

2023 Report of the Executive Secretary

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. — **James 1:5**

As we encounter challenges today, may we remember that God will give us the wisdom we need to address them.

Top Challenges Faced

The North American church faces many challenges. Last fall, the Great Commission Research Network surveyed Protestant pastors and asked them to identify the top challenges they faced. The survey was similar to one conducted in 2022 regarding challenges faced by churches.¹ However, pastors were presented 79 challenges rather than only 50 in the church survey. Pastors answered using five categories: 1) not a challenge; 2) a slight challenge; 3) a significant challenge; 4) a very significant challenge; and 5) a nearly insurmountable challenge. See the table below listing the top ten challenges.²

The Top Ten Challenges Facing Pastors in 2024



Results clustered around evangelism, retaining young adults, and training. (Download the entire GCRN report from the Executive Report page: <https://nafwb.org/executivereport>.)

This is helpful information. However, how might Free Will Baptist pastors respond to this survey? Would Free Will Baptist pastors identify the same concerns?

¹ See <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1419&context=gcrj>

² See <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/gcrj/vol16/iss1/2/>

Fortunately, enough Free Will Baptist pastors (127) participated in the study to make a comparison with other Protestant pastors. The top ten challenges of Free Will Baptist pastors are listed in the table below.

Top Ten Challenges Faced by Free Will Baptist Pastors

| Challenges | FWB Rank | All Pastors Rank | FWB Mean | All Pastors Mean |
|---|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|
| Effectively Evangelizing People Who Have Never Visited the Church | 1 | 1 | 3.37 | 3.3 |
| Retaining Young Adults | 2 | 3 | 3.32 | 3.18 |
| Mobilizing for Evangelism | 3 | 2 | 3.21 | 3.27 |
| Finding High Quality Pastoral and Intern Candidates | 4 | 8 | 3.19 | 2.94 |
| Recruiting Lay Leaders | 5 | 11 | 3.17 | 2.9 |
| Increasing Small Group Participation | 6 | 10 | 3.16 | 2.9 |
| Getting Members to Put Their Faith Into Practice | 7 | 4 | 3.15 | 2.98 |
| Mobilizing Members for Ministry | 8 | 7 | 3.11 | 2.94 |
| Running High Quality Youth Programs | 9 | 6 | 3.02 | 2.95 |
| Running High Quality Children's Programs | 10 | 8 | 3.02 | 2.91 |

Free Will Baptist pastors identified the same top ten concerns (although in a different order) apart from “Effectively Evangelizing People Contacted Through Outreach Activities,” which was the thirteenth highest concern for Free Will Baptist pastors and the fifth overall concern for all pastors.³

How Are Free Will Baptist Pastors Different From Other Pastors?

Free Will Baptist pastors had significant differences from other pastors. Differences occurred on gender (all Free Will Baptist pastors were male), church size (significantly more Free Will Baptist churches numbered between 51-100 versus 101-200), and church growth (Free Will Baptist pastors reported significantly slower growth than other pastors). Additionally, Free Will Baptist pastors rated 19 challenges as significantly greater than other pastors. See the table below.

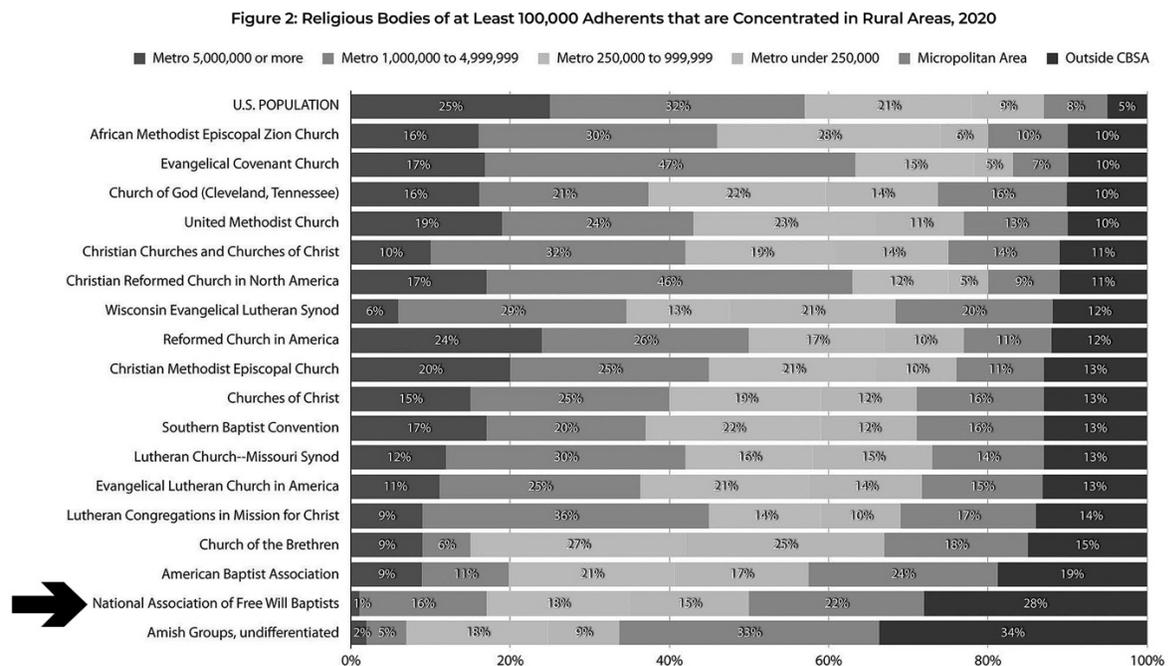
Significantly Greater Challenges for Free Will Baptist Pastors

| Concern | FWB Pastor Rank | Mean | Probability |
|---|-----------------|------|-------------|
| Finding High Quality Pastoral and Intern Candidates | 4 | 3.19 | .005 |
| Recruiting Lay Leaders | 5 | 3.17 | .000 |
| Increasing Small Group Participation | 6 | 3.16 | .000 |
| Getting Church Members to Put their Faith Into Practice | 7 | 3.15 | .010 |
| Mobilizing Members for Ministry | 8 | 3.11 | .007 |
| Reducing Member Indifference | 11 | 2.98 | .017 |
| Meeting the Demands of My Schedule | 15 | 2.89 | .033 |
| Managing My Time | 17 | 2.86 | .006 |
| Developing Effective Strategy | 19 | 2.80 | .009 |
| Promoting Active Participation in Worship | 23 | 2.76 | .013 |
| Using Technology Effectively | 24 | 2.76 | .052 |
| Creating High Quality Worship Services | 28 | 2.72 | .000 |
| Casting a Clear Vision for the Church | 31 | 2.67 | .006 |
| Creating Attractive Programs | 35 | 2.61 | .016 |
| Resolving Personal Frustrations | 43 | 2.51 | .047 |
| Combatting False Doctrine | 47 | 2.46 | .007 |
| Staying Connected to God | 55 | 2.35 | .003 |
| Maintaining My Mental Health | 56 | 2.34 | .043 |
| Making the Gospel Attractive | 67 | 2.15 | .0012 |

³ E. Moody, and D.R. Dunaetz. Top Concerns Facing Free Will Baptist Pastors. Unpublished paper.

Although, overall, pastors from all denominations expressed concern about finding high quality pastoral candidates, Free Will Baptists reported this as a significantly greater challenge. As a smaller denomination, perhaps this challenge is more noticeable. Additionally, pastors had an obvious concern about recruiting lay leaders or volunteers. This challenge is likely exacerbated by the size of many of our churches.

Perhaps one reason for these differences is that Free Will Baptist churches are largely located in more rural areas with smaller populations. Last year, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies released the results of the 2020 U.S. Religion Census. The results indicated that the National Association of Free Will Baptists is the second most rural denomination in the United States. See the table below.⁴



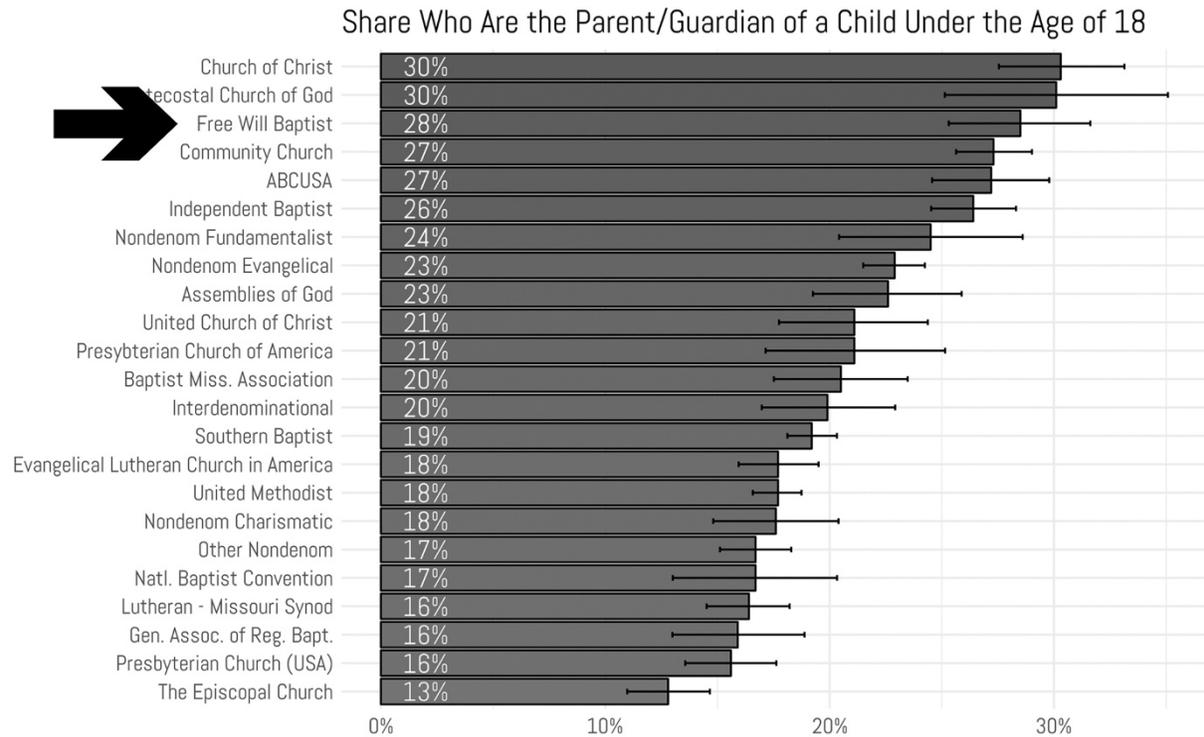
In fact, the only U.S. religious body that is more rural in America is the Amish. Fifty percent of Free Will Baptist churches are located where 13% of the U.S. population lives. The other 50% of NAFWB churches are in more populated areas.⁵ This may account for smaller church sizes and slower church growth, since nearly half our churches are in areas where fewer people live.

However, 2022 results from the Cooperative Election Survey (CES) indicate the Free Will Baptist denomination is one of the *youngest* denominations in America. Twenty-eight percent of Free Will Baptists in the sample reported being a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 18. See the

⁴ See Page 68: https://www.usreligioncensus.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/2020_US_Religion_Census.pdf

⁵ See “Things to Ponder:” <https://www.nafwb.org/onemag/ponder.htm>

table below.⁶ This is the third highest for any large Protestant denomination in the U.S. and even higher than that reported by nondenominational churches (23%).



@ryanburge
Data: Cooperative Election Study, 2022

It is also possible Free Will Baptists are keeping more youth. A recent study of Gen Z Free Will Baptists indicated 99.25% were regular church attenders (85% attended a Free Will Baptist church) and 87% were involved in church ministry. This was a biased sample of ETEAM, Truth & Peace, College Missions Program, Youth Evangelistic Team, and Church Training Service participants. However, the study shows when Free Will Baptist youth participate in NAFWB youth programs, we keep them in the faith, and overwhelmingly in the denomination, a true anomaly for Gen Z.⁷

There is a warning in the Cooperative Election Survey (CES) results for Free Will Baptists (and all evangelicals). Although 28% of Free Will Baptists reported being a parent or guardian of a child in 2022, in the 2010 administration of the CES, 37% of Free Will Baptists reported being a parent or guardian of a child under 18. In 2022, no denomination had more than 30% of respondents who indicated they were a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 18.⁸ The U.S. church is losing ground.

⁶ See: [https://churchanswers.com/blog/which-denominations-are-the-grayest-the-youngest-will-surprise-you/?utm_source=convertkit&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Which%20Denominations%20Are%20the%20Grayest%20\(The%20Youngest%20Will%20Surprise%20You\)%20-%2012961088](https://churchanswers.com/blog/which-denominations-are-the-grayest-the-youngest-will-surprise-you/?utm_source=convertkit&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Which%20Denominations%20Are%20the%20Grayest%20(The%20Youngest%20Will%20Surprise%20You)%20-%2012961088)

⁷ See Keeping Our College Students: http://www.onemag.org/keeping_students.htm

⁸ See: [https://churchanswers.com/blog/which-denominations-are-the-grayest-the-youngest-will-surprise-you/?utm_source=convertkit&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Which%20Denominations%20Are%20the%20Grayest%20\(The%20Youngest%20Will%20Surprise%20You\)%20-%2012961088](https://churchanswers.com/blog/which-denominations-are-the-grayest-the-youngest-will-surprise-you/?utm_source=convertkit&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Which%20Denominations%20Are%20the%20Grayest%20(The%20Youngest%20Will%20Surprise%20You)%20-%2012961088)

***Note:** Links to all podcasts and other resources listed through the rest of the report can be found at <https://nafwb.org/executivereport>.

What Are the Solutions?

In James 1, the Lord instructs us to view challenges or trials as opportunities. The key is to ask God for wisdom in dealing with them and to engage in the solutions that arise. Free Will Baptist pastors are significantly more concerned about the challenges of developing effective strategies and of casting a clear vision for their churches than other pastors.

Perhaps the 3 for 30 goals and objectives are a way to address the challenges we face. The Scriptures command us to reach people with the gospel, to train and disciple them in the Christian faith, and to give ourselves wholly to the Lord (nafwb.org/3for30). Free Will Baptists have chosen these three scriptural goals to work toward until the year 2030. We encourage churches to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (see “Questions Every Church Should Ask”) and to use the strategies that best fit them to reach their communities with the gospel, to train people in the Christian faith, and to give of themselves wholly to the Lord.

Below is an update on our progress toward these goals and objectives and ways pastors and churches can use them to address some of the challenges we face.

3 for 30: REACH, TRAIN, GIVE

REACH Goal: Free Will Baptists will develop a Great Commission mindset, regularly engaging their communities and sharing the gospel.

Objective: By the end of 2023, 10% of Free Will Baptist churches will have participated in Know Your Community.

Progress: Great progress was made on this goal in 2023, as 13% of all Free Will Baptist churches participated in KYC. Reports are completed on a 5, 10, 15, or 20-minute drive from the church. Each report costs \$100, but we provide the report for churches unable to pay for it. Once our office receives the report, we offer to meet via Zoom with the pastor and/or church leadership to review the results. Sixty-nine percent of Free Will Baptist churches that participate in the feedback session can, as a result, identify an action taken to reach their communities. We encourage churches to collaborate with one another by providing contact information for churches with similar results and through the Know Your Community with Free Will Baptists Facebook page.

We have gained valuable information about the communities where our churches are located.⁹ Learn more by checking out the Better Together Podcast with pastors describing how they have used Know Your Community. For more information, visit nafwb.org/know.

Objective: By the end of 2023, 24 Free Will Baptist churches will have participated in The Hope Initiative.

⁹ See <http://onemag.org/data.htm>.

Progress: Great progress was made on this goal in 2023. Fifty-three Free Will Baptist churches are currently participating in The Hope Initiative. Church Answers gives Free Will Baptists a discount to participate. By engaging three to five participants at a time throughout a 12-month process, The Hope Initiative uses prayer and Scripture as the foundation, with the goal of changing the culture of a church to be more outwardly focused.

The Hope Initiative places great emphasis on sending notes, emails, and texts of encouragement to people in one's sphere of influence. It takes participants 20 minutes a day. We have seen great results from this process as described by Pastor Noah Taylor in a Better Together podcast.

Participants collaborate at The Hope Initiative with Free Will Baptists Facebook page. If you are interested, email questions@nafwb.org with THI in the subject line. Learn more at nafwb.org/hope.

Objective: By the end of 2023, 12 Free Will Baptist churches will have participated in Child Evangelism Fellowship activities.

Progress: We are progressing on this objective, with 12 churches (of which we are aware) that have partnered with CEF. If you have partnered with CEF, email questions@nafwb.org to let us know. Participants collaborate on the Child Evangelism Fellowship with Free Will Baptists Facebook page. Opportunities to collaborate with CEF are described in a podcast with Jeff Nichols and Don Phares.

Objective: By the end of 2023, ten Free Will Baptist associations will have participated in IM's Go Global training.

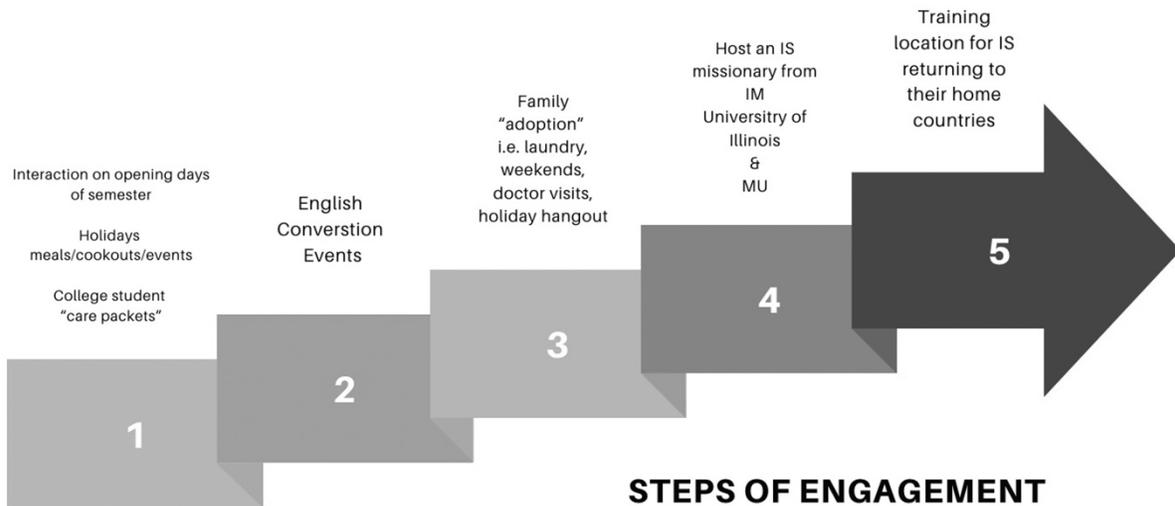
Progress: We made progress toward this goal. IM conducted nine Go Global trainings in 2023. See the Better Together Podcast with Jerry Gibbs to learn how the process works. For more information, visit iminc.org/go-global.

Objective: Increase the number of churches that develop outreach activities to area colleges and universities.

Progress: We have just begun work toward this goal. Nine churches have expressed interest in reaching international students at colleges near their churches. In fall 2023, we established the Reaching International Students Task Force led by Curt Holland (curt@iminc.org). The task force has developed levels for churches to get involved. See the figure on the following page.

The various levels of international student engagement are described on several Better Together Podcast episodes. If you are interested in reaching international students at a college in your area, contact Curt Holland at curt@iminc.org.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



Objective: Increase the number of churches and associations using Refresh resources.

Progress: In 2022, we began working with churches to get them involved in the revitalization process. When a church contacts us, we begin with a Know Your Community report and feedback session. We then encourage them to begin The Hope Initiative. This process allows a church to get moving immediately and prepare for the extensive work of Rekindle. See the graphic below.



Increasingly, churches are finding and utilizing the benefits of Rekindle. I encourage you to watch the Better Together Podcast with Travis Alexander to hear firsthand about some of the results.

Another Refresh resource is the pastor placement program. To date, 25 churches and 18 pastoral candidates have participated. Dr. Tim York describes the process on the Better Together Podcast. For a sense of the process from the perspective of a pastoral candidate, see the Better Together Podcast with Barry Long.

The pastoral counseling program has also been an impactful Refresh resource. Pastors and their families have engaged in 740 counseling sessions since July 2022. To understand how the counseling program works, see the Better Together Podcast with Tom Jones. To see the process from the perspective of a recipient, see the Better Together Podcast with Sherman Branch.

If you are interested in any of these resources, email questions@nafwb.org.

Objective: Increase the number of pastors participating in NAM boot camps.

Progress: We have made progress on this objective. Along with two boot camps in Nashville in 2023, four regional boot camps were conducted. Thus far in 2024, regional boot camps have been conducted in Texas, West Virginia, and Kansas. Future boot camps are scheduled in North Carolina, Michigan, Oregon, California, and Florida. Contact Dr. Brad Ransom to learn more about NAM boot camps (brad@nafwb.org). See the Better Together Podcast with Dr. Ransom and learn more at fwbnam.com/pastors-boot-camp.

TRAIN Goal: Free Will Baptists will develop a training and discipleship mindset.

Objective: Add new Sunday School, Life Group, and Connect classes.

Progress: On the 3 for 30 Survey, 30 churches indicated their intention to start a new class, but we are unsure of their progress.

Objective: Increase the percentage of churches using D6 Family curriculum.

Progress: We are unsure of our progress toward this goal. On the 3 for 30 Survey, 79% of respondents indicated they use D6 curriculum. Contact Katie Greenwood to learn more about the curriculum (katie.greenwood@d6family.com).

See the Better Together Podcast with Dr. Ron Hunter and Katie Greenwood on the D6 curriculum.

Objective: Increase D-Groups.

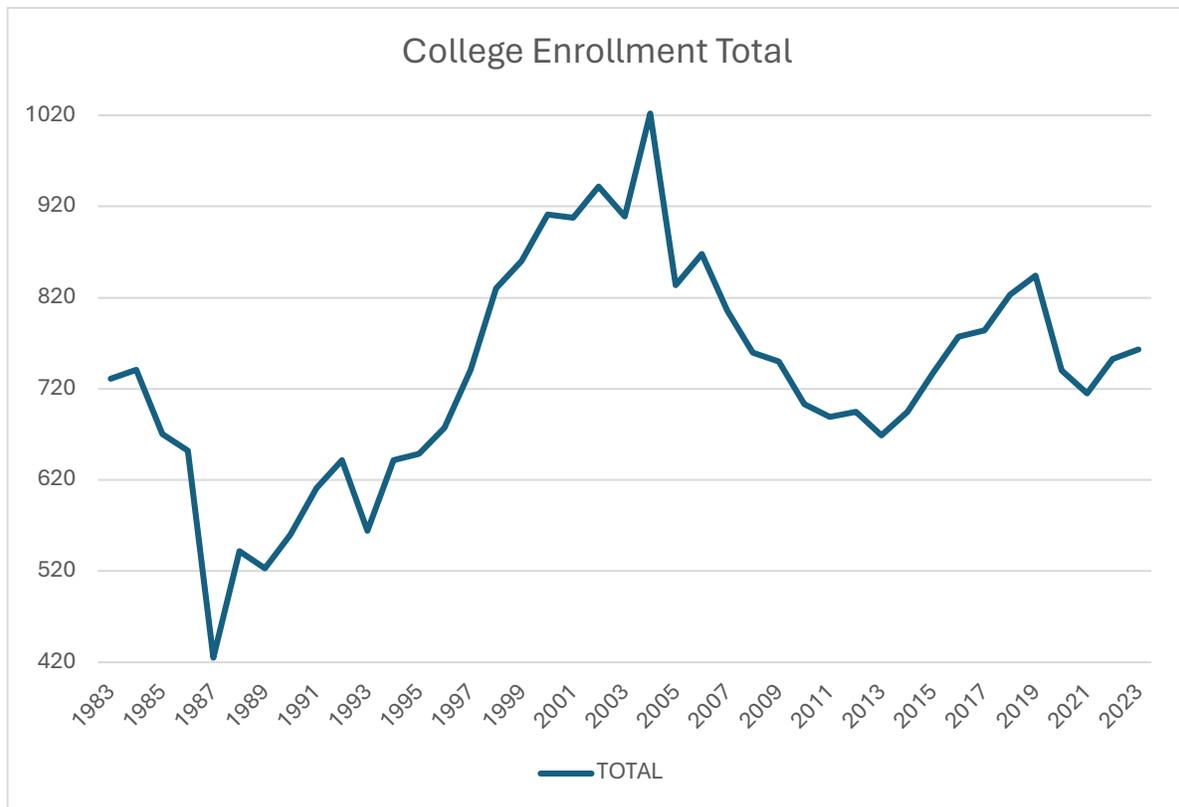
Progress: We believe we are making progress on this goal. On the 3 for 30 Survey, 36% of respondents indicated they were conducting D-Groups. Forty-eight percent of respondents reported plans to start a D-Group in the next 12 months.

To learn more about D-Groups, see the Better Together Podcast with pastor Kevin Barnett on how these groups are utilized at his church.

Objective: Increase the number of students who attend Free Will Baptist colleges.

Progress: There was some progress on this goal in 2023. Free Will Baptist colleges reported enrolling 753 students in the fall of 2023. That was ten more students than enrolled in 2022.

You can track Free Will Baptist College enrollment over the years on the graph on the following page.



If you or someone you know is interested in the new M.Div. program at Welch College, check out the Better Together Podcast with Welch Divinity School faculty.

Objective: Increase the churches that send students to ETEAM and Truth & Peace.

Progress: We need to work toward increasing the number of churches that participate in these programs. In 2023, only 6.3% of Free Will Baptist churches participated in all programs combined. Truth & Peace had students from 3.9% of NAFWB churches, ETEAM 2.9%, and College Missions Program 1.5%. Learn more about these programs at verticalthree.com and iminc.org/go/student-missions.

To gain a greater understanding of the impact of these programs, see the Better Together Podcast with Leslie Nichols and Derek Altom.

Objective: Recruit students who attend other Christian colleges to Free Will Baptist churches.

Progress: We need to work on this objective. We have been encouraging students who attend Liberty University to attend New London Church in Forest, Virginia, where Brandon and Mandy Baber are located (**475-515-1575; baberb19@gmail.com**). This past fall, Pastor Baber reported 40 college students are attending New London Church, three from Free Will Baptist churches.

To learn more about Pastor Baber and his ministry, see his Better Together Podcast episode on church revitalization.

If you have a Christian college in your area and would like to encourage Free Will Baptist students to attend, contact us at questions@nafwb.org.

Objective: Recruit students who attend non-Christian colleges to attend Free Will Baptist churches near the college they attend.

Progress: We are unsure of progress on this objective. To see how this process can work, listen to J.D. Crawford's Better Together Podcast episode about how he became involved with the Mosaic Church in Missouri and began to pursue missions.

Objective: Increase the number of students participating in Church Training Services (CTS Ministry Expo).

Progress: We are unsure of our progress on this objective. Based on the results of the 3 for 30 Survey, 33% of churches indicated they had youth participating in CTS.

See the podcast episode with Derek Altom on how CTS is a valuable discipleship tool.

Objective: Encourage local and state associations to host training sessions for church workers on the Bible and Free Will Baptist doctrine.

Progress: While we are unsure of our progress in this area, we should note the "Why I Am a Free Will Baptist" webinars led by Edwin Hayes have been some of our most downloaded resources.

Objective: Encourage associations and presbyteries to emphasize Free Will Baptist doctrine and practice and theological knowledge in the ordination process.

Progress: We are unsure of our progress in this area.

GIVE Goal: Free Will Baptists will give themselves wholly to the work of the Lord by giving of their talents, gifts, and resources.

Objective: Increase the number of churches and associations assisting other churches.

Progress: Based on the 3 for 30 Survey, 48% of churches reported engaging in activities to assist other churches.

See the Better Together Podcast with Duane Littlefield for an example.

Objective: Increase the number of Disaster Response Teams (DRT) to 15 by 2030.

Progress: Currently eight DRT are established across the U.S.

See the Better Together Podcast with Ken Akers to learn more.

Objective: Increase the number of pastors who serve as chaplains to 100.

Progress: Currently, 16 pastors serve as chaplains across North America.

See the Better Together Podcast with Chris Dotson on the value of chaplains.

Objective: Increase the number of Free Will Baptists who participate in Disaster Response Teams, The Hanna Project, and College Missions Program.

Progress: Based on the 3 for 30 Survey, 17 churches had participants. To learn more about The Hanna Project, visit hannaproject.com. To learn more about College Missions Program, visit iminc.org/go.

Objective: Increase the number of Free Will Baptist pastors who participate in the Board of Retirement and increase contributions.

Progress: Currently, 33% of all Free Will Baptist pastors participate in the BOR program.

Learn more from John Brummitt's Better Together Podcast. Find resources at boardofretirement.com.

Objective: Increase Free Will Baptist endowments from \$15 million to \$30 million by 2030.

Progress: We currently have \$15 million in endowments, including \$1.1 million in The Together Way Trust.

Learn more regarding the impact of these gifts from the Better Together Podcast with David Brown or hear about the intent of The Together Way Endowment from the podcast featuring Bill Evans and Dr. Melvin Worthington.

To learn more, go to fwbgifts.com or call at **877-336-7575**.

For a complete listing of all resources, see the "Here to Help" chart on pages 14-15.

New Initiatives

Bless Every Home

We have partnered with **Bless Every Home** to help our churches pray for, care for, and share the gospel more effectively with their neighbors. We also use this information as a supplemental resource for those participating in Know Your Community as well as The Hope Initiative. Register your church at <https://blesseveryhome.org/nafwb>. When you sign up, your church will be registered in the **BlessEveryHome.com** movement and be connected to others in the NAFWB. As your members become lights in their neighborhoods, you'll be able to follow their pray-care-share progress in covering your mission field on your own real-time dashboard and map.

We are providing your ministry with a free subscription and ask you to partner with us in this endeavor. To enroll, visit <https://blesseveryhome.org/nafwb>.

The Great Dechurching

Based on research used in *The Great Dechurching* (see the podcast with Jim Davis and Michael Graham), we have learned 15.5% of the U.S. population has stopped attending church over the last 25 years. That is 40 million people. The top reason they stopped going to church was simply that they moved. As a result, we have redoubled efforts to use the Free Will Baptist church directory more effectively (directory.nafwb.org). We encourage all churches to provide a picture of their

church, include the church website, provide a short description (about three sentences), and post an inviting video (90 seconds or less). These items can be sent to anna@nafwb.org.

We are stressing to churches we believe they have a responsibility to regard anyone who moves away as *part of their church* until that person joins with a new congregation. As a result, the accuracy of the church directory has become far more critical.

MINCE

MINCE is a financial approach created and popularized by Dr. Jay Moon. Increasingly, churches find it difficult to meet financial demands. The MINCE approach can help churches financially while also enabling them to impact their communities more directly.

For more information, visit <https://nafwb.org/mince/>.

First Aid Ready

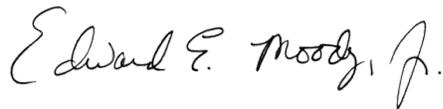
People are increasingly struggling with emotional needs. We are working to help churches become First Aid Ready.

Explore available resources at nafwb.org/firstaid and learn how to equip your church on Becoming First Aid Ready. See the Better Together Podcast with Caleb Smith on how a church can use these resources or watch a presentation from Dr. Eddie Moody at the 2023 National Convention providing a succinct description of the First Aid Ready approach.

Help Us Help You

Finally, help us help you. We encourage you to give to Co-op or The Together Way Plan. Without your giving, we would be unable to serve. If you are not already doing so, we encourage you to consider a designated gift to our office and receiving a Rest of the Family offering.

Please prayerfully consider making a yearly gift to The Together Way Trust. Your endowment gift will give to all national ministries until the Lord returns and will make an eternal impact. When we pool our resources, we truly accomplish more because **we are better together**.



Edward E. Moody, Jr., Ph.D.

Executive Secretary

NAFWB: HERE TO HELP

| PROBLEM | SOLUTION | ACTION |
|---|---|---|
| My community has changed. | Know Your Community | nafwb.org/know |
| My church is inwardly focused. | The Hope Initiative | nafwb.org/hope |
| I have hurting people and a hurting community. | First Aid Ready | nafwb.org/firstaid |
| My church does not have a pastor. | Pastor Placement Program | nafwb.org/refresh |
| My church is plateaued or declining. | Refresh and Rekindle | nafwb.org/refresh |
| I feel disconnected. | Growing Together resources | nafwb.org/grow |
| My pastor or his family is struggling. | Pastor Counseling Program | questions@nafwb.org |
| I don't have an online presence. | Online Church Directory directory.nafwb.org | Send picture, brief description & video to anna@nafwb.org . |
| My church lacks | Facebook graphics | facebook.com/NAFWB |
| I don't know how to reach international students. | Reaching College Students Task Force | curt@iminc.org |

Need help in areas not mentioned here?

NAFWB.ORG/RESOURCES
QUESTIONS@NAFWB.ORG



NAFWB

| PROBLEM | SOLUTION | ACTION |
|---|--|--|
| My church lacks musicians. | FWB Music Commission fwbworship.com | doug@nafwb.org |
| I need financial planning assistance. | Board of Retirement boardofretirement.com | boardofretirement@nafwb.org Call: 877-767-7738 |
| I need estate planning. | FWB Foundation fwbgifts.com | foundation@nafwb.org Call: 877-336-7575 |
| I need to increase discipleship activities. | D6 Family Ministry | d6family.com |
| We need to set up a disaster response team. | Master's Men | ken@nafwb.org |
| We need a leadership boost. | NAM Boot Camps in Nashville or Boot Camps on the Road | fwbnam.com/ pastors-boot-camp/ brad@nafwb.org |
| We need an educational boost. | Take a class, attend FORUM, or attend Forlines Lectures. | Welch.edu |
| We lack Spanish resources. | Spanish Facebook page | facebook.com/NAFWBES |
| My church is struggling financially. | MINCE resources nafwb.org/mince | questions@nafwb.org |
| I want my young people involved. | CTS Ministry Expo Truth & Peace ETEAM Student Missions | verticalthree.com iminc.org/go/ student-missions |

Need help in areas not mentioned here?

NAFWB.ORG/RESOURCES
QUESTIONS@NAFWB.ORG



National Association of
Free Will Baptists

NAFWB