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Ethics and economics

Where you spend your money can have moral implications

Even a financial decision as seemingly mundane as where to buy your morning coffee can have profound moral implications.

Does the company that produces or sells the coffee collude with corrupt government institutions to exploit the farmers who grow it? Does that company treat its own workers well, with health care coverage? Do the executives donate to political causes you find morally acceptable? Does its stores undercut community-supporting local merchants, driving them out of business?

And on a broader level, is investing one's retirement funds in the stock of such a company advisable?

Experts in ethics and economics say Christians need to examine their own consciences and views of what practices they believe comport with their understanding of faith to build an ethical framework to factor those values into their economic decisions.

And while the complexities of the global marketplace can make understanding the implications of individual economic decisions a daunting task, resources are available to Christians who want to understand their world better. Forming one's ethical framework regarding financial decision-making is fairly simple, according to William Mounts, an economics professor at Mercer University's Stetson School of Business in Macon, Ga.

"One: I don't find anywhere in the Bible that it says you can't try to make money," he said. "No. 2, from my perspective, what I believe is I was created by God for God's pleasure and that what I should do every day is to honor that. So it seems to me that every question that comes across my desk, no matter what it is — investment questions, a personal-finance question — is that I would answer it so that my answer honors God."

What does that mean in a concrete example?

"Well, if I explore the stocks in my portfolio and I discover that a chemical company is testing on people in the Amazon jungle — well, I ask myself, 'Does that honor God?' And I'd say



Photo courtesy of WMU

A GOOD BUY — While money spent at some stores may pose an ethical problem, money spent on items from Woman's Missionary Union's WorldCrafts goes directly back to artisans like the Thai women pictured here.

no so I wouldn't invest in that stock."

Likewise, Mounts said, on the consumer level, a Christian who believes that alcohol consumption is wrong may decide not to patronize a restaurant that serves beer.

Think before purchasing

"We've certainly been consumers for longer than we've been investors, so I think it's natural for people to think about the stuff they buy — and if they buy stuff that they believe isn't consistent with their Christian views, they'll stop buying it," he said.

Baptist ethicist Glen Stassen, who teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., would add additional factors — like environmentalism and social justice — into his moral calculus when it comes to financial decisions.

"Jesus confronted the Pharisees, Sadducees and wealthy 37 times in the Gospels for injustice, so we should be looking for justice for workers and justice for future generations in terms of our consuming too much and destroying the planet," he said.

Christians are called to live frugal lives and "not spend more on ourselves than we need to and give God thanks that we have some left over to give to important charities to meet people's needs," he added.

When it comes to investing money for retirement, Mounts noted the complexity of modern-day financial instruments — such as mutual funds, each of which places invested dollars in a broad and ever-changing array of stocks and other securities — can prove difficult for the would-be ethical

(See 'WorldCrafts,' page 3)

Critics challenge 'don't ask, don't tell' report

Critics say that despite the Pentagon's effort to put a positive face on it, the much-discussed review of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy actually shows that unit cohesion, effectiveness, privacy and religious liberty would be severely harmed if homosexuals were allowed to serve openly in the military.

The report is at the heart of a debate about whether the Senate should pass a bill during the December lame duck session to overturn the 17-year-old policy.

"There was nothing in that report that showed a single benefit to the military in terms of readiness, recruiting, retention," Elaine Donnelly, president of the Center for Military Readiness, said at a Dec. 1 news conference sponsored by the Family Research Council.

For instance, 59 percent of Marines who have been in combat and 44 percent of all personnel who have been in combat said having openly homosexuals in a field environment or at sea would have a negative effect on their unit's "effectiveness at completing its mission."

Among those in the Marine combat arms and Army combat arms, 57 percent and 47 percent, respectively, said having an openly homosexual person would negatively impact "how service members in your immediate unit work together to get the job done."

More than a third of Marines (38.1 percent) and nearly a fourth of all personnel (23.7) said they would either leave the military or think about doing so if the policy is reversed, and 40 percent of Marines and 27 percent of all the military said they would be less likely to recommend to a friend or family member that he or she join the military.

Some Christian and conservative groups, including the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ELRC), are asking supporters of the policy to contact their senators and urge that the policy be maintained. The repeal language is part of a broader bill known as the defense authorization bill.

"We remain convinced that repeal of 'don't ask, don't tell' is not in the nation's best interest," ELRC President Richard Land said in a Dec. 1 e-mail action alert.

Among other findings in the survey:

► 46 percent of personnel who

(See 'Don't,' page 5)

COMMENT

Why Should I Care?

During the past month, about 320,000 Alabamians went to bed hungry because they did not have enough food to eat. That is the implication of the most recent report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) — Household Food Security in the United States, 2009 — released in late November.

The report said 6.8 percent of Alabama households — the largest percentage of any state in the nation — lived with “very low food security” on average from 2007 to 2009. That is a polite way of saying people do not have enough to eat.

The report added that about 700,000 Alabamians live with “food insecurity,” which means they do not get enough nutrition and calories to sustain health. Fifteen percent of all Alabama households fall into this category — up from 13.3 percent in last year’s report. More than one out of every seven state residents lives with food insecurity. That puts Alabama seventh in the nation in this category.

Reports from state agencies show the number of people receiving food assistance at an all-time high — 855,732 in October. Medicaid participation in Alabama has grown almost 20 percent in the last three years, and other indicators of poverty are rising, too.

What is happening in our state is happening across the nation. Families suffering from food insecurity at least some time during 2009 stand at 14.7 percent in the United States — the highest level since the USDA began tracking these figures.

Worldwide the picture is worse. According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, about a billion people in the world live with hunger. The 30-year decline in the percentage of people living with hunger in the developing world turned upward about 2005 and has now climbed back near the level in 1990, when 20 percent of the world’s population lived with hunger.

Some people respond to the plight of the poor and hungry by asking, “Why should I care?” or “What is that to me?” Such questions come from not only those who believe in “survival of the fittest” and see vulnerable human beings as those left behind in the human chain of evolution but also Christians who quote Jesus’ words “the poor will be with you always” (Matt. 26:11) as proof of the futility of helping hurting people.

These Christians usually ignore the parallel passage in Mark 14:7 in which Jesus adds “and you can help them anytime.” Neither do they reference Deuteronomy 15:11 in which God instructs, “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in the land.”

The expectation was that followers of Christ, like the Jews before them, would care for the poor and needy. The goal of this “openhanded” care was set forth in Deuteronomy 15:4 in which God said, “There should be no poor among you.”

Caring for the poor

The Bible is unmistakably clear. Proverbs 29:7 says, “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.” The Old Testament shows God promoting a system that called for the community to help meet the needs of the poor: a day of rest for the slave and alien (Ex. 23:10–12), gleaning of fields by the poor (Lev. 19:9–10), Sabbath year cancellation of debts (Deut. 15:1–18), Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–55), daily care of the poor (Deut. 14:28–29).

The king was instructed to “vindicate the afflicted ... help the poor and crush the oppressor” (Ps. 72:4). The prophet Ezekiel counseled the princes of Israel to practice justice and righteousness (Ezek. 45:9). Amos, the prophet from Tekoa, condemned Judah because society developed systems that cheated and abused the poor and powerless.

Jesus used this same principle in the famous story recorded in Matthew 25:31–46. Jesus invited into His everlasting Kingdom those who had fed the hungry, cared for the homeless, clothed the naked, nursed the sick and remembered the prisoner. The ungodly were cast out precisely because they had not done these things.

The story is not a lesson about how to be saved. It does not teach a works theology. The story is an illustration of the evidence of salvation. Those who evidenced concern for the “least of these,” as Jesus said, demonstrated the Spirit of the Lord in their lives and actions. The second group did not.

Near the end of his life, the apostle John wrote about the same principle. In 1 John 3:17–18, he wrote, “If anyone has material possession and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with action.”

Both Jesus’ story and John’s admonition are best understood as illustrating the Old Testament

principle that “the righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.”


Baptist commitment to the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice helps one understand why Jesus valued the ethics of justice for the poor. It began at creation. The written Word of God bears witness to the fact that the Living Word (Jesus Christ) was the agent of all creation. Colossians 1:16 declares, “For by Him, all things were created.” Verse 17 adds, “In Him, all things hold together.” Jesus is the source of all life, and in Him, all things consist and hold together.

And in each human being, Jesus placed the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Christ has a connection to every human heart as Creator and Sustainer. He offers Himself as Redeemer for each human being as well. That is why the gospel must be shared with every human being.

And the connection of Christ with each human heart is so vital that our Lord could say to His disciples, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40). Service done to any human being is service done to Him.

It is not guilt that motivates the Christian to care for the poor and hungry. It is not even human compassion. The believer preaches good news to the poor, proclaims freedom to the captive and announces healing for the blind and release to the oppressed because he or she has the love of God in his or her heart and those who love God care about the needs of the poor.

That is why every Christian should care about poor, hungry and hurting people.



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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10 ideas for avoiding **HOLIDAY DEBT**

- **Decide what you have to spend.** Make a list and be realistic. Paying in cash may help you keep control.
- **Manage expectations early.** If things are tight, don't be afraid to say so to family members. They are probably in the same boat.
- **Suggest that relatives pool expenses** to buy children gifts they want instead of overindulging them individually.
- **Substitute expensive decorations** with things like paper chains and cookies that add to the fun without costing much.
- **Never take out a Christmas loan.** The consequences could be disastrous in terms of family debt.
- **Give homemade gifts,** such as vouchers for services like ironing and babysitting or cookies and fudge.
- **Don't feel guilty** if you can't afford the latest present for your children. You can't buy love, and it lasts longer in the memory than any toy.
- **Avoid the trap of reciprocal gift-giving** and buying out of obligation.
- **Don't overspend in the January sales,** no matter how good a bargain you might see. Make a budget and stick with it. If possible, leave the credit cards at home.
- **Enjoy low-cost entertainment** like lights in town, family board games and holiday programs at churches and schools.



Source: Christians Against Poverty/ABP

WorldCrafts, other fair-trade groups give consumers way to make global impact

(continued from page 1)

investor to navigate. But resources are available to help steer investors onto the right course.

The roots of socially responsible investing date back to at least the 18th century, when Quaker authorities in Philadelphia decided the slave trade was immoral and church members would be prohibited from participation in slave trafficking.

Fast-forward to the late 20th century, when the Vietnam War, the Cold War nuclear-arms race and increasing awareness of the racist apartheid regime in South Africa led many individuals, groups and religious leaders to encourage divestment in certain companies.

Firms and mutual funds began to spring up that specialized in what is sometimes referred to as socially responsible, ethical or sustainable investing.

Today, according to the Social Investment Forum, such funds account for more than \$3 trillion out of the \$25 trillion tied up in the U.S. investment marketplace.

Such funds might include those designed to appeal to conservative Christians that avoid owning "sin stocks" — companies that produce alcohol, tobacco products or pornography. They also can range to investment in companies that care for their employees well, firms that are good environmental stewards and corporations that spend significant resources investing in underprivileged communities.

A directory of socially responsible financial services is available on the Social Investment Forum's website at www.socialinvest.org.

On the everyday-financial-choices level, other resources are available to those who want to make an economic impact. Besides Mounts' description of Christians' simple choices not to patronize businesses they know to engage in activities they believe are immoral, a movement — dubbed "fair trade" — has sprung up in recent years to give consumers concerned with the moral implications of their purchases more tools to make good decisions.

"Fair trade is a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect that seeks great equality in the international trading system," said Carmen Iezzi, executive director of the Washington-based Fair Trade Federation.

"What all that means is that our members



Photo courtesy of Partners for Just Trade

INCOME — Luci de la Cruz Benito works with Bridge of Hope, a fair-trade project that helps women in poverty.

are organizations that use trade as a tool for social justice — for helping people to help themselves to change their own lives, for respecting the environment and building capacity among the poorest of the poor."

Iezzi's association, which includes both for-profit companies and fair-trade advocacy groups, promotes companies selling goods that, from start to finish, are produced in ways that are maximally beneficial not only to the consumer of the end product and the bottom line of the company selling it but also the originators of the product's raw materials.

'Dignity of hard work'

"It's not about charity; it's not about handouts," Iezzi said. "It's respecting the hard work that people do; it's about paying fair wages; it's about respecting the dignity of hard work."

"It really is about trying to race to the top, to expect more of ourselves and to enable people to reap the benefits of the work that they've done. The labor behind a product that we enjoy is considerable — and there's great

honor in that, and I think that's sometimes overlooked," she said.

Southern Baptists are engaged in fair trade through WorldCrafts, a nonprofit organization and an extension of the national Woman's Missionary Union. A member of the Fair Trade Federation, WorldCrafts sells handmade crafts from artisans in almost 70 countries. These artisans represent women who have come out of prostitution, men and women who are trying to get their families out of slums, widows and people with disabilities.

But WorldCrafts is more than just fair trade, it also engages in direct trade. WorldCrafts works directly with artisan groups so that all the money goes back to the artisans. WorldCrafts also works only with artisan groups that are concerned about the whole person, including the soul.

"People should purchase from WorldCrafts because every product they purchase has a story of someone's life, and a purchase of that product may mean a child isn't sold or a family will have food on their table," said Andrea Mullins, director of WorldCrafts.

"It's that concrete. It can have that real of an impact."

Part of WorldCrafts' mission statement is to "offer eternal hope for impoverished people around the world," and for Mullins, the principles of fair trade are biblical.

"What I discovered when I became the director of WorldCrafts is that fair trade principles come out of Scripture. We give people a humane working situation; we don't abuse families or children. We provide a way for families to have hope."

For more information on WorldCrafts, visit www.worldcraftsvillage.com.

When it comes to the moral bottom line, Stassen said, financial decisions always come back to the same starting place: Do they line up with Christ's example?

And, he added, Jesus participated in a legal, religious and economic system.

"Jesus very much dealt with questions of growing violence ... and He was really concerned about the growing economic injustices," Stassen said. "So He criticized the farmer in Luke 12 for putting all his money into his own barns instead of people who have needs."

"I think one of the biggest powers we have in this society is what we do with our money, so let's use the power we've got in ways that follow Jesus." (ABP, TAB)

Dave Ramsey answers questions about ethical financial decision-making

Dave Ramsey is the founder of the Lampo Group and one of the most widely recognized experts on the intersection of Christian principles and personal finance. He agreed to an e-mail interview about ethical financial decision-making for Christians.

Q: When it comes to financial decisions (entering into debt, investing, consumer choices), what is the proper ethical framework for Christians to use?

A: God has given us more than 800 scriptures in the Bible about money and personal finance.

These scriptures include lessons on debt, budgeting and much more. You can see through the scriptures how we are to handle money God's way. For example, God teach-

us the importance of budgeting in Luke 14:28-30.

He says, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count cost, whether he has enough to finish it — lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying 'This man began to build and was not able finish'?"

Q: What are Christians in a capitalist, consumerist culture called to do in regard to financial decisions when following a counter-cultural Savior?

A: If you study God's Word and learn what he has to say about money and personal finance, you will be able to confidently make financial decisions. Proverbs 22:7 says, "The

rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender." We are taught here that debt is dumb, and we should not borrow money from others.

Q: When it comes to consumer and investment decisions, how closely are Christians called to scrutinize the practices of the companies they patronize or the funds/industries in which they invest?

A: When it comes to investing, you should never invest with anyone that you do not trust, and you should never invest in anything you do not understand thoroughly, and by that I mean upside down, frontward and backward.

Q: In the midst of a severe economic downturn, are Christians actually called

to spend more and invest more to do their part to benefit the common good?

A: Proverbs 21:20 says, "In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has."

People all over the country are struggling to make ends meet, and if you do not have the money to spend, whether it is investing or consumer spending, you should not feel obligated to do so.

We got into this economic mess because people spent money they didn't have and bought things they couldn't afford. But if after doing your budget you find that you have extra money, you should look carefully at investing it, saving it or even giving it away.

You are responsible for taking care of your family, not the U.S. economy. (ABP)

Lee Pitts celebrates 30 years, continues to share Christ through ventriloquism

By Anna Swindle
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Lee Pitts Spooner and her friend Nicky have been a ministry team for 30 years. Sometimes Spooner and Nicky enlist the help of two other pals named Suzie and Nicole.

They travel to churches, conferences and events in the Southeast and the rest of the United States and even around the world, sharing Spooner's testimony as well as the love of God. Even though they are a quartet, there's just one voice behind the group — Spooner's.

Nicky, Suzie and Nicole are puppets, and Spooner — a ventriloquist — provides their voices and expressions.

"Nicky gives me confidence I don't have on my own," said Spooner, who uses her ministry to address her difficult childhood. "And even though I work with puppets, the ministry isn't just for children. Our mission is to reach the entire family."

Family is important to Spooner, whose early years were tainted by abuse and frequent moves.

When her family relocated to the Sylacauga area, she started attending Marble City Baptist Church, Sylacauga. Spooner developed a relationship with Music and Youth Minister Bob DeLoach and his wife, Betty, and they opened their home to her. After an especially violent domestic incident, she begged her mother to let her live with the DeLoachs.

"I told my mom, 'If you really love me, you'll let me go stay with



Photo courtesy of Lee Pitts Spooner

them," Spooner, who moved in with her foster family at age 15, remembered. "Now, when I think about all my foster parents have done for me, I can't help but cry."

Although she now shares the art of ventriloquism with anyone, Spooner discovered her talent in a more isolated way, practicing quietly behind closed doors until she one day showed her foster parents the skills she had developed.

Since then, puppetry has been an outlet for her to talk about

the miracles God has worked in her life.

Betty Burnham, Spooner's foster mother who remarried after her husband's death, said Spooner's talent brought a once shy girl out of her shell.

"She could make the puppets say things she never could," Burnham said.

"She's grown from an introvert-

ed little girl into someone who can get in front of anyone and share her story."

Spooner's husband, Larry, has been amazed by the lives that have been touched by her ministry.

"I don't know how many thousands of people have been saved because of her ministry and not just children," he said. "She's ministered to so many women and men, too, by sharing how she dealt with the pain and hurt from her childhood."

All in the family

Larry Spooner works as his wife's manager, publicist and sound technician. The Spooners married in 1993, when her career was already well established. The two began working and traveling together and eventually were joined on the road by their children, Jonathan and Joanna.

These days, though, since the children are in school, Larry Spooner typically stays home in Mobile while Lee Spooner travels. The couple are members of Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile.

Next on Lee Spooner's agenda is a trip to South Africa, where she will minister to an estimated 6,000 students ranging from elementary school age through college age.

For more information, visit www.leepitts.org.



Somalian girl killed for conversion

A 17-year-old girl in Somalia who converted to Christianity from Islam was shot to death in late November in an apparent "honor killing," area sources said.

Nurta Mohamed Farah had fled her village of Bardher, Gedo Region to Galgaduud Region to live with relatives after her parents tortured her for leaving Islam.

On Nov. 25, two unidentified men shot her in the chest and head with a pistol. Area sources strongly suspected the men were

relatives or acting at their behest.

She had been confined to home since May 10, when her parents discovered she had embraced Christianity, said a Christian leader who visited the area.

Farah's parents severely beat her for leaving Islam and regularly shackled her to a tree at their home, Christian sources said.

Farah was shot about 200 meters from where she had taken refuge. Relatives buried her.

(CD)

Apple pulls Manhattan Declaration app from store

Conservatives are expressing shock and frustration after Apple pulled an iPhone/iPad "app" from its online store that contained basic Christian-beliefs on homosexuality and abortion.

Although the move impacts only owners of iPhones and iPads, conservatives fear it is another indicator of where society is headed when it comes to critiquing core Christian values.

The app — one of more than 200,000 applications, or software programs, in the app store — included the complete text of the Manhattan Declaration, a 4,700-word statement on the culture that about 150 evangelical, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox leaders signed last year and that more than 475,000 other people have since signed.

By downloading the free app, a person could easily read and sign the declaration. More than 35,000 people have signed a petition at ManhattanDeclaration.org asking Apple to reinstate it.

The application was pulled after 7,700 members of the liberal website Change.org e-mailed Apple and asked the company to remove it, which Apple did in late

November. Apple has since told ABC News, "We removed the Manhattan Declaration app from the App Store because it violates our developer guidelines by being offensive to large groups of people." The Change.org webpage had argued that "supporters of equal rights and the right of women to control their own bodies" must stand together.

Double standard?

The Manhattan Declaration, though, contains beliefs conservatives say can be heard in numerous evangelical pulpits — and even on the floors of some legislatures — throughout the year. It cites Scripture and spotlights the issues of life, marriage and religious liberty. Conservatives also note that there are dozens if not hundreds of apps containing the word "gay" in the iPhone/iPad app store, covering everything from same-sex dating to "gay travel" to "gay news."

Apple has a history of helping liberal causes, and in 2008 donated \$100,000 to opponents of California Prop 8, the constitutional amendment that protected the traditional definition of marriage. (BP)

From Alabama's state convention president

To my fellow Alabama Baptists:

Thank you, thank you, thank you for allowing me the joy of serving as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention. My goal is to glorify God, lead with integrity and do everything in my power to encourage my dear brothers and sisters in Christ in all the Alabama Baptist churches. My prayer is that we will continue to reach out to those in Alabama who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and then be careful to disciple those who come to know Christ.

I want to enlist our state missionaries, convention officers, the staff members of our associations, pastors and staff members of our churches and all of our lay members to help make 2011 a banner year for Alabama Baptists. Jesus commanded us to "love one another," and my prayer is that we will seek to fulfill that mandate in the coming months.

December is the time to pray for our missionaries on international fields and give to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions. The Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries depends upon offerings from churches to enable it to minister effectively throughout the year. The Cooperative Program is the lifeline of missions support for Southern Baptists, not just in December, but every day of the year.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our blessed Redeemer, we remember those brave men and women in our armed forces, who provide us with the freedom we enjoy. We pray for them and their families in their absence.

May the "peace on earth" announced by the angels to the shepherds on the first Christmas reign in your hearts, homes, churches and communities as we celebrate our Savior's birth.

*I love you, I love you, I love you.
God bless you and God bless America.*

Mike Shaw
Pastor, FBC Pelham



SHAW

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Phenix City's Lakewood celebrates 125 years

Its name and location may have changed in its 125-year history, but what has not changed for Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City, is its purpose — to bring people to Christ.

And Oct. 24, about 300 people gathered on the front lawn to worship and celebrate God's faithfulness over the past 125 years.

"I don't know if the church has ever had a worship service outdoors," said Pastor Billy E. Dickerson Jr. "We thought it'd be something unique. And it was a way for the people in the community to be able to hear if they wanted to."

Brian Squires, a former member who now serves as a bivocational pastor in Tennessee, brought the morning message, and Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the Russell Baptist Association church with a plaque for its years of service.

Following the service, attendees ate lunch on the grounds, enjoyed special music and listened to four people speak on the history of the church. The story started with its beginning as Mount Olive Baptist Church and covered the name changes to Westside Baptist Church and Lakewood Baptist and what has taken place during Dickerson's nearly four-year tenure.

"We don't want to think that our best days are in our rearview mirror," Dickerson said. "Our hope ... is to be more intentional in fulfilling the Great Commission."

South Hamilton commemorates 75th anniversary

"It's just an amazing thing to see what God has done with this church," said Keith Box, pastor of South Hamilton Baptist Church.

About 260 people — nearly double the Marion Baptist Association church's normal attendance — gathered to celebrate its 75th anniversary Sept. 26, remembering God's faithfulness through the years.

Guest speakers, including William Myron Pitts, whose father, G.W. Pitts, was one of the church's first pastors, addressed the congregation. Box also preached a short message.

State representatives and senators, as well as Gov. Bob Riley, sent letters of commendation. A representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate commemorating the anniversary. The church recognized Mary Ritch, its longtime organist who recently passed earlier this year, and Barbara Carter, who served as pianist for several decades but can no longer play because of declining health.

Box said it has been a privilege to serve as pastor and the people have been a wonderful blessing to him and his family.

Dolomite celebrates 125 years, members' faithfulness

"I sincerely appreciate the faithfulness of our members," said Glen Edmonds, pastor of Dolomite Baptist Church. "They are few in number, but you can count on them to be there for worship."

But Dolomite Baptist's numbers saw a dramatic rise from a Sunday average of 15 to more than 50 as former members flocked to the Bessemer Baptist Association church to celebrate its 125th anniversary Oct. 17.

Dan Ireland, director emeritus of Alabama Citizens Action Program and former pastor of Dolomite Baptist, preached the message. A representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a plaque commemorating the occasion. John Host, a member for more than 50 years, accepted the plaque on behalf of the church.

Edmonds said "with the Lord's help" he hopes Dolomite Baptist will grow and reach its community in the future.

Eclectic's Rushenville marks centennial anniversary

It was an "old-fashioned celebration" for those gathered at Rushenville Baptist Church, Eclectic, on Sept. 26 for its 100th anniversary.

The Elmore Baptist Association church provided old-fashioned fans to the more than 100 people who attended and showcased a 100-year-old buggy on the front lawn. A representative from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a plaque to the church, and The Larch Family Gospel Singers were the special musical guests. Jim Jackson, director of missions for Elmore Association, brought the morning message.

"It was a really good day," said Pastor Ron Estes. "I'd love to have homecoming every Sunday."

SBC Executive Committee restructures, reduces staff

Citing unprecedented economic challenges facing the Executive Committee (EC), Frank Page, president and chief executive officer of the EC since Oct. 1, announced structural and staffing changes in two memos sent to EC members Nov. 17 and 29.

Page informed the EC that he has reduced the staff from five divisions to three, combining the duties of two divisions and bringing another into the president's office.

The office of news services and the office of convention relations, separated into two offices since 1991, have been combined back into one office and will become the office of convention communications and relations.

Given the economic situation the EC is facing, Page said he thought it "wise to return to this arrangement, at least for the immediate future."

Roger S. "Sing" Oldham, current vice president of convention relations since 2007, will assume oversight of the new office.

The position of vice president of news services, filled by Will Hall since 2000, has been eliminated. Hall's last day of service was Dec. 3.

In his Nov. 29 memo, Page also

indicated that, "beginning immediately," the responsibility for Cooperative Program (CP) promotion will be housed in his office. He wrote, "I hope Southern Baptists will see in this my desire to give a heightened sense of priority to Cooperative Program promotion by making it a direct responsibility of the president's office."

A separate office of CP was created in 1997. It was expanded to include stewardship education in 2006.

With the duties of CP promotion being brought directly into the president's office, the vice presidential role filled by Bob Rodgers since 2005 will come to an end Dec. 10.

In other action, Page changed the name of the office of convention policy to the office of convention policy and operations. D. August "Augie" Boto, an EC staff member since 1998, will oversee the office and will continue his

duties as executive vice president.

Page also renamed the office of business and finance to the office of convention finance. This position, vacant for the past 17 months, will be filled by William "Bill" Townes, who will serve as interim vice president of convention finance until his formal election at the February EC meeting.

CP promotion moved to Executive Committee president's office "to give a heightened sense of priority to [CP] promotion."

Frank Page
Executive Committee

In his Nov. 17 memo, Page wrote, "Bill comes to this role with a strong resumé of denominational service. He is currently the director of development at the North American Mission Board, where he has been serving since 2007. He has previously served as the chief financial officer of the Georgia Baptist Convention from 1992 to 2006."

Page added, "Among Bill's credentials include his licensure as a CPA. He also holds an MBA degree."

Townes assumed his office Dec. 1. (BP)

Former Carey DOM continues jail ministry

By Anna Swindle
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

While Pete Phillips was director of missions for Carey Baptist Association, he felt called to start a jail ministry to reach out to the inmates.

Now, 18 years later, the ministry is going strong, incorporating the assistance of 20 volunteer pastors who take turns preaching at the Clay County Jail in Ashland each Sunday at 9 a.m.

[Phillips] had a good model in wanting to include as many ministers as possible," Ben Rosser said.

"Brother Pete chooses the minister that's scheduled in the rotation, and on Friday of that week, he'll call and say, 'Brother, it's time to be a blessing and be blessed.'" Rosser is pastor of Liberty Baptist Church, Ashland, in Carey Association and was one of the first pastors to join Phillips in the jail ministry.

"I've seen God work in the hearts of men and women and have seen souls won there for Christ," he said.

"It's been a delight and a great joy through the years."

His wife, Quita, is also actively involved in the outreach, leading the Bible study for female inmates during the week.

The Rossers have even been able to keep up with a few inmates post-release, affirmation that God is working in people's hearts for

the long term. Phillips is encouraged by the ministry's growth so far and hopes for more in coming years.

He has seen it expand from reaching five to six inmates each week to 35 to 40 on a given Sunday.

It has even been able to purchase a portable baptistery to baptize inmates on-site.

In past years, inmates had to be taken to local churches to be baptized.

Baptizing on-site

"I was looking back at our records, and we had a lot of baptisms before we got the baptismal (pool), but in the last three and a half years since we've had it, we have bap-

tized 54 inmates and we have two awaiting baptism right now," Phillips said.

Richie Farrow, pastor of High Pine Baptist Church, Roanoke, in Randolph Baptist Association, has remained involved in the ministry even though he no longer lives as close to the jail as he once did.

"There have been times I've thought about giving up the prison ministry, but there's been times I've showed up Sunday morning and preached at the jail and the Lord showed up and showed out," Farrow said.

"Every time there's been a doubt, He's always reminded me how I loved it and relished the chance to go. It's a rewarding ministry that changes lives." ❧

'Don't ask, don't tell' policy debated

(continued from page 1)
had served with a leader they and others thought was homosexual said the unit's performance was negatively affected.

▶ 30 percent of all personnel and 41 percent of Marines said having an openly homosexual person in their unit would negatively affect their unit's effectiveness "at completing its mission" in an intense combat situation.

▶ 29 percent of all personnel said they would "take no action" if they were assigned to share, with a homosexual person, bathroom fa-

cilities with an open bay shower. Twenty-six percent said they'd use it at a different time than the other person, 18 percent said they'd discuss the situation with a leader to see if there were other options, and 11 percent said they'd discuss the situation with the person they believed was homosexual.

More than 60 chaplains signed a letter to Obama and Gates earlier this year expressing concern that overturning "don't ask, don't tell" would result in the marginalizing of "deeply held" religious beliefs. (BP)

Across Alabama's Associations

AUTAUGA

► **Michael "Mike" L. Johnson** is the new pastor of **Boone's Chapel Church, Prattville**, effective Dec. 12. He comes from First Church, Albertville, where he served as pastor. He has also served as pastor of Central Church, Albertville, and New Hope Church, Pell City. Johnson is a graduate of Snead State Community College in Boaz and Samford University in Birmingham. He also attended New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Cynthia, have two children.



JOHNSON

BESSEMER

► **Canaan Church, Bessemer**, will hold Journey to Bethlehem, which will include several events. On Dec. 12, the adult choir will present the musical "God Coming Down" at 6 p.m. On Dec. 18, there will be a children's birthday party for Jesus from 9 a.m. to noon in the family chapel for ages 3 years old to sixth grade. On Dec. 19, there will be a special service called "The Christmas Visitor" at 9 and 10:30 a.m. Pastor Morgan Bailey will dress as a biblical character and tell the story of Jesus' birth. There will be no evening activities. On Dec. 22, there will be a family candlelight service at 6:30 p.m. For information call 205-425-4381 or visit www.canaanbaptist.net.

BIRMINGHAM

► The choir and drama team of **East Gardendale Church** will present "Joy Has Dawned" Dec. 12, 6 p.m. For information call 205-608-0889. Allen Davis is pastor. ► **Hilldale Church, Center**

Point, will hold Supper and Picture with Santa and Happy Birthday, Jesus Celebration Dec. 15, 5:30 p.m. The church will present "The Christmas Song" Dec. 12, 5:30 p.m. There also will be a community candlelight service Dec. 24, 5 p.m. For information call 205-853-3000. Ron Pate is pastor.

COLUMBIA

► The adult choir of **Bay Springs Church, Dothan**, will present the musical "The First Noel: Born Is the King" Dec. 12, 6 p.m. There will be narration and a video presentation. Scott E. Wyatt is pastor.

EAST CULLMAN

► The Kingdom Kritters Puppet Ministry team of **Concord Church, Cullman**, in the Fairview community, will present the Christmas story Dec. 12, 11 a.m. There also will be a live nativity scene from 5 to 7 p.m. Family portraits will be available. Refreshments will be served. Ed Heptinstall is pastor.

ELMORE

► The music ministry of **Thelma Church, Wetumpka**, will present "The Star Still Shines" Dec. 11-12, 6 p.m. The children's choir also will sing. For information visit www.thelmabaptist.org. Bill Lee is music minister. Doug Chappelle is pastor.

MOBILE

► **Spring Hill Church, Mobile**, will present its 25th annual presentation of "This Is Christmas" Dec. 11-12, 4 and 7 p.m. For tickets call 251-652-1037. Randy Grim is minister of music.

MONTGOMERY

► **First Church, Montgomery**, will present its 29th presentation of "The Living Christmas Tree" Dec. 10, 7 p.m., and Dec. 11-12, 4 and

7 p.m. For tickets visit www.montgomeryfbc.org/livingchristmastree. Jay Wolf is pastor.

SHELBY

► **South Shelby Church** on Highway 145 will present "A Walk Through Bethlehem" Dec. 10-12 and Dec. 17-19, 6-8:30 p.m. The theatrical excursion will feature an escorted walk just before Jesus' birth with a guide who will protect you from Roman soldiers, beggars and thieves. You will meet shepherds, wise men and angels on the way to finding Jesus in the manger. There will be Christmas goodies, time to mingle with the cast and Christmas carols. For information call 205-669-2099. Tom Minor is pastor.

ST. CLAIR

► The children's choir of **Sulphur Springs Church, Trussville**, will present "From Our Herd To Yours" Dec. 12, 5 p.m. Brenda Solie is director. Bobby Shipp is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► The M&M Kids Choir and Catching Kids Puppet Ministry of **Northridge Church, Northport**, will present "The Christmas Puzzle" and "Puppet Medley" Dec. 12, 6 p.m. For information visit www.northridgebaptistchurch.com. Brad Smith is pastor.

OTHER

► The sanctuary choir and orchestra of **First Church, Mobile**, will present "Follow the Star, Follow the King, the Journey from Darkness to Light" under the direction of Randy Davis Dec. 12, 11 a.m. There will be a candlelight procession and narration. For information call 251-432-6513 or visit www.fbcmobile.com. Chris George is pastor.

14 Alabama, Texas men deliver shoes to Costa Rica

Fourteen men, the majority of whom are firefighters from the Hoover, Vestavia Hills and Calera fire departments, traveled to Costa Rica in late October with Happy Feet International of Gardendale to deliver shoes and share the gospel through servant evangelism.

Representing First Baptist Church, Hayden; The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham; North-Park Baptist Church, Trussville; and West University Baptist Church, Houston, the team visited villages along the Colorado and San Juan rivers, washed the feet of children and their families and gave them shoes.

The team took about 1,000 shoes to give away, and more than 1,000 people made decisions during the week. Missionaries said 20 years ago, these same villages had rejected Christ. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Jason Hill

Alabama updates

People, churches making news across the state

Mickey Castleberry marks 50 years since first sermon

On Aug. 22, Mickey Castleberry returned to Bethlehem Baptist Church, Brundidge, to relive an important day in his life — the day he preached his first sermon in a church.

"I stood in the same church, preached from the same pulpit, [held] the same Bible and used the same outline on notebook paper I had used 50 years ago," Castleberry said.

In 1958, while in high school, Castleberry was licensed to preach by Highland Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery. For the next two years, he preached in nursing homes, prisons and schools and at community events. His first sermon in a church came Aug. 22, 1960, at Bethlehem Baptist.

Castleberry attended Howard College in Birmingham and graduated in 1966, the year after it became Samford University. He graduated from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1969 and received his doctor of ministry in 1978 from Luther Rice Seminary then located in Jacksonville, Fla.

Over the years, Castleberry has served as pastor of Brewer Memorial Baptist Church, Cecil; Pike Road Baptist Church; First Baptist Church, Wetumpka; Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Trussville; and Ridgecrest Baptist Church, Montgomery. After retiring in 1998, he took on 10 interim pastorates.

In 2006, Castleberry became pastor of Bradleyton Baptist Church, Highland Home. In the past four years, he has seen the Alabama Crenshaw Baptist Association church grow from 10 members to more than 50.

Pickens Association marks 175 years by candlelight

The 175th anniversary meeting of Pickens Baptist Association from Oct. 11-12 ended much the way the first meeting might have — by candlelight.

While the first night of the meeting, held at New Salem Baptist Church, Reform, moved along as planned, the second night at First Baptist Church, Aliceville, contained a surprise. Just as the meeting was about to begin, the electricity went out. Candles used for Christmas services were lit instead.

"I can only conclude that God had a different, more meaningful and [memorable] experience in mind for us," Director of Missions Gary Farley said.

The two-day celebration included singing hymns from the association's earliest days, hearing messages about the hymns' themes and reflecting on the history of the association and its churches.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, preached the annual missions sermon.

Five local pastors also spoke during the meeting, and Farley shared his thoughts about the future of Pickens Association and its ministry. "The data from the churches confirmed that God is continuing to bless us and use us," he said. "By our cooperating, we can attempt and successfully do great things for God and His Kingdom."

Pastor Reid marks 25 years at Corner's Mount Zion

October 1 marked Sammie Reid's 25th anniversary as pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Corner. The North Jefferson Baptist Association congregation held a special Sunday morning worship service Oct. 3 to celebrate this milestone.

During the service, Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, presented the message. The church presented Reid with several cards, a monetary gift and a plaque commemorating his time as pastor. Following the service, the congregation gathered in the fellowship hall for a lunch in his honor.

He began serving Mount Zion Baptist in 1985 as co-pastor with R.E. Snow. This arrangement lasted for 14 months, until Snow's departure. During Reid's time as pastor, he has seen the church grow in membership and add new ministries and facilities.

As for his future in the ministry, Reid said, "I plan to continue to serve as long as I am physically and mentally able and the people want me to serve. ... If I had 10 lives to live, I would want to live every one of them serving as a pastor."

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Digging into the Word

University of Mobile students look for the 'true spin' on biblical Truth in weekly study

When the lights dim and the dull beat of a drum fills the air, the atmosphere radiates with raw energy. Some people raise their hands while others dance to the music. A few bow their heads and start to cry. The echo of the crowd singing along to the words projected overhead builds the intensity and excitement within every person present.

It's not your typical Bible study. It's True Spin, where approximately 250 students and faculty from the University of Mobile (UMobile) gather each Tuesday night on campus to study and understand the Bible.

Neal Ledbetter, director of campus life at UMobile, named the Bible study True Spin after a VH1 television show.

Seeking the Truth

"The show's premise was about trying to get the true story behind the music. The same idea is what we're getting at in True Spin," he said. "News media 'spin' their version of a story, politicians 'spin' their version, but what's the truth? With regard to True Spin, some say this, some say that, but what's the (biblical) Truth."

True Spin started off as a small

Bible study led by Ledbetter in the fall of 2003. Seven years later, the purpose remains the same.

"I want lives to be transformed. I want students to understand the Bible. What we're studying in here is meant to be lived out there," he said, noting the college years are more than a time for academic study; they are a time for students to grow in their walks with Christ and in their faith.

"I wanted to invest in students and advise them in teaching. I also want them to learn how to study the Bible," Ledbetter said. "I want students to understand it's okay to ask questions of the Bible."

Kala Holt, a junior double majoring in English and humanities, is discovering the power behind questions. "From True Spin, I have learned to ask the questions that lead to Him, and to seek out the answers that will lead me closer to His heart," she said. "I have gotten a deeper, stronger, fuller, and more real relationship with Jesus Christ from True Spin."

Ledbetter challenges students to think outside the box while studying the Bible.

Sara Dye, a sophomore nursing major, said the approach works. "We are encouraged to think in ways that



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

TRANSFORMING LIVES — About 250 University of Mobile students and faculty gather each Tuesday night for True Spin Bible study led by Neal Ledbetter, director of campus life.

are biblically sound, but still challenging. Sunday School answers no longer satisfy; we are seeking for the deeper truth of things," Dye said.

True Spin is a place of worship, a place of learning and a place of discussion. Two worship leaders begin the service by leading fellow students in worship through a diversity of songs.

Ledbetter teaches. He then wraps

up the night with a Q&A where students can ask about anything, whether it is related to the night's scripture passage or on another topic entirely.

Ledbetter has been teaching student ministry for 12 years. This year, Ledbetter is offering two different studies each semester. He started fall semester with a study of Ecclesiastes and will end with a study on the Holy Spirit. In the spring of 2011, Ledbetter will lead a discussion on relationships followed by a discussion on the concept that nobody's perfect.

"I choose my material in a variety of ways," Ledbetter said. "First I pray. I ask God where He is leading me. Also, I know where students are at and what they're wrestling with. I try to tie these two together."

He also teaches about things that he otherwise wouldn't know how to answer.

"During my research of the answer, I realize that many people want to know about a certain subject, and so I teach about it," he said.

Jeremy Crews, a sophomore double-majoring in theology and humanities, said, "Neal's studies have completely changed the way I view much of scripture."

True Spin has special events scattered throughout the year.

Christian recording artists Phil Wickham and Charlie Hall are among those who have led students in worship.

"We like to keep people intrigued, so we don't tell about what we're planning on doing," Ledbetter said. "I want people to be surprised."

As she prepares for a career in nursing, Sara Dye still finds time for Bible study.

"I go to True Spin because it is an incredible chance to focus on Christ in the middle of the week," she said. "It's a chance to be challenged and encouraged."

To download a free podcast of True Spin, go online to the iTunes store, search True Spin, and download. (UMobile)

Someone You Should Know

By June Mathews
Correspondent, TAB

CAROLYN OWENS

Evergreen Baptist Church
Conecuh Baptist Association



OWENS

FAVORITE VERSE: Philippians 4:13

FAVORITE HYMN: "How Great Thou Art"

HOBBIES: Reading and spending time with grandchildren and

great-grandchildren

FAMILY STATUS: Married to Ray for 63 years; two children, Sandra and Don; five grandchildren; and seven great-grandchildren

Carolyn Owens loves to travel. Over the years, she and husband Ray have visited 49 of the 50 U.S. states. "We just can't seem to get there," she said of North Dakota, the one state they are lacking.

Q: What was your early life like?

A: My daddy was a deacon, and my mama was involved in WMU (Woman's Missionary Union), so I was in church all the time. ... I went to Huntingdon College for two years, then went on to graduate from the University of Alabama with my bachelor's and master's degrees.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

A: With my mother and daddy

being so active (in church), they always took me, so it was a big part of my life. I accepted the Lord at a Thursday morning service during a revival when I was 12.

Q: How have you been involved in church through the years?

A: I served as the church librarian for a few years. I sang in the choir for a while ... I'm now facilitator for WMU, and for 17 years, I've taught in an Adult I Sunday School department. Before that, I worked in the junior department for 30 years and served as general Sunday School superintendent for three years. I started our church's bereavement and Samaritan's Purse ministries, and I'm the [chairwoman] of both of those committees. Those are my babies.

Q: What have you gotten from that involvement?

A: Much pleasure. ... The Lord has blessed [my husband and me] a great deal in our family, in our church and in our home.

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

A: Doing the same things I'm doing right now. As long as I physically can, I'll continue to work for the Lord.

Q: What does the Christian life mean to you?

A: I don't know how people who do not know Christ live day to day, and I don't know how they do without a church family. ... Thank goodness I have wonderful people to work with me (at church) and I just appreciate them; I really do. ☺

Shocco to hold 2nd Dashing Through the Springs race to support missions

Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega is gearing up for the second running of Dashing Through the Springs 5K race Dec. 11.

The 3.09-mile course weaves its way through wooded hillsides, offering a formidable challenge to seasoned runners and novices alike.

There also will be a 1-mile fun run/walk for the less adventurous and children who want to be part of the morning's activities, making Dashing Through the Springs

an event for the entire family.

Register online at www.shocco.org. Vendor space and sponsorships are available for the run, and applications also may be found online.

All proceeds raised from the event go to support Shocco Springs missions work, which has taken staff as far away as Guatemala twice this year and to points close to home, like the Gulf Coast and east Alabama.

For more information, contact Shocco at 1-800-280-1105 or e-mail mcowart@shocco.org. (Shocco)

November CP gifts down from last year

Year-to-date contributions through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program are 3.77 percent below the same time frame in 2009, according to a news release from SBC Executive Committee President and Chief Executive Officer Frank Page.

As of Nov. 30, the year-to-date total of \$31,991,253.91 for Cooperative Program gifts is \$1,253,250.22 below the \$33,244,504.13 received at the same point in 2009.

For the month, receipts of \$14,366,485.45 were 12.31 percent, or \$2,016,664.53, below the \$16,383,149.98 received in November 2009.

For the SBC Cooperative Program Allocation Budget, the year-to-date total of \$31,991,253.91 is 96.06 percent of the \$33,303,681.70 budgeted to support Southern Baptist ministries globally and across North America.

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



Senior Living R

Reverse Mortgage News

By Jimmy Dixon
 McGowin & King Mortgage
 Paid Advertising

A couple of weeks ago, I received a call from a man in the Montgomery area. He not only wanted a brochure about reverse mortgages, he wanted to know if I had references. Because of the privacy laws I told him I'd have to contact some of my customers and get their permission. One thing I've learned is most folks don't like for others to know their business, especially their financial business. But everybody knows a preacher's business. His salary is usually posted every month, so I called one of my customers who is a pastor near Montgomery. He and his wife graciously agreed. Then, to my surprise, I had some others folks agree. Well, I now have a list of references if you're interested.



Jimmy Dixon

This year we've helped a lot of seniors. We've seen a lot get rid of mortgage payments and get much needed cash. Some have started a line of credit, which has a growth factor much better than I can get at the credit union with a CD (cer-

tificate of deposit). Others have opted for a monthly check. One way to use a reverse mortgage that hasn't caught on much is the purchase option. I think we'll see this more once people realize they can purchase a home or condo with a reverse mortgage. Seniors are moving all the time, and it makes sense to try and move into a place and never have a house payment.

As we get ready to celebrate the birthday of Christ, I'm going to focus on the fact that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He was tested in every way we are, and yet He never sinned. Therefore, He was the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away our sin and is able to help us during our temptations. Praise Him!

Remember, like *The Alabama Baptist*, I cover our great state helping seniors improve the quality of their lives. For a free brochure, quote or consultation, call 205-451-0676 or toll-free at 1-866-879-7775. E-mail: jdixon@mcgowinking.net.



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Resource Guide an advertising supplement



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The Boomerang Effect

Bringing Boomers Back into the Church

WHEN: March 29, 2011
WHERE: Alabama State Board of Missions Board Room (room 302)
TIME: Check in 9:30 a.m., Conference 10 a.m.-3 p.m. (lunch included)
REGISTRATION: Online at www.alsbom.org/boomerang
COST: \$10
TARGET AUDIENCE: Pastors, ministers of education, senior adult ministers, Sunday School teachers and lay people interested in ministry with Boomers
CONFERENCE LEADER: Dr. Gary Fenton, senior pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Homewood, Ala. Dr. Fenton has authored "Good for Goodness' Sake: 7 Values for Cultivating Authentic Character in Midlife." In the book, Dr. Fenton takes a direct and intelligent approach to revealing the key to pursuing authentic character at midlife. While in this conference these topics will be discussed:

- **Boomers: Who are they and how are they different from any other generation?**
- **Boomerang: The 2nd Adolescence can become the 1st real adulthood.**
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Reception, relationships, responsibilities key to Sunday School growth

By Ashley Anderton
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Having a growing Sunday School class does not require a complex formula. It's really quite simple, at least according to state missionary Daniel Edmonds.

Edmonds, director of the office of Sunday School and discipleship for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, has identified three essential factors for attracting people to and keeping them in Sunday School. He calls these factors the three R's of assimilation: reception, relationships and responsibilities. And several Alabama Baptist churches are working out these factors.

First Baptist Church, Fairhope, is actively seeking out and welcoming new members of its community.

"Every other Tuesday night is Connections Outreach night," said Brent Shaw, minister of education and administration for the Baldwin Baptist Association church. "We obtain a list from the city of the newest people to the area and deliver information about our church, along with cookies. We continue to get a good response from this visitation."

At Decatur Baptist Church in Morgan Baptist Association, Education Pastor Dwight Moss recently encouraged the leadership and congregation to adopt a broader approach to Sunday School — open enrollment.

This allows anyone who wants to be included in a Sunday School class to be enrolled anywhere, any-

time. Moss explained that the key to open enrollment is teaching the congregation how to approach unchurched people.

He said the approach may sound something like this: "Do you have a group of people who pray for you regularly, minister to you and encourage you? Would you give me the privilege of writing your information down and adding you to our Sunday School list? We would like to pray for you and minister to you."

At this point, the appropriate Sunday School class is contacted about the new prospect and follows up weekly through phone calls, cards and visitation. "The hope is that the unchurched person will be connected to a small group that ministers to them," Moss said. "We want

our Sunday School filled with lost people because they are more likely to become a Christian in Sunday School than just sitting in the worship service.

"The churches I've observed who consistently practice open enrollment are the churches who continue to grow," he added.

NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, in Birmingham Baptist Association has seen its greatest growth in classes that cater to those with similar interests. Why?

"They are relational," said Yvonne Looney, minister to adults at NorthPark Baptist. "We even have a Sunday School class for bikers, who go out and ride their motorbikes, meet people and then invite them to Sunday School."

Connecting people in similar situations also has proven effective for

First Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Eight years ago, the Montgomery Baptist Association church added a "nearly and newly married" class. It is offered twice a year for six weeks to couples who are considering marriage, are engaged or married in the last year. Six adult Sunday School classes have formed as a result of the class.

And in every class, the members need to hold some type of responsibility, Sunday School leaders said.

"People come to church because they like the church. They stay because they feel needed and utilized," said Chuck Ashley, minister to adults at First, Montgomery. "It's

important for people in a class to feel ownership of it. That's where the Sunday School teacher is vitally important to delegate jobs to as many people as he or she can."

Evangelize, fellowship

It is also important for a class to evangelize and fellowship together, Edmonds pointed out.

"Doing life, ministry and missions together strengthens the bonds of any healthy group," he said.

This past August, NorthPark Baptist changed its Sunday evening routine to create more time for evangelism and fellowship. Instead of meeting for corporate worship

every Sunday night, church members gather only once a month. That leaves the other Sunday evenings open for Sunday School classes to get out into the community, and members get to know each other better in the process.

One class ministers at The Lovelady Center, a home in Birmingham that addresses particular needs of women such as abuse and addiction, and conducts a worship service there the third Sunday night of each month.

For more information about growing a church's Sunday School attendance, call Edmonds at 1-800-264-1225, Ext. 285.

"Doing life, ministry and missions together strengthens the bonds of any healthy group."

Daniel Edmonds
Alabama Baptist State Board
of Missions

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Photo courtesy of Montgomery Baptist Association

SWAFFORD RECEIVES MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION AWARD

Carolyn Swafford (right) receives Montgomery Baptist Association's Ira Myers Volunteer of the Year Award at the association's annual meeting Nov. 1 at Morningview Baptist Church, Montgomery. She is the wife of Gary Swafford, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Pictured with Swafford is Director of Missions Ken May.

Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Ga. church excluded for calling female pastor

ALBANY, Ga. — For the second year in a row, the Georgia Baptist Convention (GBC) has withdrawn fellowship from one of its most historic member churches for calling a woman as pastor.

Meeting Nov. 15–16 at Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Ga., more than 1,000 GBC messengers endorsed a March vote by the convention's executive committee declaring that Druid Hills Baptist Church, Atlanta, is not a "cooperating church" under the denomination's articles of faith.

The convention overwhelmingly accepted a recommendation by its executive committee stating "that Druid Hills Baptist Church in Atlanta is not a cooperating church as defined in Article 2, Section 1 of the constitution, because a woman is serving as co-pastor and that Druid Hills Baptist Church of Atlanta be excluded from the convention and all rights and privileges thereof." That article defines cooperation in terms of fidelity to the 2000 version of the Southern Baptist Convention's Baptist Faith and Message statement, which says in part, "While men and women are gifted for service within the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture."

Mimi Walker, co-pastor of Druid Hills with her husband, Graham, who teaches at McAfee School of Theology, has been listed as a pastor in the state convention's annual record book since 2003. Last year convention leaders viewed that as "a matter of concern," said executive committee member Tom Rush, prompting a meeting between leaders of the convention and congregation. After the meeting, the executive committee approved a recommendation by its administrative committee to withdraw fellowship from Druid Hills.

Last year Georgia Baptists took similar action against First Baptist Church, Decatur, Ga., a long-time leading church in the convention until it called Julie Pennington-Russell as pastor in 2007.

Tim Yarbrough elected as Arkansas editor

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Tim Yarbrough of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) was elected as editor of the *Arkansas Baptist News (ABN)* by the ABN board of directors Nov. 18.

Yarbrough, 50, has been NAMB's Acts 1:8 challenge coordinator since 2002. He will become *ABN* editor effective Jan. 1, succeeding Charlie Warren, who is retiring after 11 years as editor.

In addition to directing the Acts 1:8 strategy for NAMB, Yarbrough earlier served as media strategist and director of church relations. Previously he served as the communications director of the Missouri Baptist Convention from 1995 to 2002. From 1989 to 95, Yarbrough was an editor of a magazine, books and other publications at the Baptist Brotherhood Commission, which later merged with NAMB.


Born in Kennett, Mo., Yarbrough's family moved to Arkansas in 1967, settling in Jonesboro. Yarbrough was saved during a revival at Walnut Street Baptist Church, Jonesboro. He and his wife Pamm were married in 1986 at First Baptist Church, Russellville. They also have been members of Baring Cross Baptist Church, North Little Rock and First Baptist Church, Maumelle.

From 1987 to 89, he was a section editor for the *Arkansas Democrat*, and earlier served as news editor and staff writer for various daily and weekly newspapers, including the *Courier Democrat* of Russellville. He taught journalism as a graduate assistant at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, where he earned a master of arts degree in journalism. Earlier he earned a bachelor of science degree in journalism from Murray State University in Kentucky. He also taught strategic communications as an adjunct professor at the University of Missouri School of Journalism and taught public relations at Columbia College, both of which are located in Columbia, Mo. The Yarbroughs have two children.

Uzbek officials confiscate books from Baptists

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan — Uzbekistan has confiscated Christian books from a youth group returning from Kazakhstan. An Uzbek customs official said the confiscations were a "temporary removal." Customs officials claimed a court would decide what would happen to the literature. Baptists complained that a customs official swore at them, saying, "We are the bosses here and we will do what we like. If we need to, we'll lock you away."

Officials refused to provide copies of Confiscation Certificates and the group was released after being held for nine hours. Also, the head of Ukraine's Baptist Union has been denied entry to Uzbekistan and a Protestant has been denied permission to leave, with no reasons for either action being given. In addition, two more foreign religious websites have had access from within Uzbekistan blocked.

These actions appear to be part of a policy of isolating religious believers from their fellow believers in other countries. 

Samford trustees approve new accelerated education degree program, renovations

An additional graduate education program and preliminary plans for residence hall renovations were among actions approved by Samford University's board of trustees in their winter meeting Nov. 30 in Birmingham.

The new degree program is designed to fill a critical need for teachers at the secondary level of education, according to Samford Provost J. Bradley Creed. Culminating in a master of science in education degree, the accelerated program will train teachers for grades 6–12 in seven areas: English/language arts, general science, history, mathematics, social science and Spanish. Graduates of an accredited university with a baccalaureate degree in a certifiable area can seek teacher certification through the new program, Creed explained.

Capital projects

Based on the university's increased enrollment and the need for additional on-campus housing, trustees authorized the university's administration to seek proposals for several possible capital projects. Included are renovation and expansion of Pittman Hall, currently a women's residence facility, provid-

ing about 56 additional spaces, according to trustee Michael Dunn, chair of the board's operations and planning committee. This is a first step toward increasing undergraduate student enrollment, he added.

Other renovations are proposed for Smith and Vail residence halls and Beeson Woods residential village. Renovations in F. Page Seibert Hall would house student health and counseling services, which would be displaced with the Pittman Hall renovations.

In other business:

Andy Lampkins, assistant professor, was approved as the first John R. Sampey Jr. Research Professor in Chemistry, effective with the fall 2011 semester. The program recognizes a faculty member who has been active in research, Creed said. Lampkins has taught at Samford since 2008 and leads a research team of faculty, students and outside collaborators working on drugs to fight Alzheimer's disease.

Trustees heard that applications for admission and paid deposits for fall 2011 entering freshmen are ahead of the record pace set for fall 2010. The university's endowment has had an investment return of slightly more than 8 percent in the last 12 months and had a balance of

about \$223 million as of Oct. 31.

Controller Mike Darwin noted that the university's net assets are up \$12.5 million since the beginning of the fiscal year on July 1. Harry B. Brock III, vice president for business and financial affairs, reported that the university was on track to end the year with a positive operating margin and cash flow.

Ahead of pace

W. Randall Pittman, vice president for advancement, reported that fiscal year-to-date giving is at \$7.3 million, ahead of the near-record pace from the previous fiscal year.

Pittman also reported cumulative gifts and pledges of more than \$104 million to "A Campaign for Samford."

President Andrew Westmoreland told trustees that Samford's "vital signs are good." The university's fiscal condition is "solid" because of good fiscal practices, applications are on the rise, physical improvements are being made to the campus and giving has held up strongly in the midst of the global economic crisis.

Westmoreland also noted increasing alumni spirit and the continued growth of the spiritual environment on campus. (SU)

Christmas ad in Britain shows Christ in womb

An advertising campaign designed to help people focus on Christ at Christmas will portray an ultrasound scan of the Son of God in His mother's womb on British billboards this month despite criticism that it promotes a pro-life message.

The advertisement shows a sonogram image of an unborn child with a halo around his head. The message at the top of the ad says, "He's on His way," while the text at the bottom reads, "Christmas starts with Christ."

Promoters of "Baby Scan Jesus,"

as they have named the ad, hope it will reach 40 million people from more than 2,000 billboard and poster sites Dec. 6–20 in England, according to the *Guardian*, a British newspaper.

Trustees for ChurchAds.net, the ecumenical charity behind the campaign, said the ad "is not, in any way, designed to either support or campaign against abortion." The poster "announces the imminent birth of the Christ child in the way that many modern-day parents choose to announce the coming birth of their own child,"

they said in a written statement.

Jonathan Edwards, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, commended the ad: "The picture of a scan is one of the most defining moments of a pregnancy these days — it's full of promise and anticipation. I'm delighted to see this year's Christmas advert and pray it will encourage many people to sit up and take note of the Christmas message." (BP)



For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
Hebrews 12:2b

Michigan Baptists elect new director

The Baptist State Convention of Michigan elected Bobby Gilstrap, director of missions for Huron and Southeastern Baptist associations in Michigan, as its fourth executive director. Gilstrap will succeed Michael Collins, who is retiring at the end of December after 16 years of service to the Michigan convention.

Alabama Baptists have worked with Collins since 2007 when they began a partnership with Michigan and look forward to continuing that with Gilstrap as the Michigan partnership was extended to 2012 by messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting Nov. 16–17.

"I've been here 10 years and love

it," Gilstrap said of his time in the state.

Gilstrap earned a doctor of ministry degree from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., a master of divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, a bachelor's degree from Oklahoma Baptist University and an associate's degree from Brewton-Parker College in Georgia.

Throughout 29 years of ministry, Gilstrap has been pastor of four churches and an associate pastor of several others and he started a couple of photography businesses. Gilstrap and his wife, Brenda, have two sons, Robert and Andrew.

(BP, TAB)

Alabama pastor encourages Japanese, Korean believers

By John Evans
The Alabama Baptist

I really think American Christians can learn something from Japanese Christians," said Roger Willmore, pastor of Deerfoot Baptist Church, Trussville.

Willmore described some of the virtues he saw among believers in Japan: their respect for the things of God, their dedication to studying the Bible, their reverence in worship and their singing.

"Sometimes we have to coach [people in American churches] to sing, but you don't have to do that in Japan," he said. "If you could hear them sing, your heart would dance."

Willmore recently returned from a trip to Japan and South Korea, where Nov. 8-18, he preached at several churches and a Bible convention, encouraging believers who amazed him with their devotion to God. After landing in Osaka, Japan, he flew to Seoul, South Korea, where he visited five churches and preached at one, Sanjunghyun Presbyterian Church. As Willmore learned about Korean churches, one of their practices shocked him with its dedication.

"Just about any church you go into, they will tell you that hundreds — if not thousands — of people in that church are on their knees Monday through Friday praying for an hour and a half or two hours before they go to work," he said. "Just imagine what would happen if we had thousands of churches across the United States with people meeting every morning on their faces before God in prayer like that. It would revolutionize the church and the country."

Willmore hopes American Chris-



Photo courtesy of Roger Willmore

ENCOURAGEMENT — Roger Willmore (center) leads a Bible convention in Osaka, Japan. With him are local ministers Ryo Iwahashi (left) and Akira-Ken Horiuchi, who served in lead roles in activities related to the convention.

tians will be challenged to seek the Lord more fervently in prayer by taking note of the dedication of Korean Christians. "There's enough prayer power in (South) Korea to rattle the whole world," he said.

After leaving South Korea, Willmore returned to Osaka, where he had been invited to preach at Grace Mission for The Bible Convention, a follow-up event to the Oct. 22-24 Franklin Graham festival in the city. Willmore preached a series of sermons from 1 John focused mainly on showing new believers the basics of the Christian life and the assurance of salvation.

Understanding faith

"I was trying to give messages that would help new Christians understand their faith, such as what it means to be a Christian and how to know you're a Christian," he explained.

Willmore, who had previously been to Japan in 2008, said the re-

sponse from the more than 1,000 attendees — a good crowd in a nation where only 1 percent of the population is believed to follow Christ — was enthusiastic, with sales of the sermons on CD reaching record levels.

He was impressed with the amount of reverence the Japanese Christians showed for God's Word and their dedication to studying it. They asked him to send his sermons in advance so they could translate them and prepare in-depth study guides.

"They don't want to just hear you say what's [in the Bible]; they want to see it, read it and get to know it," Willmore said. "That's how they approach their Bible study."

He said some Japanese read their Bibles cover to cover six or seven times a year, and he believes their dedication to knowing the Scriptures flows from a desire to know Christ. "They know the way you get to know Christ is by knowing what

the Bible says about Him so they live in it," Willmore said. "It's not just to get head knowledge; it's so they can know Him personally."

Willmore also traveled to speak to a smaller gathering of the convention in Hiroshima. The city was obliterated during World War II by an atomic bomb the United States dropped Aug. 6, 1945. An estimated 70,000 people were killed initially, and perhaps 130,000 more died over the years because of the effects of radiation. Willmore visited the memorial and museum dedicated to the blast, an experience he described as emotional and sobering.

"People were vaporized," Willmore said. "Whole generations were wiped out." Despite the city's history, he didn't detect even a hint of animosity from any of its residents, especially not the believers at the convention. Willmore recalled an elderly Christian man, who was probably alive during World War II, grinning "from ear to ear," shaking his hand and thanking him for coming to teach God's Word.

Well received

"One of the most memorable blessings I will take away from going to Hiroshima was how warmly and graciously I as a person was received and how the preaching of the gospel was received," Willmore said. Throughout his time in Japan, Willmore said, he was treated exceptionally well, "more like part of the family than a visitor."

Willmore expressed a great love for the Japanese people, whom he described as people of integrity and respect. He hopes to return to their country in the future and continue ministering among them. "God has placed Japan on my heart." ■

Want to know God?

By Don Bennett
Retired pastor

I believe in God, for He is the Creator of all that there is, and that is much more than just our planet. "All" includes our solar system and the vast reaches of space.

The early church fathers tried to prove God with all kinds of arguments, but these each contained some flaw. Therefore we are left with faith. Through general revelation, even the greatest skeptic cannot deny seriously that there had to be a first cause and a divine designer.

To know God as Creator is to take a leap of faith. To believe the One who created you loves you is a leap of faith.

Despite all the problems we experience such as storms, earthquakes and other disasters, we, too, like Job can say, "Though He destroy me, yet shall I trust Him."

Not only is God Creator but He is also a loving Savior, who is continually with us. The word "steadfast" ("hesed") in the Old Testament means this God will never forsake us. When we meet His Son, Jesus Christ, we notice something is different about this man, who claims to be so powerful that He can take all of our sorrows, thirsts and need for security upon His shoulders. Jesus is God revealed in human flesh. He had a face, a human body and human hands, and yet He is more than just a good loving man. The Holy Spirit of God is the only One who can reveal God in Jesus to us. As God's Son, Jesus came as the One who can bear all of our sins. When the battle seems hopeless, He still will not leave us nor let us go. His care for us and seriousness in handling all of our problems show His personal side.

Isn't this the kind of God we want to know? We want to know One who is stable and creative — renewing us at every turn, whose strong hand can solve all of our problems and who knows us intimately. Want to know God?

When you meet Him, it's just the beginning of the real you. ■

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About Alabama

Seeking Less Unemployment

By Jim Williams
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Recent federal statistical reports have brought news of progress in reducing unemployment in Alabama. While having a job remains at the top of the Christmas wish list for too many, the numbers indicate that far fewer Alabamians will be out of work this Christmas season.

Like many states, Alabama has endured very high unemployment rates for the past two years. Joblessness peaked at 11.1 percent in January 2010, when almost 228,000 Alabamians were out of work. This figure is about double the peak level of unemployment experienced during the last economic downturn in 2003.

Since January 2010, the number of unemployed in Alabama has fallen by 38,000, according to the most recent statistics. Employment has grown by 69,000 as the economy absorbed not only unemployed workers but also people entering the workforce. Even so, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' last report showed that 8.9 percent of the state's workers were without jobs in October.

Alabama's unemployment rate fell by more percentage

points than that of any other state during the last 12 months. Since August, Alabama's unemployment rate has been below the national unemployment rate, which stands at 9.6 percent.

Much of the improved job climate has come in urban areas, where three of every four employed Alabamians work. Of the 28 counties in the state designated as "metropolitan," only six still have unemployment rates in double digits. On the other hand, 25 of the 39 rural, or "nonmetropolitan," counties have unemployment rates of more than 10 percent, and eight of them — Bullock, Clarke, Conecuh, Dallas, Greene, Monroe, Perry and Wilcox — have more than 15 percent of their workforce without a job. In Wilcox County, more than 20 percent of workers are jobless.

While improved work opportunities have come to many areas, the kind of prosperity enjoyed only a few years ago has not returned, and in some counties, the journey to recovery has not yet begun.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jim Williams is executive director of the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama.

Defending the truth

Birmingham teen shares apologetics-type message with peers

By Ben Birdsong
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Kyle Neeley knows all about church — all the routines, songs and Bible stories. The Alabama Baptist teen has been in church all his life and a Christian since he was 10 years old, but this past July, he faced a crisis of belief and realized his Sunday School answers about his faith were no longer enough.

And Neeley's journey to find deeper answers has inspired other teens to do the same.

A senior at Oak Mountain High School in Birmingham and member of North Shelby Baptist Church, Birmingham, in Shelby Baptist Association, Neeley began his search after he straightforwardly shared the gospel with an adult in his life. But instead of accepting Christ or discussing the information calmly with him, the adult attacked and mocked him for his beliefs.

When the adult began asking questions challenging Neeley's faith, he did not have the answers. So he did what any teenager would

do — "I did a Google search on the Internet."

There Neeley discovered apologetics, the study of the defense of the faith, and sought out leaders knowledgeable about the field.

"I read every book I could locate from Christian apologists, such as Josh McDowell, C.S. Lewis (and) William Lane Craig, to proponents of the new atheism, such as Richard Dawkins," he said.

Neeley wanted to know how to defend the truth against the arguments of a secular, post-Christian world, where Christianity is no longer the popular civil religion.

He had to have an answer to give for the hope he had found in Christ. And he felt God leading him to share what he was learning with his peers.

He wanted to encourage Christian students by instilling in them the fact that "religion can be an intellectual idea, too."

John Murphy, an adult leader of

Neeley's youth group, loved the idea and scheduled him to lead a month of Wednesday night youth services.

So in late September and early October, Neeley taught on the existence of God, the proof of Scripture, the validity of Christianity and reasons why people don't believe. He ended the series by sharing his testimony.



NEELEY

The youth group's attendance doubled from 50 to 100 during this series, Murphy noted.

Maggie Cox, a junior at Oak Mountain High and member of another youth group who attended the services, said, "[Neeley] helped me realize that you should learn the facts because you never know what you will face."

For information about using apologetics-type studies with youth groups, contact the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions office of collegiate and student ministries at 1-800-264-1225.

Pastor, elders found guilty of failing to report abuse

A minister and two elders of a Southern Baptist church in New Hampshire have been convicted on misdemeanor charges of failing to report suspected sexual abuse of a 12-year-old girl.

Tim Dillmuth, 34, a pastor at Valley Christian Church, Conway,

N.H., was one of four church leaders arrested in February on a charge of violating a state law requiring the report of child abuse to authorities.

Dillmuth and elders Richard Eland, 62, and Robert Gagnon, 70, will be sentenced Dec. 21. They face up to one year in jail and a \$2,000 fine.

A fourth man, Michael Wedge, 32, cooperated with the investigation. His case was placed on file without finding for one year.

According to North Conway radio station WMWV, Dillmuth met

in September 2009 with parents who told him their daughter had been sexually abused by a man who was a deacon in the church.

Court documents said the parents asked Dillmuth not to report the incident. The pastor told church elders about it but not the police. Legal authorities finally learned of the allegations Feb. 1, 2010, after a church member who knew about the case insisted that it be reported.

The three men argued in court that they acted in good faith by urging the parents to report the alleged abuse. However, District Court of Northern Carroll County Judge Pamela Albee ruled Nov. 15 the leaders "deliberately attempted" to keep the matter within the church while discussing it at meetings of the congregation's board of elders.

New Hampshire's Child Protection Act includes ministers in a list of occupations requiring persons with "reason to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected" to report the information to authorities. (ABP)

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 12

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson

Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, School of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

WHY PRAYER DESERVES PRIORITY

1 Kings 8:22-24, 27-28, 38-39, 43

The early church prayed 10 days, preached 10 minutes and 3,000 people were saved. The contemporary church prays 10 minutes and preaches 20 minutes, and we're surprised when anyone gets saved. We go to the supper room and organize, while the early church went to the upper room and agonized. What was fundamental then gradually has become supplemental today. May God help us realize we cannot do anything without Him. We not only need sound theology but we also need "sacred kneology."

Because God Is Faithful (22-24)

At the heart of all prayer is a conviction about God. That is why biblical prayer begins with adoration of God. The God to whom we pray is incomparable: "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you." We must pray on the basis of what He has chosen to reveal about Himself, not on what we like to imagine about Him. The God to whom we pray is also loving and faithful. This means we pray on the basis of His promises. That is why Solomon built his prayer around what God had revealed about Himself in history and His Word. In verses 25-26, he prayed God's words back to Him. This is an excellent strategy for every Christ follower to imitate. He also reminded himself that God had set a condition upon the fulfillment of His promises. A condition of answered prayer is that we are in a right condition before God to receive His promise. We pray because God is faithful.

Because God Listens (27-28)

Solomon connected prayer to the temple, the unique place on earth where God had placed His glory. He had no illusions about the temple, however. It may have been a glorious building from a human perspective, but God cannot be contained in one building. He created space and filled it with His own being and yet He overflowed it. "Will God indeed dwell on the earth?" Clearly not, in any literal sense, since the heavens cannot contain Him. Yet God had promised: "My name shall be there." The omnipresent Lord of the universe

had committed Himself to the temple. Solomon demonstrated a balanced theology. God's presence was in the temple. His eyes were open toward the temple. He heard prayers made in or toward the temple. But God was not, in any way, restricted to the temple in Jerusalem. Solomon set up a pattern of prayer. Prayer would be made either in or toward the temple. This pattern of prayer, physically directed toward Jerusalem and the temple, became the standard practice of faithful Jews (Ps. 138:2; Dan. 6:10). The temple was the house of prayer. Christians today pray "in the name of Jesus." There is no single building on earth made with hands where God has put His name. We pray because God listens to prayer when it is prayed in Jesus' name.

Because God Responds (38-39)

This passage recognizes the importance of every individual worshiper's prayers. Individuals' prayers mattered in the Old Testament. Abraham's prayers saved Lot's life (Gen. 18:22-33; 19:29). Moses successfully interceded on Israel's behalf after the golden calf incident in Exodus 32-34. Elijah ended a drought in 1 Kings 18. The individual not only represents himself but also humanity and all of Israel. Solomon hoped that such people always would be heard. No matter how bad things may get, the situation will never be hopeless because God is a God who hears His people when they come to Him as He requires. And He will not only hear but also forgive and restore. We pray because God responds to the effectual fervent prayer of His people.

Because Everyone Can Pray (43)

Solomon's prayer recognized God's wider purpose in His dealings with Israel, namely, that as Gentiles see Him working in and through Israel, they might desire to know Him. Solomon desired that even the foreigner, as he or she humbly prayed to Israel's God, would experience answered prayer. He also desired all the peoples of the earth to glorify God by knowing His name and living in accordance with His character. We pray because everyone can pray when they come to the Father through the Son.

Bible Studies for Life By Dennis Sansom

Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy, Samford University

GO AND DO

Luke 10:25-37

The parable of the good Samaritan epitomizes the Christian life. Christ commands us to love our neighbor, and this parable illustrates the characteristics of neighborly love.

The Lawyer (25-29)

Lawyers played an important role in first-century Palestine. They interpreted and applied the Scriptures to civil and criminal issues. Thus the lawyer in the story knew the Law of Moses, but he asked about inheriting eternal life. Jesus exposed his deception. The Law, which the lawyer knew, was clear about the requirement: Love God thoroughly and your neighbor as yourself. The lawyer did not quibble over the first part. It was the second part that he thought he could find a way around: "Who is my neighbor?" In his mind, he could show his love of God by just formally going through the rituals and reciting the religious platitudes but loving his neighbor required real involvement and risk. He wanted to justify himself by showing that he already was doing enough to merit eternal life, and so he asked sarcastically, "Who is my neighbor?" However, Jesus knew his hypocrisy and gave the parable to expose it.

The Priest and Levite (30-32)

Jesus purposely used the characters to make His point about who is a neighbor. The priest and Levite saw the man robbed and left dying, and they walked on the other side. They did not show neighborly love.

Jesus picked two of the most honorable professions to illustrate the failure of neighborly love. Though the priest and Levite were important and probably very decent people, salvation requires another quality that their lives lacked.

The Samaritan (33-35)

Jesus deliberately used the Samaritan as the one exemplifying the kind of neighborly love that creates eternal life. Samaritans, who were of mixed races and had their own religious practice in Samaria, were racial outcasts, and the man broke civil and religious

laws being so near Jerusalem and touching the Jew left dying on the roadside. He took great risk to show the care he did. He knew what it meant to be oppressed and rejected, and thus, when he saw another human being suffering, he transmuted his own suffering into compassion and took the chance to show neighborly love.

Jesus used the Samaritan to make the point that neighborly love extends beyond race, social class, age group and nationality. The citizenship of neighbors encompasses all people who suffer and need support and justice. We should not look only for those who look like us to show love.

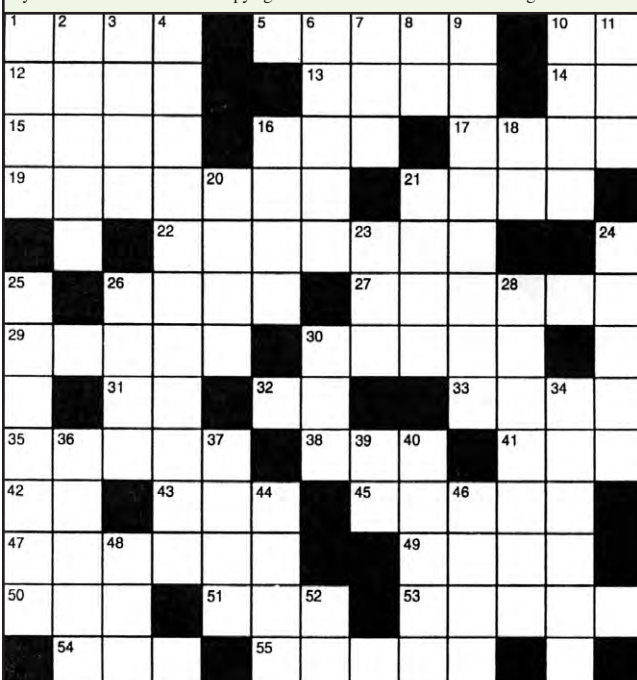
The parable emphasizes that the Samaritan goes beyond what is expected. He offered to pay the innkeeper all the man's debts when he traveled back through. His love was abundant self-expenditure. He kept giving of his time, money and safety. He did not worry about or calculate his own reward or security. True neighborly love does not expect to be repaid or promoted because of the service. Such abundant love reveals in a partial way the reality of eternal life. If we want to know how eternal life looks, then we should look at the good Samaritan. Though the priest and Levite are good and respectable people, they lacked an essential characteristic of eternal life: neighborly love.

Jesus and the Good Samaritan (36-37)

The conclusion is another commandment — "do likewise." The good Samaritan is a model of the disciple. But is the good Samaritan more than a model? All people are limited and hindered by circumstance and their wills to bind their own wounds, escort themselves to safety, heal their frail states and pay their debts. All humanity needs a good Samaritan to save it from the thieves, sin, death and the devil. In truth, humanity is like the dying man on the roadside. Jesus is the actual good Samaritan. God is our true neighbor who saves us. We have the prospects of life and hope because of the abundant self-expenditure of God in Christ. We can be neighbors to others only because Jesus is first the good Samaritan to us.

Christian Crossword

By Glenn G. Luscher Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- In the uttermost parts of the _____. (Num. 11:1)
- A son of Shemaiah. (1 Chron. 3:22)
- And she said, Yea, for _____ much. (Acts 5:8)
- A son of Eliphaz. (Gen. 36:11)
- The legs of the _____ are not equal. (Prov. 26:7)
- Used before a noun.
- Speck.
- And ye shall eat the _____ of the land. (Gen. 45:18)
- A _____ bearer revealeth secrets. (Prov. 11:13)
- But love ye your _____. (Luke 6:35)
- Where moth and _____ doth corrupt. (Matt. 6:19)
- Paul sent him into Macedonia. (Acts 19:22)
- The 12th month of the Jewish sacred year. (Esther 3:7)
- A son of Shashak. (1 Chron. 8:22)
- Youngest son of Jesse.
- A son of Joktan. (Gen. 10:29)
- Extraterrestrial. (abbr.)
- Desired _____ him letters

- to Damascus. (Acts 9:2)
- I will divide Shechem, and _____ out. (Ps. 108:7)
- The last one.
- As a thread of _____ is broken. (Judg. 16:9)
- Why is thy spirit so _____? (1 Kings 21:5)
- The word of the Lord _____ with him. (2 Kings 3:12)
- A drink made from leaves.
- To open before him the two-leaved _____. (Isa. 45:1)
- Mountain city of Judah. (Josh. 15:52)
- His clothes shall be _____. (Lev. 13:45)
- In _____ season we shall reap. (Gal. 6:9)
- Will men take a _____. (Ezek. 15:3)
- When they _____ in at the gates. (Ezek. 44:17)
- Abraham set seven _____ lambs. (Gen. 21:28)
- Neither shall he ... eat _____ grapes. (Num. 6:3)
- _____ the dead? (Luke 24:5)
- Companion.
- Take no thought ... neither do ye _____. (Mark 13:11)
- A sea of _____ mingled with fire. (Rev. 15:2)
- No man _____ fruit of thee hereafter. (Mark 11:14)
- God said unto Moses, I _____. (Ex. 3:14)
- Son of Dedan. (Gen. 25:3)
- No fountain both yield _____ water and fresh. (James 3:12)
- Be not ignorant of this _____ thing. (2 Pet. 3:8)
- I will not _____ what man shall do. (Heb. 13:6)
- Let him be _____ the younger. (Luke 22:26)
- Son of Enoch. (Gen. 4:18)
- Can the _____ grow up without mire? (Job 8:11)
- Put it upon the _____ of the right ear. (Lev. 14:25)
- Until they have _____ all my harvest. (Ruth 2:21)
- The churches ... were _____. (Acts 9:31)
- Inhabitant from the plain of _____. (Amos 1:5)
- _____ yourselves before the
- Lord. (1 Sam. 10:19)
- I punished them _____. (Acts 26:11)
- Ye have _____ that the Lord is gracious. (1 Pet. 2:3)
- Her _____ in her flesh be blood. (Lev. 15:19)
- Rejoice ye in that day, and _____. (Luke 6:23)
- Defeated king of Bashan. (Deut. 3:3)
- Cast forth the _____. (Jon. 1:5)
- City northwest of Judah. (Josh. 15:50)
- He sat in the _____ door in the heat. (Gen. 18:1)
- _____ down the tree. (Dan. 4:14)
- Negative reply.



Book Reviews

by Martine Bates Sharp

Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God

John Piper. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2010. 224 pp. (Hardback).

John Piper describes his latest book as “a plea to embrace serious thinking as a means of loving God and people.” He calls for a rejection of “either-or” thinking when it comes to “head and heart, thinking and feeling, reason and faith.” Instead, he says, it should be “both-and.”

Piper presents a surprising number of Bible verses that admonish the reader to think, consider and seek wisdom. The author takes the reader through a process, carefully developing his argument for thinking deeply about God and the Scriptures, giving the reader a glimpse into his own mind as he ponders biblical revelation. Two chapters are devoted to explaining and warning against relativism; as the author points out, thinking is futile if there is no absolute truth to know.

“Think” is pure Piper: challenging both in style and message. The

author pulls no punches, demanding full engagement of the heart and mind.

Under a Maui Moon

Robin Jones Gunn. New York: Howard Books, 2010. 288 pp. (Paperback).

Robin Jones Gunn wrote children’s books when her children were small, then books for adolescents when they were older. Now — you guessed it — her children are grown, and she has turned to writing for adults. Gunn is perhaps best known for her inspirational Christy Miller and Katie Weldon series for teenage readers. Her more recent work for adults includes the Sisterchicks series and “Under a Maui Moon.”

“Under a Maui Moon” is the story of Carissa, a woman who experiences some turbulence in her life that threatens her marriage and her faith. The unexpected loan of a house in Maui offers Carissa an opportunity to reflect on her life, which has not gone as she had planned, and to consider what a new life could be like.

With well-developed characters and an enchanting setting, the book draws the reader in and refuses to let go, as Carissa faces some hard facts about herself and her relationship with her husband, which leads her to an examination of her relationship with God.

Bible Truths in Short Stories: Encouragement

for Your Heart and Soul

Terri Burroughs. Kearny, Neb.: Morris Publishing, 2010. 127 pp. (Paperback).

Terri Burroughs, an author and Sunday School teacher from Tuscaloosa, developed a series of five-minute Bible stories to share with her class. Encouraged by friends, she compiled 14 of the stories into a book.

Not stories in the traditional sense, the readings are designed, according to the author, to offer “insights into life-changing truths of the Bible.”

One reading gives a list of ways to walk wisely. One can walk wisely, according to the author, by obeying God’s will, by claiming God’s promises and by standing firm in the Lord and His power.

Another reading presents God’s plan for man as revealed in eight covenants, beginning with the Edenic Covenant and ending with the New Covenant, fulfilled in Jesus. All readings are supported with quotations from Scripture.

The stories are illustrated with black-and-white photographs taken by Burroughs’ husband on a trip to the Holy Land in 2005.

Israel to allow some couples to marry in civil ceremonies

For the first time in its 62-year history, Israel will soon allow a limited number of couples to marry in civil ceremonies.

The Civil Union Law, which received final parliamentary approval in November, applies only to couples who have no legal affiliation with an organized religion.

Until now, all Israeli marriages had to be performed as religious unions in order to be recognized by the state. Jews, Muslims, Christians and others wishing to marry first had to register with their respective religious authorities. There has never been a provision for religiously unaffiliated couples, mixed-faith couples or Jews wishing to be married by a non-Orthodox rabbi.

While hundreds of couples without a religion are expected to take advantage of the new law, it does not provide a solution for intermarriage or couples where one partner has an identifiable religion and the other does not. There are religious leaders in Israel who will perform marriages for such couples, but the marriages are not recognized by the state.

Ultra-Orthodox politicians have repeatedly blocked a law that would permit civil marriage for any couple that wanted it, believing such a law would weaken religion and encourage intermarriage.

(RNS)



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PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Vietnam gives 2 evangelists prison sentences

SONG HINH, Vietnam — Two Christian evangelists, Ksor Y Du, 47, and Kpa Y Co, 30, were sentenced in November to six and four years in prison, respectively, for “undermining national unity.”

Du and Co of the Vietnam Good News Mission (VGNM) church received the sentences Nov. 15. House arrest of four and two years, respectively, also was added to the sentences, according to church sources. Both evangelists, who are of the Ede minority, live in Song Hinh district of Phu Yen province, where there are some 20 VGNM congregations.

Du was one of many thousands of ethnic minority people in Vietnam’s Central Highland who participated in demonstrations in 2004 against religious oppression and illegal confiscation of their traditional lands. They were held 10 months without charges, the area sources said. During interrogation, authorities ordered them to accuse VGNM leaders of illegally starting the organization and to accuse Pastor Mai Hong Sanh of opening an illegal Bible school in Buon Ma Thuot, sources said. The authorities grew angry when they refused.

Du’s wife, A Le H’ Gioi, told church leaders that the presiding judge of the People’s Court addressed the matter of their faith directly, asking her husband, “Do you still insist on following the religion?” The judge also asked him, “After serving in prison already, do you still insist on staying with the Vietnam Good News Mission?”

She said her husband answered that he would not give up his faith in God even if it meant death.

Muslims suspected in destruction of 2 churches

ZANZIBAR CITY, Tanzania — Radical Islamists are suspected in the demolition of two church buildings on Tanzania’s semiautonomous island of Zanzibar on Nov. 21, as members of the congregations have since received death threats from Muslims.

The church buildings belonging to the Tanzania Assemblies of God (TAG) and the Evangelical Assemblies of God Zanzibar (EAGZ) in Masingini village, nearly three miles from the center of Zanzibar City, were torn down at about 8 p.m., said Bishop Fabian Obeid of EAGZ.

One Christian who requested anonymity said, “One Muslim was heard saying, ‘We have cleansed our area by destroying the two churches, and now we are on our mission to kill individual members of these two churches — we shall not allow the church to be built again.’”

EAGZ pastor Michael Maganga and TAG pastor Dickson Kaganga said they were fearful about the future of the church in Masingini. Pastors in Zanzibar scheduled a meeting Nov. 27 to discuss how to cope with the destruction of the two buildings, said the chairman of the Pastors Fellowship in Zanzibar, Bishop Leonard Masasa of EAGZ church. Muslim extremists in Zanzibar, in concert with local government officials, have long limited the ability of Christians to obtain land for erecting worship buildings. In some cases they have destroyed existing buildings and put up mosques in their places.

Christian accused of desecrating Quran jailed

MOYALE, Ethiopia — A Christian in Ethiopia’s southern town of Moyale who languished in jail for more than three months after he was accused of desecrating the Quran has been sentenced to three years in prison, church leaders said.

Tamirat Woldegorgis, a member of the Full Gospel Church and father of two, was arrested in early August after a Muslim co-worker in the clothes-making business the two operated out of a rented home discovered Woldegorgis had inscribed “Jesus is Lord” on some cloth, area Christians said. His business partner later accused him of writing “Jesus is Lord” in a copy of the Quran, although no evidence of that ever surfaced.

Woldegorgis was sentenced Nov. 18 for allegedly defacing the Quran and was subsequently transferred to Jijiga prison, a source said. Jijiga is the capital of Ethiopia’s Somali Region Zone Five, which is governed by Islamic principles, and his transfer there — after a period in which his whereabouts were unknown — puts his life in greater danger, a church leader said. In Ethiopia’s federal state system, each state is autonomous in its administration, and most of those holding government positions in Somali Region Zone Five are Muslims.

'Baptist Mother Teresa'

ServeTrust founder Leena Lavanya puts faith in action

Twenty-hour days in the face of desperate poverty, terrible diseases, sometimes-hostile neighbors and even tigers could grind down even the most faithful, but somehow, Leena Lavanya draws strength from her ministry to keep going.

Sharing God's love and shining her light for others in her community give her strength, the woman sometimes called "the Baptist Mother Teresa" told a group gathered at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., on Nov. 2. Lavanya, the founder of ServeTrust, a charity ministering to the poor in southern India, spoke about her ministry and her experiences.

"I don't know how, but the more I work, the more energy I get," she said. "If I help one person, it fills my heart. I get satisfaction when I help others. I enjoy my work. I enjoy my ministries. I like to be with my schoolchildren, I like to be with the HIV patients, I want to hear and share the problems of sex workers, sitting on their dirt floors. I love to be with all these people. God always gives me physical strength and spiritual strength."

Lavanya earned her nickname in part because of her deep faith, but also her ministry's parallel focus on ministering to the poorest, the sick and the dying of India. She has earned praise from faith groups and her government. In 2009, the Baptist World Alliance presented her with the Denton and Janice Lotz Human Rights Award and, in 2007, ServeTrust was named the top nongovernmental organization in India.

She devoted herself to ministry after hearing a speech by Tony Campolo at a Baptist World Alliance meeting in 1993. He said that, though many people sing from the hymn, "All to Jesus, I Surrender," few who sing it actually do so.

"Those words touched my heart. I said to God, 'You don't need money. I don't have money to give you, but you have given me this



Photo courtesy of Mercer University

SHARING GOD'S LOVE — Leena Lavanya, founder of ServeTrust, shares about her ministry and experiences in southern India with an audience at Mercer University in Macon, Ga., on Nov. 2.

precious life by shedding your precious blood on the Calvary Cross. Here I am God, use me to do your service," she said. "So completely, I surrendered myself to God."

With her eyes opened, Lavanya soon saw the suffering of those in her community. She began her ministry with the simple act of training a sex worker in sewing and buying her a sewing machine so she could begin to support herself.

Helping hundreds

Now, Lavanya's ministry helps hundreds of people who have been abandoned. Among their ministries in Lavanya's home state of Andhra Pradesh are an AIDS hospice, a shelter for those with leprosy, a home for the aged, health-care programs for rural communities, a micro-enterprise center for former sex workers, job-training centers for youth and schools for destitute children and orphans.

"They need someone to comfort them, they need somebody to share love and concern with them," Lavanya said. "Because I am a Chris-

tian, I am able to tell them the love of Jesus and many people have gotten comfort from that, from the love of Jesus."

Lavanya recounted the stories of how her ministries were formed — often from a single interaction — and told of stories of simpler acts of compassion, from persuading suicidal AIDS patients not to give up, to taking in the destitute.

"My phone always rings," she said.

"I don't want to sit in my house and go to church on Sunday and think that is enough," she said. "I want to reach the unreached people with the love and compassion of Christ and the good news of Christ."

Her story of action in a challenging environment inspired Mercer graduate Julie Whidden Long to devote a chapter to Lavanya in her 2008 book, "Portraits of Courage: Stories of Baptist Heroes." Long, minister to children and families at First Baptist Church, Macon, was inspired by Lavanya's story and included it among the stories of 14 unsung Baptist heroes since the founding of the tradition in 1609.

Hearing Lavanya's story in person was inspiring, Long said. "I was deeply moved by Leena's stories and the quiet, humble simplicity with which she carries herself and conducts her ministry," Long said. "I was struck by the way that she began each of her stories — 'One day, I was walking on the road ...' and, 'One day, my car was stopped at the traffic light ...' and, 'One day, I was visiting in the village ...' I realized that she never set out with the goal of doing great things for God. She has simply opened her eyes and her heart to the people around her and responds to their needs out of her deep compassion and love. Leena challenged me to do the same." (ABP)



Photo courtesy of Mercer University

INSPIRING STUDENTS — Leena Lavanya (left) and Susan LeGrand (center), chair of ServeTrust's international advisory board, meet Mercer University freshman Sweedel Joseph.

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Maryland Baptist church reaches settlement with county

BALTIMORE — A Maryland county will pay a Baptist church \$3.25 million and allow construction of a Christian school that government officials have opposed for eight years under terms of a settlement reached Nov. 18 in federal court.

An attorney representing Riverdale Baptist Church, Upper Marlboro, Md., said the award is one of the largest and the case is perhaps only the third to go to trial under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000.

The settlement, reached on the 12th day of a lengthy jury trial in U.S. District Court in Baltimore, clears the way for the church to build an expanded Arundel Bay Christian Academy on 57 acres of property it owns in Anne Arundel County. The school, a ministry of Riverdale Baptist Ministry Church and Schools in neighboring Prince George's County, currently enrolls 140 students but has wanted to expand for several years.

After four years of failed negotiations, the church filed a lawsuit in 2006 accusing county officials of religious discrimination. After the church purchased property in Lothian, Md., in 2002, the county at first denied grading and building permits before changing zoning laws to prohibit the school.

In 2006 the county designated 23 roads — including two that border the church's property — "scenic and historic" and severely limited building on such roads.

County officials, who previously turned down a \$300,000 offer to settle the lawsuit seeking \$6.7 million in lost tuition and increased construction costs, denied religious discrimination and claimed their concerns were traffic safety and preserving ecosystems in the nearby Jug Bay Wetlands Sanctuary.

Under terms of the settlement, however, the county admits that it violated a federal statute that prohibits creation of local zoning laws that impose a "substantial burden" on religious freedoms without a compelling cause.

The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, adopted to correct problems that caused the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act to be found unconstitutional, restricts governments from imposing land-use regulations in a manner that "imposes a substantial burden on the religious exercise of a person, including a religious assembly or institution." The only exception to the rule is when governments can prove that imposition of the burden furthers "a compelling governmental interest" and is accomplished by "the least restrictive means" available.

The lawsuit claimed discrimination because actions taken by local officials that were "spurred by several hostile neighboring residents" applied only to the church academy and not other private schools. It also noted that a public school would be able to build on the church's property without hindrance.

Obama signs order to reform faith-based office

WASHINGTON — President Obama signed an executive order Nov. 17 that reforms the White House's faith-based office in a bid to improve transparency and clarify rules for religious groups that receive federal grants.

The nine-page order reflects numerous recommendations made more than six months ago by a blue-ribbon advisory council charged with streamlining and reforming the office created under former President George W. Bush.

"The recommendations that they've put forth make really concrete and tangible improvements to the government's relationship with faith-based organizations," said Joshua DuBois, director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

However, the executive order does not address controversial questions of whether grant recipients can hire and fire based on religion. Administration officials have said those questions will be considered on a case-by-case basis. DuBois and others said the new order gives better legal footing to public-private partnerships.

"It ... clarifies that decisions about financial awards must be free from political interference or the appearance thereof," DuBois said. Obama's order implements most of the dozen reform recommendations crafted by the council's task force on internal reform, which included a former Bush administration staffer and church-state separationists.

With the new order in place, DuBois said "well over half" of the council's total 64 recommendations — on topics ranging from poverty to interfaith relations — will have been implemented. ☐