid-circulation newspaper in Missouri.



Don Hinkle

Its print and online editions won numerous awards.

Hinkle died in the fall of 2022. He was well-respected among his peers in Southern Baptist journalism and had a large impact on Missouri Baptist life. As Missouri State Representative Doug Richey, who serves as senior pas-



Yeats addresses messengers at the 2011 MBC Annual Meeting.

tor of Pisgah Baptist Church in Excelsior Springs, said, "Don was known around the Capitol as a straight-shooter and a capable advocate for religious liberty and pro-life causes. I already miss hearing his slow, southern voice."

Meanwhile, the MBC had lost hope of regaining what remained of the Windermere Baptist Conference Center through the courts. By 2010, the issue was focused on the three remaining break-aways.

However, the legal opinion involving Windermere paved the way for victories in other cases. On New Year's Eve 2010, a new trial judge found that the Missouri Baptist Foundation (MBF) charter did contain an MBC consent clause, and that simple fact required an opposite result from Windermere. Judge Paul Wilson penned a 40-page opinion holding that MBF trustees broke the law



in 2001 when they “deliberately, repeatedly, and surreptitiously ignored the Convention’s right [to approve charter changes] solely for the purpose of ... eliminating it ... cheat[ing] the Convention out of its rights.”

And the strength of these rulings allowed the convention to obtain reimbursement from the Foundation’s insurer. By 2015, the Foundation’s insurer covered all of the MBC’s legal fees since 2001 – nearly \$6.5 million. Missouri Baptist churches did not have to bear the burden of paying legal fees to recover the legal rights that should have been theirs all along. This also allowed the convention to pay all loans and debts related to the efforts to regain the breakaway entities. With the restoration of the Foundation, the convention was debt-free.

In another bright spot, a late 2010 ruling said the Missouri Baptist Foundation did not lawfully change its charter because its newer articles *did* contain the consent clause (protecting convention messenger rights) that had been removed from Windermere’s charter.

In 2016, the Foundation’s breakaway board decided to abandon further appeals to the 2010 ruling. A new board was seated – one elected by MBC messengers – and the board hired a new president, Neil Franks.

Although the legal issues related to regaining The Baptist Home and Missouri Baptist University were essentially the same – the two entities also had the consent clause in their governing documents – leaders of those two institutions took another nine years after the 2010 ruling against the Foundation to exhaust their appeals.

## NEW LEADERSHIP

It wasn’t just the efforts to reclaim five of the convention’s institutions that made the first years of the 21st century difficult. The state fellowship

also struggled with consistent leadership. After Jim Hill’s short tenure, the next two executive directors, both conservatives, also departed under controversies. David Clippard was dismissed after a no-confidence vote by the Executive Board in 2006, and his successor, David Tolliver, resigned in 2010 after admitting a moral failure. These transitions shook the convention during a time when stories of lawsuits, charges, and countercharges between convention leaders and institutional leaders frequented the news.

One example of how the state fellowship struggled during this era was the impact on the Missouri Missions Offering from 2001-2011. The offering missed its goal *every year* from 2001-2011. MMO began to rebound in 2012 (coinciding with the beginning of John Yeats’ tenure as executive director) and logged record giving in 2019, the year the effort to reclaim the breakaway institutions succeeded. MMO set an even higher record of \$990,740 in 2022.

John Yeats was elected to lead Missouri Baptists after serving as communications director for the Louisiana Baptist Convention. Louisiana was the third state convention Yeats had served, after pastoring for 20 years in Texas and Kansas.

Yeats was also an elected officer of the Southern Baptist Convention at the time he came to the Missouri Baptist Convention. He was prepared by experience and temperament to both calm the waters and chart a course for Missouri’s Southern Baptists.

As of 2010, two of the five breakaway entities were lost to the convention. A third breakaway board had lost a pivotal court case and was appealing MBC’s win. But even winning back the remaining three would not erase the malaise of the first 11 years of the fight. If Missouri Baptists were to restore trust in the usefulness of their institutions,



The Whiteheads in front of the U.S. Supreme Court Building: Jonathan (left) and Mike.

they would have to once again be enthusiastic about the ministries of those entities, and the possibilities for partnership that existed between those diverse entities and the churches of the convention. This was a big challenge for a new leader.

MBC Chief Legal Counsel Mike Whitehead had seen the up-and-down nature of the convention's last decade in great detail. Although he praised the determination of the messengers at each annual meeting to continue the effort to restore the entities, he observed that the 2009 ruling – that the convention could not recover Windermere or *Word and Way* – was a “huge hit to MBC morale.” Again, it was only a year later that a judge ruled the convention could indeed recover the Missouri Baptist Foundation, and probably the other two entities. The crest of this wave was still eight years from final resolution.

An important issue Yeats faced upon arriving in

Missouri involved encouraging Missouri Baptists to continue legal efforts to regain the entities. Some were discouraged by the ongoing legal fight, and others had qualms about one Christian group suing another Christian group. Although they never gained any substantive traction, suggestions and motions to end the legal battle arose frequently.

When asked about the idea that the convention should discontinue the legal battle – letting the remaining entities go – Yeats said, “My view is rather structural, that churches are supposed to take care of orphans and widows. That’s expensive to do. That’s hard to do.... No one church is able to do a satisfactory job of relief ministries for children and the indigent, or of higher education.”

MBC Communications Director Rob Phillips underlined another point in a video shared with churches in fall 2013: “... the agencies don’t belong to the [Agency Restoration Group], or the Executive Board. They belong to you ... from the senior citizens on fixed incomes to boys and girls tithing their allowances ... who established most of these agencies and then entrusted them to elected boards.”

The issue was significant as some grew tired of legal wrangling and details. In his 2010 ruling against the Foundation, Judge Paul Wilson referred to the case as “complex.” Mike Whitehead weighed in on the basic issue in his mind: “This is not just Baptists fussing with Baptists. It is not a religious debate.... At stake is a fundamental right of a central organization to keep ownership and accountability of its subsidiary ministry corporations.”

## LEARNING THE LESSONS, WINNING THE PEACE

Missouri Baptists lived in hope of reclaiming the breakaway entities all through the process. For



example, in 2002 and each year thereafter, they elected boards for each entity against the day those boards would be seated. But the legal process highlighted some vulnerabilities in the documents that governed the relationships between the convention and its institutions.

By 2014, John Yeats was leading the convention to examine all the governing documents of the entities with the lessons of the past 13 years in mind. Mike Whitehead noted that the opposition lawyers seized on vague or inconsistent statements in the documents. A review of the entity charters was partly intended to close loopholes and to clearly restate elements of the relationship that might have been misunderstood.

“We started working on our governing documents in 2012, but they didn’t get to the convention until 2015,” Yeats said. “It was a process where we parsed every line, every word.” MBC leaders wanted clarity, not confusion and conflict, in the future.

The new documents even went so far as to remove the future perfect “shall” and “will” that are often found in legal documents in favor of more emphatic (and less ambiguous) present-tense verbs.

An important addition to the new charters was the specifying of “sole member” language, wherein the Missouri Baptist Convention is the sole member of each entity. The idea, used also with our 12 SBC entities, is that an entity cannot withdraw from or limit the rights of its sole corporate member, without the consent of that member, under the non-profit corporate code. Yeats calls sole membership “a good tool for maintaining our Baptist family together.”

Each charter also now contains the “consent clause” that requires messenger approval of charter changes. Such a consent clause would have protected the convention’s interest in Windermere and may have prevented the breakaway.

When the Missouri Baptist Foundation restoration was completed in 2016, the convention had trustees elected and ready to step in the moment the former board stepped down. Yeats had helped develop checklists and procedures that would serve as a template for the recovery process of the remaining two entities a short time later. The documents were in place, the officers were in place, the board was ready, and the convention had learned from the past.

These same protocols were in place when, in 2019, The Baptist Home board voted unanimously to forego further appeals and begin a transition to seat duly elected trustees. That same year, Missouri Baptist University completed the restoration when its leaders also agreed to return to the convention. MBU President Keith Ross said at the time, “After 17 years of litigation, it is time to move forward together and devote all our efforts to the University’s primary mission of providing a distinctively Christ-centered education.”

In preparing for this resolution, John Yeats’ work was essential in providing a convention that was ready to move on. According to Mike Whitehead, “Dr. Yeats masterfully planned ahead for the good of the MBC and the good of all MBC institutions. The fruit of his actions have paved a way that benefits non-profit ministries everywhere.”

Yeats was also careful to temper the rhetoric that might make restoring relationships with valued institutions difficult, even with new leadership and governing documents.

Former MBC President Ken Parker put it positively in a 2021 statement: “Dr. Yeats [was] a Christian gentleman and statesman through the whole ordeal, and I knew that his heart was to welcome the entities back to our MBC family with open arms.... I cannot imagine anyone with a better disposition to be our leader during this time.”



Windermere is now Encounter Cove Camp & Conference Center. It functions through a relationship with the Missouri Baptist Foundation.

## A WINDERMERE POSTSCRIPT

Even if Windermere Baptist Conference Center had been legally reclaimable, it was, by 2011, scattered. The new board had borrowed more than \$20 million for renovation and expansion with the land as collateral. From the beginning, revenue fell far short of the debt and the leaders' hopes, and nearly 1,000 of the 1,350 acres went to a bank in 2005.

After losing its court case against the new Windermere board, the convention was able to buy the 1,000 acres that did not include the actual conference facilities. The remaining 350 acres (the developed property) was purchased in December 2019 on the steps of the Camden County courthouse, during a bankruptcy auction, by Straightway Holdings Inc. (SHI), a real estate holding company formed by the Missouri Baptist Foundation. According to a January 2020 *Pathway* story, SHI's board members and officers are the same as those of the Foundation. Currently, the facility is leased and operated by Encounter Ministries.

Foundation President Neil Franks stressed the

Foundation acted "to secure the title to the property, not necessarily to get into the camping business, which is why it is being leased to the third-party corporation who was not a part of the past disagreements over governance."

Yeats and Franks both expressed a strong desire to preserve the camp for a witness into the future.

As of this writing, the 1,000 acres purchased by the convention are for sale. The property formerly known as Windermere Baptist Conference Center is now called Encounter Cove and functions in cooperation with the convention through its relationship with the Missouri Baptist Foundation. The Missouri Baptist Convention no longer owns camps – this change is part of the Reorientation effort of the convention that was implemented in 2016 (see Part II for more on this). A July 2023 event, called "a day of repentance and healing," was an invitation for Missouri Baptists to tour and be reintroduced to the conference center.

Repentance and healing are fitting ways to finish out two of the most challenging decades of Missouri Baptist life.





*We are missionaries cooperating with  
Missouri Baptists to make disciples,  
multiply churches, and develop leaders.*

— Mission statement of the Missouri  
Baptist Convention missionary staff

# Part II

## Reorienting the State Missionary Staff

After a few years of leading Missouri Baptists, John Yeats began a study of the MBC missionary staff that included “everything they do.” The study began even while the effort to restore Missouri Baptists’ breakaway entities was incomplete.

Yeats’ observation of the convention’s work noted effectiveness in providing resources and services to MBC churches. However, measurable metrics, such as baptisms and church health, continued to move the wrong direction. Yeats characterized the resulting changes as a “rediscovery of our historic roots and pioneer mission,” his observation being that state missionaries needed to stop doing the same things repeatedly while expecting different results.

“If you don’t aim at something, you never hit it,” Yeats said of the imperative behind an internal evaluation called Reorientation. “We needed to put the focus of the convention on something. Our churches had their own mission statements, and the convention needed one that was significantly updated.”

## IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

Yeats explained a new model for the cooperative ministry of Missouri Baptists during the 2015 annual meeting. His sermon at that meeting was entitled, “What if ....” The message began with a list of dire imaginings of a state where Missouri Baptists did not have churches in some crucial places; where young adults turned their backs on churches; where baptism and church membership were no longer considered important to most people; where students no longer held a biblical worldview; where a new generation of leaders was missing; and where church members rarely, if ever, shared the gospel with anyone. The message moved on to assert that this was in fact “an accurate depiction of life today in Missouri and among Missouri Baptists.”

He called for a return to the mission for which the MBC was established in 1835. The stated purpose for Central Association, the forerunner to the Missouri Baptist Convention, was to “adopt means and execute plans to promote the preaching of the gospel in the destitute churches and settlements within the bounds of the state.”



The Yeats take part in March for Life in Jefferson City in 2021.

Over the years, growth and prosperity enabled a broader range of ministries than those pioneer days allowed. Yeats calls it “mission creep” – doing a greater number of good things that are not part of the intent for the convention’s formation.

“The vast lostness of our region demands that we make some changes,” Yeats explained after the Reorientation rollout. “We are retooling our state missionary staff to focus energy like never before on making disciples, multiplying churches, and developing leaders.”

Mission creep afflicted Baptist work across the country. The Southern Baptist Convention had 19 boards, agencies, and commissions prior to 1997. A reorganization at that time resulted in 12 being retained, as some program assignments were

given to other entities and others were minimized or discontinued.

State conventions have made similar hard decisions over the past 20 years. Some of the largest state conventions have cut their staff numbers in half; others have sold their office buildings and reduced the number of ministry staff members, who now function as generalists in helping churches address their core ministries.

One result of these changes in state conventions is that more Cooperative Program money is made available for worldwide missions beyond the states. Missouri had also pursued this goal. Within the states, the changes required greater creativity and focus to accomplish central priorities, perhaps a little like the requirement of working in a pioneer mission field.

By 2011, Missouri Baptists were struggling to maintain their Cooperative Program giving in a context where church and staff leaders had faced

a long stretch of discouraging news. If the MBC was going to uplift priority ministries, a new focus would be needed to better utilize limited funds available to the convention.

Rob Phillips, who helped lead the Reorientation effort, noted an additional factor that, while not unique to Missouri Baptists, certainly fit the context in which the convention found itself in the mid-2010s. He noted a rising mistrust of denominational institutions, including state conventions. A grassroots effort to make the work of the convention more efficient and accountable could only enhance the credibility of the staff missionaries' efforts to undergird the work of Missouri churches.

## THE PROCESS AND THE PLAN

By choosing a broad collaboration for the Reorientation effort, the convention committed to a lengthier process than some states had used. In hopes of maintaining credibility with convention



In 2014, Yeats was part of a Missouri Baptist Disaster Relief crew, helping rebuild homes and a school in the wake of a hurricane in the Philippines.



staff, representative staff leaders of various ages and organizational levels were included from the start. The grassroots, as opposed to top-down, approach proved to be an advantage in the outcome. They began by doing a little dreaming.

Yeats recalls the meetings, “[Asking] how do we move into the future? How do we prepare the convention for the next generation to be able to do this work into the future? We went back to the roots and started asking questions. I remember asking, ‘If we had to rebuild this thing from the start, what would it look like?’

“And then, the next question is, after [we] talked about that, ‘What would it look like if you didn’t blow up everything? If you could prioritize it properly?’”

The group consulted with organizational experts, examined the experience of other state conventions, and read books on organizational change together before beginning to imagine the future of the cooperative work between Missouri Baptist churches.

The first major changes implemented in 2016 were philosophical. Convention staff, all of them, were now referred to as “missionaries” and held in common a set of characteristics they daily endeavored to manifest. State missionaries were to be devoted followers of Christ, committed to cooperation (including membership in active, generous, and connected MBC churches), and engaged in missional living. These core values, around which the state missionaries would unify, provided a foundation for their support for the work of Missouri Baptist churches.

A second philosophical difference impacted structure. Instead of eight teams that covered the usual collection of state convention ministries, the convention would now be one team that pursued six strategic emphases. One benefit would be

avoiding work silos that often plague restructured institutions after a few years.

The emphasis groupings of the new team are:

**Executive Office.** Ministries include the office of the executive director, who leads the state missionary staff, administers Cooperative Program and Missouri Missions Offering funds, and sets the state’s cooperative strategy; *The Pathway*; business services; and property management.



**Making Disciples.** Ministries include evangelism and discipleship strategies for church leaders and families that assist in producing disciples who make disciples; and age-graded training events and conferences to equip Missouri Baptists to transform lives and communities with the gospel.



**Multiplying Churches.** Ministries include the discovery of peoples from around the world now living in Missouri; developing MBC churches to engage, evangelize, and multiply churches among them; assessing, mentoring, and training churches and leaders; affiliating these churches with the MBC; and establishing partnership missions stateside and internationally.



**Developing Leaders.** Ministries include a statewide network of local church leaders, associational leaders, and convention



staff members who work together to provide pastoral leader development and care; church revitalization; transitional pastor training; and disaster relief training and deployment.

### Ministry Support.

Ministries include creative services (graphic design, web and social media, and video); live-event support; technology; and Christian apologetics.



A sixth emphasis, **Collegiate Ministries**, was added later. These include next-generation ministries on 26 Missouri campuses; training events for collegiate leaders; a summer missions and mentoring initiative; international student ministry; equipping churches to reach out to nearby campuses; developing leaders to serve on new campuses; and coordinating mission experiences for students.



## THE RESULTS

A most noticeable aspect of the new vision was that the staff missionaries were fewer in number than at the start. Staff numbers dropped by more than 40 percent. Some of the work formerly done by office staff was now run by networks or associations.

For example, women's ministry is facilitated by the Leadership Development Group but conducted in cooperation with the Missouri Baptist Children's Home. One of the convention's women's ministry leaders now serves the children's home as a women's ministry specialist, providing events, training clinics, Bible study resources, and other helps for individuals, churches, and associations. The convention no longer owns a campground,

but sponsors "Super Summer" events at Missouri Baptist university campuses. Bible Drill is another ministry that is now led on a local level.

One new way of thinking that has accompanied reorientation is that ministry success is measured by "strategic anchors" rather than numbers alone. These anchors have more to do with the priority and focus that direct what the state missionaries are doing among Missouri churches. The anchors are: Exalt Christ, Focus on the Kingdom, Promote and Model the Great Commission, Think and Act from a Biblical Perspective, and Foster a Cooperative Spirit among Missouri Baptists. These anchors impact what state leaders encourage among Missouri Baptists.

According to Rick Hedger, director of the Multiplying Churches Group, the percentage of Missouri Baptist churches engaged in some sort of missional strategy grew from 15 percent to 25 percent between 2011 and 2021. This could fall within Yeats' understanding that you're more likely to hit something if you're aiming at something. The current goal for missional engagement is 35 percent.



Rick Hedger (center) engages U.S. and Mexican pastors during a "vision" trip to the Puebla/Tlaxcala regions of southeast Mexico in 2013.

An example of how the current orientation of the convention missionaries operates is the LIFE Initiative, facilitated by the Making Disciples Group. LIFE stands for: Leading people to follow Christ, walking with them as they learn to Identify with Christ, teaching them to observe a life of Faithful obedience to Christ, where they are Equipped to lead people to Christ.

In the spring of 2023, a LIFE event in Ewing demonstrated well how this works. For months in advance, convention missionaries worked with local leaders, who decided the budget for the event, venue, prayer preparation, promotion, program personalities, and community involvement.

Brad Bennett, Making Disciples director for the MBC, told *The Pathway* that the aim of LIFE events is to have an impact that is far more than short term.

“We work with church leaders and pastors in a disciple-making structure and process. It’s a holistic approach, so it’s not a flash-in-the-pan event,” Bennett said. “The Making Disciples Group strategists’ overarching objective is to assist Missouri Baptists in developing biblical structures, strategies, and processes for disciple-making ministries from childhood to adulthood.”

Once the week arrives, it begins with a joint worship service for participating churches, and then training for those who counsel new believers later that week. School assemblies centered around character training are conducted Monday through Wednesday, and then a major event is offered on Wednesday night at a large school.

A stunt bicycle demonstration capped the four-day event in Ewing, and 70 people professed Christ at the invitation. The careful preparation of disciple-makers enabled the community to walk these new believers through their new life in

Christ with a goal that they themselves will make disciples of others.

LIFE is not only an example of how the convention’s focus on making disciples is manifest, but also an example of how the convention’s missionaries, even those beyond the Making Disciples Group, join to help churches as they impact their communities for Christ.

## JURISDICTIONAL LEADERSHIP

In Southern Baptist polity, denominational bodies, like state conventions, have no authority to direct the ministries of their affiliated churches. Neither can they control the outcomes or effectiveness of those ministries. A resetting of the MBC staff’s ministry does not necessarily impact Missouri churches. But as state convention leaders, staff missionaries are not without a purpose in edifying local churches. John Yeats called this role “jurisdictional” in his explanation of a state convention’s role.

“There are times when the people of God need to be convened to collectively recalibrate our walk with the Holy One and to consider the purposes of God and how to collectively fulfill the mission of the gospel,” he said in a 2022 *Pathway* column. “No one church or national entity can summon the people called Southern Baptists who live in a particular state or region. The state convention can do so because of a principle called ‘jurisdictional leadership.’”

Yeats uses the Acts 1:8 divisions (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth) to describe how autonomous churches can convene by jurisdictions, local and beyond, to enhance a common kingdom purpose. In our Southern Baptist denominational understanding, this would be local churches, associations, state conventions, and the national Southern Baptist Convention.





Yeats speaks to Missouri Baptists visiting the ruins of Masada, Israel, during a 2020 tour.

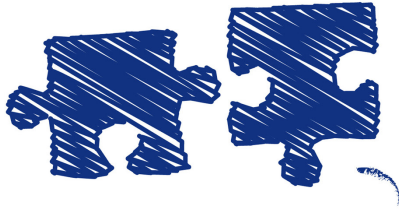
A recalibration on the part of the state missionary staff can lead to a reconsideration of the cooperative ministry of all the convention's churches. The obvious freshening of the state convention's vision during the 2016 Reorientation effort has impacted the lives of many, including churches, such as those that participated in the LIFE gatherings, or the students saved during Super Summer events.

Even impacts that are more subtle, such as budget money formerly used to support a more extensive infrastructure and now available for disciple-making or church-multiplying resources, are nonetheless fruit of an effort to return to the convention's pioneer focus. Metrics, such as baptisms, are difficult for a parachurch organization to impact

directly. But the uplifting of disciple-making as a more thorough outgrowth of evangelism has already made a difference in the lives of those disciplined and the lives of those trained to disciple them.

By the way, although Yeats admits that the impact of Covid-19 restrictions made the number of baptisms in MBC churches challenging to record for a couple of years, he's encouraged to see the numbers ticking back up. He says the total is up about 1,000 for the most recent year of record. To whatever degree the state missionaries have facilitated this harvest among Missouri Baptist churches, it's a fulfilled goal of the MBC staff reorientation.

COLLABORATE



PARTNER



IDEAS

# SYNERGY



BENEFITS



SHARE



COOPERATE

## Part III

# Cultivating Synergy Among MBC Entities



**W**hen John Yeats began meeting Missouri Baptists in 2011 as the newly elected MBC executive director, many observers were not so sure he could bring together divided factions and forge a cooperative ministry. And yet, his Christ-centered demeanor and denominational experience gave him an advantage that led to a tenure of renewed unity throughout the state.

Yeats spoke often of synergy – the cooperative work of all Missouri Baptists to accomplish more together than their local churches or entities could accomplish alone.

Missouri Baptist Foundation President Neil Franks remembers his first interactions with Yeats



Foundation President Neil Franks leads a discussion with entity leaders during an MBC Synergy Meeting in Jefferson City.

when serving as vice president, and later president, of the Missouri Baptist Convention: “I came to be impressed with his ability to manage so many projects with so many different people, each with their own competing needs or goals.”

Yeats has always represented Missouri Baptists with “an approachable spirit, Christ-centered, life-loving, humble persona,” Franks said. “The more you watched, the more you knew he had prepared well with beneficial results in mind, and in the most achievable manner, benefiting the most people.”

Ken Parker, pastor of First Baptist Church of Kearney, who would later serve alongside Yeats as MBC president, summed up his first impression of the new executive director. After hearing Yeats speak at an associational luncheon, Parker found Yeats to be “straightforward, conservative, and kind, but unapologetic about his biblical convictions.”

“I knew he had an uphill climb,” Parker admitted. Still, he remembers thinking to himself, “This is a guy I can follow.”

And thus began the Synergy Initiative.

## PRAY ACROSS MISSOURI

The ground for achieving synergy was plowed in the 2017-2018 Pray Across Missouri tour, according to Rodney Harrison, a professor and dean at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, who now serves as president of Baptist Homes & Healthcare Ministries. While the Synergy Initiative was introduced to MBC staff leaders in 2016, Yeats and his wife, Sharon, traveled from one location to another, usually making it to four counties a day.

Missouri native Spencer Hutson had served as associate pastor in Poplar Bluff before becoming an associate staff member of the MBC in 1983. “I



# PRAY ACROSS MISSOURI

In every county, a concert of prayer

had a lot of different roles through the years and retired at the end of 2020,” Hutson said, but Yeats persuaded him to work in areas overlapping with church relations.

One of the special projects Yeats asked him to coordinate was Pray Across Missouri, inviting directors of missions to participate. “Entity folks would show up and help us, too, so it was an effort at bringing people together and getting out into every area. That was important to Dr. Yeats – to be out with the people.”

Hutson remembered that Yeats had picked up the idea of touring the state and developing synergy among grassroots Southern Baptists from his friend Jim Richards, executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. Having pastored South Park Baptist Church in Grand Prairie, Texas, in the 1980s, Yeats watched division play out between conservatives and moderates of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. And, he saw how Richards engaged Texas Southern Baptists to work together.

With similar challenges amidst the lawsuits to recover Missouri Baptist entities, and “a lot of ups and downs” from the short tenures of three previous MBC executive directors, Hutson recalled telling Yeats, “We really need a win here. We want you to succeed, and Missouri Baptists probably

can’t handle any more fiascos.”

Yeats understood the critical nature of regaining trust and building unity. And when Hutson looks back on more than a year of praying on the steps of 114 county courthouses, he is quick to credit God with enabling Yeats to “hit a home run.”



Spencer Hutson

“I saw firsthand that he and Sharon were so gracious interacting with people,” said Hutson. “He did a fine job relating to them, and I think they left those meetings feeling like somebody at the state office knew who they were, where they were, and cared about them.”

Having served the MBC in roles that dealt with church training, church relations, and later as liaison in the executive director’s office, Hutson joined in on many of those stops and noticed that “John and Sharon knew how to bring people together.”

## WELCOME HOME

And after nearly two decades of litigation to recover the Missouri Baptist Foundation, The Baptist Home, and Missouri Baptist University, Yeats welcomed these entities back without rehashing the past. Along with the three entities that never left — the Missouri Baptist Children’s Home, Southwest Baptist University, and Hannibal-La-Grange University — laypeople and pastors alike knew they needed to work toward a common goal.

Through the Synergy Initiative, introduced in

2019, Yeats invited the presidents of each MBC entity, along with key staff members, to spend a day simply getting to know one another, then brainstorming how they might develop camaraderie for the sake of the gospel.

Yeats' 2017 executive director's report, delivered at the MBC Annual Meeting in October, previewed his three principles of synergy:

- *Practically, the mission of the Lord requires synergy.* "Part of the Baptist DNA is that we embrace a global responsibility to reach all people," he said.
- *The overwhelming work demands synergy.* "With so many of the world's 7 billion people lost and without Jesus, we must work together to reach them with the gospel. This involves our Southern Baptist entities, as well as our cooperative ministries in the state."
- *The angst of Jesus for his bride is transformed to joy in synergy.* "On the night he was betrayed, Jesus prayed for unity." Yeats explained that unity does not mean uniformity, but recognizes diversity within the body of Christ, and singularity in purpose.

Yeats concluded, "The secret to godly synergy is loving one another instead of loving ourselves." He closed his message by inviting Missouri Baptists to stand and read in unison the words of Jesus in John 13:34-35: "I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

As a participant in the Synergy Initiative meetings while president of the Missouri Baptist Foundation, Franks says he was surprised how little the entities worked together — particularly the ones that had remained "faithful" to the MBC.





Richard Melson began serving as the 26th president of Southwest Baptist University in September 2021. He brings more than 25 years of transformation leadership to SBU's administrative team.

"The universities were not actively collaborating on cost savings or course offerings," said Franks. "I could understand those on the other side [who left the MBC] were not working together, but I was shocked at how little the others were."

Harrison agrees, citing Yeats' recognition that "we can't do everything that we would like to do separately, but we can do a whole lot together." He shifted the focus from a silo mentality to one of cooperative ministry, Harrison said.

The annual summits that began in 2019 bore fruit in unexpected ways, but it didn't happen overnight. As cohesion grew across the entities, MBC leaders carved out solutions to meet one another's needs.

For example, nursing students training at Hannibal-LaGrange University were given the opportunity to serve patients at Baptist Homes. The



Newly installed HLGU President Robert Matz stands with Addison Miller during 2023 graduation ceremonies.

Missouri Baptist Children's Home expanded its ministry assignment to help women who were recovering from abuse. At the Missouri Baptist Foundation, more attention was given to Christian money management, assisting pastors to meet the financial needs of their families.

At the entity he now leads, Harrison said Baptist Homes is becoming an advocate for senior adults with a regular presence at the State Capitol on issues related to aging.

Missouri Baptist University continues to offer reduced tuition rates for employees of the Children's Home, which, in turn, provides childcare professionals an opportunity to earn an undergraduate or graduate degree at a reduced rate. MBU business and marketing majors gained practical experience developing a marketing and branding campaign to advance the influence and mission of Baptist Homes.





During an April 2022 chapel service, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees, administration, faculty, and students recognized the Yeats, naming an endowed chair in their honor. Standing with John and Sharon are seminary president Jason Allen and his wife, Karen.

“The synergy meetings provide a venue for entity leaders to foster friendships, establish trust, and seek God’s guidance as together we serve Missouri Baptists and others,” explained Keith Ross, MBU president.

Directors of missions and the WMU reaped the benefit of enhanced relationships as the Woman’s Missionary Union gained funding through the state missions offering, and directors of missions were offered summits in the spring and fall hosted by the MBC.

Annual synergy summits are unique among Baptist state conventions as MBC leaders host the presidents of all six entities to encourage fellowship and planning that yield greater cooperation statewide.

## HEIGHTENED INTENTIONALITY

More recently, the MBC has worked more intentionally to encourage racial reconciliation and the prevention of sexual abuse. The Executive Board has launched task forces to address each area of concern.

With so many creative and proactive efforts arising out of a desire for unity and cooperation, giving to the Rheubin L. South Missouri Missions Offering began trending upward for nearly a decade, and set an all-time record in 2022.

Parker pointed to the Yeats’ marriage as a model of a Christian couple working in a ministry partnership. “She [Sharon] brings her own flair to it and that’s been a really positive situation,” Parker said.

In addition, “John and Sharon have prayed, encouraged, and led the strategy to engage in

partnership missions,” according to Rick Hedger, MBC director of Multiplying Churches.

Stateside, the MBC has enjoyed partnerships in Illinois, Iowa, New York, Minnesota-Wisconsin, and now Montana. Internationally, connections have flourished from Canada to Senegal, and many points in between over the course of Yeats’ tenure.

Ross said John and Sharon continue to champion the important mission of Christian higher education and enthusiastically promote the Baptist institutions in our state. “He provided steady and wise leadership in our state during the season when MBU, the Foundation, and Baptist Homes were restored and transitioned back to legal entities of the MBC.”

“He brought integrity to the executive director’s office, a theological depth, but also a pastor’s heart,” Parker said. “On several occasions, when I was with Dr. Yeats at some tense meetings while some of the entities were still in exile, he was a gentleman.”

Calling Yeats a dedicated Christian who faithfully promotes and shares the good news of Jesus Christ, Ross further praised Yeats as a tireless champion for the Cooperative Program and the idea that Missouri Baptists are stronger and most effective when working together. “His advocacy for pro-life and religious freedom issues among state and federal government legislators is an important voice representing all Missouri Baptists,” he said.

Russell Martin has seen the transformation of the Missouri Baptist Convention since he first served with the Children’s Home in 1977. Prior to being selected as president of MBCH, he was one of the driving forces behind its expansion to become known as MBCH Children and Family Ministries.

Calling him a champion of the Cooperative

Program, Martin expressed gratitude for Yeats’ getting the Children’s Home “a pretty hefty jump” in funding. By reducing some of the budget allocation for the executive director’s office, Yeats demonstrated that children and families are a priority.

“Through *The Stewardship Journal*, distributed weekly, Yeats has encouraged making tools available for pastors,” Martin said. “He understands our finances. He’s always been supportive and encouraging, speaking highly of us and promoting our work. I couldn’t ask for a better ambassador of MBCH than John.”

Cheryl Stahlman contracts with the MBC to guide Missouri’s WMU in furthering the gospel through churches and ministries. “The work of WMU has reached a new height through the partnered work of our MBC under Dr. Yeats’ leadership,” she said.

In the first year of a partnership agreement between the Montana Southern Baptist Women and the Missouri Woman’s Missionary Union, leadership teams from both states have served one another wherever help was needed. Stahlman credits Yeats’ synergistic approach for enhancing Missouri WMU’s work.

## FACE-TO-FACE

While some business leaders have experienced short-term success by tackling challenges unilaterally, Yeats said building consensus and meeting face-to-face to find common ground yields long-



Cheryl Stahlman leads WMU’s missionary endeavors across Missouri.

term cooperation. “If we can drop the competition mindset, then that’s huge.”

From Yeats’ perspective, “The Synergy Initiative was a methodology for bringing the leaders of our entities into the same room with state [Baptist] leaders to talk about best practices ways we could collaborate.”

That kind of consensus could only happen when meeting face-to-face.

“Missouri Baptists are a very common-sense people, and they think that we in the Baptist sphere all work together,” Yeats explained. “Well, I’ve been in the Baptist lifeboat nationally, and state-wise – we don’t really work together.”

Within the Missouri Baptist Convention, leaders had to get rid of the silos and begin to collaborate and embrace synergistic thinking.

That mindset eventually carried over to clarify the governing documents of MBC entities by 2019. “We had a little hiccup with Southwest Baptist University due to a legal opinion that a judge should not grant the corporation papers, even though they were approved by the state convention,” Yeats said. By not rushing anyone to solve a problem, but instead trusting leaders elected by Missouri Baptists, they were able to accomplish the goal of bringing a biblical worldview to the forefront of the education process.

Just as Missouri Baptist universities stepped in to relieve the stress on the foster care system by providing degrees in social work, the same thing is happening with the education of the next generation of nurses. Collaboration removes the bumps in the road and meets the needs.

Dr. Yeats “brought integrity to the executive director’s office, a theological depth, but also a pastor’s heart.”

— KEN PARKER

“The whole idea of reorientation and clarifying governing documents yielded a different attitude for a different culture of working together – a common goal of making disciples, planting churches, and developing leaders,” said Yeats.

That approach extended to the associations by recognizing every local church as “a partner in grace,” he added. At Cape Girardeau Baptist Association, led by Director of Missions John Vernon, the MBC worked with nine churches to enlist 150 adults to coach new disciples who had just received Christ as

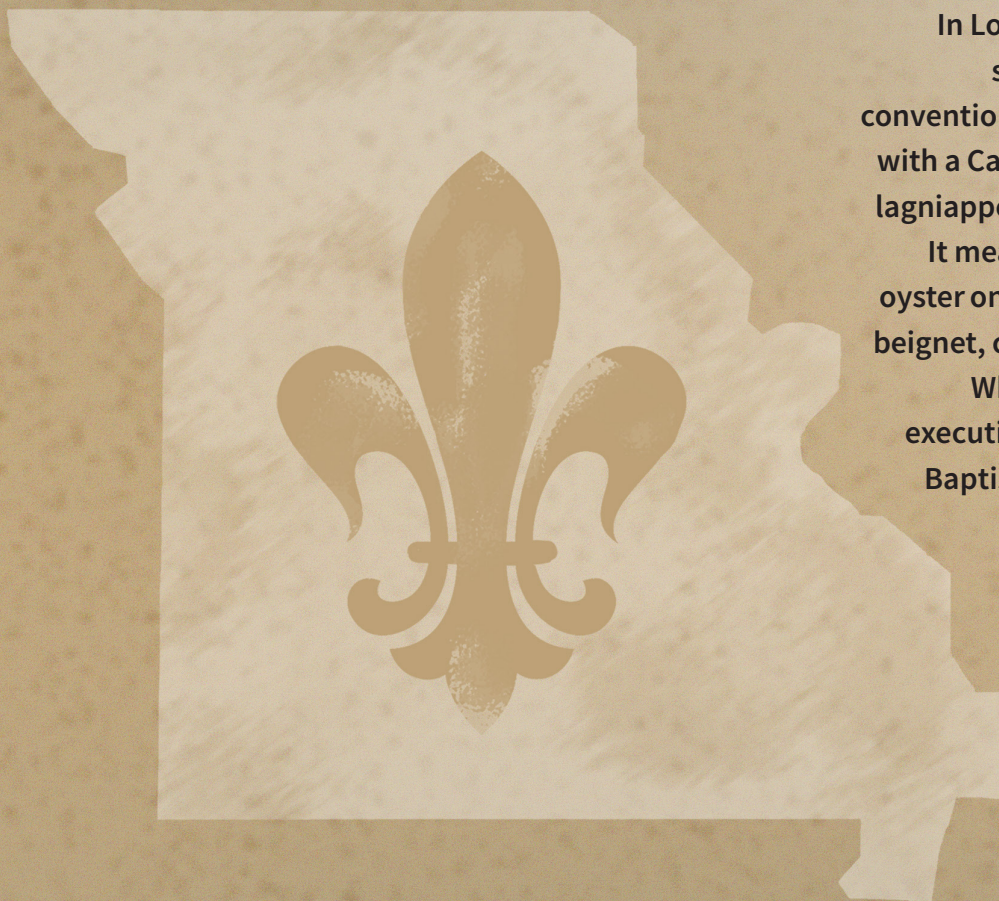
Savior so they could be assimilated into their local churches. Strategic partnerships also emerged in church planting, Baptist Collegiate Ministries, and a new structure for church renewal known as the Resound Network.

“The next generation wants to collaborate, as opposed to a mindset of each one doing their own thing,” Yeats insists. “We’re just kind of catching a little bit of the wind in their sails, working together to disciple and plant churches.”

MBC is promoting the work of each entity and the great things that are happening. “We’ve got a story to tell,” Yeats said. As a former editor and/or communications leader at the *Indiana Baptist*, *Oklahoma Baptist Messenger*, and Louisiana Baptist Convention, Yeats knows that Missouri Baptists gain encouragement from hearing stories that grip their hearts through video and print media.

Franks credits Yeats with being the one “who got us together and allowed us to begin the journey” of working together. “He rightly believed that Missouri Baptists expected us to work together, so we must strive for this as often as possible.”





In Louisiana, where John Yeats served on the Baptist state convention staff, he became familiar with a Cajun-French inspired noun, lagniappe (pronounced “lan-yap”).

It means “a little extra” – a 13th oyster on the half shell, or a second beignet, compliments of the house.

When Yeats became the new executive director of the Missouri Baptist Convention, he brought “a little extra” to mission efforts in the Show-Me State. Here’s a sampling:

# Lagniappe: A Little Extra in Missouri

## 2011

- MBC Executive Board elects John Yeats as 20th executive director on Oct. 13.
- Yeats speaks at Annual Meeting and challenges messengers to consider the seven functions of a state convention: jurisdictional leadership; church strengthening; support of pastors; multiplication of churches; gospel sharing here, there, and everywhere; synchronization of the work of entities; shining light in the public square.

## 2012

- MBC launches I-29 Corridor initiative to facilitate church planting from Kansas City to Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Puebla/Tlaxcala, Mexico partnership begins, with a goal of 50 new churches by 2020.
- Yeats restructures MBC staff around the seven functions of a state convention.

## 2013

- *The Pathway* moves from a paid-circulation to an open-circulation format, now fully funded through the Cooperative Program.

## 2014

- After months of solid stewardship, the Executive Board approves funds for capital improvements of the Baptist Building, an effort that includes infrastructure and office modernization.
- The Governing Documents Task Force begins the detailed work of updating the MBC's Constitution, Bylaws, and other documents. These are to serve as templates for the convention's entities, which are represented by the chairpersons of each entity board.

## 2015

- In an effort to correct "mission drift," the MBC missionary staff begins a reorientation process focused on its historical vision of "transforming lives and communities with the gospel," as well as its mission of "cooperating with Missouri Baptists to make disciples, multiply churches, and develop leaders."

## 2016

- The MBC launches a five-year state-to-state and church-to-church partnership with the Minnesota/Wisconsin Baptist Convention.
- The Governing Documents Task Force completes its work and recommends a revised Constitution, Bylaws, and other documents to messengers at the MBC Annual Meeting.
- After lengthy litigation involving the Missouri Baptist Foundation, the Missouri Supreme Court rules in the MBC's favor, bringing the Foundation back into the MBC family. Neil Franks is elected president the following year.

## 2017

- After the required one-year comment period, Missouri Baptists adopt the revised MBC Governing Documents. They also approve the Foundation's governing documents.

## 2018

- Yeats and other MBC leaders complete Pray Across Missouri, special times of prayer with Missouri Baptists and other believers at every county courthouse across the state.
- The MBC begins an international partnership with northern Italy, while encouraging churches to continue their partnerships with churches in Mexico.



## 2019

- Yeats launches the Synergy Initiative – a process that engages leaders from all MBC entities in collaborative conversations with a goal of doing more together for the sake of the gospel.
- After decisions against them in the Missouri Court of Appeals, The Baptist Home and Missouri Baptist University choose not to appeal their cases to the Missouri Supreme Court, thus ending years of litigation and restoring these entities to the MBC family.
- Missouri Baptists adopt governing documents for Hannibal-LaGrange University, Missouri Baptist University, The Baptist Home, The Baptist Home Foundation, the MBC, the Christian Life Commission, and the Historical Commission.
- Missouri Baptist Disaster Relief launches a proprietary app that facilitates communications between and deployment of Missouri Baptist DR volunteers.

## 2020

- Missouri Baptists elect their first African-American president: Jon Nelson of Soma Community Church in Jefferson City.
- Messengers to the MBC Annual Meeting approve the governing documents of Southwest Baptist University.
- In partnership with pastors and directors of missions, the MBC launches the Resound Network, a church revitalization and replanting initiative.
- The Baptist Home calls Rodney Harrison as president.
- The MBC launches another church-to-church partnership, this time with Montana Baptists.
- State missionaries help churches and church leaders navigate the Covid-19 pandemic, while working remotely as the Baptist Building is closed from March – May.
- At historic Old Bethel, modern restrooms are under construction to accommodate more visitors and more events.

## 2021

- The MBC enters into a new partnership with the North American Mission Board (NAMB). “Send Network Missouri” combines the church-multiplying strengths of NAMB and MBC church planters to expand community discovery and strategy development within Missouri Baptist churches and associations.

## 2022

- Midwestern Seminary names an endowed chair in honor of the Yeats: The John and Sharon Yeats Chair of Baptist Studies.
- Missouri Baptist churches give a record \$990,740 to the Rheubin L. South Missouri Missions Offering.

## 2023

- Yeats asks the Executive Board to begin the search for a new MBC leader, as he announces plans to step down by the end of the year.
- At the SBC Annual Meeting, Midwestern Seminary recognizes the Yeats with the MBTS Presidential Award of Merit.
- Missouri Baptists celebrate Yeats’ legacy, and welcome a new executive director, at the MBC Annual Meeting in Springfield.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Tammi Reed Ledbetter was a professional journalist for 50 years. She has written for local daily papers, Baptist Press, state Baptist papers, and Baptist institutions. In addition to reporting, she has served as editor or managing editor for several publications. She was also the founding editor for three publications. She graduated from the University of Arkansas with extensive classwork at Criswell College and

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Tammi and her husband, Gary, have three grown children and seven grandchildren.



Gary Ledbetter served churches in Arkansas, Texas, and Indiana before a varied career in denominational work. He served as editor and communications director for both the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana and the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. Ledbetter currently serves as senior editor for High Street Press of the Missouri Baptist Convention. He earned degrees from Criswell College,

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Gary and his wife, Tammi, are semi-retired in Northwest Arkansas.

Thank you, Dr. Yeats and Sharon,  
for a legacy of leadership and faithful service  
to Missouri Baptists!

