

## Report from the 2017 Annual Meeting

The annual meeting, held on March 18 at the First Baptist Church of Zachary, was a time of worship and celebration at what God is doing to help impoverished and hungry people help themselves through agricultural missions. Those in attendance were reminded again that "*Agricultural missions is the best kept secret of Southern Baptists*." Our only regret was that more Fellowship members— and others who have a heart for missions—were not present for this wonderful and enriching occasion.

Your Fellowship expended more than \$17,000 in 2016 for projects in three regions of the world. We funded goat, chicken, and greenhouse projects in impoverished areas of Eastern Europe; water projects in Haiti; and continued support for previously funded projects in Southern Mexico.

**Jeff Palmer**, former agricultural missionary in several Asian countries and current CEO of Baptist Global Response (BGR), gave an enthusiastic keynote address. BGR is currently involved in agricultural development in 65 countries around the world. It is an auxiliary of the International Mission Board (IMB). BGR is a "mercy ministry" that goes where the need is most urgent, such as in the event of famine, natural disaster, and war. They partner with 4,000 IMB missionaries, which enhances the IMB strategy throughout the world.

Their approach is to concentrate on training indigenous people to solve their own problems so the work will continue after the missionary or agency moves on to another site. Palmer emphasized that food is always available, even in impoverished and disaster areas, for those who have money with which to purchase it. Thus, one of the goals of agricultural missions is to facilitate the production of sufficient food to feed families and communities, but also to provide surplus food to sell to raise cash with which to purchase other items needed to improve the standard of living for families.

The **second speaker** was an agricultural missionary who serves in a highly sensitive area of the world where the identity and true purpose of the work cannot be made public because personal safety would be endangered. The area is a melting pot of different ethnic groups that do not get along, which further complicates the development work and the spread of the gospel. The missionary stated that "mercy ministries" facilitate spread of the gospel even in areas that distrust Christians. Agricultural projects currently focus on sheep and goats, chickens, potato and cabbage production, canning of food, drip irrigation, and firewood production.

**Dr. Wayne Sheppard**, Executive Assistant to the Executive Director of the LBC was the final speaker. He focused on projects at an Orphan Village in Haiti where your Fellowship has expended \$9,000 over the past two years. Dr. Sheppard stressed that Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas, but he said, "God is bigger than any of their problems." One half of all Haitians suffer from malnutrition. Most are voodoo worshipers, and are in need of Jesus Christ. The goal of the Orphan Village is to facilitate the gospel of Jesus Christ among children.

Following a recommendation from the Projects Coordinator, the membership approved expenditures of \$11,250 to support agricultural missions projects for 2017. This includes \$6,250 to support several livestock projects plus a greenhouse and irrigation system in Eastern Europe, as well as \$5,000 to go toward 500 gallon water tanks for the community water project in Haiti.

Everyone then enjoyed an excellent barbeque lunch to conclude this year's meeting. Special thanks is extended to Ms. Debbi Mashaw of FBC, Zachary for her friendly and capable assistance with local arrangements.