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Getting radical

Hundreds of Brook Hills members sacrifice big for sake of Kingdom

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Your church only thought it squirmed when your pastor preached on tithing.

Imagine this.

It's Sunday morning, and your pastor opens the Word and begins preaching from Numbers 13-14, encouraging the congregation to faithfulness, not fearfulness, when it comes to following God's leadership to take the land.

Then he gets specific.

He mentions a community roughly 15 miles away, a part of town you don't really want your wife or daughter driving through in the daytime, much less at night.

And then he asks you to pray about taking your family and moving there.

What would you do?

When David Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, posed that question to his congregation March 7, you could've heard a pin drop in the room.

But that just made it all the better for Chuck and Margaret Clarke — and roughly 40 other families and singles — to hear the call just that much more clearly.

Forty households. All looking toward putting "For Sale" signs in the yard and surfing real estate ads in neighborhoods nothing like their own.

"People might be surprised at that response to a sermon, but it wasn't an isolated message," Chuck Clarke said. "For three years, David has been preaching what it means to be a follower of Christ, so now when the opportunities come, people are ready to take them."

And God makes it happen once you do, he explained. The Clarks got a cash offer on their condo nearly immediately after surrendering to the idea of uprooting. They quickly found themselves prepping with their three children for a move to inner-city Birmingham.

And it wasn't long after moving that they found themselves already a mainstay in the neighborhood.



Photo by Grace Thornton

RADICAL MOVE — (Back row, from left) Chuck and Margaret Clarke and their kids, Timothy, 6; Anna Katherine, 13; and Matthew, 12 (not pictured), are the first of about 40 families from The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, to move into the inner city. Others are sacrificing in ways such as fostering children or combating poverty in India.

In the afternoons, Anna Katherine Clarke, 13, invites groups of neighborhood kids up onto the sprawling porch of the Clarks' new home, and her mother offers them a spread of drinks.

"You want to just go in and get yourself a snack while you wait on your parents to get home?" Margaret Clarke asks two little girls.

Another crawls into her lap and

starts munching on a pretzel stick — she's already made herself at home.

"We just wanted to be a place of refuge in the neighborhood, and [the house] is already fulfilling what we wanted," Margaret Clarke said. "We want people to come and feel loved and welcome and safe."

Do the Clarks themselves feel safe?

"We heard gunshots yesterday

morning, two houses down. That's all around us," she said. "But God has woven such a beautiful tapestry of His grace in leading us here that we know if anything happens to us, it's going to be OK."

They are the first to move there from Brook Hills, but others will be joining them soon, including Ben DeLoach, the church's associate

(See 'Radical,' page 4)

The Baptist named among top Christian papers

The Alabama Baptist continues to hold its spot among the best regional Christian newspapers in the nation.

For the 14th consecutive year, the state Baptist newspaper has garnered the top award among Christian newspapers from at least one of the four national religious press organizations of which it is a member.

For its work in 2009, The Alabama Baptist staff won an award of excellence for best overall regional newspaper from the Religion Communi-

cators Council (RCC) and a best in class award of merit from the Associated Church Press (ACP).

For specific issues of the paper related to design and content, the staff won an award of excellence from RCC for the March 5, 2009, issue; an honorable mention from ACP for the July 16, 2009, issue; and an honorable mention from ACP for the July 23, 2009, front page.

The staff also brought home several individual awards in writing, photography and audio-visual categories.

Topping the list of writing awards was the electronic bingo gambling coverage by Jennifer Davis Rash and Sondra Washington. Rash and Washington earned an award of excellence for their coverage from ACP, a first place award from the Baptist Communicators Association (BCA) and a second place award from Evangelical Press Association (EPA).

Rash also won an award of merit from RCC for the coverage, and Washington won a first place award (See 'TAB,' page 4)

COMMENT

Too Much Change to Be Dogmatic

Not since Baptists gathered in Augusta, Ga., in 1845 to organize the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) have they faced so much change in such a short period of time. In a matter of months, Southern Baptists face major changes in leadership, relationships between the national body and state conventions and how to finance the work done together.

It is simply overwhelming. It certainly is too much change to allow anyone to be dogmatic about what the future holds.

Just last week, Frank Page was named the new president and chief executive officer for the SBC Executive Committee. He succeeds Morris Chapman, who is retiring after 17 years at that important post.

It was anticipated that a new president of the International Mission Board (IMB) would have been elected by now. Jerry Rankin retires July 31 after nearly 17 years as leader of the IMB. The IMB search committee set February as its initial goal to have a successor. That was moved to May, and now the IMB board of trustees is preparing to appoint an interim president if a nominee is not in place by Rankin's retirement date.

At the North American Mission Board (NAMB), the search goes on to replace Geoff Hammond, who was forced out last August. Richard Harris has been serving as interim president of NAMB since Hammond left — first in a temporary role, then as the official interim president.

Arguably the three most important leadership positions in Southern Baptist life are all in the midst of change. No one knows what impact new leadership will have on any of the groups individually or the convention as a whole.

Add to the leadership changes a new president of the SBC. Johnny Hunt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga., near Atlanta, completes his two years of service when Southern Baptists gather in Orlando, Fla., June 15–16. What emphases will the new president bring?

Confusion on how things will work

In addition to leadership changes, Southern Baptists are considering changes in the way state conventions work with the national body to carry out agreed upon ministries. The Great Commission Resurgence (GCR) Task Force report recommends scrapping what is called “cooperative agreements.” This plan, used for about 50 years, allows NAMB representatives to negotiate with state convention missions leaders to determine what projects and ministries the organizations can mutually support.

Nothing is done that does not fit NAMB's strat-



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

egy and purpose, and nothing is done that state conventions do not support.

In place of “cooperative agreements” is a proposal for NAMB to work in cooperation with state conventions, especially in planting new churches, but what form that cooperation will take is unclear. In the meantime, there is a lot of confusion, even fear, about the negative impact the proposal could have on existing work.

There is more confusion about how established state conventions like Alabama's will work with NAMB in the years ahead if the GCR Task Force report is adopted.

Concerns about funding

The question of who will do Cooperative Program (CP) promotion and stewardship education illustrates the confusion. Since the CP was established in 1925, state conventions and the SBC have worked together to promote it. Until 1997, Southern Baptists had the Stewardship Commission, which worked closely with state conventions in this area. The Covenant for a New Century, adopted in 1995, eliminated the commission, and the assignment eventually ended up with the Executive Committee.

The task force's preliminary report recommended transferring the assignment to state conventions and taking the money the Executive Committee spent on CP promotion and stewardship education, with additional funds, and giving it to the IMB.

The final report states the Executive Committee will work with state conventions on the assignment but still redirects the money to the IMB. (The full report can be read at www.pray4gcr.com) That leaves many observers scratching their heads. How will the SBC and state conventions work together under the new plan?

Concerns about funding Southern Baptist work at home and around the world also abound. The CP has been the primary missions giving channel for 85 years. Special offerings for international missions and North American missions supplement this missions giving. No one is belittling the CP. Everyone affirms its importance.

Still some are uncertain about a new giving category — Great Commission Giving. This new category would be on the Annual Church Profile and

include all funds given to Southern Baptist causes. What has some people worried is whether this is a subtle shift away from “equal sacrifice,” as evidenced by percentage giving through the CP, to a celebration of large dollar gifts by megachurches even though those dollars make up a small percentage of the churches' income.

Added to all of this is the continued “trash talking” about ministry partners. The GCR was born in a speech at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., that blasted state conventions for being “bloated bureaucracies.” When state convention leaders howled in protest, that language was quickly dropped. But days before the final report was released, at least one GCR Task Force member was back on the stage at Southeastern Seminary blasting state conventions for being “bloated bureaucracies.”

Is this anyway to talk about one that is supposed to be a ministry partner and part of the same Southern Baptist family?

State conventions have not fired back in kind, choosing instead to try to calm the rhetoric and salvage relationships. But the “trash talk” has raised questions about whether the SBC wants to work with state conventions as the equal partners that they are or whether the SBC cares about state conventions at all.

All of the changes, all of the issues Southern Baptists face certainly should cause everyone involved to confess together with the apostle Paul that “now I see through a glass darkly.” This is no time for arrogance. It is time for humility. This is not a time to be concerned about winning or losing, “saving face” or being embarrassed.

This is a time when everyone should go slowly and speak softly. Working through change is difficult. It takes time and effort. Rushing through change usually leads to disaster.

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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Letters to the Editor

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'We are a Great Commission state convention'

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

It was 1998 and the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) executive director-elect — Rick Lance — pondered how he would lead Alabama Baptists into the 21st century.

In a matter of minutes, Lance scribbled down what he believed was a word from God and his new "north star" — one mission, the Great Commission; one program, the Cooperative Program (CP); many ministries, Great Commission ministries.

Now, 12 years later, that phrase is as much a part of Alabama Baptist life in general as it is Lance's personal focal point as SBOM executive director.

"We have always sought to be guided by the Great Commission," he said. "The discussion of and debate about the Great Commission is not new to Alabama Baptist life."

That's why he's glad to hear the topic being talked about so frequently in Southern Baptist circles.

Even though some aspects of the recently finalized Great Commission Resurgence (GCR) Task Force proposal (visit www.pray4gcr.com) concern Lance, "the good news is, we are talking about the Great Commission again."

"We can reclaim that discussion in Baptist life, and good can always come out of any kind of debate," he noted.

But no matter what happens with the task force proposal, "we (the SBOM) are not going to allow disagreements to define relationships," Lance told those attending the SBOM meeting in Montgomery on May 14.

"We are not going to be obstructionists or antagonists. That's not our spirit," he said, noting he is committed to the traditional cooperative spirit that defines Alabama Baptists.

"We are going to be ministry partners with the SBC (Southern Baptist Convention)," Lance said. "I think we all want the same thing. We may want to go about it differently, but we all want the same thing."

"We all believe passionately in the Great Commission. Not any of us are anti-Great Commission," he said, also commending the GCR Task Force members for their "good hearts" and passion for the Great Commission. "I would hope no one would think that in Alabama nor as we meet in Orlando (Fla., for the SBC annual meeting in June)."

'Biblical mandate'

State convention President Jimmy Jackson agreed.

"The Great Commission is a biblical mandate from the Lord Himself, but the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force itself is not," he said. "I want to be able to vote against it without being labeled being against the Great Commission. It will be unfair if we are labeled that way."

Lance's concerns about the task force's proposal revolve around the potential change in relationship with the North American Mission Board (NAMB), state conventions and associations; an SBC-recommended encouragement of designated giving to any entity; CP/stewardship responsibilities assigned to states and reworking missions fields to include a "borderless" International Mission Board (IMB).

"The change in relationship with NAMB



Photo by Doug Rogers

DISCUSSING GCR — Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, delivers his 'state of the state' address on the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force report during the May 14 SBOM meeting in Montgomery.

is pretty much centered around cooperative agreements," he said. "These have been called into question in recent days and that caught me a bit by surprise. If this had been an issue that we needed to debate as Southern Baptists then NAMB could have done that with state conventions."

'Do what we have to do'

If the cooperative agreements end, then Alabama's funding from NAMB — including NAMB missionaries in the state — will be gone in seven years.

"It won't be easy," he said. "But if it helps advance the work, then we'll do what we have to do to cooperate."

As far as Great Commission Giving, "I do not completely understand what it is," Lance said, but "my main concern is whether or not that will overshadow CP giving."

"The unified budget of Southern Baptists and the state conventions is the CP," he said, noting Alabama will be expected to find funding to promote CP giving among Alabama Baptists under the proposed plan.

Still Lance said the SBOM will continue to "passionately promote the Cooperative Program."

"It is the central, preferred, predominate way we do missions together as the conduit in reaching Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth."

And the GCR Task Force has also reaffirmed the CP, Lance noted. "Other ideas were floated ... but the final report does reaffirm giving through the CP."

As far as ministry partners within the state, "we will keep a close-working partnership with churches and associations," he said, noting the SBOM will also remain strong ministry partners with existing entities.

"Whether or not NAMB has funds to help us in church planting, we are going to do church planting in Alabama," he said. "We

have needs that need to be addressed and we must find ways to do that."

The task force members emphasize church planting and "that is very important," Lance said. "Church planting is a very important evangelistic tool for Great Commission ministries. It is not the only way to do evangelism, but it is a very effective way to reach people."

The idea of a "borderless" IMB working in North America as well as NAMB and the state conventions is an "untested paradigm," Lance explained.

Noting he believes in reaching all areas for the gospel as spelled out in Acts 1:8 and doing it simultaneously, Lance said he is just not sure the strategy has been thoroughly vetted.

"I'm sure those kinds of relationships can be worked out. The world has come to our world, and the various ethnic groups will be the focus of the IMB," he said. "But once people come to America, they acclimate themselves more than we think they do."

While the state convention's strategy and NAMB's strategy are not flawless, neither is the IMB's strategy, Lance noted. But it seems that the main examination happened with NAMB.

"I think the motion (at the SBC annual meeting) last year was to study Great Commission effectiveness in Southern Baptist life," he said. "Attention was given to NAMB, but the same amount of attention was not given to the IMB."

And what about studying the seminaries, asked Travis Coleman, chairman of the SBOM.

"They (the task force) have not done a thorough job of looking at all aspects of Southern Baptist life, such as the seminaries," he said. "It looks like this has been in a hurry to get this done in a year."

Jackson agreed, calling for Southern Baptists to take more time to study the report and its ramifications.

Lance added, "Thoroughness sometimes takes more time than just between conventions."

But even with the concerns raised by some Alabama Baptist leaders, many leaders affirmed the portion of the task force's report calling for spiritual renewal.

"They call for personal and corporate renewal," Lance said. "That is commendable ... but maybe it should have been first, then the study."

"We are a Great Commission state convention," he said. "We've been at this since 1823, 22 years before the founding of the SBC."

"In many ways, the SBC is our child. We helped parent the SBC," he explained. "We are going to be good family members as we look forward to the future together. We are going to give it our best to be a Great Commission state convention even more so as we have in the past."

Page named new EC president

Frank Page, vice president of evangelization for the North American Mission Board (NAMB), will be nominated as the next president and chief executive officer of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee, the chairman of that group has announced.

Randall James, assistant pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., said the search team of six men and one woman are "unified in our belief that God has indeed revealed to us His man to replace Dr. [Morris H.] Chapman."

A vote on Page's nomination will be held June 14. If elected, he will succeed Chapman, who will retire Sept. 30 after 18 years in the post.

Page told BP he was humbled to be

named, and praying about his possible new role. "I'm honored to be considered for such an important position," he said.

"My prayer is that in some small way I might help in bringing unity to our convention."

Page, who was elected to the North American Mission Board position in October 2009, is a former SBC president and was pastor of First Baptist Church, Taylors, S.C., for nine years before joining NAMB. He is a member of the SBC's Great Commission Resurgence Task Force.

Page holds a Ph.D. in Christian ethics focusing on moral, social and ethical issues and an M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. (BP)



PAGE

Radical Experiment embraced by Birmingham church

(continued from page 1)
local disciple-making minister, and his family.

Though the influx is significant, it's not going in loud and proud under the Brook Hills banner — it's just a few families moving in to live life and show Christ to the neighbors. They will be joining some people from other churches who are already doing the same thing.

"People ask, 'What are you going to do there?'" DeLoach said. "I tell them we are going to love God and love people."

The inner-city move is one more outgrowth of a challenge to take Christ's commands literally that Platt has been preaching since at least fall of 2008. He preached the Radical series in November of that

year, messages aimed at taking a long, honest look at what Christ really said about being His disciple.

Referencing the story of the rich young ruler, as well as the call of the 12 disciples, Platt notes that Jesus called His followers to abandon everything for the sake of His glory in the world.

"What if I were the potential disciple being told to drop my nets? What if you were the man whom Jesus told to not even say goodbye to his

family? What if we were told to hate our families and give up everything we had in order to follow Jesus?" Platt asked. "This is where we come face to face with a dangerous reality. We do have to give up everything we have to follow Jesus. We do have to love Him in

a way that makes our closest relationships look like hate. And it is entirely possible that He will tell us to sell everything we have and sell it to the poor."

In fall of 2009, the church began work on a drastically different budget for 2010 — hundreds of thousands less spent on the church itself, and hundreds of thousands more sent to help further the gospel and fight poverty locally and around the world.

'Let's take India'

And at the end of 2009, Brook Hills voted to send more than \$500,000 in tucked-away surplus money to fund 21 of Compassion International's Child Survival Programs in India.

Continuing to fund them became one component of this year's Radical Experiment that the congregation committed to in January — an emphasis Platt calls "one year to a life turned upside down":

1. To pray for the entire world (using resources such as "Operation World," a book and website that lists a different people group to pray for each day of the year)

2. To read through the entire Word (together as a church)

3. To commit our lives to multiplying community (through small groups)

4. To sacrifice our money for a specific purpose (to meet needs locally and globally, specifically in India)

5. To give our time in another context (by going on missions trips)

"Ultimately Jesus is a reward worth risking everything to know, experience and enjoy. But claims such as these remain theories until they are tested. That is the reason for the experiment," Platt wrote in his new book, "Radical: Taking Back Your Faith From the American Dream," which came out earlier this month.

Brook Hills members would be quick to tell you — it's an experiment that's changing their lives.

One went home after the sermon on the rich young ruler, emptied all his clothes on the bed, collected bags of food and other items and drove into the projects and gave it all away.

Nearly 100 families completed training and are being certified to take care of foster children after a sermon based on James 1:27 last fall that challenged the congregation to not let a single child in Shelby County go without a home for the night.

Still more families are signed up to go through the training soon.

And dozens like the Clarkes are selling their homes and possessions and moving overseas or into other ministry contexts, such as inner-city Birmingham.

"How do you deal with the hard sayings of Christ?" Chuck Clarke

asked. "We decided it was time to act, and our joy in Christ has only been maximized through it. So it's to our benefit, too."

"Jesus is a reward worth risking everything to know."

Pastor David Platt
The Church at Brook Hills



Teams still at work after floods, tornadoes

Seven Alabama Baptist disaster relief teams have been deployed to Tennessee since devastating floods swept parts of the state the weekend of May 2.

The teams, which specialize in mud out, have joined with teams from Georgia, Indiana and North Carolina and are working in Brentwood, Jackson, Linden, Madison and Nashville.

"Devastation is widespread ... much more extensive than the initial assessments," said Mel Johnson, disaster relief strategist for Alabama. "Many of these teams were some of the same who responded to (the tornado damage in) Marshall, DeKalb and Walker counties. My hat's off to them."

While attention has turned to Tennessee, two disaster relief

teams are still on the ground in Albertville continuing with cleanup following tornadoes April 24.

At press time, Johnson reported that the disaster relief teams had completed 96 jobs, made 157 ministry contacts, recorded 12 faith decisions and reported 350 volunteers from the work done in Marshall, DeKalb and Walker counties. (TAB)

SBC EC's Chapman states 'grave concerns' about harm to CP

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee President Morris Chapman has accused the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force (GCRTF) of taking away with the left hand what it affirms with the right.

The task force "elevates designated contributions" to mean the same in terms of cooperation as "contributions made to the whole" of Southern Baptist work through the Cooperative Program (CP), he said. Moreover Chapman challenged those who agree with his concerns to attend the annual meeting "as a messenger from your church" and oppose the recommendation to create the new nomenclature and category of giving.

Chapman said the GCRTF proposal makes the CP "just another component of a conglomerate category" and that this devalues the CP and also leads to devaluation of the CP name.

Cooperative missions and ministries are what define Southern Baptists, not what individual congregations do alone, Chapman said. Calling the CP a "brand" known by Christians around the world, he said the CP not only provides support for SBC

missions and ministries, but that "the name and methodology historically have defined Southern Baptists as cooperating for the Great Commission."

"[T]he Cooperative Program IS our Great Commission Giving!" he wrote.



CHAPMAN

Chapman named four other negative consequences he said would result from the GCRTF push to set up "Great Commission Giving" in competition with the CP:

- devaluation of cooperative efforts — "It is a sad fact of human nature that when those who proportionally give small amounts to a collaborative enterprise try to control its processes, it undermines the willingness by those who proportionally give much to continue their giving at sacrificial levels"

- unintended consequences of "budget shortfalls" caused by increased "special interest" giving

- instability for entities regarding funding projections

- a fractured spirit — "anything to lessen the effectiveness of the Cooperative Program ... will endanger ... the very spirit of cooperation by which we go about our work for God's Kingdom." (BP)

TAB staff, other Alabama Baptists bring home honors for video, writing, design

(continued from page 1)
from Alabama Media Professionals (AMP).

In addition, Bob Terry won a third place award from EPA for his electronic bingo gambling editorial "Can History Repeat Itself?" Terry also won fourth place in the EPA cause of the year category with his editorial on modern-day Chernobyl following its 1986 nuclear disaster, "Brinksmanship with Nature."

Terry, Rash and Debbie Campbell worked with Doug Rogers of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) on a video commercial production for Read *The Alabama Baptist* Sunday that brought home a first place award from BCA.

Grace Thornton earned an award of merit from RCC for her feature story "New kind of shepherd" and a second place award from BCA for her news story "Moundville's Pleasant Hill Church goes up in flames day after being robbed." Thornton also won an award of merit in photography from RCC for "Making it through," a photo of a Birmingham-area homeless man.

Brittany N. Howerton's feature story "It all started with a dream" garnered an award of merit from both ACP and RCC. And her photography series "Changing a life" won an award of merit from RCC.

Washington also earned a first place award from AMP for her House of God coverage. And John Godbey won a fourth place award

from EPA for his photo of a retiring church organist.

Rogers and others from the SBOM also garnered individual awards for their work in 2009.

Rogers won four individual awards from BCA. He took first place for the video news story "We are home" and second place in the sermon illustration or worship video category for "In memoriam." He also earned first place awards for the script of "Thank you!" and for ad copywriting for "On that day, I became a Southern Baptist."

Best in region, nation

Chris Mills of the SBOM won a BCA first place award for the SBOM's Facebook fan page, and Jesse Conte of the SBOM won a BCA second place award for "Camping out in God's Word" in the specialty items category.

Samford University's office of communications also received a number of regional and national awards under the leadership of Philip Poole, executive director of university communication at Samford.

The office won nine awards from RCC, four awards from BCA and two honors in the District III awards competition sponsored by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. The recognitions were for Samford's *Seasons* magazine as well as other print materials and web design. (TAB)

SBC Preview

'LoveLoud Through the Great Commission'

GCR Task Force report to top agenda at this year's SBC annual meeting

The final report of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force (GCRTF) will highlight the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) 153rd annual meeting when the two-day event convenes June 15 at the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla.

The report, unveiled May 3 at www.pray4gcr.com, has been the centerpiece of discussion in Southern Baptist circles since messengers at the 2009 meeting in Louisville, Ky., authorized the SBC president to appoint a task force. The public conversation intensified when the GCRTF released a preliminary version of its report Feb. 22, with some hailing it as innovative and others expressing concerns that it would negatively impact cooperation with state conventions and hurt giving through the SBC's Cooperative Program.

While the task force expects to present its report June 15, they have not announced whether its recommendations will be offered as a single motion or several.

As the theme for this year's sessions, SBC President Johnny Hunt has selected "LoveLoud Through the Great Commission" (1 John 3:18).

"We've got to 'Love Loud,'" said Hunt, pastor of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Ga. "Loud love moves beyond the four walls of the church. I hope to encourage our folks to roll up their sleeves and get after it."

"Our theme verse is clear," Hunt said of 1 John 3:18 — "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

"It is not simply enough to say; we must do," Hunt added. "We have embraced what we believe. It is now or never to engage this generation with what we believe — the gospel. Our nation is lost. We have the answer. Let's do it."

Among the highlights planned for this year's program:

► Musical features throughout the meeting presented by the worship choir and orchestra of First, Woodstock, and a 1,000-voice combined choir and 200-piece combined orchestra.

► Opening session reports by Morris H. Chapman, retiring president of the SBC Executive Committee, and the presidential message by Hunt.

► The election of officers set to begin at 2:20 p.m. June 15. Candidates for president,



BP photo

GATHERING — Messengers to the SBC annual meeting will converge on Orlando's Orange County Convention Center June 15–16.

as of press time, were Jimmy Jackson, senior pastor of Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, and president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention; Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla., and a GCRTF member; and Bryant Wright, senior pastor of Johnson Ferry Baptist Church, Marietta, Ga.

► The convention message by Mac Brunson, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., on Wednesday morning, and that evening at 8:40, a closing sermon by Southern Baptist evangelist Tony Nolan, of Woodstock, Ga.

Other highlights include:

► Crossover Orlando 2010 will extend evangelistic block parties door to door and street witness June 12, across the city and three-county Orange, Seminole and Osceola region. In conjunction with Crossover, a Hispanic family festival will be held at the Central Florida Fairgrounds.

► The 2010 SBC Pastors Conference, which opens at 5:30 p.m. June 13 with a concert by popular Christian musician Travis Cottrell, features a wide range of speakers from diverse backgrounds, including David Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham; Tony Evans, senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, Dallas, and president of The Urban Alternative; C.J. Mahaney, pastor of Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, Md., and president of Sovereign Grace Ministries; apologetics speaker and author Ravi Zacharias; and Francis Chan, teaching pastor of Cornerstone Church, Simi, Calif. The program also will feature the launch of a national campaign to help pastors adopt children.

► Gatherings for pastors' wives that feature a June 14 conference and June 15 luncheon, as well as a Women's Expo to build community, share resources and exchange ideas.

► The June 13–14 Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) Missions Celebration and Annual Meeting, gathering under the theme "Unhindered!" The program emphasis includes ways to address human exploitation, which is the focus of WMU's Project HELP for 2010–12. The missions celebration will be held in the Orange County Convention Center's Chapin Theater (West Concourse, Level 3), beginning at 6:30 p.m. June 13. Among the speakers at the missions celebration: Jennifer Kennedy Dean, author of this year's WMU emphasis book, "Life Unhindered:

Five Keys to Walking in Freedom," and Gen. Douglas Carver, chief of chaplains for the U.S. Army.

► The Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists annual worship service will be held June 16 instead of prior to the convention, as in recent years. The change is intended to increase participation of pastors who don't arrive at the convention until after Sunday morning. The service will be held from 2–5 p.m. in a theater just up the escalators

from the meeting hall at the Orange County Convention Center. The timing is intended to allow messengers to attend seminary luncheons, make it back for the worship service and then attend the closing session of the SBC annual meeting. The program includes music by Greater Vision, a southern gospel trio; a message from Evangelist Tim Lee, a former Marine who lost his legs in Vietnam; and a videotaped message from Evangelist Billy Graham.

► Associational directors of missions (DOMs) will convene for their 50th meeting June 12–14 with the theme "Celebrating 50 Years of Partnership in Kingdom Work." Speakers for the event, which will begin at 2:30 p.m. June 12 at the Rosen Plaza Hotel, will include Frank Page, Ed Stetzer, O.S. Hawkins and Jerry Rankin. DOMs also will have a chance to dialogue with a representative from North American Mission Board regarding the report from the GCRTF.

For more information about this year's highlights, visit www.sbcannualmeeting.net. (BP)

2010 June 15-16 Orlando, Florida
Southern Baptist Convention
Annual Meeting



**For more information about the
Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting ...**

Visit www.sbcannualmeeting.net or www.bpnews.net and click on "2010 SBC Annual Meeting Preview" at the bottom of the page.

www.sbcannualmeeting.net

WMU missions celebration, meeting goes 'Unhindered!', addresses human exploitation

Unhindered!" will be the theme of the June 13-14 Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) missions celebration and annual meeting preceding the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) June 15-16 annual meeting in Orlando, Fla.

Missions celebration participants, according to WMU, will:

- Learn practical ways to strengthen and energize your missionary journey.

- Dialogue with international and North American field personnel.

- Connect and network with missional leaders from around the country.

- Enjoy a special reception for Kaye Miller, outgoing national WMU president.

- Explore ways to address human exploitation, the focus of WMU's Project HELP for 2010-12.

The missions celebration, to be held in the Orange County Convention Center's Chapin Theater (West Building, Level 3), will include main sessions at 6:30 p.m. June 13 and 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. June 14. Various breakout sessions will be offered from 2-5 p.m. June 14.

Among the speakers:

- Jennifer Kennedy Dean, executive director of The Praying Life Foundation, Marion, Ky., and author of this year's WMU emphasis book, "Life Unhindered: Five Keys to Walking in Freedom." Dean's other titles include "Heart's Cry" and "Live a Praying Life."

- Frank Page, evangelism vice president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and former president of the SBC.

- Gen. Douglas Carver, chief of chaplains for the U.S. Army and a master of divinity graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

- International Mission Board representatives Randy and Debby Owens from South Asia; Monica Allen from Africa; and Ken and Beth P. (not identified by last name) from North Africa and the Middle East.

- NAMB missionary Sharon Fields-McCormick from Atlanta.

Miller, who is completing a five-year term as president of WMU, will deliver her final presidential address during the Monday morning

session. A reception will be held in her honor Monday afternoon.

Miller, of Little Rock, Ark., is the first missionary kid to serve as WMU president. Her successor will be elected during the missions celebration.

Other features of the missions celebration will include:

- a preview of WMU initiatives and resources for churches for the coming year, including WMU's upcoming "Unhindered!" emphasis, Project HELP: Human Exploitation and ongoing missions education programs

such as Women on Mission, Adults on Mission, Acteens, Youth on Mission, Girls in Action, Children in Action and Mission Friends.

- worship led by Mindy Jaquith.

- WMU Bookstore, including releases from New Hope Publishers, WMU's trade books division, and crafts by overseas artisans involved in WMU's WorldCrafts ministry.

For more information about the WMU missions celebration and annual meeting, visit www.wmu.org. (BP)



MILLER

Hispanic outreach major part of meeting

Two major Hispanic evangelism initiatives will be part of the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) annual meeting and Crossover Orlando, Fla., in June.

The 2010 National Hispanic Celebration will take place at First Baptist Church, Kissimmee, Fla., on the evening of June 13.

"Live With Urgency: Share God's

Transforming Power" will be the theme of the celebration.

Hispanic-specific Crossover events will kick off with a rally Sunday, June 6.

The Hispanic version of Crossover will not be just a one-day event, said Joshua Del Risco, North American Mission Board staff member and Hispanic Crossover coordinator.

The event will run June 7-12 with 18 Hispanic Baptist churches in the Greater Orlando Baptist Association participating.

During the week of June 7, Hispanic Baptists will share the gospel with Orlando's large Hispanic population through door-to-door and street evangelism, Vacation Bible Schools, soccer clinics, day camps and other events.

"We hope to impact the Hispanic community all week by sharing the gospel with every Hispanic we come across in this very large area," Del Risco said.

Hispanic Crossover will climax Saturday, June 12, with a Hispanic Family Festival from 10 a.m.-4 p.m., which is expected to draw 2,500 or more people to the Central Florida Fairgrounds in Orlando. (BP)

Richard Land to speak on immigration

Richard Land is scheduled to address the topic of immigration during the National Hispanic Fellowship of Southern Baptist Churches meeting on the afternoon of June 13 in Orlando, Fla.

Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, will examine implications for Southern Baptists of the nation's immigration issue.

He also will engage in a question-and-answer period with attendees after his address during the fellowship's 2-5 p.m. meeting. (BP)

Pastors Conference to focus on 'Greater Things,' adoption

Under the banner of "Greater Things," the 2010 Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference will explore the prospect of a bright future for Southern Baptist pastors, their churches and the denomination, conference President Kevin Ezell said. The program also will feature the launch of a national campaign to help pastors adopt children.

"This is a critical time in the life of our convention," said Ezell, president of the Pastors Conference and senior pastor of Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky. "We're thankful for the past, but we really do

believe the best is yet to come and God has greater things for us as a convention and, hopefully, for ministers — in their personal lives, in their ministries and in our mission as a whole. That's what each of the sessions will be about."

The program — which opens at 5:30 p.m. Sunday, June 13, with a concert by popular Christian musician Travis Cottrell — features a wide range of speakers from diverse backgrounds, Ezell said.

The diversity is reflected in a lineup that ranges from Tony Evans, senior pastor at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, Dallas and president of The Urban Alternative, to C.J. Mahaney, longtime pastor of Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, Md., and president of Sovereign Grace Ministries.

Other speakers include:

- Noted apologetics speaker and author Ravi Zacharias.

- Francis Chan, teaching pastor of Cornerstone Church, Simi, Calif.

- Daniel Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

- Matt Chandler, lead pastor of The Village Church,

Flower Mound, Texas.

- Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn.

- David Landrith, senior pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church, Hendersonville, Tenn.

- R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

- Russell D. Moore, dean of Southern Seminary's school of theology and senior vice president for academic administration.

- David Platt, pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham.

- Andy Stanley, pastor of

North Point Community Church, Alpharetta, Ga.

- David Uth, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla.

- Ken Whitten, pastor of Idlewild Baptist Church, Tampa, Fla.

A unique aspect of this year's conference will be the launch of a national campaign to help pastors adopt children, Ezell said.

Pastors Conference attendees will take up an offering to help pastors who want to adopt, Ezell added.

"I think there's a lot of pastors out there who want to adopt but their biggest hurdle is that they are financially limited," Ezell said. "I feel like if we can impact the lives of pastors in adoption, then pastors in turn will impact churches, and churches in turn will impact communities and so on. I just believe it will open up an incredible resource that will bless churches all over the country."

The June 13-14 Pastors Conference will be held in Orlando's Orange County Convention Center. More information is available at www.sbcpc.net. (BP)

For a full schedule, visit
www.sbcpc.net

2010 marks 50th year for directors of missions gathering

The Southern Baptist Conference of Associational Directors of Missions (DOMs) will convene for its 50th meeting June 12-14 in Orlando, Fla. Speakers will include Frank Page, Ed Stetzer, O.S. Hawkins and Jerry Rankin.

The meeting, with the theme "Celebrating 50 Years of Partnership in Kingdom Work," will begin at 2:30 p.m. June 12 at the Rosen Plaza Hotel with Page, vice president of evangelization at the North American Mission Board (NAMB), speaking.

Following workshop opportunities that afternoon, the group will gather for a banquet at 6:30 p.m. with musical evangelists Billy and Paula Speer.

On June 13, Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research, will preach during a 10:30 a.m. worship service followed

by lunch provided by GuideStone Financial Resources.

During the afternoon session, Hawkins, GuideStone's president, will speak before a business session and an anniversary celebration and remarks by Rankin, president of the International Mission Board.

Those who would like to take advantage of more breakout opportunities can participate in an optional repeat of the workshops on June 14, followed by a lunch for new DOMs sponsored by LifeWay Christian Resources and a lunch for retired DOMs sponsored by NAMB. As with the GuideStone lunch, meal tickets are required.

Also during the gathering, DOMs will have a chance to dialogue with a representative from NAMB regarding the report from the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force, accord-

ing to Ron Davis, the conference president and director of missions for Greenville Baptist Association in South Carolina.

F. Russell Bennett, one of the founding members of the conference, said the group began in 1960 when Harold Gregory, executive director of Nashville Baptist Association in Tennessee, sent letters to 500 superintendents of associational missions, as they were called at the time, asking them to alert him to any interest in an annual gathering.

More information about the group's founding is available in a book by Gregory called "The Mustard Tree: A History of Southern Baptist Conference Directors of Associational Missions."

To register for the directors of missions conference, complete an online form at sbccadom.net. (BP)

Alabama Baptists tapped to serve in SBC roles

Alabama Baptists will serve in strategic roles at this year's Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting in Orlando, Fla., June 15-16, and some will continue that service during the next few years on a SBC committee or board. SBC President Johnny Hunt has named members of the Committee on Committees, Credentials Committee, Resolutions Committee and Tellers Committee for the annual meeting.

► **Rob Jackson**, senior pastor of Central Baptist Church, Decatur, and **Greg Corbin**, associate pastor of teaching and ministry of Whitesburg Baptist Church, Huntsville, will serve on the Committee on Committees.

► **Gary Cardwell**, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association, and **Mark Wood**, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Ful-tondale, will serve on the Credentials Committee.

► **Shane Russell**, pastor of Shoal Creek Baptist Church, Deatsville, will serve on the Resolutions Committee.

► **James Taylor**, senior pastor of First Baptist Church, Sheffield, will serve as the chairman of the Tellers Committee, and **Randy Norris**, pastor of The Church at Ross Station, Hoover, will serve on the Tellers Committee.

Alabamians nominated to

serve on a committee or board:

► **D. Wayne Myrick**, member of Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover, and **R. Ron Madison**, senior pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville — Executive Committee.

► **J. Timothy Wilkes**, member of Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile — second term, Guide-Stone Financial Resources.

► **Richard Richie**, senior pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Roanoke — International Mission Board.

► **Raymond Jones**, senior pastor of Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Dothan — second term, International Mission Board.

► **Randall E. Ingram**, senior pastor of Riverside Baptist Church, Mobile — North American Mission Board.

► **Rickey E. (Ric) Camp**, pastor of Sunrise Baptist Church, Mobile — second term, North American Mission Board.

► **N. Bruce Moseley**, pastor of Zion Baptist Church, Mobile — LifeWay Christian Resources.

► **Edwin J. Hayes**, pastor of First Baptist Church, Cullman — Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

► **Jimmy E. Jackson**, senior pastor of Whitesburg Baptist — Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. (BP)

Seminary luncheons to take place at SBC annual meeting

Alumni and friends of the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) six seminaries will receive updates about the schools and renew acquaintances with faculty members and classmates during luncheons June 16 in conjunction with the SBC's annual meeting in Orlando, Fla.

► **Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary's** president, Jeff Iorg, will be the featured speaker at the Alumni and Friends Luncheon at 12:30 p.m. in Room W303 of the Orange County Convention Center's West Building in Orlando.

► **Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary** will host its annual Alumni & Friends Luncheon at noon in Rooms W307A-D of the Orange County Convention Center's West Building on Level 3. President R. Philip Roberts will speak.

► **New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary** will host its alumni luncheon at noon in the Orange County Convention Center's Valencia Ballroom B-C. The seminary will honor its distinguished

alumnus for 2010 as well as the Class of 1960, which will celebrate its 50th reunion.

► **Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary** will host its luncheon for alumni as well as friends of the seminary and college at noon in Room W304E-H of the Orange County Convention Center's West Building. President Daniel Akin will speak.

► **Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's** luncheon for alumni and friends will be at noon in Room W415 of the Orange County Convention Center's Valencia Ballroom on Level 4. President R. Albert Mohler Jr. will present a ministry update on behalf of the seminary.

► **Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's** National Alumni Luncheon will begin at 12:30 p.m. in the Orange County Convention Center's Valencia Ballroom, Section D on Level 4. President Paige Patterson will present the seminary's annual report and the 2010 distinguished alumnus award. (BP)



Photo courtesy of Mark Metcalf

IMPACT — Students work on a house in Birmingham during a recent World Changers project.

Missions milestones

World Changers to mark 20th year, 100th Alabama project

World Changers, an intense, hands-on missions experience for students sponsored and managed by the North American Mission Board (NAMB), will mark a number of key milestones this summer, not the least of which is its 20th anniversary.

World Changers launched its first fledgling community project in Briceville, Tenn., near Knoxville, back in 1990.

Between June 7 and July 31, the 2010 edition of World Changers also will celebrate its 300,000th student participant; its 10,000th church youth group; the 100th summer project in Alabama and Georgia; the 400th house to be renovated in Casper, Wyo.; and some \$2 million raised through small contributions by the thousands of students who have participated in World Changers over the last 20 years.

Celebrating churches

That \$2 million has gone solely to fund even more NAMB ministries across North America, said Jonathan Wilson, NAMB's strategy development coordinator for World Changers and its companion ministry, PowerPlant.

"We want this summer to be one big celebration — for the 20th anniversary as well as to celebrate the thousands of Southern Baptist churches that have partnered with us over the years by sending their students to join us. We couldn't have done it without them."

This summer, World Changers will mobilize 21,000 student and

adult volunteers to work in 85 cities on 97 projects across the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. Students from middle school to college-age will to serve on a team that will repair and renovate inner-city homes. Despite sweltering summer heat, students will paint houses, repair or replace roofs, do minor carpentry and yard work.

"With 21,000 registered students, we're pleased in light of the current economy," said Wilson, adding that NAMB reduced the fee this year in recognition of tighter money for both churches and families. World Changers also was cut back from seven days to a Monday-Saturday schedule.

"Going to the five-day model will allow our staff to facilitate more projects, streamline operations and help us use our resources more wisely," Wilson said. "We'll still be able to offer a great missions experience, one that will challenge the students to live 'an unhindered life for God' — that's our theme this year. "Our Baptist churches have responded in a tremendous way to the changes," Wilson added. "They understand we're trying to be good stewards of our resources. Our team at NAMB works hard at providing the best missions experience we can at the best value."

Wilson said World Changers will be in several new cities this summer, including Waianae, Hawaii; Waco, Texas; and Sugar Hill, Ga., north

of Atlanta. The World Changers website — www.world-changers.net — is the best source for information on the ministry and this summer's 97 projects, Wilson said. Every project site will have a blog that will be updated daily. Streamed live video, including video of nightly worship services, also will be available from some locations.

Another 2,500 or so students have signed up for PowerPlant

projects in 19 cities across the United States and in Ottawa, Ont., between June 7 and July 24. PowerPlant students gain real-world experience in church planting and evangelism. First-time PowerPlant cities

will be Philadelphia, Los Angeles and Madison, Wis.

For additional information on NAMB's PowerPlant ministry, visit www.power-plant.net.

The third of NAMB's trio of summer group mission ministries is Families on Mission (FOM), now in its fifth year. It provides families with a hands-on experience of mission projects including prayerwalking, light construction, painting, yard work, Vacation Bible School, sports camps, block parties, acts of kindness and other evangelistic initiatives. For more information on FOM, visit www.namb.net/fom, e-mail fom@namb.net or call 1-800-462-8657, Ext. 6456. (BP)

"We want this summer to be one big celebration."

Jonathan Wilson
NAMB

Across Alabama's Associations

AUTAUGA

► **Stoney Barbie** is the new pastor of **Bethel Church, Jones**.

BESSEMER

► **Doug O'Brien**, pastor of **North Highlands Church, Hueytown**, will retire from 50 years of ministry. He served North Highlands for almost 32 years. There will be a retirement celebration at the church May 30, 2-4 p.m.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Berney Points Church, Hoover**, will hold a youth benefit concert/program with Rick and Mick Ministries May 29, 6 p.m. Adults also are invited. For information or for posters call 205-979-5151. **Anton Fourie** is pastor. ► **East Gardendale Church** will hold an outdoor fish fry called **Fishers of Souls** May 22, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. There will be food, music and prizes. Bring your lawn chair. No pets allowed. For information call 205-608-0889. **Allen Davis** is pastor.

CLEBURNE

► **Heflin Church** will celebrate homecoming May 30, 10 a.m., as part of the Heflin Homecoming Memorial Day weekend. A covered-dish lunch will follow in the fellowship hall. Meat and drinks will be provided. Bring a salad, vegetable or dessert. For information call 256-463-2576 or visit www.heflinbaptist.org. **Philip R. Morris** is pastor.

COFFEE

► **First Church, Enterprise**, will hold a Ladies Power Lunch May 25, noon, in the fellowship hall. Educator and financial advi-

sor **Joan Newman** will share about "Coincidental or Providential?" For meal and child care reservations call **Kathi** at 334-393-5683 by May 21. **Alvin "Sonny" Moore** is interim pastor.

FRIENDSHIP

► **First Church, Oneonta**, honored 23 couples who have been married for 50 or more years May 2. They were given a certificate, a book with each couple's wedding photo, a framed wedding photo of their own and a flower for each wife. Lunch followed. **Larry Gipson** is pastor.

HALE

► **Rhodes Chapel Church, Greensboro**, will hold revival May 23-28 with Evangelist **Larry Draper**, of Trumpet Ministries in Rome, Ga. Services will be Sunday at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. and weeknights at 7. **Richard Allen Jr.** will lead the music. **Robert Shirley** is pastor.

JUDSON

► **Judson Association** will hold a RA fish fry June 5, 6 p.m., at Trinity Church, Headland, with Brother **Billy Bob Bohannon**. **Dan Shepard** is pastor of Trinity. **George Thompson** is director of missions for Judson Association.

LIMESTONE

► **Clements Church, Athens**, will host This Hope in concert May 23, 10 a.m. For information call 256-729-1328 or visit www.clements-baptist.org. **Tim Anderson** is pastor.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Lookout Mountain Associa-**

tion will hold an evangelism rally May 23, 6 p.m., at Mount Vernon Church, Collinsville. Dinner will be at 4:30 p.m. **Mike McLemore**, executive director of Birmingham Association, will speak. The associational choir will sing. **Terry Burke** is pastor of Mount Vernon. **Lloyd Borden** is director of missions for Lookout Association.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Jennifer Mills** is the new minister of worship for **Alberta Church, Tuscaloosa**. She has



MILLS

served churches in Tennessee, Georgia and Kentucky. **Mills** holds a bachelor's degree in music from Auburn University and master of church music from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. She and her husband, **Bruce**, have one child. **Larry W. Corder** is pastor. ► **Corinth Church, Elrod**, will hold a singing May 23, 10:30 a.m., with Capstone Quartet. **Shawn Odell** is pastor.

WASHINGTON

► **Pleasant Hill Church, Millry**, will celebrate homecoming June 6, 11 a.m., with former Pastor **David MacIsaac** as guest speaker. Lunch will follow at noon. **Still Waters**, of Gilbertown, will sing. **Mike Maloy** is pastor.

Endel is fourth to be nominated for SBC president

Leo A. Endel, executive director of the Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention (MWBC), will be nominated for president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) at the June 15-16 annual meeting in Orlando, Fla.

Endel is the fourth nominee to be announced and the only candidate who does not reside in the South.

Although he initially dismissed

the idea of running, Endel finally consented to it after much prayer and urging of others.

"What concerns many in this part of the upper Midwest (is that) there needs to be a new work perspective brought into the conversation," Endel told *The Christian Index*. "Not anti- or pro-GCR (Great Commission Resurgence), but we need some leadership out of the new work area,

(and I) felt I could bring that to the table."

Endel, who has served in his current position for eight years, said MWBC "enthusiastically" approved the decision to nominate him for president May 8.

Born in Tampa, Endel moved with his parents to Alaska shortly after and grew up in "Home Mission Board territory."

"We were always part of new work areas where Southern Baptists were planting new churches," Endel said.

Before coming on board with the MWBC, Endel served as pastor of Southern Hills Baptist Church, Sioux City, Iowa, for 11 years. The church gave \$4,098, or about 5 percent of undesignated receipts, to the Cooperative Program his first year there and \$41,908, or about 12 percent of undesignated gifts, the last year he served as pastor, according to information from the SBC's Annual Church Profile.

Endel joins **Jimmy Jackson**, **Ted Traylor** and **Bryant Wright** in the SBC president's race. (TAB)

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Adams retires after 27 years at Marshall Association

For **Barbara Adams**, working at Marshall Baptist Association was never just a job. It was a calling.

"When I was a senior in high school, I felt called to missions," Adams, 78, said. "I never did it and all my life felt like I should do missions. When the opportunity (to work at the association) came, that's when I thought it was my calling."

And when the time came to retire after 27 years as associational secretary, clerk and treasurer, she was sad to leave.

"I enjoyed meeting people and I got to know who was at what church," Adams said.

She was the first person to take this position on a full-time basis. During her time at Marshall Association, Adams worked with four directors of missions, saw the number of churches in the association increase from 97 to 102 and helped the association move into a new office building in 2001.

Randall Stoner said Adams played a big part in helping him get acquainted with the association when he became director of missions eight years ago.

"She took me in when I first came," Stoner said. "She became a good, close friend with the utmost integrity and grace."

And he's not the only one who came to rely upon her.

"Everybody in the association trusted **Barbara Adams**," Stoner said.

On May 2, the association hosted a reception in Adams' honor at Solitude Baptist Church, Albertville, where she is a member, and presented her with a monetary gift.

Adams plans to travel and volunteer more now that she is retired.

South Luverne Church celebrates 25th anniversary

April 25 was no normal Sunday for South Luverne Baptist Church. "It was a big day ... a big celebration," Pastor **Mike Green** said of the 25th anniversary celebration that took place that day.

The Alabama Crenshaw Baptist Association church welcomed approximately 300 people including **Lonette Berg**, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, who presented a plaque; **Gary Cardwell**, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association and former interim pastor, who delivered the sermon; and **Buddy Johnson**, former music director of almost 20 years, who led worship.

In addition to a commemorative program that included the history of South Luverne Baptist, the church marked the milestone with a video, homecoming meal and special recognition of current and former members.

"Throughout the years, God has blessed our church," said **Green**, who has been pastor since 1991. "I've seen our church mature and grow in the Lord and become a lighthouse in our community."

South Luverne Baptist began as a mission of **Siloam Baptist Church, Rutledge**, in 1984. On Aug. 2, 1985, the 64-member mission was incorporated into a church. That same year, the congregation began construction on its first building and finished it in 1986. In 2003, construction began on a new sanctuary and additional Sunday School rooms, which were finished in 2004.

Since 2005, South Luverne Baptist members have done missions in Venezuela, Honduras and Guatemala.

Green hopes the church's future holds even more opportunities to reach the nations.

"The bottom line is we want to do everything to fulfill the Great Commission," he said.



ADAMS

Alabama Cooperative Program Gifts

Alabama Baptist Giving
Year to Date through April 30, 2010

APRIL

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$3,875,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$3,794,534
Under Goal for Month	\$80,466

YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$15,500,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$14,760,291
Under Goal for Year	\$739,709



I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help
come? My help comes from
the Lord, who made heaven
and earth.

Psalms 121:1-2

A monthly advertising supplement — May 2010

Church Resource Guide

RECREATION MINISTER LAUNCHES AIM HIGHER HOOPS: A BASKETBALL MINISTRY TAILORED FOR A CHURCH'S INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND BUDGET

Aim Higher Hoops

Paid advertising

Chuck Williamson knows the impact that a church recreation ministry can have on young people. After all, it was through his involvement as a teenager in his church's recreation ministry during the 1970s that God showed him the importance of having a Christ-centered environment for recreational activities. So it was no surprise that Williamson answered God's calling into church recreation ministry while a student at Samford University.

Following his ministerial education and training God led him to a Birmingham church where he served as full-time recreation minister for 25 years ... until God started tugging at his heart once more.

And that's when he decided to act upon his long-time dream of starting a ministry (Aim Higher Events) geared toward faith-based recreational events for churches and businesses with a specific division being a

church recreational basketball program — Aim Higher Hoops.

From his years of experience in church recreation programs, Williamson saw a need for churches of all sizes to be able to participate in an affordable basketball program. Knowing the multitude of benefits that children and youth can learn from participating in a Christ-centered program, Williamson structured Aim Higher Hoops to be a recreational means from which participants can excel by learning life lessons through the sport of basketball ... but at an affordable price.

According to Williamson, "The purpose of Aim Higher Hoops is to create an environment where participants can have fun, foster friendships, develop a proper view of competition, instill a love for the game and experience

Christian values. These five points are the emphasis of Aim Higher Hoops."

And Williamson offers a flexible financial approach for churches by offering three different payment options.

"One and Done" is based on the number of players a church has in its first year of participation. A fee of \$33 per player includes the use of

the Aim Higher name, material for league administrators, training, six sets of devotionals and a banner announcing registration (participants will purchase their own uniform). Williamson says the benefit of this

plan is that the church will only be responsible for the first year fees and beginning in year two and beyond there are no fees required.

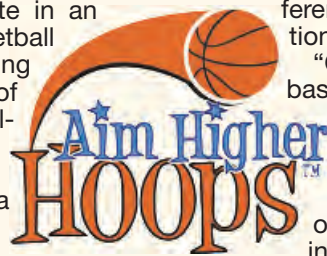
"To tip off the 2010-2011 season we are offering a 10 percent discount for this option," he said.

The second option is that the church gets the same items mentioned above but pay an annual fee of \$15 per player for three years. (Participants will purchase their own uniform.) Williamson points out that this is a great option for churches who want to keep fees at a lower rate for their participants because beginning in year four there is no cost to the church.

The third option is an annual

\$39 per player fee that includes all of the above items and a T-shirt jersey. "This is an excellent option for churches with limited staff or who simply want to outsource part of the work," he explained, adding "another financial benefit is that Aim Higher Hoops has no start-up fees and we will conduct the initial training at the host church's facility for expenses only," he said.

For more information on how your church can participate in this fresh approach to basketball ministry call Williamson at 205-919-6075, visit www.aimhigherevents.com or e-mail chuck@aimhigherevents.com.



MORE ENTERTAINING,
MORE INSPIRING,
MORE THAN A PLAY



The New Great Passion Play

Christ of the Ozarks

More than 250 actors and live animals recreate the Passion of Christ in one of the most epic performances you'll experience and the only one of its kind in North America. Located in Eureka Springs, this theatrical event is closer and more convenient than its counterpart at Mount Oberammergau in Germany. All-inclusive packages and group discounts make it a great value for families and groups. On-site attractions include Christ of the Ozarks, The Living Bible Tour, Museum of Earth History and Top of the Mountain Dinner Theater, featuring music by the Texans. Spend the day at The New Great Passion Play.

800-882-7529 • greatpassionplay.com

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get calls all the time from people telling us what a difference it makes to read our messages. This sign is on the highway as our church is back off the road but everyone can see our sign from the highway and it makes a difference in letting people know we are here," he said.

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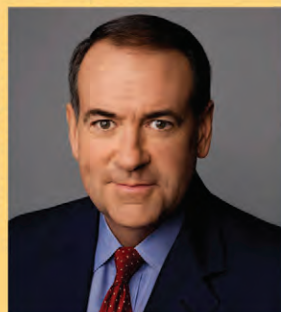
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Give an encouraging word

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.

It is a paycheck, a raise and a promotion. It is reward points and bonuses on credit cards. It is an encouraging word and recognition in the community.

It is positive reinforcement and it is one of the strongest ways to encourage behaviors.

We are very familiar with it when dealing with children.

We give gold stars for Scripture memorization, a trip to the treasure box for doing a good deed in the classroom and a special treat for making a good grade. We don't hesitate to say, "Good job!" We fully embrace the power of a reward when shaping our children's behaviors and attitudes.

A Thought for Women

By Jean Roberson



The idea of reward is central to our Christian faith.

We are promised life with God eternally in heaven, where we will receive our reward. In Philippians and 2 Timothy, Paul even likened the Christian life to a race, running to the finish line where a prize waits.

We are striving for something good.

However, we seem to lose all of that when dealing with adults. We seem to forget that we all are motivated by the idea of striving for something good, regardless of our age.

Our ways of interacting with our friends, co-workers and spouse are characterized by criticism, and we slowly lose the power of positive reinforcement. We, ourselves, become more focused on the negative.

Certainly there is a time for correction and suggestion, but our efforts to correct have to be balanced with encouraging words, words of gratitude and recognition that affect people so powerfully.

Think through your day.

Can you identify one time when you missed an opportunity to encourage someone?

Did he or she do something well and you said nothing?

How would your relationship with that person change if you were to recognize and thank him or her for a job well done?

Similarly can you identify one time when you critiqued a person for something that is usually done well?

Perhaps that person had a bad day and let something slip.

How would your relationship change if you had waited to say something until the person did the job to the usual standard and did it well?

Then you could have been affirming.

When we balance our corrective words with our encouraging words, we find that our relationships in general become more positive. We create more energy and motivation in the people around us.

Even more importantly, we develop the ability to see the good things around us instead of focusing on the negative things around us.

It is the power of positive reinforcement.

A Takeaway Value . . .

When you find you have to correct someone, also find time to encourage him or her for something done well.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

IMB appoints three Alabamians to missions service

RICHMOND, Va. — Forty-six Southern Baptist representatives, including three Alabamians, were appointed by trustees of the International Mission Board (IMB) in two services May 5 at Broadview Missionary Baptist Church, Broadview, Ill., and May 6 at First Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss. The appointment services were the last for IMB President Jerry Rankin before his retirement July 31.

"I want to thank you, Southern Baptists, because of your faithfulness in praying, for your heart for a lost world, for your faithful giving [through] the Cooperative Program [that] has enabled them to go in obedience to God's call," Rankin said.

The Alabamians appointed cannot be identified because they will serve in high-security areas.

Liberty University to investigate its seminary president

LYNCHBURG, Va. — Liberty University will investigate reports that its seminary president has misled the public in his testimony about converting from militant Islam to Christianity, officials of the school in Lynchburg announced May 10.

Liberty Provost Ron Godwin is reportedly forming a committee to conduct a formal inquiry into questions surrounding Ergun Caner, president of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, that have circulated on blogs and more recently in media outlets including *Christianity Today* and Associated Baptist Press.

But discrepancies in biographical information he has provided in sermons — many recorded — preached over the years have caused some to question his credibility. Some are questioning even his basic testimony of converting to Christianity from a devout Sunni Muslim background.

Jason Smathers, a Christian website designer, found legal documents contradicting Caner's claims of growing up in Turkey and being trained as a terrorist. Smathers says Caner actually grew up in Ohio in custody of his Lutheran mother after his parents divorced. Caner's father, a Muslim who remarried, broke off relations with all three sons from his first marriage after they accepted Christ as teenagers.

Caner issued a statement admitting to "pulpit mistakes" but insisting he never intentionally misled anyone.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR: Senior pastor wanted for growing SBC church. Church averages 950 in worship, 800 in Sunday School. Exciting worship services with blend of traditional and contemporary elements. Three Sunday morning services, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening services. Praying for a Godly pastor to lead pastoral staff and church as we seek to reach our community for Christ. Resumes to: Search Team, 501 W Sixth Street, Muscle Shoals, AL 35661 or searchteam@hpbaptist.com.

PASTOR: Faith Baptist Church is currently accepting resumes for a full-time pastor. Mail to: Faith Baptist Church, Pastor Search Committee, 3979 Co. Road 434, Moulton, AL 35650.

EXECUTIVE PASTOR: Hunter First Baptist Church, a conservative Southern Baptist church adhering to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and averaging roughly 400 in attendance, is receiving resumes for the position of executive pastor. Under the leadership of the senior pastor, this person will handle the administrative operations of the church as well as church education ministries. Please send resumes to: Hunter First Baptist Church, ATTN: Executive Pastor Search Committee, 693 Highway 91, Elizabethton, TN 37643.

INTERIM MUSIC/WORSHIP DIRECTOR: Immediate opening for an interim music and worship director. Please send resumes to: The Baptist Church at McAdory, 4954 Eastern Valley Road, McCalla, AL 35111, or fax to 205-477-8267 or e-mail to: churchatmcadory@bellsouth.net. You may con-

tact the church office at 205-477-8265.

MINISTER OF YOUTH & DISCIPLESHIP: Full-time position in northwest Alabama, twenty miles south of the Shoals area. Information available at www.tharptown.com/about/job-opportunities.php.

YOUTH PASTOR: Hunter First Baptist Church, a conservative Southern Baptist church adhering to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and averaging roughly 400 in attendance, is receiving resumes for the position of youth pastor. This person will lead in reaching young people in our community, developing a ministry focused on making disciples. He will also work with the children's ministry director to develop a natural flow from our children's ministry into our youth ministry. Please send resumes to: Hunter First Baptist Church, ATTN: Youth Search Committee, 693 Highway 91, Elizabethton, TN 37643.

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PART-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTER: East Highland Baptist Church in Hartselle is currently accepting resumes for a part-time children's minister. Mail to: EHBC, Children's Minister Search Committee, P.O. Box 888, Hartselle, AL 35640.

OTHER POSITIONS

DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES: The Mobile Baptist Association of Mobile, Ala., is currently seeking

to fill the position of the director of international ministries. Please visit www.mobilebaptists.org for information and instructions.

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Want to know God?

By Pastor Jeffrey A. Greer
Riverchase Baptist, Birmingham

I was looking for a street the other day. I hadn't had time to fire up the GPS in my truck, and anyway I knew about where the street was. My wife and I were in a semifarmer neighborhood, looking for a relocation sale (that's a fancy name for a garage sale).

We wanted to stop by and see if there was anything we "needed." Before I could consult the genius road map on the dash of my truck, my wife pointed to a lady who was jogging and said, "Why don't you ask her where it is?"

As a typical man, I rebuffed her and said, "I'm not asking her for directions!"

I figured I could find the location eventually. I was perfectly willing to drive around until I found the street on my own. And if I couldn't find it by my own doing, then I would punch in the street name on the GPS and step-by-step instructions would pop up immediately.

Life can sometimes be like that. I encounter many people who seem to be wandering around looking for something: meaning in life, the road to success, their purpose in life.

Many of them don't want to stop and ask for directions, preferring instead to find the answers on their own or perhaps hoping that the answers they crave can be found by using some new iPhone application.

At times in my own life, I have wanted someone to give me step-by-step instructions for some of life's greatest quests — "Should I take this job?" "Is this the one I am supposed to marry?" "When is a good time to start a family?" "What is the purpose of my life anyway?"

I never received a clear response on any of my questions until I made the decision to ask someone for directions. Now, every day of my life, I ask God to guide me through life, consulting His Word and spending time in prayer to understand how I can find my way through life.

The Book of Proverbs tells us that if we trust the Lord with all of our heart, then He will make our paths straight (Prov. 3:5-6). In other words, God will guide us, giving our lives meaning and purpose.

Go ahead, ask for directions and trust God to direct your paths. It never hurts to ask.

Letters to the Editor

THANKS TO SBOM

I don't have the time to read all the blogs, look it all up on the Internet and to stay on the phone to hear the latest "I heard" conversation.

One thing I do know is that anytime I've called the SBOM (Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions) with questions or for help, they have responded. As far as the CP (Cooperative Program) and NAMB (North American Mission Board) goes, we at Stave Creek Baptist Church (where I serve as pastor) are thankful to be able to cooperate with so many others in ministry and we are thankful for the resources made available through each entity and for each missionary as they have responded to God's call for their life.

Jamie Lay
Jackson, Ala.

TRAUMATIC STORIES

I read the account of the killings of the infants in an Indian slum in the May 6 issue with nausea and horror.

I am not sure I could tell this story from the pulpit without causing trauma to many members of our congregation, especially the children.

But the story must be told again and again as well as others like it until hope is realized by these mothers and a culture that finds itself in such a hopeless situation.

Each week, I read the section on World of Religion and learn of the

persecution of so many Christians around the world. The accounts of people who endure murder, torture and exile for the sake of Christ is overwhelming.

I am driven to my knees to pray for my brothers and sisters that I will never know. My appreciation for their testimony is life changing. I am compelled by Christ to do something to make a difference. This is one of the reasons that I take mission trips that will lead people to Christ, help with physical needs, strengthen church leaders and help establish new churches.

These accounts prompt me to lead our church in Cooperative Program giving, Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, world hunger efforts, Annie Armstrong Easter Offering and other causes that lift the name of Christ and help people around the world, beginning here in Ashville.

The same issue filled me with such anger as I read of \$4.4 million given to determine how God-given free will exists ("Who's Responsible?," May 6 issue). We seem to be "straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel" when this amount of money is wasted while mothers in India could use some assistance to save a baby from the cooking pot or ... someone else in the world ... is dying for the lack of a cup of water and a bowl of rice. Florida State University should be ashamed to have their name associated with this study. The John Templeton Foundation

should repent for such a wasteful use of money when lives and souls are hanging in the balance. Surely the heart of our heavenly Father breaks when we will extravagantly focus on philosophies that we will never understand while His children are tortured, murdered or die for a lack of food, water and shelter.

James Sampley
Ashville, Ala.

GCRTF CONCERN

Winston Churchill said of the Royal Air Force during World War II, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." As I read the report from the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force, my thoughts are "Never have so few who (on average) give so little to the Cooperative Program made changes that affect so many." The task force wants us in only one year to accept changes that may do more to harm the Great Commis-

sion than it will to help world evangelization and discipleship.

I know that we need revival and renewal and repentance, but do we have to accept the entire report without time to think, pray and discuss what this report may do if it is enacted? As a young pastor in 1979, I went to Houston and embraced the conservative resurgence. Men like Adrian Rogers, W.A. Criswell, John Bisagno, Jerry Vines and others led us through changes that took more than a decade to accomplish. We need to pray and seek God's will for us as individuals, churches, associations, state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. The majority at Kadesh-barnea chose not to do God's will, and they spent the next 40 years wandering in the desert until they all died. We need to know God's will before we attempt to do God's will.

Mike Shaw
Pelham, Ala.

Baptist pastor imprisoned in Azerbaijan reports another run-in with authorities

A Baptist pastor in Azerbaijan who served 10 months in prison before appeals from Baptists worldwide spurred the nation's president to pardon him says police have visited him again.

Zaur Balaev, who leads a Baptist congregation in the small town of Aliabad in the northwestern Azerbaijan region of Zakatala, said May 10 that two police officers visited his home and warned him that his unregistered church does not have the right to gather for worship.

Balaev said the officers warned of "unpleasantness with the law" if the church continues to meet.

Balaev was imprisoned from May 2007 to March 2008 on charges of

violent resistance to arrest. Supporters said the allegations, including that he assaulted five police officers and damaged a police car, were fabricated. After protests from the Baptist World Alliance, the European Baptist Federation and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev ordered Balaev's release.

A second Baptist pastor in the same town, Hamid Shabanov, was convicted in 2009 on weapons charges and sentenced to two years of hard labor. Shabanov's supporters said the weapon was planted and was part of an intimidation campaign aimed at closing the church in Aliabad. (ABP)

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WESTMEADE DONATES VAN TO FBC ALBERTVILLE

Westmeade Baptist Church, Decatur, donated a 15-passenger van to First Baptist Church, Albertville, after a recent tornado destroyed its four vans. Mike Johnson (center) is pastor of First, Albertville, and Tim Webb (left) is associate pastor. Scotty Hogan (right) is pastor of Westmeade.




Vacation Bible School

church directory



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Mountainview Baptist Church July 12–16, 6–8 p.m. 1800 County Road 39 Chelsea, AL 35043 205-601-8986 www.mountainview.cc Ages preschool through 4th grade 	First Baptist Church, Pelham June 7–11, 9 a.m.–noon Ages 3K (born before Sept. 2, 2006)–5th grade  Pelham, Ala. 205-216-0028	The Baptist Church at McAdory June 13–18, 6–9 p.m. Ages 3 years old to adult (adult VBS begins at 6:30 p.m.) Visit www.bcmcadory.org to register.  McCalla, Ala. 205-477-8265	The Church at Brook Hills Rock The Block — Back Yard Bible clubs hosted by families from Brook Hills all over Birmingham. June 21–24, 9–11 a.m. or 6–8 p.m. www.backyardvbs.org 205-313-7777	Pine Barren Baptist Association Beatrice Baptist Church June 6–11, 5 p.m. Bible Baptist Church no date set Camden Baptist Church June 7–11, 8:30 a.m.–noon Christian Way Baptist Church June 21–25, 5–7 p.m. Gullett's Bluff Baptist Church Aug. 1–3, 6:30–8:30 p.m. Vredenburg Baptist Church July 17, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. July 18, 1–3 p.m., July 19–20, 6–8 p.m.			
First Baptist Church, Helena June 6–10, 6–8:15 p.m. featuring the video "Sheriff Dan Saves Town" each night To register visit www.FBHelena.org and click on the link at the bottom of the page.  Helena, Ala. 205-663-7879	Dogwood Grove Baptist Church June 7–11, 6:30–8:45 p.m. Ages 4 years old–6th grade Kick-off party June 5, 11 a.m.–2 p.m.  Montevallo, Ala. 205-665-0202	Calvary Baptist Church June 21–25, 8:30–11:30 a.m. For information contact Tammy Driver.  Wetumpka, Ala. 334-567-4729	CrossPoint Church June 14–18, 9 a.m.–noon Register online in May at www.Crosspointchurch.info Family night is June 16.  Trussville, Ala. 205-655-0364	Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church June 7–11, 9 a.m.–noon Family night will be June 9, 6 p.m.  Hueytown, Ala. 205-491-3771	Providence Baptist Church July 19–23, 6–8:30 p.m. Kickoff will be June 17, 3–7 p.m., in the church parking lot.  Gallion, Ala. 334-295-5095	First Baptist Church, Oneonta June 7–11, 9 a.m.–noon Family night will be June 13, 6 p.m. Visit www.oneontafbc.org to register.  Oneonta, Ala. 205-625-3191	Brewster Road Baptist Church July 18–22, 6–8:30 p.m. Family night is July 23, 6 p.m.  Birmingham, Ala. 205-853-0378
Summerfield Baptist Church June 14–18, 9 a.m.–noon Kickoff will be June 13, 11 a.m. Family Night will be June 20, 6 p.m.  Valley Grande, Ala. 334-872-2614	Refuge Baptist Church June 7–11, 6–8:30 p.m. Ages 3 years old–6th grade Family night will be June 13, 6 p.m.  Tallassee, Ala. 334-857-2638	First Baptist Church, Addison June 14–18, 9 a.m.–noon for babies–6th grade Youth VBS: June 13–17, 6–8:30 p.m.  Addison, Ala. 256-747-6470					

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World Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Muslims abduct young Christian woman, beat her mother

LAHORE, Pakistan — Muslims who kidnapped and forcibly converted an 18-year-old Christian woman to Islam severely beat her mother on two occasions to discourage her from trying to recover her daughter, lawyers said. On April 25, Muhammad Akhter and Muhammad Munir broke into the home of 50-year-old widow Fazeelat Bibi while her sons were at work and beat her because they were upset at her continuous demands that they return her daughter Saira, Christian Lawyers Foundation (CLF) leaders said. CLF President Khalid Gill said neighbors' calls to the police emergency number went unheeded as the men beat her in Lahore's predominantly Muslim Bostaan Colony.

On April 18, Akhter and members of his family had beaten Bibi with clubs and ripped her clothes when the widow, having received a tearful phone call from her kidnapped daughter that day, went to their house to argue for her release. In her telephone call, Bibi said Saira told her that Munir, Akhter and Munir's sister Billo Bibi had kidnapped her, stolen the jewelry of her dowry, forced her to convert to Islam and were pressuring her to marry Munir. When Saira was kidnapped March 10, she was engaged to a young Christian man in Youhanabad, a large Christian slum on the outskirts of Lahore.

"Saira's brothers and I were very joyful because we were about to fix her wedding date," Fazeelat Bibi said. Kotlakhpat Police Station Inspector Rana Shafiq has refused to help her recover her daughter and has explicitly sided with his fellow Muslims, Gill said. Shafiq was unavailable for comment.

Pope challenges Portuguese on abortion, gay 'marriage'

FATIMA, Portugal — Pope Benedict XVI on May 13 singled out abortion, divorce and same-sex "marriage" as "some of today's most insidious and dangerous threats to the common good."

The pope made his remarks in an address to social workers at the Portuguese shrine of Fatima, on the third day of a four-day visit to Portugal. Portugal's parliament voted in February to give same-sex couples many of the rights of marriage, a policy that Benedict has in the past called "gravely unjust" and the "legalization of evil." Portugal's President Anibal Cavaco Silva, a practicing Catholic, has yet to sign the bill into law.

Speaking to Portuguese bishops later May 13, the pope specifically criticized "politicians, intellectuals, (and) communications professionals" who promote "disdain" for religion, and called upon Christians in those fields to bear witness to their faith.

Tuscaloosa Baptists start Facebook prayer group, see concept take off

By Kathy Dean
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Chip Freeman said the view from the pulpit is sobering.

"You walk into churches and you see whole churches that are a third full. You wonder where the people are," said Freeman, a bivocational pastor who also supply preaches in the Tuscaloosa area.

He found them on Facebook.

So Freeman, pastor of Old Union Baptist Church in Brent, and Jimmy Dockery, a member of South Highlands Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, started a Facebook group, On Our Knees in Tuscaloosa, to draw people to God through prayer and Christian fellowship.

Freeman designed a logo, a silhouette of a man on his knees in prayer against an outline of Tuscaloosa County, and last August, he and Dockery sent Facebook invitations to their friends, who then invited their friends. Soon people from across the county and those with ties to it who now live elsewhere were posting prayer requests, sending invitations to church events and building relationships.

The group has grown to include more than 1,100 people of all ages, races and denominations and has spawned other On Our Knees groups.

There are currently On Our Knees groups, ranging in size

from three to nearly 500 members, for Limestone, Jefferson, Lamar, Madison, Hale, Morgan, Pickens, Shelby and Autauga counties in Alabama; Okaloosa County in Florida; Hardin County in Tennessee; and U.S. troops serving worldwide.

In all, more than 2,300 people are participating in the Facebook prayer groups.

"We want On Our Knees to be a conduit where people can come together to edify the Lord, to spread the Word of the Lord, to let others know that we are people that care. Our goal is to promote Christianity through the group — first through prayer, then wherever the Lord leads down the road," Freeman said.

Dockery said using Facebook to connect people to the power of prayer is one way of incorporating an awareness of God into daily life.

"They can check their Facebook account in the middle of playing FarmVille (a game on Facebook), and if somebody posts a prayer request, they can think of that person and say a little prayer," he said. "God is being shut out of the world so much. We want to ease access to God back [into] everybody's life."

Carol Sutton, a member of Indian Lake Baptist Church, Northport, is one of those praying for people who post their needs on the Tuscaloosa group's page and being prayed for.

"I love being able to know that there are people I don't even know who are my brothers and sisters in Christ that lift me up in my times of need. And I love being able to pray for others who need me to," she said.

Since the majority of the groups are focused on a particular county, people often have an opportunity to share God's love in person after reading a prayer request.

Sutton said she recognized the last name of a girl who was asking for prayer for her sick father and realized that the girl's mother was a fellow church member.

"I found out they need a lot of prayer now," said Sutton, who also plans to reach out in other ways to comfort the family.

The Tuscaloosa group has moved beyond gathering on Facebook to gathering at churches for prayer minirevivals every

two months.

Brent Jarrett, who organized On Our Knees in Limestone and is a member of Sardis Springs Baptist Church, Athens, can attest to the power of a Facebook group to draw people to church.

Returning to church

"He said he grew up in church, had gotten away from it and had forgotten what kind of love that is," Jarrett said of a co-worker who returned to church after seeing the Facebook posts.

And that's something Freeman hopes will keep happening.

"I want people to realize there are brothers and sisters in Christ who care for them," he said. "Maybe [these groups] can draw us back together to (the) Christian fellowship and unity that the Bible tells us we are supposed to have."

For more information, contact Freeman through the On Our Knees in Tuscaloosa page on Facebook or by calling him at 205-792-8667.

"God is being shut out of the world so much. We want to ease access to God back [into] everybody's life."

Jimmy Dockery
South Highlands Baptist

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Voices of Mobile sing from Alaska to Hawaii and back

Spring semester classes may have ended, but University of Mobile students in the elite musical ensemble Voices of Mobile are getting a chance to learn a different kind of lesson, while soaking up the performance opportunities of a lifetime. The 16-member group will perform in Hawaii, working with the Hawaii Baptist Convention and local churches June 2-6.

Voices will end their 150-concert annual tour with appearances at the Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Fla., June 14-16. Earlier this year, the group presented concerts throughout the state of Alaska, including a performance at First Baptist Church, North Pole. (UMobile)



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For May 23

Explore the Bible

By Jeffrey S. Quiett

Associate professor of marriage and family counseling, University of Mobile

STAY AWAY FROM PERVERTED PRACTICES

Leviticus 18:1–5, 20–26; 20:6–8

Set Apart (18:1–5)

Beginning with a familiar preamble, Moses repeated to the Israelites their connection with God and their obedient response to Him. The Israelites were reminded frequently who they were and whom they served. God commanded them to set themselves apart from the practices of their former captors (the Egyptians) and their future subjects (the Canaanites).

Egyptian and Canaanite perversions are well attested in Scripture and nonbiblical sources. Brothers married sisters in the Egyptian royal family. Homosexuality was referred to among the Canaanites (Gen. 19:5). Bestiality (sex with animals) was known from Egyptian, Canaanite and Hittite sources. Archaeological findings also have suggested the practice of child sacrifice among the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan. These verses make it clear that God’s people are to be different in thought and practice from those who reject Him as their Lord. The Israelites were under constant temptation to deviate from God’s standard of right behavior. Much of their downfall in the Old Testament can be attributed to their inability to set strong boundaries against the unholy living of people around them. The modern parallels are clear. One’s claim to be a follower of Christ without evidence of holy living as defined by God’s standard nullifies the claim (John 14:15). Although works do not save a person (Eph. 2:8), holy living does give evidence of his or her connection with Christ after he or she has made Him personal Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:10).

Holy Living (18:20–26)

In this passage, God specified certain common practices among the Canaanites that the Israelites were to shun. Verse 20 denounces adultery, while verse 21 prohibits child sacrifice. Verse 22 is a clear condemnation of homosexuality, and other biblical passages make further denouncements of this practice (Gen. 19; Lev. 20:13; Judg. 19:22; Rom. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:9). Verse 23 condemns bestiality, which transgresses the God-given boundaries

between man and animals. Verses 24–26 give further warning of the dangers of adopting Canaanite practices. If the Israelites did adopt these behaviors, then God warned them that the land would “vomit out” them as it had the Canaanites. Failure to keep God’s law meant consequences for the Israelites. Social norms and popular opinion do not define what is right and wrong. This passage makes it clear that God defines correct thinking and behavior. God’s holiness sets the standard for human living. Homosexuality is a prime example. Although many may consider this behavior a “lifestyle choice,” the Bible clearly condemns it. Though we may change moral standards, God’s standard never changes.

Dependence on God (20:6–8)

Verse 6 refers to “necromancy” or “divination” that came in many forms in the Old Testament. This verse names “mediums” and “spiritists” as off-limits to the Israelites. The common occupation of these individuals was attempting to communicate with the dead for purposes of telling the future. Only God knows and is in control of the future, eliminating the need for necromancy. Verses 7–8 are more exhortations to holiness. Holy living demands that God’s followers separate themselves from sinful practices and live in accordance with His definition of right living. Notice at the end of verse 8 that God is ultimately the One who makes it possible for His followers to live in accordance with His will. The pursuit of holiness can only be accomplished with God, who is the very definition of holiness. An increased interest today in ghosts and communicating with these spirits is easily seen in television and other media. Scripture clearly denounces the practice of looking to the dead for guidance. Followers of Christ are to be dependent on God for direction and security. The pursuit of holy living cannot be realized unless one dies to self and gives that life to God (Rom. 6:4). Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, holy living is not possible. Sheer willpower or knowledge of all of God’s laws is not enough. Only through Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit can holiness be achieved in God’s eyes (Rom. 8:3–4).

Bible Studies for Life

By Mark DeVine

Associate professor of divinity, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University

‘I PLEDGE YOU MY FAITHFULNESS’

Matthew 5:27–30; Proverbs 5:15–21; 6:25–32

You are what you eat. You are what you think. You become like those with whom you associate. Each of these adages contains much truth. Our focal passages affirm the second one in connection with marital faithfulness. Jesus called upon His followers to love God not only with their whole heart, soul and strength but also with their mind for good reason.

Mind, Mind

“Everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart,” Jesus said. Let the thought of sexual unfaithfulness enter your mind, turn it over in your mind a few times and the next thing you know, the things of God no longer have room within either your heart or mind and the temptation to sin grows exponentially. Guard your mind jealously. Protect it. Mind your mind. Make your mind mind, because your marriage, your relationship with God, indeed everything of value in this life is at stake. The devil attacks the mind and lures the heart. The devil is a liar and murderer. He lies in order to kill. “Did God really say?” was the serpent’s seemingly innocuous inquiry of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Just a little suggestion to the mind provided the foothold for evil that sent the whole human race tumbling into tragic disobedience and the threat of eternal ruin. Yes. Guard your mind. Everything is at stake.

The devil’s temptation to sexual unfaithfulness is coming at us full force from seemingly every direction these days: the television, the Internet, texting, Facebook, e-mail and a thousand other sources. Sad statistics displaying the weakness of marriages between Christians make clear the devil is winning. Guard your mind as you guard your life. Jesus’ advice with regard to such lust in the heart is radical indeed: “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” It is metaphorical language no doubt but the meaning is clear — there should be zero

tolerance where lustful thought is concerned.

Boundaries

Take other precautions as well. Take advantage of books such as “Boundaries in Marriage,” by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, to learn ways to protect your marriage by making unfaithfulness less likely. Learn how to avoid situations proven to increase threats to the marriage bond. Jesus has us pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” for good reason. Frequent interactions with the opposite sex in settings conducive to the establishment and nurturing of inappropriate emotional bonds put marriages at risk. Avoid such settings like the plague because that is exactly what they are where marriage is concerned. “Can a man embrace fire and his clothes not be burned?”

Most unfaithfulness occurs not because a husband or wife goes looking for an opportunity to betray his or her spouse but because he or she unwittingly and repeatedly puts himself or herself in circumstances conducive to unfaithfulness. Spend time in vulnerable contexts with a person of the opposite sex and when financial difficulties arise or trouble with the children or sexual problems or a thousand other sources of stress common to all marriages, that “other” person suddenly seems so attractive, so understanding, such a refuge and comfort, so unlike my wife or husband just now. Sin crouches at the door.

Thou Shalt

But perhaps the best biblical protection for marriage lies not in the “Thou shalt nots” but in the “thou shalt.” Thou shalt enjoy and satisfy thy sexual appetite with thy spouse. The biggest fan, supporter and promoter of sex in the universe is, in fact, the only true God. God invented sex after all. He is not ashamed of it, but proud of it. He’s all for it — within the bounds of holy matrimony. Our focal passages make clear that finding sexual fulfillment within marriage is meant to satisfy husband and wife and in so doing, provide the most powerful protection against unfaithfulness imaginable. Let’s protect, cherish, nurture and enjoy what we have at home, and we won’t need to go searching elsewhere.

Christian Crossword

By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

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Across

1. There is no fear in _____. (1 John 4:18)

5. Depot. (abbr.)

8. Jacob's brother.

12. Persia.

13. Slippery fish.

14. Outdoes.

15. Man.

16. Thy word is a _____ my feet. (Ps. 119:105)

18. Samuel's mentor.

19. It is I; be not _____. (John 6:20)

20. Plunges.

22. Ancient city of Edom.

26. Scent.

30. Embrace.

31. Car.

32. Cow's cry.

33. Yea, come, buy _____ and milk without money. (Isa. 55:1)

34. For to me to live is Christ, and to _____ is gain. (Phil. 1:21)

35. Thou hast been faithful over a _____, I will make thee ruler over many. (Matt. 25:2)

37. Follow.

39. Sharp, distinctive flavor.

40. Water inlet for ships.

43. Distress call.

46. They _____ leaves together, and make themselves aprons. (Gen. 3:7)

49. _____ Town, South Africa.

50. Ended.

51. Ginger ____.

52. Region.

53. Sleepers.

54. Highways. (abbr.)

55. And he spread abroad the _____ over the tabernacle. (Ex. 40:19)

Down

1. Citrus fruit.

2. Spoken.

3. Gives official sanction to.

4. Compass direction.

5. And his servant was healed in the _____ hour. (Matt. 8:13)

6. Rend.

7. _____ Mater.

8. Musical exercise.

9. Truly this was the _____ of God. (Matt. 27:54)

10. Be gentle unto all men, _____ to teach, patient. (2 Tim. 2:24)

11. Troop entertainers. (abbr.)

17. Hollow tube.

19. Yearly interest accrued. (abbr.)

21. _____ to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)

23. And all _____ of God. (2 Cor. 5:18)

24. Part of a ladder.

25. Unto him be glory ... throughout all _____. (Eph. 3:21)

26. Lose color.

27. The _____ of that house was great. (Luke 6:49)

28. Behold, _____ is the day of salvation. (2 Cor. 6:2)

29. Small country abodes.

33. Be victorious.

35. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, _____ him. (Rom. 12:20)

36. Horse food.

38. Utilizers.

41. I will fetch my knowledge from _____. (Job 36:3)

42. Untamed.

44. Some men's sins are _____ beforehand. (1 Tim. 5:24)

45. For we shall all stand before the judgment _____ of Christ. (Rom. 14:10)

46. Weep.

47. Adam's wife.

48. Marry.

49. Feline.

I	N	T	E	L	S	D	S	B	E	S
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RESOURCES:

Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature



Southern Gospel

Courtesy of *Singing News* magazine

DOVE BROTHERS

Decennial

Sonlite Crossroads

"Decennial" celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Dove Brothers (who actually released their first CD in 1998). Eight cuts on this CD are remakes of songs recorded when John Rulapaugh and Burman Porter were in the group. "When I Move to Hallelujah Square," "One Step" and "Let the Old Man Die" were on "Pure Tradition," the first CD they distributed on a major label. "Just Another Hill," "Gonna Rise," "Sweet Baby Girl," "Didn't It Rain" and "Get Away Jordan" complete the list of remakes. The newly recorded music tracks feature Danny Crawford, David Johnson, Jeremy Medkiff and Tony Creasman.



Two titles on "Decennial" were not recorded previously by the Dove Brothers. "Anyway" is a cover of Martina McBride's hit featuring Jerry Martin. "My Life" is a Ronnie Milsap song that features McCray Dove in full country crooner mode. Martin's ballad is stylistically similar to "I Can Pray" and "A Little Good News." McCray Dove's gritty country vocals on "My Life" are not unlike the sounds he generated

earlier on a song titled "Hold On."

If I had been tasked with choosing eight songs from the group's 1998-2003 era, I'd have gone a different direction with several choices. "Sweet Baby Girl," "One Step" and "Let the Old Man Die" don't really stick in my memory as much as titles like "Something Within Me," "I'll Praise the Lamb," "Operator" and "I Know He Heard My Prayer."

The key selling point of "Decennial" is that fans can now buy a CD featuring the current lineup singing "Get Away Jordan" and "Didn't It Rain." The inclusion of two new songs should also encourage longtime fans to buy "Decennial" or at least download the new songs through their website.

(David Bruce Murray)

JEFF & SHERI EASTER

Expecting Good Things

Spring Hill Music

With titles like "The Sun Will Shine Again," "Born to Climb," "Time for Me to Fly," "I Get To" and especially the title song, "Expecting Good Things," it's pretty easy to pick up on the theme of the new CD from Jeff & Sheri Easter.

Favorites include the upbeat "The Sun Will Shine Again," the traditional country sounding "I Get To" and the straightforward southern gospel sound of "In the Name of Jesus." Their first single, "Born to Climb," is vintage Jeff & Sheri Easter.

Bluegrass gospel classic "Workin' on a Road" includes guests Marty Stuart (mandolin and vocal), Connie Smith (vocal) and radio station WSM announcer Eddie Stubbs (singing bass).



As they do on every recording project, Jeff and Sheri recorded a love song. Their choice this go-around was "I Know I Love You," written by country writer Lisa Shaffer.

Sheri is featured on "Love Remains," a Beatles-like ballad and arrangement. She belts out "Over the Mountain," and the bluesy "I Don't Wanna Cry," is in Sheri's vocal sweet spot. "Hear My Heart," co-written by Sheri, is a personal song in which she allows the listener to sneak a peak at her innermost thoughts during the peak of her battle with breast cancer.

"Expecting Good Things" contains 13 songs — a fine collection that will speak to the listener in a very personal way.

(Les Butler)

MERCY'S WELL

Songbook: Where Hymns

& *Harmony Live*

Independent

"Songbook: Where Hymns &

Harmony Live" is the latest entry in a series that Mercy's Well began in 2006 with "Hymns: Stories for Life ... Stories That Live" and continued in 2008 with "December: Hymns Where the Story Began." Not only does Mercy's Well have a tendency to place descriptive subtitles on their CD covers, they've practically created their own subgenre. The theme of this third chapter is the shaped-note era.

"Songbook," features prominent piano accompaniment with little else in the way of instrumentation. Piano is more than enough when the players are Gordon Mote and David Huntsinger.

Predictability is avoided by the incorporation of fresh chords and appearances by bass singers



Gene McDonald and Paul Harkey (Anchormen).

"He Bought My Soul" has an expressive arrangement that shifts with the singers to suit the lyrics rather than locking into a robotic rhythm. Huntsinger's stride piano patterns propel "While Endless Ages Roll."

"Songbook" concludes with a medley of "When They Ring the Bells of Heaven" and "Everybody Will Be Happy Over There."

"He Will Surely Make It All Right," "God Put a Rainbow in the Clouds," "The Unseen Hand" and three more selections are also included.

"Songbook" is unique despite the use of classic material. Mercy's Well has transported these mostly well-known lyrics to their own musical space, casting melodies you've heard before in a fresh light.

(David Bruce Murray)

Contemporary Music

By Jeremy Henderson

ROBBIE SEAY BAND

Miracle

Sparrow EMI

It sounds real for a reason. "Miracle," the third label release from Robbie Seay Band, is a collection of songs composed (except for the cover of Jon Foreman's popular "Your Love Is Strong") and recorded over 10 months that succeeds in capturing the everyday humanity within the congregation of Ecclesia, the Houston church Seay serves as worship leader. "Lament" was written after a member's son was shot and killed; the incredible title-track "Miracle" in the wake of the news that a friend had cancer. Musically, the band focuses more on the rock side of the thriving "wor-



ship rock" genre, and it works. It sounds real.

ship rock" genre, and it works. It sounds real.

MISSION SIX

Not Too Young

BEMA Media

Radio Disney regulars Mission Six are back with "Not Too Young," their second record in less than two years. The group of barely teenagers (who first formed in fifth grade) might have a problem with subtle album titles but not with robot vocal effects or sugar-rush rock ala the Jonas Brothers and even Relient K. Before rolling their eyes, older bands in the genre would be well advised to take some time with 1 Timothy 4:12, because young Mission Six is currently setting the



example in pop, rock and synth-backed pledges of purity.

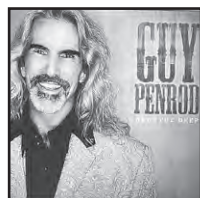
GUY PENROD

Breathe Deep

Servant Records

The first song of Guy Penrod's post-Gaither Vocal Band (GVB) solo career gets real sentimental real fast about sitting in matching rocking chairs with his wife and driving the kids to Dairy Queen.

So yes, "Breathe Deep" is a good country record (ready for radio if given half a chance). But it's one that fans of the GVB sound Penrod helped shape for 14 years should be able to embrace as enthusiastically as Penrod himself. The hair, the smile and the voice are all still there.



Christian Marketplace

Top Ten Best Sellers

Fiction

1. **Take Three**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
2. **The Telling**, Beverly Lewis (Bethany House)
3. **Her Mother's Hope**, Francine Rivers (Tyndale House)
4. **The Shack**, William P. Young (Windblown Media)
5. **Lineage of Grace**, Francine Rivers (Tyndale House)
6. **A Cousin's Challenge**, Wanda E. Brunstetter (Barbour Publishing)
7. **No Distance Too Far**, Lauraine Snelling (Bethany House)
8. **Shades of Blue**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)
9. **Redeeming Love**, Francine Rivers (Waterbrook)
10. **Take One**, Karen Kingsbury (Zondervan)

Nonfiction

1. **Jesus Calling**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
2. **Crazy Love**, Francis Chan (David C. Cook)
3. **The Me I Want to Be**, John Ortberg (Zondervan)
4. **So Long, Insecurity**, Beth Moore (Tyndale House)
5. **The Five Love Languages**, Gary Chapman (Moody)
6. **Fearless**, Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson)
7. **The Love Dare**, Stephen and Alex Kendrick (B&H Publishing)
8. **3:16**, Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson)
9. **Forgotten God**, Francis Chan (David C. Cook)
10. **Same Kind of Different As Me**, Ron Hall and Denver Moore (Thomas Nelson)

'A lot of uneasiness'

Shrimping town near oil spill buoyed by prayer

Residents in the small shrimping community of Venice, La., are uncertain about their future amid reporters who have crowded into the state's southernmost town to cover the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

"It's pretty much chaos. We have people from all over the country here — lots of reporters. I've talked to reporters from Spain and from Germany. The president's motorcade came down the other day," Steve McNeal, pastor of First Baptist Mission, Venice, said May 4.

At the same time, people who have relied on the shrimping industry and the sports fishing industry in Venice to earn an income fear the blows that could be dealt to their businesses.

"There are folks not knowing where their next dollar is coming from," said McNeal, who also works as a firefighter. "One good thing is that there are a lot of cleanup jobs. It's hard, dirty work, but money is coming in. So I guess some folks that haven't even had jobs in the past are now getting jobs."

British Petroleum, the company that leased the offshore oil rig that exploded April 20 and sank to the ocean floor, now is hiring locals to help remove the oil as it threatens the marshes and shorelines of the Gulf Coast.

"A lot of these folks have been shrimping all their lives, and now they're going to have to do something else. All they've ever wanted to do is shrimp, so there's an emotional trauma, I guess, as well as some folks just not knowing what's going to happen tomorrow or next week," McNeal said.

The most obvious ways Venice was affected by the spill were that the hotels, restaurants and streets were full of media representatives attempting to relay the story to the rest of the world, the pastor said.

"There's definitely a smell in the air. The waters are very rough, and I think they're kind of aerating the oil and the wind is picking it up," he said. "You can smell it somewhat. It's not like a horrible smell or anything."

McNeal explained that Venice is about 25 miles from where the oil is making landfall, mostly in the marsh areas of the delta where few people live.

First Baptist Mission, with an average of 12 people in attendance on



BP photo

QUESTIONS — President Barack Obama talks with local fishermen about recovery efforts along the Gulf coastline in Venice, La., May 2. Steve McNeal, pastor of First Baptist Mission, Venice, reported a pervasive sense of uncertainty in the community as oil threatens to disrupt the shrimping industry and wildlife.

Sundays, currently meets in a living room, McNeal said, but a building of their own is under construction. A couple of volunteer teams are scheduled to pitch in during June.

"I'd like to get several other teams lined up if I could to come down and help us get it built maybe a little bit quicker so we can get in and start reaching out to people," McNeal said.

About a block from the church is a cleanup station for birds and other wildlife that are expected to be affected by the oil.

"There doesn't appear to be a lot of activity going on there. Part of the training that they're giving the people who are going to be part of the cleanup is how to determine what to do with an animal when they find it," McNeal said.

The church members hosted an impromptu prayer service shortly after the oil started heading their way, and several people who don't normally attend stopped by.

"We were able to pray with them, and that eased their distress for a while," McNeal said.

First Baptist Mission is still trying to determine what role they can play if the oil comes ashore as expected.

"It's probably going to be going on for months and perhaps even years. So we're going to try to finish the church building as quickly as possible so we'll have a better facility with which to do whatever it is that God is going to lead us to do," McNeal said. "We don't know exactly yet what opportunities are going to open to us other than prayer."

As he talks to people in the community, the pastor encounters those

who wonder whether their lives are going to be totally destroyed by the oil, and he reminds them that God is in charge.

"This didn't surprise Him. He's got a plan and sometimes we just have to be flexible to go along with His plan," McNeal said.

On Sunday, a media crew filmed part of the worship service and then interviewed McNeal, and he was able to emphasize the power of prayer in an overwhelming situation such as the oil spill.

"I was able to basically tell them that we've been praying and since we've been praying things have changed. One day that we prayed was right after they found out there was not going to be shrimping anymore, so we prayed and the next day they announced that they were going to use the shrimpers as part of the cleanup and pay them a pretty good amount to use their boats and their crews to go out and clean up," McNeal said.

"There was another member of the church who was working with a guy building a new shrimp dock, which the community really needed. He had everything invested in this and now all of a sudden there's not going to be a use for the shrimp dock. So he was looking at perhaps not getting any of his return, and now it turns out that BP is likely going to lease that facility from him."

"All of that happened just right after we prayed, and I was able to share with the reporters that prayer works," McNeal said. "He wanted to know what I was preaching on, and I told him that in Christ we have all of our needs met and we don't need to worry. It will work out OK."

"There's a lot of uneasiness and a lot of opportunities for our church to follow God's guidance to show us where He's at work and join Him there to make something good out of this," he said. (BP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Court upholds mention of 'God' in presidential oath

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court ruled May 7 that a California atheist lacked legal standing to strip the phrase "so help me God" from the presidential oath of office.

Michael Newdow, an activist who previously sued unsuccessfully to have "under God" removed from the Pledge of Allegiance and "In God We Trust" taken off U.S. coins and currency, asked a district court to bar President Obama from inviting two private ministers — "The Purpose Driven Life" author Rick Warren and civil-rights activist Joseph Lowery — to lead invocation and benediction prayers at his inauguration in 2009.

Newdow also sought to prevent Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts from asking Obama to repeat "so help me God" at the end of his oath. The words are not part of the oath or affirmation required by the Constitution, but a tradition of adding them dates, by some accounts, to George Washington.

Many historians are skeptical of that claim, but the phrase has been used in unbroken succession since Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first inauguration in 1933.

A three-judge panel of the District of Columbia U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said Newdow's claims regarding the 2009 inauguration were moot, because it had already occurred and is no longer "an actual controversy" that can be decided by law.

The court also denied Newdow's challenges to future inauguration ceremonies in 2013 and 2017 for technical reasons.

In seeking to enjoin all persons a future president could possibly invite to administer an oath, lead a prayer or help in event planning, the judges said, Newdow in effect sought "an injunction against the world."

"There is another name for that type of generally applicable relief: legislation," the court said. "And that's not within the power of the courts."

Newdow previously sought injunctions to block prayers at President Bush's inaugurations in 2001 and 2005, but a federal judge said he failed to prove that he was injured by an inaugural prayer.

Controversial cross at center of case reportedly stolen

LAS VEGAS — A simple metal-pipe cross in the middle of the Mojave Desert that inspired a passionate Supreme Court debate about religious freedom has reportedly been stolen. The cross — successor to one first erected as a World War I memorial in 1934 — stood atop Sunrise Rock, next to a road in a remote part of California's Mojave National Preserve. The location is about 70 miles south of Las Vegas and 200 miles northeast of Los Angeles.

According to The Associated Press report, National Park Service officials said the crime was discovered May 10 when a service employee was sent to replace the wooden box that covered the cross, which itself had been destroyed by vandals over the weekend prior to the theft.

The employee discovered the cross missing, with the bolts that had connected it to its concrete mount cut.

Motives for the theft, the Park Service said, could range from a protest against the April 28 Supreme Court ruling in the cross's favor to a case of common thieves seeking scrap metal.

But a conservative religious legal group that argued in favor of the cross declared the theft vandalism and appealed for funds to erect a replacement in a website posting May 11. The Liberty Institute noted, as part of its appeal, that the legal wrangling over the cross isn't finished.



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The Alabama Baptist?

E-mail your information to news@thealabamabaptist.org; fax it to 205-870-8957 or call 1-800-803-5201. Church announcements should arrive three weeks prior to the event.