



ARKANSAS: TRANSFORMED

Stories of Transformed Lives



Testimonies from Student Ministry Workers Retreat 2023

There were 61 people who attended the 2023 Student Ministry Matters Workers Retreat on Sept. 16. Dr. Jonathan Cofer, Dr. Ben South and Angelyn McMurray led breakout sessions. Nathan Dodson led worship and Dr. Timothy McKnight of Anderson University, South Carolina was the featured speaker.

Conference More Than a Retreat

By Michael Battenfield, Pastor
First Baptist Church, Cave Springs

What is a retreat? Several events I have attended in the last few years have really caused me to question the definition of the term, with the BMA of Arkansas Student Ministry Workers Retreat on Sept. 16 being among the biggest.

Growing up, I always thought “retreat” meant to pull back, find some peace and to let off the accelerator that we tend to keep floored. But in the case of the Student Ministry Worker Retreat, we find something less “retreat” and more of an “intensive” experience. Even with this year’s reduction in the number of breakout sessions, the event was one step shy of a wonderful firehose of ideas and equipping that has to be experienced!

Dr. Timothy McKnight did three sessions that each covered various concepts, but all came back to a central theme of personal connections, relationships and conversations. I was not familiar with Dr. McKnight prior to this event, so meeting him on Friday evening at the informal social time at Larry’s Pizza was a real joy. Little did I know that he was actually modeling the very theme he was to teach about on Saturday. I loved his passion and desire to engage the up-and-coming generations before the world does — and indeed, these students and kids will look for and find answers to their questions. **Who** do we want giving them answers?

I was able to go to the breakout led by Dr. Jonathan Cofer, high school pastor at Antioch Baptist Church in Conway. He shared some research and suggestions relating to the “ideal” setting (vs. the reality) in trying to reach families with the gospel and encouraging and modeling biblical family worship and the need to build those discipline relationships that help prevent the open back door as students depart church as they graduate high school.

Others from our group shared the blessings and benefits they received from the conference (a more accurate label), and a wish that more had attended, as there were so many nuggets to be collected to equip us. In all honesty, while there was a great deal of information given this year, it was more about our own attitude than data and techniques. What is our mindset when it comes to student ministry? What is our primary objective and the related goals? What heart and mind change are needed in **me** to accomplish what the Lord would have me do to reach the students and kids around us?

Make plans to attend next year’s version, scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 14, 2024. If possible, come to Conway Friday afternoon and hang out, fellowship and maybe experience a bit of “retreat” before being filled with a firehose of great stuff on Saturday!



Don’t Water from A Dry Well

By Colter Hall, Youth Pastor/Missions
First Baptist Church, Damascus

A wise man once told me, “You cannot draw water from a dry well.” When working in youth ministry, you know what it is like to pour all that you have into the teenagers of your community. I am sure there is nothing you would not do, within reason, to see them succeed in Christ. We pour everything we have into our ministries, but rarely do we pause to allow ourselves to be filled and replenished. At times, we get caught up in the rat race of life, and we forget that we, too, are humans with spiritual needs.

The Student Ministry Workers Retreat was created to give people who are involved in student ministry the opportunity to be poured into while connecting with fellow servants for the Lord. The goal of the retreat is to replenish, equip and energize workers so they may return to their ministries and further pour into the youth.

This year, our speaker, Dr. Timothy McKnight, shared practical ways to evangelize by evaluating opposing worldviews and engaging with those who have a different perspective on spiritual matters. He also shared ways to reach the lost through cultivating relationships, planting the gospel seed and, in due time, reaping the spiritual harvest. We learned many ways to connect with Gen Z, which is likely the most difficult generation to date to reach for the Lord. Every topic was relevant to what student ministry workers face every single day.

Regarding church affairs, Dr. McKnight shared ways to bridge the gap between youth and the older congregation within the church family. He spoke about different models of church operation, and how youth ministers, parents and adult leaders must work together to disciple students and reach lost parents.

As you well know, this world is an ever-growing mission field. It is not a secret that it is becoming increasingly difficult to reach those around us with the gospel, much less understand their ways of thinking. Most of what we do in life as student ministry workers is simply to pour into the lives of the kids around us.

Attending events such as the Student Ministry Workers Retreat provides tools that will help us further our ministries, strengthen ourselves and better pour into our youth. We are not bulletproof, we are not self-sustaining but, most importantly, we are not alone. I encourage you, if you have not already, consider attending next year’s Student Ministry Workers Retreat scheduled for Sept. 14, 2024. Do not try to water from a dry well.



Worth Checking Out

By Chris Vines, Family and Youth Pastor
Garrett Memorial Baptist Church, Hope

It seems each time I open my email there is an invitation to attend a conference. I quickly run through the list, making quick work “filing” those invitations away in the same place I put most junk mail. Why am I so insensitive? Probably because they cost a bundle, I don’t have time to take off work and I’m skeptical about the payoff each conference promises.

Yet, among them all, there is one invitation I have accepted for four consecutive years. Want to know which one? Well, it just so happens that’s why I’m writing this article — to let you know about that one!

The Student Ministry Matters (SMM) Workers’ Retreat, made possible by the BMA of Arkansas Youth Department, has repeatedly put on an outstanding one-day conference for anyone who works with families and teenagers in their church. I’ve been blessed to work in family ministry for almost 10 years now and, among the many other conferences I’ve attended throughout the years, the SMM Workers’ Retreat stands a head taller than them all when it comes to encouraging and equipping me in the task God’s called me to in my church.

You may be wondering how I can make such a big statement. My reasoning is simple — the leadership of the conference thinks, plans and executes with the part-time volunteer and pastor in mind. Dan Carson, the director of Student Ministry Matters, has a heart for the pastors and volunteers who work 30-40 hours per week in addition to their ministry responsibilities. How does that affect the SMM Worker’s Retreat? I’ll give you three characteristics of this conference, but then, ultimately, you’ll just have to attend to see that what I’m saying is true:

- **It’s one intensely focused day, located conveniently at Central Baptist College in Conway.** That means I don’t have to take off work or travel a great distance for a high-quality event.
- **I get amazing “bang for my buck!”** Let’s face it, when we pay for something, we expect to get our money’s worth. For less than \$75, I get top notch training, 7-10 free books, lunch, unlimited coffee, a shirt and usually some kind of door prize (which means more books!).
- **The “payoff” for attending is second to none.** I certainly come away with a box load of resources, but more importantly, I’m truly encouraged and better equipped to serve the church God has called me to shepherd. After spending just one day with other part-time men and women who are “in the trenches” of ministry, I’m spurred on to keep going. I’m reminded that I’m not alone in the struggles and difficulties of ministry. I’m energized to make much of Christ in the little corner of the earth where He’s placed me.

I’ll keep getting invitations to big, flashy conferences, and I’ll keep “filing” them away. However, the one opportunity I’ll consistently put on my calendar is the Student Ministry Workers’ Retreat. I really hope you will, too.



- Plan to attend SMWR 2024 on Sept. 14, 2024
- Check out the Student Ministry Matters podcast at studentministrymatters.podbean.com or through most major podcasting platforms.
- Join the Student Ministry Matters Community on Facebook at [Facebook.com/groups/StudentMinistryMattersCommunity](https://www.facebook.com/groups/StudentMinistryMattersCommunity).





72 years (1951-2023) of sharing the gospel across ARkansas and beyond.
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 spread the gospel by planting new churches in AREas where
 people need to be connected to Jesus through a community of faith.



Still Bearing Fruit

By Bryan Clay, Church Planter • Faith Journey, Benton

As a new mission, Faith Journey began looking for ways to help serve our local community. We prayed for several weeks about what God's will was in this area to serve others. It was not long before the Lord began to open doors for us and opportunities started to become available for our mission.

We were soon welcomed into a couple of nursing facilities and an adult day center in Bryant. I began to go to these locations and get to know the administrators and staff and to help develop a relationship with them that showed them that our mission was here to serve them and their residents. Once we had established a connection in the facilities, we began to have weekly meetings to study the Bible with the residents and staff at each location.

At one of these locations, it became evident that God's hand was already at work in the lives of these people. One of these residents, a godly lady who is 90 years old and whose late husband was a pastor during their marriage, had already been having a daily Bible devotion time for anyone who desired to come and be a part of that group. Since their hearts had already been prepared, it made it fairly easy for Faith Journey to come into the facility to begin our scheduled weekly Bible studies with the residents and staff.

Faith Journey also purchased giant print Bibles for some of the residents who found it difficult to read from standard print Bibles, but who also wanted to hold God's Word in their hands and follow along when studying the Scripture. We began a verse-by-verse study in the Book of Luke and began a weekly memory verse to help give them extra work to look forward to doing in between our weekly meetings. They are so hungry to know the Word of God and hold it close to their hearts from week to week.

Faith Journey had been having meetings for a short time when a resident who had not been coming to our weekly devotion time inquired if he could join our meetings. Of course, we were thrilled to have anyone who wanted to join come and get involved. Several weeks later, I was about to start our devotional time when this gentleman asked me if he could make an announcement to the group. He began to share with the group that after the prior week's meeting, he had come to realize that he had always known who Jesus was, but had never accepted Jesus as his Savior, the Lord of his life. This was a life-changing realization for this man and one he wanted to share with everyone. He now knew in his heart that he had been saved by grace. Praise the Lord! Since that day, he has not missed a meeting and shares the gospel every chance he gets with others.

These are just a couple of wonderful examples of how our older generation is still bearing fruit even though they may have more days behind them than they may have in front of them. God still uses His children according to His purpose no matter what their years of life might be. These stories show a steadfast devotion among our older, very valuable older generation. Psalms 92:14 says that faithful believers can "...still bring forth fruit in old age..." As we go through our life journey, we could all keep this as a reminder in our hearts.





Room 161: The Answer to Prayer

By Jake McCandless, Missionary Pastor • Epic Life, Pea Ridge

If you've followed the work in Pea Ridge, you've heard about our battle with the city over a house. Property prices are crazy in Pea Ridge. The town is growing — it is expected to have tripled from 2020 to 2030. In sixth grade, there were 40 new students this year, and most of the other grades were the same. This growth has priced commercial property out of reach, but we found an old home near the main "four-way" in town. We were assured early on by leaders in town that we'd be able to secure a conditional permit to meet as a church in the home. We wanted to keep it residential so we could resell it as such. After nearly six months, one thing after another made the idea impossible. The final straw was when they required us to pave, curb and light a 15-car parking lot at the 1970s 1,600 sq. ft. home.

As you may have heard, my heart is to have in-home Connection Groups in every neighborhood in town. We prioritize those neighborhood and network missional groups by meeting weekly, then we all gather monthly for a time of worship. So, having our own building in a central location, wasn't that big of a deal for us, but we knew we'd be able to have more visitors if we had a "public" location. We find family members and close friends will come to someone's home over coming to a church building; but for strangers, it is harder to come to a home.

We wanted to take advantage of both opportunities. We envisioned the monthly worship service and a monthly preview night would be held at the central location, then people could feel more comfortable coming to a home.

The house plan crumbled at the beginning of summer, and we spent nearly three months wondering what we should do. Then one day, I ran across an event space in Pea Ridge called Room 161. It had been around the whole time, but I had missed it. They opened the space to us, and we had our first worship night and preview night in August. This week, we'll have our third one there. It was amazing. Having the central location has allowed us to utilize social media to increase awareness. Every post we have made has led to two to three conversations through Facebook Messenger. We have had a new family at each event in Room 161 and, so far, three of those families have been assimilated into a regular Connection Group. We're thankful for Room 161!



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Mustang Message

Not Her First Plan By Mason Crymes

Sierra Dodson is in her senior year at Central Baptist College, majoring in Psychology and Counseling with a minor in Forensic Psychology. She began attending in 2020, but CBC was not her original plan.

After high school, Sierra's plan was to attend the University of Central Arkansas, and she had already been accepted to UCA before ever considering CBC. However, she ended up hearing about CBC through friends at her church who had attended CBC.

Sierra came to a CBC Stampede Day and fell in love with the school. She then applied for and received the Leadership Scholarship (an institutional scholarship which provides full tuition to the rewarded scholars), which helped make her journey here possible. CBC may not have been her original plan, but she is confident that it was God's plan for her. "I am so glad He showed me CBC," she said.

Sierra finds CBC unique because of its Christ-centeredness and because of the community that she sees between the employees and students. "Students get help from the teachers and staff at CBC on a spiritual side as well as the academic side. They make sure we are all taken care of in every way," Sierra said.

One big aspect of her CBC experience has been in the Leadership Scholars program. In this program, recipients of the scholarship work in offices on campus learning leadership and workforce skills in a hands-on way. Sierra has enjoyed her time as a leadership scholar and shares insight into her experience. "It has been awesome! I work in admissions, so I get to meet prospective students, get to know them and help anyone with questions about applying and campus life. I have grown in my faith and leadership skills, learned life lessons and made great relationships with other students and workers in the Admissions office," Sierra said.



Outside of school and work, Sierra is involved in several extracurricular activities. She has been on the Student Orientation Staff (SOS) for three years, is in her second year as a member of the Student Activities Board and has worked as a resident assistant for three years. She has also been on homecoming court every year since beginning at CBC, and she cohosts a podcast for *The CBC Tower* (CBC's student media outlet).

Of all the events and memories at CBC, there are a few that stand out to Sierra the most. "Mud Week, Hall Wars, Fall Hay Day and Homecoming are always my favorite events of the year," she said. "Students really come together at these events and have fun with each other."

Sierra has made an impact at CBC, and CBC has made an impact on her. She encourages others who are interested in attending to seek God's guidance and advises those who choose to attend to get plugged into the campus and activities that CBC offers. "We are like a family who holds each other accountable and encourage growth," she said.

"CBC has been my home for the past four years and I would not change a thing," Sierra said. "I have grown in many ways and made lifelong friends since being here. I am always thankful for the opportunities CBC has given me that have helped mature me and my faith. I have learned how to keep Christ first, work hard and build relationships with everyone around me."

CBC is committed to transforming lives by providing an education that integrates Christian faith and academic excellence in a Christ-centered environment.