

Convention Shortfalls and the Real Problem

Unless we receive over \$106,000 in offerings this year during the convention, we will have a shortfall for the sixth year in a row. Conventions are scheduled through 2028, so this is a problem that requires immediate attention.

Problem

We expect to have a shortfall of over \$106,000 this year in the convention. Below is a breakdown of the actual costs of conventions since 2019 and the shortfall for each.

<u>Actual Costs</u>	<u>Shortfall</u>
2019 \$468,080.88	-\$84,324.41
2021 \$435,277.73	-\$10,484.07
2022 \$500,572.40	-\$74,080.76
2023 \$517,338.04	-\$85,974.45
2024 \$546,314.66	-\$31,821.94
2025 \$574,238.52 (projected)	-\$106,738.52 (projected)

The convention shortfall does not only impact the Executive Office. D6 Family Ministry is experiencing the same challenge. From 2021 to 2023, the average loss for the Vertical Three Conference is \$76,300 per year. The Convention and Vertical Three shortfalls are averaging \$160,000 a year.

Why are we having this problem?

We are tempted to blame the current problem on inflation, and in fact, convention costs have increased \$100,000 since 2018. Additionally, Vertical Three expenses are rising \$20,000 each year. While expenses have increased, revenue has not. The reduction in giving to co-op and The Together Way is down \$431,925 over the past 10 years (see page 19 of the Digest).

Revenue from church dues is also declining. See below.

NAFWB Church Dues Income

<u>Year</u>	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Income</u>
2019	2,035	\$305,250
2020	2,000	\$350,000
2021	1,981	\$346,675
2022	1,948	\$340,900
2023	1,929	\$331,100
2024	1,925	\$324,554

Church dues were \$150.00 in 2019 and increased to \$175.00 in 2020. Church dues are \$200.00 per church beginning 2025 and will increase \$25 every three years beginning in 2028. Even with the fee increase, the loss of churches has resulted in decreased revenue, making it more difficult to cover the expenses of the convention.

Lost Church Dues Income

<i>Year</i>	<i>Churches Lost</i>	<i>Income Lost</i>
2020	35	\$6,125
2021	19	\$3,325
2022	33	\$5,775
2023	19	\$3,325
2024	4	\$800

The Executive Office is responsible for covering shortfalls for the cost of the convention. Total giving to the Executive Office in 2024 was \$487,603.54. (See pages 20 and 42 of the Digest.) D6 Family Ministry covers shortfalls for Vertical Three. The decline in the number of Free Will Baptist church members over the last ten years has impacted curriculum sales, directly affecting D6 Family income.

NAFWB Church Membership

<i>Year</i>	<i>Membership</i>
2018	158,687
2019	132,631
2020	131,233
2021	118,292
2022	118,123
2023	103,653

The real culprit for this problem is church health, which we will address later.

Why bother?

Since the convention is so expensive, should we even bother having one? Attendance has increased at the convention even though expenses for attendees (travel, hotel costs, etc.) have risen as well.

Convention Attendance Post-COVID

<i>Year</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Attendance</i>
2021	Memphis	3,345
2022	Birmingham	4,038
2023	Raleigh	5,159

Why has attendance increased post-COVID despite the increased cost of attending? At a time when the world appears to have turned upside down, the convention provides an important opportunity for fellowship. Along with the services, there are over 90 seminars in English and Spanish that can equip attendees. Further, the convention provides a place for our agencies and others to promote ministries and missionaries as well as important networking opportunities. Read a small sample of the survey responses we received after last year's convention:

Encouragement

There is nothing like worshipping our Savior with thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ... just a glimpse of what Heaven might be like. –Anonymous Attendee

Always one of my most favorite weeks of the year; a time to refresh, reunite, and be re-encouraged! –Anonymous Attendee

Equipping

The 2023 National Convention of FWB's was an encouraging time of Christian fellowship, prayer, challenging seminars and sermons, and beautiful praises given to our King! I'm already looking forward to Tampa. –Anonymous Attendee

"HEY PASTORS--AND CHURCH LEADERS--THE INCREDIBLE SEMINARS ARE REASON ENOUGH TO ATTEND THE FWB NATIONAL CONVENTION! THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE DID AN OUTSTANDING JOB OFFERING A WIDE ARRAY OF TIMELY & INFORMATIVE CONVENTION SEMINARS. PASTORS, GRAB YOUR DEACONS & CHURCH LEADERS & BE SURE TO ATTEND THE 2024 NATIONAL IN TAMPA FOR GREAT TRAINING & VALUABLE INFO THAT YOU'LL ONLY FIND IN OUR AWESOME SEMINARS!" –Doug Carey

Impactful for New and Old Free Will Baptists

This was my first NAFWB Convention, but it will not be my last. The evening services were challenging and uplifting. The seminars were so helpful, providing very timely information that can help address current needs in our church. –Anonymous Attendee

I have participated in the annual NAFWB Convention for many years; this may have been the best I have ever attended. The preaching was excellent. The music was superb. The business sessions were gracious. As a denomination, we may be healthier than at any time in our history. –Anonymous Attendee

An Investment in the Future

There is no greater investment than the investment of our youth. –Anonymous Attendee
 The investment in the future may be the biggest benefit of the convention. You probably know about the results of a survey of alumni from Truth and Peace, ETEAM, the Youth Evangelistic Team, Church Training Service, and the College Missions Program. (See April-May 2024 *ONE Magazine* article “Keeping Our College Students.”) Results indicated that 99.25% of these Gen Zs are still attending church—85% a Free Will Baptist church. Some of the 15% who are not attending a Free Will Baptist church indicated there is not one where they live. Eighty-seven percent reported being involved in ministry in their church. Additionally, 43% of the sample had attended a Free Will Baptist college. Although the sample is not purely Vertical Three alumni, it is clear to see that Truth and Peace and CTS are working as these results are very uncharacteristic of the rest of Gen Z.

Whether we are thinking of a local pastor, lay person, or a child reciting Scripture, the convention is an investment that is truly paying dividends. Consider the below comment from an anonymous attendee last year:

The 2023 National Convention truly highlighted the growing diversity among our churches. Free Will Baptists of various ages, races, ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds were united in worship and working in unity. I'm more encouraged about the future of our denomination than ever before! Anonymous Attendee

Solutions

We *need* the convention. National ministries received \$18,078,835.17 in gifts in 2024. (See page 43 of the Digest.) The denomination can handle the additional \$107,000 (\$160,000 total with V3) needed for the Convention. What are some ways we can address this need? We will likely need to utilize multiple solutions.

Increase convention offerings.

To balance the convention budget for 2025, we have budgeted \$106,738.52 in offerings. (See page 35 of the Digest.) The total received for past conventions is below. This excludes the Wednesday evening Missions Offering that is divided between IM and NAM.

Convention Offerings

2018	\$8,441.99
2019	\$7,045.60
2020	\$385.00*
2021	\$5,951.55
2022	\$8,204.28
2023	\$18,408.00
2024	\$80,396.43**

*General Board Meeting only

**\$19.51 per attendee

Last year, we asked every attendee and viewer to give \$10.00 to the offering. The extra \$10,203.72 was very helpful. You may think that \$80,000 is out of reach, but if just 16 churches gave \$5,000, the need would be met.

Increase church dues.

Next year, the church fee will increase from \$175.00 to \$200.00. As a result, if we maintain our current number of churches, income will rise from \$331,100 to \$378,400. If we lose 87 churches (as we did in 2023), our income will be \$361,000.

Increase the convention state host fee.

We currently ask states to contribute \$40,000 to the convention. What if we ask for \$60,000 or more after the 2028 convention?

Begin charging attendees to attend the convention.

Vertical Three charges attendees to help offset their expenses. What if we charge a fee to non-V3 attendees? If we had charged \$10.00 per non-V3 attendees last year, we would have received \$21,200.

Increase giving to the Executive Office, which underwrites the cost of the convention.

If giving to the Executive Office increases, we will be able to move salaries that are currently in the convention budget enabling us to remove pressure from the convention. Giving to the Executive Office can take place via co-op/Together Way, designated money to the office (see Digest page 42), or gifts to the Rest of the Family Offering (see Digest page 18). Please place the Executive Office in your budget if you haven't already done so. If you have, please consider increasing your giving to the Executive Office.

Increase giving to D6 Family Ministry, which underwrites the cost of Vertical Three.

Sales from curriculum and V3 fees are not enough to sustain D6 Family Ministry. Would you consider putting D6 Family Ministry in your budget? This will place them in a better position to underwrite costs to the convention.

These are all options we are asking the General Board to consider. However, it is important that we take some immediate steps to stem the tide of this problem.

The Root

Loss of churches and church members are at the root of our funding problem. The problem does not just impact convention funding; it impacts all of our ministries. Even after utilizing a plethora of interventions (see Digest pages 15-16), we lost 87 churches in 2023. Based on the health of our churches, the health of many of our pastors, and the shortage of pastors we are experiencing, these problems will accelerate.

Pray for Our Team

Deanna Hollifield Accounting Administrator for the Executive Office, Convention, *ONE Magazine*, Co-op, and the NAFWB building

Eric Thomsen *ONE Magazine* editor, designer of graphics for our weekly memes and events

Ryan Lewis Convention and Leadership Conference Manager, *Better Together Podcast* producer, social media coordinator, nafwb.org website administrator

Anna Fox Convention Registration Coordinator, Church Directory Coordinator, Rekindle Coach Coordinator, BLESS Coordinator

Elizabeth Hill Building Receptionist, Know Your Community Coordinator, The Hope Initiative Coordinator

Stephen Yerby NAFWB Building Facility Manager, Church Liaison

Also pray for **Tommy Jones** who is part of our pastor counseling program. Tommy alone has conducted over 800 counseling sessions in the last two years.

Pray for **Dr. Tim York**. Dr. York works with our pastor placement program and with more than 25 churches that are without a pastor. He also leads our pastor hangout.