

# THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



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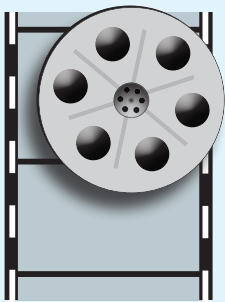
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## INSIDE



**Understanding the ins and outs of this year's big bingo bill**

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**Movie directors, screenwriters making more moves toward faith-based films**

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**Pisgah's New Home Baptist works to give family in need a new home**

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Photo courtesy of Martha McMinn

**HEALING** — Members of an Alabama Baptist medical team assist patients in a clinic in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. The seven-member team saw more than 700 patients in five days.

## 'Thank you' from Haiti

### First Alabama Baptist teams return; more headed out

By Grace Thornton  
The Alabama Baptist

Gene Birdsong said old men cry too. "I just couldn't help it," he explained.

He wasn't alone. "There wasn't a one of us on that missions team that didn't have to step behind a wall at some point and cry," said Birdsong, a member of First Baptist Church, Jasper.

The seasoned physician, one of seven members of a medical team that kicked off Alabama Baptists' work in quake-ravished Haiti, said the emotional moments just kept coming.

A child's broad smile when chaplain Hub Harvey played with him.

A woman jumping into their truck bed to pat nurse Susan Alexander on the hand and say, "Thank you for what you are doing for Haiti."

The sight of makeshift kites flying

over the city. "There's some hope here — the children are playing again," said team member Martha McMinn.

The team, which ran a medical clinic five days in mid-February, saw more than 700 patients and helped a number of Haitians come to Christ.

But it wasn't about numbers, they say. Most of all, Birdsong remembers one 2-year-old.

"She hadn't slept since 'the event,'" he said, noting that Haitians refer to the Jan. 12 disaster as "the event" — they don't say "earthquake."

"She and her family are living in a pickup truck now, and they hadn't eaten in two days," he said.

The family is a vivid picture of how the work there is far from over, said (See '350-plus,' page 13)



Photo by Grace Thornton

**'WE LET THEM KNOW SOMEONE CARED'** — Gene Birdsong, a member of a medical team assembled by Baptist Health System, tells representatives of the media about his trip to Haiti in mid-February.

## State's top attorneys spar over gambling

By Sondra Washington  
The Alabama Baptist

Two of the state's highest attorneys exchanged words Feb. 17 in separate press conferences regarding recent actions taken by the Governor's Task Force on Illegal Gambling.

Attorney General Troy King disagreed with the task force's efforts to shut down illegal slot machine gambling operations around the state and said he may decide to "superintend" and take over — but not "yet." He wants the governor to request and await a declaratory judgment from the Alabama Supreme Court to determine the legality of slot machines, which he considers "electronic bingo."



KING

Task Force Commander John Tyson called King's actions "a delaying tactic."

"Delaying allows a few people to go on breaking the law and get away with it while the rest of us obey the law," he said. "That is neither fair nor right."

Tyson added, "The Supreme Court of Alabama has ruled twice in just four months that these illegal slot machines are not bingo. ... The criminal law of Alabama is crystal clear. Slot machines are illegal no matter what name you call them. Alabama law clearly states that if it accepts money and dispenses cash-value prizes based upon any elements of chance, then it's an illegal slot machine. ... There is no question these machines do exactly that."

Calling the raids "controversial" and "irresponsible," King referred to a potential standoff between the task force and men who may be deputized by Greene County's sheriff to prevent a raid on the Greenetrack casino. Then King spoke indirectly about previously attempted raids on Houston County's Country Crossing and Macon County's VictoryLand casinos.

"This situation was unnecessary and (See 'King,' page 15)



TYSON

# COMMENT

## Friends Can 'Carry Us to Jesus'

A few years ago, I met a lady who was kind enough to share her story with me. This lady was a strong Christian from a good Baptist family. She was active in church. Many would describe her as a pillar of the church and community in which she lived. Because she knew of my first wife's death, this new friend was kind enough to talk honestly with me about her grief experience.

This lady's oldest son had died unexpectedly and tragically. Her son's death had left her emotionally and spiritually numb, even paralyzed. She never stopped going to church, but it was just going through the motions. She could not pray. She could not worship.

Her son's death had forced this Christian lady with a strong faith background to re-examine her relationship to God, even re-examine who God is.

Like many others, she had lived in a "cause and effect world." Do good things and God blesses. Do bad things and God punishes. It is surprising how many people live in a theological world like the one described by Job's three mistaken friends.

Perhaps it is because believing in a cause and effect world makes us powerful that this teaching is so seductive. It allows us to control God. We can put God in our debt just by the way we live. We can live by understanding instead of living by faith.

More than once, I have heard the story of how God caused a terrible tragedy to befall someone's family member in order to get the attention of another. Perhaps you have heard such stories, too. Details change but the story is always the same.

It is amazing how important the person telling the story views himself or herself. "I am so important," he or she reasons, "that God did something terrible to someone else just to speak to me. God turned that person into a 'thing' to be used in order to speak to me. God loves me more than He loves that person."

Such a view certainly makes some people feel important and powerful. It also can make one feel guilty. If something bad happens to someone, then are we responsible? That is the inevitable question.

If we are responsible, then we are guilty. Does the accident or disease or death mean God is against us?



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Such a position also raises questions about God. Is He a loving God toward all or only toward some? What is the nature of God anyway?

These are not abstract philosophical questions. These are questions that grieving people ask. Is God for me or against me? Others ask similar questions during life's journey.

At the time we met, it had been three years since this lady's son had died. She told me that during the entire first year, she had been the injured person whom friends "carried to Jesus."

#### A lifelong trip

You remember the story recorded in Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26. A paralyzed man's only hope for healing was to be taken to Jesus. Thankfully the man had four friends who cared enough for him that they went out of their way to make sure he got to Jesus.

Most of us remember the story of the four friends taking off the roof of the house in Capernaum where Jesus was teaching. We remember the friends had to be innovative in their solution, persistent in their efforts and compassionate in their care.

The result was wholeness for their paralyzed friend that exceeded anything they had anticipated. Not only did their friend walk from that house with his mat rolled up under his arm but he also left with his sins forgiven. For the first time in his life, the man understood that God was not against him. He was not guilty. The man walked through the door of the home he had entered from above as whole spiritually as he was physically.

This dear Christian lady described how friends had "carried her to Jesus" month after month. They allowed her to grieve rather than urging her to "get on with life." They listened to her tell her story over and over again. They talked to her, asked her questions, challenged her but with great sensitivity.

These friends encouraged her. They included her. They forced her to participate in activities even despite her protests. Sometimes these friends simply did things for her when they saw her grief was too heavy. They helped her learn to find what I call "a new sense of balance." One never heals from the death of a loved one. One

never "gets over it." One just learns a new sense of balance that allows him or her to live with the open wound.

The lady's journey toward God was not complete the day we met. That is a lifelong trip for all of us. But she was beginning to accept the mystery of God. No one can adequately explain the nature of God. But she told me she knew God loved her all the time and in all situations.

She knew that God loved her son as much as He loved her. She understood our world is corrupted by sin and groans for redemption just as humanity does (Rom. 8:20-21). That is part of the reason bad things happen to good people.

This lady's friends did not leave her alone. They did not force her to act as they wanted her to act. Her friends helped cut her burdens in half by being there to help carry them. They caused her joys to multiply by sharing them. Her friends loved her and carried her to Jesus. In their love, she could see His love until she could once again joy over the love of God poured out for all people through Jesus and His death on Calvary's cross.

How fortunate this lady was to have such friends. At the feet of Jesus, she found her new sense of balance. Today she uses her experience to help others walking the grief journey. Not everyone is so blessed. Many come face to face with death or disappointment and walk away from God. How tragic.

May God bless us all with friends who care enough about us to carry us to Jesus when life's circumstances leave us paralyzed and unable to get there by ourselves.

### THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

"If ye continue in my word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

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### Voice your opinion

**SPEAK UP** on issues in the Baptist world by writing a letter to the editor of *The Alabama Baptist*.

#### Remember to:

- Include your name and address
- Focus on issues, not people
- Be as concise as possible



## Someone You Should Know

By Kristen Lindsey, The Alabama Baptist

### Sarah Morrison

Antioch Baptist Church, Centreville  
Bibb Baptist Association

**FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE:** Psalm 19:14

**FAVORITE HYMN:** "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone"

**HOBBIES:** Cooking and watching sports

**FAMILY STATUS:** Married to Henry for 68 years; two children, Mickey and Mark; six grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren



*Sarah Morrison has served as church clerk of Antioch Baptist Church, Centreville, for 20 years. She has been a member of the church for 76 years.*

**MORRISON**

#### Q: What was your childhood like?

**A:** I had a lot of happiness in the church growing up. My family didn't have a lot of material possessions, but we had a lot of love.

#### Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

**A:** When I was 13 years old, the Lord called me and told me it was time to give my life to Him. My mother was my mentor, and she was the one to help me accept Jesus as my Savior.

#### Q: How were you involved in church through the years?

**A:** I was involved in all the activities. I taught Sunday School and was director of Bible school several different times. I directed WMU (Woman's Missionary Union) from early adult life on. I love young people and was an instrument to the young people. I felt like it was my duty, out of my love for the church, to be involved in the church as much as possible.

#### Q: What did you get from those ministries?

**A:** They were an instrument in keeping my life going. The young people I worked with returned the love I gave them to me. I was very interested in helping them, and I got a bigger blessing than they did. They helped me grow as I tried to help them grow.

#### Q: What difference has being a Christian made in your life?

**A:** If I hadn't been a Christian and dependent on God for my physical problems, I wouldn't be here today. He gave me strength and encouragement when I didn't think I could go anymore.

# Big 'bingo' bill

## Slot-machine legislation would create for-profit gambling operations

By Sondra Washington  
and Jennifer Davis Rash  
The Alabama Baptist

**P**ro-gambling legislators are working feverishly to amend Senate Bill (SB) 380 calling for a vote to legalize and expand gambling in Alabama. But the absence of key supporters and requests from cities omitted from the bill may be stalling its progress in the Statehouse.

Still heated debates and extended filibusters are expected any day for the bill, which many say will change the face of Alabama forever.

In its unaltered state, SB 380, sponsored by Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, would allow 10 "points of destination" across the state to operate for-profit "federally recognized bingo." This new term renames the currently illegal slot machine gambling commonly referred to as electronic bingo across Alabama and uses the word federal as a way to describe the machines being operated by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

#### 'Points of destination'

The bill would legalize slot machines at VictoryLand in Macon County, Greenetrack in Greene County, Country Crossing in Houston County, the Birmingham Race Course, the Mobile Greyhound Park, two locations in White Hall in Lowndes County, one additional location in Jefferson County and in two yet-to-be-announced locations in north Alabama. All but three locations would have three years to make sure their facilities are valued at \$100 million. Greenetrack's casino would have to be worth \$50 million. Locations in Lowndes County would have no minimum investment.

SB 380 calls for a constitutional amendment to be voted on in November. At press

time, the bill still allowed any county to authorize for-profit bingo games, which was causing confusion because it is being promoted as limiting gambling facilities to 10 statewide. There were reports that the "all counties" section was being re-evaluated, however.

It also established a state gaming commission to regulate gambling. The bill does not address Indian gambling in Alabama at all.

Bedford noted he has been in intense negotiations with representatives from each of the existing facilities and others from the gambling industry including leaders of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, who own the Mobile dog track. He said the final version of the bill was close at press time.

Many gambling opponents question how a bill written with the help of casino owners would impose strict regulations.

"It would make them a law unto themselves," said Eric Johnston, executive director of Citizens for a Better Alabama.

Still Bedford believes the bill has "the toughest gaming regulations in the nation."

SB 380 calls for a five-member gaming commission and tax benefits for all counties, not just those with gambling facilities, he

### Senator targets governor's power

**A**ttempted raids on two of the state's largest casinos recently ignited a media firestorm between gambling supporters and leaders of Gov. Bob Riley's Task Force on Illegal Gambling. Attorney General Troy King was even asked to step in and stop the task force's actions.

And if Sen. Bobby Singleton, D-Greensboro, has his way and legislators pass Senate Bill (SB) 375, a governor would no longer have authority to initiate or direct civil or criminal proceedings. All of that authority will be given to the attorney general.

Several district attorneys have spoken out against this bill that would void the governor's previous authority concerning civil or criminal proceedings. Riley said the bill could have "disastrous consequences." (TAB)

said. Of the 25 percent tax on the facilities, 20 percent would go to the state — 65 percent of that to education and 35 percent to Medicaid.

Gambling opponents say 25 percent is not much when other states charge up to 50 percent in taxes.

Until the Senate passes its version of the legislation, House Bill 507, its companion bill, sponsored by Rep. Marcel Black, D-Tusculumbia, is on hold.

"We are waiting until it comes out of the Senate," Black said. "Our whole focus right now is to put our efforts behind one bill, the Senate bill, and discuss it from there."

"I'm trying to [solidify the] votes to allow the people to vote. ... I'm meeting with them (the various representatives) and discussing concerns," he said. "My main goal is to tax, limit and regulate

gaming in the state and to allow the people to vote on whether or not that is what the people want to do."

Sen. Bobby Singleton, D-Greensboro, chairman of the Senate Tourism and Marketing Committee, said he wants this bill passed quickly. The committee passed SB 380 without seeing its amended version, citing the details of the bill could be hammered out on the Senate floor.

## Alabama Baptists 'rally' against expansion of gambling

By Kristen Lindsey  
The Alabama Baptist

**W**e are in a battle for the soul of Alabama," said Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), at a Birmingham regional anti-gambling rally Feb. 16.

The battle between those who want gambling and those who do not is being played out over commercials, in the news media and most importantly, in the state Legislature, Godfrey explained.

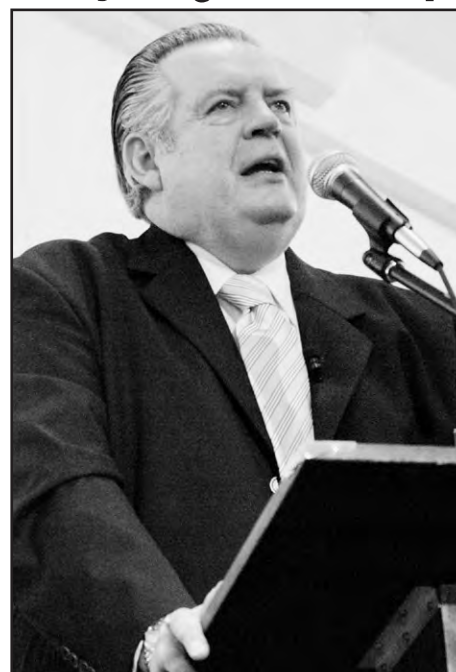
"The bills (Senate Bills 380 and 381 and House Bill 507) will make the gambling institutions immune to ... future (constitutional) amendments. (SB 380 is the bill making the most progress currently — see story, this page.)

"The main thing we need are for people to contact their legislators and tell them we don't want them to pass any gambling laws," he said.

The anti-gambling rally was just one of five held around the state Feb. 15-17 as a precursor to a statewide rally held Feb. 23 on the steps of the Statehouse in Montgomery. The rallies — sponsored by ALCAP and Citizens

for a Better Alabama — were held to inform people about the costs of gambling, the issues surrounding the gambling bills pending in the Legislature and "the truth" behind the pro-gambling arguments.

The ultimate goal was to encourage people to take action, Godfrey said, noting the Dothan rally attracted several hundred people while the other four rallies' attendance was much lower. The Montgomery rally was also attended by scores of pro-gambling people wanting



**RICHARD LAND**

to hear what Godfrey and others on the program had to say.

One featured speaker at the rallies was Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

Noting that most people are not aware of the biblical arguments against gambling, Land pointed to Romans 13 and explained that government is a divinely ordained institution with the purpose of promoting good not terror.

"When the government ... ends up promoting gambling for its own purposes, then the state, the government, has reduced its role to that of a bookie, promoting that which it knows is socially destructive behavior in order to get its cut of the action," he said.

"That is a mockery to the reason God gave us government in the first place. God gave us government to promote that which is good not that which is destructive," Land continued.

"Gambling is a bloodsucking industry," he said. "Southern Baptists have been, are and will continue to be opposed to gambling."

Land urged pastors to do everything possible to protect their flock from people who want to do it harm.

Allan Murphy, pastor of North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, attended one of the rallies and said he was leaving it more emboldened to speak out against gambling than he was before.

"It motivated me to speak out more forthrightly," he said. "It looks like it's a citizen's responsibility to take a stand."

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# Helping Hearts through BHS HeartAware

By Cary Estes

Pam Bishop had a slight pain in her heart last year on Valentine's Day. But it had nothing to do with love.

Actually, Bishop was not sure what was causing the pain, which she described as "a little needle feeling in my chest." The pain was not intense, and Bishop did not consider herself to be a candidate for any sort of serious heart condition. She was 52 years old, active, not overweight and had normal blood pressure.

Still, the pain persisted. At the same time, Bishop kept seeing a commercial on television for the Baptist Health System's (BHS) HeartAware program, with its seven-minute, online evaluation and free follow-up screening and consultation at any of the four BHS hospitals (Princeton, Shelby, Walker or Citizens Baptist Medical Centers).

So Bishop decided to take part in the program. When her on-line assessment determined she was at risk for heart disease, Bishop took advantage of the follow-up screening, which was performed by a trained clinician in Princeton's Early Detection Center. As a result of the screening Bishop underwent further testing, a cardiac calcium score, which indicated plaque had built up in her arteries and was starting to harden. And while it was not a significant problem at the moment, it easily could have developed into a major health issue without treatment.

"I really didn't think I had a problem," Bishop said "I've always been active. I work in the yard, I walk and I'm not overweight. If you look at me, you wouldn't think I was at risk to have a heart attack. But I had plaque in my heart arteries, and that's something you can't see."

The treatment was simple. She was put on a mild dosage of cholesterol medicine, and changed her diet to include more vegetables, fruits, nuts and beans and less red meat and dairy products. Two follow-up appointments with Dr. Tom Cawthon at Princeton Baptist showed the situation already has improved significantly.

"I'm good now. No more needle feeling," Bishop said. "I got on the medicine and the health care regimen I need to be on. I'm glad it happened. And,



*Baptist Health System's HeartAware program begins with a simple online screening at [www.BeHeartAware.com](http://www.BeHeartAware.com) and includes a free follow-up visit with a clinician for those found to be at risk for heart disease.*

"I'm glad I listened to the HeartAware commercials. It was so easy."

The first step is to take the confidential risk assessment at [www.BeHeartAware.com](http://www.BeHeartAware.com). After the evaluation, at-risk participants are given the opportunity to receive free follow-up services.

If the participant chooses to have the follow-up, a hospital representative sets up a 15-minute screening session with a cardiac clinician at one of the Baptist Health System's hospitals.

During the follow-up visit, the clinician asks questions to obtain the patient's cardiac medical history. Next, tests are run to evaluate blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, and weight and body mass. If the clinician's evaluation determines further study or treatment is necessary, the

patient is referred to their family physician or a cardiac specialist.

Bishop said she was surprised at the ease of the entire process, and the importance of what was discovered. She is now a major proponent of the HeartAware program, and the people within the Baptist Health System who run it.

"Shari (Brazelton, the HeartAware nurse at Princeton Baptist) is the best person in the world," Bishop said. "She worked with me through the whole thing. She is so sweet. She set me up with Dr. Cawthon, and he's been wonderful. I feel like I'm in such good hands.

"I'd tell anybody to go through the program. It doesn't take too much time, there's no charge and it really will help you. It's a great program. I don't know why everybody doesn't do it. It doesn't hurt anything to do it. If you're fine, that's great. But it's a preventative thing. It's important to catch things like this before something serious happens. You just have to take action!"

## 7 minutes could save your life

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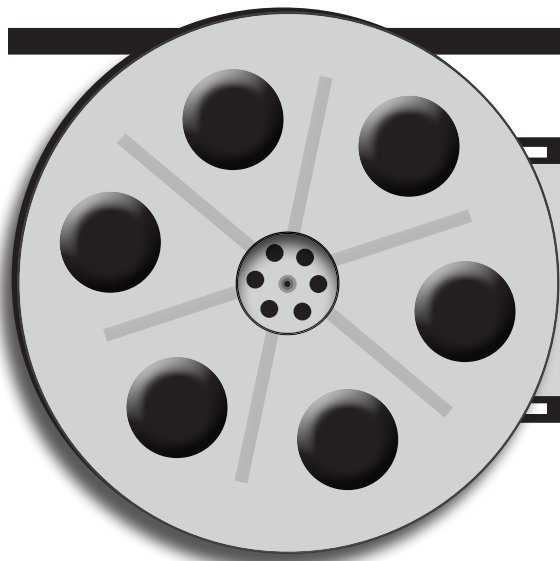
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# Lights ... camera ... gospel?

## Young filmmakers find movies a great outlet for sharing Christ in today's culture

Three hundred evangelical Christian college students sat in a dark, packed downtown St. Louis hotel ballroom, the projected glow of a movie the only source of light.

The students in the room, however, would have argued that the real sources of light were the movies' subjects: missionaries bringing the gospel to what they believe to be the darkest corners of the world for Christians — China, Burma, India, Africa.

In watching examples of such films, these missionaries-to-be are participating in an artistic renaissance of sorts within the Christian community. The potential of narrative filmmaking as an evangelical tool has grown rapidly in recent years, as the technical tools used to make movies have become cheaper and available to more — and younger — people.

"Film is ingrained into our culture, and Christians are using it more and more for God's Kingdom's purposes," said Drew Mason, a 19-year-old sophomore film major from San Diego State University who attended the film screening.

The screening was part of the recent Urbana 09 conference, the largest gathering of missions agencies in the world. Its purpose was to connect more than 16,000 young, idealistic, energetic college students with the 280 missions organizations and seminaries that staffed booths for the five-day event.

### Interest in film

Urbana is organized by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA every three years. The conference moved to St. Louis in 2006 after nearly 60 years on the campus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

But this was the first year that Urbana organizers decided to tap into the younger genera-

tion's interest in film in a big way.

"At Urbana 03, there wasn't a peep about film or filmmaking, and in 06, there were two discussions that brought in about 50 people," said Nathan Clarke, 34, a documentary filmmaker with Fourth Line Films who organized the Urbana Film Festival and Forum.

This year, organizers devoted three formal sessions to the subject, screening six films. The festival drew more than 1,000 students to the sessions and smaller workshops, roundtables, lectures and one-on-one meetings in which students could get critiques on their film pitches.

*"Film is ingrained into our culture, and Christians are using it more and more for God's [Kingdom]."*

Drew Mason  
San Diego State University

"Today there's a community of Christian filmmakers out there who have access to the technical tools but many of whom need to learn how to tell a story," Clarke said.

Probably the most popular evangelical film ever made, the "JESUS" film, was produced 30 years ago by the late Bill Bright, co-founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International. The two-hour movie features the familiar biblical story of Jesus' life and according to its Web site, has been translated into 1,000 languages and has been seen by 6 billion people.

But younger filmmakers are turning away from using their craft as an element of the conversion process itself. Instead they are taking the skills they've learned in film schools and using both documentary and fictional narrative techniques to change the direction in which their movies find an audience.

Rather than making a movie that shows the story of Jesus to a Third World nonbeliever, as the makers of the "JESUS" film did, today's Christian filmmaker might target an American audience and dramatize the dangers for those leading the underground church in China or examine the role of the prosperity gospel in Ghana.

Christian movie director T.C. Johnstone, 36, screened part of his movie "Hearing Everett" at the Urbana film forum and explained that the movie's genesis was as a promotional video for Rancho Sordo Mudo, a home and school for deaf children in Mexico.

But what began as a simple fundraising tool eventually became a feature-length telling of the story-behind-the-story — part documentary, part narrative history — of how an American missionary family left the comforts of home and began teaching deaf children in the Mexican desert.

### Taking action

Churches are the intended venue for free "Hearing Everett" screenings, after which members may take up a collection for Rancho Sordo Mudo.

But for Johnstone and, increasingly, other Christian filmmakers,

the screening itself isn't the end of the movie experience. "Hearing Everett" ends with an "action step" directed at the viewer. Pastors can request a "tool kit" that includes a "small group study guide" that Johnstone hopes will lead others toward church service projects.

Other Christian filmmakers have become activists for social justice issues that both make good sources of drama and mesh with the tenets of their faith. They are unsatisfied just telling a story of injustice and letting an audience decide how to act. For many, their faith propels them to set up nonprofit organizations.

"There's a level of responsibility," Clarke said. "If I'm just putting a movie out there, am I really answering the call?"

Urbana students also learned of an emerging group of Hollywood production companies such as Walden Media, which made "The Chronicles of Narnia" series, that

specialize in family and often Christian movies.

Kurt Tuffensam, 30, a Christian producer who has worked on mainstream Hollywood fare, told the students in one session that production companies like Mpower Pictures have successfully figured out "how to represent Christ to the mainstream."

### 'A mission field'

John Shepherd, president of Mpower and producer of last year's controversial "The Stoning of Soraya M.," said a new generation of Christians is embracing the arts in a way their parents never did.

"If the body of Christ doesn't get involved in film as a mission field, it's missing a phenomenal opportunity to have their message heard by the world," Shepherd said. "And this young generation gets it. The Church had abandoned the arts, but young people are taking it back." (RNS)

## Calvary Church makes its first movie

Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Ga., has done it three times so far. And now Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan, is doing it, too.

The Columbia Baptist Association church is making a movie.

"Writing Christmas Cool," the first independent feature film produced by the church's Kenosis Media Ministries, highlights the lives of six friends and one "outcast" who take it upon themselves to spice up their church Christmas play and its music. In the mix of it all, their lives are changed forever.

### Reaching others

While the film employs an all-volunteer cast, it features the musical stylings of Christian big-band artist Denver & the Mile High Orchestra.

The target audience is twofold, explained director Wayne Patterson.

"This will be a success if one more person comes to Christ because of the message, and that 'one

more' has been a big thing for the whole journey we've been taking. We're doing it for one more person — to reach one more person," Patterson said.

"To the Christian, it's a message of talents. ... Our message to these kids is that things will be the most fruitful they'll ever be if you'll give those talents back to God. And it doesn't matter what that gift is. This is such a huge body of Christ thing. It can be making a phone call, sending a card, baking a loaf of bread. As a Christian, you will receive so many rewards from it by giving it back to God that it will blow your mind."

Production has been ongoing since April 2009, and once the film is finalized, Patterson said a run at

a theater in Dothan and potentially other theaters across the state is anticipated before the film goes to DVD.

"We know this is what we're supposed to do, and we're just taking it a step at a time as God opens doors," said producer Brad Bradford, who also serves as worship pastor at Calvary Baptist. "That's fine if all we do is show it locally and produce 'home-made DVDs' or whatever but if God has other plans, that's great. We're truly giving this as a gift to the Lord, and whatever He wants to do with it is absolutely fine by us."

For more information, visit [www.ChristmasCoolmovie.com](http://www.ChristmasCoolmovie.com) or [www.CalvaryDothan.com](http://www.CalvaryDothan.com). (TAB)

*"We know this is what we're supposed to do, and we're just taking it a step at a time."*

Brad Bradford  
Calvary Baptist Church



Photos courtesy of Outreach Films

**LOOKING FOR HELP** — After his childhood friend makes a tragic move, popular basketball star Jake Taylor (left), played by Randy Wayne, begins a search for what he could have done ‘To Save a Life.’

## New film reaches out to hurting teens

By **Brittany N. Howerton**  
The Alabama Baptist

Sharing the gospel through film has been popular for the past 30 or so years, thanks to the “JESUS” film project, a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ International that began in 1979.

But in the last decade, “faith-based films” have moved forward in leaps and bounds with each new release challenging the quality — both technically and evangelistically — produced in years past.

The beginning of this new decade proved no different with the January theater release of “To Save a Life,” an independent film addressing the challenges teens face like premarital sex, teen pregnancy, parental divorce, peer pressure, self-mutilation, hypocrisy, depression and suicide.

### Empowering teens

“We never set out to make a Christian film,” screenwriter Jim Britts said. “We just wanted to make a film any teen would be able to connect with and love. And we, for sure, wanted to empower Christian teens to have spiritual conversations with friends and to lead friends into relationships with God.”

So Britts asked himself, “How can we make a film that’s amazing for youth ministries and youth pastors to reach their communities but also for kids who would never set foot into the church?”

The answer? Give kids something to which they can relate.

And make it real.

“We wanted to try to be a little bolder in the world we were presenting to that’s not perfect; it’s a little messy,” director Brian Baugh said. “We were hoping [the film] would ‘meet’ some

people and feel more authentic and real to them so that the story would then ring a little more true and authentic.”

Britts said relating to teens where they are is vital because “the Church is missing it when it comes to missing teens.”

“There are less teens involved in church than there’s ever been,” he said. “Eighty-eight percent of teens involved in church are not going to be within a year after high school graduation. It’s because we’re not giving them real answers about following God in the life they’re in. ... If we’re going to bring hope to hurting students, we need to authentically step into that hurt. We need to step into their issues, and that means it gets messy.”

But “To Save a Life” definitely didn’t worry about that, said Todd Oakley, interim student minister at Green Valley Baptist Church, Hoover, whose student ministry rented out Hoover’s Patton Creek 15 theater Jan. 24.

“It did a great job depicting high school life and the struggles [students] go through,” Oakley said. “It’s important for those issues to be addressed and get put out on the table. A lot of things the movie dealt with are tough things students deal with but things that get swept under the rug.”

And just as having a relatable story line was important, the “To Save a Life” production crew knew that making it entertaining was not an option.

“I think it’s always tricky when you’re making a movie that aims to en-

tertain and make a message to fit into that story so people don’t feel they’re being manipulated and preached at,” Baugh said. “I’d hope this would stand out in the sense that there’s a message but that it’s an entertaining ride.”

“In a paradoxical way, if the story is attractive, people will be more impacted by the theme. But when people are sitting in a theater and it gets to feeling



preachy or manipulative, people have this inner mechanism that turns it off.”

Oakley said one of the things his students commented about the most after seeing the film was that “it wasn’t cheesy.”

“It was very well done, and they were blown away by the cinematography,” he said.

And while entertaining students was key to them receiving the message, Baugh and Britts both said the intent was to make an impact.

“For the kids that are in a better place, I would hope they’d be inspired to look around to those that are hurting and realize they can do something and their actions do make a difference in others’ lives,” Baugh said. “For those folks that are in a spot where they’re hurting, (I hope they learn) that they’re not alone, that there are others out there ... and to know they’re loved and worthwhile.”

Britts added the hope is that the film can empower teens and show them “they can save lives by ... reaching out to the hurting and lonely.”

For more information, visit [www.ToSaveALifeMovie.com](http://www.ToSaveALifeMovie.com).

## ‘Letters to God’ movie meant to touch, change lives

By **Brittany N. Howerton**  
The Alabama Baptist

Based on a true story, “Letters to God” is the inspiring tale of a young boy, Tyler, who is journeying through his battle with cancer while impacting lives through his walk of faith.

And it was that story of hope and its potential impact on the cancer community that inspired Andy Thrower, president of aTeam Ministries, to bring the film to his own Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills.

aTeam Ministries is an organization dedicated to providing emotional, spiritual and financial support to families dealing with oncology- or hematology-related diseases in children.

“Because it’s a cancer story, we believe it’s a story that needs to be told,” said Director/Producer David Nixon, who also helped direct “Facing the Giants” and “Fireproof.” “And because of the letters it goes beyond cancer.”

It’s about hope, Thrower said. “Our thought behind going to the expense and effort of doing this is anybody, no matter the situation, would get a sense of hope and know the things God can do in their lives, if they didn’t have that already,” he explained. “Or if they were in a dark time, this could provide some hope in their life that they might not have had or renew hope they had in the past but kind of lost.”

Thrower said while the pre-

screening, being held at Shades Mountain Baptist on March 5 at 6:30 p.m., is open to anyone interested (limited seating available), nearly 100 cancer families and workers have been invited to the screening at no cost to them.

“The intent is to try to get cancer families into church to hear the gospel presentation,” he said. “That was the true purpose. ... The bottom line is not that we’re trying to hide this is a presentation of the gospel, but it’s a way to do that in a setting that’s a little bit different and something they can relate to, and that’s the point.”

### Connecting with God

Nixon said he hopes the take-away value for viewers is that “you can have a connection with God and can pray.”

“A lot of people say ‘I wouldn’t know how to pray,’ but here’s an 8-year-old boy with cancer and it was as simple for him as writing a letter to his best friend every day,” he said. “If an 8-year-old with cancer can do that, you can do it, and you can have a connection with God. It’s as simple as writing a letter to Him.”

“Letters to God” opens in theaters April 9. For more information about the film, visit [www.letterstogodthemovie.com](http://www.letterstogodthemovie.com).

To reserve a pre-screening ticket or for more information about aTeam Ministries, visit [www.ateamministries.org](http://www.ateamministries.org).



Photo courtesy of Vertical Innovations

**HOPE** — Lead characters Tyler (right), played by Tanner McGuire, and Sam, played by Bailee Madison, talk on the set of ‘Letters to God,’ coming to theaters April 9.

# Across Alabama's Associations

## BIRMINGHAM

► **First Church, Birmingham**, will hold revival Feb. 28–March 3, nightly at 6, with Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Church, Pensacola, Fla. Leo Day, minister of music for Olive Church, will provide special music. Stan Lewis is pastor.

## CALHOUN

► **Meadowbrook Church, Oxford**, will host Bill King, director of missions for Tuskegee Lee Association, March 14. King will perform a dramatic monologue as Simon Peter during the 10:30 a.m. service and then as Brother Billy Bob Bohannon during the 6 p.m. service. Gary Rivers is pastor.

## CLARKE

► The men's ministry of **Thomasville Church** will hold its annual feast Feb. 26, 6:30 p.m., with Ronnie Smith of Ronnie Smith Outdoor Adventures ([www.ronniesmith.tv](http://www.ronniesmith.tv)). Southern gospel quartet Cross 4 Crowns will provide special music. For information call 334-636-4409. Ty Parten is pastor.

## LIMESTONE

► **Lindsay Lane Church, Athens**, will hold a Global Impact Celebration Feb. 27–March 3 with more than 35 missionaries present. There will be a soccer tournament on Saturday at the Athens Sports-Plex. Larry Reesor, founder and president of Global Focus International, will speak during the Sunday morning service. For information or to sign up a soccer team visit [www.lindsaylane.org](http://www.lindsaylane.org). Dusty McLemore is pastor.

## MADISON

► **Hillwood Church, Huntsville**, will host Ivan Parker in concert March 13, 7 p.m. Doors will open at 6 p.m. Tickets can be pur-

chased at the door or in advance by calling 256-883-0485. Charles Freeman is pastor. ► The orchestra of **First Church, Huntsville**, will present "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee," a concert of great hymns, with the combined orchestra of Dawson Memorial Church, Birmingham, Feb. 28, 5 p.m. David Hull is pastor of First, Huntsville. Gary Fenton is pastor of Dawson Memorial.

## MONTGOMERY

► **Ridgecrest Church, Montgomery**, will celebrate its 60th anniversary March 13–14. The theme will be Learning from the Past, Living in the Present and Looking to the Future. There will be a picnic Saturday at noon in the family life center with worship and testimonies. Past and present choir rehearsal will be at 1:30 p.m. On Sunday, the worship service will be at 10–11:15 a.m. focusing on Learning from the Past and Living in the Present. Lunch will follow in the family life center. Worship will continue at 12:30 p.m., in the sanctuary focusing on Looking to the Future. Michael Cassity is pastor.

## RANDOLPH

► **Chuck Conley** is the new pastor of **First Church, Roanoke**. He comes from First Church, Fyffe, where he served as pastor. He also served Dwight Church, Gadsden, and First Church, Southside. Conley attended New Orleans seminary and holds a doctor of ministry in pastoral studies from Covington Theological Seminary



CONLEY

in Rossville, Ga. He and his wife, Kelli, have two children.

## SHELBY

► **Calera Church** will host singer, speaker and musical ventriloquist Lee Pitts and Nicky for its Upward basketball awards night presentation Feb. 27, 6 p.m. Hal Warren is pastor. ► **Riverside Church, Helena**, will host a Beth Moore simulcast via satellite called So Long, Insecurity April 24, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Lunch will be provided. Tickets can be purchased at the door or in advance by calling 205-426-1910. Seating is limited. J.J. Stanbridge is pastor.

## SIPSEY

► **New Hope Church, Berry**, will hold revival Feb. 27–March 1. Albert Lyles will speak Saturday at 6:30 p.m., Scott McQueen Sunday at 11 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. and James Nichols Monday at 6:30 p.m. Ed Steelman is pastor.

## TUSCALOOSA

► **Coaling Church** will host Walk This Way March 20, 9 a.m.–noon, at the Coaling Town Park. The walk-a-thon will benefit local foster children and adoption support. For information call 205-792-3515 or visit [www.defendtheorphansministry.blogspot.com](http://www.defendtheorphansministry.blogspot.com). Todd Burkhalter is pastor.

► **Northridge Church, Northport**, will host a Beth Moore simulcast via satellite called So Long, Insecurity April 24, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. Doors will open at 8:30 a.m. Lunch will be provided. Tickets can be purchased at the door or in advance at the church office or LifeWay Christian Store on McFarland Blvd. For information call 205-758-5599. Brad Smith is pastor. ► **Upper Room Church, Vance**, will hold a spring break kick-off rally March 12, 6:30 p.m., with The Hoggle Family and Teen Challenge. Food and fellowship will follow. For information call 205-477-4481. Greg Herndon is pastor.

## WALKER

► **Mount Vernon Church, Jasper**, will host singer, speaker and musical ventriloquist Lee Pitts and Nicky for its Upward basketball awards night presentation March 2, 6:30 p.m. John Gates is pastor.

## WEST CULLMAN

► **Corinth West Church, Vinemont**, will hold its sixth annual women's conference called Caution, Women at Work March 27, 9:30 a.m. Registration will be at 9 a.m. Eileen Mitchell, an associate in the office of discipleship and family ministries for the State Board of Missions, will speak. Lunch will be served. To RSVP call Dana Henslee at 256-751-3296. Glen Miller is pastor.

# Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

## Shocco's Taylor named Talladega citizen of year

Buster Taylor, director of Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, was named Citizen of the Year 2009 on Feb. 10 by the Greater Talladega Chamber of Commerce.

"I know he has touched many people's spiritual lives and positively impacted this community in more ways than we can imagine," said Andy Whiddon, a member of the chamber's board of directors and first vice president for 2010. "Shocco Springs has grown into a very valuable organization in this community because of Mr. Taylor's commitment to excellence."

Taylor, who recently completed 30 years of service at Shocco, has seen the organization's summer staff grow to more than 200. It served more than 44,000 visitors in 2009.

Chamber members throughout the community submitted nominations for the award, with Taylor receiving the largest number of votes.

Taylor said that while he was surprised to have received the award, he thinks it "substantiates the emphasis we have on serving people at Shocco Springs." He added that he hopes his being awarded Citizen of the Year "brings to mind the work and mission we have at Shocco Springs; that they (members of the community) would be more aware of the hundreds and thousands of lives that have been changed because of the ministry of Shocco Springs."

## New Bible study focuses on cancer community

After struggling through her own battle with cancer, Karen Allen, a member of First Baptist Church, Birmingham, in Birmingham Baptist Association, knew her faith-filled victory had to be shared.

And what better way to make that happen than through a self-published six-week Bible study about "Confronting Cancer With Faith."

Interlacing Scripture and biblical parallels with personal insight and stories, Allen said she hopes the book is an opportunity "to reach out to the cancer community and bring encouragement, comfort and hope."

"We are all, in some way, affected by this devastating disease," said Allen, who had worked in cancer research for nearly 15 years before being diagnosed with breast cancer seven years ago. "This book addresses that problem head on in the form of a Bible study."

Allen said she hopes the study offers readers an outlet to develop and grow in their faith during a difficult time. "This study ... pertains not only to cancer patients but also to loved ones and medical personnel — to give them insight into what's going on through the process and to provide a way to help channel the focus to be on God and to grow in faith."

For more information, visit [www.confrontingcancerwithfaith.com](http://www.confrontingcancerwithfaith.com).

## Mobile's Travis Road Church celebrates 50 years

Valentines Day 2010 was more than memorable for Travis Road Baptist Church, Mobile, in Mobile Baptist Association as it celebrated its 50th anniversary with more than four times its average number of attendees.

The day was filled with a special meet-and-greet for present and former church members; a missions report, which included commissioning Jeff and Erin Gautney for full-time missions work in Paraguay; an evangelism report, detailing its 1,484 baptisms over the 50 years of ministry; a special message by former pastor Alben Gaston; music by former youth leader Tony Gordy; and a covered-dish lunch.

Chuck Davis, of Mobile Baptist Association, presented the church with a plaque from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission in honor of its years of work.

"We had good (membership) representation from various years from the past. ... It was because of the great response of the people coming that we could see a small taste of what God has done through the life of the church over the years," said Pastor Roy Stebbins, who has served the church for nearly 12 years.

Stebbins noted that one of the things he is most proud of is the church's Global Impact emphasis, which has sent short-term missions teams around the world and has given more than \$1 million to local and international missions. Stebbins said he hopes missions involvement will continue to characterize Travis Road in years to come.



TAYLOR



ALLEN

## Vehicle accident causes delay, omission of TAB papers

It has been brought to the attention of *The Alabama Baptist* that some of its subscribers may not have received their Feb. 18 issue of the paper.

This complication was caused by a vehicle accident, which halted delivery of *The Alabama Baptist* papers to its Birmingham post office annex.

All newspaper pallets were broken and had to be returned to the printer.

"One of our primary goals is for our readers to receive *The Alabama Baptist* on time each

week," said Debbie Campbell, director of circulation and public relations.

"Though this incident was beyond our control, we regret the inconvenience it may have caused some of our subscribers. Readers should call our office if they did not receive the Feb. 18 issue, and we will be glad to send you a copy."

To request a copy of the Feb. 18 issue or for other questions, call *The Alabama Baptist* at 1-800-803-5201, Ext. 118. (TAB)

FOCUS on ONE Mission

ONE MISSION:  
The Great Commission  
ONE PROGRAM:  
The Cooperative Program  
MANY MINISTRIES:  
Great Commission Ministries

ALABAMA BAPTIST CONVENTION STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS

news and features  
about missions and  
ministries from the  
Alabama Baptist State  
Board of Missions  
(800) 264-1225 □  
[www.alsbom.org](http://www.alsbom.org)

# WHY I BELIEVE IN THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

On April 8, 1998, I remember praying the final prayer for our Wednesday night worship service. As I finished praying, my life changed in an unwelcome way. The weather alarm sounded. Then, thunder boomed and the church went black. As a young, part-time pastor working my way through seminary, I had never dealt with a severe weather situation in a church. "Everyone remain calm and move into the hallway," I shouted. Although our church and those in attendance that Wednesday were safe, we began to get word that many of the families in our close-knit community had been impacted by an F-5 tornado that tumbled through western Birmingham.

By sunrise, I was confronted with a frightening reality: I was ill-equipped to bring hope or healing to those who were left in the wake of this fatal disaster. This was a time of "firsts" for me. It was the first natural disaster that I had experienced as a pastor. It was the first time I had to

deal with death on such a scale. It was the first opportunity I had to organize a church to face a crisis. It was the first time I stood in front of someone's home and cried with them in a time of total loss. Most importantly, it was the first time I was able to experience the comforting power of Southern Baptists working together.

Imagine my excitement and appreciation when I discovered that Alabama Baptists along with men and women from other states were arriving nearby to bring supplies and to assist in clean-up efforts. Because of the Cooperative Program, Reggie Quimby and other state missionaries were able to assist in the recovery process. In that fearful circumstance, God gave me a deep appreciation for what can be done when churches participate together through the Cooperative Program. Since that galvanizing moment in my life, I have supported the Cooperative Program wholeheartedly. I have been blessed with opportunities to meet

missionaries from all over North America and the world—men and women who are supported by the Cooperative Program. Many of these faithful missionaries have been guests in our mission home during their furloughs. Each missionary has expressed to me their conviction that Southern Baptists have the most

as she attended Judson College. Churches can give with confidence, knowing that they are in a partnership that has stood the test of time.

Currently, I pastor a church located on two campuses—one campus in eastern



By Chris Crain  
Pastor, South Roebuck Baptist Church, Birmingham, and North Valley Church, Margaret

Birmingham and a newer campus in Margaret (north of Trussville). Missionaries funded through the Cooperative

Program provided wisdom and resources when we were adding a second location to our church. Associational, state and North American missionaries helped us to make sound decisions. Without their prayer and expertise, our church would not be as effective in reaching people for Jesus. Our church has learned that you can make a greater difference when you work in cooperation.

effective way of placing and keeping missionaries on the field.

I am grateful for the comprehensiveness of the Cooperative Program. Churches of all sizes and types partner through the Cooperative Program to reach the world. Your church does not have to be a certain size or of a particular worship style to participate in a global missionary effort. I am amazed when I consider that churches both large and small, in many locations, assisted me through the Cooperative Program as I attended New Orleans Seminary and my wife Carol





48TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 28-WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3  
SHOCCO SPRINGS

LAST CALL

# My Grace is Sufficient

2 COR. 12:9

To register, contact Shocco Springs:  
www.shocco.org/reser or **1-800-280-1105**

For more information, contact Roxanne Elliott at **(205) 664-0122**, ext. **218**,  
relliott@ewestwood.org.

Check out our web site at: [alabamabaptistsecretaries.com](http://alabamabaptistsecretaries.com)

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries



*...for the glory of the Lord  
filled the temple*  
1 Kings 8:10-11

# Great Commission Prayer Conference

Friday and Saturday, March 5-6, 2010  
First Baptist Church, Montgomery

**SCHEDULE:**

Friday: 6:30-9:15 p.m. • Saturday: 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
Includes general sessions and breakout conferences

Cost: \$10 per person

For more information, please contact State Missionary Mike Jackson at  
**1-800-264-1225**, ext. **210**, [mjackson@alsbom.org](mailto:mjackson@alsbom.org).

This event is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

# LEADERconnect FORUM

**Tuesday, April 13, 2010 • 9 a.m.-4 p.m.**

Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd., Montgomery

**Topic for the Day:** "Coaching on the Run," with Bob Bumgarner, director of Church Development Division, Florida Baptist Convention

**Cost:** \$20 (covers all material and lunch)

Followers of Christ have been given significant roles to fulfill in the advance of His Kingdom. Success for believers is discovering whom God has called them to be and what He has called them to do.



So, what is your process? As a ministry leader, how will you help others discover and become who God has called them to be? How can you help them become more intentional about their role in the Kingdom?

"Coaching on the Run" can help you discover the power of coaching to transform your life and those you coach. Your heart will feel the excitement as God allows you to become a vital part of their ministry journey through coaching.

As a result of this workshop you will be able to:

- understand and practice a basic coaching model.
- learn to ask powerful questions.
- begin a personal coaching development plan.
- outline what coaching might look like in your ministry setting.

For more information, please contact Ministry Assistant Jamie Allen at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 256, [jallen@alsbom.org](mailto:jallen@alsbom.org).

ONEMISSION:TheGreatCommissionONEPROGRAM:TheCooperativeProgramMANYMINISTRIES:GreatCommissionMinistries

## E-zekiel Web Training Workshop

Thursday, April 22, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Baptist Building, 2001 E. South Blvd., Montgomery

Join E-zekiel trainer and director of customer services, Dacia Gullede, as she shows how to use E-zekiel to build and maintain a great Web site.

In three 1.5-hour sessions, we'll look at the tips and tricks of the pages and panels managers, explore the management of events (calendar) and forms, and learn how to utilize the syndication manager for podcasting, blogging, as well as discuss media options for audio and video such as E-zekiel.tv. At the end of the day, we'll have a special Q & A/lab session if you want more information or to work directly with your site.

A power supply and wireless Internet connection will be available for anyone who wishes to bring a laptop. The first three sessions will be presentation style, although those who have a laptop present will be encouraged to follow along on their own sites. The final session may allow for some individual hands-on time but will depend heavily on the total participant count.

Come learn all the tips and tricks to make a great Web site quickly and easily!

Lunch will be provided.

**Cost:** \$35 per person, if registered before April 12. \$40 after the April 12 deadline.

Register at [www.alsbom.org/webtraining](http://www.alsbom.org/webtraining).

For more information, contact State Missionary Chris Mills, 1-800-264-1225, ext. 310, [cmills@alsbom.org](mailto:cmills@alsbom.org).

# Marriage Celebration

**C**ommitment **A**ffirmation **F**aith **E**xhilaration

**Friday and Saturday, March 12-13, 2010**  
**Shocco Springs**

**Leaders: Mike & Lyn Jackson, Millbrook**

Focus for this event will be the importance of prayer in marriage.

**Registration:** [www.shocco.org/reser](http://www.shocco.org/reser) or  
1-800-280-1105

**Registration cost:** \$142 per couple (*includes lodging, meals and the program*).

*For more information, please contact State Missionary Eileen Mitchell at 1-800-264-1225, ext. 221, [emitchell@alsbom.org](mailto:emitchell@alsbom.org)*



ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

## RA Congress

**Friday and Saturday,  
March 12-13, 2010**  
**Camp Grandview** (Prattville)

**REGISTRATION:** Begins at 5 p.m. Friday

**CONCLUSION:** 1:30 p.m. Saturday

**CONGRESS EVENTS:**

- Campouts
- Missionaries
- Conferences
- More than 20 Field Events
- Pinewood Derby
- Missions Fair
- Soapbox Derby
- Outstanding Royal Ambassadors
- Climbing Wall



**COST:**

- \$5 — admission/use fee
- \$4 — per meal
- \$3 — camping fee
- \$5 — floor space in gym and cabins (*presently no beds in cabins*)

ONE MISSION: The Great Commission ONE PROGRAM: The Cooperative Program MANY MINISTRIES: Great Commission Ministries

## Eight volunteers released in Haiti; two remain in jail

After nearly three weeks in a Haitian jail, eight Baptists from the United States were released Feb. 17, but two remained in prison in the quake-ravaged country.

The 10 members of a volunteer team were charged with attempting to transport 33 Haitian children into the Dominican Republic without proper documents. The 10 had planned on taking the children to an orphanage that Laura Silsby — one of the two still held in custody — was establishing across the border.

The eight volunteers were released after Haitian parents told Judge Bernard Saint-Vil they had freely given their children to the American group. They were released without bond after promising to come back to Haiti if further questions arise, The Associated Press (AP) reported.

Jim Allen, one of eight detainees flown back to the United States on Feb. 17, said in a statement on his church's Web site that he thanks "the many people around the world who prayed for me." Allen is a member of Paramount Baptist Church, Amarillo, Texas.

"I hope [our being released] will allow everyone to focus again on the dire conditions that remain in Haiti," Allen said. "People are still suffering and lack basic necessities. Please find it in your hearts, as I did in mine, to find ways to give to those in need. For those whose cases have not been resolved, we will continue to pray for their safe return."

Despite Allen's ordeal, members of Paramount Baptist Church will be sending a contingency to Haiti by week's end. Before the quake, a team was scheduled to work on an orphanage and in an AIDS hospital. That work will go on, Paramount associate pastor Lance Herrington said.

### Still in custody

Silsby, 40, and Charisa Coulter, 24, members of Central Valley Baptist Church, Meridian, Idaho, remain in custody on charges of child kidnapping and criminal association. Silsby was the leader of the group of 10 volunteers, and Coulter has been identified as Silsby's assistant.

Saint-Vil said he still wanted to question the two because they had visited Haiti in December, prior to the earthquake, to inquire about obtaining orphans, according to AP. The judge planned to question both women Feb. 18, but complications in Coulter's health status threatened to stall the process. A diabetic, Coulter was taken to a U.S. field hospital Feb. 17 for treatment because she felt faint. After a brief stay, she was returned to jail.

"I'm really praying that we'll be able to take these kids out and we'll be able to provide a safe and loving home for these kids who have nothing and that all charges will be dropped and that they will see our hearts," Coulter said. (BP)

# Pisgah's New Home Baptist works to give family in need a new home

By Anna Swindle  
Correspondent, TAB

New Home Baptist Church, Pisgah, has certainly been taking its name literally in recent months.

When church member DeShun Johnson's house was in need of repairs last summer, the Sand Mountain Baptist Association church decided to go even further by building him, his wife and their three children an entirely new home.

"We just heard through the grapevine that this family needed help," said Kenneth Gilbert, chairman of the board of deacons and an active participant in the building process. "They had problems with their floor and things like that, and so I got a couple of guys, and we checked it out and saw right off that the house was in really bad shape."

The men soon realized that the best option would be to start from scratch. And since Johnson is unable to do much construction on his own (he's in a wheelchair), his fellow church members felt especially led to lend a hand.

At the next routine men's meeting, they began discussing the possibility of taking on such a large construction project and ultimately opted to take it on as a labor of love.

"When we agreed on that night to take on the project, I told the men we'd do it by completely trusting in God to provide the need," said Pastor David Smith. "No selling of doughnuts or raffles; we were going to trust God to take care of it for us."

And sure enough, the resources began rolling in immediately. In fact, more than \$10,000 in pledges was received that very night. One church member donated half an acre of land



Photo courtesy of New Home Baptist Church

**FRESH START** — Volunteers from New Home Baptist frame up a new home the church decided to build for the family of DeShun Johnson, a church member whose home was in need of major repairs.

for the building site. A local lawyer donated his time to draft the deed.

When Smith preached at Union Hill Baptist Church, Bessemer, he mentioned the project and members there began pitching in, too. One man — a roofer — donated and installed the house's metal roof.

### Loving God and others

"It's amazing how our Lord worked things out for us," said Larry Underwood, a New Home Baptist member who was involved in the project from the beginning. "We didn't have the resources to do the project, and then we had all we needed."

Perhaps the hardest part of the project was convincing Johnson to give the OK to do it, Gilbert said.

"DeShun and his family aren't the type

of people that ask for handouts," he said. "I had to talk him into letting us do this project, and I told him that he'd be beating us out of a blessing if he didn't let us help."

Now, after months of volunteer labor, the Johnsons' brand-new home is complete. To celebrate finishing the project, New Home held a dedication service Feb. 7. Members of Union Hill Baptist who helped out participated as well.

Smith said he's overwhelmingly convinced that this project was God's will from start to finish.

"The bottom line is when we started out, we not only wanted to meet the need of their family but also put our trust in the Lord," Smith said. "When you love the Lord, you love others and they ministered to the Johnson family because of their love of the Lord." ❧

## 350-plus volunteers train in February to go help Haiti; more still needed

(continued from page 1)

Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). "This is the first of many, many trips down there," he said.

An ongoing stream of Alabama Baptist medical teams will be sent down through a partnership with Baptist Health System, and other teams will be going down doing work ranging from water purification to food distribution. Alabama Baptists' first water purification team went at the same time as the medical team and has returned after drilling multiple wells in the needy nation.

"This is going to be a long-term effort stretching over two to three years and involving many volunteers," Johnson said.

More than 350 volunteers were trained to go during SBOM-sponsored disaster relief training sessions around the state in February. And still more volunteers are needed, Johnson

said — specifically structural engineers who could help determine the safety of buildings damaged by the earthquake.

Alabama Baptist churches are also continuing to send teams, such as Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, which sent a team in mid-February, and Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, which has a medical team set to leave Feb. 27.

### Get involved

Buckets of Hope filled with specific provisions are also needed to meet immediate needs for families in Haiti and will be collected at points around the state March 4-5. For more information about how to pack a Bucket of Hope or where buckets are being collected, visit [www.alsbom.org/haiti](http://www.alsbom.org/haiti).

If you are interested in volunteering in Haiti, contact Johnson at 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 273. ❧

## Baptists' long-term relief plan in Haiti underway

In response to the Haiti earthquake, Southern Baptist leaders have formulated a plan for a long-term relief effort that focuses on work with existing Haitian Baptist churches.

Representatives from the North American Mission Board (NAMB), Florida Baptist Convention (FBC), International Mission Board, Baptist Global Response, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Network and two Haitian Baptist conventions will provide leadership for the Haiti response.

Fritz Wilson, the FBC's disaster relief director, will serve as the Haiti-based incident commander.

NAMB's Disaster Operations Center opened Feb. 15 to support the operation. (BP)

# Historical Highlights

from previous issues of *The Alabama Baptist*

Compiled by Kathleen Prude

## 50 Years Ago February 1960

**New College Committee Named:** The proposed Baptist college in Mobile is one step nearer realization in the naming of committees to promote it. A committee of four laymen and four ministers was named recently by the executive committee of Mobile Baptist Association.

It is composed of (laymen) T.T. Martin, chairman, First Baptist Church, Mobile; George F. Wood, Spring Hill Baptist Church; DeWitt Dees, Union Baptist Church; and Mrs. G.C. Coggins, Dauphin Way Baptist Church. Ministers named to serve on the committee are Bob Barker, pastor of First Baptist Church, Chickasaw; V.D. Simpson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Theodore; Robert U. Ferguson, pastor of Oakland Baptist Church; and Robert Norman, pastor of First Baptist Church, Prichard.

A state committee will work with this group, and a great spirit of optimism prevails in the establishment of this great school in the coastal city. Mobile College will be the first college chartered in Alabama in 57 years.

## 40 Years Ago February 1970

**Johnie Walker Day Observed:** February 1 was designated by Ozark Baptist Church as Johnie Walker Day in recognition and ap-

preciation for his 13 years as missionary of Dale Baptist Association. He began his service in February 1957. During his 13 years of service as missionary, the association has experienced a steady growth in all areas. And 1969 was the best year for evangelism in the history of the association with 479 received by the churches for baptism.

## 30 Years Ago February 1980

**Double Celebration Held:** Creek Path Baptist Church, Guntersville, held a double celebration at the morning worship service Feb. 3. In addition to dedicating the new sanctuary, a note burning on the original building and a new organ was observed. Members of the church did most of the inside work on both the new building and the original building.

The first two baptized in the new baptistry were Roy and Harriet Wheeler, parents of Pastor Mike Wheeler. Eight others have been baptized since the new facilities were occupied.

## 20 Years Ago February 1990

**'Emotional Experience':** Alabama Baptists were represented in an anti-abortion rally at the state Capitol Jan. 23, which drew a crowd of anywhere from 15,000 to 30,000 hoping to influence upcoming legislation. Pastor Joe Godfrey

of Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, called the march an "emotional experience." Among the marchers were Dan Ireland, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program; Doug Sager, pastor of Roebuck Park Baptist Church, Birmingham; Bill Lett, pastor of Center Point Baptist Church, Scottsboro; and Debra Glenn, a member of Glennwood Baptist Church, Morris, and her 18-month-old son, Joseph. Rona Russell, a member of Taylor Road Baptist, was the church's liaison to the Alabama Pro-Life Coalition.

## 10 Years Ago February 2000

**Pastor Baggott Dies Unexpectedly:** Bob Baggott, pastor of Farmville Baptist Church, Auburn, died unexpectedly Feb. 2 at the age of 68.

Baggott had an extensive ministerial career at several Alabama Baptist churches as well as churches in Florida and Georgia.

Among other leadership roles, he served as vice president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and a trustee of Mercer University in Macon, Ga.; Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. He also served as a chaplain for Auburn University's football team. His wife of 43 years, Betty, was a columnist for *The Alabama Baptist*.

## VictoryLand's McGregor comes under fire for his 'bingo' games

**M**ore than 800 people filed a federal lawsuit Feb. 16 against VictoryLand owner Milton McGregor and several machine manufacturing companies providing slot machines for the facility citing "illegal, fraudulent, deceptive and improper" actions.

The lawsuit states McGregor "operated bingo games" with "slot machines prohibited by criminal provisions of Alabama law" that "cannot play the game commonly known as bingo."

It also accuses VictoryLand of bribing former Birmingham Mayor Larry Langford with winnings totaling more than \$1.6 million, noting that Langford has already been convicted as a felon for these charges.

Meanwhile the plaintiffs say they spent "millions of dollars"

during the past 12 months "on machines which are prohibited under Alabama law."

Each plaintiff is seeking more than \$75,000 in relief for damages and "loss of money or property."

### Jury trial demanded

They also demand a jury trial and hope to enjoin and restrain VictoryLand from "operating illegal electronic bingo devices" without the court's approval.

According to the lawsuit, from 2006 to 2009, VictoryLand has earned "gross revenues in excess of \$1 billion as consulting fees for the operation of electronic and paper card bingo games on behalf of approximately 60 nonprofit organizations," which only received "\$2.2 million" in return. (TAB)

TOP 25  
EVENTS

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### CHURCH POSITIONS

**SENIOR PASTOR:** Central Baptist Church, Bearden (www.cbcbearden.org), a large suburban Knoxville, Tenn., church with ties to both the SBC and the CBF, is seeking a senior pastor. Selection will be led by the Holy Spirit; however, professional degrees, maturity and experience in related positions will be expected of any candidate. For more information about this position, to apply or to recommend a candidate, please see the church Web site at www.cbcbearden.org/pastorsearch.shtml.

**PASTOR:** Brindlee Mountain Baptist Church of Morgan City, Ala., is currently accepting resumés for a full-time pastor. Please mail resumé to: Brindlee Mountain Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 3422 Hwy 231, Lacey's Spring, AL 35754, or e-mail: bmbchurch@otelco.net.

**PASTOR:** Corinth Heights Baptist Church is currently accepting resumés for a full-time pastor. Mail to: CHBC, Pastor Search Committee, 4070 Dime Road, Haleyville, AL 35556.

**PASTOR:** Full-time pastor needed at Harmony Grove Baptist Church located in Winfield. Interested candidates may e-mail their resumé to: hgpastor2010@hotmail.com, or mail it to: Pastor Search Committee, P.O. Box 1736, Winfield, AL 35594.

**MINISTER OF MUSIC:** Seeking full-time minister of music. Seminary degree and prior experience required. Red House Baptist Church, Richmond,

Ky. E-mail Alex Poulter at wapbear@insightbb.com. Web site: www.redhousebaptistchurch.org.

**MUSIC MINISTER:** Ebenezer Baptist Church, Sand Mountain Baptist Association, seeking mature Christian for paid music minister position. Sunday and Wednesday work. Experience preferred. Send resumés to: P.O. Box 83, Bryant, AL 35958 or call 256-597-3435 for information.

**PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER:** Please send resumés to: Spring Valley Baptist Church, P.O. Box 978, Springville, AL 35146.

**DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES:** First Baptist Church, Piedmont, accepting resumés for the position of part-time director of children's ministries. Resumés e-mailed to: info@piedmontfbc.org, or send to: 105 North Main Street, Piedmont, AL 36272.

### OTHER POSITIONS

**FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATOR:** Alabama Baptist entity seeks financial administrator. Accounting degree preferred, extensive experience may be substituted. Minimum of five years experience required. Position oversees all accounting and bookkeeping functions for entity, provides human resources services and oversees property management. Send resumé to: 3310 Independence Drive, Homewood, AL 35209.

**CHURCH ADMINISTRATOR:** East Hill Baptist Church, Tallahassee, Fla., seek-

ing church administrator competent in accounting procedures, computer skills and oral and written communication. College degree and/or 3 years church administration experience required. Send cover letter, resumé, references to: East Hill Baptist Church, 912 Miccosukee Road, Tallahassee, FL 32308-5085 or dan@easthill.net.

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# 'Let the people vote'

## Is this catch phrase really the motivation behind current legislation? Who decides which bill wins?

By **Sondra Washington**  
and **Jennifer Davis Rash**  
The Alabama Baptist

Television commercials, pro-gambling politicians and casino operators alike are declaring, "Let the people vote." This rhetoric currently centers around Senate Bill (SB) 380 (see story, page 3) and its companion bill, House Bill (HB) 507, calling for a referendum to legitimize illegal slot machines being called electronic bingo.

Since these are only two of the bills calling for a gambling vote and are the only ones moving, opponents say the legislation receiving all the attention is more about sustaining unlawful casino operations than allowing people to exercise their right to vote.

Sen. Hank Erwin, R-Montevallo, who has fought against gambling for many years, said the gamblers only want to pass their version of the bill. "It's just one big charade," he said. "The gamblers are manipulating the media to try to drive the vote. ... Gamblers don't like to take chances. They like to stack the deck in their direction and make sure the house wins. It's about making money and winning."

And why not call for a straight up or down vote? Maybe something like "Do you want to legalize slot machines? Yes or no."

If the answer is yes, then the next step would be to figure out the parameters for that. If the answer is no, then all facilities with slot machines, no matter what they are called, would remain illegal and could not operate.

Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville, sponsor of SB 380, said this is not an option because Alabamians would not vote for gambling if that were the wording.

### Negotiating with casino owners

"We would never get it through because there is a fear that we wouldn't get higher taxes and regulations on it, because if you legalize it without those in place, then you have to fight the gambling industry to get those things," he said, noting right now industry representatives will negotiate because they want it legalized. "If it is legalized and then we try to negotiate,

## King, Tyson at odds over gambling raids

(continued from page 1)

cannot be tolerated," he told a room full of reporters. "The safety of law enforcement officers and even the general public cannot be so recklessly put at risk. Yet out of deferential respect for the governor, assuming direction over Mr. Tyson is not an option that I am prepared to exercise — yet."

King encouraged the task force to "correct its ill-advised and dangerous course" and "implored" Riley and Tyson to implement a three-step plan:

- ▶ Immediately file simultaneous and expedited actions seeking declaratory judgments in Greene, Houston, Lowndes and Macon counties over the question of whether those counties' amendments, enabling statutes, local rules or regulations and ratification debates permit electronic bingo in those jurisdictions.

- ▶ Take steps in civil courts in Greene, Houston, Lowndes and Macon counties to

determine whether sufficient evidence exists to keep these closed facilities closed and to close others.

- ▶ Not risk harm to law enforcement or the public with further warrantless raids and allow the district attorneys to enforce the criminal laws in these areas.

King said if Riley, his "mentor" and "friend," does not heed his advice, he will have "no choice but to re-evaluate."

Tyson said the task force is not going to stop "upholding the criminal law."

"I was appointed by the governor of the State of Alabama to do this work," he said. "The task force is taking its direction from the governor. The attorney general knows what his powers are, and he basically announced today that while he was going to give advice, he was not going to do anything. So the work of the task force will go on."

it will be hard to get higher taxes and regulations out of them."

But Attorney General Troy King disagrees.

He wants a simple, up or down vote on the issue, then work out the details of taxation and regulation if it is decided that expansion of gambling is what Alabamians want. "I believe the people of Alabama are just like me and want an easy, straight-forward constitutional amendment that is yes or no," King said.

Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale, who has sponsored one of the other "let the people vote" bills, SB 333, said, "Why not an up or down vote?"

"We've got to find out where the people are," he said. "If the people want to expand gambling, then we've got to figure out what to do, but the legislation that would expand gambling should not be written by the four or five who are going to benefit from it."

Bedford confirmed that representatives from the existing gambling operations in the state — such as VictoryLand, Country Crossing, Greenetrack, Mobile Greyhound Park, White Hall, etc. — are helping write the bill.

He and Rep. Marcel Black, D-Tusculumbia, sponsor of HB 507, contend that legislation dealing with this issue cannot be written without input from existing facilities in the state.

But Beason believes this proves the legislation is not a true "let the people vote" bill.

"If this bill passes and the people vote yes, then we'll never be able to repeal it because of the gambling money and the influence that will run the Legislature," he said.

That's one reason why Beason plans to introduce an amendment to SB 380 calling for a reauthorization vote by the people periodically. "That way when people realize it is bad, they can vote again," he said.

Beason still believes his bill is the best option for the state currently.

It would give state residents the opportunity to vote whether they want any kind of gambling activity in the state and would repeal all county amendments currently allowing charity bingo games.

"My bill is an abolition of gambling all the way around. It asks, 'Are we going to be a gambling state or not?'" he explained. "There is no carrot, and it doesn't buy anyone."

But Beason was clear to point out that his bill would call for a yes or no vote on whether to rid the state of all forms of gambling, even what is already legal, including the dog tracks and charitable paper bingo.

"Doing away with it for good clears out all the problems," he said.

Plus the only way to shut down the Poarch Band of Creek Indian casinos is with a bill "like mine," he added.

If Alabamians voted no on Beason's constitutional amendment, then that would not legalize slot machines in the state. It would mean everything would remain the same as it is right now.

While many have criticized the extreme restrictive nature of Beason's bill, King was considering endorsing it at press time.

But King prefers sticking with the legislation calling for a statewide vote on gambling he prepared six years ago that has had a sponsor every year, except this year.

### Troy King's proposed plan

He said in a recent press conference (see story, page 1) that the legislation he has prepared would "replace the 17 constitutional amendments we now have that allow bingo and the confusion they create with a single, simple statement of law." Yet the proposed bill he gave to media representatives does not repeal the current bingo constitutional amendments, causing confusion around the state. Instead it would "preserve" the current amendments and "allow pari-mutuel wagering or non-electronic forms of gambling."

Beason and Erwin have both sponsored King's legislation in the past.

Beason said he did not sponsor it this year because it was not as restrictive as he wanted.

Erwin said he did not sponsor it this year because the courts have spoken on the issue and slot machines are illegal in the state, so there is no need for the bill.

Still one other bill, SB 381, sponsored by Sen. Marc Keahey, D-Grove Hill, was filed in an attempt to "let the people vote." It has not moved out of committee either.

Keahey's proposed constitutional amendment would legalize "commercial bingo operations" and establish a gaming commission, but it would limit the number of facilities to eight statewide. This bill would also repeal all constitutional amendments allowing charity bingo but retain the charitable requirements for electronic bingo gambling in the state.

While Beason, Erwin and others could only speculate why their bills this year and in the past are not being allowed a chance for debate by the full legislative bodies, they do believe it is connected to the existing gambling industry. "The gambling interest already has an overwhelming influence on this Legislature," Beason said. "They are very powerful people who want to see gambling legalized while making the state pay for the social costs."

"They won't allow a bill to come up if it hinders their profit," he noted.

## 'Be courteous' to legislators, 'don't attack people'

By **Jennifer Davis Rash**  
The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptists and other concerned Christians are among the many beginning to get involved and voice their opinion about the current debate over attempts to legalize slot machines in the state.

But recent comments by legislators have some Alabama Baptist leaders concerned.

"It's important not to attack people," said Joe Godfrey, executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program. "Attack the issues, not people."

Godfrey and other leaders have heard reports that some legislators are receiving mean-spirited calls, e-mails and letters from constituents. One legislator also said a Baptist pastor confronted him in person and "told me they didn't need my type in Montgomery."

Those types of comments and interactions are not what Godfrey and others calling for action mean by "get involved" and "voice your opinion."

"As Christians, we represent Christ and

must remember to be considerate and respectful to others, even those we disagree with," Godfrey said. "Be courteous and gracious and not just to legislators but to the secretaries and switchboard operators," he added. "The secretaries and switchboard operators don't even have anything to do with the legislation. They are just doing their job and certainly don't deserve to be abused."

### Taking sides

Godfrey also noted that in some cases a legislator might be wavering on an issue and truly trying to decide which side to take. If a concerned citizen is courteous, then that would carry more weight, he said.

Several senators and representatives also said callers who are informed on the topic at hand are always appreciated. Mass calls from people who really don't know what they are talking about or are only calling because "my pastor told me to call and tell you to vote no" have little validity.

"We don't pay any attention to form letters, produced in mass and signed by different

people or calls where the person obviously doesn't understand the issue," said Sen. Scott Beason, R-Gardendale.

"But if a person calls or visits and legitimately wants to discuss the issue, then we definitely listen."

Scores of senators and representatives agreed. And several secretaries said they don't even pass the obvious mass-produced calls, letters, fliers and/or e-mails along to the legislators.

It is important to be informed, Godfrey said, but even without a large knowledge base on an issue, one's opinion can still carry weight as long as it is delivered appropriately and graciously. "When you call, note that you want to record your opinion about the issue," he said. "With the current bingo gambling issue, you might say something like, 'I am against all gambling bills and any procedural votes that might advance the bill through the Legislature.'"

To contact your senator, call 334-242-7800. To contact your representative, call 334-242-7600.

# Family Matters

February 2010

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## Restoring Ronda

Private placement allows mother to restore life, reunite with child  
By Debbie Buie, ABCH Development Associate

The charm lies cool against Ronda's neck, a constant reminder of the family who cared for her daughter and the ministry that helped make Ronda's recovery from addiction possible. "Misty was four months old when I placed her with the Children's Homes," Ronda Daugherty remembers, "and she was four years old when I brought her home.

"It was the hardest thing I have ever done, but it was the right thing, and I knew that."

Ronda had struggled with addiction for several years when she became pregnant with Misty. She had considered suicide, but learning she was pregnant ... "Misty saved my life."

After Misty was born, Ronda enrolled in a substance abuse treatment center for women and met with Carolyn Eberline Clendenin, a social worker with Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, to discuss privately placing Misty with the Children's Homes and how long Misty might stay. Private placement would allow Misty to be cared for by a foster family while Ronda would retain legal custody and all rights. It also kept Misty from being put in the custody of the Alabama Department of Human Resources and going through the court system.

Ronda acknowledges that the decision was a difficult one. "It is hard to walk away and leave your child with someone you do not know," she says. "But better to make the choice yourself than to leave the government to do it later, forcibly."

Donna and Tom Avants were Misty's foster parents. While Ronda was in recovery, she and Misty talked on the phone and Ronda visited her frequently. The Avantses made sure Misty always knew who her mother was, and gave Ronda the charm she now wears on her necklace. "I grew up thinking I was part of this really huge family," Misty recalls, "It was normal for me."

As Ronda finished her rehabilitation program and began rebuilding her life, Misty began visiting her on the weekends. The original eight months stretched into four years.

"I knew I needed to leave her in that stable environment until I could offer her emotional and mental stability as a mother," Ronda says.

While the Avantses and Carolyn were caring for Misty, they were caring for Ronda, too. "We prayed together and they prayed for me," Ronda says. "If Carolyn ever had any doubt that I could do this, I never saw it. I always felt she believed in me. You kind of say, 'If they believe in me this much, then I must be worthy enough to believe in myself.'"

Today, Ronda is the program director for the private treatment facility where she recovered from addiction. Misty is a 22-year-old blessing to her mother and others who know her. She still stays in touch with the Avantses and Carolyn. She says she is glad her mother had the courage to put her in foster care, knowing how it allowed Ronda to become the kind of mother God wanted her to be, the kind Misty deserved. "It was worth the time apart," Misty says.

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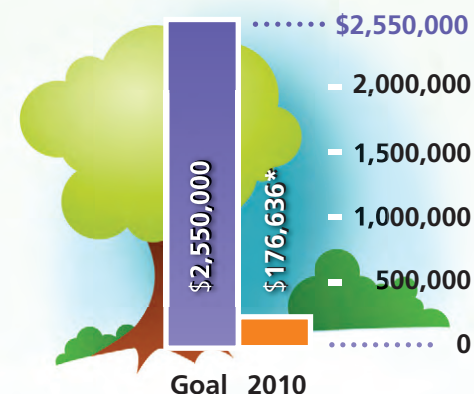
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\* Graphic represents giving totals as of press time.



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## Want to know God?

By Bobby E. Hopper  
Director of Missions  
Bethel Baptist Association

Everett did not have time for God. He spent Sundays working on his work car. The pleas of his wife and mother-in-law to attend church with them were answered with "I have to work on my car so I can make a living."

Everett was about to get a startling revelation from his mother-in-law, whom everyone called Granny. Granny was a God-fearing widow and sharecropper who raised nine children during the Great Depression. She lived by faith. Her revelation for Everett: Working on the old car was reward for not spending time with God. She was not a name-it-and-claim-it person, but through her hardships, she had learned to depend on God. Her challenge to Everett: Trust God and serve Him. Granny used Jesus' words from Matthew 6:33-34: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

Frustrated with the endless task of car repair, motivated by the prayers and loving compassion of his wife and mother-in-law and drawn by the Holy Spirit, Everett decided to put his faith in the Lord. He accepted the salvation found in accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. He made a public confession of his sins and committed his life to serving Jesus.

Everett committed to reading the Bible, joining and attending the local church and tithing. Granny challenged Everett to stop spending money on the old car and give to God.

Everett never looked back. Serving the Lord for the rest of his life, he never missed an opportunity to share his testimony. He wanted people to know God and His promise to care for His children.

Everett admitted that when he spent more time with God, he spent less time working on his old car. God did not give him a new car or more money. Everett just became a better steward of what God gave him.

That is what knowing God is. It is seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness and believing He will meet your need.

# 'Evidence of God's grace'

## Cowboy preacher survives mountain, plants churches in Idaho

North American Mission Board (NAMB) missionary Jim Ballard — all 243 pounds of him — lay sprawled in agonizing pain on a snow-covered dirt trail high in the mountains of the Salmon-Challis National Forest in east-central Idaho.

Four of his ribs and a vertebra were fractured and his sternum was cracked. His lung punctured, Ballard was spitting up pink, foamy blood, which dotted his full salt-and-pepper beard.

Ballard prayed to God and thought of Myrtle, his new wife, who was back at their RV campsite some 10 miles away. The nearest main road was a mile or two away. Panic was creeping in like the big black crow that perched only 10 feet away, cawing and waiting for what it thought would be its inevitable Ballard "buffet."

"You're not getting my eyeballs just yet," Ballard yelled at the crow while whipping out his .45/.410 revolver and two boxes of shells. At least neither the crows nor the wolves would get 'ol Jim that day without a fight.

Several hours earlier that day — Oct. 17, 2008 — Ballard's final day of elk hunting had started before sun-up, when he told Myrtle he'd be hunting all day and after dark. After all, this would be the last day of his weeklong, elk-hunting vacation.

But this day, his life would be altered forever when, at around 10 a.m., he chose to turn off a main road onto a "Jeep trail" that grew increasingly steeper as it snaked up the mountain.

"I recall stopping to put the four-wheeler into low range four-wheel drive and first gear," Ballard said. "I started up the trail, and in a split second, I thought the front end seemed



**LEADING RANCHERS TO CHRIST** — NAMB missionary Jim Ballard (left) and Mark Eams load bottled water to take to campers as they do their rodeo workshop classes. NAMB photo

a bit light and that I should stand up and lean forward over the handle bars." It was too late.

The 750-pound four-wheeler flipped up and over backward, slamming Ballard back-first into the rocky, snow-frozen ground. The handlebars and speedometer crushed his chest on impact. He remembers the crushing, grinding sounds and the severe chest and neck pain that followed. His hunting rifle was immediately snapped into two pieces. The four-wheeler rolled over and over until it finally disappeared out of view down the mountainside.

But Ballard was not out of God's view. "I prayed some more and in talking with God, I recalled the time I had accepted Christ. I was filled with an unusual peace that if I perished on that hillside, I would wake up in heaven. I also thanked Him for blessing me with seven wonderful children, seven grandchildren and for another one on the way. I also was blessed with Myrtle, my beautiful, special new wife." (Ballard was married to his first wife, Beverly, for 34 years prior to her death in 2006.)

### Penning his dying words

A practical man, Ballard turned his attention to scrawling out his last will and testament on the inside of a split-opened .410 shotgun shell box. Using a granola bar box, he scribbled out a final note telling anyone who found him — unconscious or dead — whom to notify.

"I wanted to help my loved ones understand my love for them and that if I didn't make it, I was just fine in heaven with Jesus." He carefully placed his will in his camouflage shirt pocket and the letter where it would be found.

He fell into a merciful sleep.

Ballard had spent 37 of his 57 years in ministry. For the past seven, he had served as a NAMB missionary and director of missions for Eastern Idaho Southern Baptist Association. The association is made up of 13 counties and surrounded by three states — Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

From his home in Blackfoot, Idaho, Ballard would put an average of 75,000-80,000 miles a year on his Ford Explorer or truck, handling the demands of his huge ministry territory. Grinding out 500 or 600 miles a day was not uncommon. Myrtle was his driving companion.

"Some people would call this work hard," he once said, referring to his ministry. "It's long miles and grueling work. It's also fulfilling. But yet to me, with 90 percent of the people in eastern Idaho not knowing the Lord, we have the greatest opportunity on earth to take the gospel of Jesus."

Ballard had said he believed a movement was afoot in the creation of cowboy churches in the West. "Even if the folks have a Mormon background, if we'll do a cowboy church in their setting, they'll come." And they did.

A "cowboy" himself, Ballard was born in Pueblo, Colo., and grew up working long days on ranches and farms. "Westerners are very individual people but some of the fin-

est people on earth. Morally most of them are very sound. Cowboys believe in God because they see His creation outdoors."

But because of ranchers' long hours and seven-day weeks, Ballard said Southern Baptist church planters must take their schedules into account when planting new churches and holding services. Ballard recently reported that his area's church

planters had recorded three new church plants within the last three months. His vision was that every church and mission in his association would plant a church within the next five years and then those plants would plant another one in the next five years — an increase from 11 to 56 churches in only 10 years.

After almost seven hours on the side of a snowy Idaho mountain, God clearly indicated He was not yet ready for Ballard — the longtime pastor, cowboy preacher, mentor, missionary, church planter and elk hunter — to close up shop and report to heaven. God had more work for him to do.

"My entire story is amazing evidence of God's provision and grace," Ballard says today, fully recovered after being aided by two other hunters who just also "happened" to be hunting elk in eastern Idaho that particular October day. Now he's back on the road planting churches, preaching and encouraging other church planters in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. (NAMB)



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**Alabama goal:**  
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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For February 28

## Explore the Bible By Cecil Taylor Dean, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

### WHEN LIFE IS UNFAIR Mark 15:15-39; 16:5-7

#### Crucifixion (15:15-32)

First Pilate ordered Jesus flogged. Soldiers stripped the victim and then bent him over a stone or tied him to a post with hands fastened above his head. With a whip made of leather with bits of bone, stone and metal plaited into it, they beat him. An expert could open up the victim's body cavity. So brutal was this punishment that many victims died from it.

Then Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers for execution. Before they took Him away, the troops mocked Him as a "king." They dressed Jesus in a military tunic and wove for Him a wreath of thorns to imitate the emperor's robe and diadem. They bowed to Him and contemptuously called Him "King of the Jews!" All the verbs in verse 19 indicate continual action. Repeatedly they hit Him on the head with a rod to drive the thorns deeper. Repeatedly they spat at Him in derision. Repeatedly they bowed the knee to Him in mock worship. When they finished their play, they put His own clothes on Him and an execution squad of four (John 19:23) led Him out to die.

Normally the condemned carried his own cross beam to the execution site. Such a toll had the physical abuse taken that Jesus was too weak to bear the weight. The Romans "forced" Simon from Cyrene, a Roman colony in North Africa, to take it for Him.

At Golgotha ("the place of the skull," perhaps named because of its shape), they offered Jesus wine laced with myrrh to dull the pain. He refused, choosing to have all His senses unclouded as He went about the work of atonement. They crucified Him at "the third hour," i.e., 9 a.m.

The soldiers divided Jesus' possessions by lot and over His head, nailed a sign stating the reason for His execution: "The King of the Jews." In many paintings, the letters "INRI" appear. These abbreviate the title in Latin: Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum. Two robbers were nailed up also, one to either side

of Jesus. Passers-by, priests and scribes and the robbers crucified beside Jesus mocked Him over and again. They spoke more truly than they knew. If He saved others, then He could not save Himself.

#### Death (15:33-39)

From noon to 3 p.m., Jesus hung in darkness, a cosmic sign of heaven's judgment on what took place at Calvary. During that time, a blanket of silence covered Jesus' sufferings. Finally, at 3 p.m., He cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Evidently the Father's forsaking of the Son took place during those three dark hours. God forsaken of God? Who can understand it? But clearly Jesus experienced what it is to be utterly abandoned by God. Indeed that was the worst pain of the cross. Physical agony He suffered without a (recorded) word. But when He experienced God-forsakenness, it wrenched from even the strong Son of God this scream of agony. Abandonment was the cross within the cross. It is the worst horror of hell itself. The heart of hell is when a person who just wants God to leave him alone finally gets his wish.

A soldier dipped a sponge in a jar of rough vinegar wine used by the soldiers and held it to Jesus' lips. Then He cried aloud and died.

At Jesus' death, the temple veil was ripped from top to bottom (to show its destruction was supernatural). Thus was the way into God's presence opened for all (Heb. 6:19; 9:3; 10:20).

The centurion in charge came away convinced Jesus was the divine Son of God. This conversion of an unbeliever by the dying Savior is the high point of Mark's Gospel.

#### Resurrection (16:5-7)

On the first Easter morning, an angel informed the women who came to finish readying Jesus' body for permanent burial that the Crucified One was risen. For proof, he pointed to the empty stone slab where the body was laid. Then he sent them to tell the disciples and Peter (the denier) to meet Jesus in Galilee.

## Bible Studies for Life By Kenneth B.E. Roxburgh Chair and Armstrong Professor of Religion, Department of Religion, Samford University

### HOW CAN YOU KEEP FROM LOSING YOUR MIND? 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-17

In the Greco-Roman world in which Paul lived, wrestling was not only a part of a soldier's training but was also taught to every youngster, and so in Greece, men were trained not only in grammar and mathematics but also in wrestling. Paul was using a familiar idea to remind his readers that the Christian life is one of conflict with spiritual forces seeking to undermine their relationship with God.

#### Watch Out (Eph. 6:10-12)

In these verses, Paul reminded his readers to watch out for the "wiles of the devil," who has schemes and strategies to catch them unaware. As we watch out for the evil one, we also are encouraged to look up and see the resources God has provided for His people so that we can be "strong in the Lord and in His mighty strength." One of the dangers of the metaphor of spiritual warfare is that it may suggest the possibility that the evil one may prevail against God's Kingdom. Although our struggle may be against "principalities and powers," we have the assurance that "He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world" and the victory of Christ over the powers of darkness has been accomplished in and through the cross and His resurrection.

#### Gear Up (Eph. 6:13-17)

Yet we have to be prepared by putting on the full armor of God. In his religious allegory Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan expressed it this way: "Christian considered again that he had no armor for his back; and therefore thought that to turn the back to him might give him the greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his darts." We do not run away from the attacks of the evil one. We face temptation and resist it. The foundational garment is the "belt of truth." God's truth, which enables us to think clearly, helps us to be alert and not to be caught off-guard. In Isaiah 11:5, truth is referred to as faithfulness, which suggests that truth is not only a matter of knowledge but also leads to a change in character.

We are urged to put on the "breastplate of righteousness," which may refer to having an assurance that we are in a righteous relationship with God through justification or may imply that our daily lives are characterized by righteous living. We wear the shoes of the gospel of peace, having attitudes and actions of peacefulness and remembering the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God."

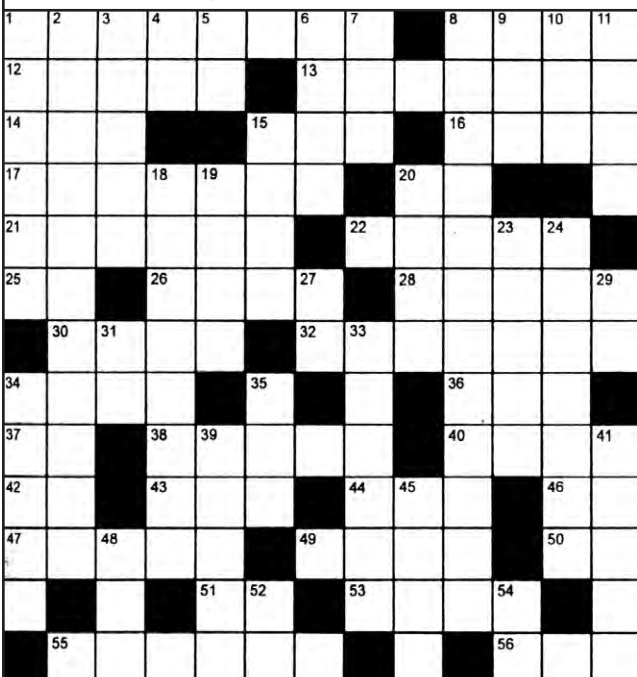
In defending ourselves against the fiery darts of the evil one, we are to use the shield of faith. The Roman soldier used a large shield, some 4 feet by 2. It had a thick coating of leather, and soldiers often worked in units, and when the arrows of the enemy were flying toward them, they would place their shields in front of one another or above their heads, protecting one another against the enemy. Paul did not want to forget the "helmet of salvation," which in 1 Thessalonians 5 is defined as the "hope of salvation." As we anticipate the final victory of Christ over the forces of darkness, we gain strength and courage for the struggle we face. One vital part of our armor is what we carry in our hands — the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God that helps us to both ward off the enemy's attacks and go on the offensive as we seek to share the message of God's love. Finally we are to "pray." In one sense, prayer is not a part of the armor, but as we put on the armor and engage in daily living, we need prayer to enable us to experience the power of God.

#### Think Strategically (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

Paul was utterly convinced that our final victory is assured because we have "divine power to destroy strongholds." Oscar Cullmann, a Lutheran theologian, spoke of the distinction between D-Day and V-Day in World War II. On D-Day, Allied troops entered France, in principle dooming the Third Reich. But it took many months of bitter fighting before the Nazis surrendered on V-Day, victory day. The cross was like D-Day, and Jesus' return will be like V-Day. As we anticipate that final victory, we know that there are many battles to be fought and we need to put on the full armor of God.

## Christian Crossword

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### Across

- Your sins are \_\_\_\_\_. (1 John 2:12)
- Ye shall be \_\_\_\_\_ indeed. (John 8:36)
- \_\_\_\_\_ to pray. (Matt. 14:23)
- I have \_\_\_\_\_ by experience. (Gen. 30:27)
- Turnpike. (abbr.)
- South-southwest. (abbr.)
- River in Switzerland.
- Thin cornmeal cake.
- Tennessee. (abbr.)
- A weasel.
- And \_\_\_\_\_ with her suburbs. (1 Chron. 6:75)
- Right. (abbr.)
- The children of \_\_\_\_\_. (Jer. 2:16)
- In the \_\_\_\_\_ of Jordan. (Mark 1:5)
- Bone from the elbow to the wrist.
- Set up our \_\_\_\_\_. (Ps. 20:5)
- One \_\_\_\_\_, a prophetess. (Luke 2:36)
- Cable News Network. (abbr.)
- Sixteenth letter in Greek alphabet.

- They did eat \_\_\_\_\_. (Ex. 16:35)
- The name of the well \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 26:20)
- Symbol for element platinum.
- Abraham and Sarah were \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 18:11)
- The desert of \_\_\_\_\_. (Num. 27:14)
- Symbol for element lithium.
- From \_\_\_\_\_ lips. (Ps. 120:2)
- King of the \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 2:2)
- Symbol for element tin.
- \_\_\_\_\_ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 11:28)
- There was a continual \_\_\_\_\_ given him of the king of Babylon (Jer. 52:34)
- With hands on the hips and elbows bowed outward.
- Greek island.

### Down

- Peace from God the \_\_\_\_\_. (2 John 3)
- We have therefore \_\_\_\_\_. (Gal. 6:10)

- His sons were Ulam and \_\_\_\_\_. (1 Chron. 7:16)
- Greece. (abbr.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ came to pass. (Josh. 1:1)
- There is none \_\_\_\_\_. (Isa. 45:18)
- He is a \_\_\_\_\_ creature. (2 Cor. 5:17)
- Gold, and \_\_\_\_\_. (Matt. 2:11)
- Ribonucleic acid. (abbr.)
- Poetic: ever.
- Garden of \_\_\_\_\_. (Gen. 2:15)
- A straw beehive.
- And of sweet \_\_\_\_\_. (Ex. 30:23)
- A small buffalo of Celebes and the Philippines.
- \_\_\_\_\_ not to the right. (Prov. 4:27)
- Frogs ... into thine \_\_\_\_\_. (Ex. 8:3)
- From the \_\_\_\_\_ even to the husk. (Num. 6:4)
- Hemoglobin. (abbr.)
- Royal Society. (abbr.)
- Lane. (abbr.)
- They were \_\_\_\_\_. (Job 32:15)
- The \_\_\_\_\_ of his eye. (Deut. 32:10)

- Abraham was old, \_\_\_\_\_ well stricken. (Gen. 24:1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ trees and precious stones. (2 Chron. 9:10)
- Before rulers and \_\_\_\_\_. (Mark 13:9)
- Archaic: certainly, assuredly.
- I wrote them with \_\_\_\_\_. (Jer. 36:18)
- Symbol for element rubidium.
- Truck. (abbr.)



# World Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

## Police 'concoct' new charge against Ethiopian Christian

JIJIGA, Ethiopia — Prosecutors and police are trying to concoct a terrorism case against an Ethiopian convert from Islam who has been jailed since May without formal charges, Christian leaders said.

Bashir Musa Ahmed, a 39-year-old Ethiopian national, was arrested May 23 when police found him in possession of eight Bibles in Jijiga, the capital of Ethiopia's Somali Region Zone Five — a predominantly Muslim area in eastern Ethiopia. Zonal police arrested him after he was accused of providing Muslims with Somali-language Bibles, sources said, though Ethiopia's constitution protects such activity.

A state official joined Christian leaders in stating that Islamist interests have kept Ahmed in jail in spite of the state's failure to find any legitimate charge against him. Initially the Christian was arrested for "malicious" distribution of a version of the Bible that is widely available in Ethiopia and is commonly used by Somali Christians inside and outside the country. Police have submitted the terrorism charge to prosecutors, prompting the prosecutors in January to ask police to find some evidence for the accusation, according to a church leader.

"Police have submitted their investigation results to the prosecutor's office, accusing Bashir of terrorism," said the church leader. "We heard that the prosecutors asked police to solidify their accusations with evidences of Bashir's connections [to a terrorist group and to specify] which terrorist group. Prosecutors seem to feel they need to have some evidence to charge him with terrorism."

## Persecution of Coptic Christians in Egypt continues

TETA, Egypt — Three men accused of killing six Coptic worshippers and a security guard pleaded "not guilty" Feb. 13 as the Coptic community mourned the loss of yet another victim of apparent anti-Christian violence.

The three men allegedly sprayed a crowd with gunfire after a Christmas service in Nag Hammadi on Jan. 6.

On the evening of Feb. 9, Malak Saad, a 25-year-old Coptic carpenter living in Teta in Menoufia province, was walking outside a meeting hall that police had seized from Christians when he was shot through his chest at close range. He died instantly.

Officials at the Interior Ministry said Saad was killed by mistake when a bullet discharged while a police guard was cleaning his weapon. The Interior Ministry said the shooter has been detained and will be tried in a military court. One of Saad's cousins disputed the Interior Ministry's account of the incident, saying the guard had used the bathroom inside the meeting hall and had come outside the building when he exchanged a few words with Saad and shot him at close range.

The building in question had been Coptic-owned for 16 years, but two days prior to the shooting, police seized it after a group of Muslims started a rumor that the owners planned to convert the hall into a church building.

Following the Jan. 6 shootings, in a move that Christian leaders said was designed to silence the Coptic community's protests, police went door to door and arrested Coptic men in their late teens and 20s. Reports vary widely on the numbers of how many men were arrested, but 15 arrests have been confirmed.

## Baptist arrested for drugs; others call charges false

GULISTON, Uzbekistan — Tohar Haydarov, a Baptist arrested by Guliston City Police in central Syrdarya region Jan. 18, faces criminal charges of producing or storing drugs, which is punishable with up to five years in prison. Haydarov's fellow believers insist the case has been fabricated, one stating that "police planted a matchbox with drugs." They also said Haydarov "was beaten and forced by the police to sign different papers. His face looked exhausted and swollen and he could hardly walk. He did not even remember what was written in those papers." The authorities say these are lies.

In another case in Tashkent region, Almalyk City Police raided a peaceful meeting of local Baptists. During their detention, the Baptists sustained injuries that were verified by a medical examination. "I don't know what to say. The police were there only to assist other state agencies with the detentions," a police officer said after being told about the medical records. In both cases the authorities are also thought to be preparing criminal cases against some of the Baptists.

Uzbek law — in defiance of the country's international human rights commitments — bans all unregistered religious activity. ☞

# City Council's meeting 'ambiguous,' 'atypical' Bessemer mayor May says

By Sondra Washington  
The Alabama Baptist

Bessemer City Councilors barely mentioned gambling in the regular Feb. 16 meeting — a stark difference from the late-night, last-minute "bingo" meeting held just four days prior.

With one day's notice of the "special called combination bingo committee and council meeting," only four of the seven councilors attended the Feb. 12 meeting. Those present — President Earl Cochran, Protem Jesse Matthews, Louise Alexander and Dorothy Davidson, three of whom (Cochran, Alexander and Davidson) comprise the city's bingo committee — have issued the council's continuous votes to legalize and expand gambling in the area.

Mayor Edward May called the bingo committee's actions suspicious since they are supposed to hold meetings and then report their suggestions to the full council. He called the 8 p.m. special called meeting "atypical" and "ambiguous."

"They didn't state the reason for the meeting unequivocally (as required by law)," he said. "They wanted to do it under the cover of darkness because they did not want the public to see what they were doing."

Despite District Attorney Arthur Green's recent warning to shut down

Bessemer-area casinos or face potential law enforcement raids, the four councilors continued their plans during the meeting to allow slot machines, which they call electronic bingo, in the area.

Cochran said, "I've thought about it and prayed about it, and I'm going to be persistent about it because I know this city needs financing."

May has said the city does not need financing from gambling since it would take more money out of the community than it could bring in. Yet under the advice of Birmingham Attorney Kim Davidson, the council approved electronic bingo gambling permit applications for Radican Foundation, Walker County Shrine Club, Alabama Minority Health Institute and New Covenant Christian Center, who wish to open casinos in the area. The organizations have said they applied for bingo permits before Circuit Court Judge Eugene Verin issued his "status quo" order.

This allowed gambling facilities already in operation before Nov. 5 to remain open during a court case to determine the legality of the ma-

chines they plan to use. But Kim Davidson said their applications were "lost" by city employees.

In the Feb. 12 meeting, council members approved a renewal bingo permit application for American Legion Hall 149 (Lucky Royale Casino) and a transfer application for the VFW/Ladies Auxiliary who they say has been operating in Lipscomb.

May, who was not present at the meeting, said he ordered city employees not to accept or process bingo permit applications since the city has no ordinance allowing electronic bingo gambling, which he considers illegal.

During the Feb. 12 meeting, council members also ordered Kim Davidson to issue a memo to May giving him seven days to instruct city employees to process and issue the requested permits. At press time, May had not received any such memo. Finally council members voted to place \$50,000 in a line-item of the city's budget to pay for the bingo-related work Kim Davidson is performing on behalf of the city. Initially the councilors considered \$100,000 for the line-item.

During the Feb. 16 meeting, the group attempted to pass a resolution to pay Kim Davidson \$15,225 for "issues relating to bingo," but May and the city attorney asked for more time to review her invoice. She was initially hired by the council's bingo committee to represent the city council in the court case before Verin. Then the committee began working with her to pass electronic bingo gambling ordinances and approve the aforementioned permits. ☞

"[T]hey did not want the public to see what they were doing."

Edward May  
Mayor of Bessemer

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Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19:14



BP photo

**'GIVEN A TALENT'** — Jinnelle Zaugg-Siergiej, No. 27 on the U.S. women's hockey team, clocked 11 minutes of playing time during a 12-1 victory over China at the Winter Olympics on Feb. 15 in Vancouver, British Columbia.

# Using it for Him

## Lacing up skates, Olympian remains mindful of God

As a girl growing up in Wisconsin, Jinnelle Zaugg-Siergiej may have played on the boys' team at her high school but she wasn't exactly one of the guys.

"I give them most of the credit for me being the player I am today," Zaugg-Siergiej said. "They challenged me daily."

But, she noted, "The first two years were very rough in the sense that the guys didn't always want a girl on the team."

She fared better her last two years of high school as the coach gave her opportunities to play and the team made it to the state semifinals her senior year.

The guys even began to accept her — and she even ended up marrying one of them.

Now Zaugg-Siergiej has taken her game to the next level, making it to the Winter Olympics as a forward on the U.S. women's hockey team.

Her ability and her place on the team's roster she credits solely to the Lord.

### 'Very blessed'

"There's something about lacing up your skates and going out and playing with your friends," Zaugg-Siergiej said.

"It's like using your God-given

talent. I feel very blessed to have been given a talent and to be able to use it for Him and go as far as I have."

Zaugg-Siergiej started playing hockey at age 6, joining her brother's team when she was 8 because they needed more players.

Raised in a Christian family, Zaugg-Siergiej was homeschooled until high school and credits her parents for giving her a strong biblical foundation.

"I accepted Christ as my Savior when I was really young, but it wasn't until between high school and college when it became my own faith," she said. "It was a choice I had to make and not necessarily what my parents wanted."

Zaugg-Siergiej, who played on the women's hockey team at the University of Wisconsin, says her college years were a turning point in her life, during which her faith grew strong (she was actively involved with Athletes in Action) and she learned a lot about how to live as a Christian.

Last summer, she married former high school teammate Mike Siergiej.

He became a Christian shortly after graduation, and the two began dating about a year after that.

Leading up to the tryouts for the Olympic hockey team, the newlyweds spent many hours reading the Bible and praying about the process.

"I always had thought for the last two years that if I make the team it's because of God, because He has bigger plans for me than I do," Zaugg-Siergiej said.

### 'Role model'

She forgot to change the name on her passport after her marriage, and the Olympic team is required to put a player's name on the jersey that is on her passport.

So she asked if the team could at least use "Zaugg-Siergiej" as her official name in printed materials, "because I want people to know that I will be Siergiej for the rest of my life."

After the Olympics, she said she'll drop the Zaugg and will be Jinnelle Siergiej.

Zaugg-Siergiej said she certainly wants to win a gold medal in Vancouver, British Columbia, but more than that, she wants to represent Jesus Christ well.

"You always get selfish, and want to play, or want to be on the top line, or want to get more media opportunities and stuff like that," she said.

"But I think going into Vancouver, I just want to be grateful for where I've been and to be a role model for others.

"I want to represent more than the name on the front of my jersey or the back of my jersey," Zaugg-Siergiej said. (BP)

## Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

### NFL players sing, share testimonies in Miami

MIAMI — Newly elected National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) Executive Director DeMaurice Smith spent most of the week of Super Bowl XLIV making the rounds with the players and the media, talking about his new league-wide responsibilities and the possibilities for labor unrest.

But when it came time for the 11th Annual Super Bowl Gospel Celebration, he was among the thousands who crowded into the downtown James L. Knight Center for an evening of inspiration as well as proclamation of their faith in Jesus Christ.

"This agrees with my spirit," Smith said. "We're not talking about work or problems or anything tonight; we're talking about faith. Being the executive director of the NFLPA is what I do, it's not who I am."

Among the players who gave their testimonies were Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb, New York Jets wide receiver/returner Brad Smith and recently retired New England Patriots defensive lineman Don Davis, with 2006 Super Bowl MVP Hines Ward announcing some of the singing groups.

"With all the glitz and the glamour of South Beach this week, people think they give up their fun when they have faith," Davis said. "But we know Jesus wants you to have fun, but do it the right way."

The resounding three-hour concert featured the 40-member NFL Players Choir with some of football's best players singing their praises to God. "I just want to give praise to God and stay in my lane," said choir member Michael Gaines, a Cleveland Browns tight end.

### Tebow ad well-received but confusing for viewers

VENTURA, Calif. — Focus on the Family's Super Bowl ad featuring star quarterback Tim Tebow may have gotten a lot of press but left many viewers with "confusion regarding the commercial's meaning and sponsor," according to the California-based Barna Group.

According to a poll based on 1,001 telephone interviews, including the night of the Super Bowl, when asked to describe the main message of the commercial, one in five viewers could not venture a guess; 38 percent described it as an anti-abortion; and 19 percent said it was about being "pro-family" or "expressing that family is important."

The remaining answers included: "reminding people that miracles happen and Tim Tebow was a miracle baby," "stressing the importance of the parent-child relationship," "asking people to visit the sponsor's Web site," or "helping people think about health care issues."

The ad generated controversy before it ever aired after CBS shifted its policy to allow an advocacy ad. Abortion-rights groups said the Super Bowl was an inappropriate venue for a hot-topic issue like abortion.

Not only was the message unclear, the commercial's sponsor was also lost to most viewers. While 78 percent could not identify the organization behind the Tebow ad, only 14 percent correctly stated Focus on the Family. Six percent guessed some other organization or group, and 3 percent remembered the name of the campaign, "Celebrate Family, Celebrate Life."

### Sour economy pushes offerings down, study finds

VENTURA, Calif. — One year after a majority of Americans said they hoped the sour economy wouldn't impact their church giving, three in 10 Americans now say they're putting less in the offering plate, a Barna Group study shows.

Compared to a similar study that Barna conducted at the end of 2008, the percentage of Americans who have reduced their donations has increased by a staggering 45 percent. Many of those who traditionally give to their congregations have been able to maintain their usual level of giving, but those who have not often substantially reduced their giving. Almost one-quarter of church donors cut their contributions by at least 20 percent.

A year ago, a separate survey of U.S. donors by Cygnus Applied Research found that more than half of actively religious donors planned to give the same or more to charitable causes in 2009 as the year before.

In addition, that survey also found that 43 percent of actively religious respondents remained "seriously committed" to giving in the face of economic uncertainty, compared to 23 percent of those who were not religious at all.