

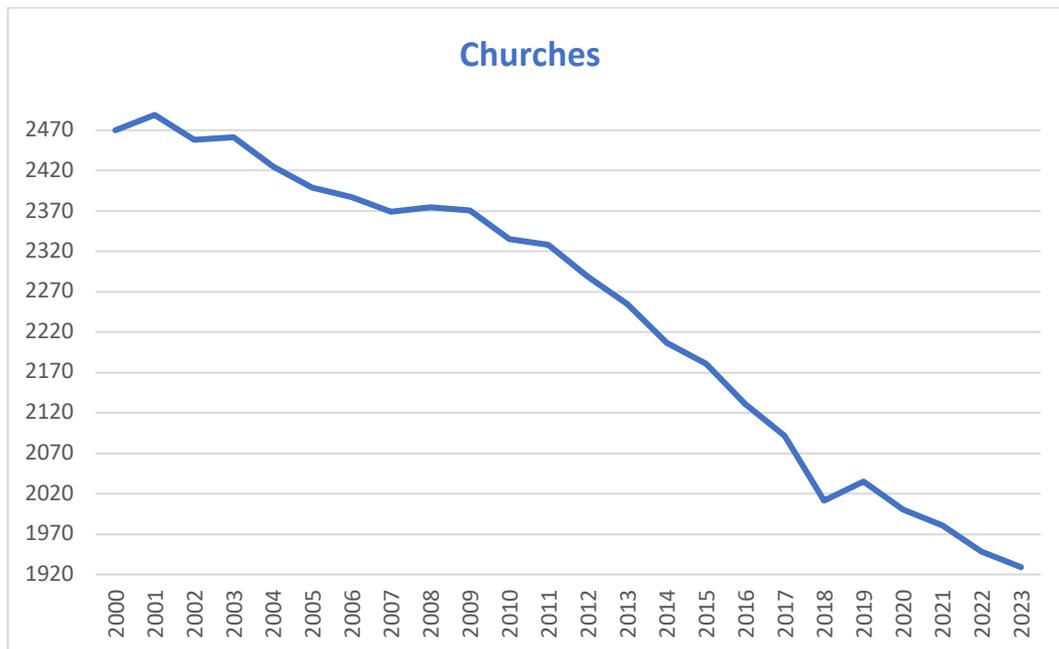
## 2024 Report of the Executive Director

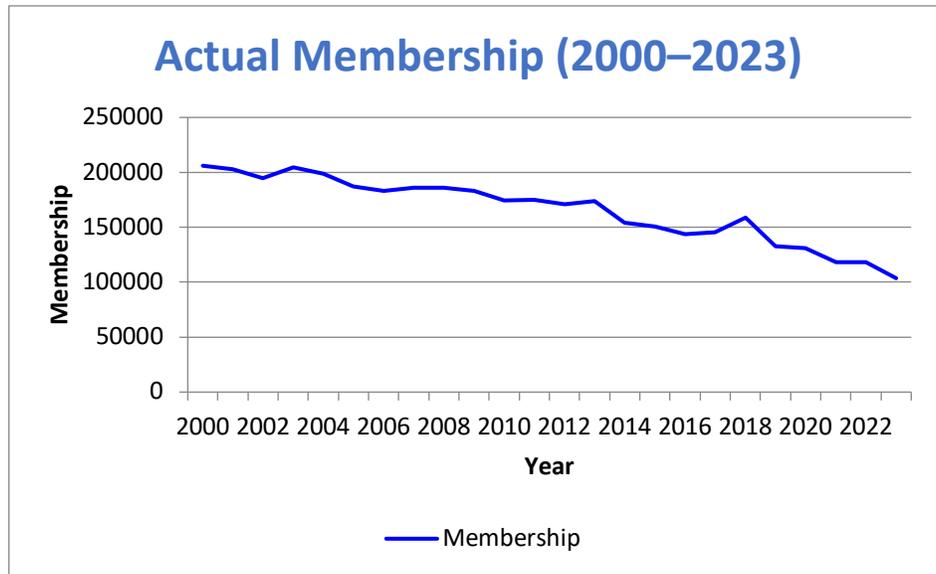
*And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). — Jesus*

When I think of the Allied effort during World War II, I tend to think of the 16 million people who served in the military. It is easy to forget the total war effort that involved rationing, recycling, and producing materials needed to fight the war. The United States became an industrial giant during World War II, producing planes, ships, tanks, jeeps, and battleships.

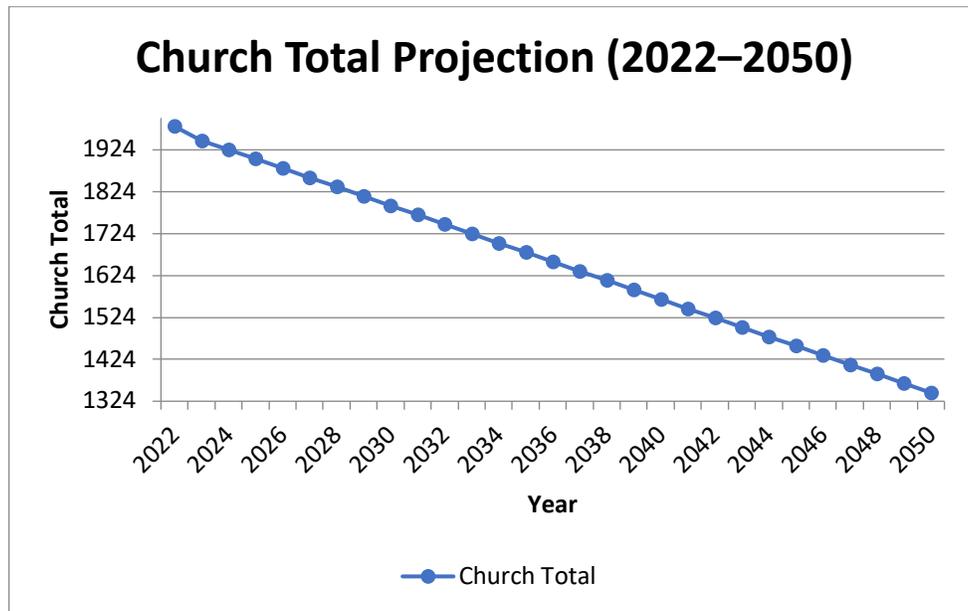
We can draw similarities between this total war effort and the efforts of the National Association of Free Will Baptists (NAFWB) to build churches by reaching people with the gospel, training them in the Christian faith, and giving ourselves wholly to the Lord. As a denomination, we have been doing these things for 90 years. Are we in a good position to do it for another 90 years, should the Lord tarry?

As I write this report, the IM Board recently appointed eight new missionaries to the field. This is an exciting occasion. I have no doubt Free Will Baptists will rise to the occasion and support these new missionaries on the field. However, will we be able to *keep* these missionaries on the field? Below is a chart showing the downward trend of Free Will Baptist churches and membership over the last 23 years.





As of this reporting period, the NAFWB is losing an average of 22 churches and 7,544 members a year. If this trend continues, the picture will be similar to the one on the chart below.



Suppose our newest missionary candidates serve thirty years. It is critical the NAFWB be strong to keep advancing missions work on the field and sending out and supporting the next generation of missionaries. However, if the current trend continues, it is unlikely we can sustain a similar effort in 2050. The United States and Canada are clearly in need of revival. Perhaps we would be wise to intervene and do what we can to reverse this trend, but how?

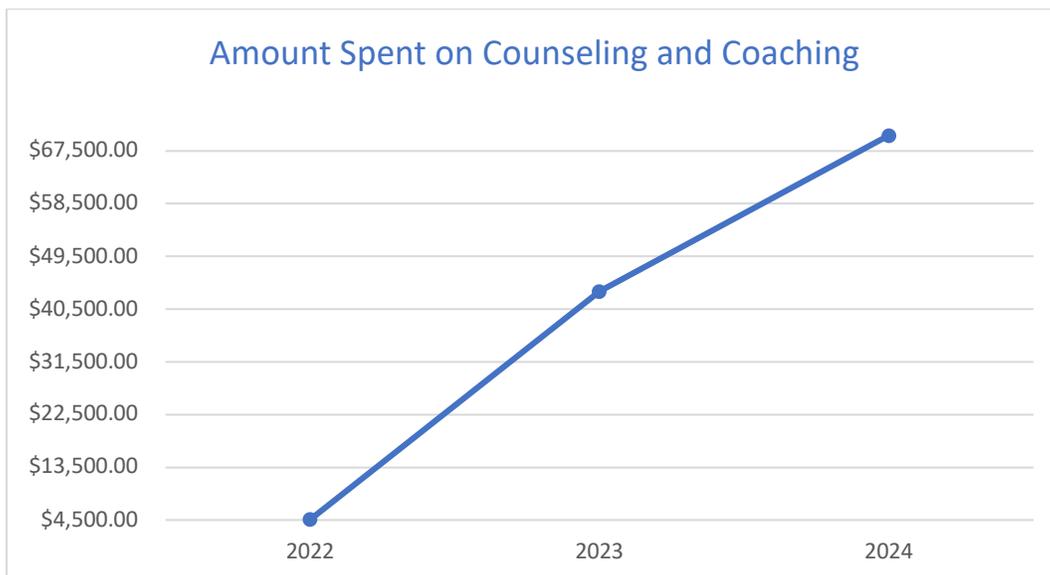
*The labourer is worthy of his hire... (Luke 10:7). — Jesus*

### **Focus on Pastor and Church Health**

During World War II, when a service member was injured or a ship damaged, those around them sprang into action. Medics tended to the injured service member. Beyond that, U.S. military medical personnel made great advancements in caring for the wounded with the development of field hospitals and stateside facilities. When battleships or other equipment were damaged, they were taken to a dry dock for repairs.

Do we engage in the same kinds of care for our pastors and churches? What happens when a church or pastor struggles? To fail to provide support and counseling is like leaving a wounded soldier on the battlefield or a damaged battleship at sea. They would have to continue the fight in a weakened condition.

Some might think pastors and churches do not need help. Our data suggests pastors and churches utilize resources when they are available. Note the chart below showing expenditures on counseling and coaching resources.



In 2022, we spent \$4,500 on counseling and coaching. As awareness of these programs has grown, so has utilization. The costs for counseling and coaching rose to \$67,500 in 2024 for pastors and churches. We believe these counseling and coaching interventions have helped alleviate the pastor shortage and helped many churches grow stronger. Note the following responses from pastors about the counseling program:

*I don't know where I would be if I did not have this resource available to me.*

*I appreciate this gift. It saved me and my marriage.*

*In the most difficult time of nearly 26 years of ministry, and the serious consideration of walking away, this opportunity became a vital piece in my decision to continue. Having someone to talk with and them asking the questions to help navigate the thinking process made it easier to refocus on the calling God has placed upon my life.*

*I didn't even know this ministry existed, but I can say with full honesty: without it, I don't know where my marriage, my faith, or my mental health would be right now. As a pastor's wife, I've spent years carrying wounds I never had time — or permission — to unpack. Some of them went all the way back to childhood. I thought I had moved on. I thought surviving was healing. But it wasn't. I had just pushed it all down because that's what life teaches you to do: take the hit, stay quiet, keep going. This ministry gave me a place to finally lay it down. To face it. To begin to heal — not just from this current season of pain in ministry, but from a lifetime of unspoken sorrow I didn't know was still shaping me. If you're wondering whether it matters — let me tell you, it does.*

*It saved pieces of me I thought were already too far gone. I'll never be the same, and I'm so deeply, eternally grateful.*

This ministry has enabled us to keep pastors and their wives in the ministry, just like WWII hospitals helped keep military personnel alive. Consider these responses:

*When I believed the enemy had finally won in my life and ministry, this program showed me that the grace of God was so much deeper and so much more powerful.*

*Pastoring can sometimes feel like you are in a cave all alone and nobody else cares. It was a comfort to hear God's still small voice say that there are others in this same battle and then be able to talk to a counselor about the issues that come up.*

*This program helped me get through a very difficult time in my life that I couldn't do myself.*

Jesus said the “labourer is worthy of his hire,” and Paul reiterated this principle. We have started saying, “The laborer is worthy of help.” We are on pace to spend over \$100,000 on counseling alone for pastors, their wives, and in special situations, their children. This seems like a lot, but ask yourself, “How have Free Will Baptists invested in pastors and churches?” One of the reasons I believe we have a pastor shortage is because we have not made pastors a priority. Consider a few more responses:

*I have never experienced this level of help from our denomination. It is incredible and invaluable for our pastors and families to have this option to help sustain and grow our faith and address roadblocks in a healthy and confidential manner.*

*I appreciate the NAFWB offering this program and taking care of the cost during my greatest hour of need. Without this, I wouldn't have sought out and received treatment.*

*I am so proud to be a part of a denomination that cares for the mental health of its pastors and their families.”*

At this writing, the giving from churches is not there to support these vital ministries. I encourage you to give so we can continue ministering. We believe helping pastors and their families is a key to reversing the loss of pastors. We believe coaching is a key to helping churches not just survive but thrive.



### **Focus on Infrastructure**

The World War II period saw the largest migration of people in U.S. history, as people moved to industrial centers to build materials necessary to win the war. The U.S. outpaced her enemies in production. By 1945, the U.S. had over 90,000 ships, 86,000 tanks, and nearly 300,000 aircraft. Some would say the war was won in the factory. What is the infrastructure Free Will Baptists must support to build churches and sustain our efforts on the mission field?

### **Convention**

A major component of the NAFWB is the annual convention. At the convention, we commission missionaries, showcase young people, engage in educational activities, conduct our business, and gather for fellowship and worship. Because of online streaming, even those unable to attend in person reap the benefits.

For comparison purposes, 5.1% of Free Will Baptists attended the 2023 convention in Raleigh. This is a much higher percentage than other denominations. For example: although Southern Baptists have larger conventions (roughly 18,000 attendees) only about .13% of their congregants attend the convention. In contrast, our convention plays a *significant* role in the life of the NAFWB.

Last year, I reported to the General Board about convention shortfalls and identified the real problem. From 2019 until last year, we ran on a deficit of around \$80,000 each year. Last year, we received \$50,000 from North American Ministries (NAM) and \$30,000 in convention offerings and still experienced a \$30,000 shortfall. This year, NAM has given another \$60,000. The Foundation has committed to giving \$25,000. Yet, we still need another \$30,000 to break even. With this in mind, we urge attendees to designate giving to the Executive Office or increase giving to the Cooperative/The Together Way program to help offset costs. So far, that giving has not materialized, and it is necessary to put us on firm footing for future conventions.

### **Curriculum, Colleges, and Camps**

Curriculum is a key infrastructure component, providing churches with biblical teaching from a Free Will Baptist perspective. In addition to curriculum, D6 Family Ministry conducts the Vertical

Three Conference and Truth and Peace. These ministries, along with ETEAM and CMP from IM, Inc., have proven to be very effective. Read more at [onemag.org/keeping\\_students.htm](http://onemag.org/keeping_students.htm).

In many ways, our young people are an untapped strength. As you may know, the results from the Cooperative Election Survey in 2022 indicated 28% of Free Will Baptists are a parent or guardian of a child under age 18. This is the third highest of any denomination!

In my opinion, this data indicates we should be putting greater emphasis on our camps. If you review the May releases from the **Better Together Podcast ([nafwb.org/podcast](http://nafwb.org/podcast))**, you will hear from three camp directors (Camp Caleb, Kentucky; Cumberland Camp, Tennessee; and the Indiana State Camp). These camps ran from 92 to 243 students each last year. These three camps alone saw 42 decisions, and seven young men answered the call to the ministry. Camps are a crucial pipeline to our colleges and churches, helping raise up pastors and other workers.

Other infrastructure needs are our colleges. One 3 for 30 objective is to enroll a thousand students in our colleges. Last year's enrollment is below.

### Free Will Baptist College Enrollment

States	Welch	Randall	Southeastern	Total
Tennessee	244	5	0	249
Oklahoma	10	177	0	187
North Carolina	16	0	51	67
International	27	18	1	46
California	4	35	0	39
Texas	1	29	0	30
Alabama	19	1	3	23
Florida	19	0	0	19
Illinois	10	0	1	11
South Carolina	2	0	8	10
Virginia	7	1	1	9
Kentucky	7	0	0	7
Mississippi	7	0	0	7
Missouri	6	1	0	7
Rhode Island	2	5	0	7
Arkansas	1	4	0	5
Indiana	5	0	0	5
Georgia	2	2	0	4
Kansas	0	4	0	4
Michigan	2	2	0	4
Ohio	4	0	0	4
Arizona	1	1	1	3
Louisiana	1	1	0	2
New York	1	1	0	2
Puerto Rico	0	2	0	2
USVI	2	0	0	2
Colorado	1	0	0	1
Idaho	0	1	0	1
Iowa	0	1	0	1
Minnesota	0	1	0	1
Montana	1	0	0	1
South Dakota	1	0	0	1
Washington	0	1	0	1
West Virginia	1	0	0	1
	<b>404</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>763</b>

Students who go to Free Will Baptist colleges are significantly more likely to continue to minister and serve in Free Will Baptist churches. We need more students in this pipeline.

*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? (Luke 14:28) — Jesus*

## **What am I asking you to do?**

### **Focus on Strategy**

To defeat the Axis powers, the Allies had to work together and follow a strategy. They were intentional and coordinated their efforts while maintaining their autonomy. The denomination also will need to follow a strategy in this major effort to turn our trends around. In 2020, denominational leadership developed the 3 for 30 plan, which consisted of three goals to emphasize until 2030: *reach people with the gospel, train them in the faith, and give of ourselves to the Lord*. What would happen if churches and associations worked toward these goals? You can see a breakdown of the goals and objectives at [nafwb.org/3for30](https://nafwb.org/3for30).

### **Utilize and Promote**

Utilize and promote resources like **Know Your Community (nafwb.org/know)**. Sixty-nine percent of Free Will Baptist churches that have used Know Your Community can identify an action they have taken to engage their community. If you have used this resource, consider working with other similar churches, discussing ways to collaborate. Also, any church that has participated in Know Your Community can receive a free “new mover list” for newcomers within a five-mile radius of the church. What might happen if we identify the needs of our community and engage our new neighbors?

Use the **BLESS app (nafwb.org/bless)** to pray for your community. The app is a free resource for NAFWB churches and congregations. Encourage other churches in your state to use it as well and maybe even set goals for praying and sharing. What might happen if we get serious about praying for our neighbors?

We have seen great progress in churches that have used **The Hope Initiative (nafwb.org/hope)**. One church leader said, “We’ve done more outreach in 30 days than the last 30 years.” What might happen if our churches actively engage lost friends, family members, neighbors, and coworkers?

Consider using **First Aid Ready resources (nafwb.org/firstaid)** to help hurting people in your community and the **Reaching International Students Task Force** if you have a college nearby (contact Curt Holland at [curt@iminc.org](mailto:curt@iminc.org)). What might happen if our churches are equipped to help hurting people and serve international students?

Encourage churches to use **Rekindle Coaching (nafwb.org/rekindle)** if they are struggling. When you hear of a church without a pastor, encourage that congregation to use **The Shepherd Initiative (nafwb.org/shepherding)** to keep moving forward during their pastor search.

**These resources work!** Rather than being idle, let's get busy doing biblical activities with a proven track record. Let's encourage others to utilize these resources, knowing our words can either be a blessing or a curse. May we be people whose words are "fitly spoken," both in person and on social media.

## **Give**

As you give, I encourage you to give to D6, Welch College, our other colleges, and Free Will Baptist camps as well as the Executive Office to support infrastructure. I encourage you to give through the Cooperative/Together Way program as a mean of giving to all national agencies. Cooperative giving would solve many of the financial problems we face. If you can't give cooperatively, **please put the Executive Office in your budget** so we can continue to do what we do.

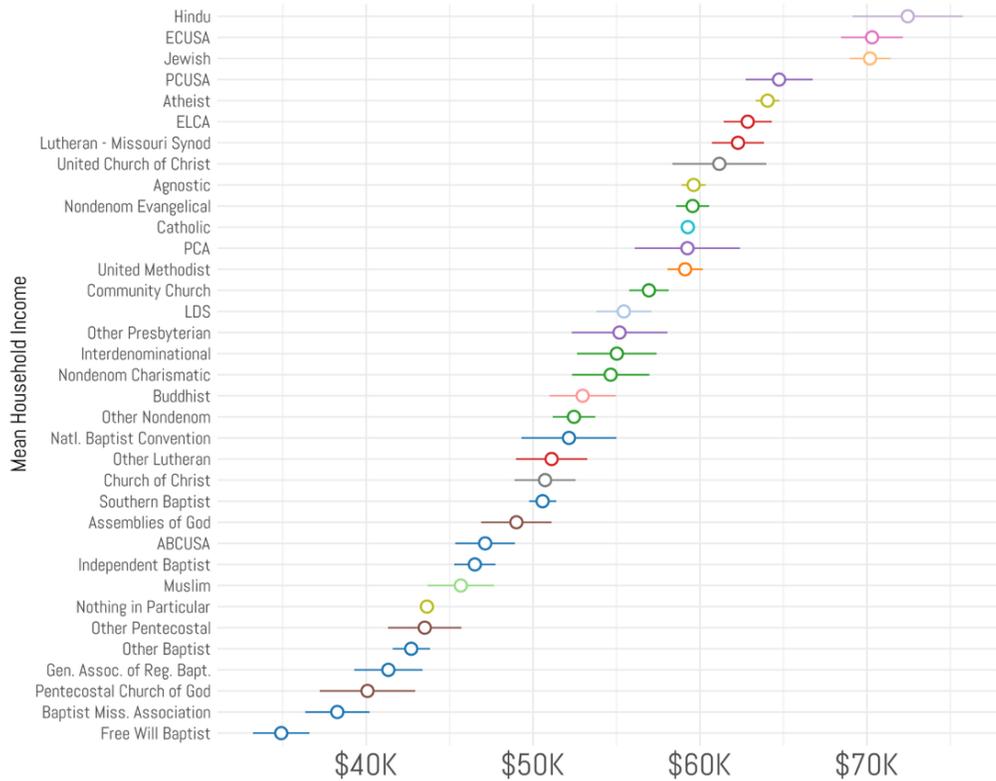
## **Focus on the Value of Free Will Baptists**

During World War II, the Allies knew they were fighting for a free world. This was a very important cause. Free Will Baptists have an even greater cause. We are trying to reach people with the gospel. Without it, they will spend eternity in Hell. We seek to train them in the gospel, which changes their life trajectory, impacting the kinds of families they will have and the way they live. Some might wonder if Free Will Baptists, who are less than 1% of the U.S. population, are even needed for this task. Wouldn't it be better to just focus on Kingdom work?

Below is a chart Ryan Burge created from the results of the Cooperative Election Study. Notice the religious group with the *highest* income is Hindus, and the group with the *lowest* is Free Will Baptists. Some have debated whether these results truly describe Free Will Baptists. I believe they are missing the point. The point is: 50,000 Americans were surveyed, using a drop-down menu to choose from many different religious affiliations. The ones with the lowest incomes said, "I am Free Will Baptist."

That tells you a great deal about our denomination. Free Will Baptists are engaged in Kingdom work with those who struggle the most from an income and educational standpoint. Many of our churches are in rural areas and will never be highlighted for their size. In the church world, most would not consider these small, rural churches to be very important. **But they are important** to the economically and educationally disadvantaged. If Free Will Baptists are diminished, who will take the gospel to them?

The Average Household Income of the Largest Religious Traditions



@ryanburge  
Data: Cooperative Election Study, 2022-2023

In December 1941, the trends were not good for the free world, but the Allies came together and reversed those trends. The world benefited from their focus decades later. Let's reverse our own trends and build churches for present and future generations. This is critical, not only for North America but also for lost people around the world. It is important to provide the infrastructure to continue reaching a world that has never heard. By working together, we can reverse the trends.

**We are better together!**

**Edward E. Moody, Jr., Ph.D.**  
**Executive Director**

Click the QR code below a list of the resources available to assist you and your church.

