



**Bobby Hayward Welch
Served as 53rd SBC President:
2005 and 2006**

Florida Pastorate:
First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach
1974 – 2006

Introductory Overview

Bobby Welch grew up “on the other side of the tracks” in the mill village of Fort Payne, Alabama. He did not have the benefit of a Christian family home life, but thanks to a budding romance in a girlfriend he was introduced to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Unfortunately, Welch became a backslidden Christian as he pursued a college degree and was enrolled in the R.O.T.C. program. Upon his college graduation he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army to pursue a military career.

By September 1966 Welch found himself in Bon Son, South Vietnam, as a combat platoon leader guiding men through the dense jungle. Before he knew what had happened, Welch was on the ground in an expanding pool of blood which was literally gushing from his mouth. The young officer quickly thought he was at the end of his life. By a miracle of God’s mercy, Bobby Welch survived the injury and later transitioned from being an Army soldier to a soldier of the Cross.

Less than a decade later, the former Green Beret, now an ordained pastor, began leading one of Florida Baptist’s largest congregations – First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach – as he was the leading advocate for a Sunday school evangelism strategy called F.A.I.T.H. It was during those years that Welch was elected to serve two consecutive one-year terms as the 53rd president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Life in Rural Alabama

Bobby Hayward Welch (b. 1943) was born and raised in the mill village of Fort Payne, Alabama. The village was literally and figuratively divided by two sets of Great Southern railroad tracks. Welch in his semi-autobiography described the tough boys who grew up

on the other side of the tracks, “as my grandma declared, ‘were as mean as a snake and full of devilment,’ It was our survival technique, and it made you tough.”¹

His parents were Mary Eloise and Robert Hayward Welch. Robert Welch at one time had been employed in the Davison Hosiery Mill, the sole employer in the village. But his dad moved on to being a heavy equipment operator in highway construction projects, “that kept him away from home until the weekends.” In describing his parents, Welch recalled, “My mother and father loved me and my brother, and there was never a day we did not know that. My dad was a good provider . . .” Yet his dad was a “two-fisted drinking, smoking, pool-shooting, guitar-playing, gambling, cussing construction worker who killed himself at work five or six days a week and lived for some relief on the weekend.” In contrast, Welch’s mother “did not drink, shoot pool or play an instrument, but she smoked, could cuss, and would mix it up with my dad when he was ‘three sheets to the wind and on his high horse.’”² Reflecting upon his parents and their relationship, which at times, rose to violent actions toward each other, Welch observed, “That kind of stuff will make you tough in your life.”³

Following a Girl Led Him to Christ

While going to high school Welch “fell in love” with Maudellen Bell whom he admired from afar. However, she was a positive influence upon Welch who “not only urged me toward college; she also led me to Christ. . . She went to church every time the doors opened. In fact, she was there so much I wondered if she didn’t open the door,” Welch recalled in his semi-autobiography.⁴ At 16-years old, Bobby often followed Maudellen to church, but “would not go inside. I waited for her outside.” Finally, one Sunday night in 1959, Welch decided to slip into the

church and sat beside Maudellen, but “I was not interested in anything the preacher said.” Although later Welch realized, “I was experiencing the truth of God’s Word.”⁵

“One Thursday afternoon, after several services of hearing the Word of God, and after football practice, I went to the office in back of the church. Reverend Bob Mowrey was

the pastor I had been listening to, and he took the time to talk to me.

Not knowing the church jargon, I

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struggled a bit to know how to tell him why I had come. Then I questioned him, ‘Do you think my life could become like that girl’s – Maudellen?’ The pastor opened a small red *Gideon New Testament* and shared the “Roman Road” experience of Saul, reading from Romans 3:23 and Revelations 3:20. Then the two men “knelt on our knees and he led me to prayer what’s affectionately called ‘the Sinner’s Prayer.’”

Welch went on to describe the event, “The reality is that Jesus did come into me, and He changed me and my life.” Mowrey gave Welch the *Gideon New*

Testament. Years later Mowrey recalled the influence of Maudellen upon Bobby Welch. “He saw Christ in her,” the pastor said. “That’s where it all began.”⁶

Welch said initially, “In the years that followed, I grew spiritually as a new Christian. Then I left for college.”⁷

“Playing sports was one of the escape routes some used to break out into an open field with more possibilities. Coaches had an eye out for boys in that part of town,” he recalled. For Bobby Welch, “Baseball was my starting place.” However, as he described, “A bat in the face knocked out three teeth and gave me 132 stitches inside my mouth and a

distinctive scar in the upper left corner of my mouth.” Fortunately, Welch had another option, given his size and high school football linebacker experience. “The only way I had a dog’s chance of getting to college was on a football scholarship.” Although scouts didn’t draft him, when he got to Jacksonville State College (now University), he tried out for the football team as a walk-on. He was impressive enough for the coach to offer him an athletic scholarship.⁸ His linebacker skills led him to be elected team captain for three consecutive years.

College and Marriage

Football did prove to be his ticket to Alabama’s Jacksonville State College. While Welch pursued a degree in business administration, he also joined the R.O.T.C. program with a plan to make the military a career. During those college years, Welch admitted “I got off course. I lost my way in following Christ.” He explained, “While I did not do a lot of things most people associate with being away from the Lord. I still was way off course.”⁹

By June 1965, Welch graduated from college with a Bachelor of Science degree and left for a one-month of summer camp at Fort Bragg, N.C. to complete his R.O.T.C. training. At the end of July, Welch was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army.¹⁰ He was scheduled for deployment to the United States’ growing war effort in South Vietnam.

However, before his first deployment, Welch married Maudellen Bell (b. 1941), the young woman who was most influential in Welch’s Christian conversion. The Fort Payne natives were married August 21, 1965, in the First Baptist Church.¹¹ He was 22 and she was 24. Soon after their marriage, Maudellen continued a career in teaching, while Bobby pursued military service. Once the couple were later re-united, and

during the ensuing years, they had two children that included: a daughter, Haylee (b. 1968) and a son, Matthew (b. 1973).¹²

Redemption Comes from Battlefield Wound

By September 1966, Lieutenant Bobby Welch found himself in Bon Son, South Vietnam, as a combat platoon leader guiding men through the dense jungle. Before he knew what was happening, Welch was confronted by a Viet Cong guerrilla who fired his weapon point blank at Welch. The bullet hit Welch's chest, ricocheted through his body, missing his heart by centimeters, piercing his lung, before exiting his body. Welch fell to the ground in an expanding pool of blood which was literally gushing from his mouth. Welch's lead sergeant rushed to Welch's aid and as he made a quick assessment of the wound, Welch recalled, "He moved his head from side to side in a disparaging way." Although his fellow soldiers tried to help, "I was bleeding to death and fighting to stay conscious. But I was losing my fight to stay alive."¹³

"As a result of that wound I would lie there on the battlefield dying. For me there was no out-of-body experience, no brightly lit tunnel, nor did all of my life flash before me. None of those things happened, but what did occur was just as miraculous. . . Everything became silent and there was nothing before me except two forms, side by side, which were shaped like men. . . My sense was that these figures were God and Christ. I thought they had come for me . . ."¹⁴ Continuing his description of the experience, Welch remembered breathing the three-word prayer, "God, help me."

"That is when the miracle happened," he recalled. Welch saw a light waving over him, which he initially thought was an angel, "dressed in an Army camouflage green outfit!" Fortunately, the light was not from a delayed medic-vac helicopter, "but a

command chopper of our battalion commander.” Welch was tossed on top of three dead soldiers as the helicopter headed straight for a field hospital.¹⁵ Upon arrival at the hospital Welch was moved into the surgical bay, where extensive surgery was performed. “I regained consciousness, but I was still battling for my life.” After a week in a recovery tent, “I awoke and discovered that I was not paralyzed and that I could speak again.” Welch asked for a drink of water and a Bible, and then holding the New Testament to his chest, said the following prayer:

*Dear Lord, I do not know if I will live through this. I may die here like the soldier who died the other night. But, Lord, if and when that time comes, I want to promise You that you will not find me in the spiritual shape that I was in before. Lord, I intend to live for You from this day on.*¹⁶

Welch returned to Alabama for a brief reunion with his young bride and to recuperate from his wounds.

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He subsequently returned to active duty that included service as an instructor at the U.S. Army Infantry School and was a Green Beret. In the next two years,

Bobby Welch completed his tour of duty, had been promoted to the rank of captain and was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism and a Purple Heart for his injuries, among other decorations.¹⁷

But more importantly, Welch remembering his battlefield promise to God, transitioned from being an Army soldier to a soldier of the Cross. Not only did he surrender to the gospel ministry, Welch’s battlefield

experience and promise to God became an often-told testimony in sermons, evangelism gatherings, patriotic observances, and in a book, titled *You the Warrior Leader*.

Responding and Preparing for Ministry Service

Returning from military service in 1969, Bobby Welch went to his home church in Fort Payne where he publicly announced his call of God to the pastoral ministry. The First Baptist Church agreed to license and ordain him to the gospel ministry. Then with the help of the church's pastor Dan Ireland, Welch enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.¹⁸ He relocated to Louisiana with Maudellen and their baby daughter Haylee. While a student Welch was called as the pastor of the First Baptist Church, Norco, Louisiana – located about a 30-minute drive west of the seminary campus. In 1972 he graduated with a Master of Divinity degree. In recognition of his contributions to the pastoral ministry and Southern Baptists the New Orleans Seminary selected Welch for their 1998 Distinguished Alumni Award.

Park Avenue Baptist Church Nashville, Tennessee, 1972 – 1974

Bob Mowery was the pastor of the Park Avenue Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, since 1960, having come from Fort Payne. He would continue leading the congregation until he retired in 1995. However, in 1972, the church leadership determined they needed a minister of youth and associate pastor. "Someone told me of a young graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary who said I had led him to the Lord," Mowery recalled in 2005. "That young graduate was [Bobby] Welch," he told *Baptist Press*.¹⁹

“I barely remembered him,” Mowery recalled, but “I asked Bobby to come and talk to me, and the church later called him to serve.” Mowery remembered the sharing of the gospel with the young man years earlier. “After Welch joined the staff at Park Avenue, he and Mowery ‘caught up’ on what had transpired in Welch’s life,” Mowery explained.

“Our people fell in love with Bobby. He was one of the hardest workers we ever had.” Mowery went on to stress that “during Welch’s two years on staff, the church’s bus ministry ‘blossomed.’” However, First Baptist Church in Daytona Beach’s leadership learned about Welch’s effective ministry and visitation program that contributed to record-breaking Sunday school attendance in the church. In God’s Plan the Welches had taken a vacation to Florida. Bobby had been invited to preach at Ormond Beach where the unannounced Pulpit Committee of First Church, Daytona Beach, was

present and heard his sermon. That encounter settled it for the committee that recommended First Baptist Church extend a call to Welch to

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serve as pastor.²⁰ “I felt like he probably needed more experience, but God knew what He was doing,” Mowery said.²¹

**First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach,
1974 – 2006**

Bobby Welch’s first Sunday in the pulpit of First Baptist Church (org. 1898) was August 11, 1974, when he preached a sermon titled, “Medicine, Mud, Miracles,” that highlighted his life and the spiritual encounter on the battlefield.²² The church’s published

history noted that less than five months after Welch's introductory sermon the church began to grow: "Sunday school attendance doubled to 1,264; each Sunday had professions of faith, rededications, baptisms; mission-giving goals were met before deadline; visitation teams were larger than ever; and the bus ministry experienced explosive growth."²³

During the decade between 1974 and 1983, the church under Welch's leadership broadened its mission and outreach ministries. In 1974, a 30-minute television program called "Sunshine" was inaugurated. The Friday morning, weekly program featured preaching, music and interviews. The program served as a springboard for the church to expand its broadcast ministry to provide a Sunday morning live telecast of the worship service.²⁴

By 1980, increased attendance necessitated the expansion of the Sunday school to two sessions and the scheduling of two Sunday morning worship services. In July of that year, Doug Williams of Marietta, Georgia, was called as minister of evangelism. "Doug's passion was to build a soul-winning church," the church's history book declared. Initially 34 members committed to participating in the launch of Evangelism Explosion.²⁵ This was not a one-time event. For the next several decades, the annual Evangelism Explosion training was conducted, resulting in the evangelism ministry "exploding and changing hearts and lives."²⁶

In the decade between 1975 and 1985, the church grew to nearly 5,200 from 2,834 members and the Sunday school had reached 2,935 enrolled from a previous high of 1,482.²⁷ To accommodate that growth and attendance the church raised \$4 million and constructed a new worship center designed to seat 2,400 that was completed in 1983.²⁸ Given the

multiple emphases upon evangelism and outreach – including 50 quarterly training sessions of Evangelism Explosion held from 1982 to 1997 – the church’s growth continued through the year 2000 when membership settled down to 3,724 and Sunday school enrollment stood at 3,656. By the time of Welch’s retirement in 2006, the church’s membership had grown to 4,095 and Sunday school enrolment stood at 3,705. The annual baptisms averaged between 150 and 175. And contributions through the Cooperative Program grew to \$494,755 in 2005 from \$25,624 during Welch’s first year as pastor.²⁹

President, Florida Baptist State Convention – 1988

While serving as pastor of First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach, Welch was active in the Florida Baptist State Convention. In 1987 he was elected to serve as the president of the Florida Baptist State Convention and presided over the 1988 annual meeting held in Lakeland. One of the highlights of the 1988 annual meeting was the retirement recognition of Executive Director-Treasurer Dan Stringer (b. 1927; d. 2007) who had served since 1979. In other action, the State Board of Missions proposed, and messengers approved, a 1989 Cooperative Program budget which reduced the percentage allocation to the Southern Baptist Convention – to 47.35 percent from 50 percent – and increased the Florida Baptist ministry causes allocation to 52.35 percent. This followed several years in which the Florida Baptist Convention had been the first state Baptist convention to achieve the 50-50 percentage distribution. However, reduced contributions from churches and increased fixed operating costs necessitated the re-allocation of the percentages distribution. The other significant action by messengers was the approval to transfer operating responsibility of the Florida Baptist Retirement Center to the Florida Baptist Children’s

Homes from the Convention's Business Services office.³⁰

F.A.I.T.H. Evangelism Training Launched

The Wednesday night of April 30, 1997, marked the unveiling of F.A.I.T.H., an evangelism outreach ministry designed by Pastor Welch and Minister of Evangelism Doug Williams. In F.A.I.T.H., teams of three people visit prospects and share their Christian faith with them. The word F.A.I.T.H. is an acronym that represents the key elements of the Sunday school-based plan of salvation comprised of: Forgiveness; Available; Impossible; Turn (repentance); Heaven. Initially, "28 originator training churches and pastors from across the nation were brought to Daytona Beach to observe, study and commit to the 16-week strategy in their own locations. . . Within five years, 60,000 members in 3,800 churches had been trained in F.A.I.T.H."³¹

"F.A.I.T.H. is far broader than just evangelism," Welch told a group of college students decades later, "it is a strategy and process wherein a local church can crystallize the ministry task."³² In a separate

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interview, Welch explained the history of F.A.I.T.H.'s development to *Baptist Press* by noting, "We

started with pure EE [Evangelism Explosion] for several years, then said this won't get it." Continuing, Welch said, "Then we started cannibalizing that and baptizing it and got to what we called ES, which is the essence of F.A.I.T.H. That was when we changed the complete outline and started over."³³ In 1998 the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board adopted the program and provided nationwide promotion, resources and training support. During the ensuing years Welch flew – on average one million miles

annually – across the country leading clinics and encouraging pastors to embrace the evangelistic visitation effort.

Elected SBC President for 2005

During the 2004 SBC annual meeting held in Indianapolis, Bobby Welch was overwhelming elected president for the year 2005. A year earlier, John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer, Florida Baptist Convention, confirmed to the *Florida Baptist Witness* that Welch had been asked to consider being nominated in 2004. “In conversations with Bobby I have encouraged him to do this and I support him,” Sullivan said. Contacted by the *Witness*, Welch said he was praying about the possible nomination. “If the convention were to want me to do that I would always try to do everything I could do to help the Kingdom’s cause,” Welch said.³⁴

During the 2004 convention’s proceedings, President Jack Graham announced the time for nominations for the election of president. Johnny Hunt of Georgia nominated Bobby Welch of Florida. Dennis Connor of North Carolina nominated Al Jerrell of North Carolina. President Graham called on Registration Secretary James H. Wells who gave balloting instructions to messengers and ballots were cast. Subsequently, Wells reported that among the registered 8,307 messengers, 5,038 ballots were cast with 3,997 (79.6 percent) for Bobby Welch and 1,020 (20.4 percent) for Al Jerrell. President Graham declared Bobby Welch as president elect for 2004 – 2005.³⁵

Bus Tour across America 2004: As the SBC president-elect and co-creator of the popular F.A.I.T.H. evangelism strategy, Welch soon announced that he would embark on a 50-state, 25-day bus tour in August and September 2004. He travelled to every

state, including Alaska and Hawaii, just not by bus. Welch said he conceived of a national bus tour rally as a means of generating a sense of urgency about

In the prior five years (1999 – 2003) Southern Baptists’ total annual baptism averaged 400,723

evangelism among Southern Baptists. The bus tour was a kickoff for "The Everyone Can Kingdom Challenge for Evangelism" campaign, which was Welch’s theme emphasis for Southern Baptists in

2004 – 2005 to achieve the goal of one million baptisms in one year.³⁶ In the prior five years (1999 – 2003) Southern Baptists’ total annual baptism averaged 400,723. According to the Annual Church Profile (ACP), information gathered by the Southern Baptist Convention’s LifeWay Christian Resources, baptisms in 2005 dropped 4.15 percent to 371,850 from 387,947 reported in 2004. The statistics indicated that baptisms — which rebounded in 2004 after a four-year decline — slumped again in 2005, according to a story by *Baptist Press*.³⁷

Reflecting upon the recently completed bus tour, Welch told the *Christian Post* that he had developed the F.A.I.T.H. evangelism strategy because he felt Southern Baptists were not sufficiently focused on evangelism and baptisms. “So, when it became obvious that I might be a likely president for the [SBC] convention, I began to pray and the Lord placed this approach in my heart. I also talked to a lot of people, and that’s where the 50-state bus tour came in. I relocated to Nashville for two months, and that was all part of that plan for this convention.”³⁸

Serving as SBC President for 2005

The nearly week-long gathering in 2005 for the annual SBC meeting held in Nashville, Tennessee,

began with a record 10,000-plus volunteers doing door-to-door evangelism as part of Crossover Nashville on Saturday. The emphasis continued through a Wednesday evening finale to the convention meeting, complete with fireworks, confetti, a balloon drop, and a performance from the contemporary Christian music group Casting Crowns. Over the course of the weekend and week, there were more than 2,500 recorded professions of faith in Christ.³⁹

Bobby Welch presided over a convention he dubbed as the one-year emphasis on evangelism through the *Everyone Can Kingdom Challenge*. Welch's emphasis on evangelism was nearly endless. Throughout the three days he prompted messengers to shout in unison, "Everyone can, and I'm it!" — a reference to the fact that every believer is gifted to share the gospel. In one impromptu moment he even grabbed a microphone and went into the audience, asking messengers to talk about their Crossover witnessing experiences.⁴⁰

Among the early items of business was the election of president to serve in 2006. First Vice President Gerald Davidson presided and recognized Evangelist Junior Hill of Decatur, Georgia, who nominated Bobby Welch. "A prophet has been among us," Hill said in nominating Welch. "Seldom has any man risen . . . more fitted to the task at hand." He commended Welch for his passionate leadership and for "focusing on the main task: winning the lost to Jesus Christ." There were no other nominations. Davidson declared Bobby Welch president for 2005 – 2006.⁴¹

The election was immediately followed by Welch's presidential speech, in which Welch clarified the message as a "passionate, personal appeal" to Southern Baptists "to try harder" in the great

challenge of “a unity of purpose for evangelism.” He went on to stress, “We can go further. We can go deeper,” noting, “We can do more for the glory of God and the sake of souls . . .”⁴²

He went on to stress, “We can go further. We can go deeper”

Other highlights of the annual meeting included:⁴³

- President George W. Bush addressed messengers via satellite, restating his support for a constitutional marriage amendment and his desire to build a “culture of life” in America;
- Messengers gave final approval to allow the Annuity Board to change its name to GuideStone Financial Resources;
- Messengers passed a resolution ending an eight-year boycott of The Disney Company begun in 1997; and
- Ken Whitten, pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church in Tampa, Florida, delivered the convention sermon, blending conservative resurgence history, a text out of Acts 27, and a line from the hymn *Rescue the Perishing*.

Serving as SBC President in 2006

Bobby Welch presided over the 2006 annual meeting held in Greensboro, North Carolina, which marked Welch’s second year as president. He set the tone of the meeting with his “*Everyone Can*” emphasis which promoted a goal of baptizing one million in one year. The twelve-month push began the prior October and ran through the final week of September 2006. To further underscore the “Everyone Can” theme, a series of video evangelism testimonies were presented during each session. It was reported that the pre-convention Crossover event had 3,189 volunteers who reported 823 people prayed to receive Christ.

“We will baptize a million in a year. I don't know if it will be this year. [But] we could baptize a million this year if you'd get up and get out of here and go to work,” an optimistic Welch said to loud applause on the final night. The evening showcased a musical finale featuring the Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tenn., choir and the “*Everyone Can*” People's Mass Choir. Seventy-five large Scripture-themed banners were displayed throughout the Greensboro Coliseum.⁴⁴

Welch said during his president's address. “With the Cooperative Program, everyone can. Your dollar works seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, all around the world, non-stop — even when you're snoring, asleep, it's still working.”⁴⁵

Among the many other business highlights:

- Messengers approved moving the responsibility for stewardship education to the SBC Executive Committee from LifeWay Christian Resources. The move consolidated stewardship with SBC Cooperative Program promotion; and
- President George W. Bush spoke via video message, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke in person to messengers.

Concluding Service at First Baptist

For most men, having served two years as SBC president would have been the pinnacle of a ministry career. However, Bobby Welch had some unfinished business. In the mid-1990s Welch and the church leadership recognized that their four-acre downtown site was landlocked and could not accommodate any expansion of facilities. A long-range plan was undertaken to identify another land site for the church closer to the prominent Interstate-4 and Interstate-95 corridors located west of downtown. Subsequently a 226-acre site was located between I-95

and U. S.-1, along Tomoka Farm Road. Although the site was officially consecrated with a special prayer ceremony in 2004, it would be years before construction of the planned \$50 million campus was undertaken. Finally, construction began in 2018 and by Fall 2019, the worship center, the first of several planned buildings, was completed.⁴⁶

Bobby Welch, at age 63, announced May 28, 2006, to the congregation that he would retire August 27, after serving for 32 years as the church's senior pastor. The announcement followed "a brief Memorial Day observance when he recognized veterans of the Armed Services and their family members and offered a prayer for survivors of those killed while on military duty," the *Florida Baptist Witness* reported.⁴⁷ David Cox, Welch's co-pastor since 2003 became senior pastor.

Reading from his prepared statement to the congregation, Welch said he and his wife, Maudellen, will remain in the church, as would his son and son-in-law – both of whom were deacons – and his grandchildren. He also expressed confidence in the leadership of David

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Cox who became senior pastor. Welch said he “will be available to assist the younger man, but only at his request.” In an interview with the *Witness* after the worship service Welch explained, “I’ve got plenty to do and I intend to go do it” noting that his preference is to serve within the Southern Baptist Convention in order to “make a difference for the Kingdom of God over the next 10 to 15 years.”⁴⁸

Post Retirement Ministry

Following his retirement from First Baptist, Welch continued his promotion of the “Everyone Can”

evangelism and baptism emphasis. He also continued preaching through pulpit supply. And within short order, Southern Baptists reached out to Bobby Welch for several special ministry opportunities.

SBC strategist for Global Evangelical Relations: A motion approved by messengers during the 2004 SBC annual meeting directed the SBC Executive Committee to establish a position for Global Evangelical Relations. The creation of the position was done in tandem with the SBC's withdrawal from cooperation with and financial support of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Paige Patterson (b. 1942), who had chaired the SBC Executive Committee study group, told messengers, "We can no longer afford in this particular day, when the press for 'gay marriage' is on, to be in an alliance of any kind with denominations which support 'gay marriage' in any form or fashion." Patterson continued, "Nor is it possible for us to be any longer in affiliation with some of the denominations of the BWA who do not believe in the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture and regularly call it into question."⁴⁹

In seeking the right leader, the SBC Executive Committee tapped Southern Baptist statesman and evangelism specialist Bobby Welch. In the assignment Welch served as the Southern Baptist liaison with existing Baptist groups worldwide, particularly in Europe. Between 2007 and 2011 the focus of the Welch-led cooperative ministry was evangelism, church planting and theological education.⁵⁰

Serving the Tennessee Baptist Convention: Beginning in 2011, Welch requested a reduced role as the Global Evangelical Relations liaison to six weeks a year. This permitted Welch to accept an additional assignment as the associate executive director/church growth for

the Tennessee Baptist Convention. The position established in 2011 had administrative oversight of the convention's programs involved in evangelism and church planting.⁵¹ Welch concluded his service in 2015.

History Artist: In 2017, in a stark contrast to his life of ministry service, Bobby Welch returned to his hometown of Fort Payne, Ala. There he developed papier-mâché style artwork representations of the village in which he grew up in the 1940s and 1950s. "This is a heritage tribute, a tribute to the ordinary," Welch told persons attending the annual meeting of

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Landmarks Historic Association of DeKalb County. The finished artwork featured eight characters from the

town's "boom" era, whom Welch said were people who will see themselves, but they are not obvious to everyone.⁵²

At the time this 2026 *Journal* article was prepared, Bobby and Maudellen Welch were living in Daytona Beach and supporting First Baptist Church as they promised at Welch's retirement.

Clarifying Thoughts

by Dr. Bobby Welch

“Large churches cannot win North America, but the church-at-large cannot only win North America, it can win the entire world.”

“Facility-based evangelism is faulty.”

“There is an eternity of difference between church growth and growing the church.”

“The church is God’s ‘forward operational base’ for the soldiers of Christ in the foreign countries of the world.”

“You must always favor evangelism in order to have a balanced ministry because natural inclination favors discipleship.”

“If you teach people to love fishing, not just catching, they will keep fishing until they are catching. Otherwise, they will stop fishing because they only love catching.”

[SOURCE: *First Faith: The Bobby Welch Story at First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach, Florida*, (Clearwater, FL: Paracomm Press, 2004), 65.]

ENDNOTES:

Editor's Note: This profile of Bobby H. Welch was written by Donald S. Hepburn, managing director, Florida Baptist Historical Society, using the following resources:

¹ Bobby Welch, *You the Warrior Leader*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), 203.

² *Ibid.*, 203.

³ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶ Lonnie Wilkey, "One pastor, especially, remembers Welch's profession of faith," *Baptist Press*, June 17, 2005, 1; the story held in the Bobby H. Welch file of the Florida Baptist Historical Society, Graceville, Florida, [hereinafter similar news publication stories to be identified as: story held in Welch's bio file].

⁷ Welch, 211.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 205 – 206.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁰ "Cadets Begin Summer Camp," *The (Jacksonville, Ala.) Collegian*, June 28, 1965, 3; [story held in Welch's bio file].

¹¹ "Miss Maudellen Bell Marries Bobby Welch," *The Huntsville (Ala.) Times*, August 22, 1965, 56; [story held in Welch's bio file]. Maudellen Bell Welch's birth year was confirmed in www.Ancestry.com, accessed May 30, 2026.

¹² The dates of birth of the Welches children are noted in the official "Biographical Sketch of Bobby H. Welch" prepared by Welch and held in the FBHS' Welch's bio file.

¹³ Welch, 224 – 225.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁷ The summary of Welch's military service is recorded in the official "Biographical Sketch of Bobby H. Welch" prepared by Welch and held in the FBHS' Welch's bio file.

¹⁸ Jennifer Davis Rash, "Bobby Welch's art honors hometown's heritage," *Alabama Baptist*, November 14, 2017; [story held in Welch's bio file].

¹⁹ Lonnie Wilkey, "One pastor, especially, remembers Welch's profession of faith;" [story held in Welch's bio file].

²⁰ Editorial Committee, "His Name Kept Coming Back," *First Faith: The Bobby Welch Story at First Baptist Church, Daytona Beach, Florida*, (Clearwater, FL: Paracomm Press, 2004), 39.

²¹ Lonnie Wilkey.

- ²² Editorial Committee, *First Faith*, 39.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ²⁷ Halifax Baptist Association, "Statistical Reports," Florida Baptist *Annual*, 1975.
- ²⁸ Editorial Committee, *First Faith*, 46.
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- ³⁰ Proceedings, Florida Baptist *Annual*, 1988.
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