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Photo by Doug Rogers

FAST RESPONSE — Glenn Pender (right), a disaster relief volunteer from St. Clair Baptist Association, talks with Albertville resident Angela MacMahon about the damage an April 24 tornado did to her home. Volunteers helped remove a tree from her home and cover the holes in her roof.

‘We will help you’

State disaster relief volunteers respond after tornadoes hit north Alabama

By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

Angela MacMahon had less than 10 minutes to get to safety April 24.

MacMahon, an Albertville resident and single mom, had just arrived home from work and turned on the television when she heard the warning.

“It was like a sheet was put over the window,” MacMahon said. “I heard the rumbling — like they say it sounds like a freight train — and all I could think of was the glass from the window.

“I jumped into a closet; I was scared to death,” she said.

But thankfully, once the tornado

had passed through, MacMahon found herself alive and unharmed. She was equally thankful that her two children had spent the night with a baby sitter and were not home when it hit.

Her property, however, was not as lucky.

In MacMahon’s back yard, a pine tree fell across and destroyed the 16-foot above-ground pool she had bought her children a few weeks pri-

or, and in her front yard, an old oak tree was uprooted and fell onto her roof.

Overwhelmed by the damage and not knowing what to do, MacMahon (See ‘Some,’ page 3)

Celebrate
Mother's Day
May 9

Donna Dunkin (right) and her daughter, Paula Oslin, both members of Pleasant View Baptist Church, Holly Pond, enjoy the spring weather while working together in the garden.

Photo by Steve Gross



COMMENT

God's Goodness Not Determined by a Test Result

The preacher's voice struck me like an unexpected blow. I had been driving for more than an hour late into the night along U.S. Highway 42, the main route between Louisville, Ky., and Cincinnati. I was hurrying back to the state paper offices after a night session of the Kentucky Baptist Convention annual meeting in order to publish eight pages of the paper the next morning.

My mind was not on the curvy two-lane road or the opening session of the annual meeting that had just concluded. I was thinking about Eleanor, my wife, and our two children, Brent, 4, and Jean, 2.

A few days earlier, the doctor had said Eleanor was ill and needed a serious operation. He said if the operation went well, recuperation would take several weeks. If it did not go well, well ...

As I drove along that night, I heard the doctor's words over and over again. I saw Eleanor's face as he spoke. I thought about how I would care for the children and every other thing a scared young husband and father can imagine.

Somehow the preacher's voice grabbed me. The radio had been on for company during the lonely drive, but I had not heard a note or word it blared in more than an hour.

I still do not know who the speaker was, but I will never forget what he said: "At some point in everyone's life, there comes a time when you have to decide to put your whole weight on Jesus."

I do not know if the words originated with him or not, but that sentence found a permanent place in my heart.

Place full weight on Jesus

The words rolled over and over and over in my mind. Could I put my whole weight on Jesus? Could I trust my wife, my children to Jesus' hands rather than my own?

There was nothing to do but pull off on the side of the road and have a prayer time with the Lord. It involved confession. It involved renewal. It involved commitment as I "put my whole weight on Jesus" and trusted Him with the welfare of my loved ones.

A few months later, Eleanor had the surgery and all went well. The day she came home from the hospital, I bought our first color television. I had promised Eleanor she could recuperate in front of a color TV.

It was the kind of outcome one prays for, an outcome that causes us to praise God and declare His goodness.

Now fast-forward to 1998. The place is UAB



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Hospital in Birmingham. The day is July 20.

Eleanor and I had arrived back in the United States only 33 hours earlier. We had been medically evacuated from Durban, South Africa, where we were involved in an automobile accident on our way to the airport to return home.

Eleanor had been in a deep coma for six days. She was kept alive by a ventilator, which only prolonged the dying process. Now we were gathered around her bed to tell her goodbye for the final time.

I sat in a wheelchair holding her hand and looked into her bruised and swollen face. Family members circled the bed. We prayed. We sang. We cried. And we "put our whole weight on Jesus" as we entrusted her eternal care to the heavenly Father.

In the days before, I had prayed, probably more earnestly, more pleadingly, even more trustingly, than I had ever prayed before. So had family members and friends literally around the world.

But Eleanor did not get better.

Fifteen minutes after we said our final goodbyes, she slipped quietly into eternity, into the arms of Jesus.

That is not the outcome we had prayed for or wanted. It is not the outcome for which most of us praise God or talk about His goodness.

Yet I know that God was just as good the day Eleanor died as He was the day she came home from the hospital to recover in front of her new color TV.

God is good all the time

God's goodness is not determined by a test result or a doctor's report or the outcome of a medical procedure. God's goodness is not even determined by whether one lives or dies. God is good all the time and in all situations.

God's goodness is not even determined by our experience. God is good because that is His nature.

The Psalms repeatedly proclaim the goodness of God.

Psalm 34:8 says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good."

Psalm 106:1 invites us to "praise the Lord. Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good."

Psalm 119:68 declares, "You are good and what You do is good."

Jesus taught that God is good. When the rich young ruler addressed Jesus as "Good Teacher," Jesus responded, "No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:18).

The Bible teaches that God does not change (Ps. 102:27; James 1:17) and is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8).

Even God's name affirms His changeless nature. God revealed His name to Moses as "I Am Who I Am" (Ex. 3:14). He is the pre-existent One, the God of your past — Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of your present and future.

The God who welcomed Eleanor into His eternal abode was the same God who saved her as an elementary-age child, guided her in every part of life, healed her through a complicated surgery and was there when earthly life ended.

Confidence even in death

Knowing that God is always good gives confidence when one has to "place all your weight on Jesus," even in death.

Testimonies about God being good because of a desired outcome of a medical test or a favorable doctor's report may be well intended but they miss the mark. God is good all the time and in all situations.



"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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Letters to the Editor

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Traylor is third to be nominated for SBC pres

Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla., will be nominated for president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) at the June 15-16 annual meeting in Orlando, Fla., fellow pastor Ed Litton told the *Florida Baptist Witness* April 22.

"In this historic moment in Southern Baptist life, God has moved upon my heart to nominate" Traylor, said Litton, pastor of First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland.

Traylor said he agreed to be nominated "in response to the Lord's prompting and the encouragement of friends across the SBC."

A member of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force, Traylor said his involvement with the work has been "life changing."

In November, Traylor will celebrate 20 years as pastor of Olive Baptist. He is a trustee of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and is chairman of NAMB's presidential search team. Among other denominational leadership positions, he has been president of the Florida Baptist State Convention (1995-96), SBC first vice president (2000) and president of the Southern Baptist Pastors Conference (2004).

A native of Pisgah, Traylor served as pastor of two churches in his home state and three in Texas before joining Olive in 1990. Traylor holds degrees from Samford University in Birmingham and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, where he earned both the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees.

Georgia, Alabama nominees

Information from the SBC's 2009 Annual Church Profile (ACP) for Olive lists 270 baptisms and primary worship service attendance of 3,105. The church gave \$731,080, or 10.1 percent, through the Cooperative Program (CP) from total undesignated receipts of \$7,213,206. According to the ACP, the church also received \$33,264 for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions and \$10,466 for the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions.

In 1989, the year before Traylor became pastor, the church had undesignated receipts of \$1,923,165 and contributed \$417,320, or 21.7 percent, through the CP.

Traylor is the third nominee to enter the SBC presidential race, joining Bryant Wright, pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga., (who will be nominated by David Uth, pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando) and Jimmy Jackson, pastor of Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville. (BP)



TRAYLOR

Some Alabama churches mobilize to help after tornadoes; others face building damage

(continued from page 1)

turned to a friend, who then turned to an Alabama Baptist disaster relief crew working nearby and took them to MacMahon.

"They said, 'We will help you,'" MacMahon explained. "I thought between the insurance company and all of the other people who needed help that it'd be later in the week or month. They were here the next morning ... at 6 o'clock."

Disaster relief workers moved the tree off MacMahon's roof, covered holes in the roof with tarps and cleaned up the fallen trees in the back yard.

"It was like bees to honey," MacMahon said. "They swarmed in with their yellow hats and shirts and started cleaning."

Disaster relief volunteers, wearing their trademark yellow shirts and hats, were some of the first responders to the storm-wrecked area.

Randall Stoner, director of missions for Marshall Baptist Association, described how quickly they responded:

▶ April 24, 10:24 p.m. — storm hit.

▶ April 25, 2:30 a.m. — Mel Johnson, state disaster relief strategist for Alabama Baptists, called Stoner.

▶ 6:30 a.m. — Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM), called Stoner.

▶ 8:30 a.m. — disaster relief teams from five Baptist associations had arrived in Albertville ready for work.

"It's just a blessing to see how fast our brothers and sisters in Christ respond to the need of our churches, our people, our town," Stoner said. "They beat all the other organizations here. ... It's just a miracle to me and a blessing to me ... how fast the yellow caps showed up."

Chain saw, cleanup, recovery, feeding and chaplaincy crews were deployed to Albertville in Marshall County and Geraldine in DeKalb County — the two hardest hit areas by what the National Weather Service identified as an EF-3 tornado. Teams were also deployed to Parrish and Cordova in Walker County.

As of April 29, there had been 228 trained disaster relief volunteers involved; 70 chain saw jobs completed; 10,788 meals served; and nine salvation decisions recorded in Walker, Marshall and DeKalb counties.

"They've done great," Ron Warren, state disaster relief cleanup, recovery and chain saw coordinator, said of the volunteers. "They're going out in (poor) conditions, fighting their way into places with debris ... and they're helping people."

Working alongside disaster relief volunteers have been the churches in the affected areas.

First Baptist Church, Geraldine, made its building available to the community as a shelter and the Red Cross and the state disaster relief teams as a headquarters for work in its town.

"We participated in the GPS: Across Alabama evangelism ... and we are currently doing the follow-up," Pastor Kirk Griggs said. "We already had signs up that said 'Find It Here' (the GPS catchphrase). Then this disaster hit and this community has been able to find it here."

First Baptist Church, Albertville, also became a disaster relief headquarters for Alabama Baptists serving in its town, hosting feeding and chain saw crews for much of the week following the storm. On April 29, the di-



Photo by Doug Rogers

HELP IS INSIDE — Kirk Griggs, pastor of FBC Geraldine, said Find it Here signs outside his church became even more appropriate when it became a storm shelter.

saster relief headquarters was moved to Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Albertville, which also housed the Red Cross.

Lifepoint Baptist Church, Albertville, has led efforts in feeding the primarily Hispanic residents of Westgate Trailer Park in Albertville, while Cowboy Church, Albertville, with the help of First Baptist Church, Boaz, had fed approximately 750 meals a day to other Albertville residents at press time, according to Stoner.

'Significant' impact

"The ministry has impacted both [Geraldine and Albertville] in a significant way," Johnson said. "It's a community of our Baptist family (working together), and they have turned out in numbers and have made a huge impression."

Pleasantfield Baptist Church, Parrish, has been assisting with cleanup efforts in its area, removing trees and covering and repairing roofs.

But as Baptists continue cleaning up their towns, some will be focusing on repairing their church buildings:

▶ Solid Rock Baptist Church, Albertville, will have much to repair after a tornado came through its sanctuary, entering a window and blowing off the sanctuary doors. It exited above the baptistry, leaving a gaping hole. The church also had damage to its nursery and front porch.

▶ Liberty Baptist Church, Crossville, had major structural damage to its main sanctuary building that will most likely result in a total loss.

▶ First, Albertville, lost its vans and buses to a fallen pine tree and had damage to its parking lot.

To give to disaster relief work in Alabama, send donations to the SBOM, Attn: Accounting Services, P.O. Box 11870, Montgomery, AL 36111-0870. Mark the check "For Disaster Relief."

Two teams help after floods in Rhode Island

While many Alabama Baptist disaster relief teams were being deployed to areas in the state April 25, a disaster relief team from Mud Creek Baptist Association was on its way to Rhode Island to help with flood cleanup efforts.

Mud Creek Association took a mud-out team to clear away mud and mold

built up in the flooded homes. On May 2, that team returned to Alabama and a mud out team from Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association left to continue the work in Rhode Island. That team is expected to return May 9. Alabama is partnering with the North American Mission Board in this work. (TAB)

Panel recaps GCR prior to May 3 report

Southern Baptists in the future will mark their 2010 annual meeting as the beginning of a Great Commission Resurgence (GCR) in the same way they refer to 1979 as the start of the conservative resurgence that changed the face of the convention, panelists said during a GCR discussion at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., on April 28.

Just five days before release of the much-anticipated update of their recommendations, GCR Task Force members Daniel Akin, J.D. Greear and Al Gilbert were present to answer questions presented by John Akin, representing Baptist21, which put the panel together.

Another task force member, R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.,

and Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Johnny Hunt presented videotaped answers to questions they received earlier. Ronnie Floyd, the task force chairman, answered questions live via teleconference.

Big turnout encouraged

Panelists encouraged pastors to bring their maximum number of messengers to the SBC annual meeting in Orlando, Fla., to vote approval of the task force recommendations, which will be presented after lunch June 15.

"We need you to join in on this force so we can make a difference," Hunt said. "You can become a catalyst to lead change."

John Akin, Daniel Akin's son and pastor of a Highview Baptist Church satellite in Louisville, Ky., moderated the panel and present-

ed questions that had come from around the country.

Asked if task force recommendations simply rearrange SBC bureaucracies, Greear, pastor of Summit Church in Durham, N.C., said, "The cry of the conservative resurgence was 'We don't want to give money to liberal institutions.' Now the cry is, 'We don't want to give money to bloated bureaucracy.'"

He said Rome was neither built, nor unbuilt in a day, and the task force recommendations are a "first step that will need to be followed by many more steps."

Greear told the seminarians most of them would be able to grow a church without the SBC or the Cooperative Program (CP), "so what's the point?" Then he encouraged them to spend time on the missions field or with an unreached people

group and "very quickly you will conclude you need cooperation with other churches to reach those places. That will lead you back to the SBC for missional reasons," he said.

Several questions related to the potential effect of task force recommendations on CP support. The CP is Southern Baptists' voluntary giving method that provides the primary support for all missions, education and benevolence ministries.

Greear said younger churches are not as excited about giving through the CP because they no longer look to convention leadership as pastors did 20 years ago. "We live in a flat world with lots of other ways to communicate" and find resources other than by going to a denominational knowledge broker, he said.

The task force report is sending a "clear message to institutions that there is a real heart in Southern Baptists to spend more money in missions," Greear said. "The days of a bloated kind of centralized bureaucracy that leads the mission ... those days are a-changin'."

Greear said CP needs to be more efficient in providing resources to the deep needs outside of Southern Baptists' current strengths in the Southeast. Even if churches are "very Southern Baptist" they are not going to give to CP at the same level as the previous generation, Greear said, and there needs to be acceptable ways to cooperate in missions beyond CP.

Local church focus

Gilbert, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., and a former executive staff member of the International Mission Board, said wording in the task force recommendations released May 3 "will talk about the local church being the global mission strategy center and the pur-

pose of every board and agency is to facilitate the effectiveness of the local church."

Any denominational structure changes "need to be addressed over time," Gilbert said. Daniel Akin, president of Southeastern Seminary, said "we will" ask boards of trustees to "rethink and reprioritize what they're doing."

Akin said he believes state conventions should forward more CP money to the SBC.

"The cry of this generation is they want to see more money going out of their state" to international missions and underserved areas of North America and Canada, he said.

NAMB strategy

The criticism that North American Mission Board (NAMB) cannot be a good national strategist from staff offices in Alpharetta, Ga., is invalid, the panel said, because they are recommending that NAMB staff be decentralized and work closely with state convention partners in local strategies.

Such strategy will use money more strategically, Daniel Akin said, and he advised those who fear they might lose their jobs in a strategy shift that "If you are doing a good job at penetrating lostness, why do you think we wouldn't fund you? On the other hand, if you are out there not penetrating lostness, why should we fund you?"

Floyd reiterated his conviction that the task force work will provide a "compelling vision" for Southern Baptists, the lack of which has contributed to the inertia of past decades.

"We're voting on the future of the SBC," Floyd said. "This is step one. But it's the most important step we'll ever take."

Visit www.thealabamabaptist.org or read next week's print edition to read coverage of the full GCR report released May 3. (BP)

BWA President David Coffey visits Alabama, reflects on time at helm

After five years, seven continents and more than 80 countries, David Coffey is looking forward to a little light reading as he prepares his upcoming final address as president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). Reading through his stack of travel journals, that is, in order to connect the dots of his time leading, encouraging and learning about the more than 100 million Baptist believers worldwide.

Since his election to the five-year position in July 2005, Coffey has been somewhere other than his Oxford, England-area home almost monthly. And in April, he was in Alabama.

As he reflects on his time at the helm of BWA, Coffey told *The Alabama Baptist* that transitions and restructuring among BWA leaders and members will likely be the big story from his time.

"I think the biggest thing I have had to handle is a change of leadership in the general secretary position from Denton Lotz to Neville Callam," Coffey said. "Transition of leadership, whether it be a local church or an international organization, is an important moment in the life of an organization."

The second thing was the Implementation Task Force's study of BWA and work to restructure as necessary to focus the vision, values and commitments to match the 21st century, he said.

And as far as his legacy is concerned Coffey hopes he will be remembered for helping grow young leaders among Baptists.



Photo by Robert Culpepper

"Developing emerging leaders is one of my passions and in passing the baton to my successor I hope the BWA will continue to give ministry opportunities for a new generation of Baptist leaders," he said.

Coffey was in the state visiting Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham and preaching in chapel April 19. He also spoke to ministers of Bir-

mingham Baptist Association and met with leaders of national Woman's Missionary Union that day.

He preached at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, during the April 18 morning worship services.

Just a few days prior to his Birmingham visit, Coffey lectured at Northern Seminary in Chicago. (TAB)

One killed, 25 injured in Baptist church bus crash in Arkansas

One woman was killed and more than 25 were injured when a busload of Hispanic Baptist pastors and church members crashed April 24 on Interstate 40 between Russellville and Clarksville, Ark.

Anna Del Carmen Ortez, 56, of Rogers, Ark., died in the crash, which occurred at about 5 p.m. The group of about 35 people was returning from the Arkansas Baptist State Convention-sponsored Hispanic Family Conference at Lifeline Baptist Church in Little Rock.

Two of the injured were airlifted to Little Rock and remain hospitalized. The others were treated in Russellville and Clarksville hospitals and released over the weekend.

Lidinia Cerda, 13, the daughter of Daniel Cerda, coordinator of Hispanic ministries for the Northwest

Arkansas Baptist Association, is in stable but critical condition at Children's Hospital in Little Rock. She was thrown around inside the bus as it rolled and broke her hip, according to the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. She underwent pelvic surgery the evening of April 24 and remained in intensive care April 26.

An unidentified woman remained in stable but critical condition at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Medical Center in Little Rock.

Other injuries included broken arms, legs, ribs and head trauma.

Police spokesman Bill Sadler said the bus, westbound on I-40, hit a guardrail, spun and flipped, according to news reports. An investigation into the cause of the accident is ongoing. (BP)

State Bible Drill results

Students from across the state gathered at Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery, for the Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament state finals April 25.

According to Sonya Tucker, an associate in the office of discipleship and family ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, Bible Drill "is an exciting way for youth ... to learn to use their Bibles to meet the challenges of life,"

as well as learn poise and confidence.

Junior high students can participate in Bible Drill, while high school students can participate in both the Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament. The first place winner of the Speakers Tournament earns a scholarship to an Alabama Baptist college — Judson College in Marion, Samford University in Birmingham or the University of Mobile. (TAB)



Photo by John Sardin

SPEAKERS TOURNAMENT WINNERS — (From left) Anna Frederick, first place, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville; Rivers Brunson, second place, Grove Hill Baptist Church; and Luke Trammell, third place, FBC Centre.



Photo by Doug Rogers

YOUTH BIBLE DRILL WINNERS — Leslie Haynes (center), first place, Meadowbrook Baptist Church, Oxford; Lee Robertson (right), second place, FBC Centre; and Sienna Borowski (left), third place, Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile.

HIGH SCHOOL BIBLE DRILL WINNERS — Tad Borowski (left), first place, Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile; and Valaine Pfister, second place, Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville.



Photo by Doug Rogers



Photo courtesy of Steve Betsill

'CHALLENGING PEOPLE' — Steve 'Stormrider' Betsill, a member of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Headland, says God told him to go on a prayer ride around Judson Association, praying for its churches.

Headland man takes bike on daylong prayer ride of Judson Association

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

Steve "Stormrider" Betsill got the idea from God. He remembers it this way: He had just pulled his black Honda Valkyrie motorcycle back into the garage after a weekend ride. He walked into the house. That's when God started talking to him.

"Hey," God said. "Did you enjoy your ride?"

"Sure," Betsill said.

"Well then I got something for you to do," God replied. "I want you to do a prayer ride across the (Judson Baptist) association and pray for every church, first for spiritual awakening and then for jobs for the people and to challenge people to get outside their box and share my love."

So that's what Betsill, a member of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Headland, did.

Two weeks later, on April 11, he woke up really early, pulled his motorcycle back out and took off on his prayer ride.

"Very few people knew about it," Director of Missions George Thompson said of the prayer ride. "I happened to be out at one of the churches that morning and just before worship time, he rode up, he and his wife and his friend, who were riding behind him in a pickup to make sure everything went OK. Steve stood before the congregation before worship started and explained what the Lord laid on his heart and led them in prayer for the community and the Henry County economic conditions and explained that he was going from church to church."

Betsill zigzagged Henry County for 146 miles, 21 churches and one breakfast and one lunch. And he

prayed — with church members, if they were there, and by himself (save for wife Anita and friend Cynthia Leteourneau, a member of the Dothan chapter of the Christian Motorcyclists Association), if they weren't.

"I have a stereo on my bike, but I spent most of the time (on the ride) fellowshiping with God," Betsill said. "Not that you have to ride a motorcycle to be in tune with God, but it helps you learn to listen and act."

'When God speaks, act'

He had plenty of learning time that day: He started at 7 a.m. and finished at 7 p.m.

"It took him all day to get to the last church," Thompson said. "They knew he was coming, and there was a group waiting for him. ... This is just one guy that thought our churches needed praying for

and took it upon himself to do it." The response to the prayer ride was such that Betsill plans on doing it again.

At Haleburg Baptist Church, he prayed with about 10 people coming for Sunday School and challenged them.

"One of the old ladies looked at me with just tears in her eyes and said, 'Thank you so much for challenging people. We need that,'" Betsill said.

He thanked her and hopped back on his Honda. There were plenty more churches to get to and more people to challenge.

"We were praying for revival and for jobs and just to challenge people," Betsill said. "Part of that challenge is, when God speaks, to act. If you think He's telling you to help some person or other, that's not just a thought you had. That's God speaking to you." ❧



Photo courtesy of Steve Betsill

MAN ON A MISSION — Steve Betsill (right) zigzagged across Henry County for 146 miles, stopping at 21 churches to pray.

Across Alabama's Associations

BESSEMER

► **Fairfield Highlands Church, Midfield**, will hold a special fifth Sunday May 30. High attendance day for Sunday School will be at 9:45 a.m. The morning service will be at 11 with former Pastor Buck Duke as guest speaker. Former Minister of Music Randy Harwell will lead the music. Lunch will follow. There will be a special music service at 1:30 p.m. For information call 205-780-6621. Ed Cruce is pastor.

BIBB

► **First Church, Woodstock**, will hold revival May 9-12 with Jack Daniels. Services will be Sunday at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. and weeknights at 7. There will be special music each night at 6 p.m. Benny Corley is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Lakeside Church, Birmingham**, will host athlete Richmond Flowers Jr. at The Happy Hearts Luncheon May 11, 11:30 a.m. For reservations call 205-823-0022, Ext. 124. Breck T. Ladd is pastor. ► **Vestavia Hills Church** will hold an art exhibit featuring artists in the church May 9-14. Hours will be Sunday at 8:45-11 a.m. and weekdays at 1-6 p.m. The church also will host singer-songwriter Carrie Tillis in an acoustical concert May 12, 6 p.m. Tillis is a Nashville performer and graduate of Samford University in Birmingham. On May 16, the church will host its annual Shepherd Scholarship Concert called An Evening of American Song at 7 p.m., at the Alys Stephens Center. Proceeds will go to the Betty Sue Shepherd Scholarship Fund. Shepherd served as organist at the church for 38 years and was professor of piano at Samford for 50 years. She died in 2007 after a battle with cancer. The concert will feature Tillis, the Birmingham Girls Chorus and Birmingham Chamber Chorus, Mildred Lanier and a festival choir comprised of singers from area churches and schools. For tickets call 205-975-ARTS. For information call 205-979-5920. Gary Furr is pastor.

BULLOCK-CENTENNIAL

► **Gene Bridgman** is the new director of missions for **Bullock-Centennial Association**. He is pastor of Eastside Church, Union Springs, and will continue to serve there also. He has served several Alabama Baptist churches. Bridgman and his wife, Julie, have three children. ► **Bullock-Centennial Association** will hold revival May 10-14, nightly at 7, at Eastside



BRIDGMAN

Church, Union Springs. Gene Bridgman, director of missions for Bullock-Centennial Association, will speak Monday, Dean Watson Tuesday, Bubber Ledbetter Wednesday, Dale Huff Thursday and Drew Burton Friday. The revival choir will practice at nightly at 6:15 for those who would like to sing. ► **Liberty Church, Union Springs**, will celebrate 173 years of ministry with a homecoming May 9, 11 a.m. Liberty is the oldest church in Bullock-Centennial Association. Ronald Earles is pastor.

CLARKE

► **Stave Creek Church, Jackson**, will hold a special service called Day of Remembering in honor of veterans May 30, 10:55 a.m., with Chaplain Glenn Taylor. Jamie Lay is pastor.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE

► **New Bethel Church, Tusculumbia**, and several other area churches sponsored a crusade with former University of Alabama running back Siran Stacy April 18 at Longhorn R Arena in Tusculumbia. Greg Beasley is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► **Bon Air Church** will celebrate homecoming May 23, 11 a.m., with former Pastor Walter Coleman as guest speaker. Lunch will follow at noon. To the End will sing at 1:15 p.m. J.W. "Bill" Casady is interim pastor.

COVINGTON

► **First Church, Gantt**, will host Usama Dakdok May 12-14, nightly at 7. Dakdok was born in Egypt, and his father was a Baptist minister. He will speak about the teachings of Islam and how it affects our country and us as Christians. Terry Campbell is interim pastor.

DEKALB

► **Ruhama Church, Fort Payne**, will hold Biker Day May 23, 10:30 a.m. Marc Merritt, motorcycle evangelist and consultant for evangelism ministries for Georgia Baptist Convention, will speak. Bruce Turner, Christian Motorcycle Association chapter president, will be present. A cookout will follow the service. There will be an afternoon ride to Lookout Mountain and Little River Canyon National Preserve. For information call 256-997-0142 or e-mail pastor@ruhamabaptistchurch.org. Chris Murdock is pastor.

FRIENDSHIP

► **Friendship Association** held a Missions Friends party Feb. 20 with Teresa Latham, former missionary for the International Mission Board. Approximately 50 people attended. There were hot dogs and crafts. Ernie Carroll is director of missions.

GENEVA

► The 39er's C.L.U.B. of **Maple Avenue Church, Geneva**, will hold a luncheon meeting May 11, 11 a.m., with guest speakers Royce and Jackie Reagan, of Marianna, Fla. The Reagans grew up in Geneva and serve in music and education ministry. For reservations call 334-684-9617 by May 6. Mike Shirah is pastor.

MADISON

► **Galilee Church** will hold a singing May 22, 6 p.m., with William Clayton and the Redeemed. Jerry Meeks is pastor. ► **Mable Hill Church, Ardmore**, will hold a gospel concert with the Dixie Echoes, of Pensacola, Fla., and Compassion May 8, 7 p.m. There will be a cookout from 5-6:30 p.m. benefiting the church's missions team going to Kenya. For information call 256-420-8172 or e-mail mhbc@ardmore.net. Mike Clark is pastor.

MORGAN

► **Morgan Association** along with the State Board of Missions will sponsor a horse whisperer event May 11, 7 p.m., at Celebration Arena in Priceville. Donnell Brown is director of missions.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Ryan Jones** is the new worship minister for **Beechwood Church, Mount Olive**. He has served as pianist for churches in Mississippi. Jones is pursuing a bachelor's degree in music at Samford University in Birmingham. Jeff Griffis is pastor. ► **Matthew Marsh** is the new children's minister for **Enon Church, Morris**. He was already a member of the church. He and his wife, Kelly, have three children. John M. Hambricht is pastor.

SULPHUR SPRINGS

► **Ken Mostella** resigned as director of missions for **Sulphur Springs Association**. He will continue to serve the association as vice moderator and director of the men's ministry. **Andy Frazier** is the new director of missions. He comes from Pisgah Church, Jasper, where he served as pastor. Frazier and his wife, Kristie, have two children.



FRAZIER

WASHINGTON

► **Chapel Hill Church, Millry**, will celebrate homecoming May 16, 10:45 a.m., with Eric Copeland as guest speaker. A business meeting will follow the service, and lunch will follow the meeting. Ferrell Mills is pastor.

Florida church takes services to Facebook

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

If you think of a church as a building, then feel free to ignore Nathan Clark. But if you think of a church as people, then just confirm his friend request and "google" your Bible.

As director of digital innovation for Northland Church in Longwood, Fla., Clark is on the front lines of a digital revolution in church ministry, spanning everything from iPhone app evangelism to clickable fellowship in the virtual world of Second Life.

"We encourage people to be the church everywhere, every day, so it just makes sense to put resources out there to help people to be that church," Clark said.

Which is why in March, Northland officially launched an application that allows worshipers to invite their Facebook friends to go to church with them — not only without leaving home but also without leaving the increasingly familiar environment of Facebook.

Third largest 'nation'

"At Northland, we often talk about the need to take the church to the people versus asking them to come to us," Clark said. "For us, it was a wake-up call to realize that we were doing precisely that online — asking people to come to our website for worship. Why require a virtual commute over to our website when you can have church where people are?"

Northland first began taking church beyond the pews in 2001 via "distributed sites" and currently operates live, two-way video connections between its central campus and four satellite campuses in central Florida. The current week's service is now

available via Facebook 24 hours a day, in order to, as Clark puts it, "take the church where people live."

While some might scoff at the idea of being "superpoked" by God, the potential of online church via social networks like Facebook and Twitter seems staggering. If Facebook were a country, then its population of more than 400 million would make it the third largest in the world behind China (1.33 billion) and India (1.17 billion).

Responding to a call

Twitter recently topped 100 million users, and a growing number of churches, including Northland, are incorporating the micro-blogging service into their actual services. In a 2009 *TIME* magazine article on tech-savvy congregations, a pastor said, "If God leads you to continue [Twitter] as a form of worship, by all means, do it."

Clark and co. feel the same way despite whatever traditional coat-and-tie objections might arise.

"Sure some people might use (online church) to duck out of reality or to avoid face to face relationships ... just as people use (going to) church to avoid having a personal relationship with God," he said. "But for us at Northland, we can't let our fears about how people might use or abuse something affect how we respond to what we clearly feel is a call from God. Even if what someone gets isn't a perfect church experience, if that person is in an environment where they're worshipping where they might not have been otherwise, that's not an insignificant thing."

For more information, visit www.northlandchurch.net.



Photo courtesy of FBC Montgomery

FBC MONTGOMERY HOLDS LATIN FESTIVAL

Kathy Cooper, singles minister at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, paints the face of a boy attending the church's Latina Family Festival on April 24 at its Nehemiah Center, located in the Chisholm community. Jay Wolf is pastor.

Trail to the lost

Mobile-area's first cowboy church accepts 'no excuses' for absences

Pastor Cody Drews drove up to the sanctuary and watered and fed the two horses.

Still Water Cowboy Church, Semmes, the only cowboy church in Mobile Baptist Association, meets in a red barn and held its second service the night of April 27.

That was a Tuesday.

"I put it on Tuesday so there wouldn't be any excuse not to go," said Drews, who recently moved to Semmes from Sulphur Springs, Texas, under the auspices of the Southern Baptist-rooted American Fellowship of Cowboy Churches specifically to start Still Water.

"You've got your (weekend) trail riders, and the rodeo cowboys are gone all weekend, and then there are those people that own a type of ranch or something and go hunting on the weekend," he said. "Their hobby is a priority over church.

I'm trying to get their priorities more in line."

Yes, there are still cowboys in Alabama, beyond "the Wal-Mart Wrangler" types, Drews said. And yes, they need their own church, he said.

"Their hobby is a priority over church. I'm trying to get their priorities more in line."

Pastor Cody Drews
Still Water Cowboy Church

Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Association, agreed.

"There is a definite need for the Western-themed 'cowboy' worship, Bible study, outreach and fellowship," Wright said.

"Half of the population of Mobile County is lost. Obviously we need some creative, bib-

lical approaches to supplement what our other 108 churches are doing."

He said Drews is the perfect man for that job.

"(Drews) is a quintessential cowboy," Wright said.

"He was raised on a ranch, and the cowboy hat, boots and buckle

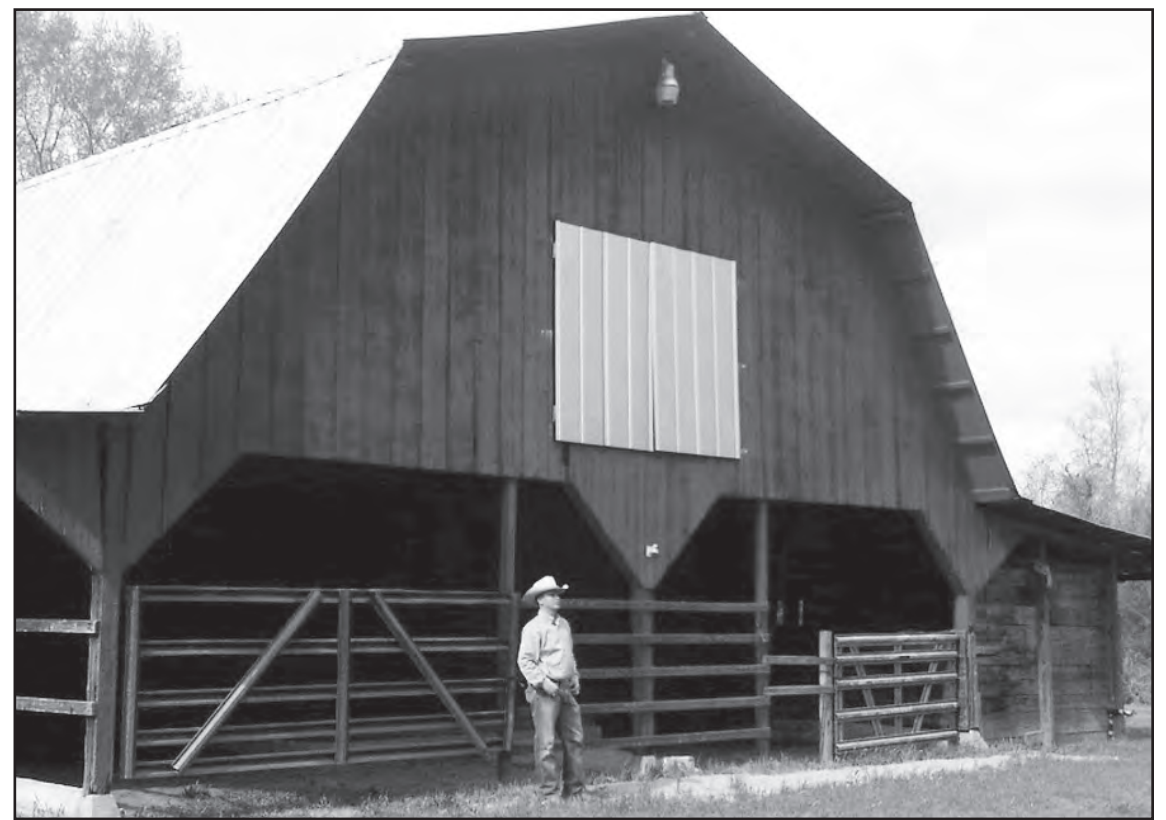


Photo courtesy of Cody Drews

REACHING THE COWBOY CULTURE — Still Water Cowboy Church, Semmes, is the first cowboy church in Mobile Association. Research shows the area needs two more.

look natural on him. He has the heart of a church planter and the gifts of an evangelist," he said. "He was able to lead his parents to the Lord and baptize them in the cowboy church he started in Texas, and he has the amiable personality that makes it easy to talk to people matched with a quiet confidence

that earns respect and credibility. Those traits build bridges to lost people."

The association's executive committee recently accepted its membership committee's unanimous recommendation for Still Water to join the association as a mission of Haven Woods Baptist

Church, Semmes. It might soon be accepting a few more.

"(Still Water's) first information meeting had 40 people," Wright said.

"Initial research indicates that we actually could have three regional, Western-themed congregations in Mobile County." (TAB)



Someone You Should Know

By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

RAY MCDANIEL

Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville
Madison Baptist Association



MCDANIEL

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES: Proverbs 3:5-6
FAVORITE HYMN: "He Touched Me"
HOBBIES: Collecting antique clocks and running

FAMILY STATUS: Married to Brenda for 36 years; three children, Karen, David and Sonya; and six grandchildren

Eighty-three is just a number for Ray McDaniel, who doesn't let his age stop him from going on national and international missions trips. McDaniel, who has been consistently going on missions trips for the past 30 years, has been to five continents and more than 60 countries. He makes money for these trips by repairing cemetery monuments, a trade that he picked up later in life. In 2003, McDaniel and his wife, Brenda, were awarded the outstanding missions volunteers of the year during the Alabama Baptist State Convention. This year, he has already been to Israel, Zambia and Nigeria.

Q: What was your first missions trip?

A: The first missions trip I went on was in 1979 with Whitesburg Baptist. It was an all men's mis-

sions trip to New Jersey. In the afternoons, we went to Philadelphia, and this was my first time to witness to someone I didn't know. He was a street person in a park in Philadelphia, and he prayed to accept Jesus on a bench in that park.

Q: Why have you continued being involved in missions work through the years?

A: Because I better understand the faithfulness of God. Every time I go, I never cease to be amazed at God's faithfulness, seeing thousands come to know Jesus and churches getting started. Whether it is in Huntsville or wherever I am, I try to share the gospel wherever I go.

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

A: I'm going to keep on keeping on as long as I'm physically able to

do it. I still run and go to the gym. I love to exercise. I think God has kept me in shape to do what I'm doing — going on missions trips.

Q: What would you tell someone who says they are too old to do missions?

A: If God could die for me, I should be able to live for Him. I keep that in my mind all the time.

Q: What has God taught you through your work in missions?

A: One of the greatest things that can happen to us is when we understand that we can do nothing apart from God. But I can do all things through Him who gives me strength. When you get as old as I am, you appreciate that more.

Silsby to face trial in Haiti; charges dropped against 9 other volunteers

A Haitian judge dropped kidnapping and criminal association charges against jailed Baptist volunteer Laura Silsby and nine others April 26 but ordered Silsby to face trial on another charge, meaning she will remain in prison.

CNN reported that Judge Bernard Saint-Vil ordered Silsby to face trial on an "arranging irregular travel" charge, which carries a sentence for those convicted of six months to three years in prison.

But CNN said Saint-Vil dropped all charges against the other nine volunteers, all of whom were previously released and allowed to fly back to the United

States with charges still pending.

The 10 Baptists were arrested Jan. 30 because they allegedly did not have the proper documents to cross the border and take 33 children to an orphanage being set up in the Dominican Republic.

The Baptists say they had the documents Haiti officials told them to have.

Saving children orphaned by the earthquake, they said, was their goal.

More than 100 people — including some from the group of 10 — rallied on the steps of the Idaho state capital April 24 in support of Silsby. Much of the rally was spent in prayer for her. (BP)



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Who's responsible?

Researchers probe whether, how God-given 'free will' exists

Are people really responsible for all the things they do? Do they have what theologians call God-given "free will" to choose between right and wrong?

Those questions are at the heart of a four-year research project under way at Florida State University in Tallahassee that aims to determine whether, and how, free will exists.

Funded by a \$4.4 million grant from the John Templeton Foundation, the project will gather together scientists, philosophers and theologians around the question of what factors — free will, genetics, environment, God or something else — lead us to do all the things we do.

"Gathering evidence for it one way or another, it's quite possible," said Alfred Mele, a professor of philosophy at Florida State who will lead the project. "Scientists have been looking for evidence for and against free will since the early '80s."

The debate however, is much older. For instance: Do humans, through their own freely chosen actions and decisions, determine whether they will go to heaven or hell? Does an omniscient God already know how things will turn out in the end? Does God give humans the free choice to turn away?

In the early 1980s, neuroscientist Benjamin Libet conducted an experiment that found subjects' brains registered the decision to flex their wrists roughly 300 milliseconds before the subjects themselves became aware of their decision to do it.

Libet concluded "conscious free will never is involved in producing a decision, and you can see how there's a quick road from there to 'there actually is no free will,'" Mele said.

The research led some to believe that brain processes traceable to genetic and environmental factors, and not free will, determine our decisions. Others think that while people might not be immediately aware of the decisions our brains make, they still possess the free will to veto these decisions.

But Mele, the author of two books and more than 170 articles on the concept of free will, doesn't discount the more common definition of free will — one used by the courts in determining guilt and premeditation.

"There really is nothing more to it than sanely, rationally assessing



RNS photo

reasons and then deciding on the basis of those reasons, as long as nobody is pushing you around or forcing you," he said. "In that view of free will, it's pretty obvious there is free will."

The "Big Questions in Free Will" research project will devote \$3.4 million for projects around the world to explore the concept of free will from scientific, philosophical and theological perspectives.

Scientists will look for evidence proving or disproving whether free will exists.

Philosophers and theologians, meanwhile, will seek a better definition of the concept, helping scientists to know precisely what evidence they are looking for, Mele said.

While it is perhaps difficult to reconcile concepts such as fate and destiny with free will, it is possible for an omniscient God to coexist

with the idea of free will, said Kevin Timpe, an associate professor of philosophy at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho.

"There is a difference between knowing what someone is going to do and causing them to do it," said Timpe, author of "Free Will: Sourcehood and Its Alternatives." "I know what my wife is going to order when I take her to certain restaurants just because I know her very well. But I also think my wife is freely choosing to order."

What if researchers discover free will does not exist? Two studies portend a troubled future, Mele said.

One found its subjects cheated more when they believed they were not responsible for their own decisions; another found subjects' behavior growing more aggressive when their belief in free will was suspended.

Norman Geisler, the author of 70 books including several on free will, said the idea that free will does not exist is incompatible with the Bible and the doctrine of original sin, which refers to the sin inherited from Adam and Eve's transgressions in the Garden of Eden.

If Adam's decision was not made freely, then that presumably makes God responsible for evil in the world.

"The Bible constantly affirms that man is free, that he can choose his destiny, that he's morally responsible," said Geisler, whose books include "Chosen But Free." "To say that we are pre-determined is to blame God for our choices. Secondly if all our actions are pre-determined, then why doesn't God save everyone? Because if He can save everyone apart from their free will and if He really loves everyone, then He would." (RNS)

Want to know God?

By Pastor Greg Walker
Grace Baptist Church, Montevallo

Have you ever asked yourself the question "Where will I go when I die"?

If so, then you are among almost every person who has ever lived, is alive and will be born.

Man has searched for the answer to that question for ages. Every people group, nation and ethnicity has its own ideas about the afterlife.

What about you? What do you think happens when we die?

The Bible has an answer to that question.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke about the afterlife in the 14th chapter. In verse 6, He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

The disciples and followers of Jesus in the first century asked Him the same question that we all ask today. The answer was clear and to the point.

Aside from a relationship with Jesus Christ, we cannot gain access to heaven when we die.

How then do you begin that relationship?

You begin by following the Bible's answer found in Romans 10:9: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

With this in mind, where will you go when you die? God is ready to receive you today.

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Valuing the sacred

Sub-Saharan Africa is most religious part of world, survey finds

Researchers say they've found the most religious place on earth — between the southern border of the Sahara Desert and the tip of South Africa.

Religion is "very important" to more than three-quarters of the population in 17 of 19 sub-Saharan nations, according to a new survey.

In contrast, in the United States, the world's most religious industrialized nation, 57 percent of people say religion is very important.

"On a continentwide basis, sub-Saharan Africa comes out as the most religious place on earth," said Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, which released the study April 15.

A healthy majority

According to the survey, 98 percent of respondents in Senegal say religion is very important, followed by 93 percent in Mali. The lowest percentage was reported in Botswana, 69 percent, which is still a healthy majority.

"That begins to paint a picture of how religious sub-Saharan Africans are," Lugo said.

The study is part of the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project. More than 25,000 sub-Saharan Africans responded in face-to-face interviews in more than 60 languages.

While the study confirms that

Africans are, indeed, morally conservative and religiously pious, researchers explored a variety of topics, including religious tolerance, polygamy, the role of women in society, and political and economic satisfaction.

A reversal of trends

Islam and Christianity dominate as the most popular religions in the region — a stark reversal from a century ago when Muslims and Christians were outnumbered by followers of traditional indigenous religions.

But for the past 100 years, indigenous spirituality has been diluted as missionaries carried Islam and Christianity throughout the African continent.

The study reports that the number of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa grew faster than the number of Muslims, from 7 million in 1900 to 470 million in 2010. One in five of the world's Christians lives in sub-Saharan Africa.

While a majority of African Muslims are from the northern region of the continent, nearly 234 million live below the Sahara Desert.

Indigenous beliefs

Indigenous African beliefs have not disappeared, but are often incorporated into Islam and Christianity, the report found. A number



IMB photo

HANDS LIFTED HIGH — Baptist pastor Jecktone Owiso (center) leads a worship service for people of various tribes at a refugee camp in Nairobi, Kenya.

of sub-Saharan Africans believe in witchcraft, evil spirits, reincarnation and other elements of African spirituality.

More than half of the people surveyed in Tanzania, Mali, Senegal and South Africa believe that

sacrifices to ancestors or spirits can protect them from harm.

According to the Pew survey, most sub-Saharan African Muslims are Sunni. Within Christianity, Catholicism dominates in Guinea Bissau, Rwanda and Cameroon,

while Liberia, South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, Nigeria and Botswana are predominantly Protestant.

Pentecostalism is rapidly spreading and deeply influential across the region, and also across Christian denominations. (RNS)

Artist Jennifer Knapp's lesbian story 'far too common'

Dove Award-winning artist Jennifer Knapp has revealed in a series of interviews that she is a lesbian and in a relationship — a revelation that may shock many in the Christian community but that should serve as a lesson for the evangelical church, a Southern Baptist Convention leader says.

Bob Stith, the Southern Baptist national strategist for gender issues and representative of the denomination's Task Force on Ministry to Homosexuals, said Knapp's story is "far too common" in evangelical circles.

"Many of us in redemptive ministry to same sex strugglers have heard the comment 'we don't have that problem in our church.' ... Whether or not your church has someone who is known to struggle with this issue, your church does have this problem," Stith said. "And it may be that you aren't aware of it because the struggler doesn't think it is a safe environment to admit such a thing."

Knapp won a Dove award in 1999 for new artist of the year, the first of four Dove Awards she won over the next five years. She also was nominated for a Grammy in 2003. Her music was played regularly on Christian radio at the time — "Undo Me" and "Whole Again" were two of her

more popular songs — but she then went on a lengthy hiatus from the industry and hasn't released an album since "The Way I Am" in 2001.

She told *Christianity Today* that she has been in a same-sex relationship with the same person since around 2002, and for much of the past eight years she and her partner have traveled throughout the U.S., Europe and Australia.

Her next album, "Letting Go," is a mainstream album. She still considers herself a Christian — she says the Bible has "saved my life" — but remains unconvinced at the often-cited Bible verses condemning homosexuality.

God's 'creative intent'

Stith said the way to win a homosexual to Christ is not through arguments but through love and compassion. "What I would want to say to Jennifer and others who may be facing her dilemma in the Christian church is that God really does have a sexual standard," Stith said. "It is based on His creative intent which is made clear in both the Old and New Testament. He did not put forth this standard to enslave us but rather to free us. When God prohibits something He always has something better for us." (BP)

Phoenix church bells ring freely again after federal court ruling

On April 19, a federal court ruled an ordinance in Phoenix trying to limit the sound of church bells is an unconstitutional impingement on religious expression.

In 2007, one day after Christ the King Cathedral moved two miles from its former location to a space near a fire station, neighbors complained the church's electronic bells — rung every hour, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. — violated the city's noise ordinance.

An 'unusual' complaint

The ordinance, which prohibits "any unusual or disturbing" sound, also allows ice cream trucks to ring at 70 decibels. The church's bells rang at 67 decibels.

"This is almost unheard of in American law," said Gary McCaleb, an attorney with the conservative Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) legal firm, who worked on the case.

Sgt. Tommy Thompson of the Phoenix Police Department agreed that the complaint was fairly "unusual," but said the hourly ringing of the bells made Christ the King perhaps a bit different from other churches.

"We value the First Amendment," Thomp-

son said. "But then we have the city ordinance. We were stuck in the middle."

Although the church attempted to appease neighbors by erecting a buffer on its speakers and passing out informational fliers, the city filed a misdemeanor complaint last year.

The church's pastor, Bishop Rick Painter, was found guilty in city court and sentenced to 10 days in jail and three years probation, though he never served time in jail.

When Painter appealed that decision, a state court limited the chiming to Sundays and designated holidays, and set a limit of 60 decibels. Two nearby churches, St. Mark Roman Catholic Church and First Christian Church, joined Painter in a federal lawsuit last September.

On April 19, the federal court ruled in favor of the church bells, saying the city cannot prohibit "sound generated in the course of religious expression."

The ADF's next stop is the state court, where the verdict against Painter is already on appeal. "We want to have the state court clear the bishop's name," McCaleb said. (RNS)

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Christians fight infant killing in Indian slum

A baby girl, only a few hours old, is carried to her execution.

The woman who holds her calls herself a midwife, but everyone in this Indian slum knows who she really is: the bringer of death.

As the woman approaches the pressure cooker, the baby's mother does nothing. She has already paid, after all, about 30 cents for her newborn daughter to be boiled alive.

The woman lowers the squirming infant into the water. The lid snaps shut. The flames rise. Then the infant's scalded corpse is tossed to the dogs for them to devour.

Even more common, a mother refuses to nurse her starving baby until the "midwife" arrives to silence her infant daughter's pleading cries with a bottle of poison and cold indifference.

If the mother cannot find help, she kills the child herself. Then she unceremoniously buries her baby beneath her house, perhaps beside other daughters discarded before this baby.

How could mothers kill?

How could a mother murder her own child?

Yet why was Baby Grace spared?

Such questions probe the depths of human depravity — and the passionate efforts of Christians who, at least in their small corner of India, may finally be turning the tide.

Sati Alva, an Indian Christian, lives a short walk from one of her city's slums. A squalid expanse of grimy one-room houses and trash-strewn alleys, it is a place teeming with misery. The men savagely beat their wives in nightly rages fueled by the alcohol they spend all their earnings to buy. The traumatized women turn to prostitution or menial labor to survive, leaving their children to gamble, drink and steal.

"That's the condition in the slum," Sati said. "Even the mothers don't really care for the children."

The children are Sati's main concern. With help from the Southern Baptist World Hunger Fund, she and her husband, Ravindra, run an after-school feeding and education program where more than 200 slum children come to escape their abusive homes, get help with homework, eat perhaps their only meal of the day and learn about Jesus.

For years, as Sati and Ravindra listened to these children sing to God, they were unaware of the blood of unborn sisters who should have been singing beside their brothers.

"The people used to come and go, but we did not know the secret that they were killing their children," Ravindra said.

Eventually he and Sati learned the truth, which the mothers themselves confirmed.

"I can tell about 80 percent of the ladies have already [killed a baby girl]," Sati said. "All the kids' mothers have done it, and they are still doing it."

It comes down to money.

"[The parents] cannot afford to bring [the girls] up," Sati explained. "They have to give them in marriage, which costs a lot, and they have to pay a dowry."

The dowry, a payment in cash or goods from the bride's family to the groom, is illegal in India but still widely practiced in villages and urban slums. Combined with other wedding expenses, it amounts to a fortune for a family struggling to survive. As a result, families in many poor areas of India allow one daughter to live but kill the rest.

"They say it's very hard for them," Sati said. "They say, 'If we cannot feed ourselves, how can we raise this girl and give her in marriage?'"

As Sati and Ravindra began to plead unsuccessfully with the slum women to spare their baby girls, they never imagined what God had in store for their lives. He revealed it in a village one day during an encounter that still haunts the couple.

"That day, a man brought us a baby that his wife and mother were about to kill," Sati recounted. "He said, 'You Christian people will take care of my baby, I know, so please take her.' He just put her in my hands and was ready to go."

Shocked and completely unprepared to care for an infant, they called the man back.

"We were not sure what we were going to do," Sati said. "We told



BP photo

CARED FOR — Children at Ravindra and Sati Alva's outreach in a slum in India show off their homework.

him, 'Take the baby. We will go look for some orphanage or some organization that can take her, then we will let you know so you can give her back to us.'"

It was a mistake she mourns with tears.

"That evening when we came back to the village, they had already killed the baby," she said. "We felt like we were the reason that child died."

In that moment, their excuses died as well. Determined that not one more baby should perish, Ravindra and Sati prayed and worked for three years to build an orphanage in a town about 70 miles from the city. They dedicated the building in October 2009.

"We announced in the slum that we were ready to take the infants," Sati said. "We said, 'Please don't kill the babies. Come and leave them here.'"

The response was heart-breaking.

"They said they would rather kill the babies than give them up," Sati said.

The women, who already feared being discovered as child-killers, worried their daughters would eventually find out who their parents were and tell others about their abandonment. Sati promised the women that the girls would be raised in the orphanage far from the city.

Then very early one morning last November, Sati's dog began barking furiously. Her housekeeper went outside to investigate.

"She opened the door and then saw the baby on the doormat," Sati recalled. Sati's heart flooded with

emotion. They had announced the opening of their orphanage a month earlier, yet at that point, its cribs were empty. Now a newborn was at their door.

"I didn't know what to do," Sati explained. "I couldn't even talk. I was really shocked."

Only three days old, Grace (as Sati soon named her) needed immediate care. Her feet were turned inward from a birth defect, and a medical checkup revealed the possibility of hepatitis, a virulent liver disease.

God's people swung into action. Sati and Ravindra's Christian friends provided clothing, diapers, formula and funds for hospital visits. Some contacted relatives in the United States, where four families asked to adopt Grace.

"God has provided everything," Sati said. "I believe He will continue to provide."

When news spread in the slum that a woman left her baby with Ravindra and Sati instead of killing her, people came to see for themselves. As Sati explained how she would have Grace's feet fixed and then take her to the orphanage, the people praised Grace's mother for making "a very good decision." It was a change in heart Sati could hardly believe.

"The ladies were saying that from now on people will start bringing more [babies] and stop killing," she recalled. "It just came out from the ladies' mouths."

For Sati, Grace is not only comfort for the baby she and Ravindra could not save years ago, but also hope that the unseen holocaust around her may finally be slowing.

"When [Grace] came, I thought 'God has answered our prayers and saved this girl,'" she said. "He will save more lives through Grace, because people are seeing [how we care for her]."

Ravindra has plenty of doubts. Although Grace was spared, he suspects most of the women will continue to murder their children, even though they now know of a safe place to leave them.

But he and Sati will still be there, working tirelessly to snatch life from the jaws of death and, they pray, to change the culture of female infanticide that still pervades the slum.

"I was just telling Ravindra that unless we have all these babies in our home,

I will not be satisfied," Sati said.

The story of baby Grace shows how seemingly insignificant acts of love can change the world in profound ways. Most Christians who donated to the World Hunger Fund probably never imagined they would be helping save a little girl destined for a pressure cooker. Those unforeseen blessings are what Southern Baptist representative Bryson Holtson wants Christians to see.

"In South Asia, there are a billion people with these huge needs, and a lot of Christians feel overwhelmed, so they don't do anything," Holtson said. "But my experience from Africa to here is the things that seem so small to us could be something people never forget."

For more information on how you can support the World Hunger Fund, visit www.imb.org/worldhunger.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names changed for security reasons. (BP)



BP photo

SAVING GRACE — Grace is the first female infant saved from death in a slum in India. Her feet, turned inward, are undergoing a series of castings.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Cecil Sherman, first CBF coordinator, dies at 82

RICHMOND, Va. — Cecil Sherman, one of the most visible moderate leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) controversy of the 1980s and first coordinator of the breakaway Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), died April 17 from complications of a heart attack. He was 82.

Sherman was born Dec. 26, 1927, in Fort Worth, Texas.

He married Dorothy "Dot" Hair, who was 10 years his senior, Dec. 23, 1953, in Greer, S.C.

Sherman was pastor of First Baptist Church, Chamblee, Ga., from 1956 to 1960. While there Dot Sherman gave birth to Eugene, their only child, who survives.

He moved to First Baptist Church, College Station, Texas, where he began his first work in larger denominational life, speaking at Baptist Student Union retreats.

He joined the staff of the Baptist General Convention of Texas to coordinate campus evangelism, where he worked until Aug. 1, 1964, when he was called to become pastor of First Baptist Church, Asheville, N.C.

In 1985, Sherman left Asheville to become pastor of Broadway Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas, a position he held until 1992.

When disenfranchised moderates decided to form their own organization following the 1990 SBC annual meeting in New Orleans, they turned to Sherman. He took the job as first coordinator of the CBF at age 64.

Sherman was preceded in death by his wife.

In addition to his daughter, he is survived by a grandson, Nathaniel, and two siblings.

Missouri convention releases state paper from lawsuit

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Attorneys for the Missouri Baptist Convention (MBC) have voluntarily released the organization's former official news journal from a long-running lawsuit against several agencies that removed themselves from convention control.

Word & Way, the historic Missouri Baptist news journal founded in 1896, has been dismissed from MBC litigation that has stretched over nearly eight years and had its roots in a successful attempt by conservatives to take control of the convention from moderates.

The convention, through its attorneys, filed a document in Cole County Circuit Court on April 23 voluntarily releasing the news journal from all claims against it.

The MBC filed legal action against five formerly affiliated institutions on Aug. 13, 2002, in an effort to force them to rescind changes in their charters. The Baptist Home retirement-home system, the Missouri Baptist Foundation, *Word & Way*, Windermere Baptist Conference Center and Missouri Baptist University each changed their corporate documents to self-elect trustees — the Home in 2000 and the others in 2001.

"The trustees and staff of *Word & Way* are elated to finally have this lawsuit behind us," Editor Bill Webb noted. "We lament that the Missouri Baptist Convention took so long to take this action."

Michael Whitehead, legal counsel for the MBC, said in a statement quoted by Baptist Press that convention leaders remain convinced the newspaper's breakaway was wrong but concluded it is in the convention's interest to halt legal efforts to recover it.

New network aims to reach 1.3M Brazilians living in U.S.

ALPHARETTA, Ga. — Brazilian Baptist pastor Silair Almeida speaks with the confidence that comes from nearly 20 years of ministry among some 300,000 Brazilians who now call south Florida home.

Almeida was one of 14 Brazilian pastors and church leaders who met for two days at the North American Mission Board (NAMB) to establish a Brazilian Mission Network that aims to exponentially expand the spread of the gospel among an estimated 1.3 million Brazilians living throughout the United States.

Only 12,000 of the Brazilians across the country worship in about 75 Baptist churches, reported Mark Hobafcovich, NAMB's consultant for urban church planting in North America.

The 1.3 million Brazilians in America predominantly live and work in nine metro areas: south Florida, an estimated 300,000; Boston, 350,000; New York, 350,000; Washington, 26,000; Atlanta, 80,000; Houston/Dallas/Austin, 50,000; Chicago, 27,000; Los Angeles, 52,000; and San Francisco, 45,000.

To begin reaching these Brazilians, Hobafcovich said Southern Baptists need to plant 400 new Brazilian Baptist churches by 2030, roughly one new church for every 3,000 Brazilians.

Telling the world Inmates share faith, help Haiti through CDs

By Anna Swindle
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Tommy Plunkett is a remarkable Christian musician. The self-taught musician has recorded a CD (with the help of about a dozen contributing friends) and has another one in the works.

Oh and Plunkett and his fellow musicians happen to be inmates at Springville's St. Clair Correctional Facility.

"I've been in the music business about 35 years and everyone always says, 'You've got to hear so-and-so!,' and usually it's not so great," said Joel Bouchillon, chief audio engineer for Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover.

"But I was totally blown away (by Plunkett). And I was thinking, 'How can I get the world to hear it?' I've never been so emotionally touched."

Multitalented

Bouchillon wasn't alone in recognizing and admiring his talent. Not only does Plunkett play the guitar, write songs and sing but he also pairs those talents with a love for Christ that shines through his music. He uses his songs to share his testimony: "I was a prisoner long before they locked the doors. I often found myself wondering what I had to live for."

Glenn Bynum, pastor of Pleasant Mount Baptist Church, Replap, is a fan of Plunkett, too. Through his involvement with a ministry at the prison, he's seen Plunkett's faith grow and watched as he began

teaching his fellow inmates music.

"We started talking a year and a half ago or so about the possibility of him recording a CD," Bynum said.

"While we were getting things straight, Hunter Street started a project. And since they have people there whose expertise is music, they got approval to go in and record."

So Bouchillon, who owns several recording studios and works with both Christian and country artists, hauled vanloads of equipment into the prison's chapel and spent two days recording with Plunkett and other inmates.

The result was "Another Captive Free," a 16-track album that Bynum said is "a mix (of genres) but more country gospel than it is traditional or southern gospel."

The CD came out in 2009 and is now played on radio stations as far away as Oklahoma.

A new project

But Plunkett and his friends are nowhere near the end of their music careers.

"Tommy and I were talking one day after a (discipleship) class, and he said he's had a burden to do a CD and donate the proceeds to Haiti relief," Bynum said. "So

we've been working now to get things approved. The only thing I have to do now is put together the recording group to go in. We need to get everything

"I was a prisoner long before they locked the doors. I often found myself wondering what I had to live for."

Tommy Plunkett
St. Clair inmate

approved to go ahead and do it but that should happen soon."

Plunkett already has six or seven songs ready for the new album, and Bynum said they plan to funnel its earnings through the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions to make sure the funds are getting directly to Haiti.

For Bouchillon, Bynum and the other prison ministry volunteers, working with the inmates has truly been a life-changing experience.

"What I've gotten from that is if you look at the general mind-set of the general population, people think that when people are incarcerated we need to lock them up and throw the key away," Bynum said.

"But what's happened to me over the years, I've seen the idea that those men, though they may be incarcerated, there is a sense of hope that they can live a meaningful life there in prison and they can do some meaningful things there even if they can never get out."

The CD is available to download at www.anothercaptivefree.com.

Panel faults Obama for lagging on religious freedom

The U.S. government is not doing enough to protect religious freedoms abroad, the independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said April 29 in its annual report to Congress and the White House.

"The problems are above and beyond what we saw last year, and

the administration must do more," said Leonard Leo, chair of the commission, which was founded by Congress in 1998.

The commission named 13 "countries of particular concern" dealing with religious freedom violations: Burma, North Korea, Nigeria, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

The panel also named 12 countries to a second-tier "watch list" that deserve close monitoring by

Washington: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Laos, Russia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Venezuela. India was the only new addition from last year.

Beyond the annual list of offenders, which has remained relatively stable in recent years, commissioners chided the Obama administration and U.S. diplomats for ignoring religion in foreign policy when so many conflicts find their roots — or justification — in religion. (RNS)


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The power of the negative

EDITOR'S NOTE—The Alabama Baptist staff is happy to introduce a new women's column to the state Baptist paper. This new column will focus on resources women can use in their lives of faith, whether lived out at home, in the workplace or in the church. The columnist is Jean Roberson, MSW, LCSW — a ministry consultant for national Woman's Missionary Union. She serves as team leader for the adult team and as director of Christian Women's Job Corps/Christian Men's Job Corps and International Initiatives. The column will run the first issue of each month beginning with the June 3 issue. Until then, we will run the column each week as a way of introduction to this new segment of the paper.

A Thought for Women

By Jean Roberson



ask her because I know she already thinks it is a bad idea?"

Unfortunately when we do this, we miss the refining power of the negative.

Though I hate to admit it, someone who disagrees with me may have good reason. That person may see obstacles that have to be overcome in order to be successful. If I do not take the time to really listen to that person, then I may miss some important steps. Furthermore if I can address the concerns and win that person over, then I may find that others follow suit.

Years ago, I was in a church that was considering a benevolence ministry. I was excited about it and saw it as a way to minister to the commu-

nity. So as we began putting together a committee, I made suggestions to the pastor for committee members, all of whom thought it was a good idea. The pastor had a few other suggestions, including two people who were opposed to the idea.

In my mind, having two committee members who were opposed meant that our committee would go nowhere. To my surprise, once I really listened, I found their concerns to be very legitimate. They correctly identified issues that had to be resolved in order for us to be successful. Truthfully the outcome was stronger because those two were involved.

Taking time to work with and discuss issues with those who disagree with you is a critical step. This is true at home, at work, at church — in all areas of our lives. Instead of seeing those who disagree as hindrances, perhaps we need to see them as resources and seek their involvement.

A Takeaway Value . . .

Talk to people who disagree with you to discover why they disagree. Be prepared to learn and be stronger because of it.

I love it when people agree with me. Don't you?

You have an idea or a perspective that you share, and everyone agrees and supports you in the course of action. It is a great moment. Unfortunately I do not think this has ever happened to me. I honestly cannot think of one time when I presented something and everyone agreed with me. It seems that there is always at least one person who disagrees or sees my idea as a mistake.

If you are like me, then your tendency is to drift toward those who agree with you.

Think about it. When you are working on a project, whether at work or in church, whom do you bring alongside to assist you? Is it someone who agrees with your idea or someone who disagrees?

Have you ever caught yourself thinking, "Well, I'm not going to



Teach me Your way, O Lord, and I will walk in Your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name.

Psalm 86:11

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CHURCH POSITIONS

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BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER: Montevallo, Ala. Should have experience in leading choir/worship service, traditional worship style, SBC church. Send resumés to: glwalker20@gmail.com or call

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Protection, not privilege

Favoring church-state separation doesn't mean being against religion, Marty says

Church-state specialist Martin E. Marty drew on historical episodes and figures to clarify aspects of the topic for audiences at Samford University in Birmingham April 27-28.

His talks were presented as this year's Walter B. and Kay W. Shurden Lectures on Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State, a series sponsored by the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and hosted by Samford.

Being in favor of separation of church and state does not mean being against religion, said Marty, respected interpreter of religion and culture and author of 50 books, many of them on the topic.

"There are strong impulses in society to say that you serve religion by protecting and privileging it," Marty said. But there is a difference in protection and privilege, which is defined as a right or immunity granted as a benefit, he noted.

"There are all kinds of ways to protect religion without privileging it," he said.

Marty told how 18th-century French philosopher Montesquieu — who wrote that religion is more harmed than helped by favoritism — influenced the writers of the U.S. Constitution



Photo courtesy of Samford University

KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE — Church-state specialist Martin E. Marty told audiences at Samford University that 'there are all kinds of ways to protect religion without privileging it.'

on matters of separation of church and state. "Montesquieu never visited America, but they were reading him," he said of the 55 founding fathers who gathered in Philadelphia, Pa., for the Constitutional Convention.

In his writings, George Washington used 28 different names for God, such as First Architect, but not one was biblical, Marty said. "They were looking for language that would enlarge the context."

The founders, he said, solved the religion problem by not solving the religion problem.

During the three-part series, Marty also told how writings and beliefs of Benjamin Franklin and James Madison played roles in matters of religious liberty.

To some extent, the quality of indifference such as that exhibited by Franklin, contributed to the lack of religious references in the Constitution, he said.

Franklin was religious, but didn't like the dogma associated with it. Nor did he like defining religions, and opposed zealotry and fanatics, said Marty, noting that zealotry and difference both play a large role in religion.

"Religion in the end almost always calls for profound, sustained passionate commitment," said Marty, an ordained Lutheran minister who taught for 35 years at the University of Chicago, primarily in the divinity school.

A degree of indifference helped move along the framing of the Constitution, which involved people who had convictions, but who had to make decisions and eventually go home.

Although Franklin once questioned why the framers did not have morning prayers to help them in their task, the idea was scuttled, in part because there were no funds for a chaplain.

Too, Marty said, the framers knew it would get them in trouble.

"They were passionate people, but they knew that introducing religion into the setting would get them in trouble." The situation, he said, "was a close-up of how it would be in the republic."

Madison predicted that it would be difficult to trace a line of separation between the rights of religion and civil authority without collisions and doubts, Marty said.

Although little is known about his religious stand as an adult, Madison saw no need for a religious protection clause in the Constitution but later became a key figure in writing the First Amendment.

It's not easy to trace the line of distinction, Marty said, citing current court cases such as those involving military endorsement of chaplains and lobbying by Catholic bishops on health care reform.

Line of distinction difficult

"Madison anticipated that it would be impossible to trace a line of distinction in all cases," Marty said. "A wall may be slender and have holes, but it's a wall. Madison said that a line wasn't something you could storm. And you could see people on the other side."

"Separation is important, and whenever we talk of convergence we must recognize potential problems," said Marty, who said Madison advised defending rights of religion, but not privileging religion. (SU)



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Letters to the Editor

BIGGER THAN BINGO

I was disappointed to see the layout of the March 4 issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. The first several pages of the print paper had articles about gambling. Buried deep into the paper was an article about thousands of Haitians choosing to follow Christ. Isn't this news a front-page story? More important than the gambling issue? Did Christ not give us the Great Commission? I can appreciate that the gambling issue is "here and now" — but I cannot appreciate this issue taking preference over souls coming to the Lord. Besides — can we change one's behavior before God changes their heart?

Jamie Jones
Huntsville, Ala.

ANSWERED PRAYER

We give praise and thanksgiving to God for answered prayer and the death of the bingo gambling bill. We also give thanks to the representatives who stood strong and did not let the bill come to a vote in the House. We appreciate the 13 senators who voted against the bill. The bill was proven to be corrupt. We know that gambling in any form brings corruption.

We need a constitutional amendment to strengthen what we have in our constitution and prohibit all means and forms of gambling, elec-

tronic bingo, slot machines and such and dog and horse racing. My prayer is that this will happen. Please join me in my prayers.

Eugene R. Thomason
Pell City, Ala.

'GOSPEL' INEQUITY

As I understand it, over two-thirds of CP (Cooperative Program) money goes to reaching one-third of the U.S. population — namely the Southeast. When you add all the resources spent by local churches on their own outreach, staff and buildings, at the end of the day, only a scant percentage of SBC (Southern Baptist Convention) giving goes to combating great pockets of lostness in the world. Brothers, this should not be. I am saddened that this means the loss of state convention jobs, but I hope for sweeping changes from the GCR (Great Commission Resurgence) Task Force to address this "gospel" inequity.

K.J. Pugh
Northport, Ala.

BECK IS WRONG

Thank you for the April 8 editorial "Glenn Beck Is Wrong." It was timely and much needed. Having seen clips of his remarks, I agree that his equating biblical principals of social and economic justice with communism and Nazism is

insulting and wrong. I looked to his website to see his words in context but was unable to find that portion of the March 2 broadcast regarding social justice in the archives. I did listen to the lengthy justification of his remarks that he made later as well as his pontifications on other subjects. All have the same disturbing undercurrents.

It appears to me that it is Mr. Beck who is perverting the meaning of social justice and the motivation of Christians who take seriously the 2,000 verses in the Bible related to issues of poverty, injustice, oppression, hunger, illness and disease as we try to live out our Christianity.

M. Joyce Greathouse
Birmingham, Ala.

GIVE US MORE

Thank you, thank you for the article in the April 22 issue, "The necessity of believer's baptism." I find the article to be very superb and very enjoyable to read. I would like to see more of these kinds of topics about our Baptist history, beliefs and sacraments in *The Alabama Baptist*. Every one of us needs to know our Baptist history and why we believe what we believe. These kinds of articles would be a blessing and a great educational tool.

Jackie Adams
Athens, Ala.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 9

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

HOW DO YOU CONTRIBUTE? Exodus 35:4-9, 30-36:1; 40:12-15

Offerings to the Lord (35:4-9)

Moses invited the people to make voluntary offerings of materials needed for building the tabernacle. The offerings were collected from property in the possession of Israelite families. God did not require things the Israelites did not already have. The list of items suggests how God had blessed them with possessions. Notice the diversity of the materials ranging from very expensive items to everyday objects owned by the majority of the people. The variety of items required to build the tabernacle provided opportunity for all to give. All gifts, no matter their worth, were given equal value in God's eyes. The important part was the people's willingness to give freely to God's purposes.

A few important principles of stewardship can be found in this passage.

First, although God commanded the Israelites to give, He still allowed them to give freely without forcing them to make offerings. Throughout Scripture, God commands us to give, but He never takes our offerings by force. God desires a cheerful giver, not one who gives out of compulsion (2 Cor. 9:7).

Secondly God never asks for more than what we are able to give but He does ask us to give what we have. Everything is God's, which makes us stewards of what He has given us (Ps. 24:1). Making financial offerings to God (and His church by extension) is simply giving back to Him what He has blessed us with already.

Abilities to the Lord (35:30-36:1)

Moses announced the appointment of Bezalel, Oholiab and others who would help the people build the tabernacle. These men were "filled ... with the Spirit of God" in order to carry out their work. The builders' talent was not their own but a gift from God much like the material possessions that were requested from the Israelites earlier. Their abilities and knowledge were used for God's purposes. The detailed work that

went into building the tabernacle also required a significant time commitment. Not only were their abilities required but their time was also a crucial part of their offering to the Lord. God would build a beautiful structure through the hands of people who surrendered their time and abilities to Him.

More principles of stewardship can be gained from this passage. Stewardship involves much more than simply giving our tithes and offerings. It also involves giving our time and talents. Like our financial blessings, our abilities and knowledge are gifts from God to be used for His glory. Many who regularly give to the church believe their duties are complete. But God also wants us to give our abilities to His service whenever and wherever they may be useful for His purposes. Blessings from God in all their different forms carry a responsibility to bless others and further His Kingdom.

Life to the Lord (40:12-15)

Once the tabernacle was completed, Aaron and his sons were brought there to be consecrated for priestly service. This was not a one-time or temporary appointment but a lifelong commitment for Aaron, his sons and the generations of his family line. The Israelites gave offerings, the appointed builders erected the tabernacle but Aaron's family would serve in the tabernacle for generations to come. This "offering" involved a serious commitment and a willingness to give up everything for God.

The ultimate lesson of stewardship can be found in this passage. Although giving money, talent and time is necessary, it is one's entire life that God desires. Money, talent and time must not be substitutes for the whole person. Giving one's life to the Lord is not just for pastors and other ministers. Anyone who follows Christ must give all of the self to Him so that the true, new self can be resurrected (Rom. 6:4).

True stewardship, therefore, begins with an entire life that is submitted to God. Money, time and talents are given more enthusiastically when a life is already under Christ's lordship.

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

'I TAKE YOU'

Genesis 2:23-25; Malachi 2:13-15; Matthew 19:3-12

The Operating Room

I typically experience a distinctive exhilaration whenever I preside at a wedding. That exhilaration stems from my conviction that I am involved in a unique, divinely created and eternally significant event called holy matrimony. The Bible encourages such thoughts. Take note of the account of the first surgery, performed by the only true God upon the first human being ever created: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.' ... So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to come over the man and he slept. God took one of his ribs and closed the flesh at that place. Then the Lord God made the rib He had taken from the man into a woman and brought her to the man. ... This is why a man leaves his father and mother and bonds with his wife and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:18, 21-22, 24).

Has a more extraordinary thing ever occurred? The first surgery has to be in the top 10 most extraordinary events to take place in the history of the universe, does it not? They — the man and the woman — become one flesh, the Lord said. Do we still believe this? Do you believe it? Jesus said of the marriage bond, "What God has joined together, man must not separate." Do you see why my occasional participation in a wedding ceremony evokes wonder and awe from me? I am on the scene of a divine act of "joining together;" of a "making of the two, one flesh." If we believe this to be true, then surely we must know that the repercussions of divorce must be uniquely tragic and profound for the husband and wife, the community of faith and the wider human community they inhabit.

Post-surgery

How do we account for the exponential rise in the divorce rate that many of us have witnessed within our lifetimes? Surely part of the explanation involves forgetting or neglecting what God has taught us about marriage. Our sense of God's meticulous and personal interest in — indeed His presence and activity

in — the marriage event has been weakened and even lost to our consciousness. Have we not approximated within the church a more secular understanding of marriage as a private matter between the man and the woman involved? Oh yes, we sincerely ask for God's help in building a strong, healthy and lasting marriage, but do we consider God's lordship over that union He created and the connection between the survival of the marriage and His redemptive work among us?

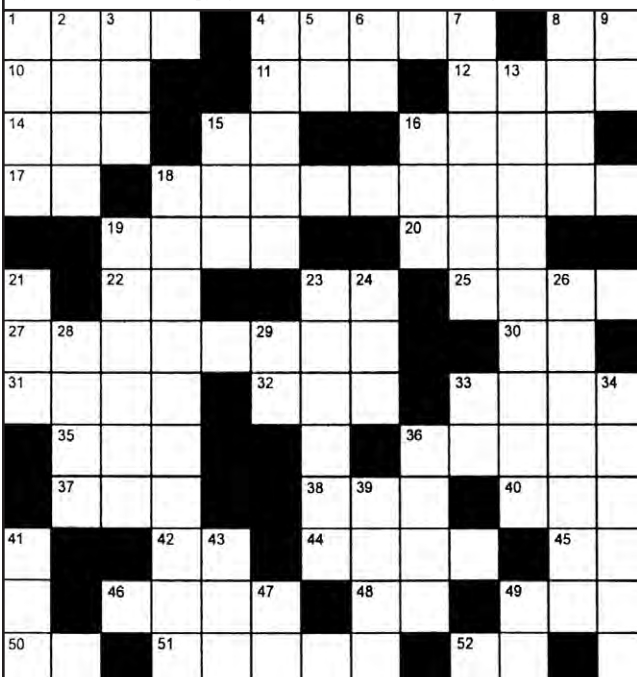
Preventative Medicine

Is it not fascinating that God, at the opening and the closing of the Old Testament, speaks to us of marriage in the context first of creation and then of salvation? Listen to the words of the prophet Malachi: "[The Lord] no longer respects your offerings or receives [them] gladly from your hands. Yet you ask, 'For what reason?' Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have acted treacherously against her, though she was your marriage partner and your wife by covenant." Take note of that word "covenant." Marriage involves a covenant commitment between a man and a woman enacted before the community and God. Covenant bonds involve solemn promises between two parties. Marriage was created by God as a mirror of His covenant with us human beings. It is not for nothing that God characterizes our covenant unfaithfulness as "adultery," as our "playing the harlot."

Do we think of marriage in such terms? We should. Faithfulness in marriage reflects the faithfulness of our God. My wife could move out and divorce me tomorrow, and there might well be little or nothing that I could do about it. Would she or I then be cut off from God's grace? Must we both then be forever relegated to a kind of modern-day spiritual leper colony among God's people? No on both counts. But make no mistake about it, the need to recover the power to build and nurture lasting marriages is every bit as urgent as the need to learn how to be sensitive and redemptive to the perpetrators and victims of divorce. The sooner we learn to do both the better for all concerned.

Christian Crossword

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Across

- For God cannot be tempted with _____. (James 1:13)
- The voice of doves _____ upon their breasts. (Nah. 2:7)
- From. (French)
- Feather scarf.
- Grow old.
- Highest point.
- He shall pour _____ upon it. (Lev. 2:1)
- Prayer book. (abbr.)
- Father, forgive _____. (Luke 23:34)
- North Dakota. (abbr.)
- He that goeth about as a _____ revealeth secrets. (Prov. 20:19)
- Let God be _____, but every man a liar. (Rom. 3:4)
- Absence. (abbr.)
- Egyptian sun god.
- He had sent messengers to _____ king of Egypt. (2 Kings 17:4)
- Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib ... the fourth to _____ im. (1 Chron. 24:7, 8)
- So can no _____ both yield

salt water and fresh. (James 3:12)

- Citizens band radio.
- Spanish aunts.
- Prefix meaning "before."
- Ye shall not fulfil the _____ of the flesh. (Gal. 5:16)
- Liquified natural gas.
- Then _____ and the other apostles answered, we ought to obey God. (Acts 5:29)
- Steamer. (abbr.)
- Hubbub.
- Before. (poetic)
- Each. (abbr.)
- It is a _____ thing that the king requireth. (Dan. 2:11)
- Part of speech. (abbr.)
- Naum, which was the son of _____. (Luke 3:25)
- Return unto _____. (Mal. 3:7)
- _____ boweth down. (Isa. 46:1)
- What shall we _____? (Acts 2:37)
- _____ women shall take hold of one man. (Isa. 4:1)
- 3.14159.

Down

- Black wood. (poetic)
- Faith is made _____. (Rom. 4:14)
- Adjective suffix.
- Thou preparest a _____ before me. (Ps. 23:5)
- Symbol for the element silver.
- Exist.
- Belonging to a notable harlot.
- Greek community.
- Former.
- And I will _____ them with the sword. (Jer. 29:18)
- The name of his city was _____. (Gen. 36:39)
- Beverage.
- I am purposed that my mouth shall not _____. (Ps. 17:3)
- Absent without permission.
- Ship's stern.
- Indian nobleman.
- They were afraid both _____ and other. (Jer. 36:16)
- Ye _____ days, and months. (Gal. 4:10)
- Greases.
- News service.

- French article.
- _____ clef.
- Skin opening.
- Condemn to everlasting punishment.
- Receive him not, neither _____ him God speed. (2 John 10)
- Tavern brew.
- Roman numeral 4.
- At intervals of two.



World Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Pakistani Muslims beat, sodomize Christian barber

SARGODHA, Pakistan — A Christian barber in a Punjab province city is still recovering from broken bones and other injuries sustained in April after eight Muslims allegedly beat and sodomized him for cutting the beard of a Muslim.

Marwat Masih, 29, initially refused the request of 19-year-old Qandeel Cheema to cut his beard in Sargodha's Gulshan-e-Bashir town April 13, knowing that area Sunni Muslims believe the Quran prohibits it.

But Cheema, a high school student, told Masih that he had lived and studied in Lahore and therefore wanted a more modern look, Masih told Compass Direct News.

Masih was cutting Cheema's beard, the client's older brother — local radical Muslim land owner Shakeel Cheema — was returning by tractor from his fields and, noting the family Jeep in front of the Marwat Hair Stylist shop, stopped in, eyewitnesses said.

Shakeel Cheema shouted orders to his companions to tie Masih up and throw him into the wagon attached to his tractor, and that he ordered his younger brother to leave for Lahore at once, according to eyewitnesses.

Masih said he was blindfolded with a black cloth and taken to an unknown place where he was locked in a room.

An hour later, Shakeel Cheema and seven others arrived and began striking him with clubs, breaking his ribs, a wrist and leg bones.

His father, Laal Masih, older brother Hassrat Masih and other relatives had begun searching for him, and after midnight that night they found him lying half-naked and unconscious off the main street of Gulshan-e-Bashir, his father said.

Police have refused to file a First Information Report against Cheema and his accomplices, all of whom remained at large at press time.

Number of Christians killed in Nigeria on the rise

JOS, Nigeria — The killing of Christians in Jos, Plateau state, in Nigeria continued April 24 with two journalists and five other people falling victim to Muslim youth gangs.

Nathan S. Dabak, an assistant editor at a newspaper of the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) called *The Light Bearer*, and Sunday Gyang Bwede, a reporter at the publication, were stabbed to death April 24 at Gado-Bako in Jos North Local Government Area, along with an unidentified motorcyclist.

Dabak, 36, and Bwede, 39, had left their office on the morning of April 24 and were on their way to interview local politician Bulus Kaze when they fell into the hands of young Muslim men, said Pandang Yamsat, president of COCIN.

The state branch of the Nigerian Union of Journalists condemned the circumstances that led to the death of the two journalists.

Four other Christians also were killed April 24 in the Dutse Uku district of Jos' Nasarawa Gwom area in a revenge attack following the discovery of the corpse of a teenage Muslim who had been missing. Their names were not released at press time.

The four Christians reportedly died, three of them stabbed to death, when hundreds of Muslim youths rampaged throughout the area in protest.

Earlier police reportedly exhumed eight bodies from shallow graves in a predominantly Christian village near Jos. The discovery of the bodies brought to 15 the number of corpses found in three days in an area fraught with Muslim aggression that has left hundreds of Christians dead.

Jos has become a flash point for ethnic and religious tensions in Plateau state, which is located between Nigeria's mainly Muslim north and Christian south.

Authorities recover tortured Pakistani Christian family

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — On April 26, local authorities recovered a 14-year-old Christian girl from Pakistan Air Force (PAF) police who allegedly tortured her and her family for five days as Christian "soft targets" over false theft allegations, sources said. Islamabad police in predominantly Sunni Muslim Pakistan removed Sumera Pervaiz from a PAF hospital, where she was recovering from injuries that a doctor said could cripple her for life. Her family was removed as well.

Christian organizations including Ephlal Ministry, Peace Pakistan, Protect Foundation, Life for All and others have condemned the incident. Ephlal Ministry Chairman Mehboob Alam has called on other Christian leaders to assist the family, as they have been evicted from their PAF quarters.

Kentucky court denies \$10M in state funding for Baptist pharmacy school

The Kentucky Supreme Court ruled April 22 that Baptist-affiliated University of the Cumberland cannot use \$10 million of taxpayer money to build a pharmacy school.

The high court said the funds, appropriated by the Kentucky General Assembly in 2006, violate the state constitution's prohibition on public funding of "any church, sectarian or denominational school." In a divided decision, justices also ruled that a \$1 million scholarship program for students at the school violated a section of the constitution that says "where a general law can be made applicable, no special law shall be enacted."

Formerly called Cumberland College, the University of the Cum-

berlands is affiliated with the Kentucky Baptist Convention. Founded by Baptist ministers in 1889, the school has historically served students primarily from the collective mountain regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio and Alabama traditionally known as Appalachia.

State lawmakers appropriated funds to begin a school of pharmacy there so that students from the area wouldn't have to travel so far to get a pharmacological education. Legislators reasoned the action would also make it more likely they would remain close to home to pursue their careers.

Justice Lisabeth Hughes Abramson, however, said in the court opinion that if Kentucky needs to expand the opportunities for pharmacy school education, the General Assembly "may most certainly address that pressing public need, but not by appropriating public funds to an educational institution that is religiously affiliated."

Justices rejected an argument by university lawyers that the state constitution ban violates the free-exercise and free-speech clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. They also rejected a defense argument that the law

is Kentucky's version of "Blaine Amendments," constitutional provisions passed in several states in the 1800s restricting government aid to "sectarian" schools prompted by anti-Catholic bigotry that was a recurring theme of politics of the time.

A 'grand irony'

In a concurring opinion, Justice Bill Cunningham sought to dispel "any abiding notion" that the court was "taking a legalistic swipe at religion."

"Nothing could be further from the truth," Cunningham wrote. "Decisions like that endorsed by our majority here today have paved the way for religion to grow and prosper in this land of the free."

Cunningham called it a "grand irony" that the case involved a Baptist-supported college seeking state support for a pharmacy school.

"Separation of church and state has been an axiom of the Baptists for centuries," he said. "The early Baptists, at least, believed that church and state are mutually beneficial only if they remain distinct and separate in the normal affairs of life." (ABP)

Military chaplains warn about gays serving openly

More than 40 retired military chaplains warned President Obama and Defense Secretary Robert Gates that allowing gays to serve openly in the military will force current chaplains to choose between obeying God or men.

"This forced choice must be faced, since orthodox Christianity — which represents a significant percentage of religious belief in the armed forces — does not affirm homosexual behavior," the chaplains wrote in their April 28 letter.

The retired chaplains — affiliated with denominations including the Southern Baptist Convention — said the change could force chaplains to water down their teachings, or force them to preach or counsel views that conflict with official military policies.

In February, Gates said the Pentagon would spend a year studying the ramifications of repealing the 17-year-old Don't Ask/Don't Tell policy.

Also on April 28, the executive director of the International Conference of Evangelical Chaplain Endorsers asked members to contact the Armed Forces Chaplains Board, which is seeking information from chaplain groups about how the repeal of the policy would affect chaplains. (RNS)

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BP photo

PRIZED POSSESSIONS — A Dinka cow keeper protects his herd from predators and thieves with an AK-47. The number of cattle owned is a sign of affluence in the Dinka society of southern Sudan.

Livestock for life

U.S. cattlemen use cows to raise AIDS awareness

What could a few good ol' boys from the Deep South have in common with a bunch of hardened, spear-throwing Dinka men in Sudan?

Cows.

Taking laminated photos from their backpacks, four Southern Baptist volunteers from Corinth, Miss. — Danny Turner, Kenneth Brawner, Jay Mitchell and Billy Taylor — show their prized cows to the Dinka herders. The young herders surround the Mississippians to view the pictures.

The volunteers have flown halfway around the world to share Christ with these cattle keepers and teach them about HIV/AIDS prevention.

Their interest in cows is a natural point of connection, with the Mississippians using the few Dinka words they know to begin the conversation.

"These people love their cows

and they respect others who feel the same," said Turner, who once owned more than 100 head of cattle but now works in insurance.

Cows are at the center of life for the Dinka, an animistic people group of nearly 3 million. In addition to providing milk, cows are a sign of affluence — the number of cattle owned determines wealth and standing in Dinka society. The herders carry spears and guns to protect their livestock from thieves and predators.

The four Mississippi volunteers are working in one of hundreds of cattle camps in southern Sudan. Dinka herders travel from camp to camp as they move their livestock from water source to water source, which changes depending on the rains.

"Cattle camps are the heart of the Dinka people," said Jermaine Edwards, a Baptist Global Response partner who works in the project to connect Dinka herders and U.S. volunteers.

The herders' traditional lifestyle is to move with their livestock, with the camps having a partylike atmosphere that includes celebratory dances, spontaneous jumping competitions and uninhibited sexual activity.

Though many Dinka have settled in towns throughout southern Sudan, "those who no longer live at the camps wish they could again," Edwards said.

Because of their promiscuity, the herders are at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, then spreading the disease.

Jennifer Miller, who also works on the project, explained: "We wanted to find a way to bring AIDS awareness to them that would hit home, that would connect with their lives and culture and would address their animistic view of the world."

Most of the herders do not read, so oral stories are used to teach

morals and communicate truth. Miller, 25, and a co-worker, Whitney Prewitt, 24, developed a series of stories the volunteers use to teach in the cattle camps.

Some of the stories come from the Bible while others are based on Dinka folklore and lifestyle.

"The stories range from helping show them how to make wise decisions based on a Dinka folktale to ... God's control over all the earth," Prewitt said.

"We also share basic AIDS stories," she said. "One is about a man who had five sons; four got AIDS. This story shows the ways to contract AIDS and also how to avoid the disease."

Campsite storytelling

Prewitt and Miller, as single females, know they have no authority in Dinka society, in which only men are respected, so the male volunteers take the initiative in connecting with the cattle herders.

As the Americans walk through the dusty cattle camp, stopping to take pictures of proud Dinka with their prized cows, they invite the herders to their campsite to listen to the stories.

After all the cows are tethered to stakes so they won't wander away during the night, some of herders gather at the volunteers' campsite. And as the volunteers talk, the cattle herders listen intently.

"No kawajas [foreigners] have ever come and stayed in our cattle camp," a young Dinka said. "We are uneducated people, and we have never heard anything of this disease before.

"Thank you for bringing this message to us." (BP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Army disinvents Franklin Graham to speak at Pentagon

NASHVILLE — Backlash over Evangelist Franklin Graham speaking at the Pentagon as part of the National Day of Prayer observance has prompted the U.S. Army to rescind an invitation it had extended to the National Day of Prayer Task Force.

Graham, son of Billy Graham and this year's honorary National Day of Prayer Task Force chairman, is being criticized for comments he has made in the past expressing his belief that Islam is a dangerous religion.

Mikey Weinstein, founder of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates on April 19 "demanding" that the Pentagon choose a more inclusive speaker for the event.

According to Reuters, the Army said it did not invite Graham to speak at the event organized through the Pentagon chaplain's office. The invitation was extended to the task force, which in turn asked Graham to speak.

"Once the Army leadership became aware that Rev. Graham was speaking at this event, we immediately recognized it as problematic," Col. Tom Collins, an Army spokesman, said. "The bottom line here is that his presence would be inappropriate. His past statements are not consistent with the multifaith emphasis and inclusiveness of this event."

In a statement released April 22, Graham said he regrets that the Army felt it was necessary to rescind the invitation to the task force, and he expressed strong support for the U.S. military and said he would continue to pray for the troops.

Most 'Millennials' have spiritual void, recent study shows

NASHVILLE — Two-thirds of Americans born between 1980 and 1991 identify themselves as Christians, but most do not regularly pray, read the Bible or attend church, according to findings of a new LifeWay Research study.

Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources who is using the research for an upcoming book, estimated that no more than 15 percent of the 80 million young adults known as "Millennials" have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

According to the survey, 31 percent of Millennials pray at least once a day, while 20 percent never pray. Sixty-seven percent said they rarely or never read the Bible, Torah, Koran or other sacred writings, and 8 percent said they read the Bible every day.

One in four attends religious worship once a week or more, but two out of three rarely or never attend a house of worship. Fewer than half believe the Bible is the written Word of God and is totally accurate in all it teaches.

Four in 10 Millennials say the devil, or Satan, is not a real being but rather a symbol of evil. Half believe Jesus Christ was human and committed sins while on earth.

Seven out of 10 Millennials believe heaven is a real place and not just a concept, but they are split 50/50 on whether believing in Jesus is the only way to get there. Six in 10 believe in a literal hell, while the most popular belief about life after death — held by 31 percent — is that "no one really knows what will happen after we die."

Arkansas judge rules unmarried couples can adopt

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — An Arkansas judge has overturned the state's voter-approved law prohibiting adoptions by unmarried couples, a decision critics say will harm children in the foster care and adoption systems who need a stable home with a mother and father.

The April 16 ruling by Pulaski County Circuit Judge Christopher C. Piazza strikes down the Arkansas Adoption and Foster Care Act, which passed 57 percent to 43 percent in 2008 and which prohibited cohabitating couples — heterosexual or homosexual — from adopting. Piazza said the law violates the Arkansas constitution's guaranteed right to privacy and forces couples "to choose between becoming a parent and having any meaningful type of intimate relationship outside of marriage." The law, Piazza said, targets a "politically unpopular group."

The American Civil Liberties Union filed the suit on behalf of several homosexual couples. Utah is the only other state with a similar law.

Although the Arkansas Family Council Action Committee — which sponsored the ballot initiative — said it will appeal, Arkansas Attorney General Dustin McDaniel has not given a definitive answer.