

### **Editorial**

Baptists are a passionate people. One area in which our passion is clearly evident is in our view of the Bible. As Southern Baptists, we fervently believe that the Bible is the written revelation of the Living God. We are “a people of the book” and strive to study and obey the Scriptures to the best of our abilities and the empowerment of the Spirit. For Baptists, the quintessential expression of our conviction about the Bible is found in our churches. That is, a Baptist church should be the most visible expression of our belief in biblical authority. Our passion about the Bible thus translates into our passion for the church.

We are “a people of the church” and attempt to “do church” in submission to the written revelation of God and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We as Baptists have historically built and practiced local church ministry in accordance to what we believe the Bible teaches. Baptist churches today must continue to follow faithfully the precedent established by the New Testament and our Baptist forebears in their mission. This edition of the *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* is devoted to this topic.

The theme for this edition of the *JBTM* is “The Mission of Today’s Church.” The articles contained in this volume discuss what we as Baptists believe about the mission of the church and how that mission is contextualized in our contemporary world. A common thread woven throughout all the articles is a concern for the Great Commission and its implications for ministry. All decisions, efforts, and ministry that occur in a local Baptist church should in some form or another be connected to the task of making disciples “of all the nations.” The Baptist passion for the Great Commission is shared and revealed by all the contributors to this volume.

Several articles within this issue examine the issue of evangelism as it impacts the mission of today's church. Dr. Alan Streett argues that modern evangelistic programs and practices have lost a crucial component essential for biblical evangelism. He contends that today's church must recover and include the theological concept of the kingdom of God in all evangelistic endeavors. Only through a renewed emphasis upon the kingdom of God will the evangelistic mission of today's church faithfully embody biblical ideals. Two articles are companion pieces that investigate evangelism from the perspective of the Sunday School within Southern Baptist churches. Dr. Bill Day provides a critical and insightful statistical investigation of the status of Sunday School and church membership growth. Dr. Day provides an analytical update on growth and evangelistic trends in our churches. In light of these findings, Dr. Margaret Williamson provides critical commentary and assessment on the health and future of the Sunday School within Southern Baptist life. She argues that "the Sunday School . . . still remains an effective evangelistic tool when used to meet spiritual needs through small-group experiences and scriptural relevancy."

Other contributions discuss the mission of today's church from the broader perspective of church growth. Dr. Jim Shaddix has graciously consented to allow us to reprint a chapter from his recently-released book, *The Passion Driven Sermon*. In this article, Dr. Shaddix contends that healthy church growth is directly tied to passionate, biblical, pastoral preaching. He states that "if church growth is to be authentic and biblical, it has to be driven by a passion for God's glory and nothing else. The awesomeness of this task demands that we give serious attention to the task of pastoral preaching in church growth." Dr. Will McRaney examines church growth from the perspective of church planting. He contends that today's church must intentionally embrace and practice church planting as part of its overall evangelistic strategy. Dr. McRaney

believes that the biblical model, and the model that will most effectively impact our contemporary world, is the development of new churches. He argues that new churches will be better suited to reaching certain groups of individuals with the claims of Christ than already established churches.

The mission of today's church is also discussed from the perspective of "disciple-making." Some Baptists believe that disciple-making is the mission of today's church and that this activity is inclusive of evangelism and teaching. Other Baptists believe that evangelism and discipling/teaching are two separate though related activities (a topic for another volume?). Drs. Jonathan K. Parker, Daniel Skubik, and H. Bruce Stokes bring their expertise in their study of the Great Commission and the Christian university. They contend that a Christian (Baptist) university can have make a vital contribution in the shaping of Christian disciples within a liberal arts context. Dr. Walter H. Norvall provides an insightful investigation into the role that teaching can have within the ministry of local church. Dr. Norvall believes "the Great Commission draws all believers into the teaching process of God and shows us the centrality of teaching in the church's mission." Dr. Bob L. Royall discusses the notion of the call of God. Although recognizing that God calls some Christians into vocational ministry, he argues that all believers are called into service for God; thus, all believers are in a sense "ministers." The church, as part of its mission today, must assist believers to discover and respond to the call of God for their lives.

The spring edition of the journal will be devoted to the topic of "Issues in Baptist Polity" and will supplement the first professional conference of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry (for program or registration information, visit our website at [www.baptistcenter.com](http://www.baptistcenter.com) or <http://www.baptistcenter.com/BCTM%20Events.htm>). We hope to publish articles that explore

topics such as congregational polity, the function and identity of elders within a Baptist church, relationship between elders and congregational polity, the role of the pastor within a congregation church polity, biblical teaching on polity, polity and denominational entities, and other related topics. We also hope to expand the offerings of the journal to include a section of book reviews.

Until the Lord returns, may He find us faithful,

Stan Norman, Editor