

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST



Dec. 16, 2010
Vol. 175, No. 49

The most widely circulated state Baptist newspaper

Toll free 1-800-803-5201
www.thealabamabaptist.org

INSIDE



Hoover's Hispanic Institute graduates its first class

◆ Page 3



Christian 'hemorrhage' mounts in Iraq; believers face decision of whether to flee or stay

◆ Page 5



Though pronounced dead three times, Shelby still lives

◆ Page 6

LIVE Bethlehem

FBC Montgomery one of 8 churches to pilot IMB webcast from Jesus' birthplace

By Ava Thomas
International Mission Board

The Muslim call to prayer pierced the air at First Baptist Church, Montgomery, on Dec. 5 at the same time it echoed through the streets of Bethlehem.

And as Muslims in Jesus' birthplace were praying, the Montgomery Baptist Association congregation was praying for them.

The experience was part of a pilot webcast the International Mission Board (IMB) produced from Bethlehem on Dec. 5.

"God's miracle of technology enabled our (First, Montgomery) family to take a live, virtual tour of the spiritual condition of Bethlehem during our Sunday morning worship service," Senior Pastor Jay Wolf said.

The fact that the video was live got excitement going in the church, said Minister of Missions Brian Gay.

"We were encouraged and challenged to give, pray and go, and we'd love to be part of something like this again next year," he said.

During the IMB's LIVE Bethlehem event, eight Southern Baptist churches watched a six-minute personalized webcast as part of their Sunday morning schedule. The pilot program was a test run for a convention-wide webcast in December 2011 to promote giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions.

"People only think of Bethlehem in terms of the Christmas story; they don't think of what is going on there today," said C.S. Stanley, IMB media team leader for the project. "We wanted to broadcast from the city because it is a microcosm of spiritual needs globally. Just like we don't want people to overlook the unfinished task in Jesus' birthplace, we also don't want them to forget the unfinished global mission task."

Participating churches saw a live shot of the Bethlehem skyline with the Church of the Nativity, which marks Jesus' believed birthplace, and the large mosque next to it prominently featured.



IMB photo

BETHLEHEM SKYLINE — Bethlehem's Manger Square (left, center) served as the back drop for the International Mission Board's LIVE Bethlehem webcast that aired Dec. 5 in churches like First, Montgomery.

As IMB worker Dale Thorne explained what life is like for Palestinians living in Bethlehem, churches viewed photos and video clips from the area.

IMB partnership

The webcast spurred New Century Church, Roanoke, Va., to want to

partner with IMB work in Bethlehem in 2011, said church member Bob Francis.

"The webcast with Dale ... was glorious. It was great to see the IMB using technology to reach congregations in such a dynamic and real-time way from the mission field," Francis said.

He added that the church is planning its 2011 trip and would love to do a service project or some activity with the IMB team in the Bethlehem area.

"We see this as a way to really bind the pray, support and go call to action with our team," Francis said.

A Southern Baptist worker in the area said he was thrilled with the opportunity for churches to become better acquainted with the people in his area, as well as their needs.

"The whole project focused the attention of Baptist churches on Palestinian people and encouraged them to pray," the worker said. "It was also an encouragement to local Palestinian believers that they were not forgotten by their evangelical brothers and sisters outside."

Other churches

Other churches that participated in the webcast were

- ▶ Wallace Memorial Baptist Church, Knoxville, Tenn.;
- ▶ First Baptist Church, Bloomfield, N.M.;
- ▶ Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.;

(See 'Videos,' page 6)



IMB photo

'GOD'S MIRACLE OF TECHNOLOGY' — IMB worker Dale Thorne speaks live to FBC Montgomery Dec. 5 about the vast spiritual needs in Bethlehem and cities like it around the world.

COMMENT

Missions is More Than a Mission Trip

Church sponsored mission trips are important. Practically all Baptist representatives serving on international fields will attest to their value. Mission trips, when done the right way, provide encouragement to local Christians as well as to Baptist representatives. Often mission trips serve as a stimulus for ministries, programs and projects long envisioned but never accomplished.

Mission trips can result in new doors of opportunity. Nationals often want to know why an American would come to their part of the world. They will listen to a gospel presentation from a missions volunteer when they would not listen to a national Christian.

It is no secret that missions teams provide manpower and other resources often lacking in a particular area. From dentists pulling teeth to construction workers raising buildings to teachers sharing with children, mission trip volunteers make valuable contributions to sites across the globe.

Not the least of these contributions is sharing the gospel through testimonies translated and printed in local languages or personal evangelism or revival meetings or any of the countless other means mission trip volunteers use to share the good news of God's love expressed in Jesus Christ.

Mission trips are valuable for the volunteer as well. Practically all return from a volunteer missions experience with new understandings about people in other areas and their needs. Equally important is the new understanding about missions.

Frequently American volunteers return home with new appreciation for the faith and prayer life of national Christians with whom they worked. The window of understanding provided by the mission trip often results in greater giving to missions, in adjusted personal priorities, even in vocational calls to missions.

From the vantage point of those served or from those who go, church-sponsored mission trips are important. Still missions is more than a mission trip.

At its core, international missions involves lives planted in a particular culture in order to share the gospel with all who will hear.

Missiologists call this "incarnational missions." It is Baptist representatives living among a particular people group, learning their language, customs and culture. It is Baptist representatives earning the right to be heard through relationship-building. It is becoming the presence of Christ among a people to whom God has called that Baptist representative.



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Volunteers want to get the work done in a week or two. Missions looks at how to share the gospel over a longer time frame. Volunteers want the project completed. Missions wants to impact circumstances that will create an ongoing openness to the gospel. Volunteers come with a clear goal. Missions allows for the continuing evolution of goals as circumstances change.

Identifying with people

Volunteers reflect the gospel through American values, culture and understandings. Missions identifies with the people that the gospel is presented to in ways that relate to local values, culture and understandings. This is true even when the gospel challenges local customs.

Volunteers usually communicate through an interpreter. Missions communicates in the heart language of the people. Volunteers can be flexible enough to live and eat in unusual circumstances for a week or two. For missions, it is a lifetime of learning, living and eating in those circumstances.

Volunteers often develop a new appreciation of "home." Missions weans one away from home as one becomes part of a new place and people. It is no wonder that many children of Baptist representatives often feel trapped between two worlds — where they served and the United States — not really belonging to either.

For volunteers, the experience is a trip. For Baptist representatives, it is a lifetime.

Mission trips are important and needed. So are the incarnational missions efforts of Southern Baptist representatives. In fact in most places around the world, churches would not be doing mission trips if it were not for the work of Baptist representatives. Incarnational missions is the foundation of what Baptists do around the world.

Going on a mission trip — or scores of mission trips — does not make one an incarnational Baptist representative. Nor does it mean that one knows and understands what life is like for these God-called men and women.

A term being heard with increasing regularity is "recreational missions." It describes volunteers who treat mission trips like annual vacations.

Please do not confuse recreational missions volunteers with volunteers who sacrificially give of themselves in order to participate in missions projects. God has blessed His kingdom with men and women, usually lay persons, who have the heart, the skills and the resources to pour themselves out in missions efforts. These godly men and women are an inspiration to all who know them.

Also, there are some volunteers who advocate their churches reducing giving to missions through the Cooperative Program (CP) in order for the churches to sponsor more mission trips on their own. Translation: reduce CP giving so the churches can underwrite their participation in mission trips each year. These are recreational missions volunteers.

This position puts mission trips in competition with incarnational missions. Instead of valuing both, a dilemma is created forcing the church to choose between the two. Churches should do international mission trips and support incarnational missions as done by the roughly 5,000 Baptist representatives around the world.

This season of the year Baptists give a special offering to support incarnational missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. Hopefully you have already given as the Lord laid it on your heart. If not, be sure to give soon.

Every Sunday Baptists support incarnational missions as a portion of undesignated offerings are channeled to international missions causes through the CP. Keep that giving strong. Do not cut it.

Then, when the time comes for the church to sponsor an international mission trip, go or help someone go. These mission trips are important. But always remember, missions is more than a mission trip.

Letters to the Editor


SPIRITUAL FOOD

To keep people coming to our churches, we need real spiritual food served. I need food for my soul, I need direction for my life, I need the correc-

tion for my path, I need comfort when I'm hurting and there's always a lost person who needs salvation. When I'm not getting these needs met, it's a lot like going to a favorite restaurant —

they could be very friendly, [but] I order my food, I'm there for an hour and I'm never served.

Sue Varner
Deatsville, Ala.


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).

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
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is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 1-800-803-5201. Fax: 205-870-8957. **Web site:** www.thealabamabaptist.org. **E-mail:** news@thealabamabaptist.org or circulation@thealabamabaptist.org. Periodicals postage paid at Birmingham, Ala., and other locations.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.
ADDRESS CHANGE: Send old and new addresses, and name of church to Circulation Department, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Allow two weeks.

Hoover's Hispanic Institute graduates its first class

By **Kristen Padilla**
The Alabama Baptist

Carlos Lemus, Hispanic missionary for Autauga and Chilton Baptist associations, and Hispanic Baptist pastors in Alabama saw a need — there were not enough Hispanics trained to plant and serve Hispanic churches in the state.

With a Hispanic Baptist Bible Institute in north Alabama, they needed a Bible school in central Alabama, but no one knew how to get one started.

That was until Cary Hanks, catalytic missionary for the Central Alabama Baptist Hispanic Ministry Coalition, and Pablo Moscoso, pastor of Iglesia Cristiana Agape (Agape Christian Church), Hoover, came on the scene.

“Those two [men] helped us to achieve our dreams,” Lemus said.

Hanks, who previously served with the International Mission Board in Ecuador for 15 years, came to Alabama in January 2009 from the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, while Moscoso came from New Jersey in 2008. They quickly connected with the Alabama Hispanic Baptist Fellowship and started working on the possibility of a Bible school for Hispanics.

“I came in with the idea, realizing that for a Hispanic work to grow, we needed to start training leaders,” said Hanks, who serves as the institute’s coordinator. “As it turned out, all the pastors here have been wanting it for years.”

After looking at several options, the fellowship decided to go with the

Instituto Biblico Bautista Hispano (Hispanic Baptist Bible Institute) in Louisville, Ky., becoming one of its extension centers. And in January of this year, the Hispanic Baptist Bible Institute opened its doors at First Baptist Church, Hoover.

“Basically what we are looking (to do) is to provide this training to those students that, first, cannot speak English (and), secondly, [do not have a high] level of education,” Lemus said. “Most of those students we have right now in the Bible institute don’t have a high school or college degree to be ready to go to colleges or seminaries. There’s no other option except the Bible institute. ... Otherwise they will not have a formal Bible training.”

Completing the training takes three years. In their first year, students work on a certificate of ministry, taking eight classes that include Old Testament 1, New Testament 1, Theology 1 and Missions. Second-year students work on a diploma of ministry, taking eight classes that include Old Testament 2, New Testament 2, Church Planting and Church History. In their third year, they take four courses, including homiletics (the art of preaching) and eschatology (the theological study of end times), for a superior diploma. Classes are offered one at a time and meet for four consecutive Saturdays starting in January.

“We hope [many] will sense the call to full-time ministry or bivocational ministry, and that’s why we don’t stop with one year,” Hanks said. “By the time they finish the three years, they’ll be equipped to



Photo courtesy of Carlos Lemus

GRADUATES — Fourteen of the 17 students who graduated Dec. 4 with a certificate of ministry from the Hispanic Baptist Bible Institute in Hoover celebrate with a reception.

be involved in basic ministry — equipped to plant churches, evangelize and disciple others.”

Already Hispanics are coming to the institute from all around the state, from places like Birmingham, Chilton County, Lineville, Pinson and Tuscaloosa, and from Hispanic churches like Iglesia Biblica Berea (Berea Bible Church), Heflin, which has about 10 members studying at the institute.

Juan Villanueva, pastor of Berea Bible and a student at the institute, said the institute has been a good thing for his church.

‘We need to learn’

For one thing, there is more excitement among members, and during their Friday night Bible study, those who are students at the institute are sharing what they are learning with others. In addition,

Villanueva now feels he has several people he can trust to fill the pulpit when he is out of town.

“It’s very good because when we come to our houses, we continue to study,” Villanueva said. “And it’s good because we are studying with a purpose, and you know someone will tell you if what you are thinking is according to the Bible or not.”

“It’s very important because if we want to teach other people, first we need to learn,” he added.

On Dec. 4, 17 students graduated with a certificate of ministry — the institute’s first graduating class. Once students complete a year, they graduate with the certificate or diploma corresponding to that year. By the end of three years, students will have graduated with one certificate and two diplomas.

The reason graduation is held after each year is because Hispanics tend to be more “project-oriented than process-oriented,” Hanks said.

‘Cultivate, fertilize’

This year, the professors received certificates, too, as the graduates surprised them with framed certificates thanking them for their work, love and commitment.

The graduation ceremony was followed by a reception.

“We are trying to cultivate and fertilize ... Baptist Hispanic work in the future,” Lemus said. “We’re just preparing these leaders so when the time comes, they’ll be able to work with the local church or be a church planter.”

For more information, contact Hanks at 205-602-0082 or cary.cabhmc@hotmail.com.

Dothan church debuts its first movie ‘Writing Christmas Cool’

What began as a Christmas stage production written by Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan member Wayne Patterson in 2008 ended up on the big screen at Dothan’s Northside Cinema II Dec. 10–16.

“Writing Christmas Cool,” the first independent feature film produced by the Columbia Baptist Association church’s Kenosis Media Ministries, is purposely evangelistic with the goal “to win one more person for the kingdom of Christ,” said Patterson, who directed the film.

Said to be patterned after musicals like “Glee” and “High School Musical,” “Writing Christmas Cool” is about seven students who are on a quest to discover what is “cool” and end up rewriting their church’s Christmas musical. Along the way, these students reveal major life problems and challenges they have encountered.

From having the help of almost 200 volunteers to receiving funding to attaining Northside Cinema, Patterson said it has “been a God thing the whole way through.” That included enlisting the help of Denver Bierman of the Christian big-band Denver & the Mile



Photo courtesy of Kenosis Media Ministries

ALL-STAR CAST — ‘Writing Christmas Cool,’ a musical produced by Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan’s Kenosis Media Ministries, stars Denver Bierman (center) of the Christian big-band Denver & the Mile High Orchestra.

High Orchestra, who arranged all the music but one song for the film and starred as Carl.

But “we never want to come across as a one-shot wonder,” said producer Brad Bradford, who serves as the church’s worship minister.

That’s why Bradford’s team chose to use the film as an opportunity for follow-up.

As people left the theater, Calvary Baptist members gave them a LifePoints brochure that Kenosis developed that deals with five

difficult questions found in the movie. In the brochure is Scripture to answer each question as well as the plan of salvation. On the back of the brochure, people are invited to two follow-up events on the evenings of Jan. 9 and 16 at Calvary where the questions will be discussed further, clips from the movie will be shown and cast members will give testimonies.

“[Kenosis Media Ministries] is commissioned as an outreach and that is our goal,” Patterson said. “We are more excited about the LifePoint brochures (than the movie).”

Patterson and Bradford hope local churches will use the movie and the follow-up material to reach their communities for Christ.

The first place for this to happen is at Sardis Springs Baptist Church, Athens, which will show the film during its Dec. 26 evening service.

“[The movie] is going to relate to everyone in my church, from old to young,” said Tim Keenum, pastor of Sardis Springs Baptist. “The thing with this movie is if you see it you’re going to like it.”

For more information, call Calvary at 334-792-5159. (TAB)

NAMB trustee Lester Cooper resigns protesting direction of new president

A trustee has resigned from the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) North American Mission Board (NAMB) saying he does not share the vision of the agency's new president.

"I believe that throughout my life, and particularly as I've gotten older, that it's very important to take your body where your heart is," Lester Cooper, pastor of Concord Baptist Church, Cumming, Ga., told church members Nov. 28. "If you've got your body somewhere where your heart's not, that just not where it ought to be.

"I just wanted to share with you this morning — for whatever it's worth to anybody — that this past week I resigned as trustee of the North American Mission Board," he said.

Cooper added, in an interview with Associated Baptist Press, "My heart is not with the North American Mission Board."

Cooper, former director of missions for the Atlanta Association of Southern Baptist Churches, was elected as a NAMB trustee in 2008. He said watching changes made since the election Sept. 14 of Kevin Ezell as the agency's presi-

dent "is not what I signed on for."

On Sept. 30 Ezell announced an early-retirement incentive for employees age 54 and over. The goal is to reduce staff by a net 25 percent by the end of the year — including new people brought in by Ezell.

Cooper said he agrees with the strategy of focusing on church planting in urban areas with large populations, but doesn't think the way to do it is by losing senior staff members recognized as leading experts in the field.

"I can't imagine how you can see 80 people leave an organization that has 260 people in it and have any idea of how you are going to function or come to the conclusion of who is going to go before you have been there two months," Cooper said. "It's not reasonable, and I cannot get a satisfactory answer from anybody where we are going."

Restructuring of NAMB

He also said that since a Great Commission Task Force report adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention calls for a restructuring of NAMB within seven years, he doesn't understand why decisions

are being handed down so quickly and without vote by the board of trustees.

"I do not really see the direction I see it going in as being something that I think is helpful," Cooper said. "I don't think that I should stay and stand in the way of what others think need to be done."

Cooper said three NAMB staff members taking the early-retirement option are members of his church.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Cooper, a pastor for more than 30 years with a long record of denominational service. "It's a new day for Southern Baptists, and I really don't know what it looks like."

Ezell, 48, took the NAMB job after 14 years as pastor of Highview Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky. Some criticized his selection because the church favors designated missions giving over traditional funding mechanisms like the SBC's Cooperative Program unified budget and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Trustees who recommended Ezell said his innovation and passion for reaching people is what attracted them to him in the first place.

Ezell said early on one of his first tasks would be to make the agency more credible to young ministers less prone than their parents' generation to support institutions. (ABP)

"My heart is not with the North American Mission Board."

Pastor Lester Cooper
Concord Baptist Church,
Cumming, Ga.

Across Alabama's Associations

BIRMINGHAM

► **Grantswood Church, Irondale**, will present "Live Nativity" Dec. 19–21, 7–9 p.m. Refreshments will be served in the fellowship hall. For information call 205-956-0083 or sonnyrl@bellsouth.net. Cary Baker is pastor. ► The choir of **First Church, Overton**, in Birmingham, will present the musical "Behold Emmanuel" Dec. 19, 10:30 a.m. Jimmy Ray is pastor.

COOSA RIVER

► The choir of **Blue Eye Church, Lincoln**, will present "Joy to the World" Dec. 19, 11 a.m., under the direction of Mike McBurnett. Jacky Morgan is pastor.

ETOWAH

► The sanctuary choir of **Immanuel Church, Hokes Bluff**, will present the musical "Joy Has Dawned" Dec. 19, 6 p.m. Refreshments will follow. The children's choir will sing at 5:30 p.m. For information call 256-492-4188. Anthony Copeland is pastor.

MOBILE

► **Paul Sands** is the new pastor of **Spring Hill Church, Mo-**

bile, effective Jan. 9. He comes from George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University in



SANDS

Waco, Texas, where he was associate professor of theology. He also has taught in the religion department at Baylor and at Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Sands has more than 30 years of ministry experience having served as pastor or interim pastor of six churches. He holds a bachelor's degree from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, master of theology from Southwestern Seminary and doctor of philosophy in systematic theology from Baylor. Sands and his wife, Linda, have three children.

ST. CLAIR

► The adult choir and drama ministry of **Sulphur Springs Church, Trussville**, will present its Singing Christmas Wreath Dec. 17–18, 7 p.m., and Dec. 19, 4 p.m. The theme will be "The Gift Goes On." The wreath stands 11 feet tall

with 3,600 colored lights, 1,000 feet of garland, 100 feet of steel rods and a 3-foot bow. A nursery will be provided. Everett Sollie is minister of music. Bobby Shipp is pastor.

MUD CREEK

► **Jerry Cunningham** is the



CUNNINGHAM

new children's pastor for **Union Hill Church, Bessemer**. He has served as children's pastor for First Church, Indian Springs, and Canaan Church, Bessemer. He and his wife, Lisa, have three children. Mickey Bell is pastor.

OTHER

► **First Church, Mobile**, will hold its annual Christmas candlelight service Dec. 19, 5 p.m. There will be readers, soloists and carolers. For information call 251-432-6513 or visit www.fbcmobile.com. Randy Davis is music minister. Chris George is pastor.



Chandler Mountain marks 100th anniversary

Extra seating was brought in to accommodate the large crowd expected Oct. 24 for the 100th anniversary celebration of Chandler Mountain Baptist Church, Steele, and former members did not disappoint.

More than 325 people — almost five times the attendance average of 75 — gathered at the St. Clair Baptist Association church to celebrate.

Lee Gilliland, who organized the anniversary service with his wife, Mary, presented a brief history, beginning in 1910 with the six men who began the congregation, and Ben Chandler, director of missions for St. Clair Association, spoke.

Special presentations also were made.

Linda Rodgers, a representative of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a plaque, and State Rep. Blaine Galliher presented a plaque on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries to Nancy Burton, Woman's Missionary Union director for the church. Other awards were presented to Pastor Phillip Ellen and chairman of deacons Charlie Hunsucker.

West County Line celebrates 75 years of service

October 17 was a special day of remembrance for West County Line Baptist Church, Opp, as it celebrated its 75th anniversary.

A representative of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission was on hand to present a plaque. The Covington Baptist Association church also received a plaque from Director of Missions Larry Cummings.

More than 150 guests and members attended the anniversary service and enjoyed a fellowship lunch afterward.

The service included a slideshow with pictures from the church's history.

Former Pastor Randall Pearson brought the message.

Looking to the future of West County Line Baptist, Pastor Shawn Bentley said, "[I hope] we reach as many people as we can and become more effective in our community. The Lord's done great things so far, and we know there are even greater things He has in store for us."

Aimwell Church commemorates 150 years

A simple service marked an important milestone at Aimwell Baptist Church, Sweet Water, on Nov. 21.

The Bethel Baptist Association church commemorated 150 years with more than 75 people in attendance and former Pastor Percy Clarke bringing the morning message.

Bobby Hopper, director of missions for Bethel Association, presented the church with a certificate acknowledging its many years of service, and a representative of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission also recognized the church with a plaque.

In turn, Aimwell Baptist recognized Irene Daniels for being the longest-tenured active member and the oldest member still living in the area.

Don White is pastor of Aimwell.

Eastaboga Church marks 175th anniversary

More than 400 people made the journey to Eastaboga Baptist Church on Nov. 7 to mark its 175th anniversary.

The anniversary service included a message from Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and a plaque presentation by a representative of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

Youth Pastor Mike Snyder said he hopes the Coosa River Association church would continue to keep Christ as the head of the church.

"We hope that Jesus will lead this ministry ... until He returns," he said.

**The Alabama Baptist will not print Dec. 30.
Please submit all news items for
the Jan. 6 issue no later than Dec. 21.**

'In the face of violence'

Christian 'hemorrhage' mounts in Iraq; believers face decision of whether to flee or stay

Rahim took one bullet in the leg and then one in the head while sitting in a church pew. But his death and the deaths of more than 50 other Christians gunned down with him Oct. 31 marked more than just the end of their lives. They symbolized the demise of the entire Christian population of Iraq, said one Baptist worker familiar with the situation.

"This is not the start — it's the period to a long-running sentence, the end of a tragic novel that's been playing out for years," said Nik Ripken, who has served 25 years with the International Mission Board and is an expert on the persecuted church in Muslim contexts.

The Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaida group, took credit for the massacre at Our Lady of Salvation, a Syrian Catholic church in Baghdad, plus the spate of bombings and killings that followed. The group claimed the violence was in response to the alleged detention of two women in Egypt said to have converted to Islam.

Major news outlets showed the world the bloodbath, the most fatal single incident of violence since Islamic extremists began targeting Christians, according to Compass Direct News (CD) in a Nov. 3 Baptist Press article.

But that one highly publicized tragedy doesn't account for the hundreds of thousands of Christians who have been lost to Iraq

one way or another in the past seven years, Ripken said. More than half of the nation's Christians have fled Iraq since 2003, according to CD. Just shy of 600,000 remain.

Most who flee go first to Syria or Jordan and then try to find permanent residence as refugees in Europe, Canada, the United States or Australia, according to Bassam Madany, whose ministry, Middle East Resources, offers perspectives on Islam from a Christian viewpoint.

"This is probably one of the biggest flights in recent history, and the world has stood silently by as it's been happening," Ripken said, noting that the losses might be even bigger than those claimed by news sources. "It's been a hemorrhage since the second Gulf War. When Saddam Hussein thanked the Christians on public television for supporting him — even though they were simply being peaceable under his rule — he basically gave them a death sentence. He put a big political target on their backs."

And, he noted, there was no al-Qaida presence in the nation while Saddam was still in power.

The persecution of Christians in Iraq since his removal reportedly has ranged from crucifixions to rape. The Islamic State of Iraq "seeks the establishment of harsh Islamic law and says all Iraqi Christians are targets for jihad," as *USA Today* put it.



Photos courtesy of Nabeeh Abbassi

DANGEROUS BELIEF — Baptisms in Iraq, like the one pictured here, are no longer taking place due to the more severe persecution, including death threats, believers are now receiving. Churches are either cancelling services or changing the days and service times to be less conspicuous.

As a result, many Iraqi Christians are facing the decision of whether to flee with their families or stay and likely face severe persecution. Church leaders in Iraq and worldwide are voicing concerns this may nail the coffin shut on a Christian presence in the nation.

Crucified for Christ

"They will definitely leave," Faiz Bashir, curate of St. George's Church, an Anglican church near Our Lady of Salvation, told *USA Today*. "We hope it's not the end of Christians in Iraq, but if things

get worse, if there are attacks on the churches and killing on the streets, this will be certain."

Nabeeh Abbassi, former president of the Jordan Baptist Convention and provost of Jordanian Evangelical Theological Seminary, has been working with pastors and church leaders of Our Lady of Salvation and has heard firsthand of the situation there.

"The bombing in the Catholic church in Baghdad that killed over 50 people has been a discouragement for the entire Christian community," Abbassi wrote in a recent newsletter.

"Our contacts have told us that they are getting many death threats and are living in greater fear. Church services are either canceled or the days and service times changed in order to be less conspicuous. However, most people are not attending services."

Christians are soft targets in Iraq and the world has failed to advocate for them, Ripken said.

The U.S. State Department did not name Iraq as a severe violator of religious liberty when it released its annual International Religious Freedom report Nov. 17. The decision came despite an April recommendation by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to add it as a "country of particular concern."

"They (Iraqi Christians) talk about their persecution as expected, as normal," Ripken said. "What they talk about with brokenness is being rejected and forgotten by other people. The international Christian community has been silent. Iraq needs the prayers of Christians, for peace to come there so that Iraqi Christians can stay and those who have left can return home."

Prayer needed

A nation increasingly devoid of a Christian witness also will need intense prayer, Ripken said. "Iraqis' access to the gospel is at stake."

Persecution has already stifled sharing between Christians and their neighbors, he said.

"Pray for the boldness of Iraqi Christians to share the gospel in the face of violence. This really needs to be a burden we carry for our brothers and sisters in nations like this."

Ripken said Christians around the world can be praying for a sense of brokenness for brothers and sisters in Iraq, an opportunity for Iraqi Christians to return home peacefully and the gospel to spread in the midst of suffering.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names have been changed to protect the individuals. (BP, TAB)

"Our contacts have told us that they are getting many death threats and are living in greater fear."

Nabeeh Abbassi
former president of the
Jordan Baptist Convention

Cheaha Ministries reaches parkgoers

The congregation at the Al Alexander Building changes vastly from Sunday to Sunday. That's because the chapel houses Cheaha Ministries, an outreach to visitors at Cheaha State Park in Delta.

The ministry holds a non-denominational service at 9 a.m. every Sunday from the first week in April through the last Sunday in October, with rotating pastors each week.

"It's a 'come-dressed-as-you-are' service," said Donna Frames, a member of Mount Moriah Baptist Church, Delta, in Carey Baptist Association who has served as pianist and soloist for the ministry for 21 years.

"People just wear whatever they have on. We've had dogs attend the service. We offer op-

portunity for people to participate in the service, too, by singing or playing instruments."

Since 1980, the ministry has reached out to people from as far away as New Zealand and Germany, but it has a few consistent "members," too.

Regular attendees

"We've been going up there for years," said Jo Craven, of Lineville. She and her husband, Thirl, have been regular attendees since the ministry began in an open-air pavilion. "We love going up there."

The inspiration for the ministry came from Al Alexander's desire to have a worship service atop the highest point in Alabama. Alexander, who is now deceased and was a member of Macedonia Baptist Church, Delta, in Carey Association, visited the park manager's

house and pitched his idea of providing a place of worship for visitors to Mount Cheaha as well as others who may not have a church home.

Though the ministry has become somewhat of a staple in the park, invitations to the service can no longer be handed out so it has to rely on word-of-mouth, ads in local papers and signs in the park store, motel and restaurant to attract people to the service.

"I don't want to build a mansion of a church," said Tony Knight, who took over as coordinator of the ministry after his father, Roy, passed away in September. "My one goal for Cheaha [Ministries] is that people know there's a service. Whether they come or not, I want them to know it's there." (TAB)

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Though pronounced dead three times, Shelby still lives

By John Evans
The Alabama Baptist

It was a Sunday afternoon when Charlie Moore saw a dead woman rise.

On the morning of April 18, 2004, Moore climbed in the car to return home to Mississippi from a weekend church retreat in Alabama. Riding with him were his wife, Judy; his friend Jeff Morland; and Morland's wife, Robin. As they left,

Morland remarked how amazing it would have been to see Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. That afternoon, as the group was passing through Tuscaloosa, Moore missed his turn off U.S. Highway 82 so he kept going. In front of him was a large Ford truck; its driver had missed his turn as well.

As they crested a hill at about 60 mph, a small white Toyota driven by Kristy

Shelby — who also had missed her turn — pulled out of a parking lot onto the highway in front of the truck. Both drivers later said they never saw each other.

"The driver of the truck didn't have the chance to hit his brakes," Moore recalled.

The truck broadsided Shelby's car, annihilating the driver's side as they both crashed to a stop.

Moore and Morland rushed to the scene. As they approached Shelby's

mangled car, they found her unresponsive, slumped over the steering wheel with the windshield on top of her.

Then they saw her children. Her son, Cody, 8, and daughter, Abigail, 4, were in the car, screaming and covered with glass. Fearing a fire, Morland pulled Cody out immediately, but the seat belt on Abigail's car seat had tightened from the crash and couldn't be released.

Morland cut the belt and pulled her from the car as Moore pried the windshield off Shelby, who couldn't be removed from the driver's seat.

"I reached through the window and caught her by the arm," Moore said. "I couldn't think of anything else but to pray."

Morland, an emergency medical technician, checked Shelby's vital signs. She had no pulse.

Because of where she was trapped, he was unable to perform CPR.

"He looked up at me and said, 'Brother Charlie, I think she's gone,'" Moore recalled.

"Is my mother dead?" Cody asked before pleading, "Please don't let my momma die."

Moore continued praying. Soon a nurse pulled over to the wreck. Crawling into the car, she affirmed Morland's assessment — Shelby was dead.

"There was just a special anointing on the prayer service that night, an assurance that God was not only there but He had heard."

Max Stripling
Sipsey Baptist Association



Photo courtesy of Kristy Shelby

THE SHELBY FAMILY — (L to r) Butch, Jon David, Kristy, Abigail and Cody Shelby have seen people come to know Jesus through hearing Kristy's story. She actively tells of her faith and God's purpose.

The truck's driver and passengers were dazed but avoided serious injury. As firefighters attended to Shelby's children, a doctor arrived. While Moore stood next to Shelby praying aloud, the doctor checked her for vital signs.

"She's gone," he pronounced.

As the doctor walked away, Moore thought of Shelby's children. He looked into her eyes, open yet lifeless, eerily bulging from her head. Desperate, he cried out to God.

'Bring her back'

"Please don't let this woman die," he pleaded. "If she's dead, bring her back for her children's sake."

When Moore finished his prayer, he looked down at Shelby once again. The dead woman turned to meet his gaze.

"She's alive!" he screamed. "She's alive!"

Emergency personnel scrambled to cut her from the car. It took 30 minutes. Shelby was rushed to Tuscaloosa's DCH Regional Medical Center with a faint pulse and grievous injuries: a back broken in three places, a lacerated liver, a ruptured spleen, collapsed lungs, a broken collarbone, several broken ribs, swollen internal organs and a pelvis that was utterly crushed.

Her husband, Butch, had just gotten off work when he received the news.

"My dad came to bring me to the hospital," he recalled. "He said, 'Kristy's been in an accident.'"

"I said, 'How bad is it?' He said, 'Son, let's wait.'"

At the hospital, as soon as the surgeon cut Kristy open, her spleen fell out in his hand. She was bleeding internally and her liver was lacerated to the worst level of severity. She flat lined on the table but came back as the surgeon struggled to keep her alive.

Unable to stop the bleeding, the surgeon delivered a crushing prognosis to Kristy's family. Kristy, who now required a ventilator to breathe, was in dire condition. Even if she survived, he didn't know if she would have any brain function left. Her only hope was an emergency airlift to UAB Hospital in Birmingham.

Facing the unknown

Butch suddenly faced the shock of possibly losing his wife. He thought of their children, what he would tell them if their mother died.

"I knew [Kristy] was strong, but at the time, I didn't know what to expect," he said.

The Shelbys' church, New Hope Baptist Church, Berry, canceled its Sunday evening service as members flocked to the emergency room. In the hospital's prayer chapel, about a dozen church members, including Butch, gathered to pray for Kristy.

"I can remember us praying that whatever the Lord willed, we were going to accept it," he said. "I know things happen for a reason."

Max Stripling, director of missions for Sipsey Baptist Association, was pastor of New Hope Baptist at the time. He recalls an especially powerful sense of the Holy Spirit in the room, assuring them Kristy would be all right.

"There was just a special anointing on the prayer service that night, an assurance that God was not only there but He had heard and was going to answer the prayers of the people who were there," he said.

That night, Kristy was flown to UAB by helicopter. She flat lined three times on the way as paramedics performed CPR.

When Kristy arrived, doctors sewed up her liver as best they could and labored to stop her internal bleeding. They rushed to pump blood into her body as quickly as she lost it, eventually replacing her entire blood volume.

After the surgery, Kristy's organs were so swollen that doctors could not sew her up. They placed a protective plastic covering over her organs and moved her to the intensive care unit. Doctors were pessimistic about her chances, saying she would probably end up in a vegetative state.

Gradual improvement

But as Kristy lay in a medically induced coma, her internal bleeding gradually stopped. Doctors watched in shock as her brain, which showed no function the first two days, gradually improved. Her colon, which had not been working properly, began to heal. Her pelvis, crushed beyond saving, was replaced with a metal one, although doctors still said she would never walk again.

About two weeks after the accident, the swelling in Kristy's organs had gone down enough for doctors to sew her up. The ventilator was removed in favor of a tracheotomy, with a tube bigger than a half dollar inserted into her throat. Doctors said she would never speak above a whisper again.

Three weeks later, Kristy woke up.

"I knew I was in a hospital because of the way it looked, but I didn't know what it meant," she recalled.

Kristy, whose last memory was of driving with her children, wondered where they were and to what new reality she awoke.

"The nurses and doctors were telling me, 'You shouldn't be here. You died.' I thought, 'You're joking, right? I don't remember any of this. I want out of this bed now.'"

Butch was at work when Kristy woke up, so her parents explained everything to her. As doctors conducted a series of movement tests, they were amazed. She could move her arms, legs and feet.

After the tracheotomy tube was removed, Kristy's voice, just a whisper at first, began to strengthen until she could speak audibly again. She even gradually started walking;

(See 'Shelby,' page 13)

Videos, blogs enhance virtual tour of life, faith in modern Bethlehem



IMB photo

FRIDAY PRAYERS — Muslims participate in Friday prayers at a mosque next to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the believed birthplace of Jesus Christ.

(continued from page 1)

► West Franklin Baptist Church in Tennessee;

► Oakhurst Baptist Church, Clarksdale, Miss.; and

► an adult Sunday School class at First Baptist Church, Dallas.

Video stories and blogs about life and faith in Bethlehem also were posted as accompanying media on mReport.org in the week leading up to the webcast. An informal follow-up webcast Dec. 6 offered an hour of extra video footage, live interviews and photos for church members interested in seeing more.

To view a replay of any of these webcasts, visit livebethlehem.com. For more information, stories and photos from the project, visit mReport.org. For information about how your church can be involved in next year's broadcast, e-mail info@livebethlehem.com.

(Chris Mills contributed)

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Luke 2:13-16



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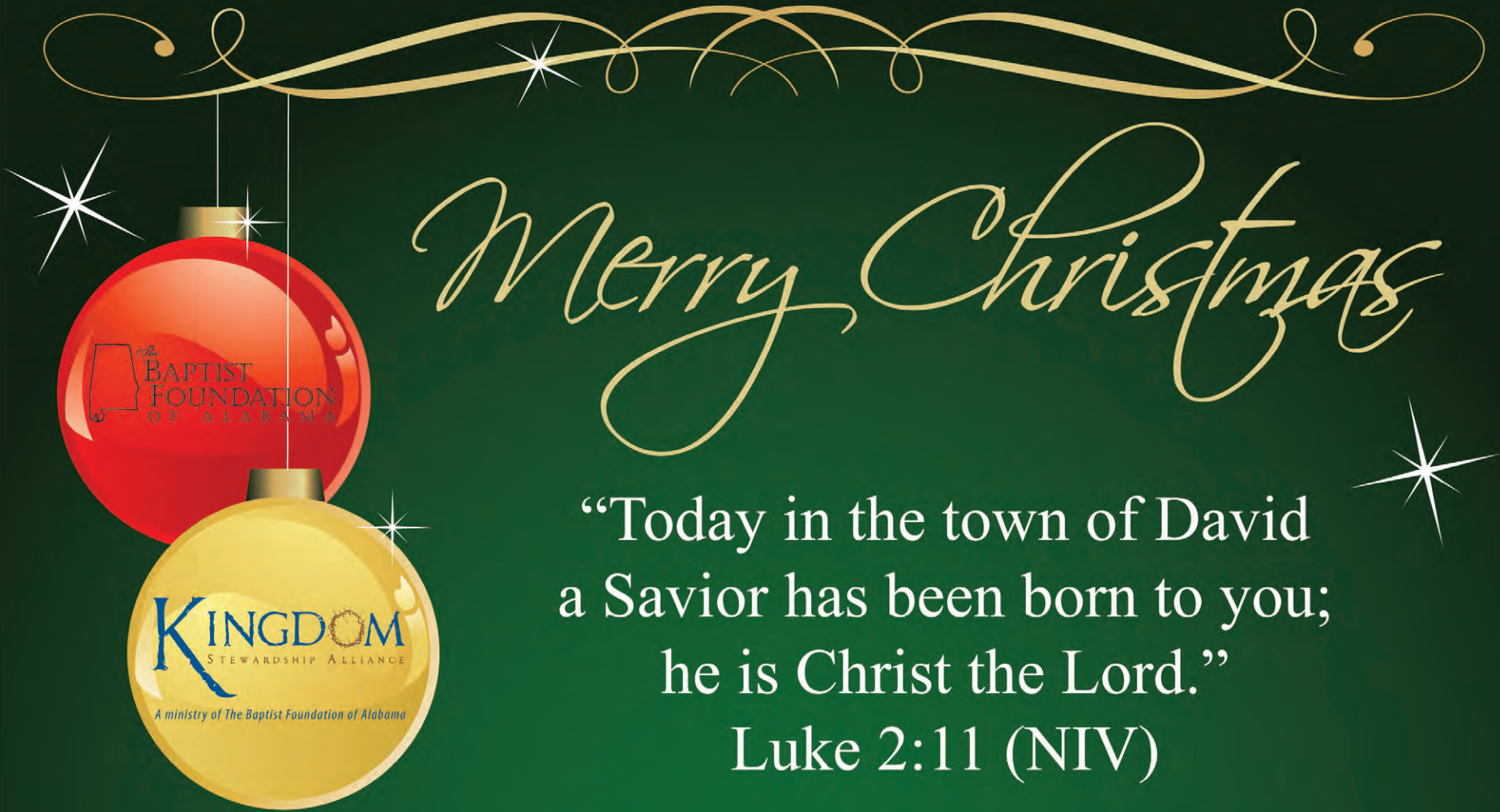
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Baptist News Briefs

Compiled from Wire Services

Pastors question faith of national leaders

NASHVILLE — A majority of Protestant pastors believe that George W. Bush and Sarah Palin are Christians but President Obama, Glenn Beck and Oprah Winfrey are not. Those are findings of a LifeWay Research survey of 1,000 pastors polled about their understanding of the faith of five well-known public personalities Oct. 7–14, 2010. Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research, said Dec. 7 that most Americans consider themselves to be Christians and for many of them what has been called the “Oprahfication” of American spirituality is a positive thing. Among pastors, however, just 19 percent believe that Oprah Winfrey is a Christian.

Stetzer said for many people “Christian” is a box they check on a demographic survey. Pastors, meanwhile tend to have a more detailed view. Many apply terms like “born again” or “evangelical” as synonyms for “Christian.” Stetzer said that might explain why just 27 percent of pastors in the survey considered Fox News personality Glenn Beck a Christian. Beck belongs to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and many Protestants view Mormonism as not a Christian denomination but another religion. Four out of 10 Protestant pastors (41 percent) said they believed President Barack Obama is a Christian. Former President George W. Bush, in contrast, was viewed a Christian by 75 percent of Protestant pastors, the highest percentage of any of the public figures in the survey. As for Sarah Palin, the former governor of Alaska and presumed presidential hopeful, 66 percent said she is a Christian. Twenty-three percent of pastors who identified their political party as Republican believed Obama is a Christian. That compared to 80 percent of Democrats and 52 percent of independents.

BGCT executive director resigns, accepts pastorate

MIDLAND, Texas — The executive director of Southern Baptists’ largest state convention is leaving his post after less than three years to return to the pastorate. The Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) announced Dec. 6 that Randel Everett had accepted a call — approved unanimously by the church after a trial sermon Dec. 5 — to the pulpit of First Baptist Church, Midland, Texas.

The 61-year-old Everett has been serving as the church’s interim pastor for several months. While the BGCT began several new initiatives under Everett’s leadership, including Texas Hope 2010 — a holistic evangelism-and-social-service program aimed at sharing Christ with every Texan by Easter 2010 — and an effort by the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and the Baylor University School of Social Work to end hunger in the Lone Star State by 2015.

However, under Everett’s leadership, the state convention has faced significant challenges posed by stagnating revenues, controversies over gay-friendly member congregations and continuing competition from a rival state convention more closely aligned with the conservatives who dominate the Southern Baptist Convention’s leadership. He has previously served as pastor of several prominent Baptist congregations in Texas and elsewhere, including First Baptist Church, Newport News, Va.; Columbia Baptist Church, Falls Church, Va.; First Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla.; First Baptist Church, Benton, Ark.; and University Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

Tenn. convention exec. affirms Belmont decision

NASHVILLE — The executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention (TBC) is expressing support for Belmont University in Nashville following the departure of a lesbian coach whose exit has sparked a nationwide debate. Randy Davis, in his first year as TBC executive director, made the comments although the state convention and Belmont reached a settlement in 2007 severing ties following a 50-plus-year relationship. While Belmont is no longer Baptist, its mission statement describes it as a “Christian community.”

“Our relationship is broader than merely a denominational relationship,” Davis told Baptist Press. “I would be applauding them if they were affiliated with another denomination because of the stand they’ve taken.”

Neither Belmont nor former women’s soccer coach Lisa Howe have disclosed the specific reason she is no longer with the program, although she left soon after she told her players that her lesbian partner was pregnant. In a Dec. 6 statement, though, Howe seemed to imply that her sexuality was an issue, saying that her dedication to the program and school did not change “when I acknowledged that I am a lesbian and that my partner and I are expecting a baby.” Belmont’s non-discrimination policy does not mention “sexual orientation,” a term that includes homosexuality. In the past, Belmont has denied official recognition to a homosexual student group called the Bridge Builders.

Samford University Auxiliary makes scholarships for MKs priority project

By Sondra Washington
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Karen Bergquist spent the first 18 years of her life in Nigeria with her missionary parents, Bill and Audrey Cowley. Like many other missionary kids (MKs), Bergquist planned to leave the missions field and come to America for her college education knowing she would have to attend the school providing the most financial aid.

After receiving enough scholarship money, she — along with about 90 other MKs with similar backgrounds — chose to attend Samford University in Birmingham. Bergquist even met her husband, the son of missionaries to Taiwan, at the school.

“I would have never been able to be at Samford University, a private university, without the scholarships,” she said. “To have scholarship money to allow us to come here means the world to us (MKs) and means the world to missionaries to know that their children will be able to go to such an outstanding university. If you are coming from the missions field, it’s nice to be able to go to a university where they can appreciate where you’ve come

from.” According to Bergquist, many Southern Baptist MKs chose Samford during the 1970s and 1980s because the school helped them find enough scholarships and financial aid to take care of the costs. But this changed through the years.

Now, as the president of the Samford University Auxiliary, Bergquist is working with her fellow members to provide the same opportunity for other MKs by creating a scholarship to supplement their financial aid.

‘Bridge the gap’

“Missionary kids have to follow the money,” she said. “We want to be in a position where we can make those offers to them again so they can come to Samford. ... It is the desire of the auxiliary to be able to financially bridge the gap that will be the difference in an MK being able to come to Samford or not.”

A longtime supporter of this type of program, Samford President Andrew Westmoreland is pleased with the auxiliary’s plans.

“Samford always has welcomed missionary kids as students and has tried to help financially where we could, so I am especially pleased that members of the Samford Auxiliary have chosen to make scholar-

ships for these students a priority project during the coming year,” he said. “We want these students, whose parents are making sacrifices to spread the gospel around the world, to benefit from the environment that Samford can offer. Additional scholarships will help make that possible.”

The auxiliary is sponsoring several events to help raise funds for the scholarship. On Jan. 20, 2011, the group will hold a luncheon at the Vestavia Country Club that will feature Sherri Burgess, wife of Rick Burgess of the “Rick & Bubba Show.” A portion of the ticket fee will cover the lunch and the rest will go to the scholarship fund.

The auxiliary also will host three opportunities to spend time with former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee on May 3, 2011. From 4–5 p.m., a town hall meeting will be held at the Leslie Stephen Wright Center on Samford’s campus. From 6:30–7:30 p.m., a gala private patron reception will be held at The Wynfrey Hotel in Birmingham. From 7:30–9:30 p.m., there will be a gala scholarship dinner.

For more information, contact Melissa Allphin at 205-726-4373 or visit www.samford.edu/auxiliary.

East Liberty Association celebrates 175 years

It was business as usual for East Liberty Baptist Association on Oct. 21 as it marked its 175th anniversary with its regular business meeting at First Baptist Church,

Lanett. But Oct. 24 was a time to celebrate.

First Baptist Church, LaFayette, played host to guest speakers and other special guests who lauded the association’s years of service.

Charles Wynn, former director of missions; Gary Swafford, director of the office of associational missions and church planting for the Alabama Baptist State Board

of Missions; and David Meacham, former vice president of the associational strategies group for the North American Mission Board, all spoke.

Historian Calvin Milford presented the association’s history to those in attendance.

Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a plaque.

A commemorative book was compiled by Betty Barrett, with help from Marsha Smith, Director of Missions Dale Wood and members of the 175th anniversary committee. (TAB)

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Taking a 'plunge'

UMobile students serve inner cities during Urban Plunge

Acting out the story of David and Goliath, hosting a backyard Bible club and praying in Spanish were just a few of the things that University of Mobile (UMobile) students did in Montgomery during a 48-hour inner-city missions trip.

Just a few hours north of their campus in Mobile, students discovered ministry opportunity after ministry opportunity — chances to demonstrate their servant hearts. Through the university's Urban Plunge weekend, students realized that missions do not exist only across an ocean but also in their back yard.

The UMobile Campus Life program sent out 12 student-led teams to six capital cities in the Southeast: Atlanta; Montgomery; Baton Rouge, La.; Jackson, Miss.; Nashville; and Tallahassee, Fla. The idea was to "plunge" the 125 students into an urban environment for an intense 48-hour missions experience Nov. 5-7 and impact urban cities with the love of Christ through service.

Mallory Green, a sophomore majoring in intercultural studies and English, led a team that worked with The Community of Hope in Montgomery.

"Many of these kids had never heard the story of David and Goliath before, and it was a humbling and exciting experience to get to be the first ones to tell them a story from God's Word," Green said. "We asked them questions at the end, and they answered them so well. After that, we explained the significance of the story and that no matter what is going on in their life at that time, God is bigger. We were also able to present the plan of salvation to them.

"It was a beautiful thing to be able to love these children with the love of Christ and be a part of His plan

for reaching our 'Judea and Samaria,'" she added.

Students also had the opportunity to put their Spanish skills to work. Some people in an apartment complex did not have beds, and the team reached out to provide them with mattresses. On Nov. 5, team members put their muscles to work by loading up the mattresses on a truck and then delivered them the next day.

"It was a beautiful thing to be able to love these children with the love of Christ."

Mallory Green
University of Mobile

"It was so amazing that the Lord would allow us to be a part of meeting that physical need as He softened their hearts to see their spiritual need. It had a largely Hispanic population, and some on our team were able to speak with them in Spanish and pray with them as well.

"Others used translators through means of older children in the neighborhood," Green said.

Another group ministering in the Montgomery area served lunch and held a Bible study at a homeless ministry Nov. 5. The next day, it installed insulation in a Habitat for Humanity house.

Group leader Ryan McPhail, a junior majoring in accounting, said, "My eyes were opened to the living conditions of some people, and I realized how blessed I really am. I was able to pass on that blessing in a small way by serving with my time." He said before Urban Plunge, many students had no clue of the needs of the people in Alabama.

Reaching out

The other teams reached out in several ways. In Tallahassee, students helped replace a woman's roof.

"She had been waiting six months for her roof to be replaced, and because of our team, she will have a new roof in two weeks," said Aman-



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

PLAYTIME — UMobile students play with children at an apartment complex in Montgomery. The city was one of six sites for UMobile's Urban Plunge weekend Nov. 5-7.

da Roach, a junior majoring in business management.

Baton Rouge teams hosted block parties, a team in Jackson did Bible studies for women coming out of prison, the Nashville team helped renovate the Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes facilities and a team in Atlanta worked with girls who had been trapped in human trafficking.

"I had never known how huge this problem (trafficking) was until

I worked with this organization. It broke my heart," said Josh Allen, a junior majoring in intercultural studies. Urban Plunge came to an end, but the lasting effects remain on the hearts of the students.

"The Lord showcased His holiness and plan for the lost this weekend and allowed us, even in some small way, to be a part of it," Green said. "Praise Him, for we exist to make His name famous and for nothing else." (UMobile)

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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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Shelby defies odds, makes full recovery after life-threatening car accident

(continued from page 6)
hospital staff members were stunned when she was finally able to walk through the front doors.

"They were just in shock that I could even remotely do this," she said.

At first, Kristy didn't want her children to see her in such bad shape. But as she began to recover, she was ready for them to come. Cody refused to believe she was getting better so she called him. But she didn't anticipate how different her recovering voice would sound.

"This is your mom," Kristy told Cody. "How are you doing?"

"You're lying to me," he replied. "This is not my mother."

Distraught, Kristy told him he could come see her. When Butch, Cody and Abigail arrived at the hospital, Cody was still uncertain. Kristy had lost a lot of weight and didn't look the same. She assured him she was all right.

"You were dead," he said. "They told me you were dead."

Still skeptical, Cody asked to see

her doctor, who confirmed that his mother was doing fine.

Six weeks after being pronounced dead, Kristy was released from the hospital. Her recovery was so rapid, she didn't require any additional rehabilitation; her only lingering injuries are scars from surgery and persistent back pain. Because of the internal injuries she suffered in the wreck, doctors told her she would probably never have children again. Her 3-year-old son, Jon David, proves otherwise.

There wasn't any debt from Kristy's hospital stay; a fund set up in her name at her bank paid for everything.

But the blessings since Kristy's car wreck have not been limited to her.

Butch said the wreck helped him realize that life is fleeting. Now he focuses more on his family and faith.

"I never once questioned God (because of the accident)," Butch said. "It served as a wake-up call; He does things for a reason."

Kristy said she is more active in sharing her faith now than she used

to be and people have come to Jesus through hearing her story. Among them is the driver of the truck that hit her. She sees God's purpose in the lives that have been changed through her tragedy.

"When I woke up in the hospital, I questioned the Lord," Kristy said. "I asked, 'Why did you do this to me? I have always been faithful to you ...' I see now it was for other people to see."

As Butch looks back, he is grateful for the members of his church who ministered to him and his family. "You can thank them but they don't realize what they really were until later on, that the support we got was just tremendous," Butch said.

Kristy said after she died, she didn't have any experiences such as seeing Jesus or visiting heaven; she only remembers a recording of her children singing gospel music played by a radio above her hospital bed.

But what Kristy's brush with death and the years that have followed have shown her is the power of God, who she is confident still heals the sick — and raises the dead.

"I knew there was a God, but I didn't know how real He was until this happened to me." ❧

"It served as a wake-up call; He does things for a reason."

**Butch Shelby
Husband of car wreck victim**

Someone You Should Know



By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

PAUL HOWARD

LaFayette Heights Baptist Church
East Liberty Baptist Association



HOWARD

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE: John 3:16

FAVORITE HYMN: "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go"

HOBBIES: Playing golf and attending

Auburn University athletic events

FAMILY STATUS: Married to Donna for 38 years; two children, Beth and David; and four grandchildren

Paul Howard has been in the ministry for 45 years with more than 20 of those years spent as pastor of LaFayette Heights Baptist Church.

Q: How did you become a Christian?

A: For several Sundays leading up to Easter in 1955, my pastor-dad had been preaching a series of messages about the cross and what Jesus did for us by dying for us. And for several Sundays, I would wait for my dad to leave church so I could walk home with him. I had questions I needed answers to, and my dad very clearly answered my questions and explained to me what I had to do to be saved. On Palm Sunday, I knew as Daddy preached, that God was working in my heart, and when the invitation was given, I went forward to receive Christ into my heart.

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

A: Early in my life, I told God that I was willing to do whatever He wanted in my life just as long as it was not preaching. ... So I taught a Sunday School class and played the piano for my church, and before long, I was called by Jackson Memorial (Baptist Church, LaFayette) as minister of music and youth. ... I finally realized that my feeling (to follow the pastor into the pulpit every Sunday) was a little bit like Jeremiah who said he had a fire burning in his bones and he was weary of holding it back. When I found that verse in Jeremiah 20:9, I took that as confirmation of my call to preach.

Q: What do you love the most about being a pastor?

A: Watching God at work in the lives of people. When I am able to

see people growing and look back over the road they have traveled, I feel blessed beyond measure.

Q: What does the ministry demand?

A: 100 percent.

Q: How do family members support you?

A: Donna knows when to give me space, and she knows when to challenge me with a question to bring balance to my perspective. In every instance, her support and her love have always been unconditional and encouraging.

Q: How has Jesus Christ made a difference in your life?

A: He has saved me, gifted me and called me to serve Him. Had I missed that, my life, at best, would have been desperately mundane. ❧

HEART OF MISSIONS ...

Andy Frazier, director of missions (DOM) for Sulphur Springs Baptist Association, and Ken Mostella, former DOM for Sulphur Springs Association, traveled to Penalva, Brazil, Sept. 28–Oct. 5.

This was the second trip they have taken in the past two years to lay the groundwork for a partnership between the association and First Baptist Church, Penalva, which begins in 2011. Frazier believes this is the association's first international partnership, which will last for the next three to five years.

Working through LINC-UP (Linking International Needs with the Church's Untapped Power) Missions, church staff members and lay leaders from Sulphur Springs Association will help train church leaders in Brazil in areas like discipleship, generational ministries, worship ministry and evangelism.

The first trip is planned for next summer.

Frank Hopson, David Mullins and Pastor John Thweatt from First Baptist Church, Pell City, went to Mount Elgon in Kenya in late October. The trip was planned with David Crane, an International Mission Board representative who works in East Africa.

The team from the St. Clair Baptist Association church worked with four local Baptist churches. Using Chronological Bible Storying, team members shared stories of Abraham, Isaac, the Passover, creation and Christ.

"I think the best part of the trip was spending time each morning and evening with the four pastors we worked with. We all stayed in the same place, shared our meals and spent quite a lot of time just talking about the Bible (and) what God is doing in our lives and doing discipleship," Thweatt said. ❧

Alabama Cooperative Program Gifts

Alabama Baptist Giving

Year to Date through November 30, 2010

NOVEMBER

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$3,875,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$3,565,394
Under Goal for Month	\$309,606

YEAR TO DATE

CP Challenge Budget Goal	\$42,625,000
CP Challenge Budget Gifts	\$37,978,098
Under Goal for Year	\$4,646,902

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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 19

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson

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

WORSHIP THE KING OF KINGS! Matthew 1:20b-23; 2:1-11

Jesus: Sent to Save (1:20b-23)

Joseph's world came crashing in on him when he discovered that his betrothed, Mary, was pregnant. Heartbroken, he had decided to divorce her privately without any court proceedings. God sent an angel to explain to Joseph that Mary had not been unfaithful and her child had been conceived supernaturally. He reminded Joseph of his messianic lineage by calling him "son of David." He commanded Joseph not only not to divorce Mary but also to go ahead and marry her. Therefore the child would be Joseph's son legally and thus the son of David. The phrase "that which has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" is profound. In those words is the ultimate testimony to the virgin birth. This special child was to be named Jesus, which means "the Lord saves." Mary's son would be the One to bring God's promised eschatological salvation. There was much Jewish expectation of a messiah who would redeem Israel from Roman tyranny and even purify his people, but there was no expectation that the Davidic Messiah would give His life as a ransom to save His people from their sins. Jesus' supernatural conception by the Holy Spirit and birth in Bethlehem took place to fulfill God's Word. God comforted Joseph by informing him that all was going according to the divine plan. Quoting Isaiah 7:14, Matthew identified Jesus as the promised Messiah. He also noted that Jesus would be called Immanuel, meaning "God with us." This verse introduces one of Matthew's key themes: God's presence with His people. This precious truth also is found at the end of the book in Jesus' marching orders to the Church in Matthew 28:18-20. The name Immanuel ought to encourage us because it clearly affirms Jesus' deity and the fact that He will be with us all over the world as we take His gospel to unreached peoples and proclaim salvation in His name.

Jesus: Born to Rule (2:1-6)

Herod the Great was wealthy, politically gifted, an excellent administrator and clever

enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb, and his building projects were admired even by his enemies. But he loved power, inflicted heavy taxes on the people and resented the fact that many Jews considered him an usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and, in fits of rage, killed close associates, his wife and at least two of his sons. After Jesus' birth (probably in 6 B.C.), wise men from the East came to worship Jesus. Contrary to the Christmas carol, the wise men were not kings. Rather they were a combination of wise men and priests probably from Persia. They wanted to find the One "born" king of the Jews. When King Herod heard whom they were looking for, he was troubled. Because of his paranoia and fits of jealousy, all Jerusalem was troubled as well. People died whenever King Herod was troubled. He summoned the biblical scholars of his day and asked them where the Christ was to be born. They correctly answered Bethlehem, citing Micah 5:2. Matthew quoted part of Micah 5:2 and added some shepherd language from 2 Samuel 5:2. Jesus was born to rule not just the people of Israel but God's entire universe. He is not just the King of the Jews but the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus: Worthy of Worship (2:7-11)

The reason King Herod wanted to learn, at his secret meeting with the wise men, the exact time the star appeared was that he had already schemed to kill Bethlehem's small boys. King Herod's hypocritical humility — "that I, too, may come and worship Him" — deceived the wise men. Conscious of his success, King Herod did not send an escort with them. He did not foresee God warning them not to return to him (Matt. 2:12). As the wise men headed to Bethlehem, the star reappeared and "came to rest over the place where the child was." The wise men found the mother and child and bowed down to worship Him. The gifts they presented typically were associated with royalty. Their actions wonderfully foreshadowed the worship of Jesus by all the Gentile nations (Matt. 28:19; Rev. 7:9-10). ☞

Bible Studies for Life By Dennis Sansom

Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy, Samford University

FOCUS ON JESUS Luke 2:8-20, 33-35

If we were told that the savior of the world had been born, then we would expect him to have been born in a great palace, because only such a ruler would have enough power to save the world. To save the world, a king would need great armies and wealth. But Luke's Gospel tells a different story. Instead of palatial glory, the Savior was born in a manger with animals; instead of great might, the Savior was born as a vulnerable baby. Luke recorded two memorable stories about the unlikely way the world's Savior was born.

The Shepherds (8-20)

Christian art always has been fascinated with the story of the angel announcing to shepherds that "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (11). The image depicts the meeting of the highest reaches of heaven with the lowest aspects of society. Though the shepherds were not a despised class, they were one of the lowest rungs of the social order. However, they received the angelic announcements and went to Bethlehem. There they saw what shepherds ordinarily saw — a poor woman giving birth to her child among animals. It is significant that the angel picked the shepherds rather than the powerful and dominating. God elected to redeem the world not from the position of those who have corrupted it but from the position of the lowly. The Savior is not just another king. He is the Messiah and Lord "wrapped in bands of cloth and lying a manger" (12). We would be wrong if we tried to change this story and turn Christ into something other than what the shepherds found in the manger. Christ is not like Herod in his palace, Pilate with his army or Caesar adorned in his majesty. God redeems the world through the meekness, suffering and truth of the baby born in Bethlehem. It is no wonder that Mary "treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (19), because they were so fantastic, novel and without precedent.

Simeon (33-35)

Along with the prophetess Anna (whom

Luke described following this story), Simeon belonged to the simple people of Israel. They were ordinary people in terms of social class and power but extraordinary in their devotion and spiritual discernment. Simeon had equipped his heart for years to see something the ordinary person could not. He was a righteous and devout person, who looked for the coming Messiah. He was alert and anticipatory, and when Joseph and Mary walked into the temple, he immediately recognized the infant Jesus as the long-anticipated Messiah. It was not the temple guards, Roman soldiers or priests who identified the child as the Messiah. It was one of Israel's simple people. Luke said, "the Holy Spirit rested on him," which indicates that Simeon played a significant role in Christ's birth. First Simeon played a similar role to the angels with the shepherds. He announced to those standing around in the temple that "my eyes have seen your salvation ... a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (30, 32). Just as an angel's duty is to be a messenger, Simeon proclaimed the new message that in this child, the long-awaited salvation had arrived. Second Simeon foretold Jesus' judgment of Israel and His future suffering. He directed this prediction to Mary. She already was pondering in her heart the shepherd's message from the angel that her son would be the Savior, Messiah and Lord. But now she heard sobering facts. Her son would cause the "falling and rising of many in Israel" and reveal the "thoughts of many." Her infant would cause the splitting of Israel and endure agony for His role. Not everyone would welcome the salvation He would bring to Israel, and He would experience rejection and scorn because of it. Simeon not only foretold Jesus' future Passion but also Mary's passion. The "sword" of pain would grieve her as she watched her son fulfill His divine role. Mary would faithfully remain by her son's side and eventually watch Him die. Not all the news proclaimed during Christ's birth is cheery and celebrative. As Savior, Jesus has an important but costly role to play, and Mary pondered it in her heart as should we. ☞

Christian Crossword

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Across

- Dance step.
- David took an ____, and played with his hand. (1 Sam. 16:23)
- The reeds and __s shall wither. (Isa. 19:6)
- Indian tribe.
- Unusual person or thing.
- Recently deceased.
- The liberal soul shall be made __. (Prov. 11:25)
- Insect parts.
- The day cometh, that shall burn as an __. (Mal. 4:1)
- The worlds were __ by the word of God. (Heb. 11:3)
- Yet the __ man is renewed day by day. (2 Cor. 4:16)
- Compass direction.
- For we shall __ him as he is. (1 John 3:2)
- To them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be __. (1 Cor. 1:2)
- He which converteth the sinner from the __ of his way. (James 5:20; plural)
- Flawed merchandise. (abbr.)
- Residence. (abbr.)
- Thou art __, O Lord.

- I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, Who hath __d me. (1 Tim. 1:12)
 - Anger.
 - That the light shall __ be clear. (Zech. 14:6)
 - And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of __. (Zech. 14:4)
 - __ not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath. (Rom. 12:19)
 - Fetch olive branches, and __ branches. (Neh. 8:15)
 - River flowing to the North Sea.
 - Math branch. (abbr.)
 - Arabian prince.
 - __ and void.
 - May. (French)
 - Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the __. (Luke 5:5)
 - Very. (French)
 - Belonging to the talking horse.
- Down**
- Knowledge __eth up. (1 Cor. 8:1)
 - __oth, and Dibon. (Num. 32:3)
 - Bristles.
 - Provide things __ in the sight of all men. (Rom. 12:17)
 - Positively charged electrodes.
 - Quit work at 65. (abbr.)
 - I shall yet __ him for the help of his countenance. (Ps. 42:5)
 - All the goodness thereof is as the __ of the field. (Isa. 40:6)
 - Volcano output.
 - The children of __ of Hezekiah. (Neh. 7:21)
 - Masculine/feminine class. (abbr.)
 - __ of high degree are a lie. (Ps. 62:9)
 - The captain of his host was Abner, the son of __. (1 Sam. 14:50)
 - Be ye angry, and __ not. (Eph. 4:26)
 - Blessed __ the merciful. (Matt. 5:7)
 - __ the lthrite. (1 Chron. 11:40)
 - Sphere.
 - Kin. (abbr.)
 - Compass direction.
 - I will extend peace to her like a __. (Isa. 66:12)
 - Before.

- To feel bitter.
- I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath __d me. (1 Tim. 1:12)
- Long prose narratives.
- Did eat.
- His ears are __ unto their cry. (Ps. 34:15)
- And the people shall be as the burnings of __. (Isa. 33:12)
- First letter of a name. (abbr.)
- Call his __ Jezreel. (Hos. 1:4)
- Let us be __ and rejoice. (Rev. 19:7)
- Protection.
- Persian tribe member.

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Your Guide to Today's New Music and Literature



Sound Bites

By Rick Sharp, Leigh Pritchett and David Bruce Murray

39 STRIPES

Beyond Broken
Hollar Records

Guitar-heavy, highly processed straight alt rock with strong vocals by new member Mike Wilson, 39 Stripes' new album, "Beyond Broken," presents a message of faith wrapped up in a well-produced package that should please rock fans of any ilk.



It comes as no surprise that tasty guitar work is showcased on

most tracks. Lead guitarist Steve Henderlong, who produced the album, has done an excellent job of ramping up the band's sound and, in the process, his own guitar work. If the song "Wake Up" doesn't have you playing along on air guitar (or air drums), then you should get someone to check your pulse. Other standout cuts include "My Desire," "Mustard Seed" and the title cut.

The acoustic version of "Saving Me a Place" is surprisingly (and pleasantly) different from the rest of the album — simple, mostly unprocessed and clean; an oasis in the

otherwise hot sands of hard rock served up by most tracks. (Sharp)

PHILMONT

The Transition EP
Caliber Recordings

It is always nice to hear lyrics that actually make sense. That is what "The Transition EP" by the group Philmont has to offer. The words are straightforward and easy to follow, except when instrumentation is so prominent that it drowns the vocals.

The six tracks that make up "The Transition EP" are decidedly rock. However, one selection, "The Last Song I Sing," detours a little, conveying a more melodious, but haunting, sound reminiscent of the 1970s group Kansas.

Though God and Jesus are not mentioned by name in the lyrics, the songs do have a clear message: "When all is said and done, You will remain"; "Your words keep ringing through my head"; "my work is in vain."

No doubt, Philmont and "The Transition EP" have potential.

(Pritchett)



BRIAN FREE & ASSURANCE

Never Walk Alone
Daywind Records

From a production standpoint, "Never Walk Alone" is the best studio recording by Brian Free & Assurance in several years. They're giving the music a chance to breathe now rather than trying to squeeze every possible ounce of volume from every moment. The excitement level is high on tracks that bump the stylistic boundaries of southern gospel. "Anything Is Possible," "God Will Close the Door," "Turn the Page" and "It's Gotta Be God" push the energy to the front with driving rhythms and a big wall of vocals.

I enjoy those aggressive arrangements, but I expect the slow and medium tempo selections will resonate with more fans. "I Believe" affirms faith by reminding us of familiar Bible stories. "The Part Where You Come In" is a mid-tempo track that shifts the perspective of the chorus so the subject is first "she," then



"we," then "I," with "You" (God) being the constant. One trademark of every Brian Free & Assurance CD is a ballad about the cross. For "Never Walk Alone," that song features Jeremy Lile and is titled "Remind Me of the Cross."

"Never Walk Alone" is so balanced in terms of overall quality that it's difficult to choose a favorite song. Brian Free & Assurance did their homework choosing great songs for this album and capably delivered the goods in the studio.

(Murray)

MARK TRAMMELL QUARTET

Testimony
Daywind Records

I have been eagerly waiting for a major label release from the Mark Trammell Quartet since Pat Barker was hired to sing bass, converting the group from a trio to a quartet.

"Testimony" begins with Mosie

Lister's tried-and-true "How Long Has It Been," featuring good harmony over piano and strings.

"God Knows How Much Mercy I Need" is a medium-paced feature for Trammell written by Dianne Wilkinson. It's my overall favorite cut on the CD.

The CD closes with

two more Wilkinson songs titled "When Jesus Comes" and "I Believe, I Believe, I Believe." The former could have benefited from a more dynamic delivery on the verses. The latter is a fun track that is reminiscent of the similar but shorter titled song Glen Payne recorded with Greater Vision ("I Believe").

"Testimony," as good as it is (and it's very good), is still only hinting at this group's potential. (Murray)



Book Reviews

By Martine Bates Sharp

The 12 Days of Christmas Cookbook: The Ultimate in Effortless Holiday Entertaining

Marla Tipton. Uhrichsville, Ohio: DayMaker-Barbour Publishing, 2010. 224 pp. (Hardback).

Although no holiday entertaining is likely to be effortless, this cookbook does offer help for the busy hostess. The 12 chapters, not really related to the well-known Christmas song except in number, contain fairly simple recipes for everything from appetizers and breakfast foods to dishes kids can cook. While many of the dishes are old standards, like Red Velvet Cake, a number of the recipes are new, like the Holiday Breakfast Grits that incorporate eggnog and blueberries.

The book is laced liberally with hints and tips for entertaining, as well as encouragement from Scripture. Beautiful color illustrations make it difficult to resist trying some of the dishes.

The Snowflake

Jamie Carie. Nashville: B & H Books, 2010. 240 pp. (Hardback).

Ellen Pierce is an unlikely member of the group of adventurers headed to Alaska in 1897. The others are seeking their fortunes in the gold rush that sent multitudes scurrying north; Ellen has been compelled to accompany her unstable — and at times even dangerous — brother. All she wants is a home and a family of her own.

When the ship runs into ice, Buck Lewis volunteers to lead a group through the Alaskan wilderness to safety.

The arduous journey proves deadly for some; by the end of it, Ellen is all alone in the world, except for Buck. Although she and Buck have formed a bond of sorts, he is on a personal mission and cannot stay to protect her.

Stranded in Alaska in the dead of winter with little money and little hope, Ellen does what she has to do in order to survive — and clings to the hope that Buck will return by Christmas as he promised.

In this novella, award-winning inspirational author Jamie Carie returns to the Alaskan setting of her earlier novel, "Snow Angel." Woven through "The Snowflake" is the

thread of God's love and steadfastness, even when His children fail to recognize His presence.

Stories Behind the Greatest Hits of Christmas

Ace Collins. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010. 224 pp. (Hardback).

Did you know that "O Come, All Ye Faithful" was the first song recorded with a microphone instead of the pre-1925 acoustic recording horn? The sound was so much improved over earlier recording methods that it became a hit in July of that year.

How about the old favorite "I'll Be Home for Christmas"? It was tied up in a court case that threatened its timely release in 1943, with a songwriter claiming he provided the inspiration for the song and should have credit for his part.

Ace Collins is known for writing about the stories behind events and songs. In this latest book, he shares interesting details that might enhance your enjoyment of many Christmas hits, from "Silent Night" to "Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer."

Top Ten Best Sellers

Kids

1. **Beginner's Bible** (Zondervan)
2. **The Joy of Giving**, Michael Berenstain (Zondervan)
3. **The Action Bible Hardcover** (David C. Cook)
4. **The Berenstain Bears Give Thanks**, Michael Berenstain (Zondervan)
5. **The Sweetest Story Bible**, Diane M. Stortz (Zondervan)
6. **Adventure Bible Storybook**, Catherine DeVries (Zondervan)
7. **Show God's Love**, Michael Berenstain (Zonderkidz)
8. **God Loves You!**, Michael Berenstain (Zondervan)
9. **Jesus Storybook Bible**, Sally Lloyd-Jones (Zondervan)
10. **Kindness Counts**, Michael Berenstain (Zondervan)

Nonfiction

1. **Jesus Calling**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
2. **Crazy Love**, Francis Chan (David C. Cook)
3. **Jesus Calling Deluxe Edition**, Sarah Young (Thomas Nelson)
4. **Coming Economic Armageddon**, David Jeremiah (FaithWords)
5. **Sun Stand Still**, Steven Furtick (Waterbrook/Multnomah)
6. **Choosing to SEE**, Mary Beth Chapman and Ellen Vaughn (Revell/Baker)
7. **Outlive Your Life**, Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson)
8. **Heaven Is for Real**, Todd Burpo and Lynn Vincent (Thomas Nelson)
9. **Without a Word**, Jill Kelly (FaithWords)
10. **Radical**, David Platt (Waterbrook/Multnomah)



Photo courtesy of University of Mobile

3-THROW ME — Mark Mitchum, member of First Baptist Church, Panama City, Fla., stands on a street corner ‘three throwing,’ the three-finger gesture he came up with as a symbol for the Trinity.

‘Three throwing’ Florida nurse creates Christian gesture symbolizing Trinity

The idea is deceptively simple: Stand on a street corner and hold up three fingers.

It’s just the idea that First Baptist Church, Panama City, Fla., member Mark Mitchum had after recognizing the lack of a clearly defined, unmistakable hand gesture for Christians.

“I came up with the idea while driving around,” said Mitchum, a 1995 graduate of the University of Mobile school of nursing and a registered nurse in a cardiac lab in Panama City. “I would see lots of Christian symbols, like the cross, fish or dove or even a clever bumper sticker or two, and would think, ‘Hey, that’s cool; they’re Christians but what do they know about me?’”

He chose the three-finger gesture as a symbol of the Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While researching Christian gestures, Mitchum said he found “nothing in mainstream pop culture to mean ‘Christian.’” Other than the “W” in sign language, the three-finger symbol didn’t have another national meaning in popular culture.

That is until now. Mitchum is on a mission to spread the symbol, also known as “three throwing,” among the Christian community.

First, Panama City, Senior Pas-

tor Craig Conner said, “Mark has given the body of Christ a simple, yet meaningful, symbol for encouraging one another as we are walking in the world. A simple ‘three throw’ reminds us who we are and challenges us to fight the good fight of faith.”

Mitchum hopes to see three throwing used to promote fellowship and community among followers of Christ whether in “traffic, ballgames, concerts, photos or anywhere the Word can’t be heard.”

In order to raise awareness of the symbol, he created a video titled “Three Throw the Trinity Christian Hand Sign!,” which shows it in action at a busy intersection. In addition,

Mitchum has given out thousands of bumper stickers depicting the sign. He said the sticker can serve as an invitation to another believer to connect with you.

Convenient icebreaker

Mitchum also hopes the symbol can stir the curiosity of non-believers and act as a convenient icebreaker for those outside the Christian community to ask questions and create dialogue.

“I think this expression of our faith has the potential to sweep across the nation and world,” said Bruce Raley, national educa-

tion ministry leader with LifeWay Christian Resources and former teaching pastor of First, Panama City. “This simple sign is a means to let others know of our faith and life in Jesus Christ. There is encouragement in knowing that others in our community are Christians and not ashamed to proclaim so.”

Matthew 18:20 serves as the inspiration for three throwing, reading, “For where two or three are gathered together, I am there in the midst of them.” Mitchum encourages believers to “gather together in corporate fellowship” to lift up Christ and promote a sense of Christian unity.

Easy as it may be, there’s a deeper purpose to three throwing than just holding up three fingers. It’s a matter of glorifying the name of Jesus in a creative, unconventional way.

“There is just something different, eternity-centered and all-completing about helping initiate and establish a way for ... the King of the universe to be exalted in more places and by more people than before,” Mitchum said.

It’s a simple effort that could go a long way.

“What we as Christians did for the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, will be the only true criteria for any effort worth remembering and celebrating,” Mitchum said.

For more information or to receive a Trinity sticker, e-mail info@threethrow.com or visit www.threethrow.com. (UMobile)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Clergy ethics, morals judged average, survey shows

WASHINGTON — What do nurses, soldiers, pharmacists, elementary school teachers, doctors and police officers have in common?

Americans say they are all more ethical and honest than members of the clergy, according to a Gallup survey released Dec. 3.

Slightly more than half of Americans (53 percent) rate the moral values of priests, ministers and other clerics as “very high” or “high.”

That percentage is a slight bump from 2009, when only 50 percent of Americans said men and women of the cloth are ethical paragons, the lowest number in Gallup’s more than 30 years of measuring professional reputations.

Before the Roman Catholic clergy sexual abuse scandal erupted in 2002, two-thirds of Americans had regularly approved of ministers’ morals, according to Gallup.

“Stability is generally the norm in Americans’ ratings of the honesty and ethics of professions, but Americans’ opinions do shift in response to real-world events, mostly scandals, that reflect poorly on a profession,” Gallup said.

A third of Americans this year said the clergy’s morals are “average,” and 8 percent rated them “poor,” according to the survey.

Bringing up the bottom of the professional ethics list were lobbyists, car sales people and members of Congress.

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted Nov. 19–21, with a random sample of 1,037 adults, ages 18 and older. The margin of error is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Ground Zero church starts legal action to rebuild

NEW YORK — Nearly two years after negotiations abruptly ended over where a Greek Orthodox church destroyed on 9/11 may rebuild, legal action has begun against several agencies and officials involved in the Ground Zero land dispute.

Until talks broke off in early 2008, leaders from St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and Ground Zero developers had reached a preliminary agreement to rebuild on a larger piece of property at 130 Liberty Street, allowing the original 155 Cedar Street lot to be used for a vehicle security center.

Under the deal — either binding or tentative, depending on which side you ask — the church also would get \$20 million towards its rebuilding costs, which include enhanced security requirements for the Ground Zero area.

In a statement released by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the agency blames the tiny church’s escalating demands for the 2008 stalemate and reiterated that it supports “the return of the church to its original home” on Cedar Street.

But church leaders insist the old lot is unsuitable and that years of planning already have gone into the new site. Now both sites are under heavy construction — neither with the church’s permission, said Mark Arey, spokesman for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

“We’ve spent a year and a half trying to reach out to the Port Authority, but they still haven’t spoken to us directly,” he said.

“There has been no phone call, no telegram, no fax, nothing.”

Friends at church seem to be key to happiness

WASHINGTON — Close friendships among congregants rather than theology seem to be the key to happiness among religious people, according to a new study.

One-third of Americans who attend religious services weekly and have three to five close friends in the congregation said they are “extremely satisfied” with their lives.

In comparison, only one in five Americans who attend services weekly but have no close friends in the congregation said they are extremely satisfied.

“In short, ‘sitting alone in the pew’ does not enhance one’s life satisfaction,” conclude authors Chaeyoon Lim of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Robert D. Putnam of Harvard University in a December article in the *American Sociological Review*.

“Only when one forms social networks in a congregation does religious service attendance lead to a higher level of life satisfaction.”

The findings are from the Faith Matters Survey of U.S. adults, which included 3,108 people in 2006 and 1,915 in 2007.