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# Through outsiders' eyes

## Most church Web sites ineffective, too inwardly focused

Churches, by and large, still haven't entered the digital age when it comes to evangelism — but those who have are reaping huge rewards, according to a new survey.

A poll conducted by Christian technology company Endis, which provides the ChurchInsight church Web platform and has offices in the United States and the United Kingdom, indicates that when churches deliberately focus their Web sites on attracting outsiders they see a corresponding rise in the number of non-Christian visitors.

But many focus on the internal life of the church and their effectiveness is reduced.

Endis polled 1,600 churches for its DigiMission project, asking questions about church size, the Web site's target readership, the number of Christians and non-Christians coming to events and the influence of the Web site on their decision to attend.

The 120 churches that responded reported more than 1,300 non-Christian visitors in the last 12 months to church events, services and discipleship courses through the Web — an average of 11 non-Christian visitors per church.

For Christian visitors the figure is 1,600, an average of 14.

Among the survey's key findings were that most churches' Web sites were not created with the unchurched in mind. Only half offer an outline of the gospel, and only a quarter provide testimonies of people who have come to faith in Christ.

Endis spokesman Geoff Knott said there were clear differences in the effectiveness of different Web sites.

"When we looked at the successful sites, we found that they had the gospel on their site, and that people were able to book into events like Alpha courses," he said. "Interactivity is important, but we didn't find that blogs or forums did much. The other thing that was very successful was stories."

It was also noticeable that larger churches were less effective than

### TIPS FOR CHURCH WEB SITES

- 👤
**Identify your audience.** Most church Web sites are designed for the reached, not the unreached.
- 📅
**Try to be more interactive.** Letting visitors sign up for events gives them an immediate opportunity to get engaged with you.
- ✉️
**The Web is just part of your missions effort.** Multiple contact by different means increases chances of success. There's no substitute for personal contact.
- 🌐
**Be serious about the Web.** It's the new printing press, and hundreds of millions of people use it every day.
- 💡
**Think about what image you're communicating.** What does your site say about your church?
- ✝️
**Put the gospel on your Web site.** How would you explain the gospel simply to someone who never heard it before?

Source: DigiMission/graphic by Lauren A. Chow

## Farmers needed for ag work with missions purpose

By Anna Swindle  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

John Clement of Santuck Baptist Church, Wetumpka, says there are three things he knows a lot about: football, farming and the Bible.

He never dreamed that two of those areas of expertise — farming and the Bible — would converge to form a viable missions outreach. But Farming for Christ (also known as Alabama Agricultural Fellowship), an organization that strives to partner agriculture experts with countries and people groups in need, is just that.

"We're trying to get a group of farmers to help out [Baptist representatives] throughout the world, because [they] might not have an ag background," said Ben Ingram, a member of Farming for Christ and Providence Baptist Church, Opelika.

The organization takes a true holistic approach. It helps Baptist representatives learn to meet physical needs by reaching out to people through agriculture so that they also can meet spiritual needs by introducing them to the gospel.

"That's great if you want to beat [people] over the head with a Bible, but you also have to meet their needs, and their needs are in their belly," Clement said.

Plus having farming skills creates another way for Baptist representatives to appeal to countries that are often hesitant about letting in those who are planning to preach about Christianity.

### Using expertise, interests

Though Farming for Christ is not a new organization, part of its focus now is building up membership since it was inactive for several years before restarting in 2007.

As people come on board, Ingram said he hopes to piece together a database to keep track of people's expertise and interests statewide. That way when Baptist representatives contact Farming for Christ with a specific need, the database can be

(See 'Planting,' page 3)

smaller ones at attracting unchurched people.

"Smaller churches of between 100 and 150 are very good at getting guests in. I think they push harder, using Google AdWords for instance — they're trying to grow. Are we losing our missions edge as we grow bigger?"

He stressed that good content and ease of use were far more important than a sophisticated image or a multiplicity of functions.

The survey was welcomed by Tony Whittaker, the U.K. coordinator for Internet Evangelism Day. Most church Web sites fall short of what they could be for various reasons, he said.

"They are often mainly 'brochureware' — static informational pages with little interactive comment, or frequently updated material such as a blog or Twitter feed," he said. "An-

other reason is that wittingly or unwittingly, they present the church as a building where there is a program of meetings. Obviously there is some truth in this.

"But the greater, and more meaningful and biblical truth, is that the church is a big family in that community, which happens to meet together from time to time, as families do in one or more locations. In other words, it's people, not programs."

There were many ways of showing this on Web sites, he said, such as including photographs of members.

He also referred to churches' habit of using Christian jargon.

"Sites that are actually effective for outsiders have looked at themselves through an outsider's eyes — or better, actually asked non-yet-believers to give an honest opinion of the site — and built everything around that understanding." (ABP)

*"We're trying to get a group of farmers to help out ... throughout the world."*  
 Ben Ingram

# COMMENT

## What Has Changed in Four Years?

**D**o you remember 2006? Southern Baptists were gathering in Greensboro, N.C., for their annual meeting. Johnny Hunt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga., had declined to be nominated for president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). He promoted Ronnie Floyd, pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., for the office. But concern about the Cooperative Program (CP) giving of Floyd's church, which was less than 1 percent of undesignated receipts at that time, caused widespread concern.

Some noted leaders of the conservative resurgence movement urged Jerry Sutton, then pastor of Two Rivers Baptist Church, Nashville, to enter the race. When the votes were counted, it was a third candidate — a relative newcomer to the SBC stage — who defeated both longtime SBC personalities on the first ballot. Frank Page, then pastor of First Baptist Church, Taylors, S.C., won largely because his church contributed 12.3 percent of undesignated receipts to support missions causes through the CP. SBC messengers sent a strong, unequivocal message — CP giving matters.

Now Southern Baptists are preparing for their 2010 annual meeting to be held in Orlando, Fla. Only one candidate has been announced for SBC president so far, and he is campaigning on the fact that he led his church, Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga., to cut its giving to missions through the CP.

The news release announcing Bryant Wright's candidacy outlined how he had led the church to lower CP giving to 2.5 percent of undesignated receipts for 2010 and said that he would continue to lower the percentage unless radical changes are made to how CP funds are divided.

Wright wants 25 percent to 30 percent used for state causes with at least 50 percent going to the SBC's International Mission Board (IMB). The Georgia Baptist Convention, which Wright's church is affiliated with, says it divides CP funds 50-50 between state and SBC causes.

### Bigger budgets than state conventions

Johnson Ferry Baptist, with a resident membership of more than 7,000 and a worship attendance of more than 4,000, has redirected much of its missions money to direct projects with the IMB and will continue to do so, according to Wright.

It is amazing how the climate of Southern Baptist life has changed in four short years. In 2006, CP giving mattered. In 2010, the big thing is supporting the IMB.

Some voices claim the change occurred because Southern Baptists finally recognized that CP giving is about maintenance ministry while supporting the IMB is about penetrating lostness.

There are other possible scenarios that might help explain the change. In this column, we will address only one — the tension between megachurches and smaller churches.



### THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

For many, it is hard to imagine a local church with more staff members and resources than the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM). There are many, however. First, Woodstock, served by now SBC President Johnny Hunt, is but one.

While the SBOM budgeted nearly \$14 million for state convention causes in 2010, First, Woodstock, received nearly \$17 million in undesignated gifts in 2009. The church has a marvelous ministry in its education program, music program, counseling center, recovery groups, pastoral care emphasis, missions efforts, technology support and more. And, of course, there is the great preaching and leadership Hunt provides. That is why multiple thousands worship there every week.

Megachurches like First, Woodstock, even support their own missionaries. They have resources to do things that average Baptist churches cannot do by themselves. Such churches do not need the cooperative efforts of sister churches to train teachers and leaders. They do not need joint missions projects. They do not need help from outside their own resources for evangelism efforts. God has blessed them to the point such churches can largely do what they want to do.

Now read the words of Mark Gallups, director of missions for Marion Baptist Association. He wrote, "My heart breaks for the pastor of Country Road Baptist Church, where there is no growth in the community. The baptism waters are seldom disturbed. Yet Country Road's pastor is faithful day in and day out to proclaim the gospel, support CP giving, live on a pauper's salary with no health insurance and literally sacrifice his life and family for the cause of Christ only to be ridiculed for not baptizing enough people.

"It is the average-size churches that give sacrificially, even to the point we don't hire needed staff. We suffer and do without that the CP may be funded. We realize that together we can be more for Christ than we can be alone. We are not independent. We are 16 million strong," he continued.

In the judgment of this writer, the desire to penetrate lostness is no greater in the megachurches that choose to support their own missionaries than it is in Country Road. The difference is that Country Road chooses a different methodology. Its way of

penetrating lostness at home and around the world is by working with others in a commonly agreed on program.

To be sure, something Country Road might want included in the work cooperating churches choose to support might be left out. Something they might not favor may be included. But that does not cause Country Road to cease participation. By working with others, it can do more for God's Kingdom than it could ever do alone.

Someone may observe that Country Road has no real choice. Its size and circumstances leave it only one effective methodology — cooperation. That may be true. When the CP was birthed in 1925, most SBC-related churches were more like Country Road than today's megachurches.

Back then, it was the independent Baptist Bible Fellowship churches — the Baptist Temples of the nation's major cities — and others who threw rocks at the methodology of cooperation and the CP. The biggest criticism was control. A church's CP dollars might go to something it did not like or something that was not its priority.

### Cooperation has been blessed

But Southern Baptists stuck to their methodology of cooperation despite the criticism and supported missions at home and around the world through the CP. During the past 85 years, God has blessed the methodology of cooperation and the CP. Today it is still a good choice for Country Road and megachurches. In 2010, the CP still matters because Southern Baptists can still do more together than we can do apart.



"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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## Potential among immigrants great; more work needed

A North American Mission Board (NAMB)/LifeWay Research study found that while ministries across North America are reaching out to a significant portion of first-generation immigrants, much work remains to be done. Still while evangelistic growth among these groups has been slow, the potential is promising, with immigrants from most countries considered somewhat receptive to the gospel.

"Things are changing in the U.S. and Canada," said Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research. "By 2050, there will be no majority race or ethnicity in the United States. Already in Toronto, the majority of residents were born outside of Canada. This is a wake-up call to the church in North America. The nations of the world are living right here, yet many are not hearing the gospel in an intentional, organized way. We can do better."

The 74 Christian organizations included in the study have 3,757 missionaries and church planters working among first-generation immigrants.

Participating organizations report having the highest number of first-generation immigrant believers from Mexico. The next highest numbers of believers involved in their churches or ministries, in descending order, are immigrants from Haiti (a distant second), South Korea, Cuba and China.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate, by country, changes in the number of immigrants involved in the organizations over the last year. Only Myanmar's, Vietnam's and Cambodia's immigrants average at or above "more total participants than one year ago."

### 'Opportunity is great'

"The opportunity here is great," said Ken Weathersby, NAMB's vice president of church planting. "Many immigrants come from places where preaching the gospel is illegal, but they can hear the gospel in their new home. In turn, those believers can impact their families here in North America and in their country of origin, more easily crossing language and cultural barriers [than non-native believers]."

Significantly, despite the slow growth of immigrants participating in these organizations, respondents said immigrants from most countries, overall, are considered somewhat receptive to the gospel.

Surveyed organizations currently minister to immigrants from 151 of a possible 202 countries considered in the analysis. This number includes countries such as the Vatican and Taiwan, which are not always counted among the world's official countries.

That means that 25 percent of possible countries of origin, including nations of Europe, Africa and the South Pacific, have no organizations ministering to their immigrants in North America. Another 26 percent have only one or two national or regional organizations ministering to them. (BP)



IMB photo

**TEACHING A MAN TO FARM** — Baptist representatives around the world need help from Alabama farmers who can help take the gospel into hard-to-reach places by teaching skills ranging from growing coastal hay to starting a tilapia farm.

# Planting seeds

## Group helps Baptist representatives make inroads in hard-to-reach areas

(continued from page 1)

used to find the person who can best offer the help they are looking for.

Ingram said Alabama has "a vital resource of farmers that aren't being used" but it's been difficult to spread the word about Farming for Christ to them.

"We're having a hard time getting people involved," Clement said, adding he and Ingram have been praying about what to do next.

The concept of teaching a hungry man to farm instead of just giving him food is not at all unfamiliar to retired Baptist representative Harold Watson. He and his wife, Joyce, spent three and a half decades educating people in

the Philippines about ways to care for their land, which was often prone to erosion.

Watson said he quickly learned how life changing simple farming skills could be.

"The gospel message, to people who are hungry, sounds hollow," Watson said. "So we see the command of fulfilling Jesus' commandment of helping 'the least of these' as helping these people to learn agriculture or a craft or a cottage industry, something they can do to generate income. All these are ways for getting to these people."

Wendy Norvelle, a spokeswoman for the International Mission Board (IMB), said the method has proven very fruitful.

"IMB agriculture (workers) have the op-

portunity to help communities meet their own needs for food and as they do so, they also have the opportunity to share the gospel and introduce them to the one who is the Bread of Life," she said.

Watson said he sees a bright future for agricultural missions through Farming for Christ.

"I see a slight trend now looming a little toward this, as a new generation is coming in to see the whole picture," Watson said. "In the past, we got lost in evangelism and forgot that people have needs. We have to reach out and touch these people. ... Jesus did that."

For more information, e-mail Ingram at [bding@bellsouth.net](mailto:bding@bellsouth.net).

# Faith, churches continue to sprout in Haiti

While traveling to a crusade in Bouce Carre, Haiti, the vehicle carrying Craig Culbreth broke down in a remote area.

Peering under the hood at a busted radiator hose, Culbreth and his traveling companions, De Louis Labranche and Michele Elius, who serve with the Confraternite Missionnaire Baptiste d'Haiti convention (CMBH), were soon surrounded by 14 Haitians who appeared seemingly from nowhere to offer assistance.

As Culbreth, Florida Baptists' partnership missions director who was scheduled to preach during the crusade, prepared for the hour walk to Bouce Carre, one of the locals reached into the engine and pulled out a brand-new rubber hose from the bottom of the motor — the exact size needed to repair the radiator.

With the car fixed, Culbreth and his fellow travelers arrived at the crusade within 30 minutes — just as he was scheduled to begin

speaking. At the conclusion, 143 people made professions of faith.

"I'd love to be able to explain what happened with the car," Culbreth said. "But I know if we had purchased the new hose, we would have stored it inside the car. Nor can I explain why it was the exact size we needed."

### Openness like never before

He does believe, however, that the incident is just one of many ways "God has proved how much He cares about the work being done in Haiti" through Southern Baptists and the CMBH churches.

Ten weeks after the Jan. 12 earthquake hit Haiti, Baptist leaders in the hurting nation see an openness to the gospel unseen before, spawning a renewed urgency to their task.

In the days after the quake, Haitian pastors reported 40,127 professions of faith among

their churches as Haitians sought hope amid the rubble. This fresh spiritual renewal compelled the pastors, with funding from the Florida Baptist Convention, to conduct a series of crusades across the nation.

During the first wave of these crusades — four large associationwide events and 51 smaller local meetings — the Baptist pastors in Haiti have reported another 18,038 conversions, totaling 58,167 new Christian believers in their earthquake-scarred land.

In the crusades he attended, Culbreth noted the Haitian pastors met with the new believers for as long as three hours, explaining their newfound faith. Among those attending the crusades were two voodoo priests who came to know Christ before the earthquake. Their transformation led to the conversion of many other voodoo priests, Culbreth said. A second wave of crusades began March 22. (BP)

# 'Transcends the trend'

## BelieverBands provide evangelism tools, Christian symbols amid Silly Bandz craze

By **Jeremy Henderson**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

It's at least 50,000. Maybe 60,000 or 70,000. Maybe even more.

Off the top of his head, Wayne Cook, pastor of First Baptist Church, Eclectic, and former youth pastor of Northbrook Baptist Church, Cullman, can't really say how many packs have been sold. But it's enough for him and his partners to describe BelieverBands on their Web site, [believerbands.com](http://believerbands.com), as "the best-selling Christian rubber band" on the market today.

And if you have children between the ages of 4 and 14, then chances are you're well aware that there is a market for the item.

### 'Christian version'

"It's just been crazy; it's really taken off," Cook said of BelieverBands, multishaped, multicolored rubber band bracelets intended as "a Christian version" of Silly Bandz — rubber band bracelets shaped like animals and other objects. "We're getting orders from all over the country and as far away as London, England."

He started BelieverBands with Michael Pugh, one of the youth directors at Bluff Park United Methodist Church in Hoover and a former member of his youth group at Northbrook Baptist, last fall.

"[Pugh] called me one day and told me about this idea he had," Cook said. "The idea was to use the

bands as a gospel presentation, and so we worked out a deal and kind of put our money together."

The evangelical potency of BelieverBands seems to lie in the symbols' subtlety. With the exception of the cross-shaped bands, the bands featured in the company's original Share Your Faith series — a once-bitten apple (signifying original sin), a crown (the reward of heaven), a green flower (Christian growth) and a white heart (a clean heart) — only become religious in a gospel context. Of course, flower- and heart-shaped bracelets also can be found in the packs of "secular" bracelets.

"The original pack has definitely been the most popular pack," Cook said. "It just kind of transcends the trend if that makes any sense."

Capitalizing on the national Silly Bandz craze — which, according to Cook, was started by the bands' popularity in Birmingham — has been relatively simple, he said.

"Believe it or not, we got our first contract with Books-A-Million, and then we had a distributor that came through that wanted to distribute them to Christian markets, so now we're in LifeWay and Family Christian Stores," Cook said. "We're not going to give up our ministry jobs or anything. But we're looking at this as a business but also an opportunity to do ministry in a different way than we've ever had the opportunity to do it."

Gina Sanders has seen the impact



Photo by Grace Thornton

**A WAY TO SHARE** — BelieverBands come in three different packs, the most popular of which has an apple, a cross, a white heart, a green flower and a gold crown and can be used to share the gospel.

BelieverBands have on their target audience firsthand as a Girls in Action leader at First, Eclectic. And she likes what she's sees.

"Well I think they're a really good thing because it's taking something the kids are going to do, something trendy, and it's applying their faith to it," Sanders said. "Not only that,

it's a good way for them to witness. You wouldn't believe the stories they've told me about the different people they've given them to and how it opens a way for them to live out their faith and spread the gospel in their own way."

Exactly, Cook said.

"What we've done is just take a

trend that's popular with kids right now and have tried to give it a relevant purpose."

A lot more relevant than he first thought.

"Actually [Pugh] just counted it up and we've sold 200,000 [Believer Bands packs]," he said. "I knew it was high."

## Laughter is a 'godsend,' 'tension-reliever' for believers

For every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven ... a time to weep and a time to laugh," according to the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes. What is the role of laughter and humor for Christians? When should believers take time to laugh?

Humor takes several forms — from stand-up comics to cartoons to clowns to storytelling. Many Christians who practice some form of humor believe God granted them the opportunity to use it to enhance believers' lives and to draw other people to Christ.

"God makes His people happy, and happy people love to laugh," cartoonist Joe McKeever said, pointing to Psalm 4:7. "Laughter is a tension-reliever, an anger neutralizer, the best icebreaker and one of the sweetest sounds on the planet."

"Humor is a godsend that we as human beings need to give one another," said Joel Goodman, founder and director of the Humor Project, a Saratoga Springs, N.Y., organization that offers humor resources, training and life coaching.

Laughter and humor cause physical changes that enhance people's lives, which can help defuse tension.

"Laughter relaxes the whole body, carries more oxygen to cells and tissues and increases cardiac output," explained Day Lane, a registered nurse in Kansas City, Mo., who is completing a doctorate in religious studies and sociology and has taught at Central Baptist

Theological Seminary. "So you can imagine with an atmosphere relaxed by a little humor and more blood flowing in everyone's brain, the possibility for creative solutions to tough problems opens up."

Motivational speaker Steve Kissell, of Norfolk, Va., uses humor as a natural part of all types of speaking engagements, including to government entities, education and industry. Humor can be a "gentle reminder" to make sure his listeners do not forget God as they work, he said.

### Sharing the gospel

A comedian for almost 15 years, Chonda Pierce currently serves as president of the Christian Comedy Association. She sees comedy as an effective means of reaching out to people.

"The greatest tool comedy has been for me is the way that it opens an audience up to receive — no matter if the motivation for a particular event is soul-winning, information or just clean entertainment," she said. "I have seen comedy allow an audience to bond and to sit up and take note of a truth that was on my heart to share."

Junior the Clown — a.k.a. Tony Jones, of Mansfield, Ga. — loves to make people laugh while presenting the gospel. He sees clowning as a way to reach people who might not attend traditional worship services.

"There has been more than one instance that an individual has heard something we

have presented that they had not gotten before," he said. "I believe that there are a lot of ways to preach the gospel and that different people hear different things, depending on how it is presented."

Many pastors and evangelists use humorous stories and antidotes in their sermons to capture the audience's attention or to illustrate a point. But for Alabama evangelist Junior Hill, there must be a balance.

"Warren Wiersbe says 'Blessed are the balanced,'" Hill said. "I think of humor like that. There are excesses on both sides. You have to have a healthy balance."

Whether used as a sermon illustration or a remark that just pops out in response to stress, humor and laughter can help individuals deal with problems.

As director of missions in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina hit, McKeever saw firsthand the balm humor could be. McKeever and up to 100 pastors met weekly as the city and its people dealt with the disaster and began to recover.

"Each person in the room was invited to address the others," he said. "When one had a funny story to tell, we welcomed it like the baked summer ground thirsts for water. Nothing was more welcome than a good laugh."

*"God makes His people happy, and happy people love to laugh."*

Joe McKeever  
Cartoonist

Lane sees humor surface frequently in hospitals. "Sometimes the humor comes through people, especially children, to lighten some of the difficulties we bear," she related.

Humorous stories become teachable moments, as well. McKeever uses them whenever possible.

"Years ago, when brides and grooms sometimes wrote their own vows, a couple said to me, 'We don't want to say, 'til death do we part,'" the former director of missions said.

"When I asked why, they said: 'So many people say it and don't mean it and end up getting divorced. We want to be honest.'

"I said, 'What do you want to say?' They said, 'We want to say, 'So long as love shall last.' I said, 'Well, that'll be about Tuesday.'"

Injecting humor allowed him to minister to that couple and to several couples since then.

"Some of the most creative leaders in church communities are brilliant humorists," Lane added. "Humor is effectively used to lessen tensions between parties in church disputes, troubled marriages and, heaven forbid, committee members."

Use laughter and listen for the humor in others, Lane suggested. Then, watch God use those stories to minister. (ABP)

## Gordo church tears down walls to meet needs

By **Jeremy Henderson**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Since churches aren't exactly in the habit of signing on to building projects that cut the size of their fellowship halls in half, it's an understandable question: Where are the members of New Harmony Baptist Church, Gordo, going to eat now?

Terry Billings, interim pastor of the Pickens Baptist Association church, has a quick answer. It's something about not living on bread alone.

"People say, 'Well where are you going to eat?'" said Billings, who recently oversaw a multicongregational effort to convert his church's fellowship hall building into a facility housing Sunday School classrooms and a nursery and incorporating air conditioning and other things it's never had. "Hey we're going to eat in those rooms. You know what I mean?"

The members of Billings' finally growing congregation know exactly what he means. They've been waiting on it. Three months ago — and for many months prior — the status quo at New Harmony Baptist was less than ideal for growth: no classrooms, no Wednesday night programs. That was before Billings and his distaste for the status quo lit a fire under the tiny church and rallied neighboring congregations — black, white, Missionary Baptists, Methodists — to its cause.

### 'An explosion of God'

Billings accepted the call to preach just a year ago, came in January and was voted interim pastor in February.

Gary Farley, director of missions for Pickens Association, isn't surprised by how far Billings and his church have come in such a short time.

"[Billings] helps folks and folks want to help him. He's just one of those neat people you run into every once in a while," Farley said. "This is a church that was very weak and in need of help and Terry connected with them. ... He's got no other agenda than the will of God."

And that's something other churches could connect with.

"We just sort of let the walls down, and we almost built this thing (the renovated fellowship hall) in one week," Billings said of the churches' joint effort to get New Harmony built up for all the new people coming in.

"There's just been an explosion of God here through prayer," he said. "He's just been bringing people into the fold. We've gone from maybe 30 (people) on Sundays to 65, 70, even 85 a couple of days."

To thank everyone for their assistance with the building project, the church decided to feed them, literally.

"God gave us a pretty day so we just went outside and anybody that wanted food, even if you were just driving by, we would feed you," Billings said. "We just wanted to give back for what God's already done for us." ❧

# 'Mama B' pounds the keys for 76 years at Marion's Ephesus Baptist Church

By **Anna Swindle**  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Chances are if you're from an area near Marion, then you've heard of Mama B and her incredible gift for music. In fact, you've probably heard her play the piano, organ or guitar at some point, if not on several occasions.

Despite the fact that she's never had a formal music lesson, Mama B — whose real name is Annie B. Huey — has been playing the piano for Ephesus Baptist Church for 76 years. She's never been paid for playing, but what she has received is joy from contributing to the Cahaba Baptist Association church for so many years.

Music has been a part of her life as far back as she can remember.

"I was just about 4 or 5 years old playing on a wooden doorstep and singing and it sounded so good and I went in to our pump organ and that didn't sound good so I went back to the steps," Mama B, who turned 89 in March, recalled with a laugh. "I would sit down to the pump organ and just pick out one note at a time until I found the tune and just went from there is all I can say."

Born and raised in Sprott, Mama B and her husband, Douglas Haig Huey, made sure music was a consistent presence in their household.

"We just all learned to appreciate music," said Ann Nichols, the Hueys' daughter. "During the holidays, we'd get together and, once we had children, gather everyone together and sing Christmas carols."

Often grandchildren and then great-grandchildren would slide onto the piano bench next to Mama B (who got her nickname from her oldest granddaughter back in the 1960s) and "help" her play the high notes, said her daughter-in-law Donna Huey.

In addition to sharing her talents with her church family on Sundays, Mama B played



Photo courtesy of The Marion Times-Standard

**MUSIC HAS BEEN 'MY LIFE'** — Annie B. Huey — known by most as Mama B — began playing the piano when she was just a little girl in Sprott. Nearly eight decades later, she's still playing at Ephesus Baptist Church, Marion.

piano for Gospel Four, a musical group that was formed about two decades ago and included her daughter and son Larry, who now serves as the music minister at Ephesus Baptist. The quartet performed at church homecomings, nursing homes and Saturday night singings across the state.

"We didn't make a lot of money, but we got something that money can't buy," Mama B said. "We did it because we all loved the Lord and were Christians. And we were told that one fellow decided he was going to be a preacher because of our singing."

One song that was part of the group's

repertoire was a Mama B original — a tune called "What a Beautiful Morning." She said her inspiration for the song came from a strikingly peaceful morning one cold day about 15 years ago. She was marveling at the beauty of the day when she received word that her brother had died, and the combination of events led her to write the song.

Even though she moves a little more slowly and needs the help of a walker these days, Mama B feels as at home on a piano bench as ever.

After all, music has been "my life," she said. ❧

## Western convention execs concerned about GCR report

Executive directors from nine Southern Baptist state conventions in the West and Canada have told the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force that its proposed restructuring of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) would severely curtail their ministries.

Leaders from California, Colorado, the Dakotas, Kansas/Nebraska, Montana, New Mexico, the Pacific Northwest, Utah/Idaho, Wyoming and Canada met in Denver March 15–16 to discuss and share concerns regarding the "progress report" released by the task force Feb. 22. Task force chairman Ronnie Floyd, of Springdale, Ark., and member Roger Spradlin, of Bakersfield, Calif., attended the meeting to field questions and solicit feedback for the committee.

### Could severely curtail ministries, execs say

Following the meeting, Bill Crews, executive director for the Northwest Baptist Convention, said the group decided to draft a document addressing their concerns, particularly how dissolving the "cooperative agreements" between NAMB and the state Baptist conventions would affect the work of smaller conventions such as those in the West and Canada.

Baptist state conventions currently operate under agreements with NAMB in which Cooperative Program funds are returned to each state convention for missions and ministry. Those understandings, known as cooperative agreements, would be phased out over a four-year period until NAMB would be free to unilaterally appoint missionaries, rather than through shared funding with the states.

Several Western state conventions have gone on record saying such an agreement would severely curtail their ministries since they are largely dependent on NAMB funding for their ministries. (BP)

## SBC-Va. leaders issue open letter to GCR Task Force

State Baptist conventions will be expected to handle more responsibilities with fewer resources if the Feb. 22 "progress report" is implemented — and some believe it will cause some state conventions to retain higher percentages of Cooperative Program (CP) missions money, leaders of one state convention said in an open letter to the Great Commission Resurgence (GCR) Task Force.

"The preliminary report of the GCR Task Force seemed to indicate that state conventions might be called upon to take on more responsibilities (e.g., CP promotion, adopting pioneer state conventions, etc.) with fewer resources (due to such factors as the possible elimination of cooperative agreements with the North American Mission Board)," said the letter from the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia convention. "More than once, it was voiced that state conventions could simply retain more CP monies to enable them to shoulder these added responsibilities ... The last thing we want to do is retain a higher percentage of CP resources."

Partnership, not turf wars, is what will move the Christian mission forward, the letter said. "The heart of state partners is to give more so that the peoples of the world might come to the feet of Jesus. Ongoing cooperation between partners such as NAMB and the state conventions is part of what will enable us to do this. It is imperative that we avoid fostering a turf mentality in which each entity endeavors to 'cover its bases.' Collaboration is the order of the day, not competition." (BP)

# Across Alabama's Associations

## BIGBEE

► **First Church, Livingston**, will host singer, speaker and musical ventriloquist Lee Pitts and Nicky, God's Little Talking Tree, April 25, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. For information call 205-652-2261. Jerry Hall is pastor.

## BIRMINGHAM

► **Springdale Church, Tarant, in Birmingham**, will hold revival April 16-18, nightly at 6 and Sunday at 11 a.m. Thomas Graves, pastor of New Georgia Church, Birmingham, will speak. Winston McNeil is pastor. ► **Valleydale Church, Birmingham**, will host an area Walk for Life May 1, 9 a.m., to support Sav-A-Life Shelby. Registration begins at 8 a.m. For information call 205-664-1667. Calvin Kelly is pastor.

## EAST LIBERTY

► **County Line Church, Dudleyville**, will celebrate its 175th anniversary with homecoming May 2, 10:45 a.m. Lunch will follow. The time capsule buried at the church's 150th anniversary will be opened. Former Pastor Jim Johnston's history of the church from 1835-1985 that was presented at the 150th anniversary has been republished and updated to 2010. The books will be

on sale. Wayne Barrett Sr. is pastor.

## HALE

► **Gallion Church** will celebrate homecoming April 25, 10:30 a.m., with former interim pastor Ken Scott as guest speaker. Reign will provide special music. Sunday School will be at 9:30 a.m. A covered-dish lunch will follow the service. A nursery will be provided. There will be no evening service.

## MARSHALL

► **Barbara Adams** will retire from **Marshall Association** April 29. She has served as secretary, clerk and treasurer for 27 years. There will be a reception in her honor May 2, 2-4 p.m., at Solitude Church, Albertville. Joey Cannady is pastor of Solitude. Randall Stoner is director of missions for Marshall Association.

## TUSCALOOSA

► **Taylorville Church, Tuca-loosa**, will hold its third annual car show Crusin April 24, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Bring your car, truck, motorcycle or tractor. There will be hot-dogs, chips, drinks, door prizes and oldies music. For information or to register call 205-758-0868. Curtis A. Kelley is pastor.

## MOBILE

► **Jimmy Draper** is the new interim pastor of **Dauphin Way Church, Mobile**. He is a former two-term president of the Southern Baptist Convention and former president of Life-Way Christian Resources.

Draper also served First Church, Eulless, Texas, as pastor from 1975 to 1991 and has authored nearly 30 books. He is married to Carol Ann. ► **Airport Boulevard Church, Mobile**, will celebrate homecoming April 25, 11 a.m., with Lee Harper as guest speaker. Jud Harbison will lead the music. John Nixon is pastor. ► **Dauphin Way Church, Mobile**, will host a Vacation Bible School training and networking event called VBS U May 1, 1-4 p.m. Area churches planning to use Group Publishing's Egypt: Joseph's Journey from Prison to Palace, will receive training from a Group VBS expert. For information or to register visit [www.grouppublishing.com](http://www.grouppublishing.com). Jimmy Draper is interim pastor.



DRAPER

# Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

## Baptist from Grady crowned Miss Rodeo USA

It had been her life's dream, and now it is her reality. Dakota Missildine, a member of Friendship Baptist Church, Grady, in Montgomery Baptist Association, was named Miss Rodeo USA 2010 during the Jan. 17 pageant in Oklahoma City.

As Miss Rodeo USA, she will travel around the country, representing the International Professional Rodeo Association and promoting the sport of rodeo.

"I cannot dream of anything more rewarding than giving back to a lifestyle that has influenced and shaped me into the person I am today," said Missildine, 22, who competed in the pageant as Miss Limestone Sheriff's Rodeo 2009.

She said although her role as Miss Rodeo USA will keep her very busy, she looks forward to what she will learn through the year.

"I feel very blessed to have been given this opportunity to share with many people my platform, Golden Heart, and encourage them to live by the golden rule," Missildine said. "My ultimate goal this year as Miss Rodeo USA is to make a difference in the lives of others."

Her pastor, Chuck Francisco, is confident she'll be able to do just that. "In my humble opinion, she'll make an excellent representative for rodeo in the United States and also be an excellent representative for Jesus, and I feel that very much so about her," Francisco said. "She's a wonderful kid ... and I expect good things from her always."



MISSILDINE

## Bethlehem DOM's wife combats county's job losses

Monroe County lost more than 2,000 jobs last year. That's when the Lord laid a burden on Maarah Marks' heart. So she set out to teach people to read in a county where 40 percent of the population is illiterate.

"The burden for this ministry came out of a loss of jobs and the need for training people so that we can have a better skill base and bring some economic growth back to this area," said Marks, director of Literacy Missions for Bethlehem Baptist Association and wife of Director of Missions John Marks.

Last August, she was trained in the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) Adult Reading and Writing program. The faith-based program is designed for seventh-graders through adults and uses NAMB Bible study material and the Bible as its texts.

In January, Marks completed the training of nine volunteers. Thus far, four students have enrolled in the program. And Marks, a retired software trainer, hopes to attract more students with a promise to train those who complete a year in the program on Microsoft software so that they will have the necessary computer skills to find a job.

"We pray and study the Bible with them," she said of the volunteers. "We're just trying to let God open the doors to get into people's hearts and minds that 'I can do this.'"

## MBA churches help plant community garden

In an effort to empower people to take care of themselves, Montgomery Baptist Association (MBA) churches are partnering with other area churches and organizations to fight hunger through planting a community garden.

"We want to help people be independent and take care of their families," said Lisa Rose, MBA's director of church and community ministries. "This is a great way for families to grow healthy food and take part in a community activity."

The garden, which is being planted on the corner of Emerson and South Holt streets in west Montgomery, will enable adults to teach younger generations about the importance of growing one's own food. The first leg of the effort was held April 10 when members of Heritage Baptist Church, Yarbrough Street Baptist Church and First Baptist Church as well as several other churches from throughout the community helped with digging, painting and building a structure for collecting rainwater and a vineyard trellis system. The second portion will take place April 24 with planting and the building of a block wall.

"We're hoping this will be a great catalyst for other communities around Montgomery to be able to deal with the hunger/poverty issue in a positive way," Rose said.

For more information, call Rose at 334-271-6794.

## Someone You Should Know



By Kristen Padilla  
The Alabama Baptist

### CHARLES A. BALLEW

First Baptist Church, Winfield  
Marion Baptist Association



BALLEW

**FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE:** Romans 8:28  
**FAVORITE HYMN:** "Amazing Grace"  
**HOBBIES:** Golfing, fishing, hunting and woodworking

**FAMILY STATUS:** Married to Joyce for 51 years; three children, Mike, Darryl and Janna (who is deceased); seven grandchildren; and one great-grandchild

Charles A. Ballew has served as pastor of First Baptist Church, Winfield, since January 1987. At age 70, Ballew is involved in the lives of the members of his congregation. According to one member, his door is always open to the needs of the people.

**Q: How did you become a Christian?**

A: Attending a revival service when I was 16 years old. I didn't grow up in an evangelical household, and I had never really heard the gospel until that revival meeting. The Lord touched my heart and I was saved.

**Q: When and how were you led into the ministry?**

A: I was called to preach when I was 19. Joyce and I had been married for three months, and we went to a youth rally with youth

from our church. The Lord just touched my heart that night, and I knew that the Lord wanted me to be a pastor.

**Q: What does the ministry demand?**

A: Love for people. When that's there, there is no burden. I enjoy preaching but I am a pastor first and a preacher second.

**Q: What do you get from the ministry?**

A: Satisfaction of knowing that I am doing what the Lord wants me to do. A realization within my own self that I am doing what my life's call is. It's not really something I do but something I am.

**Q: How do you see yourself involved in this in the future?**

A: Within the next few years, I'll be retiring from the active

pastorate, but Joyce and I want to do short-term missions trips.

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

A: I was aimless. I had no focus before I became a Christian, but from the point in time that I received Christ, my focus has been to serve Him. I hate to think what life would have been like had I not received Christ.

If you know of a person who should be featured as "Someone You Should Know," send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

# 'Not a radical departure'

## Mission board leaders respond to GCR Task Force recommendation on North American missions

By Bob Terry  
The Alabama Baptist

Jerry Rankin said it is not a radical departure from the way the International Mission Board (IMB) has worked with the North American Mission Board (NAMB) for more than a decade.

Richard Harris said, "We (NAMB) welcome any help we can get."

Both Southern Baptist Convention mission board presidents (Harris serving in an interim capacity) were commenting on the Great Commission Resurgence (GCR) Task Force's recommendation that "Southern Baptists entrust to the International Mission Board the ministry to reach the unreached and underserved people groups without regard to any geographic limitations."

In other words, the IMB would add the United States and Canada to its field of service. Both nations currently are the field of service for NAMB.

In making the recommendation, GCR Task Force chairman Ronnie Floyd said most of the 586 people groups in North America who do not speak English have IMB strategy coordinators working overseas with the same groups. He said as the IMB is allowed to reach these groups in North America, people will come to Christ, churches will be planted and gospel work will be advanced.

That has been the goal of the Inter-Mission Council established in 1995 by the Covenant



*IMB would keep "perspective of need." ... "We could not pull a person off of a field of millions in order to serve a field of thousands."*

Jerry Rankin  
IMB president

for a New Century. Leaders from the IMB and NAMB meet twice a year to collaborate about how the two boards can work together to reach the unreached for Christ, Rankin explained.

Harris acknowledged the IMB has representatives overseas with more expertise and experience in reaching some of the ethnic people groups in the U.S. and Canada than NAMB. That is why the day before the task force report was released, officials from both boards agreed to intensify their efforts to work together in reaching these ethnic minority groups.

For the IMB, it is a practical matter. Baptist representatives trained in a culture and language might be able to do their work among their target people group in the U.S. or Canada if visa problems were encountered in certain parts of the world.

The same would be true for those serving overseas who are forced to return home for one reason or another. These people might be

able to accept a temporary assignment among their people group in North America until they could return to their overseas assignment.

Rankin said the IMB would have to keep "the perspective of need" related to appointing people to serve. "We could not pull a person off a field of millions in order to serve a field of thousands," he said.

Still if the GCR recommendation is adopted, then Rankin said it is probable the IMB would appoint a strategy coordinator for many of the various minority ethnic groups in North America that IMB representatives attempt to reach overseas.

These strategy coordinators would not be "religious professionals hired to do what churches need to do," Rankin explained. He said their primary tasks would be to mentor and train local churches to reach these people groups.

Harris had a slightly different view of the recommendation. "This (the GCR recommendation) gives them permission to work with us in North America. We would still be on lead," he said. "That is the way I'm reading this recommendation."

While Floyd said NAMB and the IMB can "communicate" with state

conventions and associations to avoid duplication of work, Harris said more than communication will be necessary.

"Coordination of our work is essential, or we will all run over each other," Harris said. He explained that experience in North America has taught that it is "best to work with and through our partners — associations and state conventions."

"That is the missiology that works best in North America. IMB may be able to do direct missions overseas, but here it is met with resistance," Harris observed.

NAMB is about "cooperative missions," Harris said. That means working as facilitators and helpers to state conventions, associations and churches.

Neither mission board head ventured a prediction about the outcome of the task force recommendation, but both said additional clarification about what the recommendation means would be necessary.

*"Coordination of our work is essential, or we will all run over each other."*

Richard Harris  
NAMB interim president



## Churches wrestle with drop in donations

The number of churches that reported a drop in giving due to the sour economy rose nearly 10 percent last year, according to a new survey.

In 2009, 38 percent of churches reported a decline in giving, versus 29 percent in 2008.

Megachurches — those with 2,000 members are more — were hit hardest, with 47 percent reporting a decrease in giving last year, up from 23 percent in 2008.

The second State of the Plate study, by Colorado Springs-based Maximum Generosity and Christianity Today International, was based on data from 1,017 churches. The study included small and large churches, as well as mainline, evangelical, Pentecostal, nondenominational, Catholic and Orthodox parishes.

"Multiple research projects last

year documented the sharp decline in church giving," said Brian Kluth, founder of Maximum Generosity. "Our research this year shows things have only gotten worse for a growing number of churches."

West Coast states suffered most from the depressed economy: 55 percent reported decreased giving. Mountain states were close behind

with 48 percent reporting a drop in giving.

The study also found that December contributions, usually high during the holiday season, fell short of expectations, leaving many churches in the hole as they started the new year.

Even so, 45 percent of churches increased their budget for 2010,

and 24 percent kept their budget the same. The report said the 34 percent of churches that scaled back made cuts in travel and conferences, ministry programs and expansion or renovation projects.

The survey, sent via e-mail, was not a traditional random phone sample and does not have a statistical margin of error. (RNS)

## CP giving 1.21% behind last year's pace

Year-to-date contributions through the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Cooperative Program (CP) are 1.21 percent below the same time frame last year, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and Chief Executive Officer Morris H. Chapman.

As of March 31, the year-to-date total of \$99,404,879.36 for CP missions is \$1,220,767.53 behind the \$100,625,646.89 received at the end of March 2009.

Designated giving of \$119,693,011.67 for the same year-to-date period is 3.12 percent, or \$3,623,288.66, ahead of gifts of \$116,069,723.01 received at this point last year.

Monthly CP receipts totaled \$15,508,692.03 while designated gifts received last month amounted to \$28,617,789.79.

Month-to-month swings reflect

a number of factors, but largely result from the timing of receipts from state conventions.

The end-of-month total represents money received by close of business on the last business day of each month.

### Supporting missions

For the SBC CP Allocation Budget, the year-to-date total of \$99,404,879.36 is 97.27 percent of the \$102,192,796.32 budgeted to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America.

The SBC operates on an Oct. 1-Sept. 30 fiscal year.

During the last fiscal year (Oct. 1, 2008-Sept. 30, 2009), CP receipts for the year declined 2.23 percent and combined CP and designated giving for the year declined 3.65 percent.

The CP is Southern Baptists'

method of supporting missions and ministry efforts of state conventions and the SBC.

The total includes receipts from individuals, churches, state conventions and fellowships for distribution according to the 2009-10 CP Allocation Budget.

Designated contributions include the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions, Southern Baptist World Hunger Fund and other special gifts.

State and regional conventions retain a portion of church contributions to the SBC's CP to support work in their respective areas and forward a percentage to Southern Baptist national and international causes.

The percentage of distribution is at the discretion of each state or regional convention. (BP)

First Baptist Church  
LEEDS  
1910-2010

*Celebrating Our First 100 years,  
Preparing for the Next 100!*

First Baptist Church Leeds is celebrating 100 years of ministry in the Leeds Community! We will have special guests joining us each Sunday in April.

*Join us on Sunday Mornings  
at 10:45 a.m.*

April 11

Guest Speakers: Ray Foreman & John Harry  
Special Music: Everett Sollie

April 18

Guest Speaker: Buddy McGohon  
Special Music: Nash Wills

April 25

Guest Speaker: David Lawrence  
Special Music: Steve Price

7481 Parkway Drive Leeds, AL 35094  
205-699-6141

Want to see your news in  
*The Alabama Baptist?*

E-mail your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org, fax it to 205-870-8957 or call 1-800-803-5201.

Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.

# Shelters for Chilean families yield 'open door' for witness

Wiping tears from her eyes, the 21-year-old mother thanked Baptists for providing shelter for her family.

"I want to give thanks to everyone for this shelter," Rosa Inostroza de Santibañez said of the 10-by-20-foot structure with wood walls and a tin roof for her family in Tirua, Chile. "We are very thankful. We are going to sleep under a roof tonight and not on the ground."

She and her family had been living in a makeshift lean-

to pieced together by her husband, Rodrigo, after the family had to run for higher ground to escape an earthquake-induced tsunami Feb. 27.

"We didn't know what we would have done if you hadn't come," Rosa said of the Chilean Baptists and volunteers from Second Baptist Church, Russellville, Ark., who delivered the shelter March 24.

Early in the morning of Feb. 27, an earthquake crumbled their roof. Less than an hour later, a tsunami crashed into their Pacific coast town.

## Making do

Rosa and Rodrigo grabbed their 2-year-old daughter while Rosa's mother, Luz, pushed her 30-year-old wheelchair-bound daughter up a steep hill amid neighbors running and cars racing to escape the wave.

The older daughter is living with other relatives, while Luz stays with Rosa and her family on the hill. They had been sleeping in a tarp-covered enclosure just large enough to hold two twin-sized mattresses pushed together. They've salvaged some of their belongings by making trips on foot up and down the hill to get dishes and blankets.

Municipalities are helping families rebuild. But the need is far-reaching. Many homes at water's edge were swept away, strewing debris and belongings along the Tirua River that feeds into the ocean. Local authorities also are providing food at a school located at the bottom of the town's hill.

The bread store where 20-year-old Rodrigo worked as a baker was damaged; then looters stole all the equipment. Rodrigo volunteers at the school, helping distribute food and clothing until the bread store reopens or he can find another job.

It may take families several years to rebuild, to make repairs or to add on to temporary shelters to make them more permanent, said International Mission Board (IMB) repre-



BP photo

**NEW HOME** — Bobby Biggers (left), pastor of Second Baptist Church, Russellville, Ark., and Rodrigo Santibañez carry a tin roof panel to his family's new shelter in Chile.

sentative Trent Tomlinson, an Alabama native.

Rodrigo agreed, "This will be our home for a while."

Tomlinson realized this area's need while he and fellow IMB representatives Anders Snyder and David Hines drove through it to assess damage two days after the quake.

About 20 people representing churches from several denominations met in Tomlinson's home, forming a plan to fan out and meet needs generated by the disaster.

"This is an open door," Tomlinson said. "We're earning the right to be heard here."

The volunteers delivered pre-assembled shelters to four other families, including fisherman Manuel Arias, who came home from a family gathering to find his house, boat and dock destroyed.

"I was feeling desperate, not knowing what to do," Arias said. "I almost felt like I was out of the hands of God."

His shelter is being put together in a section of town called Nueva Esperanza (New Hope).

"I've got new hope now to keep moving forward," Arias said.

Mario Barros, president of Iglesia Misionera Internacional Agape

(Agape International Missionary Church, an association of national Baptist congregations), met with the mayor of Tirua the day before volunteers arrived with the shelters.

"We want to be organized and be a channel of hope to those who need it," said Barros, who works alongside Tomlinson as a church planter.

## Helping out

Honey producer José Prado from Iglesia Bautista de Cunco (Cunco Baptist Church) responded to a request Barros made on a Christian radio station for help in transporting the shelters prefabricated by volunteers in Temuco. He donated the use of his open-bed transfer truck, which he uses to transport beehives. He drove the shelters 80 miles to Tirua and helped with their construction.

"I always like to help and when I heard Mario on the radio ... I saw this as a possibility to do that," Prado said.

It took Chilean and Arkansas Baptist volunteers about three days to construct sections for five shelters. It will take several weeks to construct the hundreds of shelters that have been requested, Tomlinson said. (BP)

## Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

### Anne Graham Lotz prays over Mo. budget shortfall

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Just as Isaiah caught a fresh understanding of God in the face of adversity, God's people in Missouri must catch a fresh vision as lawmakers wrestle with cuts necessary to balance the state's budget, according to evangelist Billy Graham's daughter.

Anne Graham Lotz called the state's Christians to prayer, sacrifice and an attempt to understand Christ's provision and the needs left unmet as the state faces a massive financial crisis during a March 29 appearance at the Missouri Capitol in Jefferson City.

Lotz was the featured speaker at a prayer rally after state legislators, struggling to bridge a \$500 million budget gap, had called on spiritual leaders to pray over the state's financial woes.

Some legislators approached registered lobbyist and Missouri Family Network president Kerry Messer, a longtime Missouri Baptist, and Sue Stoltz, Midwest national area leader for the National Day of Prayer, to organize 40 days of prayer and fasting.

The noon prayer service in the building's rotunda kicked off "Show Me Your Glory, Lord," followed by prayer-walking around the complex. Constituents also prayed with their respective lawmakers. The 40-days-of-prayer emphasis is slated to end on May 7, the day the budget is due.

Billed as a non-partisan, non-political event, the prayer focus drew a standing-room only crowd, with onlookers watching from both rotunda galleries, as well as lining the steps.

### Churches observe month for Baptist women in pulpit

ATLANTA — A total of 104 churches reported inviting a woman to preach in February for an annual promotion both to celebrate and educate congregations about women in ministry.

Pam Durso, executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry, said churches in 18 states and the District of Columbia participated in the 2010 Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching.

Durso said the influential 18th-century Baptist woman preacher for whom the event is named — largely forgotten by many historians — "would be proud" of the response, which has grown from 55 churches since the first year of observance in 2007.

First Baptist Church of Williams in Jacksonville, Ala., which has welcomed women preachers for many years, participated formally in Martha Stearns Marshall Month for the second time.

"In our church we believe that God can call anyone to the ministry and to serve, and so we take this opportunity to support the calling of women to ministry," Pastor Mike Oliver said.

### Mich. Convention starts search for executive director

FENTON, Mich. — There's more to Michigan than a troubled auto industry, leaders of the Baptist State Convention of Michigan say in launching a search for their next executive director.

With Michael Collins' announcement that he will retire Dec. 31 upon completion of 16 years of service to the state, a 14-member search committee has issued a news release envisioning another "visionary leader with administrative skills" who will have "a minimum of a master's level degree, pastoral experience and proven [Southern Baptist Convention] denominational leadership."

"This is my 41st year in state convention work," Collins told Baptist Press.

Before becoming Michigan's executive director, Collins served in various roles with the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio for 22 years. He also was a staff member in the Florida Baptist Convention's Sunday School department and was pastor of churches in Tennessee and Texas.

### WMU Foundation receives largest gift to date

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — The Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) Foundation recently received its largest gift to date of \$1.7 million dollars, according to David George, president of the foundation.

The gift was received from the estate of Charles N. Burch after his death in September of last year. In his honor, the WMU Foundation established the Charles N. Burch International Mission Endowment, which will be used to fund international missions efforts.

The WMU Foundation is guided by a 17-member board of trustees and was created in 1995 to support the mission and ministry of national WMU. Through more than 120 funds and endowments, the WMU Foundation provides grants, awards and scholarships to further the work of WMU at every level — church, associational, state and national — as well as overseas.

## Join us for a fundraising event for Stoney Creek Christian Camp

— April 24, 2010 —



Darrel Barrie

Auditions for the top 24 for the upcoming May 15 talent show will begin at noon. There will be a silent auction fundraiser at 3 p.m. followed by great food and the show "Clarity Through Illusion" with Christian illusionist Darrel Barrie. For more information about Barrie visit [www.darrelbarrie.com](http://www.darrelbarrie.com).

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# 'God did some amazing things'

## Couple follow call to revitalize small church in Vermont; town responds

They say the night is always darkest just before dawn. It certainly was a dark night for Tad and Annice Perry and others of the small remnant at the United Church of West Pawlet, Vt., when they made the difficult decision to close the doors.

"I just hated to see the church close," Annice Perry said. "It was very hard to deal with emotionally. I just wanted to keep it going somehow, but we didn't see any hope, so we just started praying about it."

Nearly 1,000 miles away in Rutherfordton, N.C., dawn was breaking in the heart of a young pastor named Lyandon Warren. "It wasn't an ah-ha moment," he said. "God developed the desire in my heart to plant a church in West Pawlet over time."

Members from Piney Isle Baptist Church, where Warren was serving as an associate pastor, had been to West Pawlet on a couple of missions trips.

### 'Different' culture

"When we came back the second year, we could really see that God was at work in the town," Warren said. "There was more enthusiasm about Vacation Bible School. People were asking questions, they were very curious about all the activity going on at the church."

The old church stood vacant for two years, but new life began to emerge when the Perrys met Terry Dorsett, director of missions for Green Mountain Baptist Association, and the decision was made to turn the church over to the association for revitalization.

"I didn't want to see the church

turned into an antique store," Tad Perry said. "So I asked Terry what would happen if this didn't work. He said, 'I don't know; we've never had a church revitalization fail.' So that was a real encouragement to us and prompted us to pray even more."

A few months later, Dorsett spoke in a chapel service Warren attended. "He laid out the case for ministering in Vermont," Warren recalled. "At the end of his message he asked the question, 'What would keep you from serving in Vermont?' and I couldn't come up with a compelling answer. I knew then if God wanted me and my family there we should go."

God confirmed the call in Kim Warren's heart as well, and the couple pulled up their western North Carolina roots and moved away from family, friends and a strong church community to what surveys show is the least spiritual state in the United States. The Warrens came to Vermont as North American Mission Board missionaries, with Lyandon working bivocationally in dairy farming.

"The culture is a little bit different here," Warren said. "Things are smaller and slower, so we started out by just trying to get to know people. We began a program for kids called Bible Buddies and a weekly Bible study for adults. Word began to get out that God was doing something here, and we started to see lots of new faces."

One of those new faces was Steven Baker, a father of three, whose children attended Bible Buddies.

"I got off work about the time Bible Buddies started on Wednesdays, so I would stop by on my way home to check on the kids," Baker said. "Pastor Warren was there on Wednesday nights, too, so it gave us an opportunity to have some good conversations. Pastor Warren built a wonderful relationship with



BP photo

**NEW MISSION** — The white, clapboard church in West Pawlet, Vt., sat empty for two years after members of the former United Church made the difficult decision to close the doors. The church building now houses Mettowee Valley Church led by NAMB missionary Lyandon Warren.

us, and we were really anticipating the church opening."

Mettowee Valley Church held its first service on May 6, 2007. It was scheduled to start at 10:30 a.m., and at 10:25 only six people were present.

"I didn't think anyone was coming," Warren said. "Within five minutes, 35 people showed up and God did some amazing things in that service."

Several people came to know Christ, including Steven Baker and his wife. "The Lord moved on both our hearts and we gave it all to Him," Baker said. "We were a functional family before, but now we're functionally set up to serve the Lord."

Since that first service, the church has continued to grow.

"The Lord has done things beyond our wildest dreams," Annice Perry marveled. "I thought if we got 20 people we'd be doing good, and now it's 50 to 80 or more!"

"Some people may say, 'Why invest resources in a town of only



BP photo

**CHANGED LIVES** — Steven Baker (right) spent many a Wednesday night with Lyandon Warren talking about God while his kids were in Bible school at the church. Baker and his wife both gave their lives to Christ at the first service of Mettowee Valley Church.

600 people?" Warren said. "But Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost and nine out of 10 people in Vermont don't know Christ.

"At Mettowee Valley Church we're passionate about getting out into the community and sharing that Jesus saves. I think that's really what God's looking for." (BP)



**L**et your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise. ... Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight.  
Psalm 119:76-77

## Judson students take three-state spring choir tour

Nearly 40 Judson College musicians spent their spring break on a choir tour encompassing three states. Students will perform at four high schools and two churches in Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina.

Presentations were given by the entire choir and by "Faith," the official ambassador ensemble for Judson. The Judson handbells performed as well.

According to Judy Ransom, head of Judson's music department, one primary focus of the tour was to reach out to high school students, particularly those in music classes, and to promote Judson as a college choice for women of faith.

"In short, [the tour] was a lot more than any of us expected — there were some wonderful inspiring moments," Ransom said. "Our students were also able to make connections with high school students and hopefully they can stay in touch and encourage them to come to Judson." (JC)



Photo courtesy of Judson College



Photo courtesy of Pat Gallagher

**'VERY BLESSED'** — Members of Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association churches build a home for Earle Trent Assembly's first full-time director, Pat Gallagher, and his family.

## 'Something God wanted'

### CLBA churches build home for camp director

Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association (CLBA) hiring a full-time director for its Earle Trent Assembly was one thing. Finding a comfortable place for his family of four to live was another.

But Danny Clark and David Mathis, members of Woodmont Baptist Church, Florence, didn't think it was a problem at all.

They'd just build one.

So Clark, Mathis and about 30-40 other men from CLBA churches drew up plans for a house with five bedrooms, two and a half baths and a two-car garage.

In three and a half days, the house was framed.

Needs were met as fast as they became known with men and women from CLBA's 74 churches, as well as local businesses, donating time, skills and money.

From a heating unit, Sheetrock and shingles to ceramic tiles, siding and cabinetry, free and discounted materials, along with labor, rolled in one after another. And in about

four months, the house was completed.

"It just confirmed to me that this was something God wanted," Pat Gallagher said, referring to his move to Earle Trent after more than 20 years of working for the YMCA. "We didn't expect to have a house built ... for another three to five years, and when Woodmont (Baptist members) said, 'Hey we do a missions trip every year. Can we come here and build a house?' we knew that it was God. I wasn't surprised at all that everything came together ... and I wasn't surprised to see people come out in droves to help. That's how God works."

#### 'Outpouring'

But that was only the beginning of the blessings, Gallagher added, as people continue to give to further the retreat center's ministry.

"The vision is for Earle Trent to be a place for people of all ages to come to," Eddy Garner, CLBA director of missions, said of the 100-acre retreat located

about 20 miles north of Florence.

Gallagher was brought on board to help make that vision a reality, he added. And the men and women who worked to build his house made his coming possible.

"Our needs are taken care of, and it's a blessing the outpouring we're seeing," Gallagher said. "[God] had been telling me, 'This is what I want you to do — be in a ministry.' This is an incredible ministry and I'm very blessed. It's the hardest work I've ever done, physically, in my life, but it's so rewarding to know that for the first time, this is where God wants me, not where I want me, to be working."

Garner said it was a blessing for him to see so many of the CLBA churches "come together with a common purpose."

"It shows part of what an association is all about. It shows we can do things together as Baptists." (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Pat Gallagher

## About Alabama

### Health Care Reform Issues for Alabama

By Jim Williams  
Special to The Alabama Baptist

The national health care reform act has been signed into law. It requires individuals to have health coverage and calls for their employers to offer insurance; it also requires states to expand their Medicaid programs to cover all people under age 65 with incomes up to 133 percent of the national poverty level.

Those over 65 are already covered by the federal Medicare program.

The new law's requirements are being challenged in court and the outcome is uncertain. Nevertheless the health care reform debate highlights two important issues facing Alabama.

The first is that many Alabamians lack adequate access to health care. About 475,000 adult Alabamians have no health insurance, according to the Census Bureau. Increased coverage will mean greater demand for medical services. The state already has shortages of doctors and nurses. One of every five Alabamians — 888,000 people — live in a designated "health professional shortage area."

#### Challenges magnified

Both of the state's medical schools have telemedicine programs to overcome geographic barriers, and they offer rural medicine scholarships; the nursing profession also has proposals to increase the availability of nurse practitioners. Still providing adequate numbers of medical treatment professionals already is a big challenge

in Alabama, and health care reform will add to it.

The second issue for Alabama is how to pay for Medicaid, which even now consumes 30 percent of the state's general fund budget. The program is financing about \$5 billion of medical care this year, and federal funds pay for a large percentage of it.

#### Medicaid funding?

However, Alabama struggles each year to pay its matching share and operates a program at the minimum levels allowed by federal law.

More than 835,000 people are currently eligible for Medicaid, and about 240,000 uninsured adults fall within the income levels proposed for Medicaid expansion. Where will the state get additional dollars for Medicaid?

Alabama is one of several states that are disadvantaged by inaccuracies in the Medicaid matching formula, which ignores the number of poor residents, the capacity to tax and the cost of medical care in a state. The U.S. Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, has documented these flaws and their implications in several studies.

Alabama's congressional delegation has never made this an issue of concern, but now the stakes are much higher.

*EDITOR'S NOTE — Jim Williams is executive director for the nonprofit, nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama.*

## Author John Piper takes leave to tackle 'sins'

Minnesota megachurch pastor John Piper, a prolific author whose staunch Calvinist views have made him a popular leader in Christian Reformed circles, is taking an eight-month leave of absence to address unspecified "sins" that have "taken a toll" on his marriage.

"I am not making peace, but war, with my own sins," said Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, in a March 29 post on his desiring-god.org blog.

In his open letter, Piper explained: "I see several species of pride in my soul that, while they may not rise to the level of dis-

qualifying me for ministry, grieve me, and have taken a toll on my relationship."

Piper is best known for his many books extolling the total depravity of humankind and the universal need for God's grace in Jesus Christ.

#### 'Ongoing character flaws'

Several have tackled the theme of sin, such as "Spectacular Sins: And Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ."

With regard to his own sin, Piper was vague. He said he was apologizing "not for a specific deed, but for ongoing character flaws, and their effect on everybody."

Piper's leave will begin May 1 and will include letting go of what he called "the passion for public productivity" by swearing off sermon preparation, book-writing and even Twitter. He will make only four public appearances between May 1 and Dec. 31, including three overseas engagements, he said.

His leave will include pay, he said, even though he told elders he was undeserving of his salary.

"We will seek the Lord for how much of your financial support to give back to the church," Piper told parishioners through his blog, "to perhaps bear some of the load." (RNS)

# Who has the president's ear on faith?

## Obama's 'spiritual cabinet' helps shape policy, tends to his soul

Near the end of a bumpy first year in office, President Obama readied for a Christmas vacation in Hawaii, but before he left, he called on a group of five ministers for a spiritual recharge. Like previous prayer calls, this one was more personal than political.

"He certainly does not ask us how we would run the country and what issue to pursue or not pursue," said Bishop Charles Blake of the Memphis, Tenn.-based Church of God in Christ, who was on the phone last December.

For 10 minutes, the president and the pastors prayed for peace, an economic recovery, protection for U.S. soldiers and for the president to be guided by a wisdom and power beyond himself.

Glimpses into Obama's spiritual life have been rare since he became president. He split with his longtime Chicago pastor, Jeremiah Wright, after the fiery minister nearly derailed his campaign and has not joined a church in Washington.

Still Obama continues to champion the role of faith in public life, frequently summoning the spirits of Martin Luther King Jr., Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and even St. Thomas Aquinas to frame his policies in moral terms.

Like previous presidents, he regularly seeks the counsel of longtime Washington insiders, including Jim Wallis, founder of *Sojourners* (a publication articulating the biblical call to social justice); Reform Rabbi David Saperstein; and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, to shape decisions about the Iraq war, health care reform and the economy.

But Obama has also turned to a group of fresh — and relatively unfamiliar — faces to manage religious issues in his administration. They are recalibrating America's engagement with Muslims, revamping the White House faith-based office and tending to the president's soul.

A year into Obama's presidency, each of the following seven people has become an essential member of what might be called his "spiritual cabinet."

### Joshua DuBois

His official title is director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Unofficially Joshua DuBois is the administration's go-to guy for almost all things religious. He travels as Obama's roving ambassador to religious gatherings, connects the president with faith leaders for spiritual counsel, helps scout Washing-

ton churches for the first family and handles the frequent media queries about the president's faith.

Before stepping into politics, DuBois, 27, was a pastor at small Pentecostal church in Massachusetts, and his approach to the president bears traces of his former calling. DuBois sends daily devotionals to Obama's BlackBerry — often a Bible verse or an excerpt from the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer or a snippet from the works of theologians Helmut Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr, particular favorites of the president.

More publicly, DuBois is tasked with overhauling the White House faith-based office and managing its branches in 12 federal agencies. Under Obama, DuBois is steering the office away from the Bush administration's policy of direct funding to religious charities and attempting to rescue it from charges that it improperly blends church and state.

### Denis McDonough

When Denis McDonough was in eighth grade, he heard his older brother, a Catholic priest, deliver a homily entirely in Spanish. McDonough soon learned Spanish himself and became an expert on bridging cultural gaps.

Now as Obama's deputy national security adviser and chief of staff of the National Security Council, McDonough is working to strengthen international bonds strained by the Bush administration's go-it-alone approach to foreign policy.

Traveling by the president's side on overseas missions, the 40-year-old Minnesotan is a crucial player in Obama's quest to engage Muslims, find common cause with the Vatican and restore the country's moral authority.

McDonough helped craft Obama's landmark address to Muslims last June in Cairo, Egypt, and the robust defense of American foreign policy — including the waging of "just wars" — during the president's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in Norway.

A key component of Obama's foreign policy is the Catholic concept of the common good, McDonough said. "It's a general posture of seeking engagement to find mutual interests but also realizes that there is real evil in the world that we must confront," he said in an interview at his West Wing office. "The president also recognizes that we are strongest when we work together with our allies."

### Rashad Hussain

As Obama pursues a "new beginning" between the U.S. and Muslims around the world, he frequently seeks the counsel of Rashad Hussain, a 31-year-old White House lawyer. Hussain briefed Obama before his first interview as president — with Al Arabiya, a television station

based in the United Arab Emirates. He has also contributed to Obama's two major speeches to Muslims — in Ankara, Turkey, and Cairo — offering insights about the history of Islam in America and suggesting suitable verses from the Quran.

Hussain also has traveled to the Middle East with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and, closer to home, helped organize a Ramadan dinner at the White House that replaced the usual crowd of ambassadors with young American Muslims.

In naming Hussain as his special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Obama noted that the young Muslim is a hafiz (someone who has memorized the Quran). But Hussain and others said Muslims abroad are more likely to take note of his White House credentials, and access to the Oval Office, as he seeks partnerships in education, health, science and technology.

"For many years, Muslim communities have been viewed almost exclusively through the lens of violent extremism," Hussain said in an interview. "We do not feel that we should engage one-quarter of the world's population based on the erroneous beliefs of a fringe few."

### Melissa Rogers

When the Obama administration decided that Bush's faith-based office was on shaky legal ground, it sent Melissa Rogers, a Baptist, to firm up the foundation.

For the last year, the 43-year-old church-state expert has chaired Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

DuBois called Rogers, the director of the Center for Religion and Public Affairs at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity in Winston-Salem, N.C., "one of the country's foremost experts on faith and public policy," who is "respected across the board" by liberals and conservatives alike.

Her legal and political acumen helped Rogers guide the council's 25 members, who run the theological gamut from Baptist to Hindu, to reach a consensus on more than 60 recommendations for revamping the White House faith-based office, which were presented March 9.

Twelve of the proposals aim to put the faith-based office on more solid constitutional footing by clarifying its "fuzzy" rules, as Rogers says, on charities that accept direct government aid, insulating charity clients from proselytism and making government partnerships with local groups more transparent.

Rogers said she expects the faith based-office to enact many of the reforms — and be better off for it.

"The more we can come to agreement on the church-state issues, the more durable the policies are," Rogers said. "And the more time and

energy we have to focus on people who are in need."

### Lt. Carey Cash

The pastor who's preached to Obama most often since he became president is a 6-foot-4-inch Southern Baptist Navy chaplain whose great uncle was country music legend Johnny Cash. Like President George W. Bush, Obama has often preferred to worship outside the fish-bowl of Washington in the seclusion of Camp David's Evergreen Chapel, where Lt. Carey Cash "delivers as powerful a sermon as I've heard in a while," Obama said. White House officials say Obama has worshiped at the Maryland retreat a half-dozen times, and his daughters, Sasha and Malia, have attended Sunday School there.

Before his stint at Camp David, Cash, 39, was a chaplain for the Marines' 1st Battalion in 2003 in the Iraq war, during which he baptized 59 soldiers, including one in Saddam Hussein's former presidential palace in Baghdad.

The Memphis native was raised in a deeply religious household — his mother is a Christian author — and has harsh words for Muslims, writing in his 2005 book that Islam "from its very birth has used the edge of the sword as the means to convert or conquer those with different religious convictions."

Cash's three-year rotation at Camp David began in 2009, so Obama has nearly two more years to hear him preach, but they may not form the usual pastor-parishioner bond. Former Camp David chaplains say there is often little interaction between president and pastor outside of the services.

### Joel Hunter and Sharon Watkins

When Obama wants to pray privately, he has repeatedly called Joel Hunter, a Florida megachurch pastor, and Sharon Watkins, president and general minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Politically Hunter, a registered Republican, and Watkins, who heads a liberal-leaning denomination, may not always agree, but like Obama, both are committed to transcending traditional barriers.

Hunter, 61, serves as senior pastor of the 12,000-member Northland Church outside Orlando, and leads a new crop of centrist pastors calling for a cease-fire in the culture wars. He's also pushing to broaden the evangelical agenda to include issues like poverty, immigration and the environment.

Watkins, 55, whom Obama tapped as the first woman to preach at the post-inauguration National Prayer Service last year, leads a denomination in which Christian unity and overcoming divisiveness are central to its DNA. (RNS)



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# HEART OF MISSIONS...

John Thweatt, pastor of **First Baptist Church, Pell City**, in St. Clair Baptist Association, led a team to Kenya on a medical missions trip Jan. 15-25.

The team consisted of 12 members of First, Pell City; a member of **Willowbrook Baptist Church, Huntsville**, in Madison Baptist Association; a member of **Twelfth Street Baptist Church, Gadsden**, in Etowah Baptist Association; and five others from Georgia.

Working mainly among the Sabaoth people, the team conducted 10 medical clinics in conjunction with local Baptist churches and averaged seeing 200-300 people a day at each of the clinics.

"We did medical missions in order to be able to do evangelism. Our goal was to strengthen and assist the local churches," Thweatt said. "God was good throughout the entire trip."

**NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville**, member David Chism, who is a church planter and United States team leader to Peru for e3 Partners Ministry, led 30 people to Iquitos, Peru, March 13-20 to plant churches.

The group was split into a medical team and a sports-evangelism team with one purpose — to evangelize, disciple new believers and plant churches.

The medical clinics saw anywhere from 150 to 170 patients each day and performed approximately 60 eye exams daily. Approximately 175 professions of faith were made at the medical clinics. The sports team held soccer, volleyball, basketball and ten-

nis clinics and had approximately 150 professions of faith.

In addition to the medical and sports clinics, the team did door-to-door evangelism and held discipleship meetings at night. By the end of the week, the team had planted four churches.

Noting that e3 always works through existing churches, Chism said, "[The trip] was very successful, and we accomplished what we hoped and ... planned to do which was to establish these four churches in an area where there are no churches. It's exciting to see these things happen."

The team consisted of members from **Brookwood Baptist Church, Birmingham**; **The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham**; **NorthPark Baptist**; **Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover**; and **Blooming Grove Baptist Church, Jasper**.

Eight people traveled to San Marcos, Guatemala, March 12-19 on a missions trip with Huntsville-based T.I.M.E. Ministries.

The team consisted of members from **Danville Baptist Church** in Morgan Baptist Association; **Whitesburg Baptist Church** and **Southside Baptist Church**, both in Huntsville, in Madison Bap-

tist Association; and **Underwood Baptist Church, Florence**, in Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association.

Half of the trip was spent training pastors and lay leaders on strategies of evangelism and the other half of the trip was spent doing evangelism in public areas of the city such as the marketplace, parks, streets, jail and schools. The team had approximately 475 people made salvation decisions.

Seven people from **First Baptist Church, Montgomery**, went to Cuba March 4-12 on a missions trip led by member Troy Amster.

The team did construction work on a local Baptist church, led a women's Bible study in the afternoons and held Vacation Bible School and a men's Bible study in the evenings.

This is the 10th year for members of the Montgomery Baptist Association church to do missions work in Cuba and to partner with the Western Baptist Convention of Cuba.

"One of the biggest things we can do is encourage the body of believers while there," Amster said. "They don't have a large source of encouragement ... just to be able to encourage the believers in that town that they are not forgotten."

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## Want to know God?

By Pastor Tony Barber  
Bluff Park Baptist Church

I believe in God." The middle-aged man who said those words to me had not been in church since he was a child. My first inclination was to try to convince him that he did not believe in God or berate him for not going to church if he did believe in God. In fact, in my younger years, I had done just that to the many people who expressed that thought even as they were not involved in His church. But this time, I simply asked, "Wouldn't you like to know that God?"

There is a huge and important difference in knowing there is a God and knowing God. It is the latter that makes a difference in your life and death. Knowing God implies a relationship with Him. It speaks to an intimate communion with your Creator. Through knowing God, you will find comfort, peace and purpose in this physical life and an eternal spiritual life in His presence in heaven.

Perhaps you believe there is a God. You may phrase it differently by stating that you believe in a "higher power" or a "creator," but you believe there is One who caused the very existence of all that is. My question to you is "Wouldn't you like to know that higher power or creator?" You can. You can know God.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there is only one way to know God. In John 14:6-7, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well."

The first step, though, is this: You have to know yourself. You must acknowledge that you are a sinner. Not necessarily a bad person but a sinner — one who has not met the high ideals and standards of God. Then you must repent of sin in your life and ask Jesus to forgive you and save you from the consequences of sin. He promises that He will do that.

Now you must grow. Find a good Southern Baptist church near you, and join that family of believers. Study His Word, the Bible, so that you not only know God but also know more about Him. You will be thankful that you made the leap from believing in God to knowing Him. ☞

# Bringing 'new life' to worship

## Choctaw Association's newest church growing through nontraditional outreach

By Dee Ann Campbell  
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

It's about building the kingdom of God," said Furber Robinson, a founding member of New Life Fellowship Church, Gilbertown.

Just five months ago, during the association's annual October meeting, New Life Fellowship became the newest member of Choctaw Baptist Association. In existence since September 2007, the congregation is growing, baptizing and following God's lead for the future.

And they are, as church members say, looking, thinking and worshipping outside the box.

### 'Incredible journey'

Beginning with only a handful of people, the congregation has grown to more than 40 in attendance for Sunday morning worship services, and the church has already seen the baptisms of 11 new Christians in just over two years.

"It's been an incredible journey of faith," said Darnell Pritchard, who, along with her husband Johnny, is among the founding members of the church.

Recently the church called its first pastor, Chris Vowell and his

wife, Stacey, and is planning its first revival later this month.

"It's been exciting to be a part of this," Vowell said. "We are starting from scratch, and that's causing people to pour their hearts and lives into it. God has really breathed new life into this congregation."

In order to reach the unchurched and to follow what they believe is a New Testament style of worship, New Life members decided from the beginning that their worship services and outreach efforts would be anything but traditional. In fact, they work hard to make sure of it.

"We're not a cookie-cutter church," Andrea Nordan, a founding member.

According to Nordan, the styles used in worship services at New Life change from week to week.

"Everyone is free to worship in whatever way they feel comfortable," Nordan explained. "Some people raise their hands and others don't. People come wearing jeans or wearing suits. It doesn't matter. We are interested in people, not their wardrobe."

Vowell added that, despite the nontraditional approach to worship, the church believes that God's Word is the guideline that governs it all.

"We want to be effective in reaching the unchurched," he said. "We want to reach those that the church is not reaching. We are staying with the message but using ways that are outside the box to spread that message."

New Life's non-traditional approach to worship includes their Sunday and Wednesday evening services. Instead of the traditional evening worship services and prayer meetings, the church incorporates what they call Life Groups — small groups of members who meet in homes for prayer, fellowship and Bible study.

"We feel like these Life Groups are the heart of what we are doing, and they are already making a difference in people's lives, especially among our young couples," Nordan said.

The church has been meeting on Sundays in Gilbertown in a rented building, a former Methodist church that had been closed for several years.

But early in the church's formative months, it was able to purchase property for a permanent location just west of town.

The church held a note burning in February in celebration of

the final payment on the property. The payoff was made possible in part by a contribution from the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

At press time, the congregation was planning to hold worship services in a mobile chapel located on the new property April 11, and funds are being raised to build a permanent facility within the next two years.

Members say the building project has been a validation of God's hand at work in their congregation.

"God has really blessed us," Johnny Pritchard said. "We've got the land and the plans, and we believe we can reach more people once we have a building."

### 'Vibrant relationship'

In the meantime, New Life is continuing to reach out to a lost community that they believe is searching for answers.

Vowell said they are "letting the Lord build this church."

"We want it to be the kind of church you see in the New Testament," he said. "We are letting some of our man-made traditions fall by the wayside so we can get back to a vibrant relationship with Christ and with each other." ☞

*"We are staying with the message but using ways that are outside the box to spread that message."*  
Pastor Chris Vowell  
New Life Fellowship Church

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# SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 18

## Explore the Bible By Jeffrey S. Quiett Associate professor of marriage and family counseling, University of Mobile

## Bible Studies for Life By Mark DeVine Associate professor of divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

### WHAT ARE YOUR GROUND RULES? Exodus 20:1-17

#### God Alone (1-7)

The first commandment was responsible for shaping the Israelites' monotheism. Belief in one God set their religion apart from all other ancient Near Eastern religions. Such overwhelming paganism may explain why they were tempted to worship other gods. One could think of it as the ancient equivalent of "peer pressure." The first commandment is basic to all the others, for unless God is the only God, none of the other commandments is meaningful or binding. Anything more important than God becomes an idol. Such gods today may be career, family, wealth, pleasure or anything else that drains ultimate concern away from God. Any form of self-exaltation above God is also idolatry. The prohibition against making images is not a wholesale condemnation of all art forms but specifically forbids the use of images in the worship of God. This command was given against the background of a world that believed gods could be controlled by such images. The true God, however, cannot be controlled by rites or words. He is spirit (John 4:24) and no likeness or location can represent Him accurately.

The command to respect the name of God usually is associated with profanity but its implications reach further. "In vain" or "misuse" includes any frivolous, insincere or unjustified use of God's name. The command may be violated by the use of profanity but also by using God's name when there is no commitment to Him or to manipulate people.

#### Sacred Rest (8-11)

The word "Sabbath" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to cease" or "to rest." The Sabbath commemorated God's rest from His creative activity and later celebrated the Exodus from Egypt (Deut. 5:15). In the New Testament, overly strict interpretations of this command were enforced so that the day became oppressive. Jesus tried to restore the original intent of the Sabbath. It was never intended to be a burdensome day upon man but to be a day to renew one's physical body

through rest and one's spiritual being through worship. Early Christians later changed the "Sabbath" to Sunday to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus.

#### Further Commands (12-17)

"Honor" in the fifth commandment carries the idea of "respect." The command is not conditional on whether the parents deserve respect. Since parents are God's representatives, the child learns to honor God by honoring his or her parents.

The sixth commandment underscores the sanctity of human life. It served not as a blanket prohibition against killing but only against unauthorized killing, i.e., the taking of the law into one's own hands. Jesus broadens this command to include anger with one's brother (Matt. 5:21-26).

The seventh commandment implies respect for marriage and requires purity of the marriage state. Adultery violates the marriage trust. Jesus later increased the strictness of the command by adding "lustful looks" to the meaning of adultery. One can commit adultery with thoughts just as much as actions.

The command to not steal implies respect for others' property. The Bible defends the right to hold property. Any unauthorized taking of property, whether it is someone else's goods, time or ideas, violates this command. The Bible also equates withholding tithes and offerings with robbing God (Mal. 3:8-10).

The command not to bear false witness originated in the setting of the court, where witnesses were under oath to tell the truth. But in its broader application, it is a prohibition against untruthfulness of any kind. The tongue is a powerful weapon (James 3:5-6); it can destroy as surely as killing does, whether it is the malicious lie, gossip, propaganda or a half-truth. Insincere flattery or keeping silent when another's reputation is being maligned unjustly violates the spirit of this command.

The last commandment involves one's thoughts rather than overt actions. The Hebrew word for "covet" is itself a neutral word that means "desire" or "to take pleasure in." It is only when desire is directed into wrong channels that it becomes sin.

### THE RIGHT MOTIVATION 2 Corinthians 5:9-21

How does God have His way with us? How does it ever happen that we serve, as we should, at His beck and call? I think I know how. Let me tell you a story that may make it plain.

#### The Tyranny of Green Eyes

I saw them for the first time in a middle school hallway in 1973. It was a set of green eyes, shining like emeralds set in the precious head of a certain girl whose name I shall not reveal. I fell head over heels in love for the first time, and my world was turned upside down and inside out. Do you know what I am talking about? Have you ever been there?

Before I laid eyes on those eyes, no one could count on Mark DeVine for much of anything. But afterward I found myself taking on the discipline, focus and commitment of a Marine under orders to take a piece of enemy ground. I discovered the cosmetic sections of department stores and products like Clearasil and Vitalis. I suddenly required the frequent use of mirrors. I mapped out my days according to my research related to the movements of that girl with those eyes. I positioned myself between mirrors and doorways I expected her body to break the plane of.

Have you been there? This is exactly how God gets His way with us. He causes us to fall in love with Him, and we become His little Marines. We become tools in His hands much as I became putty in the hands of that girl with those eyes. "We make it our aim ... to be well-pleasing to Him." "Christ's love compels us." We long to see Him pleased with us because His love for us has evoked our love for Him. We study to please Him.

#### The Tyranny of Love

This is how things are for those who have partaken of His mercy and have understood and believed His promises. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new."

When we fall in love, the whole world looks different. The whole world is different. Do you know of what I speak? If not, then why not? If not, then God will never have His way with you, at least not in the way He deserves to have His way with you. "He died for all, so they who live might no longer live for themselves."

But, of course, we who are in love lose the desire to live for ourselves, do we not? The prospect of going back to living for ourselves the way we once did appalls and repels us, does it not? What a colossal waste of time when we can spend our days pursuing and seeking to please the one we love. Paradoxically our new way of living for ourselves is to live for Him.

When we fall in love, it seems to us that our previous existence was hardly worth calling life at all, isn't that so? Only now do we feel alive. Only now do we understand something of what life is all about, right? That is just what Paul is talking about, and no one who has yet to fall in love with God in Jesus Christ can possibly make sense out of what he says. But whoever has fallen in love with Him understands perfectly.

#### That Old Love Letter

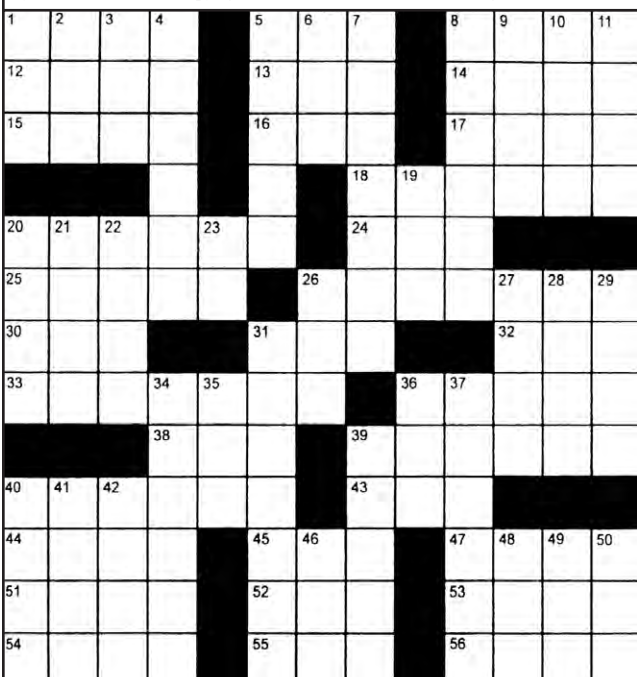
The girl with the green eyes did become my girlfriend for a little while. It was that puppy love that is all too real for the puppy but actually lacks deep roots and fades quickly. She wrote me a love letter that I would revisit from time to time and experience a twinge of the old feelings.

Have you ever been in love with your Lord? Has it faded? Get out that old love letter He wrote to you and me, the Bible. Unlike the one received from that girl with the green eyes, this one is still true and shall remain true. Read of His love for you, of what His love prompted Him to do for you, of what He has promised to do for you.

Woody Allen was right about one thing: "The heart is a resilient little muscle." You might just find yourself falling in love all over again. And if you do, then the One you love will have His way with you once more.

## Christian Crossword

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### Across

- In \_\_\_ was there a voice heard. (Matt. 2:18)
- And so forth.
- Cut them with \_\_\_, and with harrows. (1 Chron. 20:3)
- They called his name \_\_\_; he is the father of Jesse. (Ruth 4:17)
- Standing Room Only. (abbr.)
- Equal.
- Freezing point centigrade.
- Greek "T."
- House. (Spanish)
- Value of 15 cross.
- To break camp.
- To be. (Spanish)
- Then I will be an \_\_\_ unto thine enemies. (Ex. 23:22)
- Matthew, sitting at the \_\_\_ of custom. (Matt. 9:9)
- One. (Scottish)
- My \_\_\_ Sal.
- Chinese Communist Party Chairman.
- Found in \_\_\_ as a man, he humbled himself. (Phil. 2:8)
- Summer TV fare.
- By faith \_\_\_ch was

- translated. (Heb. 11:5)
  - Then I will set my face against that man and his \_\_\_. (Lev. 20:5)
  - I will \_\_\_ of thee. (Job 38:3)
  - Grain.
  - Tel \_\_\_.
  - Miss Farrow.
  - We stumble at \_\_\_ day. (Isa. 59:10)
  - Anger.
  - Put on strength, O \_\_\_ of the Lord. (Isa. 51:9)
  - \_\_\_ Timnah. (Gen. 36:40)
  - Ardor.
  - No. (Scottish)
  - I am ... the bright and morning \_\_\_. (Rev. 22:16)
- ### Down
- Woman's nickname.
  - Lincoln's nickname.
  - Mal de \_\_\_.
  - And \_\_\_ was over the tribute. (2 Sam. 20:24)
  - To bar legally.
  - \_\_\_ la la.
  - Pharisees and lawyers rejected the \_\_\_ of God. (Luke 7:30)
  - And thou shalt be \_\_\_,

- because there is hope. (Job 11:18)
- His king shall be higher than \_\_\_. (Num. 24:7)
- \_\_\_ me thoroughly from mine iniquity. (Ps. 51:2)
- Thin strip of wood.
- Atomic Energy Commission.
- And the \_\_\_ hear. (Matt. 11:5)
- Sicilian resort.
- After "bees" and before "dees."
- Belonging to me.
- His father saw him, ... and \_\_\_ and fell on his neck. (Luke 15:20)
- The son of Omri, the son of \_\_\_. (1 Chron. 9:4)
- \_\_\_, a servant of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:1)
- Short for Anthony.
- For a \_\_\_ some would die. (Rom. 5:7)
- Joy shall be in \_\_\_ over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:7)
- There was no room for them in the \_\_\_. (Luke 2:7)
- Sunbeam.

- Improves.
- Picture holder.
- For a good man some would even \_\_\_ to die. (Rom. 5:7)
- Not rendering \_\_\_ for evil. (1 Pet. 3:9)
- Polish distance measure.
- \_\_\_ and Ithrite. (2 Sam. 23:38)
- Though our \_\_\_ ward man perish. (2 Cor. 4:16)
- Central European river.
- Abner, the son of \_\_\_. (1 Sam. 14:50)



# RESOURCES:

Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature



## Sound Bites By Jeremy Henderson

### THE RUBYZ

*Sound Off*  
BEMA Media

They've lost a member. They've kept the sound. They continue to surprise.

Maybe I'm just in a good mood — this is, after all, music intended for fifth-grade girls prepping for the impending pressures of dating. But I can't help but thinking that with the Go-Gos-meets-Hilary Duff follow-up to their 2008 debut, Cammie and Alexis have earned the right to — if they want — stop thinking of themselves as “recommended if you like” rock for Christian tweens and to start thinking of themselves as legitimate pop artists worthy of legitimate attention. The songs are that catchy, that danceable, that flat-out good.

Buy this if you have kids. Buy this if you don't have kids.

### VARIOUS ARTISTS

*iShine LIVE — DVD*  
iShine Records

What's the next best thing to catching Disney Channel on-the-verger Luke Benward jam to “Everyday Hero” with his dad live on a stop of the iShine Tour?

Watching him do it on the “iShine

LIVE — DVD.” Geared for tweens — a recently coined term for the preadolescent demographic that iShine producers deem under siege by the media — this Christ-centered tour package is chock full of the best and brightest pop-rockers that market has to offer: Luke Benward, The Rubyz, Mission Six, Paige Armstrong, Jamie Grace and Jasmine.

The DVD captures their non-stop energy and heartfelt message as best it can.

### SELAH

*You Deliver Me*  
Curb Records

It takes two sheets of paper to list the awards, the acclaim, the accomplishments achieved by Allan Hall, Amy Perry and Todd Smith over the course of Selah's 10-year history.

Their harmonies, their melodies, the arrangements on their renditions of classic hymns (their African-inspired version of “I Have Decided” is fantastic) have been that good, that powerful, that inspirational. So to say that their eighth

album “You Deliver Me,” arguably their most personal project to date, is nothing new is, in this case, the ultimate compliment.

### ABOVE THE GOLDEN STATE

*The Golden Rule*  
Sparrow Records

Weezer's influence on the six-song EP follow up to Above The Golden State's critically acclaimed debut is undeniable and acknowledged, which is great because Weezer is great and because most

Christian bands in the same genre that might want to claim them can't.

Unfortunately Above The Golden State isn't most Christian bands.

Laid-back pop-rock? Check. Undeniable knack for the hook? Check.

Christian lyrics? Check. Looking like Buddy Holly? Well even if they don't, plenty of their fans — myself included — probably do. Good job.

### STELLAR KART

*Everything is Different Now*  
INO Records

Not everything is different now with Stellar Kart; their third studio album is as relentlessly catchy and unapologetically Christian as pre-

vious efforts, but the pop-punk purity that brought them to the contemporary Christian music (CCM) forefront has been replaced with a danceable worship-rock brilliance that will keep them there.

Produced under the hook-savvy hand of CCM veteran Ian Eskelin, the album is simply better than anything they've ever done; the track “We Shine,” is catchy enough — and powerful enough — to stay in top rotation at youth conferences for the next 10 years.

### STARFIELD

*The Saving One*  
Sparrow Records

Starfield does what a hundred swoop-banged boy bands in the of-

ficially canonized genre of worship rock are doing right now. They just happen to do it better — much better — than most.

That's partly because of the behind-the-scenes influence of CCM hit-maker Ian Eskelin but mostly because of their capacity both for palms-in-the-air praise symphonies (like the incredible opening title track “The Saving One” and “Rediscover You”) and fist-in-the-air ready-for-radio rock anthems (like “Declaration of Dependence”).

To say that their latest studio project just builds on the momentum of 2008's wave-making “I Will Go” almost does these 10 songs an injustice. Starfield has taken it to another level.



## Book Reviews By Rick Lance

An avid reader, Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, has suggested three must-read books you should consider as you think ahead to some summer readings.

### John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace

Jonathan Aitken. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2007. 400 pp. (Hardcover).

This inspiring and fresh biographical account is about one best known for writing the world-renowned hymn “Amazing Grace.” Skilled author Jonathan Aitken has enriched this famous life story with new research found in recently published papers. As Dean Timothy George of Beeson Divinity School has so well said: “John Newton not only wrote one of the greatest hymns of all time, he lived one of the greatest stories of salva-

tion.” Newton's life story comes alive in Aitken's book, and it will warm your heart as you read this well-written biographical story.

### The Painful Side of Leadership: Moving Forward Even When It Hurts

Jeff Iorg. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009. 288 pp. (Paperback).

Written by Jeff Iorg, president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, this book is for Christians who are serious about growing in their leadership skills. While some authors seem to avoid this less than glamorous aspect of Christian living, Iorg confronts the painful side of leadership without hesitation. He writes with unusual candor and transparency, yet the book is a source of tremendous encouragement to Christians seeking to make

a difference in their own sphere of influence. This book is not theory but more of a testimony from a seasoned leader.

### Jonathan Edwards: American Genius

Christian George. Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008. 158 pp. (Paperback).

Christian George has proven that accomplished writing is not confined to his father, Timothy George, or his mother, Denise George. This recent book is a brief, but substantive biography of Jonathan Edwards. Christian George tackles this monumental task of presenting the life of Edwards as writer, preacher and missionary with a sense of focus and giftedness usually associated with writers marked by decades of experience. This book, like Christian's biography of Charles Spurgeon, is published in the Trail Blazers Series.

### Christian Marketplace

## Top Ten Best Sellers

### Christian Living

1. **Crazy Love**, Francis Chan and Danae Yankoski (David C. Cook)
2. **So Long, Insecurity**, Beth Moore (Tyndale)
3. **The Five Love Languages**, Gary Chapman (Moody)
4. **The Love Dare Day by Day**, Stephen and Alex Kendrick (B&H Publishing)
5. **Forgotten God**, Francis Chan (David C. Cook)
6. **Fearless**, Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson)
7. **Love and Repet**, Emerson Eggerichs (Thomas Nelson)
8. **Imagine Your Life Without Fear**, Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson)
9. **Love and War**, John and Stasi Eldredge (Random House)
10. **Loving the Love of Your Life**, Mark Gilroy (Thomas Nelson)

### Fiction

1. **The Shack**, William P. Young (Windblown Media)
2. **A Lineage of Grace**, Francine Rivers (Tyndale)
3. **Shades of Blue**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
4. **Take Three**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
5. **Take Two**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
6. **Burn**, Ted Dekker and Erin Healy (Thomas Nelson)
7. **Redeeming Love**, Francine Rivers (Multnomah)
8. **Take One**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
9. **A Cousin's Challenge**, Wanda Brunstetter (Barbour)
10. **Morning's Refrain**, Tracie Peterson (Bethany House)



NAMB photo

**IN FOR THE LONG HAUL** — NAMB missionaries Craig (left) and Suzy Miles, founders of Appalachian Trail Servants minister to a hiker somewhere along the 2,175-mile-long Appalachian Trail.

# Amid the miles

## NAMB missionaries share Christ along Appalachian Trail

To understand a person, walk a mile in his shoes. But if that person is an Appalachian Trail (AT) thru-hiker, you'll have to walk several hundred miles.

"It's not until about mile 500 that they start to listen," said North American Mission Board (NAMB) Mission Service Corps (MSC) missionary Suzy Miles. "Before that, they're superheroes."

MSC missionaries Craig and Suzy Miles started Appalachian Trail Servants (AT Servants) six years ago so they could help represent Christ through service, evangelism and discipleship to reach the longtrail hiking community trekking the 2,175-mile AT.

The couple has hiked about 1,000 miles of the trail themselves and visited most of its length to conduct ministry training to churches near trailheads and to minister to hikers through acts of kindness.

The AT is a marked, yard-wide footpath winding through the Appalachian Mountains from Springer Mountain in north Georgia to Mount Katahdin in central Maine. Conceived in 1921 and completed in 1937, it passes through 14 states. More than four million people hike some part of the trail each year, and another 2,000 "thru-hikers" attempt to go the entire distance.

Suzy grew up in Dahlonoga, Ga., with a family and a father who took hikers in, fed them and shared with them the truth about Christ.

A native of Stone Mountain, Ga., Craig had already earned a degree in economics at the University of Georgia and seminary master's degrees when he met Suzy. Suzy had been the hiker in her family and shortly after, the couple and her family began hiking almost every weekend in the North Georgia Mountains.

At the time he met Suzy, Miles was working in information technology for a regional bank but believed he had a higher calling. One morning, he stopped by his Baptist church and prayed a simple prayer: "Lord, how can You use our time

and talents for Your glory?" God was about to answer Craig's prayer.

"Right after I prayed that prayer, I spotted a missionary magazine on a table next to me," Miles said. "On the cover was a story about extreme hiking in China. It just clicked in my head that we needed to start a ministry on the Appalachian Trail. Suzy and I were seeing hundreds of hikers pass over the roads and trails and through the woods of north Georgia, but we knew their spiritual needs were not being met."

Miles and Suzy married and now six years later, their home and ministry are based in Franklin, N.C., only a short drive from a major AT trailhead. They continue to serve hikers but are beginning to focus their attention on training churches and leaders who have a heart for hikers.

Hikers are a subculture, Miles said, and most of them use trail names rather than their own. The Mileses are no different. Craig's trail name is "Clay," taken from Romans 9:21. Suzy's is "Branch," which comes from John 15:5.

Whether simply hiking on a crisp autumn weekend or thru-hiking the entire Appalachian Trail, the sport is not for the faint-of-heart. Backpacks containing tents, sleeping bags, food, clothes, first-aid and water purification equipment can weigh 35 lbs. or more. In addition to the obvious physical and mental challenges, other hazards include severe weather, Lyme disease, steep grades, limited water and poison ivy.

### Training churches

So the Mileses have focused their efforts on training churches and trail chaplains — a select position with AT Servants that requires a mature walk with Christ, a missionary mindset and the ability to walk thousands of miles under often heavy loads.

Trail chaplains, which have the greatest direct impact on hikers, trudge the 2,175 miles with every ounce of gear any other hiker would carry and with a goal of enjoying the journey and reaching the end. But chaplains sit around shelters and campfires with the purpose of representing Christ, answering hard questions from thoughtful, hurting people and walking alongside those same people for days, weeks and months.

"We have an amazing opportunity," Suzy said. "If we can represent Christ to someone during a critical few months on the trail, we can see Christ change them for a lifetime." (NAMB)

## World of Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

### Memphis' Bellevue Church sends \$73K for Haiti relief

CORDOVA, Tenn. — Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn., has raised more than \$73,000 for Southern Baptist relief ministries that help survivors of the Jan. 12 earthquake in Haiti.

A sixth of that total was raised March 6 in a 5K run-walk that drew nearly 500 participants, said Andy Beal, sports outreach minister at Bellevue. The majority of the participants were Bellevue church members. The remainder of the total came from a special offering held in January in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.

"The vision of the event was to include the entire body of Christ in the Memphis area," Beal said. "It worked out beautifully. ... We had people from all over the place, from all walks of life."

Bellevue was already planning to hold a 5K event when an intern approached him about wanting to organize a 5K that would benefit the people in Haiti, Beal said.

"God just preordained that," Beal said. "We changed the emphasis behind the 5K and put some meaning behind it."

Beal said Bellevue hopes to hold more run-walk events in the future, with the intent of sending aid to other disaster areas.

"(The 5K) blew away our expectations," Beal said. "We came in not sure what to expect, and God showed up and made it a great day. ... Everyone seemed to have a great time and they were really excited to hear the tentative total."

The money raised will be channeled through Baptist Global Response to projects conducted in partnership with Haitian Baptist churches. Bellevue's members also contributed to Haiti relief by helping their students fill 169 Buckets of Hope, amounting to more than 3,000 pounds of food. Each bucket can feed a Haitian family for a week.

### Kazakh Baptist threatened with deportation

ASTANA, Kazakhstan — Kazakhstan authorities have left threats to deport Viktor Leven "hanging in the air," Leven told Forum 18 News Service.

The now-stateless Baptist, who is Kazakh-born, was convicted of missionary activity without state permission, and because he and his wife do not have passports they cannot either obtain paid work or travel by train.

He and his family live on what they can grow themselves. Another Baptist, Zhanna-Tereza Raudovich, who was fined 100 times the minimum monthly wage for hosting worship in her home, has had an appeal against the fine rejected and has appealed to the Supreme Court. Akmol Regional Police held a seminar on ways of struggling against religious extremism, during which Baptists were associated with terrorism.

When asked why this association was made, police told Forum 18 that Baptists were not extremists but they "do violate the law often" as they continue religious activity without official registration. Attendees at the seminar included members of President Nursultan Nazarbaev's Nur Otan political party.

### Kazakh believers fined for praying for woman

TARAZ, Kazakhstan — Two Protestants have been given criminal convictions to punish them for their activity.

Vissa Kim, pastor of Grace Light of Love Church in Taraz in southern Kazakhstan, was fined 10 months' minimum wages April 1 for allegedly harming a woman's health by praying for her.

Sergei Mironov was given one year's restrictions on his free movement after being found guilty of depriving a client of his drug rehabilitation centre of his freedom. The authorities have closed the centre.

Both Kim and Mironov deny any wrongdoing.

A criminal case has been opened against the leader of another Christian-run rehabilitation centre in Almaty.

"Religious communities can do social work but only if they do it in accordance with the Religion Law," an official told Forum 18 about Mironov's case. "Now it looks like pastors will get fines for praying for the sick in churches," a member of Kim's church said.

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