

Missouri Free Will Baptist

GEM Magazine

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the GEM Magazine

Volume 97, Number 2
March-April, 2026

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In this issue:

From the Editor ..... Page 3
Missouri Missions ..... Page 4
Church News ..... Page 6
In Loving Memory ..... Page 8
From Our Boards ..... Page 9
Sowing Seeds In A Prison Yard ..... Page 11
MOFWB Calendar ..... Page 12
2026 State Meeting ..... Page 13
Ministry Gems ..... Page 14
What Is the Purpose Of Sunday School? ..... Page 15
Ten Practical Ways to Encourage A Discouraged Church ... Page 16
Financial Receipts ..... Page 18
Available Churches and Fill-in List ..... Page 19

The Free Will Baptist GEM (1929-present), published by the MO State Association, grew to widespread regional, even national distribution across the denomination. The longest-running Free Will Baptist periodical, the GEM continues to be published today. The Historical Commission invites you to enjoy reading nearly a century of amazing history in the GEM Magazine.

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from the Editor, Stan Bunch





WORKING TOGETHER REQUIRES TRUST
(AND YOU MIGHT GET HURT)

Several times while serving with International Missions stateside, I would take on employment as a means of helping our financial account accumulate more rapidly, and because I enjoyed the work, which ranged from row crop work, pig farming, grading roads, flooring installation, and pole barn building. One incident stands out in my mind that illustrates the title of this article. Robert and John were coworkers and friends. On this occasion, each had a ladder leaning against one side of the same corner. John needed to drive a nail that he couldn't quite reach. I heard the words, "Hey Robert, hold this nail for me, I can't hang on to the ladder and nail, and drive it through the barn metal at the time." Both men were very experienced builders, so missing the nail head was not a real concern. They thought. Robert agreed to hold the nail, and at the precise moment when John's forearm went forward to strike the blow, John's dad yelled, "Don't hit Robert's finger!" John's eyes moved from the steel nail head to Robert's fingernail, and the result was not funny, but it was. Robert scurried down the ladder rather quickly and had some choice words for John. The lesson: "Working together requires trust, and you might get hurt."

I would trust John to hit the right nail head 99% of the time. He unintentionally missed the mark & Robert was hurt. However, trusting another person or group at some point will likely open the door to being hurt, offended, or misunderstood. Christians experience this and more. Maturity as believers leads us to work through these difficult situations and grow for the glory of God.

Working together requires trust. Mutual trust allows us to see the merits and benefits of cooperating together toward common goals and interests. Trusting each other leads to the accomplishment of greater goals. A business owner who trusts her employees will avoid micromanaging; as a result, production increases, and employees are better stewards of their talents and abilities. The man who recently installed new carpet in our state office had three trustworthy crews working simultaneously on different jobs. Production tripled.

If the threat of potential negative results looms larger than the blessing and benefit of working together, the individual or group will likely isolate themselves and forfeit the blessing of greater maturity and fruit bearing. Conversely, when the benefit of trusting others and associating together in common interests is embraced greater things are accomplished. Two mules pulling together accomplish much more than two working independently.

Working with others might eventually result in disagreements, conflict, and hurt feelings. We can take our marbles and go home, normally to become more upset, angry, and bitter if those issues are not confessed and dealt with biblically. Much of the time, the things that upset us are petty, childish, and selfish. In the larger scheme of things, the issues that divide us are usually because we lust for our own way, for our opinion to prevail, or some personal preference.

John & Robert remained good friends, even though Robert never again held a nail for John. Because they continued to work together cooperatively, there are many barns and homes in southwest Missouri and southeastern Kansas with the marks of their labor on them.

Scripture and maturity as a believer will lead you to work with others. Your pastor, congregation, local, state, or national association of churches will not do everything exactly the way you would prefer. Your husband, wife, children, and grandchildren probably don't either, yet you still claim them and accept their birthday gifts.

Earning the trust of others is a process. I want to be trustworthy. I don't want to abuse the confidence of others, nor take it for granted. Sadly, I am capable of failure, offense, harsh words, or any other number of sins and errors. So are you. Can we agree to grow together in our trust and commit to work together for God's glory and refuse to allow minor offenses or differences to divide us? May God help us to apply this concept in our home, neighborhood, church, and association.

WE ARE TRULY BETTER TOGETHER



from the Missions Director, Steve Reeves

WHY HAVE A MISSIONS CONFERENCE?

For some churches and associations, the annual missions conference is a thing of the past. We used to do it, but it no longer seems relevant. I suggest we still need them. A **missions conference** helps a church lift its eyes beyond its own walls and refocus on God's global purposes. It's not just an event—it's a spiritual **reset** that reminds the church *why* it exists. Here are the key reasons churches (and associations) should hold missions conferences…

1. To Obey Christ's Last Command

Jesus' final instruction to His followers was international in focus—the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:18–20) helps the church intentionally focus on that command, not as a side ministry but as central to discipleship. A missions conference or emphasis reminds us why we exist as believers and as churches. A church that is not involved in reaching lost people (whether down the street or across the world) is a disobedient church.

2. To Cultivate God's Heart for the Nations in our Churches

It's easy for churches to become inward-focused, concerned only with what meets our needs and feeds our preferences. Missions Conferences: Expose the congregation to people without the Gospel; Share stories of what God is doing around the world; Help believers see people, not statistics. God's heart has always been for *all nations*. You have never locked eyes with a person that God did not love with every bit of His being. If they matter to God, they must matter to us. Missions helps align our hearts with His.

3. To Inform and Mobilize the Church

Many believers want to be involved in missions but don't know how. A missions conference: Educates the church about global needs; Highlights missionaries and how we can partner with them; Invites people to pray, give, or go. **It turns interest into action.**

4. To Encourage Personal Calling & Obedience

God often uses missions conferences to: Call people into full-time missions; Rekindle passion for evangelism; Challenge believers to live on mission…locally and globally. For some, it's a turning point moment of surrender. Some lament that we don't see young people answering God's call to missions, to pastoral ministry, to church planting. Maybe it is because we have not challenged them with the possibility that God might call them.

5. To Strengthen Missionary Relationships

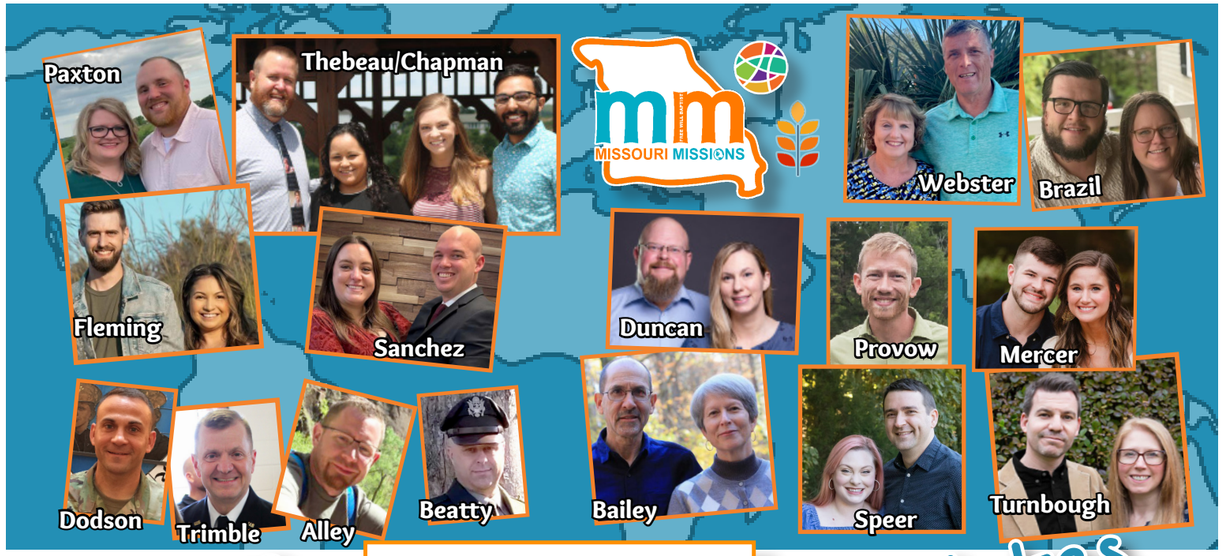
Bringing missionaries into the life of the church: Gives missions a human face; Encourages those who serve; builds long-term partnership with missionaries rather than one-time support. It reminds missionaries they are *sent*, known, and prayed for. One of our greatest encouragements while serving as a missionaries was knowing that people back home were remembering us and praying for us every day. There were times when we could literally sense the prayers of God's people in our life and ministry.

6. To Refocus the Church's Identity

Ultimately, a missions conference reminds the church: We are not the focus—we are the sending base. God's mission defines the church, not the other way around. Every believer has a role in God's global story.

If your church (or local association) does not have a missions conference or some kind of missions emphasis each year, I want to encourage and challenge you to do so. I would be happy to assist you in any way I can. A missions conference helps a church **remember** why it exists and how it can be a part of God's plan to reach the world.





MMB SHOW ME plan Updates

- STATE -

Paxton - Grace Fellowship (Cape Girardeau): Ask God to bless and send them new people through their partnership ministry and the community. Ask God to call out more leaders to serve in the church.

Thebeau/Chapman - Mosaic (Rolla): The church will be undertaking a building program in 2026. Ask God to provide the needed funds to finish the facility. Please pray for God to bless. Pray that the church will continue to grow and that God will provide a wall of protection from the enemy.

Fleming - Freedom Point (Florissant): The church has a good group of children who attend each week. Pray for their youth workers and for God to call out more to help.

Sanchez - Esperanza (Grandview): Seven people from the church served on a mission trip to Cuba in January. They were a blessing to the folks there. One woman was baptized in February. (See page 10)

- NORTH AMERICAN -

Webster - Connect (Florida): The Villages (Florida): Connect Church continues to do well. They have moved to a community center while their new facility is being built. They had 110 attendees on their first Sunday at the new location. Please pray that the church will continue to grow.

Brazil (Hawaii): Dylan and Katie moved to Hilo, Hawaii, in January. Please pray for them as they make adjustments to their new field of service. Pray for God to go before them and prepare the way.

- INTERNATIONAL -

Mercer (University of Missouri): They continue to see fruit from their efforts as international students come and go each semester. Bradley and Madison are able to share the love of Jesus. on a regular basis.

Bailey (Japan): The KCC Church saw a school-age boy come to know Jesus at their Christmas Service. Several people are attending but have yet to place their faith in Jesus. Pray for their Salvation.

Speer (Japan): Winter is long, cold, and filled with snow in Sapporo, Japan. Please pray for Daniel, Kate, and their family that God would keep them safe and healthy.

Turnbough (Spain): The work in Villalba continues to reach out to their community, and God is blessing them with a regular flow of new attenders each month. Please pray for Matthew, Brooke, and their family.

Duncan (Ecuador): Adam and Carol continue to reach out to surrounding villages with their medical ministry and to help towns improve their water facilities. They hosted a medical mission trip in November. Missouri Missions Board members Curt Gwartney and David Beltz were a part of this team.

Provow (Bulgaria): The church in Novi Pazar is experiencing growth after a long period of struggles. They have added 2 new families and several individuals. Pray for their salvation. Silas Houser, who will be joining the work in the Shumen region soon, arrived in Bulgaria in January.

Cape



Pastor Ray Paxton baptized Scotty and Stephen on Sunday, January 4th at the church in Cape Girardeau.

Freman Chapel



Freeman Chapel held a baptism service on January 11th. Pictured Left to right: Kai, Ryan & Brittany Williams, Braden Smithers & pastor Vernon Maggart.
Brother Maggart has pastored the church for fifty-three years.

Mill Creek



On Sunday, August 31st, 2025, Bro, Raymond Michael baptized 2 of his grandchildren. Pictured are: Bro. Raymond Michael, Liam Michael, Aubree Michael, Remi Bruning and Jenny Pinson.

Rejoice

Pastor Aaron Pontious baptized four new believers recently. Baptisms are regular motive for rejoicing at the Rejoice church in Columbia.









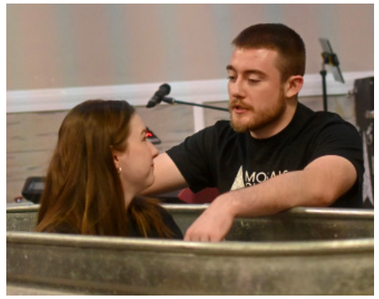
Hopewell



On August 17 the Hopewell church had 13 baptized. Brother Judd Carnahan led the group and received acknowledgement with a loud clap of thunder…a blessed day! The church is located in Tunas, MO.

Mosaic

Hannah Coffman, was baptized along with Faron Thebeau's two sons, Truman and Dominic recently at the church in Rolla.







Mt. Pisgah



Mt. Pisgah associate pastor James Hays baptized four believers on November 23rd. Above, L/R: Clifton Kohler, Merle Colborn, Pastor David Carroll, Matty Cannon, and Seth Owen, and associate pastor James Hays.



Pastor David Carroll (center) baptized Jimmy Jones and Parker Ott at Big Rock Candy Mountain August 28.



Calvary Fellowship

Calvary Fellowship got to witness Lynn Thomas' baptism on Sunday, February 1st at the church in Fenton, MO.

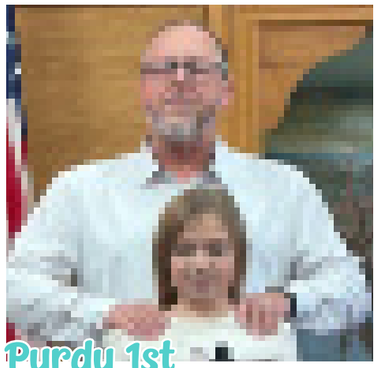
Calvary Chapel

Naomi Marquis and Zoe Kirk were baptized on January 1st, and Liam Hughes on February 1st at the church in Buffalo, MO.





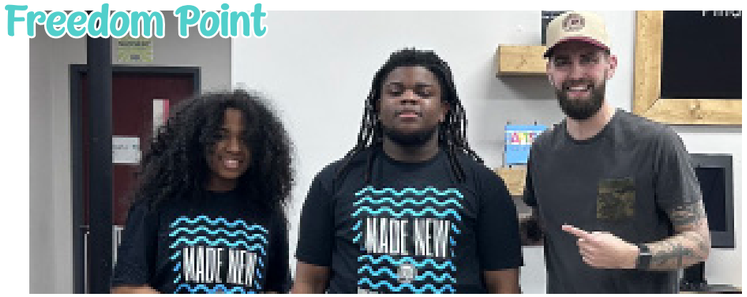




Purdy 1st

Russ Neill, pastor at Purdy FWB, baptized Abby Terry on January 18th.

Freedom Point



MOFWB church planter Matt Fleming baptized Sarah and Nick on February 15th. Since March 31st 2024 this new church has baptized over 100 new believers. Editor's Note: Many of the baptism photos you see in the GEM are examples of your prayers, mission support, COOP support and encouragement at work.

In Loving Memory



Jeannie Bowman

Jeannie (Parsons) Bowman, 78, of Independence, MO, died Monday, January 5, 2026, at her home.

Born September 20, 1947, in Nashville, TN, she was the daughter of Rev. Harold Wayne Parsons and Oletha N. (Chapman) Parsons. She graduated Clearwater High School in Piedmont, MO, and earned a Business Certificate from FWB Bible College in Nashville, TN. On August 10, 1968, she married Rev. Dennis Bowman.

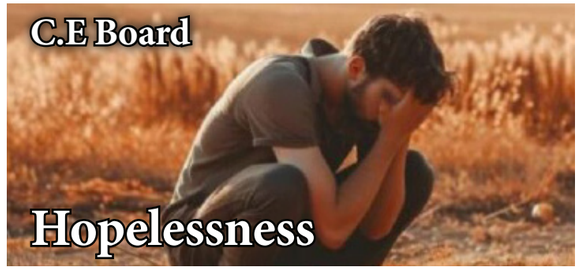
Jeannie is survived by her husband Dennis; two sons, David Bowman and Stephen Bowman, both of Independence; two grandchildren; sisters, Kathy Wilson (David) of Gastonia, NC, and Waynelle Scott, Marshall, MO; brother, Jon Parsons of Marshall, MO; and nieces, nephews and other relatives.

Jeannie was preceded in death by her parents, brother-in-law, Jerry Scott, and one niece.

A memorial service was be held on February 28, 2026, at Berean Free Will Baptist Church, Rev. Warren Hall closed the service.

Read the full obituary at mofwb.com Click on the GEM Magazine tab, then the links & articles tab.

From Our Boards



One of the most severely entrenched garrisons of Satan's army is hopelessness. How tedious life becomes during those days when despair has replaced daylight and lethargy steals our zeal. We can see Satan used his hopelessness against Job, Elijah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, the Apostle Paul, and countless modern preachers today. Such trials are not just for the unsaved or backslidden.

The temptation to despair is often associated with loss and the stress that accompanies it. It does not need to be death or divorce, but sometimes it is. Often, our sense of loss gathers with financial or family setbacks, as if woe is set upon woe. Fears often surface, and even friends disappoint, and then comes an emotional and spiritual breakdown. Satan intensifies our sorrows as he tempts us to give up, and our friends retreat.

The cure for such hopelessness is almost so simple as to be scorned as shallow advice. "Draw nigh to God." You may think such a simple answer dishonors your grief and mocks your pain. However, through the years, I have watched the tragedy of those who have pulled away from God. They lay aside their Bibles and become inconsistent in their church attendance, soon prayer becomes an empty attempt from an unbelieving heart. The reality of pulling back from God is to yield to Satan, who will roar over his victim.

Instead, you must make a commitment to be faithful in devotion, commitment, and worship! Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God" (Isaiah 50:10).

So if you're walking a seemingly lonely path and dealing with some tough times - come back to church and "Draw near to God"!

~ Rev. Roger L. Hogan, C.E. Board, Treasurer



Director's Note: Linda and I, along with MO Missions Board members David & Kathy Beltz, Carl Short, MO Missions church planters Victor & Valerie Sanchez and 9 others had the privilege of visiting our FWB work in Pinar del Rio Cuba on January 5-13, 2026. Below, Carl Short shares some of his observations from this special time.

To say someone has "Grit" is to highlight their courage, their resolve, their strength of character. When describing the people of Cuba, especially those that have committed their lives to Jesus and his gospel message, "Grit" offers one of the best descriptions of their character possible.

As our team of sixteen began our adventure into the country of Cuba, specifically to the Pinar del Rio and the Cedros del Libano Seminary I was captivated by Cuba's rustic beauty and how industrious the people are with their very limited resources.

The purpose of our trip was to take part in a Pastor's Conference of the FWB churches that are spread across the country. The highlight of the conference for me was the Q&A sessions. It was interesting to realize that the Cuban pastors' questions focused on issues that American pastors also wrestle with.

Certainly, there were physical aspects of the trip that will be treasured for a lifetime; however, it is the emotional impact of the trip that captures you unexpectedly when you return home. It is difficult to process the joy of believers who suffer hunger, and who lack many creature comforts that American Christians take for granted. If God gives you the opportunity to go to Cuba, or any other mission field, Go!

~ Carl Short, Missouri Missions Board Member



2025 Hanna Project Trip to Ecuador

Missouri missionaries, Adam and Carol Duncan, invited a team of five medical professionals to the Misahualli region in the Amazon Jungle of Ecuador to conduct medical clinics and also serve Jungle Kids for Christ. A couple of Missouri pastors joined the team to help in any way they could.

I was grateful to have experienced this trip and minister alongside my son, who is a physician in Oklahoma, as well as two medical professionals from the church I pastor in Park Hills. Working side by side, each one using the gifts God had given us, was an experience I will never forget!

Packing and delivering over 500 pounds of medications, medical supplies, and equipment to be used in the clinics and in Antioch Christian Academy's science lab was part of our mission. Through His people, God provided the money needed for shipping the packed crates. God went before us every step of the way, even allowing us to breeze through customs without agents inspecting one single thing. The team arrived safely in Quito after uneventful flights, and then the real adventure began.

After a 7-hour bus ride through the Andes Mountains, a picnic lunch, a hike near a waterfall, and a gondola ride across a massive gorge to see the incredible sights of Ecuador, we finally arrived at our hostel.

On Sunday, we attended church with the missionaries, then toured Antioch Christian Academy and took a prayer walk through their town, Misahuall. The rest of Sunday afternoon was spent counting and sorting medications and medical supplies. We did this each day in preparation for the next day's clinic.

The next four days, we conducted medical clinics in four remote villages. Our medical team was incredible to watch as they worked together in diagnosing and treating patients. The nurses would triage the patients and determine if they needed to visit with one of the doctors. The doctors treated ailments ranging from respiratory problems, pneumonia, and parasites to far more severe medical issues. They worked in cooperation with our pharmacist to determine which treatments and medications were needed. In all, over 200 patients were treated over those four days.



Pastor David Beltz and I went along as the "pack mules" for the supplies and to provide spiritual counsel when needed. We were able to have fun with the children as the medical staff tended to physical needs. We were privileged to pray with multiple families, asking God to bring both physical and spiritual healing.

We traveled by taxi (Chevy trucks) to the villages. Some trips required taxi rides, then a half-mile hike to the Napo River, plus a 30-minute canoe ride downstream, and a quarter-mile hike to the village — all while carrying the medical supplies, our lunches, and our backpacks for a stay deep in the jungle. At the end of the day, we would do it all in the opposite direction.

The goal of our team was to provide help, hope, and healing to the people of these remote villages. Medical visits, such as this one, "build bridges" for the missionaries to be able to share the gospel with these precious people!

The eyes of our team were opened to the great need for more people to volunteer and go. What does God want you to do? What gift(s) do you possess that can be used for His kingdom work, even in the deepest jungles of the earth?

Curt Gwartney, Pastor
Fellowship Free Will Baptist Church in Park Hills, MO



SOWING SEEDS IN A PRISON YARD

January 9th, 13 men from the Calvary Chapel Church travelled to Panama to do some hard time in a prison. Hard, as in work inside a juvenile prison in the city of Chitre.

The group, led by pastor Brandon Mankey met up with three couples from the Bethel FWB Church in Marshfield. Pastor Robby & Jessica Colten and the two couples from Bethel were already in Panama.

The first day was dedicated to serving the Chame FWB church by making needed repairs on a block perimeter wall, plumbing, electrical lines, and painting. In the evening and on Sunday, they joined worship at the annual convention of the Panamanian FWB Association.

Work at the juvenile prison began early Monday morning with the daily routine of everyone emptying their pockets, storing their cell phones, and signing in. Work immediately began on repairs to A/C units, welding metal bars on the cell blocks, cleaning rain gutters, extensive plumbing, and replacing over 150 light bulbs.

After the first day, the workers had pretty much free access to the prison's interior. For certain jobs, access was allowed inside the cell with the offenders. All the workers were greeted with smiles, thanks, and brief conversations in broken English.

While in the prison several of the workers had prayer with the young men, shared Bible verses, and some of the incarcerated worked alongside the "gringos."

Working together is a powerful tool. The Good News Church in Chitre has weekly Bible preaching and teaching services in the prison. They also minister to the families of the young men, and are charged with overseeing community service for some of the offenders upon release.

On the last day, the prison workers surprised us with a meal and a heartfelt expression of their gratitude for what had been accomplished. Several prison employees commented on the good ministry and the testimony of the Good News Church. Two North American and one Panamanian congregations working together for the glory of God.

The believers from Calvary Chapel and Bethel who gave their vacation time and invested financially in this mission trip came away blessed and with many good memories. They went expecting nothing in return. That is what it means to be "Better Together." One group of believers gave generously, emotionally, materially, and financially to be a blessing to others. The gospel was shared, prayers were offered, and lives were touched.



The Bethel couples blessed an elderly widow with home repairs.

Baptisms at the Convention.

Missouri Free Will Baptist
2026 State Calendar

March 2-4	Ministers' Retreat - Cross Pointe Camp & Retreat Center, Rocky Mount, MO
March 6-8	Pastors' Wives' Retreat - Child Evangelism Fellowship, Warrenton, MO
April 11	CTS Ministry EXPO - First FWB - Hartville, MO
June 1-3	MOFWB State Meeting - Oasis Hotel & Convention Center, Springfield, MO
June 2	Missions Celebration and CE Board Seminars
June 8-12	Teen Camp - Camp Niangua
June 22-26	Pre-Teen Camp - Session 1, Camp Niangua
July 6-10	Pre-Teen Camp - Session 2, Camp Niangua
July 19-22	NAFWB Convention & National Youth Conference, Columbus, OH
August 21-22	Evangelism Conference - Camp Niangua
September (TBA)	MOFWB Women's Ministry Retreat - location to be determined
October (TBA)	Retiree Retreat - location to be determined
November (TBA)	E3 Conference - location to be determined
November 2	General Board Meeting - State Office, Lebanon, MO

All events & additional information, as it becomes available, can be found at mofwb.com



NO FEAR
2 Timothy 1:7

Teen Camp: June 8-12

Pre-Teen Camp
Session 1 → June 22-26
Session 2 → July 6-10

REGISTRATION DEADLINES → | June Camps (Teen and Pre-Teen 1): May 18
July Camp (Pre-Teen 2): June 15

Make plans to join us at the

Missouri State Association of Free Will Baptist
112th State Convention
June 1st *through the* 3rd

at the Oasis Hotel and Convention Center in Springfield, MO

Raising the Bar;
Pursuing
Christian Excellence

Music: Naman, Amanda Dement & Family

Speakers:
Monday Evening
David Gibbs
Tuesday Evening
Jacob Jones
Wednesday Evening
Brent Patrick

Tuesday Morning Sessions:

9:00 am .. Various Threats (Legal and Otherwise) Facing Our Churches *
10:30 am .. Missions Celebration (Hosted by MO Women's Ministry)
1:30 pm .. Raising the Bar in Preaching: Best Practices for Pulpit Ministry; Panel Discussion *

* Hosted by the MO Christian Education Board

PRE-REGISTER APRIL 1- MAY 25 AT MOFWB.COM

Room Cost: $112 + tax

All individuals are responsible for making their own hotel reservations.
Call the Oasis at 417-866-5253

Ministry Gems

News Tidbits from Around the State



The WNAC board announced the hiring of Kristi Johnson as Director. Mrs. Johnson is well known in our denomination as an IM missionary to Spain along with her husband Tim.

Order At the Feet of Jesus From WNAC - Now available from WNAC! Enjoy this beautiful, limited edition book published cooperatively by the Free Will Baptist Historical Commission, the Executive Office, D6 Family Ministries, and WNAC to celebrate the 90-year anniversary of the denomination. At the Feet of Jesus is a 366-day (yes, even a leap day) devotional volume drawn from the lifetime writings of Dr. Mary Ruth Wisehart, former WNAC Executive Director, Welch College professor and administrator, and Historical Commission chair. Each day, encounter Dr. Mary's unique perspective on life drawn from Scripture.

New WMO Resource: Missions Moment - IM has released a new WMO resource called the "Missions Moment," a new resource that offers a free monthly downloadable PDF which includes a Scripture, devotion, activity, and prayer focus for adults, youth, and kids. We will release one for each month. Subscribed to the WMO Newsletter to get first access. Find all WMO resources at iminc.org/wmo/.

Caring for Bivocational Leaders - Paul was a tentmaker…he literally made tents to help support his ministry. Today, bivocational pastors carry on that tradition. Probably not by making tents, but by working in another job while, at the same time, taking on the role of pastor. Paul didn't have a family, or many of our modern-day demands, so pastors who follow this bivocational model today have special needs and circumstances Paul never had to consider. We encourage you to read this recent article by John Brummitt, "The Tentmaker's Toolbox—Caring for Bivocational Leaders," to learn how churches with bivocational pastors can help support them!

Stonebridge - Save the Date: 20th Anniversary & Homecoming Celebration April 20th following the morning service. The church is located at 10 Sunrise Acres, Troy, MO 63379. Food, Fun & Fellowship!

"Seven for Heaven" Challenge - Dr. Danny Dwyer (Rekindle Training) challenges every believer to identify seven people who need the hope of Christ. Your Daily Commitment: Write down seven names of family, coworkers, or neighbors. Commit to praying for their salvation every single day. You can also use The BLESS App (FREE) as a guide for praying for your neighbors. Sign up at nafwb.org/bless.

Thank You for Giving - The final total is in! Over $806,000 was given for Kingdom work through the 2025 Mission North America Offering. Thank you for your generosity! Because of you, church planters and chaplains are being equipped and sent to plant healthy churches and make disciples in North America and beyond. You gave it, now let's watch HIM use it!

HELP Fund Student Missions - Many students from your area have been accepted for IM's summer missions trips through ETEAM (high school) and the College Missions Program. Financial deadlines for these students are coming up soon, and many still need financial support for their trips. Over 75% of IM missionaries have gone on these short-term opportunities with IM, and many of them answered the call to missions while on these trips. Join the challenge of getting all 2026 students fully funded for the summer!



Aaron Loomis recently presented a partnership check to the MOFWB which blesses various ministries in the state association. Thanks to those churches who chose Brotherhood Mutual as your insurer.

Chili/Soup For Missions - The Calvary Chapel church raised $7,749.86 for mission projects. Over $4,000 was raised through a silent auction.

The Mosaic church in Rolla recently surpassed their previous record attendance with over 180 people present. Continue to pray for land and building funds as this congregation continues to reach families and college students in the area.



What is the purpose of Sunday school? It's perhaps the best-structured program in the local church for effectively carrying out the teaching ministry of Christ. Instead of being an agency that's separate from the church, it's a vital arm with four parts. These include reaching, teaching, winning and caring.

Just as the New Testament church was built on teaching and preaching (see Acts 5:42), so the modern biblical church must be built on Sunday school lessons and church services that offer exhortation and preaching.

What is the purpose of Sunday school? It remains functionally defined as reaching people so you can teach them, win them to Christ, and then care for them spiritually.

This Old Testament verse expresses the fourfold nature of Sunday school. "Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:12). This verse reflects the four distinct "arms" of Sunday school ministry.

What is the Purpose of Sunday School: 4 Distinct Areas

1. Sunday school is the reaching arm of the church. First, Sunday school is the arm that reaches people of all ages for Christ. "Reaching" is making contact with people and motivating them to honestly listen to the gospel. Because evangelism involves spreading the gospel, reaching is basically pre-evangelism, for it gets people to listen to the gospel. In our text, it's expressed in the word "gather."

Note that we identify those who gather as fathers, mothers, little ones or children, and the stranger. Most church members have someone within their sphere of influence who is a stranger to the church and could be gathered into it.

2. Sunday school is the teaching arm of the church. Second, Sunday school is the church's teaching arm. "Teaching" means guiding the learning activities that meet human needs. The Deuteronomy verse expresses that step through the words "that they may hear." The ultimate goal of teaching is "that they may learn."

3. Sunday school is the winning arm of the church. Sunday school is also the part of the church that wins people to Christ. "Winning" involves communicating the gospel in an understandable manner and motivating a person to respond to Christ. The Old Testament expression "fear the Lord" means to bring a person to reverential trust of God. It was a concept of salvation. Today we might describe a person who "fear[s] the LORD" as a person who receives Christ, or trusts the Lord, for salvation.

4. Sunday school is the caring arm of the church. Finally, Sunday school is the avenue for providing spiritual care to all church members, including upper elementary students. One objective of every Sunday school is to spiritually care for people so they will "carefully observe all the words of this law." Some people call this nurturing; others call it maturing.

What is the purpose of Sunday school?

Sunday school is the reaching, teaching, winning and caring arms of the church. However, this definition becomes a mosaic when applied to individual churches. Just as we need all the tile pieces to make up a mosaic, so we need all four aspects of the definition for Sunday school.

If we focus on only one section of the mosaic, we can destroy its beauty and lose the whole picture. This happens when a church demonstrates a strong emphasis on only one aspect. For example, we may gain an abundance of visitors by emphasizing a bus-outreach ministry. The focus on outreach causes a church to lose the perspective of teaching, winning and caring.

Some churches have strong teaching Sunday schools with a deep commitment to Bible mastery but no outreach. Others emphasize soul-winning. They measure their success by how many people they bring to Christ or prepare for church membership. But they lack a passion to oversee students to help them grow in faith. Finally, some Sunday schools do a great job of caring for students but ignore the other three objectives.

Each function is crucial, so don't forget to build a balanced Sunday school. What is the purpose of Sunday school? The healthy Sunday school performs all four ministry basics equally: reaching, teaching, winning and spiritually caring.

About the Writer: Dr. Elmer L. Towns is Dean Emeritus of the School of Religion and Theological Seminary at Liberty University, which he co-founded with Dr. Jerry Fallwell Sr. in 1971.



Ten Practical Ways to Encourage a Discouraged Church

When a church becomes discouraged, energy drains away and mission focus fades. Evangelism slows. Outreach dwindles. Over time, discouragement settles like fog over the entire congregation. Yet, God specializes in breathing new life into tired hearts and weary churches. Even the most downtrodden church can rediscover hope, strength, and purpose.

Understanding Discouragement

Discouragement is a negative emotional state characterized by a loss of motivation and confidence, often resulting from failure, unmet expectations, or perceived inadequacies.

- Failure: I tried, and it didn't work.
- Unmet expectations: I was expecting something better.
- Perceived inadequacies: I can't do this.

A discouraged congregation will often respond emotionally with feelings of sadness, hopelessness, frustration, and apathy. When discouraged, people frequently resort to distortions, such as overgeneralization ("nothing works") or catastrophizing ("my church won't make it").

Members may sigh, We're too small. We're too old. Over time, pessimism becomes contagious, spreading from individual leaders to the entire congregation.

Scripture offers a striking example in Numbers 13–14. When the Israelites saw the giants in Canaan, they felt like "grasshoppers" in comparison. Fear led to despair: "If only we had died in Egypt!" (14:2). Their discouragement distorted reality, overgeneralizing defeat and catastrophizing the future. Churches can do the same, magnifying problems while minimizing God's power.

The Causes Behind Church Discouragement

In many cases, discouragement arises when an inward focus supplants an outward mission. The church begins maintaining instead of moving. Comfort replaces calling. Leaders lament, "We've tried that, and it didn't work," or "We just need to keep the lights on." The result is stagnation—a congregation existing rather than advancing.

Conflict, nostalgia, and fear also feed discouragement. When churches relive past hurts or cling to former glory days, they lose sight of what God might be doing now. Confusion about purpose leads to apathy. Fear of rejection silences evangelism. But hope can rise again when leaders cast a renewed vision rooted in faithfulness and mission.

Ten Ways to Encourage a Discouraged Church

Discouragement can feel overwhelming, but recovery does not have to be complicated. Small, intentional actions, when done consistently, can reignite passion and restore purpose.

1. Celebrate faithfulness, not just fruit. God measures obedience before outcomes. Celebrate effort, not just results. Faithfulness is success in God's eyes.

- Discouragement: "We've tried that, and it didn't work."
- Encouragement: "Faithfulness is about effort. God provides the results."

2. Rediscover the joy of the mission. Invite your church to dream again. Share stories of life change. Remind people that God still does new things in old places.

- Discouragement: "It's what we've always done."
- Encouragement: "Let's dream again. What if God wants to do something new right here?"

3. Reframe from survival to purpose. You're not just keeping the lights on; you're part of God's redemptive plan for your community.

- Discouragement: "We're just trying to keep up with the bills."
- Encouragement: "What if our church was made for this moment?"

4. Leverage strengths, not limitations. Emphasize the relational depth, wisdom, and adaptability your church already has.

- Discouragement: "We're too small. We're too old."
- Encouragement: "Small and faithful can be powerful. Let's expect God to do something."

5. Heal, learn, and move forward. Acknowledge past mistakes, but don't live there. Let lessons learned become foundations for a stronger future.

- Discouragement: "People got upset last time."
- Encouragement: "You've grown wiser. Let's build something stronger this time."

6. Renew trust through repentance and grace. Encourage humility and forgiveness. When leaders model transparency, healing follows. God restores broken places and uses them for His glory.

- Discouragement: "Leaders or power groups made mistakes."
- Encouragement: "God restores broken places. Your healing can become someone else's hope."

7. Clarify the next faithful step. Overwhelmed churches often need a simple starting point. Choose one six-month initiative to build confidence and momentum. Focus on one major emphasis every six months, building one mid-term success on top of another.

- Discouragement: "We don't really know where to start."
- Encouragement: "You don't have to do everything—just the next right thing."

8. Reclaim the power of the gospel. The good news message still works. People are more spiritually hungry than ever. Invite boldly, knowing God's Word never returns void.

- Discouragement: "People today aren't interested in church anymore."
- Encouragement: "God promises to save people. Why not those around us?"

9. Honor the past but invest in the present. Use your legacy as a launching pad. Do something meaningful for the next generation without idolizing the last one.

- Discouragement: "We used to do big events, but people just don't come anymore."
- Encouragement: "God isn't finished. Let's do something meaningful for this generation."

10. Replace fear with boldness. Courage is not harshness; it's conviction guided by compassion.

- Discouragement: "We don't want to offend anyone."
- Encouragement: "Let's lead with love and truth. Both are more needed than ever."

A Final Word to Leaders

Encouragement is both spiritual and strategic. It starts with leaders who refuse to catastrophize and instead cast vision. Pessimists predict failure. Realists describe what is. But optimistic, faith-filled leaders show what could be.

If your church feels stuck, start where you are. Celebrate faithfulness. Tell stories of hope. Invite your people to take the next small, faithful step. God delights in renewing discouraged churches because His glory shines brightest through weakness redeemed by grace. Even when the fog of discouragement feels thick, remember this truth: your church is not finished. God still writes new chapters of revival in places that once seemed forgotten.

If you're looking for a safe place to ask church leadership questions, check out our membership at Church Answers, which includes access to Church Answers Central.

~ Sam Rainer



About the Writer: As President of Church Answers, Sam Rainer wears many hats. From podcast co-host to full-time Pastor at West Bradenton Baptist Church, Sam's heart for ministry and revitalization are evident in all he does.

Financial Report

Please note: The amounts listed are for two months, December 2025 - January 2026

COOP Disbursements

19% MO Missions..... $36,656.97
21.5% Gen/Exec..... $41,480.26
8.5% Youth Camp..... $16,399.17
2% Youth Ministry..... $3,858.63
2% Christian Education $3,858.63
2% Retiree Ministry $3,858.63
9% State Retirement $17,363.83
3% Show-Me $5,787.94
33% Nat'l Ministries.. $56,530.26
Randall U (.1121)..... $7,137.11
Total Disbursed..... $192,931.42

RECEIPTS

COOP

Alton $200.00
Amity..... $152.10
Aulsbury Chapel $3,904.72
Bailey..... $850.00
Bailey Chapel $293.85
Belton $465.90
Black Oak $1,629.15
Byrd $902.00
Calvary Chapel..... $10,173.90
Calvary Fellowship $7,220.68
Christ Chapel..... $3,700.00
Copper Mines $2,388.03
Cornerstone..... $450.00
Cuba $1,304.00
De Soto 1st..... $3,321.00
Esperanza FWB $318.50
Faith - Fair Grove $516.50
Faith Chapel $3,110.24
Farmington 1st..... $9,013.99
Fellowship..... $3,915.00
First Day $1,870.51
Fredericktown 1st $2,205.00
Freedom Point..... $1,741.13
Freeman Chapel..... $438.00
Friendship..... $1,240.00
Gary Tune..... $100.00
Generations $807.16
Good News..... $780.90
Gospel Light $800.00
Grace..... $4,764.00
Grace Fellowship..... $888.00
Grace Pointe..... $770.00
Grant Avenue..... $1,429.15
Hannon..... $5,012.00
Hartville..... $5,545.00
Hazel Creek..... $4,002.96
Hopewell..... $1,609.00
Houston 1st $1,111.26
Hurryville..... $878.00
Koshkonong..... $227.27
Leadington..... $2,315.00
Lebanon 1st..... $7,218.24
Lebanon Green Hills..... $300.00
Liberty - Gatewood $535.00
Lucille Franklin..... $600.00
Marshfield $541.50
Mill Creek..... $1,292.42
Mine La Motte..... $61.95
Monett 1st..... $645.30
Mosaic $3,093.64
Mountain Grove 1st $3,063.17
Mt. Pisgah..... $1,390.00
Neosho 1st $1,439.00
Nevada $2,050.24
New Hope..... $620.00
New Life- Licking $1,310.88
Number One..... $50.00
Oak Grove- Mtn. Grove ... $681.70
Oak Hill..... $435.20
O'Fallon 1st $3,841.50
One Accord..... $740.90
Ozark 1st - Heritage $724.00
Ozark Family Church.... $8,720.90
Park Hills 1st..... $1,777.06
Parkview..... $611.00
Pleasant Home..... $392.80
Pleasant Ridge- Urbana .. $535.00
Purdy 1st $2,000.00
Rejoice..... $5,916.00
Republic..... $1,371.68
Resolve..... $200.00
Richwoods 1st $739.00
Rock Chapel..... $940.42
Seymour $2,356.00
Smyrna $320.00
Springfield 1st..... $2,089.00
Stockton..... $440.74
Stonebridge $2,640.30
Thayer $4,998.00
Trinity..... $1,658.40
Twin Oak..... $2,378.79
Union Light $386.80
United $4,290.51
Unity $1,510.00
Verdella..... $1,308.07
Viburnum $487.00
Victory- Alton $3,450.37
Victory- KC $2,725.40
Walnut Grove..... $62.62
Waynesville 1st..... $2,248.14
West Plains 1st..... $5,873.64
Willow Springs..... $2,520.24
Wolf Creek..... $4,985.00
Total $192,931.42

Show-Me Plan

Alan Kinder..... $200.00
Aulsbury Chapel..... $180.00
Belton $175.00
Black Oak $380.00
Brent Emmerson..... $100.00
Byrd $50.00
Calvary Chapel..... $90.00
Cleo Reeder $60.00
Copper Mines $300.00
Cuba..... $262.00
D6 Commission $67.36
De Soto 1st..... $1,665.00
Esperanza FWB $30.00
Farmington 1st..... $1,050.00
Farmington 1st- WAC $50.00
Fellowship..... $765.00
First Day $935.25
Frank Webster..... $120.00
Fredericktown 1st $600.00
Freeman Chapel..... $720.00
Friendship..... $50.00
Gary Tune..... $146.64
Generations..... $164.95
Gospel Light $1,800.00
Grace..... $1,215.00
Grace Pointe..... $580.00
Graceful Beginnings $330.00
Grant Avenue..... $120.00
Hannon..... $2,500.00
Hartville..... $350.00
Hopewell..... $18.52
Hopewell WAC $25.00
Jerry Rader..... $40.00
Joshua Provow..... $100.00
Kevin Williford..... $40.00
Leadington..... $1,100.00
Lebanon 1st..... $388.24
Liberty Association..... $4,431.05
Lucille Franklin..... $600.00
Macedonia - Purdy $3,000.00
Macedonia Women's Auxiliary - Purdy $5,000.00
Mill Creek..... $210.00
Mine La Motte..... $300.00
MOFWB-COOP..... $7,993.89
Mosaic $330.00
Mountain Grove 1st..... $145.00
Mt. Pisgah..... $650.00
Mt. Pisgah Women $50.00
Myrtle..... $300.00
Neosho 1st $500.00
New Hope..... $400.00
New Life- Licking $315.00
Number One..... $120.00
Oak Grove- Mtn. Grove ... $350.00
Oak Hill..... $42.00
O'Fallon 1st $3,336.60
Ozark 1st - Heritage $500.00
Ozark Family Church..... $350.00
Park Hills 1st..... $200.00
Pleasant Grove- Anderson $900.00
Pleasant Home..... $400.00
Pleasant Ridge- Urbana .. $140.00
Porter Chapel $8,405.59
Purdy 1st $800.00
Rejoice..... $110.00
Republic..... $80.00
Resolve..... $200.00
Richwoods 1st $378.00
Rock Chapel..... $800.00
Southeast Association $120.00
Springfield 1st..... $600.00
Springfield 1st WAC $210.00
Stockton..... $120.00
Stockton Auxiliary $120.00
Thayer $1,350.00
The Hasting Trust DTD.... $240.00
Trinity..... $210.00
Trisa Johnson $47.58
Twin Oak Auxiliary $110.00
Union Light $650.00
United $950.00
Unity $490.00
Verdella..... $2,616.14
Viburnum $45.00
Victory- KC $922.10
Virginia Bunton $600.00
Waynesville 1st..... $1,130.00
West Plains 1st..... $100.00
West Plains 1st WNAC.... $125.00
Willow Springs..... $389.00
Wolf Creek..... $600.00
Total $69,849.91
Total $44,442.39

Missouri Missions

Calvary Fellowship $966.68
Cuba..... $98.25
D6 Commission $426.59
De Soto 1st..... $60.00
Farmington 1st..... $5.00
Fellowship..... $50.00
Freedom Point..... $1,000.00
Grace Fellowship..... $3,000.00
Lebanon 1st..... $28.28
Loretta Minney..... $50.00
Mosaic $9,000.00
O'Fallon 1st $1,500.00
Oliver Adamson $220.00
Ozark 1st - Heritage $200.00
Ozark Family Church..... $20.00
Pleasant Ridge- Urbana $50.00
Republic..... $50.00
Rock Chapel..... $259.72
Ryan Akers $100.00
Scott Keith $100.00
Thayer $55.00
William Moore..... $50.00
Total $17,289.52

North American Ministries

Bailey..... $200.00
Belton $131.59
Cuba..... $98.25
De Soto 1st..... $940.00
Farmington 1st..... $100.00
Friendship..... $450.00
Grace..... $380.00
Hartville..... $100.00
Indian Creek Association $1,704.00
Lebanon 1st..... $400.00
Lebanon 1st Women $900.00
Loretta Minney..... $50.00
Mountain Grove 1st $125.00
New Hope..... $100.00
Ozark Family Church..... $1,565.25
Park Hills 1st..... $100.00
Southeast Association $50.00
Springfield 1st WAC $150.00
Stockton..... $60.00
Trinity..... $60.00
Twin Oak Auxiliary $320.00
Union Light $50.00
Victory- KC $460.00
Waynesville 1st..... $120.00
Total $8,614.09

International Missions

Alvin Hook $50.00
Black Oak $200.00
Christ Chapel..... $500.00
Copper Mines $1,400.00
Cuba..... $196.50
De Soto 1st..... $2,398.00
Fellowship..... $2,080.00
Fredericktown 1st $1,200.00
Freida Hays $50.00
Friendship..... $80.00
Generations..... $84.95
Gospel Light $1,490.00
Grace..... $1,018.40
Hannon..... $850.00
Hartville..... $600.00
Houston 1st $1,010.35
Indian Creek Assoc..... $1,704.00
Leadington..... $600.00
Lebanon 1st..... $650.00
Lucille Franklin..... $500.00
Mill Creek..... $300.00
Mill Creek- Young Adult $75.00
MMB $2,200.00
New Hope..... $200.00
Oak Hill..... $84.00
O'Fallon 1st $2,125.00
One Accord..... $200.00
Ozark Family Church..... $345.00
Park Hills 1st..... $400.00
Pleasant Ridge- Urbana .. $100.00
Rejoice..... $2,270.00
Rock Chapel..... $50.00
Southeast Association $100.00
Stockton..... $150.00
Stonebridge $550.00
Thayer $205.00
Trinity..... $40.00
Twin Oak Auxiliary $30.00
Union Light $150.00
Verdella..... $5,250.00
Victory- KC $1,916.26
Waynesville 1st..... $510.00
Total $33,912.46

ACM

Bailey..... $120.00
Total $120.00

Berea Ministries

Bailey..... $140.00
Total $140.00

Ch-TN

Bailey..... $400.00
Belton $10.00
De Soto 1st..... $160.00
Derik Frederiksen $96.64
Grace..... $170.00
Hartville..... $100.00
Mill Creek..... $75.00
Myrtle..... $200.00
Union Light $290.05
Unity $300.00
Walnut Grove..... $50.00
Total $1,851.69

Harvest Childrens Ministry

Fredericktown 1st $150.00
Twin Oak Auxiliary $50.00
West Plains 1st..... $150.00
Total $350.00

MO CE

D6 Family Commission $44.90
Total $44.90

MO Retiree

D6 Family Commission ... $44.90
Total $44.90

MO Youth Ministry

D6 Family Commission $47.41
Total $47.41

Getsemani

Stockton..... $44.90
Total $44.90

Rainbow Ministries

Union Light $300.00
Total $300.00

Randall U

Farmington 1st..... $200.00
Fellowship..... $60.00
Thayer $200.00
Total $460.00

Welch College

De Soto 1st..... $120.00
Thayer $200.00
Total $320.00

WNAC

Stockton Auxiliary $10.00
Twin Oak Auxiliary $20.00
Total $30.00

Youth Camp

Cuba..... $100.00
D6 Commission $179.62
De Soto 1st..... $160.00
Hannon..... $150.00
Hartville..... $100.00
Mt. Pisgah..... $100.00
Myrtle..... $100.00
Oak Hill..... $42.00
Ozark Family Church..... $20.00
Stockton Auxiliary $30.00
Thayer $1,087.00
Trinity..... $80.00
Walnut Grove..... $50.00
West Plains 1st..... $50.00
Willow Springs..... $150.00
Total $2,398.62

Youth Camp Development

Thayer .....

Total $20.00

Young Children's Home

Thayer $111.00
Total $111.00

MOFWB Women's Ministry

Mt. Pisgah..... $40.00
Total $40.00

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