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Helping hand

Birmingham Association continues annual Season of Our Savior project

By Anna Swindle
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

More isn't always better, especially if it is more people in need.

But Birmingham Baptist Association (BBA) is looking at the record 2,000 requests for assistance from its Season of Our Savior project this year as a good thing — more people to help.

In the two decades since BBA churches began donating Christmas stockings for needy children, tens of thousands of gifts have been distributed to dozens of area service organizations.

With the hard economic times, the organizations are feeling overwhelmed, said Linda Pair, BBA's director of church and community missions. "And we're so glad we'll be able to help them."

Each group has developed its own tradition for distributing the stockings, which are filled with items like nuts, candy, coloring books, crayons and small toys.

At Firehouse Shelter in Birmingham, some stockings are passed out to children who visit the soup kitchen on Christmas Eve or Day. The others are given to men at the shelter so they can have gifts for their children and grandchildren.

"The guys feel like they're part of their kids' lives that way," said Steve Freeman, the shelter's executive director. "It gives them such a sense of value and worth that can't be accomplished any other way. They'd never be able to give those gifts on their own."

Glowing reviews

According to Pair, all the groups that receive gifts from Season of Our Savior have similarly glowing reviews and BBA often gets thank-you notes in the weeks following Christmas.

"[The people] are all so appreciative and grateful," said Pair, who has been working with the project for about 15 years. "For many of them, this is all the Christmas they'll have."

For Tom and Beverly Toone of Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, participating in Season of Our Savior has become such an ingrained part of their lives that they can't even remember when their involvement began.

"Whenever we're out in stores, we're always on the lookout for things we can add to stockings," Tom Toone said. "This is a year-round thing for us."

Together with about 75 other members of Lakeside Baptist, (See 'This,' page 5)

Baptists around the world share their cultures' Christmas lore

It's the eve of Christmas Eve. You probably are preparing the last bits and pieces of your Christmas menu, bustling around the grocery store, wrapping those last-minute gifts and anticipating what

Americans have made into at least a two-day holiday characterized more often by catering to the commercial industry than celebrating the birth of the Messiah.

Despite the stress you may be feeling, a popular Christmas song reminds us that "it's the most wonderful time of the year" — whether you prefer inclusive holiday greetings to "Merry Christmas" or insist that "Jesus is the reason for the season."

While there is a wide range of Baptist traditions in the United States, some of the more common observances include family feasts, ex-

changing gifts, decorating Christmas trees, live nativity scenes, Christmas dramas, singing Christmas trees and candlelight services.

And as you are settling in for the festive season, Baptists around the world are doing the same.

Not that different

Characterized by weeklong festivals, jolly tunes and grand feasts, Christmas celebrations around the world are not always all that different from the celebrations in the United States.

To provide Baptists in the United

States with a small glimpse of their cultures, Baptist leaders in Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, Zimbabwe, Poland, South Korea, Italy, Russia and El Salvador took time to share about some of their festivities by answering three questions:

► What is the significance of Christmas in your society?

► In what distinctive ways do Baptists celebrate Christmas?

► What is your favorite thing about Christmas in your country?

Their responses are reflected on pages 7-10. (ABP, TAB)



Graphic by Lauren A. Chow

Merry Christmas from Editor Bob Terry and the staff of The Alabama Baptist

COMMENT

Historical Facts and Present Faith

Christmas celebrations are filled with retelling the historical facts surrounding the Savior's birth. Celebrations recall the story of a young couple's arduous journey to an unfamiliar city, of an overcrowded inn, of them finding shelter with the animals in a cave hollowed out of a hillside.

No Christmas celebration would be complete without stories of angels, shepherds and wise men following a brilliant, never-before-seen star that led them to Bethlehem. Most of all, the Christmas story tells about the birth of a baby, a baby named Jesus impossibly born of a virgin.

To be sure, some question these historical facts. No reference to any of them exists outside the Bible, and some are prone to question any single-source assertion. The human impossibility of a virgin bearing a child only adds to some doubters' skepticism.

For Christians, the single source of the Bible is not a problem.

We believe the Bible is the Word of God. It is truth and we believe all that it teaches. That is why we describe the details surrounding Jesus' birth as historical facts. That is why these colorful details have been faithfully retold for more than 2,000 years.

God incarnate

At the center of the Christmas celebrations is another historical fact. In the birth of Jesus, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This historical fact is the center of present-day faith for every Christian.

The Bible teaches the eternal God revealed Himself in human form so that from within mankind, He might declare His eternal love.

Theologians refer to this as "Incarnation." The Bible explains it this way: "Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6–7).

One writer observed that Jesus' reduction of



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

Himself from the supreme end of creation to the supreme means for humanity's salvation is the greatest demonstration of the nature of God's love.

Consider that after describing Jesus as "the Word," the apostle John said of Him "and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

The apostle added, "Through Him, all things were made; without Him, nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and that life was the light of men" (vv. 3–4).

The apostle Paul repeated this theme in Colossians 1:16–17.

There he wrote, "For by Him (Jesus), all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together."

The Bible clearly teaches as historical fact that Jesus is the source of all creation. When God willed to call humanity into being, Jesus was at work. It is in Jesus' creative power that "all things hold together." All things were created not only "by Him" but also "for Him."

Even life itself has its roots in Jesus as the source of life, and that life is sustained by His encompassing presence.

The One

As mysterious as it is, that is the One who laid aside the form and privilege of deity. That is the One who was born of a virgin. That is the One in whom all the fullness of God dwelt (v. 19). That is the One through whom reconciliation was made possible (v. 20). That is the One who became obedient to death, even death on the cross.

Only love could cause such action.

God's love for humankind is an everlasting love. That is how God described His love in Jeremiah 31:3. From creation forward, God's heart has

throbbled in love for His prime creation, that being in whom He entrusted His likeness.

Jesus' declaration that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son" (John 3:16) was not a new revelation about God's love. Rather it was another evidence of God's love that has been a historical fact for eternity. God loves so much that He was willing to become the remedy for the sin that mars humanity.

That is why Paul could write the doubters in Corinth and confidently declare that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Jesus' words as recorded in John 3:17 read, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him."

Eternal hope

Historical fact — that is how the Bible presents the Incarnation. And that historical fact is the reason for the eternal hope that beats in every Christian's heart.

Our hope is not in ourselves. Our hope is in the love of God, who loved us so much that Christmas happened. God became flesh and dwelt among us.


As you retell the Christmas story this year, rejoice in all the details of the historical facts surrounding Jesus' birth. Most of all, rejoice in your present faith in "the Word (who) became flesh and dwelt among us."

VOICE YOUR OPINION

SPEAK UP on issues in the Baptist world by writing a letter to the editor of *The Alabama Baptist*.

Remember to:

- Include your name and address
- Focus on issues, not people
- Be as concise as possible



The Alabama Baptist
will not publish an issue Dec. 30.
The next issue will run Jan. 6.

THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

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

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Alabama Legislature passes 7 'historic' ethics bills

By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

In what many, including Gov. Bob Riley, are calling "historic," Alabama lawmakers approved a major ethics reform package of seven bills that is geared to hinder political corruption.

After Riley called a special session Dec. 8 for his proposed bills to be considered, the Legislature passed the last bill at 3 a.m. Dec. 16.

"Passing any one of these reforms would have meant a tremendous positive change for the way the people's business is conducted in Montgomery," Riley said in a press release. "Passing all seven of these reforms represents a sea change of historic proportions and will make Alabama the new standard for ethical government in the United States.

"In just one week, Alabama has gone from having some of the weakest ethics laws in the country to having some of the strongest," he continued. "The passage of these bills will usher in a new era of transparent, accountable and responsive government in Alabama that can begin the work of restoring the public's trust."

The bills come only two months after 11 lawmakers, gambling bosses and lobbyists were arrested Oct. 4 in a FBI "bingo" probe investigation on charges of conspiracy, bribery and other fraudulent practices. The trial is set for April 4.

"This was a reaction to what happened with the indictments," said Joe Godfrey, executive director of the Alabama Citizens Action Program. "That's what really motivated the people of Alabama. [They] said, 'We have had enough of this kind of junk.' The legislators knew (this) and ran to clean up Alabama politics."

The people of Alabama first made their voice heard in the Nov. 2 election, voting for candidates they thought would clean up Montgomery, added Godfrey, who attended the special session. "And they did."

At press time, Riley planned to sign the bills into law Dec. 20.

The seven bills are

► Senate Bill 1, which gives the Alabama Ethics Commission subpoena power. This means they will have the power to call witnesses and require them to take an oath and provide evidence, whereas they could not do any of this before. Most state ethics commissions already have this power.

► Senate Bill 2, which will ban state and local governmental employees, political action committees (PACs) and any other governmental agency from using payroll deductions to pay dues for organizations that use funds for political activities. This includes the Alabama Education Association and the Alabama State Employees Association.

► Senate Bill 3, also known as the "Legislative Double Dipping Prohibition Act," which with some exceptions will ban

state legislators from holding a public office, such as a job at a state agency, college or public school, while also serving as a senator or representative. This will go into effect after late 2014.

(In related news, the Alabama Supreme Court said on Dec. 17 to the Alabama Education Association's request to rehear a case that banned double dipping at two-year colleges. The high court had unanimously ruled in October to uphold the state school board's ban, meaning legislators cannot hold a second or third tax-payer funded job in the two-year college system while also serving as a legislator.)

► House Bill 9, which will ban transfers of money between PACs and other groups. PAC-to-PAC transfers can launder money and hide from the public the source of a candidate's campaign money.

"In just one week, Alabama has gone from having some of the weakest ethics laws in the country to ... the strongest."

Bob Riley
Governor of Alabama

► House Bill 10, which will ban "pass-through-pork" spending. This refers to the practice of a legislator spending state money that has been allocated to an agency or school on something else that has not been clearly marked in a budget.

► House Bill 11, which mandates that (many) elected officials and public employees at all levels of government receive training on the state ethics law.

It also requires anyone who tries to solicit the executive or judicial branches in the awarding of a grant or contract to register as a lobbyist.

► Senate Bill 14, which will limit (with exceptions) the amount of what a lobbyist can spend on a legislator. Before a lobbyist could spend \$250 per day per legislator. Now a lobbyist can spend no more than \$150 a year per legislator, according to the Ethics Commission.

"[These bills] won't alleviate corruption, but it will certainly make it harder for corruption to exist in our state, and that's always good for Alabama," Godfrey said.

Alabama's Attorney General-elect Luther Strange applauded both parties for working together to get these bills passed.

"Ethics reform has been talked about for years, and now, thanks to Gov. Riley's leadership, we finally have strict ethics laws that bring accountability and transparency to state government," Strange said. "Restoring honesty and integrity in Alabama is a bipartisan issue. Republican and Democratic legislators from all across Alabama came together and passed this much-needed legislation.

"I look forward to working with our district attorneys and Ethics Commission Director Jim Sumner to ensure that these new laws are vigorously enforced," he added.

Godfrey said Alabamians need to applaud the legislators for a job well done.

"The people of Alabama need to ... contact their legislators and say, 'Thank you for passing these strong ethics laws. And we'll remember ... that you stood strong at election time,'" he said.

A touch of 'North Pole'

Dora's Mission of Hope gives 175 children Christmas

By John Evans
The Alabama Baptist

The Grinch stealing Christmas in Alabama isn't likely to have a change of heart.

For many children in the state, poverty snatches away the childhood joys associated with the holiday.

"They may not wake up with toys under the tree," said Lori Abercrombie, a member of New Temple Baptist Church, Dora, and director of Mission of Hope, a nonprofit ministry in Dora.

But Dec. 12, about 100 volunteers gathered at Mission of Hope to help change that. They spent two hours preparing for the ministry's annual toy giveaway, which provides poverty-stricken children with a Christmas they otherwise might not have.

At this year's giveaway Dec. 18, the Mission of Hope took on a "North Pole" theme. Each of the 175 children scheduled to come at press time entered a room filled with toys and selected five to take home, as well as a new jacket, hat, gloves and shoes. The children also got their picture taken with Santa Claus.

"For many of these children, this will be Christmas for them ... so we try to do everything we can to make this day a day they will remember," Abercrombie said.

But the fun wasn't just for the children. The adults who came with them listened to music and had a chance to win door prizes put together by volunteers.

"If you want to see excitement on someone's face, see a little old woman who wins Christmas decorations," said Steve Abercrombie, Lori's husband. "We take that stuff for granted."

Throughout the year, the ministry aids impoverished families in the surrounding area

with twice-a-month food giveaways. More than 150 families start to line up as early as 4 a.m. to receive food, clothing and hygiene supplies.

"You wouldn't think there are people in the United States with nothing to eat," said Donald Blackmon, a volunteer and member of New Temple Baptist.

Lori Abercrombie said some families require long-term food assistance while others may come to the food giveaway only a few times before getting back on their feet.

"Lately we're seeing a lot of people like me and you, families where the husband has lost his job," said Jamie Blackmon, a volunteer and member of New Temple Baptist. "It's hitting closer to home with this economy."

Every event at the Mission of Hope begins with local ministers sharing the Word of God. Lori Abercrombie hopes the people who come for food assistance also will be able to find a church family.

She strives to keep the Mission of Hope a place to which the poor will not be ashamed to come.

"These people are our family, not just numbers on the other side of the door," she said.

Strong support

The ministry is supported by more than 20 churches from area associations such as Walker, Sulphur Springs, Birmingham, Limestone, Mud Creek and Pickens.

Lori Abercrombie hopes they and other faith families will continue to be Jesus' hands and feet long after the Christmas decorations are put away.

"At Christmas, your heart strings are pulled, but we need to make sure we're sharing God's love 12 months out of the year." ❧

"This will be Christmas for them ... so we try to do everything we can to make this day a day they will remember."

Lori Abercrombie
Mission of Hope



Photo by John Evans

TOYLAND — Jennifer Echols, a member of New Temple Baptist Church, Dora, is one of about 100 volunteers from the church who spent two hours Dec. 12 getting Dora's Mission of Hope ready for its annual toy giveaway.

Balancing act

Women's ministries, services find ways to survive tough economy, meet more needs

By **Kristen Padilla**
The Alabama Baptist

I think during this economic time, nonprofits are hurting across the board," said Jean Roberson, ministry consultant and adult team leader of national Woman's Missionary Union and director of Christian Women's Job Corps (CWJC)/Christian Men's Job Corps (CMJC) and International Initiatives. "However, women are typically an underserved population. So anytime you have a financial crisis in the economy, it already puts those underserved populations more at risk."

Many women's ministries and services in Alabama can attest to that. As demand for their services increases because of the struggling economy, the donations and gifts they receive decrease, making it difficult to offer more services.

An example of this phenomenon is Jessie's Place, a service of The Jimmie Hale Mission in Birmingham, which provides shelter and other services to women and children. In 2009, Jessie's Place served 63 women and 61 children, and so far this year, Jessie's Place has served 56 women and 44 children.

Last year was the first time in its history that The Jimmie Hale Mission saw any kind of decrease in revenue with outside revenue down 6 percent. The mission operates on a July to June fiscal year.

In the first five months of the 2010 fiscal year, outside contributions are down almost 9 percent. Even though November and December tend to be its best months as far as donations, the mission experienced a significant decrease from October (down 5.5 percent) to November (down nearly 9 percent).

Decrease in giving

Executive Director Tony Cooper said while there is always the possibility the mission will make up some of that loss this month, "if [November] is a sign (of what will happen in December), it's not a good one."

"By no means am I poor-mouthing, complaining (or) whining," Cooper said. "I'm just giving you the numbers. God has blessed us for 67 years ... and [He] knows what our needs are."

But "you can't give what you don't have," he said of people who may normally give to places like the mission but can't now because

of their financial situation. "When the economy starts knocking on everyone's doors ... most of the ones that are usually hit the hardest are your churches, nonprofits and charities because [those are] the easiest ones to cut back on."

Pathway's Women's Shelter in Birmingham has seen an increase in demand and a decrease in giving, too. Last year, Pathway's served its largest number of people ever — approximately 305 women and children. And it's "on par" to serve as many women and children this year as it did in 2009, said Development Director

Lara Wheeler. According to Wheeler, the job situation is to blame for the number of women and children filling Pathway's beds.

"Because we have such a high unemployment rate in Alabama, it has been difficult for women who do not have jobs or who have lost their job

to find one," she said. "But also for women who do have jobs, it's been very difficult for them to move up because people are hanging very tightly to their jobs."

"The way that affects our women and children is women who may have found themselves four years ago finding better-paying jobs ... are stuck in [their current] position trying to save more," Wheeler continued. "(Thus), we do see them staying in the shelter longer."

Monte Gilstrap, program manager of Family Care, a ministry of the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries in Mobile, also has noticed women extending their stay because they can't find jobs.

That includes well-educated ones, Gilstrap said, noting there are two women who have college degrees at the shelter now.

"Just because of the dynamic of their life, they ended up without a job, and they don't have the support of family," she said.

Women's ministries are able to provide that support because people are still supporting them, just not necessarily with money.

"I think people now are focused on in-kind gifts in the event of a low cash flow or a lower cash flow," said Maria Dickens, Path-

way's executive director. "We've seen more volunteerism and more donated items as opposed to mainly cash. People are still very generous in this climate, but I think that their giving has taken on a different face."

While Pathway's is able to continue to provide basic services to women and children, like shelter, heat, air conditioning and food, it is having to look to outside sources to meet other needs.

"We need laundry baskets," Wheeler said. "That's an example of where we would have been able to provide a pretty basic need before ... but now we're having to go to the public to look for those donations."

When the economy hit The Lovelady Center in Birmingham (see story, page 5) and giving began decreasing, it forced founder and Executive Director Brenda Spahn into two directions. It forced her to begin a thrift store to supplement the ministry's income and to reach out to more believers.

Both have been positive changes that have actually helped their ministry, Spahn said.

Unlike some places that have seen an increase in volunteers, places like CWJC sites have seen a decrease in volunteers.

"A lot of our volunteers have had to go back to work," said Linda Henry, volunteer Alabama CWJC/CMJC coordinator and executive director of Marshall County Christian Services in Albertville.

That includes site coordinators. And where there is not a site coordinator, needs are not being met. Just ask Stacie Reed, who used to serve as site coordinator for DeKalb County CWJC and now serves as one of its board members.

"I had to resign that position (site coordinator) because I worked normal business hours and couldn't work (at the CWJC site) during normal hours (any more)," Reed said.

"If we cannot find someone who can volunteer those hours during the day, then we're really at a standstill," she added.

The economic downturn hit DeKalb County CWJC from the ministry's beginning in September 2008.

"Because the economy took a downturn, the federal and state governments came up with some initiatives to help people get in the workforce," Reed said. "But some of those ... do a lot of the same things that CWJC does. People weren't interested in

Sav-A-Life centers hit hard by economy

By **Sondra Washington**
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

No matter how important a ministry's services are to the kingdom of God, lack of funding can make those services an impossibility. Pregnancy resource centers across the state understand this situation.

Over the past few years, many have had to drastically reduce their budgets. For some, this has meant reduced or canceled programs.

Jodi McMillian, executive director of Sav-A-Life Shelby in Pelham, said, "We've had to lay off four staff members, close the center on Highway 280 (in Birmingham) and restructure our whole budget and action plan for next year."

"We've had to cut our budget significantly, and it still may not be enough to meet the growing needs that we are seeing in the community if the economy doesn't recover. We are trusting God and leaning on Him that we won't have to do that."

Cutting programs

McMillian said Sav-A-Life Shelby also had to discontinue its abortion recovery assistance program, which she believes is necessary because many women — both Christian and non-Christian — have had abortions and need help dealing with guilt and shame.

And if the economy doesn't improve, McMillian believes we will see more abortion-minded women in the future.

"They are going to go seek an abortion because their husbands or boyfriends can't find employment," she said. "They are going to seek that to deal with the cri-

sis pregnancy that they are in. ... You are supposed to be servicing the community; and if it's not there, then that's going to be a win for the abortion clinics. That's not going to impact the kingdom of Christ at all."

Limiting services

Last year was worse for Sav-A-Life of Covington County, according to executive director Amy Davis. For the first time ever, the ministry had to dip into its building fund.

"We (also) had to limit the amount of ultrasounds we do for our clients," she said. "We were doing one for every client who had a positive (pregnancy) test, but we had to limit that to very young girls age 16 and 17 who were abortion-minded and abortion-vulnerable. ... The opportunity of providing the ultrasound if they tested positive would have provided that extra impact that they were not able to get otherwise."

Linda Buchanan, executive director of Sav-A-Life Tennessee Valley, said her organization has seen an increase in clients while trying to keep the ministry afloat financially.

"We will probably see 2,500 clients this year," she said. "Last year, we saw 2,150. The year before that, we had 1,300."

Ministry directors hope people and churches will continue to give to the ministries they say are critical to the lives of so many unborn babies.

"I would encourage churches and individuals to keep giving if they are able," Davis said. "The mission of the ministry is vital ... to promote a culture of life in our country and community." ❧

committing to CWJC and our services when they could get it from somewhere else."

She noted that many of those government-sponsored programs, like Ready to Work, pay for people's gas to come to class and some even pay them to attend class. CWJC sites simply have not been able to compete with that, especially in places like DeKalb County.

"We haven't had anyone wanting to participate in over a year," Reed said. "It can be very discouraging because we believe CWJC can give women a hand up ... and a better life."

Henry said other CWJC sites across the state, like the ones in Mobile, Montgomery and Etowah County, have closed for similar reasons.

"What we're seeing also is that new sites aren't coming up," she said. "At one point, we had 20 sites and now we have 11 CWJC

sites and three CMJC sites. There's been a gradual decrease over the last three to four years."

Henry said many people do not realize the money it takes to keep a place like a CWJC site going, noting the ministry has to pay for insurance (liability, board member and workers compensation) and unemployment taxes.

"If it were not for the Christian people in the churches that continue to give of their time and talent and their finances and their prayers, we would not exist," she said.

Dickens said even though giving has gone down, "we should never underestimate [people's] giving."

"[People] should never think that what they are giving is not enough," she said. "If everyone continues to give to their ability, we will still see great things accomplished. I'd encourage people to continue to give even if their [method] has changed. It's a wonderful gift — giving." ❧

"Most of the ones that are usually hit the hardest are your churches, nonprofits and charities."

Tony Cooper
The Jimmie Hale Mission

"If everyone continues to give to their ability, we will still see great things accomplished."

Maria Dickens
Pathway's Women's Shelter

The gift of a second chance

Birmingham's Lovelady Center transforms women's lives, wipes slate clean

By John Evans
The Alabama Baptist

Bonnie Miller gave one last cry for help.

"God, you have to help me, because if you don't, I'm going to die like this," Miller pleaded.

She used to be a paralegal with a home, a family and a hefty bank account. But she prayed that night as a homeless drug addict.

"Nobody wakes up in the morning and says, 'I want to be a junkie and alcoholic, lose my children and live on the street,'" Miller said. "Things happen in their lives."

Within a year of her third marriage falling apart, she lost her job and faced her mother's death. Miller sent her two sons to live with their father while she lived out of her car. Then she got hooked on drugs.

'I had nothing'

"Before, I would look at a woman who didn't have her children or was on drugs and look down on her," Miller said. "I thought, 'There is no reason you should be a junkie or an alcoholic.' I just couldn't comprehend that. Then one day, I looked at myself and I was exactly like that. I had nothing."

She moved from house to house, man to man, enslaved to methamphetamine and cocaine. Drug dealers took her car.

A day after her plea for God's help, Miller had a run-in with the law that ended with her being sentenced — not to jail but to The Lovelady Center. It would change her life.

The Lovelady Center is a Birmingham nonprofit ministry that welcomes women — be they poor, criminals, drug addicts, abused or

homeless — and gives them hope by helping to transform their lives.

The women come from a variety of sources, including prisons, social service referrals and alternative sentencing. About 40 percent come of their own accord, and many stay with their children at the center.

Once the women arrive, they are immersed in a 9–12 month program that provides the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual support they need to lead new lives.

"My personal goal is to see everyone here [come to faith in Christ] and become productive members of society," said Brenda Spahn, founder and executive director of the center.

The center provides those enrolled in the program with basic necessities, including a room, meals, clothing and hygiene products. The women and children receive medical and dental care, which is often badly needed.

Dr. Bill Powell, a dentist who volunteers at the center, sees firsthand the devastation wrought by drug addiction on many of the women's mouths.

"I've been on 28 short-term mission trips, and the decay matches anything in a Third World country," he said. "We have 22-, 23- and 24-year-old women whose teeth all have to be pulled. It breaks your heart."

The program provides a variety of other services to prepare the women to re-enter society, including drug rehabilitation, counseling, legal help, job training and post-educational courses offered through partnerships with Jefferson State Community College in Birmingham and Tennessee Temple Univer-



Photo courtesy of The Lovelady Center

SEE THE DIFFERENCE — Women at The Lovelady Center hold cardboard signs about what their lives are like after putting their faith in God. The nonprofit ministry gives hope to women by helping to transform their lives.

sity in Chattanooga. Child care and transportation also are provided.

But the center doesn't just provide services; women must earn graduation from the program. They are required to have some kind of job and take biblically based classes on topics including parenting, budgeting and anger management.

'Get your life together'

The women's lives are regulated and scheduled to reintroduce discipline and structure many of them lost. They can be dismissed from the program for using drugs, fighting, sexual activity or continual rebellion. Before they leave, the women

must have a plan for how they will care for themselves. Spahn said if a woman completes the requirements and graduates, then there is a 91 percent chance she will not return to her former life.

"The program helps you get your life together before you go out, because if you don't, you're going to fall again," Miller said.

But what the women and children need most is love, Spahn said, and that's what they are shown.

"There was an overwhelming feeling of love and forgiveness that just baffled me," Miller said of her time in the program.

"They didn't have to love me, but this program welcomed me with open arms."

In addition to the love of others, those at the center are shown the love of God. Church services are held three days a week, and the women spend 30 minutes each morning in devotions. Spahn estimated about half of them genuinely receive Christ and He radically transforms their lives.

"I've never seen it like this before," she said. "Even their appearance is changed, the way they talk and walk. ... It's just miraculous."

Many of the center's volunteers come from local Baptist churches.

Amy Tosney, a member of Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover, recalls mentoring a 23-year-old woman pregnant with her fifth child. The child's father was murdered over drugs in front of the woman.

"I would go down and take her lunch, sit, and we would talk," Tosney said. "It was getting to know her day-to-day struggles and life."

Members of The Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham, also are involved with the center, teaching classes, renovating rooms and mentoring women.

"It's a wonderful facility for ladies to hear the Word of God, be able to change and get their lives back on track," said Andrew Whitehead, the church's community outreach coordinator.

Kristin Dutt, high school associate at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, leads groups of students who minister to the children at the center.

"The Lord is at work there," she said. "He's doing a lot in these women's and kids' lives, and it's just a blessing for us to get to be a part of it."

Miller, who graduated from the program and now serves as the center's outreach coordinator, is thankful God brought her there.

"I'm very appreciative for what God has done for me through this program," she said. "I can't say I would be alive otherwise."

'A new life'

With so many families to care for, the center has many needs, including vehicles for transportation, employment opportunities for the women, used clothes and furniture, money and volunteers, especially in dental work. The Lovelady Thrift Store in Irondale, which helps fund the center and provides some of the women with paying jobs, accepts donations of everything from clothes to electronics.

As long as the center can stay open, it will continue to give a fresh start to women and children who need it.

"When you come through these doors, it doesn't matter what you did before," Spahn said.

"Your slate is wiped clean. It's a new life."

For more information, call 205-833-1064 or visit <http://lovelady.homestead.com>.

'This is what Jesus would do'

(continued from page 1)

the couple help sew stockings, fill them and then drop them off at the BBA office each December.

"I guess that's what missions is all about: wanting to be involved and then actually helping others," he said.

In addition to stockings, Season of Our Savior collects cakes — both homemade and store-bought — to be served to people in need through soup kitchens and groups like Meals on Wheels.

Pair said this project is what makes this her favorite time of year.

"We feel like we're expressing God's love," she said. "This is what Jesus would do if He were here."



Photo by Stuart Sentell

'WHAT MISSIONS IS ALL ABOUT' — Stockings donated by Birmingham Baptist Association churches are sorted by gender and age as they are brought into the associational office.

Across Alabama's Associations

BESSEMER

► **Eastern Valley Church, Bessemer**, will hold a Christmas celebration Dec. 25, 10–10:30 a.m. The community is invited. John Mooney is pastor. ► **Southcrest Church, Bessemer**, will hold a gospel singing New Year's Eve benefit Dec. 31, 7:30 p.m., with Embassy Quartet, Stanley and Company and members of Birmingham's Sons Dixie Riders. Benefits will go to the Christian Motorcyclists Association. Dinner will begin at 6 p.m. For information call Marti or Beverley Kiewel at 205-425-1794. Scott Bush is pastor.

BIBB

► **Ashby Church, Brierfield**, will hold a New Year's Eve singing Dec. 31, 8 p.m., with the Florida Boys. Refreshments will be served.

BIRMINGHAM

► **Robert G. Wilkerson** is the new pastor of **Midway Church, Birmingham**. He previously served at Valley East Church, Pinson, and resigned in February 2010 to finish his first book, "Characters of the Crucifixion," which will be released in 2011. He has served several other churches in Alabama, Colorado and Kentucky. Wilkerson is a Christian writer and has had several articles published. He also writes a devotional column for a local newspaper. He holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University in Birmingham, and a master of divinity and doctor of ministry from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He and his wife, Jane, have two children. ► **Shades Mountain Church, Vestavia Hills**,



WILKERSON

will hold a Christmas Eve candlelight service Dec. 24, 5 p.m. For information call 205-822-1670 or visit www.shades.org. Danny Wood is pastor.

BLOUNT

► **Pleasant View Church, Holy Pond**, will hold a watch night service Dec. 31, 8 p.m. New Dawn, of Cullman, will sing. Refreshments will be at 10 p.m. The church will pray the old year out and the new year in. For information call 256-796-5986. Randy Burtram is pastor.

COVINGTON

► **Southside Church, Opp**, will hold a candlelight service Dec. 24, 8 p.m.

LIMESTONE

► **Piney Grove Church, Ardmore**, will hold "Winds of Revival" preaching conference Jan. 9–12. Sessions will be Sunday at 10:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. and weeknights at 7. Mike Duff will speak Sunday morning, Harold Fanning Sunday evening, Jimmy Jackson and Dusty McLemore Monday, Jeff Laborg and Scott Dawson Tuesday and Gary Rickman and Tim Anderson Wednesday. Area churches will provide music. Ray Stonecypher is pastor.

MARION

► **Shiloh Church, Hamilton**, recently ordained Bryce Jones to preach. The church also ordained Max Frye and Gene Stidham as deacons. Jimmy May is pastor.

MARSHALL

► **Haney's Chapel, Guntersville**, will celebrate homecoming Jan. 9, 10:30 a.m., with Joy Ministries. Lunch will follow. Michael Crowe is pastor.

MOBILE

► **First Church, Irvington**, will host The Lamb Family Jan. 9, 6

p.m. Ron Griffin is pastor.

MONTGOMERY

► **Stephen Johnson** is the new youth and family life minister for **Hayneville Church**. He recently served as education director for



JOHNSON

All Nations Fellowship Church, Garland, Texas, a church of refugees from Sudan. Johnson holds a bachelor's degree from Auburn University and is currently pursuing a master of arts in media communications from Dallas Theological Seminary. Darrell Paulk is pastor.

NORTH JEFFERSON

► **Jay Strickland**, youth pastor for **Sharon Heights Church, Birmingham**, received the Paramedic of the Year award from the Warrior Fire Department. Jason Dunlap is pastor.

WINSTON

► **Winston Association** will begin a new Winston Baptist Institute class Jan. 11, 6:30 p.m., at the associational office. Director of Missions Al Hood will teach "Survey of the Old Testament." For information call 205-489-5137.

OTHER

► **First Church, Mobile**, will hold a six-week study about the life of Abraham called "The Magnificent Obsession" by Anne Graham Lotz on Mondays at 9:30 a.m. in the church library beginning Jan. 10. Margaret Mangham will lead. Preschool child care is available. For information call 251-432-6513. Chris George is pastor.

Newsite women 'backbone of church'

The pastor is the face of the church, but it takes committed members to make sure everything runs smoothly.

At Newsite Baptist Church, Sylacauga, Leverne Bice and Lorene Sherrill have been the epitome of committed for nearly eight decades.

"Leverne and Loraine are the ladies that have been the heart of the church," said Pastor Don Evans. "Anytime I need something, I call those women."

Bice, 78, and Sherrill, 76, were raised in the Central Baptist Association church and raised their children there.

Being involved in the church is something that's always been a priority for them, and over the years, each woman has taken on a variety of positions, ranging from Vacation

Bible School worker to treasurer to church clerk to singing director, among others.

"We've been there for a lifetime, and so I guess we just kind of do what needs to be done," said Sherrill, who is currently serving as Newsite Baptist's clerk and kindergarten Sunday School teacher.

Newsite is a small church, with roughly 100 members and an average Sunday attendance of 40. Bice, who is currently serving as treasurer, said the church's size leads it to be an especially tightknit congregation.

"We're all just family there and get along well with each other," she said. "I think in a smaller church you have a closer community."

It's something that makes each member's contribution especially needed, too, making Bice's and

Sherrill's contributions quite vital to Newsite. "I've known these ladies a long time," Evans said.

"They, along with their husbands, were two families that were part of the backbone of the church."

Evans first met Bice and Sherrill when he came to Newsite as a student pastor in the late 1950s. He said they were significantly involved members even then.

A little more than 20 years ago, Evans was given the chance to return to the church as pastor, and it was an opportunity he was thrilled to take.

"Sylacauga was my home and so I loved getting to come back," Evans said.

"Coming back to Newsite was like coming home again, too, and Lorene and Leverne are two of the reasons why." (TAB)



Leighton's Zion Hill celebrates 50th anniversary

The sanctuary of Zion Hill Baptist Church, Leighton, was filled to capacity Nov. 7 for its 50th anniversary celebration. More than three times the normal attendance of 40 came to help mark the milestone.

Sam Wolfe, who led the Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association church's dedication service 50 years ago, returned to speak. Jim Warren, former director of missions for Colbert-Lauderdale Association, also addressed the congregation.

The daughters of B.C. Willcutt, who founded Zion Hill Baptist, returned to talk about their father and the church's beginnings. Allen Jeffreys of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and Eddy Garner, director of missions for Colbert-Lauderdale Association, presented plaques. Event organizer Pam Clement created a display of Zion Hill's original records, memorabilia and its missions programs in the fellowship hall. Looking to the future, Pastor Thomas Thornton said, "I hope [the church] grows and we continue doing the missions work we're doing."

Sunny Eve marks 75 years with triple attendance

The 75th anniversary celebration at Sunny Eve Baptist Church, Anniston, drew a larger than normal crowd. Approximately 130 people — more than three times the congregation's normal attendance — gathered Nov. 14 to help mark the milestone.

Two of the Calhoun Baptist Association church's former pastors, Jerry Willingham and Brian Turner, returned to speak. Sunny Eve Baptist's current pastor, Bobby Ray Lipscomb, also spoke. All those who have held an office in the church were recognized and given the opportunity to say something to those present.

A representative of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission gave the church a plaque for its 75 years of faithful service.

The congregation is currently compiling a book of drawings done by church members. The book also will include the history of the church as remembered by its oldest members.

Baptist volunteers temporarily suspend work in Haiti

After facing three days of escalating civil unrest in Haiti, along with the continuing outbreak of cholera, Florida and Southern Baptist disaster relief volunteers suspended their work and returned to the United States on Dec. 10.

Eddie Blackmon, rebuild coordinator for Florida and Southern Baptist disaster relief, and other volunteers were holed up at the Florida Mission House for three days after rioting began Dec. 7. Florida Baptists have had personnel stationed in Haiti since the Jan. 12 earthquake.

Unrest over election

The unrest in Port-au-Prince began with the announced results of the presidential election, requiring a runoff between two candidates.

By Dec. 12, all teams had arrived back in Miami safely. The rebuild team plans to return in January.

Meanwhile, with more than 2,000 confirmed deaths and as many as 100,000 cases of cholera, Florida Baptist officials have

sent another \$30,000 to Haiti to purchase bottled water and water purification supplies to help stop the spread of the disease.

Cholera is caused by drinking polluted water containing the vibrio cholerae bacteria, which can result in diarrhea and vomiting. The resulting dehydration can lead to death.

With the additional funding, Florida Baptists have provided more than \$67,500 since Oct. 25 to help churches affiliated with Confraternite Missionaire Baptist de Haiti (CMBH) combat the spread of and treat the disease.

Craig Culbreth, who directs Florida Baptists' partnership missions department, reported that as many as 15 Haitian Baptists have died from cholera, including two pastors, a pastor's wife and two entire families with five and seven members.

Florida Baptists have been in a 15-year partnership with CMBH churches, growing the organization from 88 churches in 1995 to more than 1,200 congregations today. (BP)



Germany: Two-day Christmas: 'Feast for family, feast of peace'

Klaus Rösler works as an editor for various Christian magazines and press services, including the European Baptist Press Service, a department of the European Baptist Federation.

Significance of Christmas

In German society, Christmas is above all a feast for the family and a feast of peace. It involves two holidays (the 25th and the 26th).

The reason behind Christmas — that Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth — has largely been forgotten.

Nevertheless the Christmas services in Lutheran and Catholic churches have the highest annual attendance by far. It's a longtime tradition for many to go to church at Christmas — but never otherwise.



RÖSLER

For trade and commerce, Christmas is, of course, vital, for it is the time when we give each other gifts.

Twenty percent of a store's business is done only during November and December. On toys, it amounts to 30 percent. The Christmas rush begins in grocery stores as early as September, when chocolate and gingerbread Santas begin to appear on the shelves.

In December, Germany's cities and villages are blanketed by thousands of lights, which exude a romantic atmosphere.

Every town has a Christmas market consisting of small stalls smelling of hot wine punch (Glühwein), bratwurst and holiday pastries.

And most German households will have a Christmas tree, which are to be more expensive this year than ever before. An average tree costs more than \$50.

Baptist church celebrations

This question is tough to answer, for one cannot speak of "the Baptists" in Germany. We support a broad range of theological convictions with very different ways of expressing faith.

Some congregations use Christmas as a time for evangelistic campaigns. Becoming increasingly popular are "living manglers," in which the Christmas story is portrayed by real people. Before Christmas, youth groups and church choirs sing in homes for the elderly and hospitals.

The biggest event of all is Christmas Eve. Then choirs and orchestras perform with additional manger games and activities for children.

Baptist services also are well attended on Christmas Eve, though there usually are not many more in attendance than for other services.

As a rule, during the course of an entire year, Baptist congregations are better attended than Lutheran or Catholic ones.

Many Baptist congregations have no services whatever on the 25th and 26th. Other congregations hold special events for singles. Christmas being a family feast leaves not a few people lonely. Such persons are then invited to visit a Baptist congregation. Other congregations offer special events for the homeless and itinerate.

My favorite thing

Christmas is important to me as a celebration for the family. We have a seriously handicapped daughter, Marie, age 16.

She suffered cerebral bleeding 11 years ago and has been in a coma and living in a children's care center ever since.

The remaining family visits her every year at Christmas — that is, her older sister Lara, 19, we as the parents and often also the grandparents. We sing Christmas songs for her, take her for a walk in her wheelchair and play games.

We often have the impression Marie notices that her family is there and she is glad about that. That is then a very special present for us for which we are very thankful to God.

United Kingdom:

Christmas in United Kingdom often a retail race

Mark Woods is editor of The Baptist Times, a weekly newspaper associated with the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

Significance of Christmas

Christmas in the United Kingdom is dominated by commercial interests as it is everywhere in the developed world.

It sometimes seems that there's a race between retailers to see who can get their Christmas merchandise and decorations up soonest; it seems to have crept back as far as late November nowadays, and the widespread irritation this causes still doesn't stop them doing it.

Baptist church celebrations

Like many European countries, the church in the U.K. is swimming against a secularist tide, quite a lot of it very aggressive and vocal.

A popular book in 2009 was "The Atheist's Guide to Christmas." And generally church attendance at Christmas seems to be declining, though it's still much higher than at other times.

Interestingly attendance at our great cathedrals has risen consistently year by year. Churches and parachurch agencies make a concerted effort at this time to reach out to people who don't normally attend.



WOODS

In 2009, there was a national ad campaign using billboards and bus shelters, for instance, and many churches will carry out their own neighborhood invitation programs as well. We try to make sure that services are seeker-friendly, with mixture of welcome and challenge.

Many churches would have a carols by candlelight service, where the old favorites are sung. Some would have midnight communions.

Often the young people will visit elderly members of the congregation or local care homes to sing for them. And many churches will have an outward-looking focus, caring for homeless people or inviting people without families of their own to meals.

On Christmas Day itself, children often are invited to bring one of their gifts to church and show it to the congregation.

The service will be short, probably around 45 minutes, and include lots of singing and a short address.

My favorite thing

As a pastor, I prepared literally hundreds of Christmas messages over the years.

But I never found that the old story grew stale or that I ran out of things to say about what that quintessentially English poet, John Betjeman, said about "that most tremendous tale of all" — "that God was man in Palestine/ And lives today in bread and wine."

COUNTRY PROFILES

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Canada:

Rising multicultural society encourages 'Happy Holidays' over Christmas terminology

Lois Mitchell is justice initiatives coordinator for Canadian Baptist Ministries, a national partnership of four Baptist conventions and unions serving more than 1,000 Baptist congregations and 250,000 people who worship across Canada in 32 languages.



Photo courtesy of Lois Mitchell

Significance of Christmas

Canada is an intentionally and proudly multicultural and pluralistic society. Religious freedom is unambiguously embedded in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, many Canadian Christians feel increasingly marginalized by the political correctness of inclusion and diversity.

In recent years, it has become inconsiderate and a breach of multiculturalism to use time-honored and traditional Christmas language. Thus, for example, it's more acceptable to say "Happy Holidays" or "Seasons Greetings" than "Merry Christmas."

Similarly a "Christmas Tree" is now a "Holiday Tree," and Christmas music is a mix of traditional carols and an increasing array of non-Christian songs of cheer. Nativity scenes are generally not welcome in public places, although they're fine in private homes or in churches.

The Christmas season, though enthusiastically celebrated, has been thoroughly secularized. It's all about shopping and gift giving, culinary indulgence, festive adornments — both inside and out — and shifting the emphasis from busyness as usual, to busyness with an added social



MITCHELL

emphasis with family, friends and co-workers.

In spite of the individualism of our society and our time, there remains a spirit of "good will" — communities of all sizes and political persuasion find creative ways to encourage charitable giving for the sake of the "less fortunate among us."

The Christmas season begins for many in mid-November and extends into the new year. As Christmas Day approaches, there is an expectation that families will spend the holiday together, but with the dramatic increase in the rate of family breakdown in Canada, this is more and more challenging. Cards are still exchanged but more and more people resort to digital communication, sending greetings and family updates by e-mail.

Baptist church celebrations

Perhaps because of the excessive commercializa-

tion of Christmas in secular society and the efforts to neutralize the Christian message of the season, Baptists in Canada seem to be making efforts to reclaim the holiday.

While gift giving still is practiced, there has been a real shift toward giving to the poor and marginalized, both locally and globally. More and more churches are involved in compassionate ministries in their own communities, and through the proliferation of gift-giving options for overseas projects through Christian charities, many Baptists now give a significant portion of their personal gift-giving budgets in the form of donations to these organizations.

Traditions such as Christmas concerts and musicals and special Christmas Eve services still play a prominent role in many, perhaps most, Baptist churches in Canada.

There also seems to be a renewed interest — especially in small towns and rural areas — in caroling in the neighborhood, going from house to house and singing Christmas carols, especially to those who are shut-ins.

My favorite thing

My favorite thing about Christmas in Canada is the general sense of goodwill that permeates both secular society and the church. Despite the commercialization — and maybe in a weird way partly because of it — that is, when shopping produces an artificial "high" that causes a short-term elevation of mood — there seems to be a deep sense of community and care for one another. For a few weeks, an emphasis on peace and goodwill pierces through the otherwise callous drive for self-fulfillment and personal prosperity.

Zimbabwe:

Former pastor, editor recalls Christmas traditions

Isaac Mwase is currently a cancer-prevention fellow with the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Md. Previously he taught at Tuskegee University and Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Ark. A native of Zimbabwe, Mwase was a pastor and editor there before coming to the United States. He earned a bachelor's degree at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, N.C., and master's and doctorate from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He returned to his homeland as a visiting instructor at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe in the summer of 1992.

societies. For Christians, Christmas was a time when I was reminded — and as a young preacher, I participated in the reminding of others — to put Christ back into Christmas.

I remember gathering at a church or at the Baptist conference center to celebrate Christ's coming into the world as our Lord and Savior. We prayed a lot. We were part of all-night prayer meetings. Other Christmases and for many outside the church, it was a time to get a new set of clothing and shoes, a time to eat the bird for special occasions — free-range chicken. The cold Fantas, sparkling lemon, ginger beer and Coca-Cola sodas pleased our palates to no end.

Baptist church celebrations

It just occurred to me that I have not been in

Zimbabwe for Christmas since 1983. Back then, we spent Christmases at the Baptist camp in Gweru — the young people, that is.



Photo courtesy of Isaac Mwase

In Dotson/Nyathi Hall, named after the first Southern Baptist missionary and the first national Baptist pastor, we would seek to draw closer to God through energetic choruses and fire-and-brimstone preaching. Sometimes we would spend the whole night in prayers.

My favorite thing

The abundance of food and cold sodas in just about every home, even those known to be populated by the working poor and the willingness to share these simple pleasures of life with whoever showed up. Christmas allowed us to experience an abundant life of sorts. The sharing and caring was heavenly.

Polish

Common meal

Polish C

Daniël Trusiewicz of European Baptist Federation Missionary Project, evangelism and planting Europe, the Middle E

Significance of Christmas

Christmas is preceded by the culmination of Advent is gather around the festal table food can be served only when in the sky. People start this meal bread — a piece of flat and with good wishes. It is also im with each other.

After that, people eat a series of several dishes. A red beet with cabbage, different types poppy-seeds cake would be p is not allowed on that night. Eve table must be free for a symbol of hospitality and openness to an invisible presence of the One who once was rejected when He came to this earth from heaven.

After the meal, people sing carols and give gifts to each other. All gifts are laid at a Christmas tree, and children always wait impatiently for the moment of unwrapping them. This is practiced in order to remember that God had sent His Son as the gift to humankind. At midnight, the Roman Cathol

Baptist church celebrations

Baptists would practice the except for the midnight Mass. Most Baptist churches work with children singing carols, Nativity stories according to gifts in churches that are pre Sermons during Christmas w about the birth of the Savior, churches.

My favorite thing

I personally like that Christmas. People try to be reconciled for more friendly than usual. I think that Christmas can be celebrated of the Savior who became mortal eternal life.



GERMANY



UNITED KINGDOM



CANADA



ZIMBABWE



POLAND



and:
characterizes
Christmas

Poland oversees the
generation's Indigenous
an effort to facilitate
new Baptist churches in
East and central Asia.

Christmas

the four weeks of Advent.
Christmas Eve. Families
for a special meal. The
in the first star can be visible
meal by breaking a wafer
white bread — and exchange-
important to be reconciled

me vegetarian meal composed
root soup, dumplings filled
of fish, fruit drink and
particularly popular. Meat
One place at the Christmas
potential guest. This is a



Photo courtesy of Daniël Trusiewicz

ics attend a Christmas Mass.

celebrations

the same rituals as Catholics,
s.
ould have a family service
reciting poems or acting the
the Bible. Children often get
pared by Sunday Schools.
ould be based on the stories
and carols would be sung in

Christmas is a family reunion.
for this occasion and are even
think it is really important
ated, because it reminds us
an so that sinners may have

Australia: Christmas falls during summer for Australians

Rod Benson is an ethicist and director of public theology for the Tinsley Institute, based at Morling College in Sydney, Australia. He is a former church planter and pastor. He is married with three sons and attends Dural Baptist Church.

Significance of Christmas

Australia lies south of the equator, and Christmas falls in the middle of summer. The weather can be sweltering, there is often bush-fire smoke in the air and winter Christmas traditions seem strangely out of place. Yet most Australians persevere with the traditional trappings of the festive season.

Although secularists and multiculturalists have tried to abolish public expressions of the Christian tradition of Christmas in Australia, in recent years, there has been plenty of evidence that Jesus is the reason for the season. Nativity scenes appear in shopping malls, homes are adorned with Christmas lights, people say “Happy Christmas” to one another and there are nationally televised Christmas concerts featuring traditional carols and an implicit evocation of the biblical Incarnation narrative.

Baptist church celebrations

For Australian Baptists, Christmas is a time for spiritual formation, outreach and community service.

For example, Small Boat Big Sea, an innovative missionary community based on Sydney’s northern beaches, kicked off Advent in 2009 with a labyrinth

service (prayer walk), and the next two Sunday services will address different aspects of waiting on Jesus.

Blakehurst Baptist Church, a Sydney suburban church, will host a “stations of Christmas” event, where participants walk from house to house as elements of the Christmas story are presented in drama and song.

Kenmore Baptist Church, a large Brisbane church, presented a contemporary version of the Christmas story set to adapted lyrics from pop songs such as “I’m All Shook Up” and “Graceland,” emphasizing God’s gracious intervention in human history to save us.

Dural Baptist Church, of which I am a member, has a range of Christmas activities, including three fund-raising projects.

We will help develop Futsal, a small-court soccer program, in Solomon Islands, building a stronger sense of community through sport. Dural introduced Futsal to the Solomons in 2001.

We also will contribute to a Baptist World Aid Australia ... project in Solomon Islands focused on employment, HIV/AIDS education and teacher training. And we will support a Baptist World Aid Australia project in Cambodia, providing micro-finance to help people disabled by landmines to achieve economic independence.



Photo courtesy of Rod Benson

Away from church, there also are opportunities for meaningful outreach. A friend of mine directs an [prenatal] ward in a major Sydney hospital and last Christmas, commissioned a series of scenes from children’s stories for the hospital — “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe;” “The Wind in the Willows;” and “Little Women.”

My favorite thing

What I love most about Christmas, apart from the delicious rest and food, is a fresh awareness of the depth and extravagance of God’s love and the reminder that with God, the impossible becomes history. Christmas never fails to deliver.

Italy: Christmas all about family reunions, special meals, faith, welcoming lonely people or immigrants in Italy

Anna Maffei is president of the Christian Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy, which includes 116 churches and 6,200 members.



Photo courtesy of Anna Maffei

Significance of Christmas

Christmas is the feast of the family in Italy. It is felt very much as the occasion for the extended family to meet together, starting from the evening of Dec. 24.

Special meals are prepared and shared. There is exchange of gifts and visiting. Before Christmas, one tries to reach the highest number of relatives and friends by phone or mail to exchange information and wishes. In our country, which is massively and culturally a Catholic country, even those who never attend the Mass may choose to attend a special Mass, either on Dec. 24 — the midnight Mass — or on Dec. 25. Of course, before Christmas, there is a lot of shopping going on, the same as it happens everywhere in the Western world.

Baptist church celebrations

The Baptists celebrate Christmas in a similar way as the others but concentrate more on the Christian meaning of the feast.

It is not only a family-reunion holiday but also a community feast when we try to welcome the lonely people or immigrants and be family for them.

We may eat together, for instance, or play together a special Christmas play.

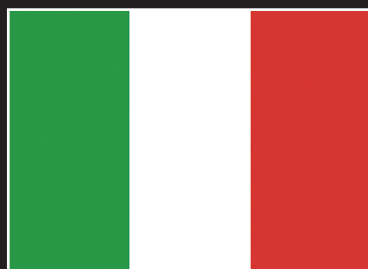
Christmas is also the children’s feast, and many churches organize plays on the nativity or other subjects in which to engage mainly children. In many churches, choirs sing gospel songs and carols.

My favorite thing

The atmosphere, the warmth of the family, the celebration of being together and the good food!



AUSTRALIA



ITALY



EL SALVADOR



RUSSIA



SOUTH KOREA



El Salvador: Christmas celebrations start early in Catholic society

Mauricio Vargas has lived in the United States about 20 years but has family in El Salvador and visits three or four times a year, including a visit to the San Vicente region when it was devastated by floods and mudslides associated with Hurricane Ida in November 2009. While there, he participated in a memorial service for seven children and two adult members of First Baptist Church, San Vicente, who died in the tragedy. He retired as multicultural church planting specialist for the Missouri Baptist Convention but works part time as coordinator of the convention's partnership in El Salvador, which is scheduled to end in two years. He

also works part time as multicultural minister for Concord Baptist Association in Jefferson City, Mo.

Significance of Christmas

In a word, the coming of Jesus Christ. In a Catholic society, the celebration of Christ's coming starts early in December with the posadas — a nine-day festival Dec. 16–24 symbolizing the journey to Bethlehem before Jesus' birth.

Mary and Joseph travel the streets of our city, looking for a place to rest for a night. The following day, they travel to another home and wait for the baby to be born. People sing praises during the walks, and many times, at the end of the journey, families celebrate with drinks and candies.

Baptist church celebrations

I remember well the coming of Christmas because the church began to prepare music, poems and different prayers where children

and youth participated. I still remember some of those poems that my teacher asked me to learn. We prepared to celebrate Dec. 24 in the evening service. Our parents provided us with new clothing for the special occasion. After the service, we had tamales and hot chocolate. For me, the best part was that the people from our mission points came to spend the night with us at the church. It was an extended church family celebration.

My favorite thing

When I was growing up, my sisters were in a Baptist college in Santa Ana. I really looked forward to seeing them coming home. Our church was the center of activities in December, and we really enjoyed being part of the Christmas plays and music. We did not receive many toys, but we always had some home cooking that my mother did, like special turkey and sweet tamales. Family has been important to me, so to see all my three sisters and two brothers was a celebration that we still have as family.



Photo courtesy of Mauricio Vargas

South Korea:

Christmas relatively new for Koreans

Billy Kim is pastor emeritus of Suwon Central Baptist Church and was the first Asian to serve as president of the Baptist World Alliance, a position he held from 2000 to 2005.

Significance of Christmas

Christmas is called "Sung-Tan-Jul" in Korean.

South Korea's Christmas began at the beginning of the 20th century. It was introduced in South Korea by the Christian missionaries from Western countries, and for many years, the only people who celebrated it were those who had turned to the Christian faith.

But now, Christmas becomes one of a few holidays that are celebrated in South Korea, and not only Christians are enjoying this holiday but also non-Christians.

Many Western customs in observing Christmas have been adopted by Koreans. Besides exchanging gifts, they decorate their houses with colorful lights and ornaments, and in some places, there are even community Christmas trees.

During the holiday season, The Salva-



sxc.hu

tion Army rings the bells in front of their red kettles, as well.

One of the common traditions to South Korea is "Christmas cakes." Generally people buy the cakes and light candles to celebrate Christmas. Artists and entertainers run Christmas-related shows and Christmas-themed performances. Most churches will have their own special Christmas worship service on Christmas morning and on Christmas Eve, too. Lots of church activities are going on during the Christmas season, including children's night, volunteering work and music program like Christmas cantatas and choir concerts. Indeed South Korea's Christmas customs are similar to other, Western, countries. However, there is no special meal for Christmas in South Korea.

Baptist church celebrations

There is no particular distinctiveness among Christian denominations in South Korea.

My favorite thing

Christmas, especially in South Korea, has become associated with love and mercy, so that people usually take good care of the poor, especially during this season.

Russia: Christmas comes twice a year for Baptists, others in Russia

William Yoder is media spokesman and liaison to the English- and German-speaking communities for the external-relations department of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian-Baptists.

Significance of Christmas

Russians are only now re-learning Christmas. There was no official Christmas holiday in Russia between 1925 and 1992. Its reintroduction also is greatly hampered by the fact that Christmas, the new year and usually also Easter need to be celebrated twice. Vladimir Lenin, the first head of state of the Soviet Union, adopted the Western, Gregorian calendar — introduced in 1582 — in 1918, but the Orthodox Church continues to celebrate by the Julian one, which presently has Dec. 25 falling on what the Western calendar regards as Jan. 7. Presently the Julian calendar — introduced in 46 B.C. — is 13 days behind the Gregorian one.

As a consequence of the Soviet era, New Year's — the Gregorian, worldwide one — remains the biggest celebration of the year. December 25 is not an official holiday in Russia, and most Russian celebration occurs in the first two weeks of January. Add that the Russian economy grinds to a halt between the days of the New Year's (Jan. 1) and the "Old New Year's" celebrations on Jan. 14.

Baptist church celebrations

The churches of Western origin, which remain primarily the homes of ethnic minorities — the Catholics, Lutherans and

Mennonites, for example — celebrate almost exclusively on Dec. 25. Others, like the Baptists, who stress their Russianness, celebrate twice. How Baptists manage the calendar spaghetti is dependent upon the creativity of the local Baptist leadership. A friend reports that in his Baptist church, the last hours before midnight on both Dec. 24 and Dec. 31 are spent in church on one's knees in prayer.

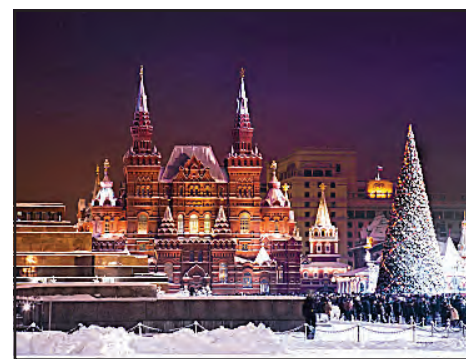
In his Baptist congregation, the family celebration occurs on the evening of the 24th, and the year's most special church service occurs on the 25th. Baptists often use Jan. 7 as an opportunity to evangelize, attempting to invite persons off the street to attend a church event that day.

Caroling is done on the street on the evening of Dec. 24 or Jan. 6. This occurred even during the late Soviet period, but the caroling was done on the move without remaining at one location in order to minimize difficulties with the authorities.

My favorite thing

Christmas gifts remain modest in Russia; there is no monthlong shopping spree to speak of. Advent, the last four Sundays prior to Christmas, also is rarely commemorated. But there are gifts for Baptist children on the evening of the 24th, and this is indeed the most special time of the year for the vast majority of Baptist children and their parents.

The evening of Jan. 6 is a terrific time for Baptists like me to visit an Orthodox church. It's their version of an all-night hymn sing. The candles glow and the drawn-out, almost sad and highly melodious music of the Orthodox tradition reverberates until late in the morning hours. Indeed the same occurs at Orthodox Easter.



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KIM

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Burmese Christians fear civil war, consequences

RANGOON, Burma — Civilians in two ethnic minority states with large Christian populations fear their lives may be in danger as skirmishes between rebels and a Burmese junta bent on instilling Buddhist nationalism threaten to escalate into war.

"It is likely that the military junta will carry out a military offensive against ethnic armed groups now that the elections are over," Nang Mya Naddy, ethnic program coordinator of the Democratic Voice of Burma radio program told Compass Direct News.

Christians fear full-scale civil war in Burma (also known as Myanmar) could result in either ethnic cleansing or total subjugation of minorities. Independent media reports suggest the possibility of a major clash between ethnic armies and government troops is highest in Kachin and Karen states.

Persecution of Christians in Burma is part of a wider campaign against ethnic minority tribes to create a uniform society in which the only accepted religion is Buddhism, according to the British *Daily Telegraph*, citing a 2007 government memo circulated in Karen state giving instructions on how to drive Christians out of the state.

Burma's ethnic minorities, who inhabit states along Burma's border with Thailand, China and India, have long demanded independence or autonomy.

It is estimated that of the 1.2 million people in Kachin state, around 1 million are Christian. About 40 percent of the 3.5 million people in Karen state are estimated to be Christian.

The Burmese junta, dominated by an ethnic Burman Buddhist majority, also seems to be preparing for war in the predominantly Buddhist state of Shan.

Four Algerian Christians to appeal prison sentences

LARBAA NATH IRATHEN, Algeria — Four Christian men in Algeria will appeal a court decision to hand them suspended prison sentences for worshipping without a permit, saying the verdict could have repercussions for all the country's churches.

The correctional court of Larbaa Nath Irathen, about 27 kilometers (17 miles) from the capital of Tizi Ouzou province, gave two-month suspended prison sentences to four Christian leaders of a small Protestant church Dec. 12.

Mahmoud Yahou, the pastor of the church and one of the four, also was charged with hosting a foreigner without official permission. The court gave him a three-month suspended sentence and a fine of \$130, reported French TV station France 24 on its website.

The prosecutor had asked for one-year prison sentences for each defendant. Although the suspended sentences mean the four Christians will not serve prison time, Yahou told Compass Direct News that he and the three other men plan to appeal the verdict because the outcome of their case could affect all Protestant churches of the country, none of which have official permission to operate.

"If they close us, they can close all the gatherings and churches that exist in Algeria," Yahou said. "They could all be closed."

Armenians anxious about restrictions on religion

YEREVAN, Armenia — Concern is mounting among human rights defenders and many of Armenia's religious minority communities about proposed amendments to several laws imposing new restrictions on and punishments for religious activity.

The state would conduct a "theological expert examination" before granting registration to religious communities, while those that fail to provide full information about all their activities could be liquidated. Sharing faith is a particular target, with penalties for violations of up to three months' imprisonment.

"If adopted, they will create two kinds of citizens in Armenia — those of the Armenian Apostolic Church on one side, and then the rest," Pastor Rene Leonian of the Evangelical Church told Forum 18 News Service (F18). "It is difficult for us to accept in an independent and democratic state that there can be two classes of citizen." The amendments, prepared by the Justice Ministry, only became known when placed on the Council of Europe's Venice Commission website Nov. 30.

"Such secrecy and silence is unacceptable," Larisa Minasyan of Armenia's Open Society Foundation told F18.

New year, new goals

12 spiritual goals to make 2011 best year yet

By Judy Woodward Bates
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

As the new year rolls around, many folks will make resolutions to change or improve something in their lives. A couple of goals that make every top 10 list are get out of debt and lose weight. But what about spiritual goals? With the Bible as our guide, here are 12 tips and corresponding Scriptures to help you make 2011 your best year ever:

▶ Commit yourself fully to Jesus Christ. God wants more than a relationship; He wants total commitment. "Happy are those who keep His decrees and seek Him with all their heart" (Ps. 119:2).

'Seek first the Kingdom'

▶ Put your commitment to Christ above all else. Only when Christ has first place in your life can the rest of your life be in the right order. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you," Jesus said (Matt. 6:33).

▶ Put others' needs ahead of your wants. If we look at Jesus' life, then we realize that your time on earth is not about personal comfort but about being a comfort to others. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve," Jesus said (Matt. 10:45a).

▶ Spend time daily in the Word and prayer. The living Word wants you to spend time with Him. Remember that prayer is a two-way conversation; don't just talk to God — sit quietly and wait for Him to speak to you. "How happy is the man ... [whose] delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night" (Ps. 1:1-2).

▶ Attend church regularly. As a member of the family of God, it's important to spend time with and worship with your fellow believers. "And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, not staying away from our meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other" (Heb. 10:24-25a).

▶ Become a blessing to your pastor and church staff. According to a survey of 1,050 pastors conducted by The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, 71 percent of pastors said they are burned out and struggle with depression and fatigue on a weekly and even daily basis. There is no end of volunteers to criticize pastors; be one of the rare few who encourage them. "Now we ask you, brothers, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you and to regard them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thess. 5:12-13a).

▶ Learn your spiritual gifts and use them in specific places of service. Until you find that perfect fit, just serve wherever and however you can. You're far more likely to find shoes that fit by trying them on rather than by staring at them through the window. "Based on the gift each one has received, use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).

▶ Consciously seek opportunities to tell others about Jesus. The day you accepted Christ's offer of salvation, you volunteered for service in the army of God. And that means active duty — you're on assignment: "In Christ, God was reconciling the

world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor. 5:19).

▶ Confess your need for Christ's control over your finances. Everything you claim as your own is simply on loan to you from the true Owner. Commit to follow His guidance in managing all that's been entrusted to you. Only through the leadership of the Holy Spirit can you properly manage money. "Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much, and whoever is unrighteous in very little is also unrighteous in much. So if you have not been faithful with the unrighteous money, who will trust you with what is genuine? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to someone else, who will give you what is your own? ... You can't be slaves to both God and money" (Luke 16:10-13).

▶ Determine to live within your income. Trust God as your Provider, and refuse to create credit card or any other unnecessary debt. "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Phil. 4:11b).

'Do not owe anyone'

▶ Begin to eliminate all credit card debt. Concentrate on paying off credit cards, focusing first on the one with the lowest balance. Pay your credit card bills on or before their due dates. "Do not owe anyone anything" (Rom. 13:8a).

▶ Faithfully tithe to your church and trust God's Word for His provision. Like a bucket under a spout, tithing aligns believers to receive God's blessings. "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

Birmingham's Passport receives \$750,000 grant

Birmingham-based Passport Inc. received the largest donation in its 19-year history in the form of its first freestanding grant for its new program Echo Initiative.

"Christmas came early for our office this year," said Passport President David Burroughs. "We are very excited about the ability to implement the carefully crafted vision that this grant makes possible."

The \$750,000 Lilly Endowment grant will enable the ministry originally conceived as a summer camp for students in grades 6-12 to produce needed resources it cannot currently provide, said Colleen Burroughs, executive vice president of Passport and wife of David. David and Colleen Burroughs co-founded Passport while they were both still in seminary.

The Echo Initiative, which refers to God's call as a repeated sound throughout a Christian's life, will seek to broaden the conversation of call beyond paid vocational ministries to reach into the daily lives of



DAVID AND COLLEEN BURROUGHS

children, youth and adults. It will produce tangible resources such as Vacation Bible School and retreat materials designed around the question "How can I be a minister as a follower of Christ today?"

The initiative will include three phases:

▶ An education initiative will produce resources for children, youth and adults designed to be flexible enough to allow for varied settings but cohesive enough to connect the conversation of God's call over time.

▶ An empowerment initiative will include training of college-aged leaders for annual Echo events for youth and minigrants for practicum experiences through PASSPORTexpeditions, a program that provides students with individual opportunities around a specific interest like ministry to victims of sex trafficking or addressing poverty through Passport's Watering Malawi well-drilling initiative.

▶ An encouragement initiative will provide professional development support for youth ministers both to reaffirm their personal vocational calls and to cultivate a culture of calling with students in their ministries.

The Echo Initiative is particularly interested in offering the new resources in Spanish and is working out relationships to enable not only word-by-word translation from English but also considering cultural context, Colleen Burroughs said. (ABP, TAB)

Historical Highlights

from previous issues of *The Alabama Baptist*

Compiled by Kathleen Prude

50 Years Ago December 1960

Three Ordained, Called As Pastors: Clyde H. Dailey, Thomas E. Hosmer and L.N. Oswalt, an uncle and two nephews who surrendered to preach in 1959, have been ordained and called as pastors of Alabama churches. Dailey was ordained at Woodstock Baptist Church at the request of Greenpond Baptist Church, where he has been called. Hosmer was ordained at New Highland Baptist Church, Hueytown, at the request of Antioch Baptist Church, and Oswalt was ordained at Lipscomb Baptist Church at the request of Abernant Baptist Church, Vance.

40 Years Ago December 1970

Samford Trustees Elected: Two north Alabama business leaders have been elected to serve on the Samford University board of trustees. C.M. Adamson, of Anniston, district manager for Alabama Power Co., and Judge James H. Crow Jr., of Decatur, vice president of Monsanto Co., were named to three-year terms on the 36-member board.

30 Years Ago December 1980

DOM Honored: John Chafin, director of missions for Columbia Baptist Association since 1960, was the speaker for annual "M" Night services held at First Baptist Church, Dothan, with more than 850 in attendance.

A reception honoring Chafin and his wife, Hazel, was held afterward.

They were presented with a new car and lumber to add a room to their trailer in the Pleasant Plains community, where they will reside when he retires at the end of the year.

20 Years Ago December 1990

Church Benefits From Estate: Capshaw Baptist Church recently received a check from the estate of Helen Clem as she requested prior to her death in 1979.

A member of Capshaw Baptist for 62 years, she worked with children in many positions of leadership. Concern for young people also prompted her in 1950 to give to Limestone Baptist Association a 30-acre tract of land in the Cap-

shaw community that is now an associational camp.

10 Years Ago December 2000

SBOM Seeks Volunteers in Northwest Alabama: After 21 years as a pastor and 21 more as director of missions for Winston Baptist Association, Blanton Adair is taking on a new task: boosting participation in volunteer missions among northwest Alabama Baptists by becoming the region's first volunteer missions consultant. Adair's job will be to travel from church to church in Blount, Cullman and Winston counties and motivate members to consider volunteering for missions work with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

POSITION: KENTUCKY BAPTIST CONVENTION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SEEKING: To fill the position of executive director to provide visionary leadership to the Kentucky Baptist Convention. The executive director will give direction to the KBC Mission Board ministries and staff, promote the ministries of the KBC and Cooperative Program, conduct all fiduciary responsibilities of the office and build working relationships with Kentucky Baptists and all partners. A minimum of a master of divinity degree from an accredited institution or equivalent is required. Please submit resumes no later than January 3, 2011, by e-mail to: kbcsearch@gmail.com, or by mail to: KBC Executive Director Search Committee, P.O. Box 460, Elizabethtown, KY 42702-0460.

Paid Advertising

99 exit from NAMB at end of year as part of downsizing

One-third of the North American Mission Board's (NAMB) staff will be leaving at the end of the year as a result of retirement incentives and other downsizing of the Southern Baptist entity. On Dec. 10, NAMB recognized retirees who are taking advantage of incentives offered at the beginning of October.

Of the 99 people leaving, 81 are taking an early retirement package Ezell announced Oct. 1. Employees aged 54 and older were eligible for the package.

NAMB also trimmed a number of services and support staff positions. These additional reductions

brought the total number of year-end departures to 99.

In October, Ezell told NAMB's board of trustees he is undertaking a four-step process: re-focus NAMB; build a strategy; develop the staff necessary to execute the strategy; and implement the strategy. The downsizing is part of a re-focus effort that will narrow the number of activities the entity undertakes.

"I have the very strong conviction that NAMB has been trying to do too much in too many different arenas," Ezell stated in a Nov. 22 e-mail to the executive directors of state Baptist conventions. (BP)

Dallas church starts Grinch alert

At the time of year when "Happy Holidays" supplants the traditional "Merry Christmas" at various businesses, a website — GrinchAlert.com — is giving consumers an opportunity to register their compliments or complaints about which seasonal greeting they see or hear at stores or in their advertising.

Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, announced the website's launch by saying that "naughty" and "nice" lists would be broadcast every morning at 7:40 until Christmas Day on the 100,000-watt church-affiliated KCBI-FM (90.9).

"I wanted to do something positive to encourage businesses to ac-

knowledge Christmas and not bow to the strident voices of a minority who object to the holiday," Jeffress said in a news release Dec. 6 recounting how several businesses nationwide reportedly have removed Christmas trees and are avoiding the traditional Merry Christmas verbiage.

Jeffress subsequently appeared on Fox News Channel's "Fox and Friends" and CNN's "American Morning" to discuss the website. (BP)

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads.

Clay Association moderator works to involve everyone

By Anna Swindle
Correspondent, *The Alabama Baptist*

If you mention the name L.C. Harris to anyone in the Clay Association, they'll know who you're talking about," said Nelson Morrow, secretary/treasurer of Clay Baptist Association. "L.C. was one of the founding members of the Clay County Baptist Association, and he knows everything about the association."

And Harris — moderator of the association and pastor of Mount Olive Baptist Church, Lineville — works hard to make sure all members feel valuable.

"One thing I've learned is that we need to involve everybody — both young and old," said Harris, who has been a part of Clay Association for more than 60 years. "There's sometimes a tendency to put old people on the shelf, but to watch the glow in their eyes when they know they're wanted and needed, that's so important."

'Like a family'

Mount Olive Baptist is practicing what its preacher is preaching, ensuring that each member — many of whom are senior citizens — is an active, contributing part of the small congregation.

"It's a close-knit fellowship, where we love one another, pray for one another, support one another and, most importantly, love the Lord," Harris said. "With so few of us, it's like a family."

In keeping with the "family" comparison, Mount Olive has chosen to structure its Sunday

School classes a bit differently. Instead of a designated teacher leading the class, the session is conducted in an open forum style, meaning class members are encouraged and expected to be active contributors to the discussion. In this way, Harris said, every member feels heard.

Receiving a blessing

"We share with one another, because that's what we ought to do," he said. "The older people have so many life experiences to share. If you want a blessing, get a group of senior citizens to share what the Lord has done in their lives."

In addition to looking after his church family's needs, Harris is devoted to helping his neighbors.

Harris works in the Baptist Center Thrift Store. The store takes donations and then either sells or gives away the items, depending on people's ability to pay.

"It's not to make money; it's to help people," Morrow said. "We help people in the community, but we've also sent clothes to Honduras, and the association sent \$3,200 to the Haitian relief fund."

This charitable spirit is a distinct characteristic of the churches that belong to Clay Association, Harris said.

"It all starts here," he said. "We may be small but we're big in heart. If something in the area needs to be done, just let it be known and it will happen. These are the easiest folks in the world to work with." ❧

MARKET PLACE

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT PLACING A CLASSIFIED AD, CALL THE ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT OF *THE ALABAMA BAPTIST*, 205-870-4720, EXT. 102, OR E-MAIL ADS@THEALABAMABAPTIST.ORG. COPY DEADLINE IS TWO WEEKS BEFORE PUBLICATION.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR: Following God's leadership and the prayers of the members of First Baptist Church, Union Grove, we are seeking God's person to become our full-time pastor. Please send resumes to: P.O. Box 125, Union Grove, AL 35175.

MINISTER OF MUSIC: El Bethel Baptist Church is looking for a part-time minister of music to lead adult choir. Seeking someone to join our team who is Christ-centered and ready to grow with us. If interested, please send resume to: El Bethel Baptist Church, P.O. Box 506, Chancellor, AL 36316. Call 334-684-9544 or e-mail: elbethel@centurytel.net.

STUDENT MINISTER: Circlewood Baptist Church is currently seeking a full-time student minister. Please send resumes to: Circlewood Baptist Church, 2201 Loop Road, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405.

CHILDREN'S MINISTER: Circlewood Baptist Church is currently seeking a full-time children's minister. Please send resumes to: Circlewood Baptist Church,

2201 Loop Road, Tuscaloosa, AL 35405.

BUSINESS

CHURCH SIGNS: Reliable Signs offers design, fabrication, installation and service. All types of signs from electronic messaging to traditional. Ask about our exterior light maintenance service. Statewide coverage. Christian-owned. Church references available. www.reliablesigns.com. 800-729-6844, 205-664-0955.

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STEEPLES, ET CETERA: New pews, re-finishing of pews, stained glass windows, baptistries and steeples. Single source for all church furnishings. More than 20 years experience serving churches exclusively. No job too small. Locally owned company. Please call Terry Barnes toll-free 1-888-980-6161. Visit our Web site at www.steeplesetc.com.

CONSTRUCTION

CHURCH BUILDING PROJECTS: Let Webb Builders help your church expand its facilities. Large or small projects. Your

plans or use our custom-design building services. State licensed with 25+ years experience. Call Webb Builders, Inc., 334-285-9302. Millbrook, Ala. Numerous church references available.

CONFERENCES/RETREATS

CHRISTIAN RETREAT: Stoney Creek, new 52-acre Christian-based retreat facility perfect for family reunion rentals, church gatherings, weddings and receptions. Amenities galore. Located in Vinemont, Ala. Reservations: 256-338-5583. www.stoneycreekalabama.com.

TRAVEL/VACATION

LOG CABIN: Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log onto www.paradisevista.net to see pictures. Call for reservations at 205-540-3600.

WINTERFEST IN THE SMOKIES: Peaceful mountain cabins, fun in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg. 1-8 BR cabins, great Web site, www.edencrest.net, 1-888-236-3105. Try Kara Kottage, 2 BRs, 2 BAs, Sleeps 10. Many extras.

Want to know God?

By Evangelism office
State Board of Missions

God wants to have an intimate relationship with you. He has placed an emptiness in every person that can only be filled by God. People often seek to fill this emptiness with things other than God: material possessions, success in business, sports, alcohol, illicit drugs, immoral sex and so forth. Nothing can permanently satisfy this emptiness other than God Himself.

The problem is our sinfulness keeps us from having this relationship with God. The Bible teaches “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Our sin is separating us from a holy and just God. Moreover, God’s Word makes it clear that “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).

Our only hope rests in the love of God demonstrated in that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

As is stated, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Jesus lived a sinless life, a life totally in submission to God’s will. Christ is the spotless sacrifice to remedy our sin problem. He paid the wages of our sins by His death upon the cross. He died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day.

You can receive this salvation and have an intimate relationship with God by turning from your sins and placing your faith in Christ alone. “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10).

This very moment you can have eternal life if you will:

1. Admit you are a sinner.
2. Be willing to turn from your sins.
3. Believe Jesus died for you on the cross and rose from the grave.
4. Through prayer invite Jesus to be your Lord and Savior.

Princeton doctor provides health care to Black Belt, receives national recognition

By Anna Swindle
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When Dr. Sandra Ford was 8 years old, she witnessed a black woman’s death in a doctor’s waiting room. At that time, waiting rooms — along with many other places — were segregated and white patients typically got better, faster access to care.

“At 8 years old, it impacted my life so profoundly that I asked God to enable me to become a doctor so I could ... help people like that woman,” said Ford, an internist at Princeton Baptist Medical Center in Birmingham. “Then after 25 years of practicing [medicine], I was reminded of my promise when my husband and I read an article in *The Birmingham News* called ‘The Black Belt: Alabama’s Third World.’”

The article prompted her and husband Henry to initiate an outreach to the region, and the Spirit of Luke Charitable Foundation — which sponsors A Promise to Help (APTH), a nonprofit working toward eliminating health care disparities in the Black Belt — was born. Resources began to come together in a way she said could only have been from God, and soon their organization had access to a mobile clinic.

Once a month, dozens of volunteers travel from Birmingham to the Black Belt to work with the Spirit of Luke. Several Birmingham churches have adopted communities in the region, but the Fords said there are still about five areas that have yet to be adopted.

With the help of more than 3,500 volunteers over the past six years, the ministry has been able to provide health care and medication for more than 10,000 Black Belt residents and seen hundreds accept Christ. In addition to offering health care, APTH provides cloth-

ing, food, school supplies and more.

“We’ve had volunteers from all walks of life, from as far away as Alaska and Cuba and South America and from 22 different denominations the last time I counted,” Henry Ford, executive director of the Spirit of Luke and an ordained minister, said. “God has a special place for the poor and forgotten and has put it on thousands of people’s hearts.”

For David Bivin, a member of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, volunteering with the Spirit of Luke has become a family affair. He and his family travel to the Black Belt with the Fords

about three times a year. Bivin said it has made a profound impact on their lives.

“A lot of people want to participate in missions, and not everyone can go to South America or Swaziland, but just about everyone can take a Saturday and go a couple of hours from where they live and go to basically a different world,”

he said. “So we’ve really tried to encourage our friends and people we go to church with. You don’t have to go halfway around the world to make a difference.”

And others are starting to take notice of the need and the work being done. General Mills’ Feeding Dreams program recognized Sandra Ford as its Community Cham-



Photo courtesy of David Bivin

MINISTRY — Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Birmingham, members entertain children during one of the church’s trips to Alabama’s Black Belt region to work with Dr. Sandra Ford’s Spirit of Luke Charitable Foundation. In addition to helping with medical needs, Dawson Memorial members feed families and assist with construction projects.

pin for Birmingham. Though she didn’t win the title of Grand Champion and the \$10,000 grant that came along with it, she was thankful for the nomination.

“We’re very grateful to General Mills for giving us the exposure,” she said. “I look[ed] at this as a win whether or not we actually [got] the award, because just the exposure for the Black Belt and for the Spirit of Luke has been amazing. We are winners already.”

Still the Fords said the money would have been a huge boost to the ministry. One of their most pressing needs is a van to use as both volunteer transportation and a way to bring people from especially remote areas to the mobile

clinic to have access to care and other resources.

They also want to reach out to an area of Wilcox County where residents only have a primitive sewer system, severely impacting their quality of life.

Offering help, hope

“You wouldn’t believe you could go an hour or two from Birmingham and witness people living with hardly a sewer system,” said Sandra Ford, who is also an ordained minister. “We hope we can eventually help them to get their current system to a more functional place.”

For more information, visit www.spiritofluke.com or call 205-786-4029.



FORD

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Photo courtesy of Logan Baptist Church

LOGAN BAPTIST CHURCH BURNS NOTE

Logan Baptist Church in West Cullman Baptist Association held a note-burning celebration Sept. 26. The church paid a \$310,000 debt in nine years for its new building and renovations in its old building. Pictured are the church’s deacons and oldest members.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 26

Explore the Bible By Jay T. Robertson

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

WHERE COMPROMISE TAKES YOU 1 Kings 11:1-13

What Part of No Isn't Clear? (1-3)

Despite all his obvious strengths, Solomon had a very evident weakness: "King Solomon loved many foreign women." This statement reminds us of an earlier description of him: "Solomon loved the Lord" (1 Kings 3:3). These were incompatible loves, since God had commanded His people not to intermarry with pagan foreigners because "they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon chose his wives from the very nations that God had prohibited, probably to form alliances with local chiefs and clan leaders. He probably rationalized it as a means of national security, but it was an act of rebellion against God. Solomon not only broke God's command not to marry foreign women but he also ignored His command against multiple wives in Deuteronomy 17:17. Intermarriage inevitably led to toleration and finally observance of Canaanite religious practices. If anyone should take these warnings seriously, then it should be the king, who leads by example. Yet Solomon apparently considered himself above the law and paid a bitter price.

What Heart Problem? (4-8)

Solomon's compromise resulted in him abandoning God. It is almost impossible in these verses to recognize the man who prayed the great dedicatory prayer at the beginning of his reign. This defection began when Solomon tolerated the presence of false gods. He did not insist that his pagan wives leave their false gods in their homeland and worship the Lord alone. He imported his wives and they imported their gods. One compromise inevitably led to another in a process of creeping idolatry. He then sponsored the presence of these pagan gods by building places of worship for them. The place where these pagan altars were built became known as "the Hill of Corruption." It lasted until it was destroyed more than 300 years later by King Josiah (2 Kings 23:13). Solomon's sin did not stop at

toleration or sponsorship. He actually bowed in worship to false gods, offering sacrifices to them. Polytheists in the ancient world tended to worship the gods of nations that had conquered their armies. Solomon, however, was the dominant power in the region. His "God" had conquered the other nations' gods. Why bow at the shrine of a less powerful god? Since the worship of most of these false gods was associated with sexual immorality, it seems clear that they appealed to something in Solomon's sinful heart. Solomon continued to attend the temple and probably did many things in the Lord's name. In reality, he was worshipping a god that looked more like him than the Bible's God. He "did not wholly follow the Lord, as David, his father, had done." The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. His heart was divided. Solomon fulfilled his religious duty outwardly but did not worship God with all of his heart, soul and might. He honored God with his lips, but his heart was far from Him.

What Might Have Been? (9-13)

God did not sit idly by while the king led the nation into spiritual rebellion by means of idolatry. God was outraged at Solomon's sin. Two things made Solomon's sin particularly outrageous. First the God of Israel had appeared to him twice. Second he could not claim that he was ignorant of God's requirements. Through the written Word, his father's instruction and God's direct intervention, he had received His standards. But all of these did not keep Solomon true to God. Solomon once again met God. God charged him with covenant unfaithfulness. The Lord had repeatedly reminded Solomon that while the Davidic covenant was unconditional, covenant blessing was contingent on obedience. Because of Solomon's rebellious attitude, judgment was sure. His sin soon would cause the nation to crash from the heights it had achieved. His idolatry would lead to idolatry among the people. Israel had begun the long road to exile, though they did not yet know that their actions entailed such consequences.

Bible Studies for Life By Dennis Sansom

Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy, Samford University

GO AND TELL Acts 8:26-39

This story records the first full conversion of a Gentile to Christianity. Many Jews already had discovered Jesus as the Messiah of Israel, but now we see the good news of Christ spreading out of Israel into Africa. The key aspect in this account is the particular Old Testament text the Ethiopian eunuch was reading and how Philip the Evangelist interpreted it. There is some question whether this is Philip the apostle or Philip the "table-waiter" of Acts 6:1-6, who had been selected and ordained to "wait on the tables" (i.e., serve the congregation's physical needs). It is more likely that this is Philip the "table-waiter," because Chapter 8 mentions that after Saul's persecution of the church in Jerusalem, everyone except the apostles scattered out of the city and Philip went to Samaria, which is north of Jerusalem. However, in verse 26, the angel told Philip to go "down from Jerusalem to Gaza," which is south of Jerusalem. Thus, though it is not conclusive, Philip the "table-waiter" is probably the figure in this story.

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Though we do not know the Ethiopian eunuch's name, we know two important things about him. He worked for the queen of Ethiopia, whose title, not name, was Candace. He served as the palace treasurer and special confidant to the queen. He knew the "ins and outs" of the kingdom's power and cultural structures and was highly respected by the queen. He took back to Ethiopia a Christian witness, and probably because of his connections, it endured, and in the fourth century, the rulers turned Ethiopia into a Christian nation. He was considered a proselyte and thus could enter the temple area, but because he was a eunuch and thus was considered "unclean," he could not enter deeper into the temple, into the Court of the Jews. Nonetheless the eunuch was part of the covenant of Abraham and, consequently, studied the Hebrew Scriptures. Moses' teachings may have entered Ethiopia as early as the eighth century before Christ.

Thus, the eunuch represents a long history of Ethiopians, schooled in the Scriptures, coming to Jerusalem to worship.

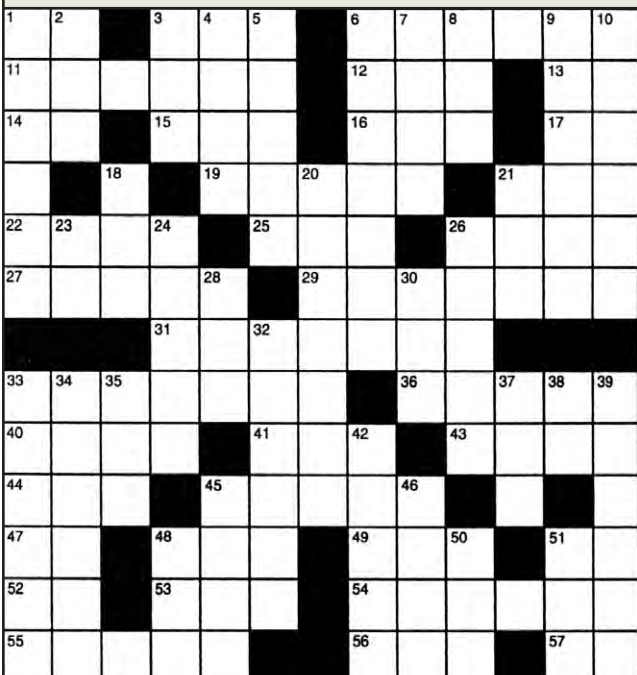
The Text

As the eunuch returned to Ethiopia, he studied one of the scrolls of the prophet Isaiah, which contained Chapter 53. While reading, he became confused about the meaning of verses 7-8. When we compare Acts 8:32-33 with Isaiah 53:7-8, we see two differences. First the wording is different. This is because Acts 8 comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint), which the eunuch was reading. Though the overall meaning of the Hebrew and Greek texts is the same, some emphases are different. For instance, Isaiah 53:8 says, "Who could have imagined his future," whereas Acts 8:33 says, "Who can describe his generation?" Second the last part of Isaiah 53:8 is not in Acts 8:33, which says "stricken for the transgression of my people." The Acts quote leaves off the last part of the Septuagint verse 8, "because of the iniquities of my people he was led to death." We do not know why it was omitted; however, in all likelihood, the eunuch read it as well. He did not know who could fulfill such a description and whose death atoned for humanity's iniquities. If there were a such a person, then salvation would be possible for all, because only this One, who would be guiltless, would, in fact, be able to pay the debt for all, who are guilty. Philip knew who fulfilled this prophecy. He told the eunuch of the "good news [which means gospel] of Jesus," that He was unjustly tried and convicted by the Sanhedrin and Pilate; beaten and crucified as a common thief; and after three days, raised from the dead, confirming to witnesses that He is the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. After Philip interpreted the passage this way, the eunuch saw the connection between the person of Isaiah 53 and Jesus. He then asked to be baptized. He was baptized to become a proselyte and now is baptized into the gospel to become a witness of it back in Ethiopia.

The Alabama Baptist will not publish an issue Dec. 30. Sunday School lessons for Jan. 2 will be available at www.thealabamabaptist.org.

Christian Crossword

By Janet W. Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

- Yes. (Spanish)
- Hit sharply.
- The promise made of none _____. (Rom. 4:14)
- I ____ thee by God, that thou torment me not. (Mark 5:7)
- Chinese pagoda.
- Howl, O Heshbon, for ____ is spoiled. (Jer. 49:3)
- French article.
- With. (German)
- 60 minutes. (pl.; abbr.)
- Sierra Leone. (abbr.)
- The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a _____. (Matt. 1:20)
- Ga. capital. (abbr.)
- Frog's kin.
- No room for them in the _____. (Luke 2:7)
- Heap.
- A woman that hath a familiar spirit at _____. (1 Sam. 28:7)
- Who made me a judge or a ____ over you? (Luke 12:14)
- In the ____ (pl.) of the book it is written of me. (Heb. 10:7)
- Dip thy morsel in the _____. (Ruth 2:14)

- The name of the Lord is a strong _____. (Prov. 18:10)
- ____, which was the son of Seth. (Luke 3:38)
- The 13th letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- If ye shall ask any thing in my _____, I will do it. (John 14:14)
- Serving. (abbr.)
- So Hiram gave Solomon ____ trees. (1 Kings 5:10)
- Continent. (abbr.)
- Light brown.
- God, which hath not turned away my prayer, ____ his mercy from me. (Ps. 66:20)
- Symbol for gold.
- The children of Gad called the altar _____. (Josh. 22:34)
- How terrible ____ thou in thy works! (Ps. 66:3)
- Watching thereunto with all ____ supplication for all _____. (Eph. 6:18)
- So he that getteth riches ____ shall ____ them. (Jer. 17:11)
- ____ (Kookie) Byrnes.
- Shoe width.

Down

- All the saints ____ you. (2 Cor. 13:13)

- Chemical suffix.
- Alcoholic drink.
- Dry.
- Lab culture dish.
- The month ____, which is the seventh month. (1 Kings 8:2)
- They ... went their ways, one to his ____, another to his merchandise. (Matt. 22:5)
- Foreign Agricultural Service. (abbr.)
- He ... entered into the ____, and told Paul. (Acts 23:16)
- Cain was a ____ of the ground. (Gen. 4:2)
- He feigned himself ____ in their hands. (1 Sam. 21:13)
- Who for the joy that was set before him ____ the cross. (Heb. 12:2)
- ____ and abet.
- Poti-pherah priest of _____. (Gen. 41:45)
- The fourth part of a cab of ____ dung. (2 Kings 6:25)
- Receipt of goods. (abbr.)
- Animal doctor.
- That ye shall weep and _____. (John 16:20)
- Giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker _____. (1 Pet. 3:7)
- Whom thou wouldst not let Israel _____. (2 Chron. 20:10)
- Egg drink.
- And my wrath shall ____ hot. (Ex. 22:24)
- Printer's measure.
- Because they ____ to do judgment. (Prov. 21:7)
- Minister's residence.
- Lord dost thou not ____? (Luke 10:40)
- Whither have ye made a ____ to day? (1 Sam. 27:10)
- The 23rd letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- I will ____ evil beasts out of the land. (Lev. 26:6).
- Did eat.



World Religion

Compiled from Wire Services

Anglican diocese in favor of same-sex blessings wins dispute

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — A Canadian appeals court has ruled in favor of an Anglican diocese in a property dispute with congregations opposed to same-sex blessings.

In a unanimous decision released Nov. 15, British Columbia Court of Appeal Justice Mary Newbury, writing for a three-judge panel, dismissed an appeal by four breakaway parishes against a 2009 lower court ruling.

Newbury said the dissident clergy of the four parishes in the Vancouver-based diocese of New Westminster cannot remove themselves from their bishop's oversight and the diocesan structure and retain the right to use properties that are held for purposes of Anglican ministry in Canada.

The diocese has begun to replace the clergy of the four Vancouver-area churches, whose properties are worth an estimated \$20 million. One of the churches, St. John's Shaughnessy, is widely considered one of Canada's wealthiest parishes.

Clergy and trustees of the four churches, which split from the Anglican Church of Canada in 2002 when the diocese authorized a liturgy for blessing same-sex couples, had asked the court to give them control over the properties.

Those who left joined a breakaway group called the Anglican Network in Canada, which they say is the true, orthodox Anglican Church.

The Nov. 15 decision could set a precedent for similar cases across Canada, where gay "marriage" is legal. Six out of 30 Anglican dioceses in Canada make some provisions for same-gender unions.

Four Ghanaian ministerial students killed in bus crash

KUMASI, Ghana — Baptists in Ghana are mourning the deaths of four ministerial students killed Dec. 11 in a bus crash while on their way to a classmate's wedding.

Twelve more passengers were injured — two critically — when the bus owned by Ghana Baptist University College crashed into a stalled truck loaded with teak on a road between the school's main campus in Kumasi and Ghana's capital and largest city, Accra.

An online news service in Ghana reported that officials at the college confirmed that three students died at the scene and a fourth died later at a hospital.

Acting Register Ayim Nayko Amanfo identified the dead as Felix Owusu Ansah of Christ Baptist Church, Kumasi; George Bofo Nyamson of Miracle Baptist Church, Ghana's Western Region; Andrews Dorwunah, of Sunyani; and Francis Owusu Adjei of First Baptist Church, Tema.

All four were studying toward the bachelor of theology degree at the university's school of theology and ministry.

Ghana Baptist University College is one of the country's newest universities.

Sponsored by the Ghana Baptist Convention, the school opened in 2006 alongside the Ghana Baptist Theological Seminary in Abuakwa.

The university later added two other campuses in the former headquarters of the Ghana Baptist Convention in Kumasi and Accra.

Support of Palestinian people not anti-Israel, Mikhail says

KELLER, Texas — Theology that equates the modern state of Israel with the Israel of biblical prophecy has caused some evangelical Christians to let eschatology trump ethics when it comes to the Middle East, a Palestinian-American Christian told a recent interfaith gathering at a Texas Baptist church.

Speaking at the Global Faith Forum at NorthWood Church, Keller, Texas, Henry Mikhail rejected the notion that support for the Palestinian people makes a person anti-Israel.

"What I am against — and what most Palestinian evangelical Arabs are against — is not Israel itself, but unjust and oppressive Israeli policies," he said.

The Jerusalem-born Arab now serves on a peace-and-justice work group of the Reformed Church of America's General Synod Council.

Belief that God has a prophetic role for the modern nation of Israel has caused some evangelicals to turn a blind eye to the suffering of Palestinians, Mikhail said.

"Because of American evangelicals' embrace of the current state as the Israel of prophecy, they have supported policies that are harsh and oppressive — even against Christians, which is very ironic," he said.

HEART OF MISSIONS ...

Members of **First Baptist Church, Florence**, used the holiday season to do several missions projects for people in their community and around the world.

On Nov. 17, members of the Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association church turned in approximately 200 Samaritan's Purse shoeboxes that contained hygiene items and gifts for children worldwide.

In the Nov. 21 morning service, Senior Pastor Ric Camp gave attendees \$5 and a blessing card on behalf of the church and asked them to give the money and card to someone in the community. Each card had written on it, "You have been blessed; now be a blessing. You have received free of charge; give free of charge. Matthew 10:8b." The cards, which were Camp's idea, also contained contact information for First, Florence.

The next day, Sunday School classes turned in 116 boxes filled with a complete Thanksgiving meal. The boxes were given to needy families who came to a church-sponsored dinner Nov. 23. More than 40 people indicated they

made a salvation decision during an invitation given at the dinner.

Following the morning service Dec. 5, First, Florence, held a blood drive in honor of church members whose 16-month-old son has cancer. The church surpassed its goal of collecting 25 units of blood by collecting 32 units.

Nine members of **Southside Baptist Church, Fayette**, led by Pastor Robert Parrish, went to Belmopan, Belize, this summer to work with Belize Vo-Tech, a ministry of Global Outreach International in Tupelo, Miss.

Belize Vo-Tech trains boys 14 to 16 years old in a trade, such as auto mechanics, welding and small engine repair, and helps them finish their high school education so that they can get a job.

Two years ago, the Fayette Baptist Association church committed to raising the funds necessary to build a house for American teams to stay in when they go to minister at Brazil Vo-Tech. The church raised and sent \$28,000 to Brazil Vo-Tech for the house to be built before its team's arrival this year.

The team put the finishing touch-

es on the house, like installing security bars, and tutored and interacted with the boys. Team members also did street evangelism in Belmopan.

Steve Dunn, pastor of **Eastwood Baptist Church, Monroeville**, and his wife, Deborah, traveled to Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece and Macedonia Nov. 8–18 for a church vision trip.

The Bethlehem Baptist Association church has implemented an Acts 1:8 strategy, and the Dunns went to this area to investigate a possible partnership with International Mission Board (IMB) representatives in order to fill the fourth phase of the strategy — taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

While there, Steve preached and both he and Deborah encouraged local Christians.

Eastwood Baptist member MaeLee Taylor, a junior at the University of West Alabama, is in an undisclosed location in Asia on a missions trip with the IMB. She will be prayer walking around Buddhist temples, visiting English schools and holding American Christmas parties. Taylor left Dec. 17 and will return Jan. 3.

FBC Hoover holds Polar Express party

Children visiting **First Baptist Church, Hoover**, Dec. 18 experienced a different kind of Christmas party. They saw the usual decorated trees and sparkling lights, ate the traditional Christmas cookies, drank hot chocolate and apple cider and watched Christmas movies. But, this time, they were invited to become a part of the stories being told as they attended the church's first ever Polar Express party.

The festivities, named after the acclaimed Christmas book and movie, began as the brainchild of David Liles, children's pastor at First, Hoover, who got the idea from a church doing a much larger Polar Express party in Calera.

"The message I like bringing to children, mainly for adults, is that the belief in Santa Claus helps to strengthen and explain faith," he said. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for but not seen. So, the whole bell and believing is knowing that we have faith. ... It's just a conditioning in of how we think about faith and believing."

The church gave out invitations, which the pajama-wearing attendees used as their "tickets" to enter the party. Church volunteers transformed the church foyer into a train station, and kids rode in a trackless train from the foyer to the party room to watch "The Polar Express" along with several other Christmas movies. At the end of the movie, the

children were given a bell like the child received in the movie for believing in the magic of Christmas.

"We just decided this will be a fun event and maybe start a tradition," said Martha Stokes, a children's Sunday School teacher at the church. "We just hope to reach one

person for the Lord. We wanted to invite (everyone) in to fellowship with Christians ... to let them know that we are there all the time and for them to realize that Christians have fun, too. ... If we just reach one person, we are doing what we are supposed to do." (TAB)



Photo courtesy of FBC Leroy

LEROY'S FIRST CHURCH HONORS FINANCIAL SECRETARY
First Baptist Church, Leroy, in Washington Baptist Association, honored Elsie Patrick (center) on Dec. 12 for her 50 years of volunteer service as financial secretary. Pictured with Patrick are Pastor James Watkins (left) and Associate Pastor Dave Delegal.



BP photo

PARADE MINISTRY — More than 200 Southern Baptist volunteers will be mingling through the crowds at the Rose Parade on New Year's Day in Pasadena (similar to this past year, shown above), passing out 30,000 brochures and tracts and sharing the gospel along Orange Grove and Colorado boulevards.

Parade evangelism

Southern Baptists to participate in 15th Rose Parade ministry

For the 15th year, Southern Baptist volunteers from the Los Angeles Southern Baptist Association and several states will participate in ministry centered around the annual Rose Parade in Pasadena on New Year's Day.

The Rose Parade, which will draw an estimated 600,000 people, runs from 8–11 a.m. Pacific Time and is aired live on ABC, NBC, Hallmark Channel and Univision.

The parade is seen in more than 200 countries and international territories.

With First Southern Baptist Church, Pasadena, a multicultural congregation, as their main base, Baptist volunteers will distribute more than 30,000 free full-color brochures — titled "Order of Marching Bands, Equestrian Teams and Floats for the 122nd Rose Parade" — along the parade route. Each brochure also includes a gospel presentation and local church contact information.

Additionally, on Dec. 31 from noon until the start of the parade at 8 a.m. on Jan. 1, volunteers will



BP photo

DISTRIBUTING TRACTS — Southern Baptist Martin Davis (left), a San Diego businessman, founder of the Rose Parade ministry, distributes gospel tracts to people camped out the night of Dec. 31, 2009, waiting for the next day's annual Rose Parade.

share the gospel through mime presentations, Bible tract distribution, one-on-one conversations and servant evangelism.

Intentional Community Evangelism volunteers from several states will be on hand to help train members from local churches how to

witness among the vast crowds in three-hour shifts.

Traditionally parade-watchers come out 24 hours in advance to get coveted front-row seats to see the flower-covered floats, bands and equestrian teams during the five-mile parade down Pasadena's Orange Grove and Colorado boulevards.

From 6 a.m.–9:30 a.m. on Jan. 1, volunteers will staff another outreach: a refreshment station at First, Pasadena, welcoming and offering parade float and horse-trailer drivers free coffee, juices, water and pastries, and making the church's restrooms available.

Free Bibles and literature also will be available at the refreshment station. Last year 43 people reportedly came to know the Lord as a result of the parade ministry. (BP)

Religion In America

Compiled from Wire Services

Manhattan Declaration signers submit revised app

NASHVILLE — Signers of the Manhattan Declaration — a Christian document at the heart of a growing controversy — have resubmitted a tweaked "app" to Apple in hopes that the company will approve it after pulling an earlier version from its iPhone/iPad app store. ("App" is short for "application" and is another name for a software program.) Chuck Colson, one of the three drafters of the 4,700-word document, said the proposed app has only the wording of the Manhattan Declaration itself and does not include a series of four introductory survey questions, as did the earlier app. Among those questions was "do you support same-sex relationships?" and "do you support the right of choice regarding abortion?"

"In reading some of the blogs and press on the Manhattan Declaration app, we understand that one element of the app, the poll, seemed particularly offensive to those who asked for the app's removal," Colson said in a statement. "As a sign of goodwill, we have removed the poll and have resubmitted the app without it."

Colson and others say the declaration is simply a summary of Christian beliefs on life, marriage and religious liberty. Nevertheless, Apple pulled it from its app store in late November, saying it "violates our developer guidelines by being offensive to large groups of people." The app, which was free, allowed owners of iPhones and iPads to read and sign the document with ease.

Apple originally gave the app a rating of 4+ — meaning "no objectionable content" — but changed its mind after roughly 7,700 people at the liberal website Change.org e-mailed Apple and asked it to remove the app. The Change.org webpage had argued that "supporters of equal rights and the right of women to control their own bodies" must stand together.

Meanwhile, more than 45,000 people have signed an online petition at ManhattanDeclaration.org asking Apple to reinstate the app.

U.S. Jews and evangelicals help Israel rebuild

JERUSALEM — American Jews and evangelical Christians are taking a central role in rebuilding the Carmel region in northern Israel after a deadly fire decimated large swaths of the Carmel forest and left many people homeless.

Several Jewish and evangelical Christian organizations have launched fund-raising drives to assist the region after a massive wildfire in early December killed 43 people in one of Israel's few green belts. It took a team of international fire fighters to put out the blaze.

The fire highlighted the woeful state of Israel's fire service, which employs fewer than 1,500 fire fighters in a nation of 7 million people. There is a severe shortage of fire trucks and the under-funded service does not own a single fire-fighting plane.

American Jews and evangelical Christians, who have a long tradition of funding everything from Israeli tree plantings and soup kitchens to ambulances and bomb shelters, will be supplementing Israeli government aid for fire relief. They hope to raise several million dollars. Israel's Ministry of Tourism and the Jewish National Fund USA announced a joint plan to raise funds from American Jews and U.S. evangelicals. Tourism Minister Stas Misezhnikov instructed his North American representatives to increase marketing and fundraising to fund the planting of trees on Tu Bishvat, a holiday celebrating trees and nature, in late January.

Republicans join FRC protest of hate group listing

WASHINGTON — The Family Research Council (FRC), joined by prominent Republican allies, is mounting an aggressive defense to a decision by the Southern Poverty Law Center to designate the powerful conservative lobby as a hate group.

"The group, which was once known for combating racial bigotry, is now attacking several groups that uphold Judeo-Christian moral views, including marriage as the union of a man and a woman," read a Dec. 15 FRC ad placed in the print editions of *Politico* and the *Washington Examiner*. The ad, in the form of an open letter, was signed by more than two dozen Republican leaders, including several potential GOP presidential candidates: Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee and Sen. Jim DeMint of South Carolina. Other signatories included House Speaker-designate John Boehner of Ohio and House Majority Leader-elect Eric Cantor of Virginia. The ad follows a Nov. 22 report from the Alabama-based civil rights watchdog adding the FRC and four other conservative religious organizations to its list of hate groups for their "demonizing propaganda aimed at homosexuals."

The ad says the signatories "stand in solidarity" with FRC and other groups known for their opposition to gay "marriage." ☞

Want to see your news in The Alabama Baptist?

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

