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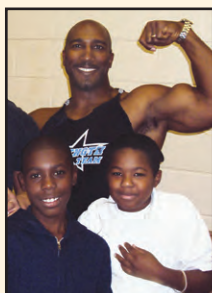
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'Gentle soul'

Billy Graham gives 1st interview in years, reflects on his 92 years

Billy Graham granted his first interview in several years Dec. 20, telling Fox News' Greta Van Susteren that if he could do it over again, he would spend less time traveling and more time in meditation and prayer.

The renowned evangelist, now 92, spoke to Van Susteren just before meeting President George W. Bush and his wife, Laura, along with Franklin and Jane Graham, for lunch in Charlotte, N.C. The Bushes were at the Billy Graham Library to sign copies of their autobiographies.

Van Susteren asked Graham if he has hope, and Graham said he has a tremendous amount of hope because he is a believer in Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead and "is alive right now."

"My wife is already in heaven. I look forward to seeing her definitely in the near future because I'm 92 now and I know that my time is limited on this earth," Graham said. "But I have tremendous hope in the fact I'll be in the future life. And I'll be there because of what Jesus Christ did for me on the cross and by the resurrection. And this gives me a great deal of hope."

If Graham had the opportunity to live his life over again, he said there are things he would do differently.

"I would study more. I would pray more, travel less, take less speaking engagements. I took too many of them in too many places around the world," he said. "If I had it to do over again, I'd spend more time in meditation and prayer and just telling the Lord how much I love Him and adore Him and [am] looking forward [to] the time we're going to spend together for eternity."

Van Susteren inquired about what age Graham realized he wanted to be a preacher, and he said it was around age 18 or 19 when he was a student at a Bible school near Tampa.

"I used to walk the streets in this area that had completely disintegrated because of the Depression at that time. And I would pray and I would ask God for a direction for my life and for the genuine purpose of my life. What



Reuters photo

FAMILY FRIENDS — Billy Graham greets Laura Bush at the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, N.C., during the Bushes' book signings, which took place after Graham's first interview in several years with Fox News' Greta Van Susteren on Dec. 20.

am I here for?" Graham recounted.

One night at a nearby golf course, as he was lying on the 18th green amid the palm trees, he heard God's call.

"The Lord seemed to call me and say that I was to preach the gospel. And from that time on, I began to prepare," Graham said. "By preparation, I mean I began to read books which contributed to what I would say in the years to come. And then I began to realize that my job was to try to win over people to Christ, which I did privately and publicly, which became eventually my sermons that we call evangelism."

Over the years, as he spoke to millions, he was surprised by the numbers who gathered to hear his message, Graham said. He noted a particular engagement in Seoul, Korea, the largest audience he ever had.

"They were just spread out as far as you could see, in a great plaza along the river," he said.

Graham passed along some advice to young preachers.

"Spend more time in study and prayer. That's the secret of successful evangelism," he said. "If you neglect that, you've neglected the very heart of God's call to you."

With Christmas approaching, Graham said the holiday means "a great

deal" to him, and his wife "always made a big thing of Christmas for the children."

"We all looked forward to it. We would get up on Christmas morning and have our prayers, and then we would sit under the tree and open our presents, usually on Christmas morning, sometimes on Christmas Eve," Graham said.

"But when I looked into the crib or

the manger and saw that little baby who was going to rise to become the greatest teacher that ever lived, to die on the cross for my sins, to know that I'll be forgiven because of what He was doing, it absolutely transformed Christmas for me," he said.

"And all the shopping and the gifts and all the things we celebrated [at] Christmas, it's a spiritual time. It's

(See 'Graham,' page 13)

Rebuilding Haiti tops 2010 news

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

By now, your crisp, new calendar has several ink marks (or key strokes if you go paperless) dotting its January spread. You've not only set your feet toward 2011 but you've also plunged right in, leaving 2010 a quickly fading memory.

But several things already important for Baptists in 2011 are follow-ups to what happened in 2010 — rebuilding Haiti, adjusting to continued economic hardships and fleshing out Southern Baptists' new direction known as the Great Commission Resurgence.

All three of these things involved a great number of people in 2010, but it

was earthquake-ravaged Haiti that garnered top news with its Jan. 12 magnitude 7.0 quake that killed more than 200,000 people. More than 300,000 people were injured, and more than 1 million people were left homeless.

The already poverty-stricken country was left in shambles, but religious and humanitarian groups across the United States stepped in and stepped up in what has been described as an unprecedented movement of compassion.

Relief efforts included a strong presence by Southern Baptists with an almost immediate open door through Florida Baptists' partnership with Haitian Baptists.

(See 'Year in Review,' page 4)

COMMENT

Is This What Was Intended?

Do you remember the Covenant for a New Century adopted in 1995 by messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) meeting in Atlanta? It was a thorough restructuring of the SBC designed to position the national convention for effective and efficient ministry in the 21st century.

The first decade of that century has come and gone. One can now ask if what Southern Baptists are experiencing today is what was intended when the restructuring was done.

Consider, for example, what has happened to Cooperative Program (CP) promotion. In 1995, Southern Baptists had a Stewardship Commission with the sole purpose of teaching biblical stewardship and promoting the CP. Staff members worked closely with state directors of stewardship promotion to develop teaching materials and promotion campaigns that were used across the convention.

In order to increase efficiency, the Covenant for a New Century transferred the responsibility of CP promotion to the SBC Executive Committee (EC). It was an attempt to link the responsibility of allocating funds with the task of raising them. The EC already was responsible for recommending the annual SBC budget. What had been the sole focus of the Stewardship Commission became one of several assignments of the EC even though a staff member was charged with promoting the CP.

The result was predictable. Cooperation and coordination of CP promotion among the state conventions declined. Some state convention directors have been openly critical of EC actions (or inactions).

In December 2010, EC President Frank Page announced that he was eliminating the office of CP promotion and taking on the responsibility himself to demonstrate to Southern Baptists how important the task is. Page's action complied with the recommendations of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force report approved earlier in the year, which called for returning CP promotion to the state conventions and reduced the EC's budget by about one-third.

In 15 years, Southern Baptists have moved from having an official entity charged with stewardship education and CP promotion to having CP promotion be one of the personal assignments carried out by the chief executive officer of the SBC EC. And during that time, average CP giving by SBC churches has fallen from 8.73 percent in the 1990s to 5.86 percent for the 2008–09 fiscal year.

Southern Baptists repeatedly say glowing words about the importance of the CP. Historically it has been the financial foundation of the SBC's balanced program of missions and ministries. An organizational truism is that "structure follows priorities." Considering what has happened to CP promotion and giving in the last 15 years, one can only ask is this what was intended by the Covenant for a New Century?



THOUGHTS By Bob Terry

The SBC Education Commission, which the Covenant for a New Century did away with, worked primarily with the colleges and universities of cooperating state conventions. The commission always seemed out of place being an SBC commission primarily focused on state convention entities. Almost unnoticed was the informal channel of communication and coordination between the SBC seminaries and the various colleges and universities, which the commission provided.

Seminary training

Generally Southern Baptists agreed that state convention-related schools would handle college training while the SBC concentrated on professional training for ministry through its seminaries. The seminaries have had diploma programs for those called to ministry late in life and without college training. However, the primary focus of the seminaries was the professional training of the master of divinity program and doctoral level instruction.

In 1995, one SBC seminary had a baccalaureate program and the six SBC seminary presidents already had tried to diffuse what they called a "potential issue of competition and conflict among the seminaries" through The Colorado Concord.

Today every seminary has a college program of significant size. For the 2008–09 academic year, one-third of the total instruction done by Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., was in the college program. At New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, it was more than 25 percent of the total hours; for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., it was more than 20 percent.

Across all six of the seminaries, the percentage of instruction done at the college level has reached as high as 26.76 percent and remained above 25 percent for four consecutive years.

The importance of the college level training to the institutions is seen in the fact that total full-time-equivalency students in 2008–2009 were fewer than in 2007–2008, which, in turn, was fewer than in 2006–2007. The trend has been downward even with the influx of college level students.

In 2008, the EC called attention to this trend in a report to the SBC annual meeting. The report said,

in part, "The committee believes most Southern Baptists expect their offerings to be used primarily to fund such graduate level instructions (master's degree level and advanced doctoral degree level)."

The report continued, "The committee wonders whether the escalation of instructional hours from other than basic and advanced degree programs may over time undermine the priority of producing graduate level ministerial training." Messengers accepted a recommendation to study that very issue: what impact does college level instruction have on seminary level training.

Today, in addition to supporting the three colleges affiliated with the Alabama Baptist State Convention through the CP, Alabama Baptists also support six other colleges — one at each at the six SBC seminaries. Alabama Baptists contribute as much CP support for a freshman English course at the College at Southeastern, for example, as they do for a theology of the New Testament course in the master of divinity program at the seminary.

Seminaries may boast of record enrollments because of their growing college programs, but they also have to divide their CP dollars to support the college programs as well as the traditional seminary training.

Southern Baptists find themselves in an awkward situation. In the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force report, more money for seminary education was championed. At the same time, increased attention is being focused on the impact of baccalaureate programs on CP funding for ministerial graduate education. Would more money be available to train pastors if the seminaries did not sponsor colleges? Would the circumstances be different if the seminaries and colleges had continued to communicate and coordinate through an entity like the Education Commission?

Again is this situation what was intended by the Covenant for a New Century? There is more, much more, to consider. Next week, we will look at other developments in the past decade as we continue to ask is this what was intended?

"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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Someone You Should Know

By June Mathews, Correspondent, TAB

Marilena Willoughby

Midway Baptist Church, Smiths Station
Russell Baptist Association

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE: Matthew 5:16

FAVORITE HYMN: "One Day at a Time"

HOBBIES: Sending cards to church visitors, hospital patients and others in need of encouragement

FAMILY STATUS: Widowed after 57 years of marriage to Joe; two daughters, Marie and Linda; two grandchildren; and one great-grandchild



WILLOUGHBY

Marilena Willoughby is a charter member of her church. She feels loved there because "people at church hug me all the time. We have a hugging church."

Q: What was your early life like?

A: I was raised in Roanoke, Ala., and lived awhile in Fredonia and awhile at Pine Mountain. ... I was baptized when I was about 9.

Q: How did you come to know the Lord?

A: It was in 1950 and I was 29 years old. I was at home and asked the Lord to keep our family safe and watch over us. I gave Him the rest of my life that day. That was really when I came to know the Lord.

Q: How were you involved in church through the years?

A: I had a Sunday School class, a women's class, and my husband taught the men's class. I've been in our church since it began in 1970, and now I'm the only charter member still there. I was in a women's Sunday School class (at another church) when we decided we wanted to build a church. So we and three other couples started this church (Midway). We wanted a place where we could really worship the Lord.

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

A: I don't know how long I'll be here, but I want to be in church as much as I can (and) as long as I'm able and stay close to Him.

Q: What does the Christian life mean to you?

A: It means dying to yourself. When you say anything, you need to build people up. You need to always have a smile on your face and let people know you love them. We need to stay close to the Lord so we can live like He wants us to and leave the bad things behind.

Close call

Alabama congressman helps stop 'secret' plot to legalize Internet gambling

By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

Although Alabamians once again stopped an effort to legalize gambling in the state this year, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada nearly dealt Alabama and every other state in to Internet gambling.

During the lame-duck session of Congress, Reid attempted to introduce a bill that would repeal the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006, which was drafted by U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus of Alabama.

"[Reid's bill] would [have given] a federal right to gamble no matter if places like Jefferson County, Shelby County or Tuscaloosa didn't want gambling," said Bachus, who attends Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover.

Had it not been for his sources, he said the bill probably would have passed unnoticed because of the way it was being handled — secretly and behind closed doors.

"We had heard from our own sources that they were going to attempt to bring a bill, so we were looking for it," Bachus said. "We did get a tip from someone in the Senate that they were drafting a bill. [Reid] denied it for a while, then we got a copy of the bill."

According to Bachus and sources of a MSNBC article, Reid's plan was to tuck his bill into the tax cut bill. If he did not succeed by going that route, then he would attach it to the government funding bill, Bachus said. Reid nor his staff would comment.

It is speculated that Reid drafted his bill as political payback to casino companies that donated to his campaign in the last election. He received \$192,000, the most given by a single company, from casino company MGM Resorts International and \$83,100 from Harrah's Entertainment (now Caesars Entertainment Corp.), according to The Associated Press. In addition, the bill was written in such a way that, at least for a little while, only Nevada and New Jersey would profit.

"Call it what you want to call it — if it brings revenues and jobs into the United States, it's the right thing to do," Alan Feldman, senior vice president for public affairs for MGM Resorts, said to MSNBC.

But Bachus disagreed with that argument, saying the ends do not justify the means.

"(They say) because it raises so much money, we should be for it," he said. "It's like saying, 'It is bad (and) it will hurt people but we need the money.'"

"A government should not finance its op-



istockphoto.com

eration off of people's addictions," Bachus added. "It's just another sign that when you can't live within your means, you become a slave. You lose freedom and one of the freedoms is to say no."

And that's what this bill would have done, said Tim Johnson, Bachus' press secretary.

"How ironic would it be if people in Alabama spent a lot of effort to oppose gambling, then the federal government overruled (them) and made it legal for every home," Johnson asked.

Another victory

After Bachus and Reps. Dave Camp of Michigan and Lamar Smith of Texas, all three of whom are incoming chairmen for influential House committees, wrote a letter to Reid and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and gave the bill media attention, Reid decided to pull the bill.

"By all accounts, this was the closest call yet for the gambling prohibition," Johnson said. "Even a staunch Senate supporter of the ban, Sen. John Kyl (of Arizona), said without the intervention by Congressman Bachus and the House colleagues he rallied, Sen. Reid would have prevailed."

Bachus' strong stance against gambling hasn't come without some bruises. He has been criticized for having the backing of

"radical evangelist groups" and has been called an "extremist" and "radical." "I'm being attacked for my faith," he said.

But it's because Bachus believes Internet gambling would have devastating effects on families that he hasn't let opponents intimidate him enough to stop the fight.

"My No. 1 concern is for our youth and for our families," Bachus said. "To allow gambling on every computer in every teenager's bedroom and every college student's dorm room is just too much of a temptation."

"No. 2, gambling is corruptive," he continued. "And I'm afraid it will corrupt our political system. Third, as a parent and a citizen, I believe local communities and states should make those decisions and not the federal government."

Although this latest attempt to legalize Internet gambling failed, there will be other attempts in the future, Bachus warned. That's why everyone needs to become educated and to speak out on this issue, he added.

"Become educated to the issue that these are well-funded organizations that are attempting to allow gambling on the Internet 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which would permit a teenager to gamble on the Internet and to become addicted," he said.

To contact Bachus or for more information, call 202-225-4921.

Ministers receive decreased SECA Social Security tax rate in 2011

Ministers for tax purposes will receive a small financial benefit from the recent tax compromise legislation signed by President Barack Obama on Dec. 17. Their SECA Social Security tax rate will fall from 12.4 percent to 10.4 percent for 2011 only. The additional Medicare tax rate of 2.9 percent remains in effect. Ministers for tax purposes will see their total SECA tax rate drop to 13.3 percent for 2011 only.

American workers in general will also receive a one-year 2 percent cut in their Social Security taxes under the Tax Relief Unemployment Reauthorization and Job Creation Act of 2010. The bill — a compromise between Republican congressional leaders and the White House — keeps the "Bush tax cuts"

in place through 2012. Additionally, it extends some unemployment benefits and reduces the 6.2 percent OASDI (old age, survivors and disability insurance) tax rate to 4.2 percent for 2011 only.

'Dual tax status'

Ministers normally pay the 12.4 percent OASDI portion of their SECA tax because of their "dual tax status" as self-employed for Social Security tax purposes. The total OASDI portion of their SECA tax represents the combined employer and employee OASDI tax rates.

The cut in Social Security taxes is for the 2011 tax year only and will not impact any SECA taxes owed for income earned in 2010.

GuideStone will be releasing the annual Ministers Tax Guide in February 2011, which provides specific information regarding ministers' unique tax status as well as tips on filing a minister's 2010 tax return. It will be found online at www.GuideStone.org/taxguide, and participants can request a free printed copy by calling GuideStone at 1-888-984-8433.

Orders can be placed now for the tax guide, and they will be shipped once they are finalized.

For specific information regarding the 2011 Social Security tax reduction, GuideStone encourages its participants to consult with a tax or legal adviser who is versed in ministerial tax issues. (GuideStone)



(continued from page 1)

Alabama Baptists were among the first Baptists to help and even initiated a new partnership between Alabama Baptists and Haiti's city of Jacmel.

As part of the relief efforts, Southern Baptists collected and delivered 132,000 Buckets of Hope filled with basic food provisions such as flour, cooking oil, rice and other foodstuffs. Alabama Baptists sent about 8,300 buckets.

Scores of Alabama Baptist volunteers visited Jacmel and other areas of Haiti throughout the year delivering medical supplies, working with children and orphans and providing other relief efforts.

And while Alabama Baptists have found success helping Haitian orphans, one group of 10 from Idaho and Texas were not so fortunate. The volunteers traveled to Haiti in February to help and ended up arrested and detained on charges of trying to smuggle Haitian orphans out of the country. They were later released.

Alabamians, Americans and the world reached out to Haiti, and all while suffering intensely from the general state of the economy.

People were hurting, money was tight and the trickle effect was harsh, but many still found ways to help those less fortunate.

Studies showed this was happening in many places (see story, page 11), even though deep cuts were being made in budgets across the board.

Decrease in giving

Churches especially took a hit in 2010, seeming to be a little behind the curve of the major hit of the recent recession, which experts say actually ended in June 2009.

And the financial pain moved quickly down the line to associations and the state convention, which was predicted to end the year about \$4 million under budget for receipts.

At press time, Alabama Baptists had given more than \$40 million of the \$46 million budget

for the year. Bobby DuBois, associate executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said \$4.3 million was needed in December to make the \$42 million mark.

The decline in giving was no surprise, however, as November marked an overall record percentage of unemployment for the nation as well as a record budget deficit.

If the general state of the world economy weren't enough, the Gulf Coast oil spill in the spring sunk several Southeastern states even lower, including Alabama.

An explosion on a British Petroleum (BP) oil drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20 killed 11 workers and began the largest and worst accidental oil spill in petroleum history, according to London's *The Telegraph*.

Before finally capping the oil well at the bottom of the ocean floor in July, more than 200 million gallons of crude oil had spilled into the water during a three-month period, devastating both wildlife and economic life along the Gulf Coast. Effects from the oil spill continued long after the well was capped. Merchants, hotels and restaurants along the Gulf Coast, including the coastline in Alabama, saw a significant drop in business during the summer months — usually it's busiest time in the year — leading to several places having to close.

BP launched a major goodwill campaign and

worked to help promote the Gulf Coast through media advertising, but business still wasn't nearly the same. Social service agencies also found themselves stretched thin trying to deliver relief to families and businesses struggling to cope with the spill.

With an across-the-board tightening of the belt in 2010, the dollar became much sought after in all walks of life, including missions and ministry.

Southern Baptists found themselves debating how to divvy out Cooperative Program (CP) dollars while also moving quickly to cut several ministry areas.

The Great Commission Resurgence (GCR) Task Force presented its report for a vote in June during the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) annual meeting in Orlando, Fla.

Majority of votes

Messengers voted to accept the report and get to work on some new ways of doing things in SBC life, including making the CP the primary element of a new giving category rather than the sole recognized avenue of general missions support.

GCR Task Force leaders encouraged Southern Baptists to examine all areas of SBC life, but the specific areas mentioned in the report deal with the North American Mission Board



TAB photo

BUCKETS OF HOPE — Following the January earthquake, Alabama Baptists sent about 8,300 Buckets of Hope, which were filled with basic food provisions, to Haiti. They were collected at four drop off points around the state, including Birmingham Baptist Association as shown here.



Reuters photo

THE NEW NORMAL — Three-year-old Morgan Edmonds plays in the surf as a clean-up crew combs the beach on Dauphin Island on May 10, two days after tar balls washed up onshore. Alabama beaches were severely impacted by the Gulf oil spill.



BP photo

ADDRESSING QUESTIONS — Ronnie Floyd (center) chairman of the Great Commission Resurgence Task Force and pastor of First Baptist Church, Springdale, Ark., answers questions during a press conference June 15 after the recommendations by the task force were passed by messengers to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Orlando, Fla.

(NAMB), the International Mission Board (IMB) and the Executive Committee (EC).

Anxiety levels were high at two of the three (NAMB and EC) as work turned to scrutinizing the organizations, functions and personnel (noted below). The IMB looked to gain 1 percent in its CP allocation from the EC and was granted permission to appoint missionaries to serve in the United States as related to specific people groups from other countries.

Leadership transition

Both mission boards and the EC also remained in leadership transition during 2010, with the IMB still searching for its leader at the close of the year.

Frank Page filled the first open slot, becoming president of the EC, when Morris Chapman retired. Within a few months Page announced staff reductions and ministry assignment changes for the EC in order to come in line with the GCR Task Force recommendations. A couple of his changes included eliminating the office focused on CP promotion and assuming the responsibility of CP promotion himself. Page also combined the convention relations office with the Baptist Press news office.

NAMB may have made the biggest splash with its new leader, Kevin Ezell. Elected to the position 37 to 12 in September, Ezell arrived on the scene amid controversy and managed to keep media outlets busy for several weeks after he took office.

He downsized the NAMB staff, cut funding from some existing ministries and caused a stir among state convention leaders as he initiated the move toward disbanding NAMB's cooperative agreements (funding) for certain evangelistic efforts across the United States.

"It will take a while to change the NAMB DNA, but we will do it through attrition, retirement incentives and infusing some of the right DNA," Ezell told *The Christian Index* in October. "I didn't come here to go out and beg churches to just give. They are giving and we are competing for dollars, but we want to do something that people can believe in."

The IMB managed to move along steadily and quietly while still not finding the right person to head the organization. Several high-profile names were rumored to be candidates for the position off and on throughout the year, but at press time trustees continued to argue among themselves about who was the right person.

And amid all the movement and news coming out of the IMB, NAMB, EC and SBC in general, the SBC Twitterverse population increased daily. More and more SBC leaders, pastors and

laypeople are communicating their initial reactions and opinions to convention-related decisions and releasing news and information via Twitter, an online social media tool. Some are even finding themselves in heated debates and saying things for which they have to later call and apologize.

But Twitter was not only used for SBC news, it became a favorite among many following politics in 2010.

And the political climate turned intense as the November elections neared with numerous incumbents being defeated and the recent Tea Party movement working to unseat Democrats in favor of shifting power to the Republicans. The movement was successful in the U.S. House but not in the U.S. Senate, even though it was a close call.

In Alabama, several legislators also felt the wrath of angry citizens and found themselves out of state political work.

While some of the reasoning matched that on the national front, some of the concern in Alabama also came from the major gambling battle that has increasingly grown over the past few years. The latest two- to three-year push finally met defeat during the legislative session in the spring when a FBI "electronic bingo" investigation over vote buying was announced.

The FBI probe resulted in Montgomery lobbyist Jennifer D. Pouncy pleading guilty to one count of conspiracy for her role in the scheme and 11 indictments of lawmakers, gambling bosses, lobbyists and others. Those indicted pleaded not guilty in October, but lobbyist Jarrod Massey struck a deal with prosecutors in late December and admitted to offering bribes to legislators over this year's "bingo" legislation.

Pouncy worked under the authority of Massey and admitted offering bribes as well.

Massey represented Ronnie Gilley, owner of Houston County's Country Crossing and another one of the 11 indicted. Gilley and Alabama gambling superpower Milton McGregor were pushing the legislation being considered, which would have protected their gambling operations from Gov. Bob Riley's Task Force on Illegal Gambling. The task force had successfully closed down Gilley's and McGregor's "electronic bingo" operations early in the year.

How Massey's testimony will play out for the others involved was not known at press time. The lawmakers involved are Sens. Larry Means, Jim Preuitt, Quinton Ross and Harri Anne Smith.

And while Riley and others had difficulty getting a fair hearing from Alabama legislators



Photo by Robin Cooper

'AS LONG AS I'M GOVERNOR, WE'LL ENFORCE THE LAW' — Governor Bob Riley (at podium) yells over a crowd of protesters and garners cheers and applause from anti-gambling leaders at a Feb. 23 rally at the Statehouse during the 'electronic bingo' debate this year.

for any type of ethics reforms previously, they had no problem in December when Riley called a special session to deal with hindering political corruption. Many attributed this to the indictments and information that had been revealed from the indictments.

The "historic" ethics reform package of seven bills were signed into law Dec. 20. "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."

These laws include giving the Alabama Ethics Commission subpoena power, or the power to call witnesses and require them to take an oath and provide evidence; banning transfers of money between political action committees (PAC), better known as PAC-to-PAC transfers; and limiting the amount of what a lobbyist can spend on a legislator to no more than \$150 a year.

"[These laws] 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," said Joe Godfrey, executive director of the Alabama Citizens Action Program.

Back on the national scene, this year seemed to have more, at least more publicized, religious tensions, especially in regards to Islam.

Islamic sites

Tennessee made headlines during the summer regarding opposition to Islamic sites planned in Brentwood and Murfreesboro. A month after Brentwood residents defeated a plan for a mosque, residents in Murfreesboro and its Rutherford County tried to do the same by opposing planned construction on an Islamic mosque, community center and athletic fields. By August, attention had turned to New York City where Muslims were readying plans to build an Islamic cultural center and mosque just two blocks from where the World Trade

centers were destroyed Sept. 11, 2001. If this weren't enough to start a national debate and garner worldwide attention, a Florida pastor planned to burn copies of the Muslim's holy book the Quran on Sept. 11. The day before the anniversary he suspended his plans after receiving backlash from President Obama, the Pentagon and the state department.

Tensions also escalated in the homosexual debate in 2010.

In a landmark moment for the homosexual movement, President Obama signed a bill into law Dec. 22 overturning the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, a move that will lead to open homosexuality in the military and will harm religious liberty, readiness, privacy and retention, critics say.

The U.S. House and Senate's approval of the bill during the lame duck session capped a nearly yearlong effort by the Obama administration to reverse the 17-year-old policy, which was adopted in 1993 as a compromise between conservatives and President Clinton. Clinton wanted homosexuals to be able to serve openly but faced resistance from Congress and the Pentagon. As part of the '93 compromise, homosexuals would not have to disclose their sexuality on the front end — as had been required — although they would be required to keep their homosexuality secret while serving.

The U.S. military has never allowed open homosexuality.

Homosexuality also made news in 2010 as a federal judge struck down California's Proposition 8 banning gay "marriage" in the state, and gay bullying became a hot topic in Hollywood after a rash of homosexual teen suicides.

The homosexual topic also surfaced again in the Episcopal Church as Mary Glasspool was elected the church's second openly gay bishop and first openly gay female bishop. New Hampshire Bishop V. Gene Robinson, the Episcopal Church's first openly gay bishop whose 2003 election sparked a global schism, announced he will retire in 2013. (Kristen Padilla, Leigh Pritchett, BP, RNS contributed)



EZELL



RILEY

Across Alabama's Associations

BALDWIN

► **Stuart Ryan Davidson** is the new pastor of **Eastern Shore Church, Daphne**. He comes from First Church, Montgomery, where he served as student pastor. Davidson is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham and New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Angela, have two children.



DAVIDSON

BETHLEHEM

► **Eastwood Church, Monroeville**, will host the South Alabama Men's Conference Feb. 4-5 with Lance Sawyer, pastor of First Church, Muskogee, Okla.; Fred Kelley, of Monroeville; Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Church, Pensacola, Fla.; Keith Pugh, pastor of Open Door Church, Tuscaloosa; and Johnny Nixon, pastor of Northport Church. Chris Weide, minister of music/youth for Northside Church, Jasper, will lead the music. To register visit www.eastwoodbc.net/conf or call 251-575-3843 by Jan. 15. Steve Dunn is pastor.

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN

► **Danny Langley** is the new

pastor of **Victory Church, Gaylesville**. He and his wife, Sonya, have two children. ► **Shady Grove Church, Collinsville**, will host Mountain Wind in concert Jan. 29, 6 p.m. George Moses is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA

► **Calvary Heights Church, Alexander City**, will host the Fellowship Quartet Jan. 30, 11 a.m. Jeff Freeman is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA

► **Taylorville Church, Tuscaloosa**, will honor Pastor Curtis Kelley for 60 years in the ministry Jan. 23, 10 a.m. There will be a reception at 2 p.m. in the fellowship hall.

TUSKEGEE LEE

► **Cubahatchie Church, Shorter**, will host Brother Billy Bob "The Baptist" Bohannon Jan. 9, 10:30 a.m. Soup and chili will be served in the fellowship hall following the service. Perry Neal is pastor.

WINSTON

► **Winston Association** will hold a discipleship training rally Jan. 30, 6 p.m., at New Prospect Church, Haleyville. Rick Lance, executive director of the State Board of Missions, will speak. Ron Horton is pastor of New Prospect. The association also will hold a Vacation Bible School early bird clinic for

pastors, directors and spouses Jan. 31, 6:30 p.m., at the associational office with James Blakeney, associate in the office of Sunday School/discipleship for the State Board of Missions. Dinner will be served. For reservations call 205-489-5137 by Jan. 21. Al Hood is director of missions for Winston Association.

OTHER

► **First Church, Mobile**, is holding its Winter Divinity Sessions Wednesdays from 5:45 to 6:30 p.m. for four weeks. The first class was Jan. 5. There are three adult classes/lectures — course #301; Sweet Treats: The Culinary Arts of Hospitality led by Jennifer George and others; course #302, The War: Reflections From the Frontlines and the Home Front led by Katharine Singer, Sid Phillips and Glenn Frazier; and course #303, The Book of Jonah led by Elizabeth Mangham Lott, Bart McNeil and others. A children's class, Missions & More, is being held in the children's wing with Connie Easterling, Libba Flott, Thelma Johnson and Margaret Mangham. A preschool nursery also is available. Dinner will be served at 5 p.m. Reservations are requested by calling 251-432-6513. To register for classes call 251-432-6513 or visit www.fbcmobile.com. Chris George is pastor.



Vincent's Calvary Church sees healing, marks 50 years

Healing came to a community during the afternoon of Oct. 3 as Calvary Baptist Church, Vincent, celebrated its 50th anniversary.

That morning, about 250 people — quadruple the Shelby Baptist Association church's normal attendance — gathered for the first part of the celebration. Former Pastor Winston Brooks spoke, and former Ministers of Music Carl and Ashley Williams provided music.

After lunch, the afternoon service began with the choir from First Baptist Church, Vincent — the church Calvary Baptist split from decades ago.

"I think that was very important to bridge the gap of all those years," said Calvary's Interim Pastor Wayne Lowe, who added that he works "hand in hand" with Darryl Wood, pastor of First, Vincent. "All the church pastors in Vincent work together well, and I'm really proud of that," Lowe said.

Calvary itself split 10 years ago, and Lowe invited some of the members who left to come speak, which he said was a pleasant experience. Other former members shared memories from their days at the church. Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented the church with a plaque to commemorate its 50 years of service, as did Hugh Richardson Jr., director of missions for Shelby Association.

Lowe, who is encouraged by the growing number of young people attending Calvary, hopes the church will grow enough to be able to hire a full-time pastor. He is pleased that everyone seemed to enjoy the anniversary service and former members had fond memories of their time at Calvary to share. "That was the biggest thing to me, that everybody got along so well and were glad to see each other."

Selma's Pisgah Church celebrates 175th anniversary

"Y'all come back" was what Pisgah Baptist Church, Selma, members, like Sandra Reed, told former members concerning the Cahaba Baptist Association church's 175th anniversary. And they did come back — about 120 of them — to the Oct. 24 anniversary program and the pleasant surprise of the approximately 20 active members.

One former pastor spoke during the afternoon program, and three other former pastors sent letters that were read. Former members, including two women in a local nursing home, also shared special memories. Bill Wallace, director of missions for Cahaba Association, presented the church with a plaque on behalf of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.

Following the program, those in attendance congregated underneath a tent on the lawn for a reception. "We had a wonderful time," said Reed, who organized the day's events. "We were so happy when we saw the pews full." Harold Arnold is pastor.

New Orleans Seminary launches new institute to study issues of faith and public square

At a time when people of faith often are relegated to the sidelines in public policy discussions, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) is launching an Institute for Faith and the Public Square (IFPS) to help reframe the debate.

"The need for a Christian voice in the public square has never been greater than it is today in our pluralistic culture," said IFPS Director Lloyd Harsch, associate professor of church history at NOBTS.

"The Judeo-Christian values and ideals upon which this country was

founded are no longer assumed but challenged by an increasingly diverse society." Harsch believes many people are confused about the role of faith in government and the political process.

Religious liberty, a long-held hallmark of Baptist belief, has even been used by some to silence faith-informed voices, he noted.

The institute, announced during a meeting of NOBTS trustees Dec. 7, will explore the role of faith in the development and application of public policy and provide an open-minded academic forum where the concerns of Christians can be discussed in a

thoughtful way without intimidation. On the academic side, the institute will develop graduate and doctoral level seminary courses and continuing education programs focused on public policy. (BP)

Creationism: 4 in 10 Americans support it

Four in 10 Americans believe that God created humans in something like their present form within the last 10,000 years, according to a new Gallup Poll.

While that percentage represents a slight dip from 2008, when 44 percent said they do not believe divinely made humans evolved over time, it has remained remarkably stable since 1982, the earliest year for which Gallup provided data.

Nearly as many Americans (38 percent in 2010) say they believe humans evolved over time, but that

God guided the process. That percentage, too, has remained consistent since 1982.

Meanwhile, the number of Americans who believe humans evolved apart from any divine intervention crept up from 14 percent in 2008 to 16 percent this year. With few exceptions, that number has risen — albeit slightly — from 1982.

Gallup's 2010 poll was based on telephone interviews of 1,019 adults conducted Dec. 10-12. The margin of error is plus or minus 4 percentage points. (RNS)



Photo courtesy of Macedonia Baptist Church

MAPLESVILLE'S MACEDONIA BREAKS GROUND FOR NEW BUILDING

Macedonia Baptist Church, Maplesville, in Chilton Baptist Association holds a groundbreaking ceremony Nov. 20 for its new multipurpose family life center. The approximately 10,200-square-foot main floor will include a fellowship hall, kitchen and gymnasium with plans for completion of the second floor to house more classrooms and offices. Pictured are Pastor David R. Bishop (sixth from left), deacons and the building committee.

Accomplishing more together

Bullock-Centennial Association, area churches bring evangelistic event to Union Spings

By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

When Gene Bridgman accepted the position of director of missions for Bullock-Centennial Baptist Association in May of last year, one of his goals was to see more cooperation between the churches in Union Springs, the county seat of and largest town in Bullock County with about 3,500 people.

"We are a small, poor area, and it was just like everybody was doing their own thing," said Bridgman, who also serves as pastor of Eastside Baptist Church, Union Springs. "There's not a ministerial alliance in Union Springs, and that's been a dream of mine since I got here that we'd develop [one]."

While attending the Southern Baptist Convention 2010 annual meeting in Orlando, Fla., in June, he met members of the Strength Team, professional athletes who use their physical ability to share the gospel, and began a conversation with them.

Bridgman thought the team could be the very opportunity he had been looking for to get everyone in the community to work together. In order to do something that big in a small, rural community, he would need everyone working together. But would people be willing to work together, he wondered.

"Part of it was the need of people getting saved, but part of it was a vision of seeing everyone in the community working together — whites, blacks and Hispanics," Bridgman said.

After presenting the idea to the association in October of last year, it voted to bring two members of



Photo courtesy of Mike Facciani

POWER — Strength Team members Greg Mead (back row, left) and Smiley Elmore mingle with children from one of Bullock County's schools during a school assembly Dec. 10.

the team to Union Springs for a three-day crusade Dec. 10–12. Bridgman started contacting area churches and pastors and the response was tremendous.

"At a meeting, we had a black pastor say, 'I've been praying for this about five years,'" he said.

Overcoming obstacles

Mike Facciani, Strength Team development manager, said what impressed him most was how all the churches came together to pull off this weekend event.

"What was awesome about this crusade is we had all the reasons not to do it and [Bridgman] did as well because a lot of the churches weren't accustomed to working

together," said Facciani, who also served as road manager for the crusade. "But I was just amazed at [Bridgman's] faith and how he and others took and ran with the vision and (how) the churches that were considered white and the black churches got together."

But that wasn't the only obstacle the community overcame.

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2005–2009 American Community Survey five-year estimates reveal that 47 percent of people in Union Springs live below the poverty level and the per capita income is \$18,863.

In order to bring the Strength Team to the city, Bullock-Centennial Association had to commit \$1,700. In addition, the team

charges \$500 for a school assembly or requests a suggested \$2 donation at the door of other events. But the schools could not afford that cost, and it would be "detrimental" to even suggest a \$2 donation, Bridgman said.

"In this area, \$2 is a big deal," he said. "[The Strength Team] came on faith [because] we didn't guarantee them anything with the school assemblies."

Even though the team came, Facciani admits team members had doubts.

"We were concerned about going down there ... because we have a budget, too," he said. "We like to pride ourselves [on] being people of faith ... but we were nervous (with it being) right before Christmas."

When it came time to pay the team for four assemblies, two other events and speaking at churches, Bridgman and others had raised \$2,000 for the school assemblies, and combined with love offerings and other donations, the team received almost \$700 more than its budgeted expenses of almost \$9,000.

"Most crusades we don't meet our budget, but there we went over our budget," Facciani said. "We went over and that's the miracle about it. ... These were small churches."

By the end of the weekend, 136 decisions had been made, the majority for salvation and rededication.

"We had 41 trained counselors, 38 of those ... served in a counseling capacity," Bridgman said. "Some of them were able to share the gospel one-on-one who had

never had the courage to do that before. There were people in the churches that never felt comfortable sharing the gospel but now feel comfortable to share the gospel in the community."

Follow-up is planned and the churches are committed to plugging those who made decisions into a church, wherever they feel most comfortable. And as Bridgman hoped, the crusade only served to get the ball rolling on bringing churches together.

Making a difference

"No matter where [those who made decisions] are going, it's going to make a difference in this community; it's going to make a difference in the school systems," he said. "I think churches realize, 'Hey, we can work together.' I think we all found out that we serve the same God. He doesn't care whether a black, white or Hispanic needs to be saved."

"I think it's going to be an awakening or a revival (here) that doesn't end with a one-time event," Bridgman added.

As far as a ministerial alliance is concerned, he already has a breakfast planned this month that is open to all pastors in the area for them to discuss ways they can continue working together.

"The main thing is not only was it a good event, but I think it's going to raise the belief level in that area that they can work together and accomplish things together," Facciani said. "The story of Union Springs will inspire other communities across the country that when God's people work together, much can be accomplished."

Russell Baptist Association plays Santa for 37 families with its Christmas Store

Christmas came early and abundantly for 37 families, representing 171 individuals, thanks to Russell Baptist Association's Baptist Center.

For the third year in a row, the center opened its Christmas Store on Dec. 14 to families in Russell and south Lee counties living at or below the poverty level who were not being assisted by another organization.

"The only thing unusual (about our store this year) is that we sought those who didn't know they'd be in need," said Joycelyn Carrell, director of church and community ministries/Baptist Center for Russell Association. "We just filled in the gap for some families who didn't know that they'd need help until the last minute."

"Several of [those we helped] are grandparents who had to start raising their own grandchildren,"

she added. "They're living off their Social Security checks and needed help with gifts."

With the help of nine volunteers from four Russell Association churches who assisted with the store and people from all over Russell and Lee counties who donated new items, parents were able to take home more than 500 gifts, most of them for children.

Stress reliever

"I'm always relieved that we can relieve at least one stress that they have ... and know that they are going to be happy (on Christmas Day) instead of adding to the frustration of a lack of income," Carrell said.

In addition to gifts, each person who came to the center took home a pamphlet that told the Christmas story and was encouraged to share the story with his or her family on Christmas Day.

"It's a blessing that ... we get to share Christ and encourage them to share Christ with their families," Carrell said. "We're here because Jesus loves us and Jesus loves [them], too, and we hope [they] share His love on Christmas Day. We want them to realize that their hope is in Christ."

In addition to hosting the store, the center, which helps people all year long, gave out 194 grocery sacks of food to needy families in December. There is still enough food to be given to more people this month.

"I think all of our churches are always looking for a way to help people in need," Carrell said. "They donate [to the center] because they know we follow up on the families and that we know their physical state as well as their spiritual needs."

Wayne Burns is director of missions for Russell Association. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of FBC Hoover

FBC HOOVER HONORS CHURCH SECRETARY

First Baptist Church, Hoover, in Birmingham Baptist Association recently honored Marilyn Woodley (right) for 15 years as church secretary. She was presented with roses, a book of notes and a monetary gift. Pictured with Woodley is her husband, Mike. Randy G. Atkinson is pastor.

Birmingham's Vann Burchfield uses music to glorify God

By Kristen Padilla
The Alabama Baptist

Being featured on the cover and inside of the world's largest saxophone magazine, *Saxophone Journal*, could give any aspiring or professional saxophonist a right to brag.

But for Bessemer-native Vann Burchfield, this recognition only served as an opportunity to brag on Jesus Christ and what God has done for him.

"This is the largest, most highly publicized magazine for professional saxophonists," said Burchfield, who has been labeled the Christian Kenny G. "Here I am in this secular magazine talking about Jesus. ... God has called me and has equipped me to be a strong, bold witness for [Him]."

Throughout the seven-page interview in the November/December 2010 issue, Burchfield, who plays the soprano, alto and tenor saxophones, shares ways God has been instrumental in his 15-year career. In answering one of interviewer Thomas Erdmann's questions, he said his music and God are inseparable.

"First, what God orders, He pays for, and second, who He calls, He equips," Burchfield said. "I can't separate my life from God and I can't separate my music from God ... because He's been too good to me. ... My life is full of joy and (is) complete all because the Lord has blessed me."

And although the magazine fea-



Photo courtesy of Vann Burchfield

GOD-GIVEN TALENT — Saxophonist Vann Burchfield, a member of Fullness Christian Fellowship, Birmingham, feels called to be a witness for God. He has been labeled the Christian Kenny G.

ture is just the latest of many honors he has received over the years — such as beating Kenny G's Guinness World Record for circular breathing and playing at the White House and the Alabama governor's mansion —

his greatest honor has been glorifying God through his music.

"God puts all of us here on this earth for a reason," Burchfield said. "When I became a born-again Christian, I knew then that I wanted

to use my music for the purpose of lifting up the name of Jesus and glorifying my Father in heaven. God has been very gracious to me, very good to me, very merciful to me to take that dream and make it a reality."

Because of that calling, he plays in churches as much as possible. Burchfield recently played a Christmas concert at The Baptist Church at McAdory, McCalla, in Bessemer Baptist Association.

"In Vann's presentation, he made sure you knew that he was playing for his Lord," said Pastor Bill McCall. "[Burchfield] said, 'I want people to know that I'm coming there to glorify God.' That was one of the things that impressed me so much as a pastor. He was coming not to be the center of the show but that Jesus was going to be the center of the show, and he let us know that ahead of time."

Faithful members

And when Burchfield isn't on the road playing at another church, he and his wife, Teresa, can be found at Fullness Christian Fellowship, Birmingham, where they've been members for nine years.

"He's a talented musician who gives his talents to the Lord," said Pastor Bart Brookins. "It's awesome to see how God has grown his ministry over the years."

Brookins also noted that Burchfield continually volunteers his talents at the Birmingham Baptist Association church, whether it is

playing during the worship service or giving a Christmas concert.

"I'm not always able to be at my home church, but if I'm not, I'm always out ministering at another church," Burchfield said. "These people are here for me, and they'd do anything in the world to help me aside from church."

'Blue Eyed Soul'

While ministering at another church in the Birmingham area, the pastor made a comment that inspired the name of Burchfield's latest album, "Blue Eyed Soul."

"I was ministering at a black gospel church here in Birmingham, and the preacher said, 'Mr. Vann, you are what we call a blue-eyed soul. You are a white man with blond hair and with blue eyes, but you play like a black man,'" he recalled.

The album, for which he wrote, recorded and produced every song, is his first smooth jazz album. Burchfield, who is new to the smooth jazz community, soon will be touring with his band across Europe playing in jazz venues.

But whether it is a jazz festival, corporate office event or church, Burchfield considers what he does music evangelism, proclaiming God through both music and testimony.

"I want my future to be one of more of me playing, more of God's power and more of His anointing and to be used by God to draw all men to Him," Burchfield said. "That's my plan and purpose and the life that I have. I want these horns to go out to lift up the name of God more."

For more information, visit www.vannburchfield.com.

Anniston's Renovation City Church seeks to restore community

By Anna Swindle
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The word "renovation" means "to restore to life," and that's exactly the mission of Renovation City Church, Anniston. This multicultural church plant intends to bring new life to the Glen Addie community with a new kind of place to worship and minister.

But it's not going to rely solely on church members to reach out.

One of the unique aspects of Renovation City is its emphasis on bringing groups from around the state, the country and even the world to Anniston for missions work.

"I went on a missions trip to Memphis over the summer and then thought, 'What if God wants to host this kind of ministry in Anniston?'" said Chris Terrell, who is in the process of planting the church, which will continue the discipleship efforts of his nonprofit Renovation Ministries. "We can bring in churches from all over to reach out to people who are hungry for the gospel." The only problem was where would we house the church itself and the groups that come to Anniston."

That's where Greenbrier Road Baptist Church, Anniston, stepped in. Brad Williams, Greenbrier Road Baptist's pastor, has been a friend of Terrell's for about three years, and his church shared Terrell's

desire to reach out to Glen Addie.

"Chris really wanted a partnership, someone who wanted to reach a community," Williams said. "We're small, with a Sunday School attendance of just over 100, and we didn't have money to offer him, but we did have the same goal: to be missions-minded."

Available space

And the church had an entire wing of its building available for Renovation City to use.

Eventually, though, Terrell knew his church would need its own space. That need was met in a one-of-a-kind way: the donation of a hotel, something that's still hard for him to believe.

"Literally, who gives you a hotel?" he said. "God provided a hotel that's sitting on a hill in a community that needs the gospel. That in and of itself is something intriguing."

And as it prepares for its first official meeting in January, Renovation City has found another source of support — Calhoun Baptist Association. The church has been voted into the association under watch care.

John Thomas, associate director of missions for Calhoun Association, is excited about what the new church will bring to the community.

"The box that this church is in is pretty big," Thomas said, adding, "It's not going to look like a traditional church." Those words are music to Terrell's ears. He wants Renovation City to challenge the concept of "church." Eventually he hopes to help with missions trips worldwide and spread out to other parts of the world to reach out to communities in need.

For starters, the church plans to offer different options for groups coming to reach out to its commu-

nity: a weekendlong event called Renovation Weekend, a weeklong missions experience known as the Summer Renovation and a project specific to a team's expertise called a Custom Renovation.

"The main thing is there's no better way to get people involved than to put them on the missions field. It's addictive," Williams said. "I can't wait to see what happens."

For more information, visit renovationministry.epiclifecreative.com or call 256-499-1182.

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Family Matters

A NEW KIND OF

Resolution

By Dwight Wilson,
Pathways Professional Counselor

On New Year's Eve, many take a quick glance at the past to review their accomplishments, failures or near misses. Then the eyes of the mind turn toward next year. Questions formulate within the confines of imagination as to the possibilities of the near future. What can change? How to make a change? How much to change? Who to change? How much effort must be expended in order to achieve the desired result?

On the About.com Guide to Pittsburgh, writer Albrecht Powell gave the following as the New Year's Resolutions Top 10 list for many in the area. Do you have any in common with the citizens of Pittsburgh?

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1) Spend more time with family and friends. | 6) Quit drinking. |
| 2) Fit in fitness. | 7) Get out of debt. |
| 3) Tame the bulge. | 8) Learn something new. |
| 4) Quit smoking. | 9) Help others. |
| 5) Enjoy life more. | 10) Get organized. |

Dare we examine our intrinsic attitudes, values, and personal desires to such a depth that we seek deeper and more lasting change than this list implies? Are we willing to forego the everyday rituals of existence enough to enhance our character and relationships with God and others?

I encourage you to ask yourself, "What must I do—what must I give up in order to reach the majestic heights of the goal that imagination will establish? How willing am I to pay the price to become the person I have been designed to be by our Creator?"

This writer does not adhere to the tradition of New Year's Resolutions. His personal reasoning can be traced to a few Scriptures like Matthew 6:34: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (KJV) Does one have the luxury to wait for one specific day in the year to make changes which need to be made now, or should have been made yesterday? Luke 9:23, "And he said to them all, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.'" (KJV)

Maybe New Year's Resolutions need to become a thing of the past, replaced by a new tradition that was inaugurated by Jesus and could be tagged NEW DAY RESOLUTIONS. Let each one of us arise every morning with the resolve to do what God is calling us to do. Be blessed by every sunrise. And let us end each day with a confession to God of the sins committed today. First John 1:9 says that, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (KJV)

As the old saying goes, "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today." God makes all things new for those who will allow Him to do so.

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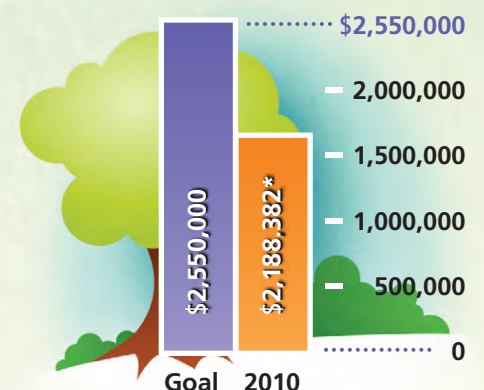
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2010 ANNUAL OFFERING



Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Psalm 82:3

The 2010 goal for the Annual Children's Homes Offering is \$2.55 million. Please encourage your church to give.

* Graphic represents giving totals as of press time.



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Try doing something new

Jane Doe really has her ear!" "He trusts John Smith's opinion."

Have you heard those kinds of statements? I think we all have, and we probably have made them, too.

Have you ever known a pastor or boss who would take an issue to the appropriate group of people for input — such as deacons or a board — but then would seek out specific people outside that group to discuss it with? Almost as if he or she valued the other people's input more than the deacons' or board's?

Have you ever had a boss who had the position but did not really have the influence? Have you ever known a young wife who would seek her mother's advice on an issue that really should be decided with her husband?

The issue we are talking about is the difference between formal and informal structures.

Everyone has a formal structure. In a church, you have the pastor, the deacons, the committees, the trustees. In a business, you have the president, the vice presidents, the middle managers. In a home, you have a husband, a wife, children. These are all formal structures. These are our roles.

Informal structures are the key relationships that people have. Who really listens to whom? Perhaps that pastor really listens to the Sunday School director. Perhaps the president listens to a long-tenured middle manager. Perhaps that

A Thought for Women

By Jean Roberson
jroberson@wmu.org



husband really values his son's opinion. This is how we function informally.

It's a way of life. So what does it matter?

It matters when we are trying to change something or do something new.

Many times when we are trying to do something new, such as begin a new ministry or make a significant move, we use formal structures to make it happen. If I want to do something new in the music ministry, then I need to first talk to the choir director or music minister. The music minister will talk to the pastor. The pastor may talk to a trustee. And so on.

We follow the chain of command, the formal structure. Sometimes this works. But sometimes

our ideas seem to die in the process.

Most decisions are actually made based on informal structures. It's the person we really listen to, whose opinion we truly value, who influences us the most. Hence the statements such as, "If you really want the president on board with you, then you need to talk to so-and-so."

When you are looking to make a change or start something new, stop and consider first who the influencers are.

Talk to them first. Get them on board with you and then begin working through the formal structure. It's often much more effective and efficient.

A Takeaway Value . . .

When doing something new, use both informal and formal structures.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Jean Roberson, MSW, LCSW, is a ministry consultant for national Woman's Missionary Union. She serves as team leader for the adult team and director of Christian Women's Job Corps/Christian Men's Job Corps and International Initiatives.



The Lord is the strength of His people, a fortress of salvation for His Anointed One.

Psalm 28:8

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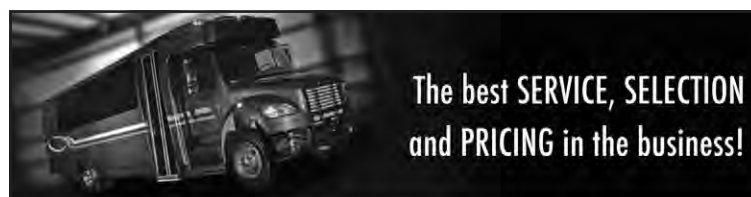
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Baptist News Briefs

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Georgia Baptists to study giving to state, national work

ATLANTA — A study committee will encourage stewardship growth among the state's Baptists while examining the percentage allocation of funds to the Georgia and Southern Baptist conventions.

The committee will examine how Georgia Baptists can impact lostness around the world without neglecting those in their own back yard, Georgia Baptist Convention executive committee members said.

Jeremy Morton, pastor of Cross Point Baptist Church, Perry, made a motion to create the study committee on behalf of himself and five Georgia Baptist pastors during the executive committee's Dec. 14 meeting. Joining Morton were Frank Cox, pastor of North Metro First Baptist Church, Lawrenceville; Larry Wynn, pastor of Hebron Baptist Church, Dacula; Don Hattaway, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church, Cartersville; Ernest Easley, pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church, Marietta; and William "Bill" Harrell, pastor of Abilene Baptist Church, Martinez.

Morton said he and the pastors submitted the motion "to ensure that while we are committed to reaching the nations globally, we as Georgia Baptists remain committed to not abandoning the nations that have come to Georgia."

Morton said the intent of the motion was to consider ways of increasing missions support to Southern Baptist mission boards "while strengthening our mission commitment to the work here in Georgia."

"In light of dramatic change in direction by leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, many in our churches have grown uneasy about their own mission giving and if it is being used most effectively," Morton said.

Missouri Baptist home resident oldest in state at 111

IRONTON, Mo. — From the standpoint of years alone, one resident of the The Baptist Home in Ironton, Mo., outranks every other senior citizen in Missouri. Jewell Stehlik celebrated her 111th birthday Oct. 25 and holds the distinction of being the oldest person in the Show-Me State.

By all accounts, the Arcadia Valley facility, one of three campuses of the ministry that offers independent living, assisted living and nursing care services for residents and a senior adult ministries resource for churches, might as well pencil in her birthday on calendars for the next few years.

At 111, Jewell appears to be going strong. During a Nov. 2 interview, she was articulate and demonstrated a keen sense of humor. And she still recalls memories that date back 100 years and longer.

The Baptist Home's staffers believe Jewell is the 35th oldest person in the United States and the 51st oldest in the world.

Jewell is often asked to divulge the secret to her longevity. She says she tries to be good-natured and "I don't carry a grudge. And I had a good husband for 54 years." On other occasions she has attributed her long years to "never worrying about anything and loving the good Lord."

Before she came to The Home, Jewell lived in Camdenton, Mo., and was a member of First Baptist Church there.

As Christmas approaches, Jewell has already requested a single gift, Arcadia Valley administrator Sherri Snider said.

"I want a harmonica," Jewell said, noting she already has three. It is the only instrument she still plays.

Perhaps she'll try out the new one at her 112th birthday bash.

Criswell College given warning by accrediting agency

DALLAS — A regional accrediting agency has issued an official warning to Criswell College, citing issues regarding "institutional effectiveness" in planning and assessment.

The Bible college — established about 40 years ago by First Baptist Church, Dallas, and named for its longtime pastor W.A. Criswell — retains its accreditation but will be monitored by the accrediting agency for the next year.

A warning is the least-severe public citation the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools issues. The maximum time during monitoring any school can be on warning is two years.

The warning grew out of the accrediting agency's regular review of the school, scheduled every 10 years.

Three years ago, the accrediting agency placed Criswell on probation for not meeting standards in financial stability and financial control, but it was cleared a year later.

Recession over?

Church offerings continue to drop, LifeWay study shows

The National Bureau of Economic Research declared in September that the recession that began in December 2007 ended in June 2009.

According to a new LifeWay Research study, pastors of Protestant churches might disagree: Data gathered Oct. 7-14 show that 2010 is on course to be the third straight year with an increased number of churches receiving lower offerings than the prior year. Thirty-four percent of churches reported receiving less offerings this year than the previous year, compared to 23 percent in 2009 and 19 percent in 2008.

Additionally LifeWay Research reported that 79 percent of pastors said the economy is impacting their church negatively, reflecting media reports that overall offering dollars reportedly have declined for the first time.

"It's hard to explain in financial terms how churches have done as well as they have the last three years," said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research. "Churches actually saw average offerings rise 3 percent in 2009, but the recession — though officially over [the middle of] last year — has finally taken its toll on churches in 2010."

In the October telephone survey, churches reported average 2010 offerings of 3 percent less than their 2009 offerings, though the median amount hasn't changed.

Also

► 42 percent of churches reported offerings that are the same as those of 2009.

► 21 percent of churches reported offerings that are at least 10 percent below last year's giving.

► 19 percent of churches reported that the 2010 offering is at least 1 percent above what it was in 2009. The smallest churches, those with less than 49 people in average worship attendance, were least likely to have experienced growth in offerings over 2009.

Flat Social Security benefits as well as sustained high unemployment leading to long-term decreases in consumer income are now, likely more than ever, impacting churches even as the economic news has grown more positive, McConnell said.

"Because many members give in direct proportion to their income, Protestant churches may be more impacted by unemployment and Social Security than the stock market," he said. "Until unemployment turns around, Protestant churches may continue to struggle financially."

Negative impact

Two-thirds of pastors said the economy has "somewhat negatively" impacted their churches, and 13 percent of pastors said it has "very negatively" impacted them. These numbers represent the highest level of negativity expressed during the

four occasions — February 2009, November 2009, March 2010 and October 2010 — when LifeWay Research has asked pastors, "How is the current economy impacting your church?"

In the midst of this less-than-encouraging financial data, LifeWay Research did uncover some heartening trends.

Forty-nine percent of churches reported that in comparison to recent years, volunteering in the community has increased in the past year. And in spite of the overall lower offerings, 47 percent of churches have increased spending from the church budget to help the needy.

"Scarcity brings clarity. Economic realities call for churches to be cautious with their spending."

Scott McConnell
LifeWay Research

"Scarcity brings clarity. Economic realities call for churches to be cautious with their spending," McConnell said, noting that more than half of churches (54 percent) have frozen staff salaries in response to the economy. "Still there are clear indicators that churches can simultaneously take bold steps forward in serving their communities. Even while limiting spending, 35 percent of churches have explored launching a new ministry to help disadvantaged individuals and 25 percent have gone ahead and launched one."

While the increased community service and spending on ministries to the disadvantaged is encouraging, other data reveal that churches are simply confirming the idea that "necessity breeds invention."

In 2010, more than two-thirds of churches reported receiving increased requests for financial assistance from individuals outside the congregation and 46 percent of churches reported increased requests from those within the congregation.

"Our studies at LifeWay Research have shown that churches quickly responded at the beginning of the recession to address emerging needs in their communities," McConnell said.

"Now, as a third of all churches are directly dealing with declines in giving themselves, they have actually made their community service more permanent by building spending into their budget and launching new ministries to meet needs."

The survey involved 1,000 telephone interviews with the church's senior pastor, minister or priest. (BP)

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Graham shares about close relationship with Bush family

(continued from page 1)
a time that strengthens my faith and gives me courage for the future. And I don't expect to live that much longer, but I do remember that every Christmas strengthened my faith as I came along."

Also in the interview, Van Susteren asked about Graham's relationship with the Bush family, and Graham recalled that he first met Bush's grandfather, Prescott Bush, in Florida and then was invited by Bush's grandmother to answer biblical questions and pray with a group of neighbors in her home.

"She was one of the sweetest women I think I ever met, a very deep Christian. And she became a wonderful friend to me. And through her, I began to meet the rest of the family," Graham said of Dorothy Walker Bush.

President George H.W. Bush and his wife, Barbara, "became very close friends to Ruth and me," Graham said, and it was during a visit to their retreat in Kennebunkport, Maine, in 1985 that he met their son George. Graham had been asked to conduct a Bible study for the family, and George W. Bush stood up to ask questions. Later the evangelist and the future president went on walks and played tennis together.

Close friends

"I remember he was very interested in spiritual things and he asked a lot of very deep questions about the Bible and about the Christian faith. And I tried to answer as best I could," Graham told Van Susteren.

After lunch with Graham, Bush sat down with Van Susteren to elaborate on what he wrote about Graham's influence on his life in his book "Decision Points."

"He's a gentle soul. I mean, here's one of the most famous people in the world, and in his presence, you



BP photo

realize how humble he is," Bush said. "And his humility, and obviously, his love for God and Christ can overwhelm the cynic. And I was a cynical person at the time, and his spirit overwhelmed me."

Graham, at Kennebunkport, was able to lead Bush from being a man full of questions to one with some peace about God.

Planting seeds

"I mean, one way, from a kind of biblical analogy, he was — started to help me plant seeds. And the ground was — the ground was pretty hard," Bush said. "But after meeting Billy, the ground became more fertile for the seed, is one way to put it. No, he helped change my life. He truly did. And I was a questioning person. I was drinking a lot. And religion was — you know, I used to — I put in the book 'I would listen but never hear.' And Billy Graham helped me understand the redemptive power of a risen Lord."

More than 1,000 people lined up outside the Billy Graham Library to meet the Bushes, and Graham joined them briefly to receive the first signed copies of their books that day. Franklin Graham gave the former president and first lady a private tour of the library and later said his father's mind is as strong as it has been in the past few years.

"His mind is sharper today than it was five years ago," Franklin Graham said. "I don't know what it is. He is getting better. He is getting stronger." (BP)

Retired Alabama Baptist pastor Adolph Phares dies at age 77

Retired Alabama Baptist pastor Adolph Phares died Nov. 12. He was 77.

A native of Moundville, Phares served as a pastor for 55 years in seven churches in Marion, Greene, Tuscaloosa and Mobile counties as well as churches in Florida and Indiana. He also served as president of the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association Pastors Conference and moderator of associations in Indiana and Florida. He was a member of the Florida State Board of Missions from 1977 to 1980 and 1989 to 1995.

Phares continued to serve as an interim pastor after he retired in 1995.

He served in the U.S. Air Force from 1952 to 1956, during which time he accepted Christ as a result of receiving a Gideon New Testament. He graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham with a bachelor of religious education and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary with a master of divinity.

At the time of his death, Phares was a member of Pathway Baptist Church, Dothan.

He was preceded in death by his son Bob. Phares is survived by his wife of 53 years, Shirley; three children; seven grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. (TAB)

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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).

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Touching lives

Mississippi author hopes to change hearts with fiction book about abortion

Stephanie McAllister’s break-up with Sonny Shamrock was so devastating that she never told him of her pregnancy. Instead, she aborted the baby.

Stephanie dropped out of church in the suburban town of Westhaven, Miss., and became a reporter on women’s affairs for a metropolitan newspaper.

“A Scent of Jasmine,” a novel, begins 14 years later, when health issues bring Stephanie, now 35, back to Dr. Ward’s clinic, where her abortion was performed.

There she meets Libby Anderson, the 14-year-old adopted daughter of her former pastor. Libby is picketing against abortion at the clinic.

Stephanie is unmoved by Libby’s passion for the unborn but does promise to use her skills as a reporter to help Libby find her biological mother. Stephanie increasingly struggles with her pro-choice views as her love for Libby grows. But the search for Libby’s mother is complicated by a death in Westhaven — and as a funeral turns to chaos, Stephanie and the town are forever changed.

‘Compelling’

“Fiction is not preaching to somebody, so you’re writing a story that has to be believable and has to be compelling in its characters,” said David Dockery, a Mississippi geologist and author of “A Scent of Jasmine.”

“It gave me the opportunity to

portray Stephanie, who had aborted her child, as a character that people could associate with. She explains herself in the story in a way that you could understand her and kind of see her side,” Dockery, a member and Sunday School leader at Pocahontas Baptist Church near Jackson, Miss., said.

“Libby provided an alternate view. You can kind of have the debate within a story that is compelling, without feeling like you’re reading something you don’t want to read.”

Story ‘writes itself’

Though he had written two novels on other subjects, Dockery’s thoughts on abortion led to a book he hopes will change hearts as part of the pro-life movement.

“As a writer, I try to think of how a reader will react when they have this reality. The story kind of writes itself [through] characters that mean something to you and you care about them,” Dockery said. “To have them go through a conversion experience on this issue, that can impact a reader. There are women in all kinds of situations like this, and a fictional story can help them sort this out.”

As for how a story like this might affect a woman who feels remorse about an abortion, Dockery said it is best to come to terms with such an act, as painful as that may be, in order to receive forgiveness as well as healing and encouragement from God.

The central theme of “A Scent of Jasmine,” he said, is that each unborn child is unique and children hold unlimited promise and hope for their families, their communities and the world.

“There will be a day to come in which we will see what was missed because a child was not here to make a difference,” he said.

Dockery told of a 14-year-old girl named Laney Frazier who read the book five times. Frazier’s mother works with Pro-Life Mississippi, and the girl has ministered outside of abortion clinics for years. She sings hymns while her mother counsels women to choose life for their unborn children.

“[The book] touched my life about abortions. It made you want to save the lives of these babies,” Frazier said. “Girls who are pregnant can pick up the book and see that there is hope. They should not feel condemned but should turn their life over to Christ.”

C. Ben Mitchell, professor of moral philosophy at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., recommended a list of five novels with a pro-life perspective:

- “Children of Men” by P.D. James
- “The Thanatos Syndrome” by Walker Percy

► “Never Let Me Go” by Kazuo Ishiguro

► “Winterflight” by Joseph Bayly

► “Healing Noelle” by Michael J. Huckabee

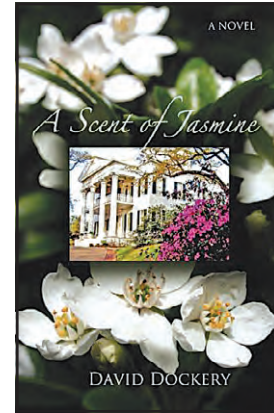
Other novels with a pro-life perspective include:

► “False Positive,” the third book in a series by William Cutrer and Sandra Glahn. Cutrer, a professor of Christian ministry at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and a medical doctor, said he and Glahn wrote from a Christian perspective on bioethical issues to present biblical truth within an

enjoyable, believable storyline.

“My historical precedent would be the parables of Christ, where He told engaging stories, drawing His audience into the story, and placed the spiritual truth beside it,” Cutrer said. False Positive is set in a crisis pregnancy center located across the street from an abortion clinic.

► “A Perfect Persecution” by James R. Lucas, published by B&H Publishing Group. The plot: An underground group seeks to rescue as many babies as possible at a time when the moral landscape is rapidly deteriorating and babies are being aborted because they do not meet certain criteria for “social contribution.” (BP)



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‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ repeal becomes law, homosexual activists celebrate

President Obama signed into law Dec. 22 a repeal of the ban on open homosexuality in the military, putting his stamp of approval on what homosexual activists celebrated as an important victory in their ongoing effort to expand legal rights for their movement.

The new law’s critics have warned it will result in infringements on religious liberty, as well as harm the readiness, privacy and retention of service members.

The president’s signing of the legislation did not officially repeal the previous policy, however. Final repeal will require certification by Obama, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Michael Mullen that it will not harm the military. That final step seems a foregone conclusion, since all three supported the bill.

By enacting the reversal of a 17-year-old law known as “don’t ask, don’t tell,” the president kept a promise he had made and accomplished a goal President Clinton failed to achieve in his first year in

office. “Don’t ask, don’t tell” was approved in 1993 as a compromise between conservatives and Clinton, whose effort to lift the longtime military ban was resisted by Congress and the Pentagon. “Don’t ask, don’t tell” barred homosexuals from serving openly but also prohibited military commanders from asking service members if they are homosexual or about their “sexual orientation.”

The signing ceremony came only days after both houses of Congress approved the repeal during the lame duck session. The Senate’s 65–31 vote occurred Dec. 18, three days after the House of Representatives approved the measure in a 250–175 roll call.

Obama signed the legislation into law in an auditorium at the Department of the Interior large enough to seat a cheering crowd of about 500 people. After the Senate’s passage, Richard Land, president of The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, called it a “very, very sad day for America.” (BP)

'Man of faith'

Mobile's BayBears' manager brings faith to field

By Bill Sorrell
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

While not a "shotgun wedding," moments after saying, "I do," a pistol landed Turner Ward in handcuffs.

Before boarding a plane for his honeymoon in Denver, Ward went through a metal detector and was cuffed immediately. Returning from the rest room, his wife, Donna, was shocked by what she saw. His brother Wade had slipped a 2-inch derringer inside his carry-on luggage.

"That was pretty serious at the time, but we look back at how funny that was. My brother got me pretty good," said Ward, who was named manager of the Mobile BayBears, a Southern League affiliate of the Arizona Diamondbacks, in December. Ward, a former youth minister for First Baptist Church, Satsuma, is a member of First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland, where he also served a short stint as youth minister.

The pistol incident took place about the same time his professional baseball career was just taking off.

Drafted out of the University of South Alabama in Mobile in 1986 by the New York Yankees, Ward played in the Yankees' minor league organization before making his Major League Baseball (MLB) debut with the Cleveland Indians in 1990.

Although he completed his playing career with the Philadelphia Phillies in 2001, Ward started as a manager in 2006 with the Bradenton (Fla.) Pirates in the Gulf Coast League. In 2007, he became manager for the State College (Pa.) Spikes in the New York-Penn League and was inducted into the Mobile Sports Hall of Fame.

Ward came to the BayBears as the team's hitting coach in 2008 and was in that position until his recent move to manager.

In 626 MLB games with six teams — the Indians, Toronto Blue Jays, Milwaukee Brewers, Pittsburgh Pirates, Diamondbacks and Phillies — Ward had 389 hits, 39 home runs (nine as pinch-hit home runs), 219 RBIs (runs batted in) and a .251 batting average.

Personal highlights

A few of his highlights include
▶ winning two World Series championships with the Blue Jays (1992 and 1993) as an outfielder and

▶ running through the right field wall at Three Rivers Stadium chasing a fly ball while playing for the Pirates in 1998.

But what happened in the early to mid-1990s while playing for the Brewers became Ward's most precious highlight — he surrendered his life to Christ.

About 30 at the time, Ward said he thought he had accepted Christ at 15 but he didn't truly understand what salvation meant.



Photo courtesy of Mobile BayBears

PLAY BALL — Turner Ward, member of First Baptist Church, North Mobile, in Saraland, was recently named manager of the Mobile BayBears, a Southern League affiliate of the Arizona Diamondbacks.

"There is no turning point greater in anyone's life than when they accept Christ," Ward said. "It changed who I was as a baseball player, who I was as a husband, who I was as a father."

He and his wife have been married for 22 years and have three children. "Anytime I start thinking about my plans or what direction I want in my life, I am reminded of [Jeremiah 29:11]," Ward said. "God knows the plans and I want to follow just as much as I can."

"The biggest thing is understanding Christ and what He did in my life, not just knowing who He is but trying to have that personal relationship and getting good direction."

He added the guidelines Christ gives through Scripture are "pretty black and white."

"It is a tough standard to live up to, but it is a great challenge, and that is a challenge I want," Ward said. "It is a struggle. As a hitter, you struggle. It's no different as a coach, as a husband, as a father."

But he has learned from where his help comes.

"God has given me the gift of athleticism, but for a long time, I glorified myself for what I was able to accomplish. I put baseball so high on a pedestal in my life," Ward said. "When I learned these gifts were to glorify Him, that was when I got a true blessing and under-

stood I can give God all the praise."

Ward, who teams with BayBears pitching coach Dan Carlson to keep each other accountable and lead team Bible studies and chapel, said baseball is his ministry.

Relationship with Christ

"I feel like I am supposed to lead as a man of faith," Ward said. "Being the face of the team, the direction, I am excited to bring a kind of atmosphere to the field and clubhouse. ... We share with these guys our experiences of the game, but what is really most important is our relationship with Christ."

Carlson said Ward motivates the team through competition, laughter and seriousness (when needed).

"He encourages me the way he is steady every single day," Carlson said. "When there is an opportunity to share (his faith), he jumps right on it. He is solid all-around. He is firm in his faith. Everybody on the team knows it."

BayBears second baseman Jake Elmore agreed. "I know that he is a man of faith, and that is important to him. He is very patient with everybody and tries to lead by example," Elmore said. "He is unbelievably positive no matter what goes on. He believes in you. He believes in every guy on the team, which is awesome. He is a guy that has got your back no matter what every day."

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Compiled from Wire Services



Vietnam authorities stop Protestant Christmas events

HANOI, Vietnam — In what appeared to be part of a central government crackdown on Protestant Christianity in Vietnam, hundreds of Christians from 10 northern provinces were locked out of a Christmas celebration that was supposed to take place in Hanoi on Dec. 19. The throngs who arrived at the National Convention Center in the Tu Kiem district of Hanoi for the Christmas event found the doors locked and a phalanx of police trying to send them away, sources said. Deeply disappointed, some of the Christians began singing and praying in the square in front to the center, they said.

Police moved in, striking some Christians with fists and night sticks in the melee that followed. Christian leaders worked to calm the disappointed crowd, which eventually left, but not before at least six people — including Pastor Nguyen Huu Bao, the scheduled speaker for the event — were arrested. They had not been released at press time. Similar incidents occurred Dec. 19 in at least four other places throughout the country: Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Quang Nam provinces, and in the city of Danang in central Vietnam. Even those who closely follow Protestant church developments in Vietnam were somewhat surprised at the severity of the crackdown. One well-respected overseas Vietnam leader observed that it is now clear that the actions resulted from a coordinated, well-planned and executed crackdown involving top Communist Party and government officials. One key church leader in Vietnam said that Directive No. 75, a secret Ministry of Interior document dated Oct. 15, ordered the crackdown on unregistered groups.

Islamists raid house churches in West Java, Indonesia

BANDUNG, Indonesia — About 200 demonstrators from hard-line Islamic organizations in West Java on Dec. 12 disrupted a church's worship service in Rancaekek district, Bandung, driving more than 100 worshippers from the building. Members of the Islamic Defenders Front, the Indonesian Ulama Forum and the Islamic Reformist Movement arrived with the Civil Service Police Unit of Rancaekek district and sealed the house used by the Batak Christian Protestant Bethania Church (BCPBC), thus leaving other churches that use it without a worship venue. The protestors also disrupted the worship of six other churches meeting in homes the same day, including the Indonesian Evangelical Tabernacle Church, the Pentecostal Tabernacle Church and the Church of Pentecost-Rancaekek.

In the BCPBC incident, the demonstrators removed by force more than 100 members of the BCPBC church on Teratai Street, the pastor said. "Because they were fearful, children and women were crying when they came out of their place of worship," Pastor Badia Hutagalung said. Hutagalung said the church was using the house because it had not been able to obtain permission to establish a church building under conditions imposed by Indonesian law.

The Joint Ministerial Decree issued in 1969 and revised in 2006, which requires places of worship to obtain the approval of at least 60 people from the local community, mandates there be at least 90 church members and the church must be approved by the village head.

Indonesian churches wary of Islamist 'protection' offer

JAKARTA, Indonesia — In the wake of several attacks on worship services by Indonesia's notorious Islamic Defenders Front (IDF), several Jakarta-area church leaders rejected the IDF's offer to help protect them over Christmas. IDF leader Rizieq Shihab made the offer in December, saying he was working in cooperation with the Indonesian Communion of Churches and the Indonesian Bishops Conference. But several churches publicly rejected the offer, with online forums comparing IDF church protection to "foxes protecting a chicken coop." Jakarta's police chief Dec. 18 reportedly promised protection for every "registered" church in the area.

Many Indonesian churches are unregistered, however, since they fail to meet the strict conditions of a Joint Ministerial Decree governing places of worship. The Indonesian public has harshly criticized IDF members for their role in multiple church attacks over the past year and faulted police and politicians for failing to intervene. One attack Sept. 12 led to the arrest and detention of 13 IDF members, including Murhali Barda, leader of the IDF's Bekasi branch.

During the attack, assailants stabbed and critically wounded church elder Hasian Sihombing and beat Pastor Luspida Simanjuntak over the head with a wooden beam.