

*Florida Baptist Witness*  
James A. Smith, Sr., Executive Editor  
Report to the Associations  
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Missions news and promotion continues to be the backbone of *Florida Baptist Witness* coverage. Throughout the year, we have given generous space to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and other work of the North American Mission Board, including its recent reorganization. The *Witness* covered the NAMB missionary appointment service at First Baptist Brandon in March, and in connection with that service, we interviewed new NAMB President Kevin Ezell. The *Witness* was first to report on Ezell's nomination as president.

As with every year, the *Witness* has also given prominent coverage to the Maguire State Mission Offering, with stories helping Florida Baptists to understand their cooperative missions efforts to reach the Sunshine State.

Significant coverage also was given to Florida Baptist Children's Homes, both concerning the resignation of President Jerry Haag and the beginning of a search for a new president, as well as the annual Mother's Day Offering. The *Witness* also gives considerable coverage to the other FBSC agencies, including Baptist College of Florida and Florida Baptist Financial Services.

The missions work of Florida Baptists doing disaster relief during the spring in the wake of tremendous loss in Alabama due to tornadoes was given significant coverage. Indeed, although *The Alabama Baptist* boasts significantly larger resources than ours, the *Witness* was delighted to be able to task our managing editor, Joni Hannigan, to Alabama for four days after the tornadoes to assist that newspaper in covering this tremendous story, as well as the work of Florida Baptists.

Throughout the year, the *Witness* has covered a plethora of efforts by local churches doing the Great Commission in multiple ways in the Sunshine State. Each issue also includes Florida Focus, announcing upcoming events in churches around the state.

Considerable coverage during the year was given to the initial report and recommendations of the Imagine If Great Commission Resurgence Task Force presented, as well as its adoption at the 2010 annual meeting. Since the adoption of the report, the *Witness* has followed up with additional coverage, and will continue to cover implementation of the report throughout the rest of 2011 and beyond.

Coverage of Florida's IIGCRTF work parallels what is occurring in other state Baptist conventions in the wake of the adoption by the Southern Baptist Convention of its Great Commission Resurgence report and recommendations in 2010. The *Witness* has included significant coverage on the actions of other states, as well as those of SBC entities that are beginning to take steps to respond to the GCR's adoption.

The *Witness*, once again, provided major coverage of the events and activities associated with the FBSC annual meeting – before, during and after – in Brandon last November. In December, a two-part interview with newly elected FBSC President David Uth, pastor of First Baptist Church in Orlando, reported his initial plans to lead Florida Baptists in 2011.

The *Witness* has continued its commitment to covering important social, moral and public policy issues of concern to Florida Baptists. Various stories related to the 2010

campaign season highlighted by Florida Baptist Dan Webster's successful run for Congress, as well as other candidates of interest. In April, we ran a special report about Webster, capturing a typical day-in-the-life of a congressman.

For the primary election, the *Witness* published interviews with the two leading Republican candidates for governor, Bill McCollum and Rick Scott.

The *Witness* covered the inaugural prayer breakfast and swearing-in ceremony for Gov. Scott, including a private breakfast the governor held with a small number of conservative religious leaders, notably a number of Florida Baptists.

The *Witness* has covered extensively the successful efforts by Santa Rosa county school teachers to protect their religious liberty against threats by the American Civil Liberties Union, a legal challenge to a Ten Commandments display in Dixie County, and the court decision overturning Florida's ban on homosexual adoption.

The 2011 legislative session in Tallahassee resulted in major pro-life victories, while most pro-gambling legislation was only narrowly averted in literally the final hours of the session. The *Witness* extensively covered these and other issues.

In May, the *Witness* featured an exclusive interview with Gov. Scott, following on interviews earlier in 2011 with president of the Florida Senate, Sen. Mike Haridopolos, R-Merritt Island, and speaker of the Florida House, Rep. Dean Cannon, R-Winter Park. We also interviewed the new head of the Florida Department of Children and Family, David Wilkins, who is a lifelong Baptist layman and former trustee of the Florida Baptist Children's Homes.

Coverage by the *Witness* on public policy matters continues to be closely watched by secular media outlets across the state, with citations of *Witness* articles in newspapers across the state. Further, our coverage has gained attention in the wider publishing world. A recent editorial of mine on gambling will soon be published in a book for high school students offering pro- and anti-gambling views – produced by a secular publisher.

Examples of other coverage include: a September special report, "Caring for God's Creation," explored the growing discussion of environmental stewardship in Southern Baptist in recent years, especially in light of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil disaster. Recent features have also included Florida State University retired coach Bobby Bowden, a book about University of Florida football players who are Christians, and coverage of Tim Tebow's book, *Through My Eyes*.

The *Witness* reported in December on plans to honor Jess Moody, founder and first president of Palm Beach Atlantic University and former pastor of First Baptist Church in West Palm Beach, with a statue celebrating his role in founding the school, and the unveiling of the statue in the spring.

In November the *Witness* covered the passing of its Editor Emeritus, Dr. Edgar Cooper, who led the state newspaper, 1970-1983, and was a Florida Baptist leader for years before and after his *Witness* service.

The staff of *Florida Baptist Witness* expresses appreciation to Florida Baptists for their continued support of this vital ministry of our state convention as we seek to faithfully carry out our mission to publish "Good News about God's work that encourages, enables and exhorts Florida Baptists to exalt God and extend His Kingdom."