

Baptists want churches to help them with personal needs, survey reveals_61404

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LifeWay Christian Resources

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Ask 16,000 Baptists what they need, and their responses will show the real answer is discipleship.

LifeWay Christian Resources surveyed adults and youth attending 29 conferences and events sponsored by the Southern Baptist publishing house last year about what kind of help they need from their churches.

The No. 1 need expressed by both groups was help with personal needs—spiritual, emotional, physical and social.

In a previous survey of 1,500 pastors and ministers of education inquiring about the purposes of their churches' discipleship ministries, the leaders' responses indicated many of the personal needs of their members could be addressed through discipleship studies.

Participants were asked in which three areas they could use help from their churches—church, education and learning, home and family/relationships,

personal needs (spiritual, emotional, physical, social), world/culture, and work/school.

Personal needs ranked first with both adults and youth.

The No. 2 area for adults was home and family/relationships; for youth second place went to work/school.

Third for adults was education and learning. Among youth, home and family/relationships ranked third.

Fourth for both adults and youth was world/culture.

Fifth for adults was work/school. Among youth, church ranked fifth.

Sixth for adults was church. For youth, education and learning ranked last.

“Both adults and youth place home and family/relationships as top areas in which they could use some help,” said LifeWay's Scott McConnell, who directed the survey.

“Students place more emphasis on school as an area where they could use help, but, interestingly, adults place work, the response most equivalent to school, as No. 5.”

Discipleship ministries and studies available to churches are designed to address practical needs such as these.

While many churches do not use the term “discipleship,” this area of ministry still exists in many churches.

The latest figures from the Annual Church Profile, compiled by LifeWay from reports routed through local Baptist associations and state conventions, show more than 2 million Southern Baptists are enrolled in some sort of discipleship study.

“A church might call this ministry area discipleship, or they might call it small-group studies, equipping studies, personal growth studies, video studies or any number of names, but it's still about helping individuals grow in their relationship with and knowledge of Christ,” McConnell said.

In the earlier survey of 1,500 Southern Baptist church leaders, 69 percent said a purpose of their discipleship ministry was to inspire and motivate people in their Christian walk.

Sixty-three percent said it was to provide opportunity for discussion.

Sixty-one percent said the purpose of their discipleship program was to encourage personal daily Bible reading/study.

Fifty-seven percent said their purpose for discipleship training was to foster life application (to give members a way to apply biblical principles to their daily lives), and 56 percent said it was to train people to share the gospel.

“It's interesting to note that all five of these discipleship purposes encourage personal growth—from motivation to building daily habits and skills to encouraging other group members,” McConnell said. “When you look at what the people in the pews ... say they want their churches' help with, it's clear that these needs can be met through discipleship studies.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.